



FINE VOICE: Vocalist Adelia Douw has become a professional singer.

PICTURES: GREGORY FRANZ

Big band leads to big dreams

Delft 16-piece has helped its talented members reach for the sky

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tgw saturday

AT A TIME when it's sometimes so difficult to focus on what's good in this country come the inspiring stories about the Delft Big Band.

Founded in 2008, the band – which adheres to the traditional big band lineup of 16 musicians and two vocalists – comprises young men and women aged 16 to 25 who come from one of the roughest areas on the Cape Flats and whose marvellous musical talents have been honed and nurtured into a jazz outfit that performs a repertoire of more than 300 songs in several genres, all over the world.

Keeping the band going is no easy task. There are funds to be raised for the teaching programme to school the next generation of musicians as well as to pay each member a stipend for every performance, and the ongoing inherent challenges of the community from which the band members come. "There is crime, and there is always drama," says Butch Rice, marketing director for the band. He relates tales of muggings and shootings, cars that break down, theft, and so on. In addition, some members are still at school, while others work at low paid jobs, while there are those who stand to benefit from the life skills workshops that are being offered to them.

At the same time, the Delft Big Band has seen members progress into professional music careers, like vocalist Adelia Douw, 22, who is in high demand. When she launches into Etta James's *At Last*, you will get goose bumps.

"Ever since I joined the Delft Big Band my life changed," she says. "I could do what I love and still make a name for myself. It gave me hope and drive to go further and chase after my dream.

"I have travelled all over the

world. I've been to Sweden twice to perform for Queen Sylvia at the world children's prize. I won a scholarship to Berklee College of Music in Boston, USA, and I went on tour with the Delft Big Band in France, and we have performed at a lot of world class stages in and out of South Africa."

The best thing about being part of the Delft Big Band is that she gets a chance and a platform to do what she loves, says Douw: entertaining and singing. "To me being a musician means I'm able to think and be creatively artistic without being judged by anyone; to share what I feel and spread some love to people all over the world; to entertain and still be able to have fun while doing it."

Marcelle Adams plays third trumpet in the band (big bands have four), and is in his second year

BMus at UCT, where he plays first trumpet in the university's big band. "I started in the Delft Big Band when I was 15. I didn't see a future for myself then, I just went through life not knowing what I'm going to do or what to expect," he says.

"Until I got in the Delft Big Band. I started getting serious about music and Delft Big Band improved my knowledge of music and different types of music. I started gaining more and more interest in the band and jazz. The Delft Big Band has really changed the way I think about life and it has taught me communication skills as well. Right now it is my life. And we at the band have a bond. I feel at home when playing with the guys in the band and I thoroughly enjoy playing in the band. The band has also generated an income for me and to help support my family."



IN CHARGE: Musical director Ian Smith whips his charges into shape ,



FATE: David October joined the group after a singer didn't pitch up.

None of the band members has had an individual music lesson which is an incredible testament to their talent and that of musical director Ian Smith (Virtual Jazz Reality) who whips these youngsters into shape.

"The relatively high standard of musicianship displayed by the Delft Big Band may well be (apart from a great deal of innate talent displayed by a number of members) – if it may be stated without false modesty – a result of my tried and tested banding methodology which dates back to my teaching days at SACS and other schools," says Smith. "My system works as well for both advantaged and disadvantaged communities. It's all about psychology, motivation, inspiration, a focus on sight reading and music literacy, and a great deal of shouting.

"No individual lessons (due to

financial constraints) and performing at every opportunity help in goal setting. I guess the payoff is witnessing these young musicians unleash their potential and flourish in the highly competitive music industry as well as a sense of dignity brought about by their achievements and travel which has certainly broadened their minds.

"But most of all I just get a kick out of hearing a great big band come together, and when it does, nothing else matters."

Percussionist and vocalist David October – who has a wonderful stage presence and knows just how to charm the ladies when he sings – joined the band about five years ago. He went with his drummer friend Mark Williams to a rehearsal one night. October sat in at another rehearsal, and when the singer didn't pitch up, he offered to sing. According to October, Smith replied: "He can try the song but it doesn't mean I'm gonna book him for the job". October took the mic and did his thing. "And ever since then I'm with the band and that was a life-changing experience going from nothing to a semi-professional musician," he says.

"For me being part of the band has its ups and downs but the part I most that I enjoy is the gigs we do, the places we see, and the people we meet. Going overseas as a band was such an awesome experience, and the gig money we get, obviously!" he laughs. "This year will be my first time to sing at the Cape Town International Jazz Festival... what a dream come true!"

Upcoming performances include at Starlight Classics at Vergelegen, under the baton of Richard Cock, together with a 40-piece symphony orchestra, on February 27 and 28, and they're all very excited to be on the main stage at Cape Town International Jazz Festival at the end of March.

For more information on the band and its newly released CD, and more performances go to www.delftbigband.co.za.