

**DRAFT NOTES FOR COMMENT ONLY – NOT FOR PUBLICATION**

**25a – 4 / 1972 Percy Sledge SAfrican Safari - Soul Singers Freedom Fighters**

**Percy Sledge** hated flying – in airplanes that is. To make matters slightly worse, his fear of flying must have been compounded by a number of related if extraneous factors – of which I am certain, when accepting this gig in 1972 to tour Southern Africa, he had no idea. The promoters were **Ralph Simon** and **Clive Calder's** SAGITARIUS Management. After all, how much rougher or tougher could Africa have been for a Southern boy who shot to fame and then lost fortunes in any of the many Southern States Soul gig rip-offs that he'd been through since his massive No 1 hit in the USA, and most of Africa and Europe as well, *When a Man Loves a Woman?*

To start with, by 1972, the international cultural boycott of Southern African had kicked into gear – a low gear, too true, but gaining some momentum. Percy's music safari – which did not include South Africa at that time – did require him to fly in between the anti-colonial warring factions, nations and tribes of Southern Africa. This had to be done in an unmarked, *pirated flight planned* 1940's Swaziland registered *Dakota DC 3* with outside toilets and a roof-rack; piloted by captain Dare Devil himself. A handle-barred mustachioed 60 something WWII veteran *who flew these things during the great world war old chap!* A co-pilot who could drink and smoke with the best of us after the gigs - until all hours of the morning just before the real crack-of-dawn lift off - and an air hostess that every musician made mind-love to 3 times a flight.

All this and more had to be achieved without the relevant fly people in the various warring countries knowing that we were in the air. For some parts of the journey we had to fly just above tree-top level – about 50 meters off the ground - to avoid detection by East German, Chinese, Cuban or Russian anti-aircraft fire. This must have put Captain Dare Devil in his element. Not that a plane load of gypsy musicians in hip finery would have meant anything important to the liberation armies down below – but it could have been a case of mistaken identity. Oops, sorry comrades, you looked like a plane load of Boere in disguise.

All seats from the one side of the old Dak had been removed to accommodate my *3<sup>rd</sup> Ear Music / Hanley Sound* system... the *Woodstock Bins* as they had affectionately become known in townships jazz and soul festivals since we did the **Brooke Benton** tour in early 1971.

Tuesday September the 5<sup>th</sup> 1972 and the Dak would have to use more than half its fuel just to take off for *Lourenco Marques*, the Portuguese colony capital of *Mozambique* – then under siege from FRELIMO – led by a *University of Alabama* history lecturer **Dr. Eduardo Mondlane**. Even captain Dare Devil wouldn't take a chance with too much over loading. A few last-minute runway compromises had to be made.

About to board were the amiable and friendly super-star of the show, an extremely nervous **Percy Sledge, The Miracles** (a 7 piece Soul outfit from Newlands in Johannesburg), SA pop sensation and local chart topping **Richard Jon Smith, Peter Vee** – tour manager and singer of note; a **Cape Town Horn Section** - 3 Mitchell's Plain vegetarians, who happened to be butchers; all under the mighty baton a proud *San* (the first inhabitants of in the 'cradle of human kind', they say) **Chris Schilder** and the *Sagittarius Music Management* **Ralph Simon** and **Clive Calder** from Johannesburg (later to become **Zomba Jive Music**, UK and USA).

As vice-president and president never travel on the same plane, it was either **Ralph Simon** or **Clive Calder**; the short end of the straw would fly, the other would go by road... well, a mostly untarred jungle pathway, shall we say.

**Cocky 2-Bull Thlothalemaje** the compare and yours truly, with the Captain, co-pilot and the sweet air-hostess for comfort, made up the rest of the crew; 20 people with some of **Bill Hanley's** Woodstock Sound re-enforcement – including costumes, amps, guitars and lights – crammed down the one-side of a non-pressurized 40-year-old WW II paratrooper airplane.

Either some of the crew gets off or pieces of the equipment must go, ordered Captain Dare. Surrounded by fashionably dressed Afro-hair-styled soul artists in white suits, platform heels, bell bottoms and adventure smiles all round, a runway argument ensued - just before take-off from *Waterkloof Military Air force Base* outside of Pretoria. It ended in me having to let some of the equipment go. And as has been the sound person's lot in life, if any compromise on a tour or show has to be made, then it's always the sound. The lights and the Guitar amps, costumes and décor can stay; and and as is the traditional African way, even a few extra stray family members or friends can board the tour bus – but the sound has to go. Wasn't quite like that – but it got close.

