

an Ode to **Joy** in **South Africa**

Perspectives on South Africa from Ben Zander, a world expert on leadership and a man that played an influential role in developing the South African brand message "South Africa: Alive with Possibility."

All eyes will be turning again to South Africa on July 18th as Nelson Mandela celebrates his 90th birthday. We will be reminded that in 1992 not just South Africa, but the whole world, turned on its moral axis, as a visionary leader coaxed the human race back from the conflagration of the races towards a society, which Barack Obama now calls the post racial age.

It must sometimes seem to South Africans caught up in the maelstrom of poverty, violence, HIV, and crime that now Madiba's dream is a far-off fantasy. But it is good to reflect at this time, how far human beings have come since 1992 and to take pride and comfort from the fact that the world community looks to South Africa and its legendary former President for inspiration and hope for all mankind.

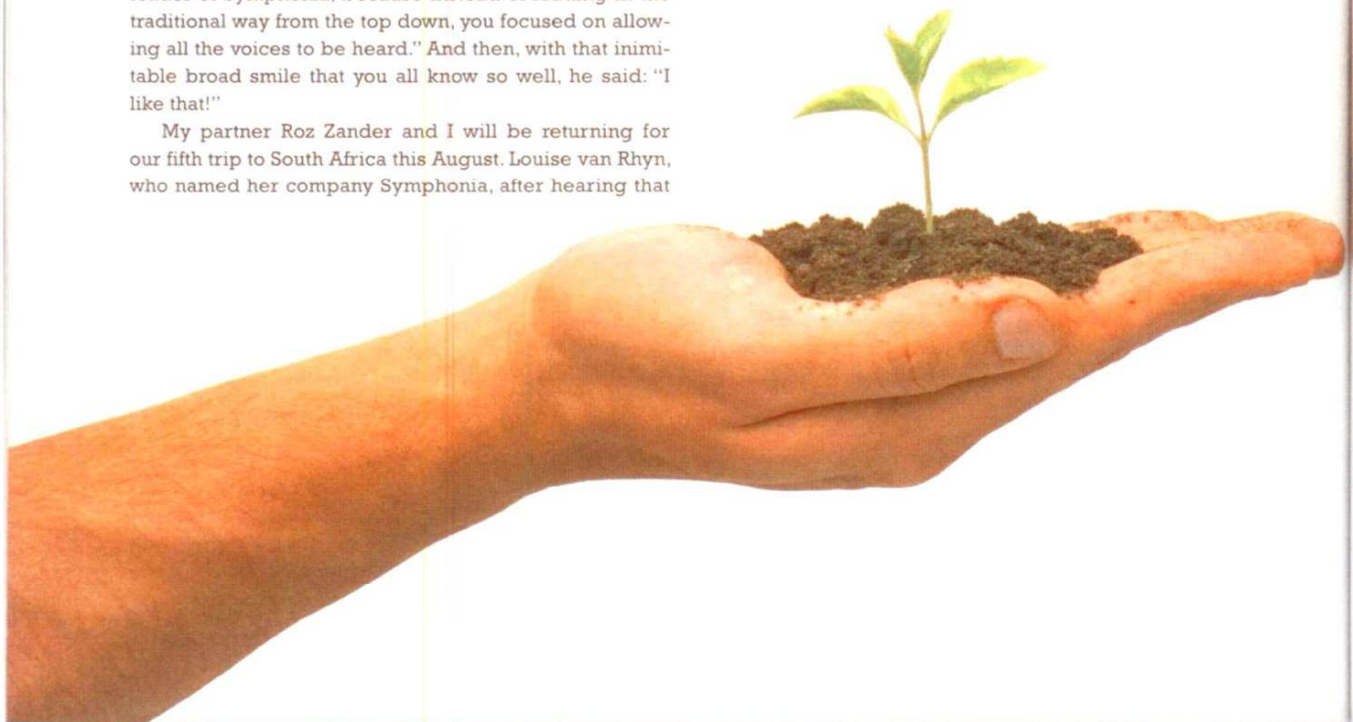
I once had the opportunity to tell President Mandela that he was the first leader of Symphonia. "Oh", he said, his eyebrows raised in amused interest, "What is that?". I explained that the word symphony is a combination of "sym" - together, and "phoniae" - to sound - the sounding together of all the voices. "You are," I said, "the first leader of Symphonia, because instead of leading in the traditional way from the top down, you focused on allowing all the voices to be heard." And then, with that inimitable broad smile that you all know so well, he said: "I like that!"

