



MIRIAM

MAKEBA

THE POWER & THE PASSION

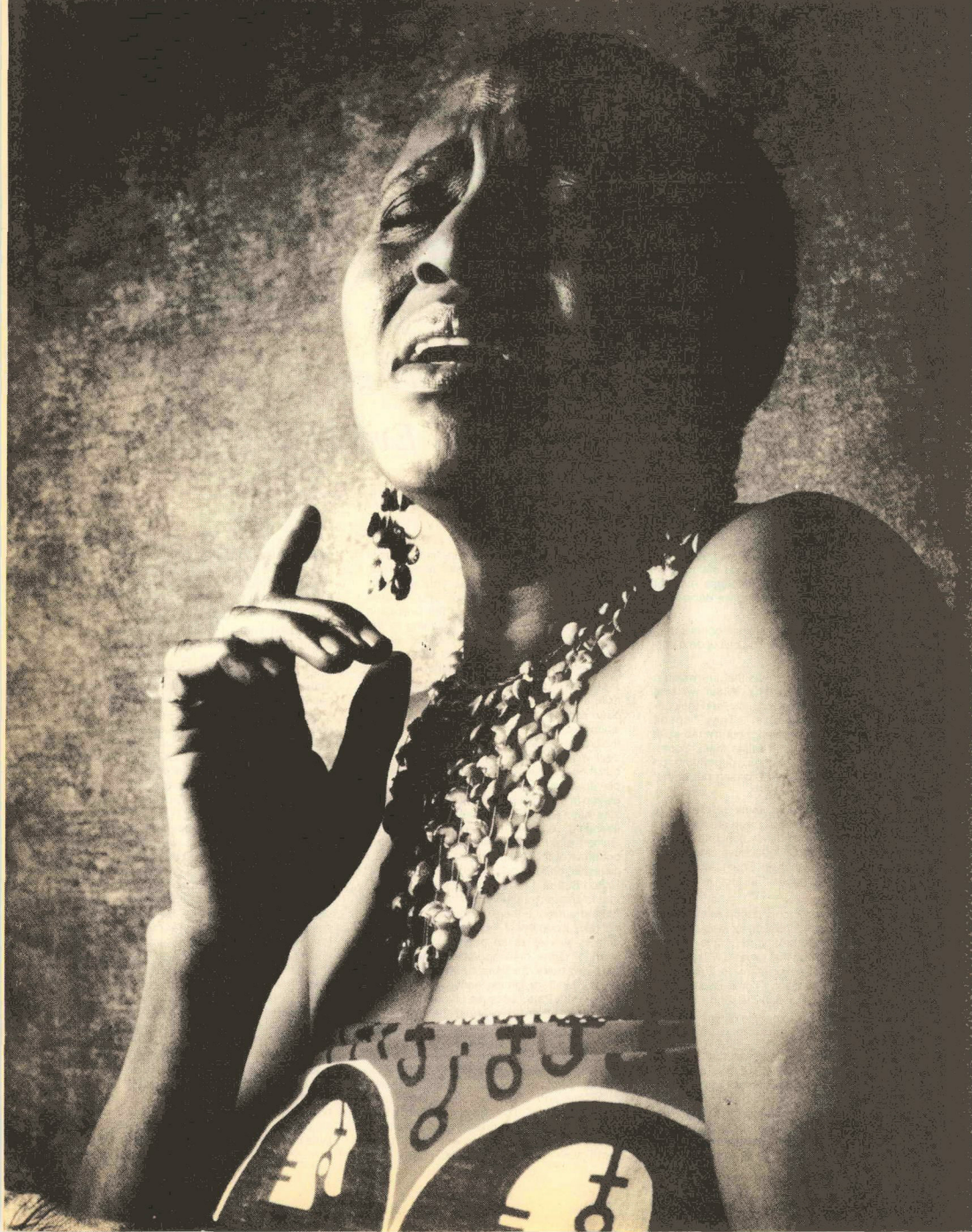
The hard diamond life of Miriam Makeba has countless facets, all formed under the crushing press of recent history. She was jailed along with her mother while still an infant and was discovered as a singer while still in her teens. Exiled from her homeland of South Africa for nearly 30 years, she has been married to five men, including Hugh Masekela and Stokely Carmichael, and was a special friend to Guinea's Sékou Touré, that country's founding president and an early leader in the Pan-African movement. She has survived 11 fearsome road accidents, one fiery plane crash and cancer surgery. She performed, often as a headliner, at the vast majority of the African independence celebrations. She was an apprentice to her mother, a traditional healer, yet she watched her own daughter Bongie reject similar psychic/spiritual gifts and die as a result. A one-time U.N. delegate who has argued in vigorous all-nighters with Marlon Brando, she won the Dag Hammarskjöld Peace Prize in 1986. Still a shy coquette well into her 50s, she is self-effacing and modest but is capable of channeling pure verbal firestorms of concentrated bile and rage.