The weight far exceeded the legal limit for any plane to fly, let alone an ancient Dakota DC3. Re-fueling along the un-chartered African Safari route, explained Captain Dare, was an essential safety element for the tour and for the ultimate return of the musical cargo - baring a stray unintentional misguided missile.

For the second leg of the tour to *Rhodesia* the colossal 6x6x4 foot 500lb JBL and Altec loaded *Woodstock Bass Bins* and some of the *Crown* and *Macintosh* power amps were to be trucked up by road-freight to meet us at the stadiums that Percy and a bevy of SAfrican soul and pop stars were booked to play at in *Zimbabwe / Rhodesia, Zambia* and *Malawi*. There was no way that we could get the sound bins up by road to *Angola* – surrounded as it was at that time by the MPLA on one side and UNITA on the other – so we decided to deal with the stadium gigs in *Luanda* when we got there. If we got there. No SAfrican planes could over fly the recently independent states – so we had to fly around them, because the unmarked Swazi registered Dak fooled no one.

Some of the power amps had to be off loaded at *Waterkloof Airbase* before we took off for *Mozambique* and it was too late to get them up on road freight to our first stadium gig scheduled for *September the 19<sup>th</sup> 1972*, at *White City Stadium in Bulawayo* - another sound problem I'd have to deal with when we got there. Right now we had to take off into the wild blue yonder; into the untamed skies of deepest darkest Africa at war, with a plane load of musicians; think **Buddy Holly and the Big Bopper** and pass the brown paper bag please! **Percy** is about to fly.

That the Dak DC 3 took off from South Africa at all was somewhat of a miracle. Technically speaking we were not allowed to be shot down, by the *Zambian Air force, Frelimo, ZANU-PF, MPLA* and the ever encroaching ANC and other resistance movements and Freedom fighters over whose territory we were flying. Cold comfort for a plane loaded with SAfrican soul and funk musicians and a world-renowned Soul artist who was terrified of flying anyway. On the up side it was also considered a miracle that we managed to land – like a pregnant bird with a thunderous bang, rumbling wheels and flapping wings, skidding side-ways to a stop!

Photo →>> Richard John Smith Rufaro Stadium Salisbury / Harare Rhodesia 1972



**FINALMENTE**  
**UM ESPECTÁCULO EXCEPCIONAL!**

**HOJE** NO **N'GOLA**  
 ÀS 21.15 — M/ 12 ANOS  
**NO PALCO**

os extraordinários cantores  
 de  
**RITMOS  
 MODERNOS**

**RICHARD JON SMITH**  
**PETER VEE e "THE OUTLET"**  
 E O FABULOSO CONJUNTO  
**"THE MIRACLES"**

**NO ECRAŊ**  
**"LET IT BE"**  
**IMPROVISO**

**Os Beatles  
 a sua  
 MÚSICA!  
 as suas  
 canções!**

BILHETES À VENDA — Na bilheteira do Cinema — Café Palo Norte e Agência ADEP na Av. dos Combatentes

Photo →>> Poster for an earlier Angolan Tour – Courtesy Peter Vee Collection 1972



**Soul Flying - Mozambique Rhodesia / Zimbabwe Zambia Malawi Angola**

Percy was performing to the masses that loved and wanted him, in countries outside of South Africa and although the only non-blacks on the tour were the crew and management, I don't think that escaped the boycott administrators – whoever they were. What were we doing flying at tree-top level entertaining the people while their sons were dying on the ground? As far as they were concerned the tour was planned from *enemy* territory, using *enemy* expertise to manage and administer the safari. Had Percy's fear of flying been justified - taken a turn for the worst, like meeting a missile or running out of fuel because the Dak was refused landing rights - it may have been some sort of poetic justice to those who managed the cultural embargo - filled, as we were later to learn, with opportunism and hidden agenda. Those of us who thought we knew better – and **Sledge** certainly wasn't one of them - felt dreadfully guilty. But the show must go on. And so it did.

