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## YOUNGSTA'S DEBUT ALBUM OFFERS A NO-HOLDS-BARRED ACCOUNT OF LIFE FOR MARGINALIZED COMMUNITIES IN CAPE TOWN

**3T (THINGS TAKE TIME), YOUNGSTACPT (2019), Y?GEN RECORDS,  
CAPE TOWN, SOUTH AFRICA**

*Reviewed by Warrick Moses, University College Cork*

Riyadh Roberts aka YoungstaCPT has been a prominent figure in the Cape Town hip hop scene for a number of years. Despite numerous mixtape and EP releases, *3T* (an abbreviation of the aphorism 'Things Take Time') is the prolific MC's first full-length album. Released in 2019, *3T* pays homage to the city of Cape Town, acknowledging the complicated political and racial histories of South African apartheid as well as the lasting effects that segregation has had on the lives of marginalized communities. In particular, Youngsta highlights issues of disenfranchisement, spatial displacement and social stigmatization that plague Cape Town's coloured or 'mixed race' population at large. Employing US hip hop signifiers – the unmistakable Dr Dre or G-Funk production style on some tracks – alongside deeply local place names and linguistic references, Youngsta asserts the importance of Cape Town as the birthplace of South African hip hop (comparable in significance to Los Angeles's place in the history of gangsta rap), presenting as a homegrown version of luminaries like Snoop and 2Pac. With this concept album, Youngsta moves seamlessly through and between both musical and autobiographical pasts and presents. The message seems to be, that to script one's own narrative requires an intimate knowledge of what has come before. In this way, Youngsta exemplifies the hip hop cultural truism that to know where you are going, you gotta first know where you are coming from.

The album consists of 22 set pieces: songs interspersed with snippets of conversations between Youngsta and his 77-year-old grandfather, Boeta Shaakie. The introduction, entitled 'Pavement Special', traces Youngsta's progression through a cityscape filled with the sounds of honking car horns, taxi touts calling out to potential passengers, and the appeals of a street hawker peddling his wares. We hear the *adhaan*, or Muslim call to prayer, which then

segues into a sentimental piano melody and a discussion between two speakers of the unabated violence and underemployment impacting coloured neighbourhoods. Towards the end of this section, Boeta Shaakie contends that the seemingly entrenched problems facing today's youth can certainly 'be rectified'. Taking up the older man's charge, Youngsta bursts onto 3T's opening track, declaring himself to be the 'voice of the voiceless'; the undisputed 'Voice of the Cape'.

While informally, detractors have criticized Youngsta for relying too heavily on an 'American sound', the MC's true skill lies in effortlessly combining the tropes of US-based hip hop with Cape Town-specific cultural practice; tracing a direct line from the American West Coast to South Africa's Western Cape. The first part of this formulation is easily surmised: the Biggie-inspired hook that dominates 'VOC'; the chorus for 'The Cape of Good Hope' that matches the melody to Nate Dogg's verse in 'Oh No' (2008); the opening line of the same track ('I'm coming straight outta Cape Town') that references NWA's seminal album 'Straight Outta Compton' (1988); or even Youngsta's 2016 single 'Weskaap' ('Western Cape', not featured on this album) that borrows directly from Dre and Snoop's iconic 'The Next Episode' (2011). Yet, in order to fully appreciate the nuances of Youngsta's lyrics – and postcolonial critique – requires a brief lesson in the history and significance of separatist rule in South Africa.

In 1948, a system of segregation was implemented in South Africa under the National Party, that represented the interests of the country's minority white population. This system, known as apartheid, divided the country along the racial lines of white, and African (meaning 'black'). Anybody else who fell somewhere between these extremes – basically 'brown' folks – were officially categorized as 'coloured'. This intermediary classification included Indigenous groups, biracial people and those of Malaysian, Muslim descent. The racial and cultural diversity of the Cape is a result of the region's history as a Dutch settlement, initially a re-fuelling station for the Dutch East India trading company, and later, a site for the trade of goods as well as enslaved people from Dutch colonies in East and southern Africa. After a period as a British colony, control of South Africa was eventually ceded to its white, Afrikaner population, ostensibly descendants of the first Dutch settlers. However, apartheid legislation did not only determine the degree of political representation one was entitled to – whites had the most constitutional privilege, then coloureds, and finally, black Africans – it also outlined where one could live; whom one could marry; the quality, or even *possibility* of one's education; and the kind of job one could hold.