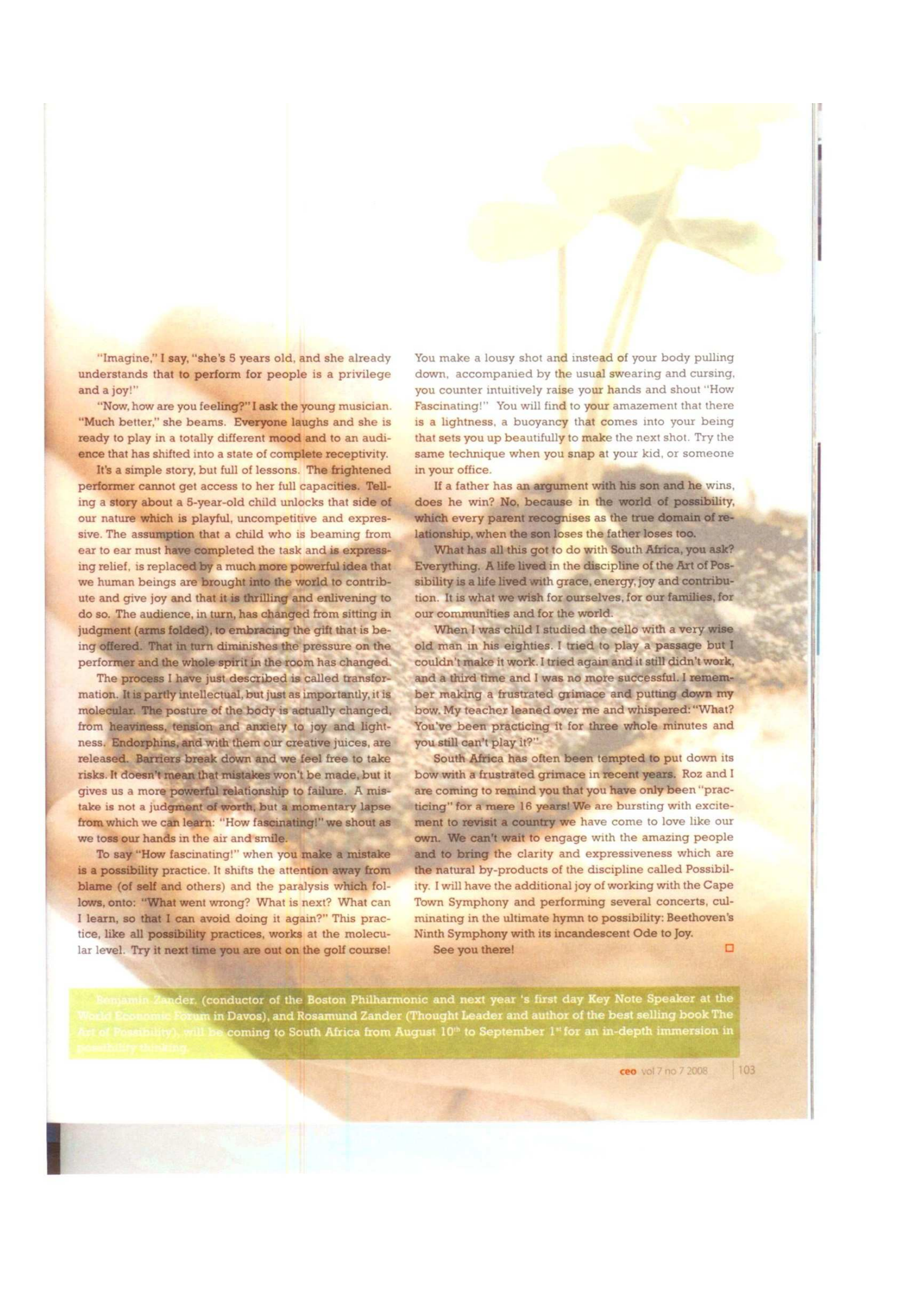
My partner Roz Zander and I will be returning for our fifth trip to South Africa this August. Louise van Rhyn, who named her company Symphonia, after hearing that

story, has moved mountains to bring us back to speak to literally thousands of people in many different venues, because she believes passionately that it is vital at this time to realign South Africa with its vision: "Alive with possibility".

