

YUSI MAHLASELA

WISDOM OF FORGIVENESS

The melody of life flows thickly in the veins of one of Mamelodi's most gifted and talented sons YUSI MAHLASELA, known to many simply as "The Voice".

Vusi was born in Lady Seibourne, Pretoria in 1965 and grew up in Mamelodi, a township famed as a cradle of culture which produced many great intellectuals, artists and writers. Vusi began singing at the age of seven and by the time he had reached high school, his amazing vocal range was demonstrated when he was the only boy still able to sing soprano parts. Vusi had taught himself how to play guitar using an instrument made of tin cans and fishing line, and he soon set about putting together a vocal group. By now he had begun formal guitar lessons and four years later Vusi played his first public concert. At first he sang cover versions of popular songs but soon discovered a flair for composition and began penning his own. Vusi was now much in demand at political rallies and other events and he began working with poetry groups, even appearing in a few stage productions.

Only after joining the Congress Of South African Writers in 1988, did Vusi develop confidence in his talent as a poet and writer, rather than simply a lyricist. He now came into contact with various other artists and poets who were to influence him greatly, including the murdered Chilean folk singer Victor Jara and local dub poet Lesego Rampolokeng, with whom Vusi has struck up a lasting and creative friendship. Other influences were to come out of the South African jazz and traditional music genres with artists like Miriam Makeba and Philip Tabane. His introduction to the International scene came in 1990 when Vusi played at the Zabalaza Festival in London, and since then his talents have taken him to Sweden, Singapore, France, Austria and Finland amongst others.

Vusi's debut album "When You Come Back" was recorded and released by Shifty/BMG in September 1992. It received much critical acclaim and was very well received in Europe, particularly France. Vusi now uses these overseas trips to develop a second career as a journalist and has interviewed fellow performers like Manu Dibangu and Carlos Santana. Vusi also became closely involved with the anti-rape campaign in his home suburb, having used his growing recognition to help set up a rape crisis centre for Mamelodi women.

Tragically, one person who will never hear Vusi sing or tell his tales of Mamelodi is his nine year old son Tshidiso, who is deaf. "Sometimes he asks to listen to the tape and shows he can hear a little bit, or he will put his head against my guitar and feel the vibration of the music." says Vusi.

Towards the end of 1993, the track "Mayibuye" from "When You Come Back" was featured on a Canadian album compilation "X Marks The Spot" which featured greats such as Paul Simon, Peter Gabriel, The Neville Brothers, UB40, Johnny Clegg, Mzwake Mbuli and Youssou N'Dour. The album proceeds were used for voter education in South Africa and Vusi was featured on Canadian TV in a documentary on the making of the album. The man with the voice like an angel had arrived on the International scene in a big way and the stage was set for stardom.





Early 1994 saw Vusi team up again with Lloyd Ross of Shifty Music and work was begun on a new album at Valley Studios in Johannesburg. Working and writing closely with Lesego Rampolokeng and Zimbabwean guitar maestro Louis Mhlanga, and bringing in the countrys' top musical talent, the stunning new album "WISDOM OF FORGIVENESS" was born into a rapidly changing South African society.

"WISDOM OF FORGIVENESS" is an exquisitely crafted collection that sees Vusi taking his now famous voice in new directions and effortlessly exploring the vast and rich Southern African musical landscape. He is ably assisted in this journey by a selection of musicians that include accordion maestro Nico Carstens (adding a somewhat continental flavour to the tracks "Qondo Phumula" and "Ubhule"), drum and percussion legends Ian Herman and Lloyd Martin as well as other local luminaries such as Noise Khanyile, Bruce Cassidy, Bra Ntemi, Jannie "Hannepoot" van Tonder, Kelly Petlane, Gloria Bosman, James Philips, Thula Sizwe, Victor Masondo, Duncan Senyatso, Tony Cox and Didi Kriel.

The new album also sees Vusi teaming up with the unique sounds of the acclaimed Soweto String Quartet on the tracks "Hope", "Fountain" and the title track "Wisdom Of Forgiveness". The resultant musical chemistry is set to make more than a few music lovers the world over sit up and take a closer listen. Vusi was invited to play with the Strings at the 1993 BMG International conference in Singapore and the combination proved an instant hit with the delegates, causing an unprecedented demand for Vusi's work. Hence 1994 will see the worldwide release of his two albums via BMG International. At last the humble genius from Mamelodi will be able to spread his message of hope and forgiveness throughout a troubled world in search of peace and understanding.

Thanks to his dynamic live shows with backing band "Music Ye Africa", Vusi is much in demand at music festivals in Europe, and he will be travelling extensively for the rest of the year. On the 10th of May 1994 in Pretoria, the man with an ethereal voice that should be declared a national treasure, was on stage with his fellow musicians for the most important gig of his life, to celebrate the inauguration of South Africa's brand-new president, Nelson Mandela.

"WISDOM OF FORGIVENESS" is an album stunning in its depth and scope, a mix of mellow harmonic nuances and unequalled vocal mastery with shades of jazz and complex African rhythms, set against a backdrop of seamless production by Shifty supremo Lloyd Ross (who also plays guitar and mandolin on a few tracks). According to Vusi it is "an album dedicated to the respect of all humanity. Music to fight crimes and injustices in this Era Of Hope, to bring us better living years." The soul of the new South Africa has been captured on an album that is set to be an essential item in any self-respecting music lovers collection.



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Tracklisting :

*Ntate Mahlasela
Tontobane
Hope
Fountain
Emigodini
Yithi Masotsha
Two Birds
Basimanyana
Nqondo Phumula
Treason
Ubuhle Bomhlaba
Don't Tramp On Me
Wisdom Of Forgiveness*

*For further information contact LANCE or MARGRET at BMG/Shifty
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*Also available from BMG/Shifty : Vusi Mahlasela "When You Come Back"
CD SHIFT 50/L4 SHIFT 50*