Although these laws were repealed and South Africa appointed its first democratically elected president in 1994, the legacy of apartheid rule is still very much alive today – as Youngsta reminds us on *Things Take Time*. Coloured people, imagined under apartheid as not quite white, and not quite black, continue to experience socio-economic and political marginalization under the country's contemporary neo-liberal dispensation. This is complicated by notions of racial and linguistic self-determination: not everyone historically classified as coloured, identifies with or accepts the implications of the term. Additionally, 'standard Afrikaans' is conventionally associated with white Afrikaners and erstwhile Nationalist rule. Most coloureds in the Western Cape, like Youngsta, speak vernacular Afrikaans, regarded as a deviation from the standard form. In the South African popular imagination, the stigma of a speaking a supposedly 'inferior language' connotes coloureds themselves as inferior to whites.

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Youngsta addresses these complexities head-on, and with healthy dose of irony. Track 2, 'VOC', takes its title from the abbreviation for the Dutch East India Company, or *Vereenigde Oostindische Compagnie*, under whose authority the first Dutch settlement at the Cape was established in 1652. 'Voice of the Cape' is also the name of a longstanding Muslim community radio station in the city. Claiming and re-figuring these initials as his own, Youngsta highlights his Malay heritage and frames the history of Cape Town as a story of the city's oppressed people. A similar strategy is used in the anthem 'YVR' (track 5). Jan van Riebeeck is the name of the first Dutch administrator of the Cape settlement. Here, Youngsta adopts the persona of *Young* van Riebeeck; he proclaims 'the hip hop game is like a country I am colonizing', and entreats listeners similarly to re-evaluate the histories they have been 'brainwashed' to believe.

The tracks 'Yaatie' (track 3), 'To Live and Die in CA' (track 7), 'The Cape of Good Hope' (track 8), 'Tik Generation' (track 13) and 'Kaaipstad Naaier' (track 20) deal variously with working-class life on the Cape Flats, the spaces to which coloureds were forcibly relocated by apartheid-era residential restrictions. They point out the ubiquity of gang violence and drug abuse in these areas and having to hustle to make a name for yourself or to simply get by. On 'To Live and Die in CA' the 'Westside' comparison is made explicit as Youngsta raps 'It's like Cape Town and Compton are step-bros' over a G-Funk beat and police sirens. 'Kleurling' (track 10), 'For Coloured Girls' (track 16), 'GHAM' (track 18) and 'Just Be *Lekker*' (track 19) celebrate coloured cultural identity and advocacy more explicitly ('We fight for a cause, never tighten our jaws'), while 'Crazy Arabian' (track 11) and '786' (track 12) are reflections on Youngsta's devout practice of Islam. Amidst all the bravado, the frustrations, and triumphs of these works, listeners also find more introspective pieces like 'Sensitive' (track 6), 'Old *Kaapie*' (track 9), '1000 Mistakes' (track 15) and 'Mother's Child' (track 17).

Alternating between rousing bangers and low-fi grooves, some of *3T*'s thematic content is not unproblematic. There is the tired rehearsal of coloured and broader Black Consciousness identities as wholly distinct. Or the patronizing and heteronormative attitudes in tracks explicitly praising women, the same contradiction that characterizes old-skool G-Funk. *3T* nevertheless offers a sustained, candid account of life on the Cape Flats.

At the album's conclusion, Youngsta's justified anger, tangible throughout, is tempered by the words of his grandfather. Boeta Shaakie's commentary, interrupted at the end of 'Pavement Special' (a colloquialism for 'mongrel' or 'mutt'), is now heard within a broader context. 'There *can* be change', he avers. 'You gotta look into the past [...] and *extract* the good [...]. *That's* what we gotta do'.

Whereas some might critique the production sound as overly familiar (too *much* of a G thang?), Youngsta's inventive wordplay is unsurpassed and undeniably situated in a localized context. As a standalone album, and thematic introduction to Youngsta's significant *oeuvre*, *3T* marks an impressive debut.

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