Drum: The Making of a Magazine by Anthony Sampson

Anthony Sampson from the cover of his autobiography The Anatomist (2004)

It was 1951. The Nationalist Party under D F Malan had won the elections three years previously and apartheid was rapidly becoming entrenched in South Africa. Anthony Sampson had been sent a telegram by his friend Jim Bailey begging him to become editor of the ailing magazine African Drum he had launched earlier that year. Its circulation was only 20 000 and Bailey was losing £2 000 a month. Young (25 years of age) and adventurous, Anthony Sampson left England for South Africa to spend 3½ years as editor of “the crusading black magazine of the fifties” Drum.

Anthony Terrell Seward Sampson (3 August 1926 – 18 December 2004), writer and journalist, is probably best known for his biography of Nelson Mandela (Mandela: The Authorised Biography - 1992) for which he won the Alan Paton prize and his series of five analytical books on power in Britain, starting with Anatomy of Britain (1962) and ending with Essential Anatomy of Britain: Democracy in Crisis (1992).

Anthony Sampson attended Westminster School from 1941. He served in the post-World War II Royal Navy from 1944 – 1947. It was while reading English at Christ Church, Oxford University that he met Jim Bailey. He was editor of Drum 1951 – 1955. He was on the staff of the Observer from 1955 – 1966, editing The Observer Colour Magazine from 1965 – 1966. During this time he was regularly sent as a correspondent to report on events in South Africa, including the Rivonia trial in 1964. In 1965 he married Sally Bentliff. He was appointed as an associate professor at the
University of Vincennes, Indiana, USA in 1968. From 1973 – 1974 he was the chief American correspondent for the Observer. From 1977 until his death in 2004 he was a contributing editor to Newsweek. From the time he left Drum in 1955 until his death he wrote many books on South Africa and on power in both the political and corporate world.

Anthony Sampson is known for his astute analysis. This characteristic is already present in his first book Drum: a venture into the new Africa (1956) (republished in 2005, unchanged except for a new Foreword and Afterword, as Drum: the making of a magazine). It is an account of his time as editor of Drum. In the book we meet the people not only of Drum but also of South Africa. As he says in his foreword to the 2005 edition, he felt that he had “left the characters to speak for themselves with their authentic dialogue and voices”. While we see the people Sampson meets through his eyes, those of a young Englishman, he does, to a large extent, stand back and allow them to speak to the reader directly.

“The overcrowded Drum office in Johannesburg housed most of its journalists and photographers. Jürgen Schadeberg took this picture in 1954, while [Anthony Sampson] directed it, showing (from left to right) Henry Nxumalo, Casey Motsisi, Ezekiel Mphahlele, Can Temba, Jerry Ntsipe, Arthur Maimane (with hat), Kenneth Mtefwa (on floor), Victor Xashimba, Dan Chocho (with hat), Benson Dyanti (with stick), Robert Gosani. Todd Matshikiza was away.”

Photographer: Jürgen Schadeberg
The reader meets the journalists with whom Sampson and Bailey work, a talented
group of young black men whom owner and editor wisely allow to dictate the
direction of Drum as they know what the black citizens of Johannesburg want to
read about. They are the doyens of black journalism and writing: Henry Nxumalo,
Can Temba, Casey Matsisi, Ezekiel Mphahlele, Arthur Maimane and Todd Matshikiza
among others. It was allowing them to write about what they felt passionately, that,
through many ups and downs, eventually propelled the magazine to new heights.
They covered such topics as poor conditions on farms and in prisons, the latest jazz
groups to hit the music scene, the lives of gangsters and the South African favourite:
sport. And the articles were “devoured” by its readers.

“The three „Jazzolomos” were stars of the early fifties, much featured by Drum’s
writer on music Todd Matshikiza. Performing in 1953 are (from left to right) Jacob
„Mzala” Lepers (double bass), Sol „Beegeepee” Klaaste (piano) and Ben
„Gwigwi” Mrwebi (alto sax).” Photographer: Jürgen Schadeberg

Through the book the reader meets famous people, such as Nelson Mandela and
Trevor Huddleston, infamous gangsters, shebeen queens, musicians and ordinary
people. Each is seen through the keen eyes of Anthony Sampson. We see the effects
of apartheid and discrimination on the black, coloured and white people of
Johannesburg and we see the failed attempt by the ANC to prevent the removal of
people from Sophiatown to Meadowlands.
“Father Trevor Huddleston, a monk from the Community of the Resurrection, was a close friend of Drum. He was a prominent figure in Sophiatown and superintendent of St Peter’s School in Johannesburg, which educated many of the most talented Drum writers, and was later closed down under the Bantu Education Act.”

