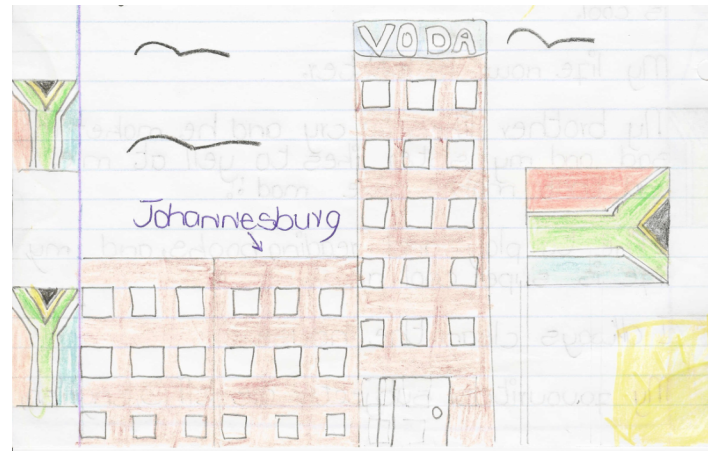


Background Info for “The Core of Ponte”

“The Core of Ponte” was written in 2008 for a benefit concert for the organization [Broadway in South Africa](#). Songwriters were asked to create songs inspired by the writings and drawings (which they supplied) of children living in Johannesburg.

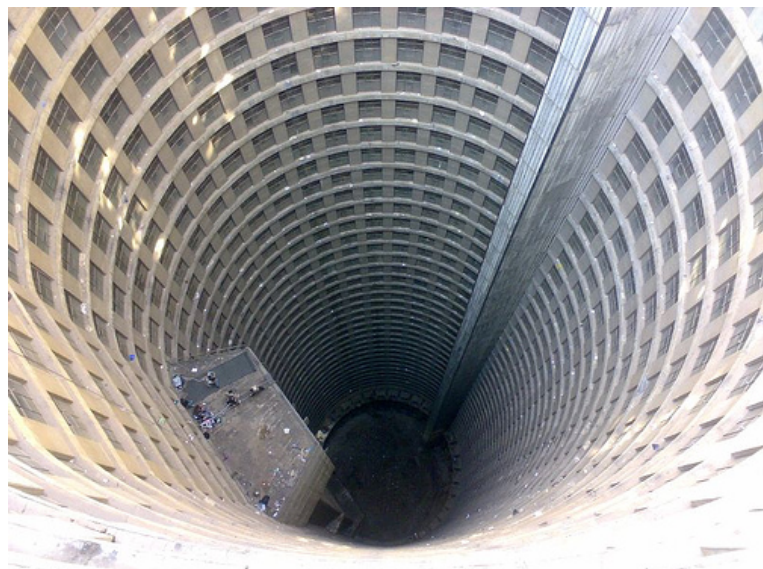
It is my experience that this song is performed most effectively when the history of the building has been explained beforehand.

One of the things that stood out to me in the materials I received was a drawing of Johannesburg made by an eleven year old girl. She had drawn a row of buildings, but one was significantly taller than the others, with the word Voda across the top. I was intrigued by the “Voda Building,” and so began my research into The Ponte City Tower.



The Ponte building went up in 1975, and at 54 stories, it was (and still is) the tallest residential building in Africa.

The building is shaped like a cylinder, designed to allow light into the apartments from the inside, referred to as the core.





The top three stories host a wraparound, flashing LED sign, a little bit of Times Square on the Johannesburg skyline. The original sign hawked Coca-Cola, while the current sign advertises Vodacom, South Africa's leading cellular network.

The Ponte building straddles two neighborhoods, Hillbrow and Berea, which were designated "white" areas at the time of its opening, when Apartheid laws were still in effect. Once these laws were repealed, the neighborhoods around Ponte became heavily populated with blacks and immigrants, which sent the whites fleeing to the suburbs, Berea and Hillbrow quickly became the new inner city, with Ponte its most obvious symbol.



The building fell into major disrepair, becoming notorious for the garbage that filled the core, for the high incidence of murders and suicide jumpers, and for the fact that even the armed guards positioned at the entrance couldn't control the crime that had overtaken the building. At one point, there was even a proposal to convert the building into a prison. In 20 some-odd years, Ponte had gone from "heaven on earth," as the original marketing campaign had boasted, to a literal hellhole.



In 2007, a developer purchased the building for an undisclosed sum and is spending upwards of 200 million rand to refurbish it as stylish, modern condos. (200 million Rand is roughly \$27 million, which may not sound like much to us in NY, but it's a significantly different standard of living in South Africa.)

In October of 2007, just before the sales office opened, the New Ponte developer partnered with the city to sponsor an event to raise awareness and funds for an inner city arts non-profit organization by offering the privilege to rappel (or abseil, as they call it) down into the center of the building on ropes like mountain climbers use.



P.S. A few months after the concert for which this song was written, The New Ponte Project was cancelled. The development company had never, in fact, purchased the building, yet had begun renovations on floors 1-34 with the understanding that they could buy the building once they had raised the money, which they intended to do by pre-selling the condos. Evidently, the upscale buyers they were targeting weren't biting, and the developer never got the money to complete the deal. The building is still occupied by original residents, who reportedly share two painfully slow elevators to take them to their apartments on floors 35 and up....