**Ralph Simon** and **Clive Calder's** Johannesburg based *Sagittarius Music management* company had acquired the **Percy Sledge** through Capetown impresario, **Selwyn Miller's** LA based agency. They were about to pull off another one of their spectacular hyper-ventilating events, that was to follow a pattern of bizarre unplanned intuitive (and in hindsight extremely successful) publicity stunts, and see *Zomba Jive Records* claw its way to the top of the record industry in the UK and USA.

Ralph and Clive were at the beginning of their mission which was to launch a herd of SAfrican (township mainly) musicians onto the international pop music scene – and although **Percy**, a former hospital porter and stretcher bearer from Atlanta, Georgia was the draw-card, it was the dynamic hospital porter and stretcher bearer from *Mitchell's Plain Capetown* - popular local Soul act **Richard Jon Smith**, that *Sagittarius Music* wanted to focus on and needed to launch in Southern Africa. **Sledge** was the pad. RJS was post *Coon Carnival* and *Golden City Dixie's* stock – and unlike the tragedy that would befall the ever popular and ageless good looking **Zane Adams (Moghamad Zyan Safidin Adam)** – who unlike **Jonathan Butler** did not / could not leave South Africa - RJS was at the cusp of a so-called *verligte* policy as regards, entertainment, arts and culture. It was all still a cosmic and international tragic joke – but it was the reality of the times, none the less.

The SABC were never too happy about mixing the races; there was no official *coloured* radio station, so it wasn't easy for RJS to get playlisted to the so-called *coloured market* – a *market segment* that wasn't quite white and not quite black or brown enough – not quite the government's nightmare but the people of the street's dilemma. Only the radically inclined and the politically driven would listen to so called *radio Bantu* - if they could reach it on their dials; while the young gangs and hipsters would have to tune into the nebulous white *Radio Good Hope or Springbok / Radio 5*. The government had to be careful of so called coloured radio and the mass media aimed at them, in general. *Radio Freedom* broadcasted out of *Moscow* daily and they would not have had a weekly Afrikaans programme for the farmers in *Constantia, Capetown*, or the policy makers and holders up on the *Waterkloof Ridge* in *Pretoria*. There was even a Department of Afrikaans at the *University of Moscow* and it wasn't being administered from *Potchefstroom*.

Despite the mass appeal and powerful live shows, RJS and his many so-called coloured music comrades could do little else but entertain and draw the crowds – political utterances and social grievances of the like were not permitted. It's true that **Ralph and Clive** and all of us would excuse ourselves and claim that at least, if these *ous\** weren't political in nature, they were bringing the people together – at R2 to R10 a pop, what else could management say?

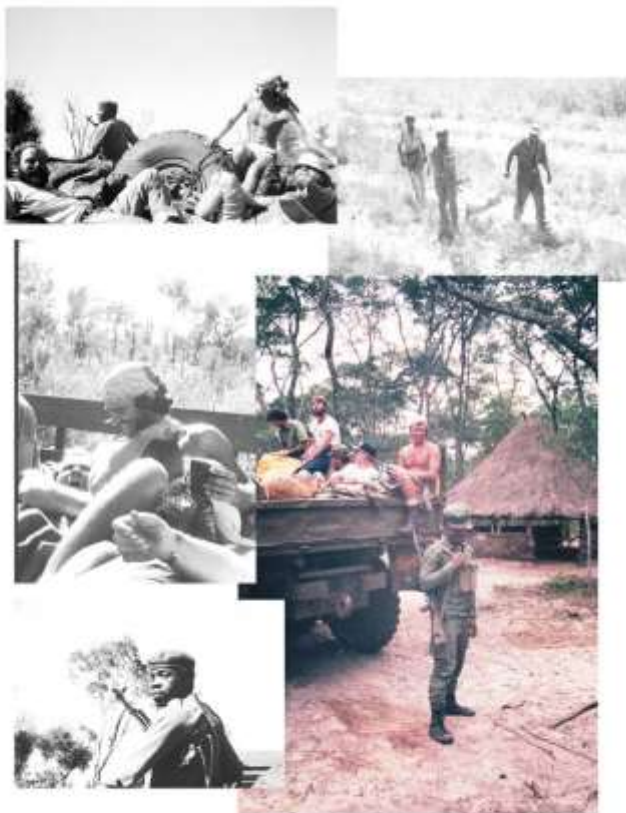
For years I believed that bringing people together and writing relevant protest tunes from the safety of the suburbs was better than nothing at all – but if we consider where *Zomba Jive* is today – the worlds largest independent pop music label - and what they have achieved internationally and look, with some concern, to what's happening with the lost generations in the townships where they started off – then one feels let-down. What happened to our high Hippie ideals of saving the world?