Photographer: Jürgen Schadeberg

“The apartheid government in 1954 was determined to demolish Sophiatown, the multiracial suburb of Johannesburg where many of the Drum writers lived. The ANC, encouraged by Mandela, campaigned vigorously to resist, with much publicity from Drum.”

Photographer: Jürgen Schadeberg
For a fresh and perceptive account of a magazine, a city and its people at the beginning of the apartheid era, Drum: the making of a magazine is a book well worth reading.

“This cover picture from 1954 showed a model being measured for her vital statistics by Drum writers including Ezekiel Mphahlele (kneeling on left) and Bloke Modisane (standing on right).” Photographer: Jürgen Schadeberg

If you would like to learn more about Drum you might find the following books, articles and documentaries interesting:

Note: * The University of Johannesburg has these books

- The Drum decade : stories from the 1950s / edited by Michael Chapman, University of Natal Press, 2001*
- The Beat of Drum : the story of a magazine that documented the rise of Africa as told by Drum’s publisher, editors, contributors, and photographers, Heyns, Jacky, Ravan Press, 1982-1984
- Drum : South Africa’s Black picture magazine, Creative Camera, 1984
- Good-looking Corpse: World of Drum - Jazz and Gangsters, Hope and Defiance in the Townships of South Africa, Mike Nicol, Secker & Warburg, 1991*
- Who killed Mr Drum?, Sylvester Stein ; with a foreword by Anthony Sampson, Mayibuye Books, 1999**
• Come Back, Africa. Lionel Rogosin & Peter Davis, TE Publishers *
• 1952 Time magazine article – South African Drumbeats 1959 Time
• magazine article - Drum Beat in Africa
• Drum, a film about Drum and one of its journalists Henry Nxumalo
• Come Back, Africa, a film shot in Sophiatown in the 1950s with writing credits by Lionel Rogosin, Blake Modisane and Lewis Nkosi
• Have you seen Drum recently?, a film by Jürgen Schadeberg using photographs drawn from the Drum archives

You might also like to read other books by Anthony Sampson:
• Drum: A Venture Into The New Africa (1956)*
• The Treason Cage: The Opposition On Trial In South Africa (1958)*
• Commonsense About Africa (1960)
• South Africa: Two Views Of Separate Development
• (1960)* Anatomy of Britain (1962)*
• Anatomy of Britain today (1965)*
• The New Europeans (1966)
• Macmillan, a Study in Ambiguity
• (1967)* The New Anatomy of Britain
• (1971)*
• Arms Bazaar (1977)*
• Changing Anatomy of Britain (1982)
• The Essential Anatomy of Britain: Democracy in Crisis
• (1992)* The New Europeans (1968)*
• The Sovereign State of ITT (1973)*
• Seven Sisters (a study of the international oil industry) (1975)*
• The Arms Bazaar (a study of the international arms trade)
  (1977) The Money Lenders (a study of international banking)
  (1981)
• Black Gold (about the crumbling of apartheid and the business/financial picture in South Africa) (1987)*
• The Midas Touch : Understanding the Dynamic New Money Societies around Us (1989)*
• Company Man (a study of corporate life) (1995)*
• Mandela: The Authorised Biography (1999), winner of the Alan Paton Award
• Who Runs This Place?: The Anatomy of Britain in the 21st Century (2004)
• The Anatomist (2004)*
• Drum : The Making of a Magazine (2005)*

Biographical information on Anthony Sampson was obtained from the following websites:
http://www.guardian.co.uk/media/2004/dec/21/pressandpublishing.booksobituaries
www.sahistory.org.za/pages/people/bios/sampson_a.htm
http://www.independent.co.uk/news/obituaries/anthony-sampson-754481.html