The way we will do this is to first identify the ways in which despair, resignation and anger can take over and close down our energy and spirit. Then we will deliver practices to move into the open spaces of creativity, effectiveness and action by creating new stories.

Let me give you an example. A musician is about to perform for a large group. I ask; "How are you feeling about performing for this audience?" "Rather nervous," is the reply. I could say, "Don't be nervous, you'll be fine," but it is unlikely to do much good. Instead I tell a story: Jackie DuPre, the greatest cellist of her generation, went in for her first competition when she was 5 years old. She was seen running through the corridor with her cello and a broad grin on her face. The porter at the door says: "Well, I can see that you have just played". "No!" Jackie shoots back, "I am just about to!"





"Imagine," I say, "she's 5 years old, and she already understands that to perform for people is a privilege and a joy!"

"Now, how are you feeling?" I ask the young musician. "Much better," she beams. Everyone laughs and she is ready to play in a totally different mood and to an audience that has shifted into a state of complete receptivity.

It's a simple story, but full of lessons. The frightened performer cannot get access to her full capacities. Telling a story about a 5-year-old child unlocks that side of our nature which is playful, uncompetitive and expressive. The assumption that a child who is beaming from ear to ear must have completed the task and is expressing relief, is replaced by a much more powerful idea that we human beings are brought into the world to contribute and give joy and that it is thrilling and enlivening to do so. The audience, in turn, has changed from sitting in judgment (arms folded), to embracing the gift that is being offered. That in turn diminishes the pressure on the performer and the whole spirit in the room has changed.

The process I have just described is called transformation. It is partly intellectual, but just as importantly, it is molecular. The posture of the body is actually changed, from heaviness, tension and anxiety to joy and lightness. Endorphins, and with them our creative juices, are released. Barriers break down and we feel free to take risks. It doesn't mean that mistakes won't be made, but it gives us a more powerful relationship to failure. A mistake is not a judgment of worth, but a momentary lapse from which we can learn: "How fascinating!" we shout as we toss our hands in the air and smile.

To say "How fascinating!" when you make a mistake is a possibility practice. It shifts the attention away from blame (of self and others) and the paralysis which follows, onto: "What went wrong? What is next? What can I learn, so that I can avoid doing it again?" This practice, like all possibility practices, works at the molecular level. Try it next time you are out on the golf course!

You make a lousy shot and instead of your body pulling down, accompanied by the usual swearing and cursing, you counter intuitively raise your hands and shout "How Fascinating!" You will find to your amazement that there is a lightness, a buoyancy that comes into your being that sets you up beautifully to make the next shot. Try the same technique when you snap at your kid, or someone in your office.

If a father has an argument with his son and he wins, does he win? No, because in the world of possibility, which every parent recognises as the true domain of relationship, when the son loses the father loses too.

What has all this got to do with South Africa, you ask? Everything. A life lived in the discipline of the Art of Possibility is a life lived with grace, energy, joy and contribution. It is what we wish for ourselves, for our families, for our communities and for the world.

When I was child I studied the cello with a very wise old man in his eighties. I tried to play a passage but I couldn't make it work. I tried again and it still didn't work, and a third time and I was no more successful. I remember making a frustrated grimace and putting down my bow. My teacher leaned over me and whispered: "What? You've been practicing it for three whole minutes and you still can't play it?"

South Africa has often been tempted to put down its bow with a frustrated grimace in recent years. Roz and I are coming to remind you that you have only been "practicing" for a mere 16 years! We are bursting with excitement to revisit a country we have come to love like our own. We can't wait to engage with the amazing people and to bring the clarity and expressiveness which are the natural by-products of the discipline called Possibility. I will have the additional joy of working with the Cape Town Symphony and performing several concerts, culminating in the ultimate hymn to possibility: Beethoven's Ninth Symphony with its incandescent Ode to Joy.

See you there! □

Benjamin Zander (conductor of the Boston Philharmonic and next year's first day Key Note Speaker at the World Economic Forum in Davos), and Rosamund Zander (Thought Leader and author of the best selling book *The Art of Possibility*), will be coming to South Africa from August 10th to September 1st for an in-depth immersion in possibility thinking.