If the term *Soul* didn't mean anything to this rock, folk and township jazz cynic before undertaking to do the sound for his historic SAfrican *Percy Sledge Safari*, this was it! *Soul Music* to me was just another commercial market con not unlike the *Kwaito, Hip Hop* and pretty *Boyz and Girlz* pop con of today – not that music shouldn't be commercial – but this staged revolutionary shout for freedom to the back-beats of *Sam and Dave* and the love tunes of *Traffic* didn't sound right to me. But what Percy delivered, night after night, in *Mozambique, Rhodesia, Malawi and Angola* in 1972 was pure, raw, heart wrenching soul magic.

In 1984 I returned to *Angola*... as a sound-man of a completely different sort; none of that mixing horns, band and vocals, so that the sold-out stadiums and amphitheatres could delight over **Richard John Smith**, **Peter Vee** and **The Miracles**, or swoon over the soul love ballads of **Percy Sledge**; this was mixing sound-bites from the *Commander-in-Chief Jonas Savimbi* on a 70 Kg *Sony Umatic Tape* recorder and a 16mm analogue news-cam for **Roger Harris**' war torn shots and distant bombing and mortar fire over **Peter Sharp**'s *CBS News* commentaries. (As history would have it, singer-songwriter **Roger Lucey** – **Fran**'s cousin who, like me, had packed in the 'folk 'n rock' music biz back South - given that we saw no future but war for all of *Southern Africa* - was a cameraman and correspondent on that 'war tour' for *WTN News* – [Link to "Back in From The Anger"](#).)

**Savimbi** had bragged, on camera, that he would capture the capital, *Luanda*, any day now. We didn't get too far North West in *Angola*; the 'front line' was some 25 kilos South-East of *Luanda*; and that's where it stayed until **Savimbi** and his troops were driven back to their base in Southern *Angola*. But, if I was romantically hoping to see a liberated country, that was once one of the most magnificent, and fertile earth-rich countries on the continent, the road to *Luanda* sadly proved otherwise. The skeletal remains of burnt and bombed out pock-marked bullet holed deathly quiet empty *Portuguese* churches, homes and hospitals, in every village and town we stumbled across, told us that the entire country was just another uninhabitable hell-hole on earth. Whereas, just 12 years earlier **Cocky 'Two Bulls'** and my roommate, **Peter Vee** were wondering at the magnificence and raw beauty of *Angola*... especially the night sounds; from our quaint hotel balconies or at a road-side stop between the villages and towns that we toured in 1972. We could hear that the country was alive - laughing children and the faint distant rhythmic music of the *Angolans* and *Portuguese*... to a soundtrack of insects and animals of every kind imaginable, as we passed through pastures of green and plenty. And now here we were, sleeping in 'rebel' camps in dug-outs under the earth, and travelling in convoy, flat on our backs, in captured rattling rusty Russian army trucks, and not a sound but the weary whining diesel engines and the distant sounds of mortar and gun fire. Where there were once majestic white low-walled open air theatre stadiums in *Lobito* and *Luanda*, surrounded by lush green grass and filled with thousands of Pink Flamingos, standing silently one legged listening to **Percy** crying *When a Man Loves a Woman*, here we were peeping at this weird world through the lens of a 16mm camera and mixing a surreal soundtrack onto the tape from under sweaty ear-phones, and occasionally peering out from under a bunker in disbelief at it all; out there a vast open heavenly silent starry night; and you could hear absolutely nothing. And there's nothing more scary or intimidating on earth, than being in a tropical jungle and not hearing one single living sound.

**ANGOLA In Music / ANGOLA at war – 1972 / David with Savimbi 1984 with CBS News Angola 1984 (Photo by Roger Harris 569)**



ANGOLA 1984 – 12 Years after the PERCY SLEDGE SAFARI we were back – this time no guitars but cameras & guns. The Sgt. Ngonjo Story - our guide & security – is intriguing. Roger Lacey, Roger Harris, David Marks, Peter Sharp etc