In many ways, the three things that have defined Makeba's life are hope, determination and song. The

revolutionary singer has just released her first U.S. lp in some 20 years, the triumphant *Sangoma* (Warner Bros.), which offers continuing proof of these three elements. The mostly a cappella album is a collection of the ageless traditional songs of her youth, many of which she sang with her mother during healing sessions. Her mother was a sangoma, the word for those people possessed by the spirits of the ancestors. Not only do sangomas heal the sick, they also have the ability to see the future and, most importantly, they act as the mediums between the ancestors and the living. Makeba sings these 19 songs from the soul of her people with such passion and transcendent power that no listener can remain unmoved or uneducated after hearing them. Considering the pop success of Paul Simon's *Graceland*, it is a tribute to her artistry that she decided to do something so uncompromisingly rootsy in lieu of trying to cash in on the aftermath of commercial hildom.

Roger Steffens' talk with her was commissioned by Warner Brothers for a promotional interview album and took place in a Hollywood studio one rainy evening in December 1987. What follows are excerpts of their conversation, a moving testimonial to the Empress of African Song, Mama Africa, Miriam Makeba.

Interview begins on page 18



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Q: I would like to start by asking you about your mother. Could you explain some of the powers that you witnessed as a young girl as well as how you assisted your mother with those powers?

A: Well, my mother was a traditional healer. She was an African doctor, but of course, to many people in the Western world, they don't believe we had doctors. And when the invaders of our continent came, they called them "witch doctors." Something which I always say is, you can't be a witch and a doctor at the same time. So to us, they are traditional healers. And we call them sangoma—that's the plural of sangoma. And my mother had these powers. The healers have powers that enable them to see into the future and to see what is ailing somebody, and be able to go to the veldt or to the mountains or on the riverbanks—wherever these powers send them to get the traditional medicine that they need to administer to someone who is ill.

Q: Why did you choose to call the album *Sangoma*?

A: Because most of the songs that are on the album are the songs that I learned from my mother as she went into her trance to heal somebody or to see what and how she could do it. We had to sing these songs, and she sang them. I heard them when I was very young, and they are songs that are handed down from long ago. And because most of them are the songs she sang, we decided to call the album *Sangoma*.

Q: Would it be proper to say sangoma songs are all invocations, where you call upon a particular god?

A: You call upon the spirits that are within a person, who is a sangoma. When we sing these songs, and they sit quietly, and they become somebody else. They speak through...it's them speaking, but it's the spirit of someone else who is within them. Sometimes their voice changes, depending on which one of the spirits is coming out at that time.

Q: Can we talk about some of the tracks now? Despite the fact that these are traditional songs, they sound as if they could have been written this very second, because of how they illuminate the situation in South Africa. The first song, "Emabhaceni," in fact, is about a civil war.

A: Well, we, like all other people in the world, had our own little squabbles, as wars between the different ethnic groups from time to time. And so this is a song that says: "I will never go to Zululand. I will never marry in Zululand." I prefer to marry a Baca—I'm a Baca—why? Because my father died in Zululand.

Q: So don't marry the people of your enemy.

A: Yeah! In a way.

Q: Yes. I was shocked and disturbed, through a feeling of empathy when I read your book, at the incredible roller-coaster of emotions that your life really has been. And yet, professionally, it seems to me over the past 30 years that you have gone from one triumph to another. When you were in effect banned from the United States in the late '60s, when you mar-



walking tall.

Q: Did it hurt when that career opportunity was closed to you in the late '60s?

A: Yes, it did hurt. But I just took it like I took the fact that I can't go back home to my own country. When I was banned to go back home, it hurt, but I had to say well, that's life, you know? I can't sit and drown myself in that kind of thing. I have to get up and fight and do something to survive. So I had the same attitude; but it did hurt. And I always said, well, I'll wait, because it's been said that good things come to those who wait.

Q: I'm amazed by that inner strength you

The strength I get is from my people . . . Even those who have died are still with us.

ried Stokely Carmichael, you had at least three other continents that welcomed you with open arms. And last year you probably reached more people than you've ever reached in your life as part of the *Graceland* tour. And now we see you returning to the States and releasing a long-awaited album. Am I misinterpreting your career? It seems to me to be one success after another.

A: Well, I must say I was never really banned from the United States, because I've always been coming here. What happened was that when I was married to Stokely, some people in the business, in show business, decided not to deal with me artistically. Many shows that I had then were cancelled. My records were not played as much as they had been, or were not played at all. And so I decided that, rather than stay here and drown, or allow myself to be strangled, I should leave. So I left and went to Guinea, and from Guinea I was going to different parts of the world where I had fortunately cultivated an audience while I was living in the United States. I would go to Europe, to Asia, and to different countries in Africa to perform. I had an audience there, fortunately, which did not take my personal life so personal. So I was able to survive as an artist for the past 18 years...I came here sporadically to perform here and there, for benefit performances, but my career here almost ended in 1968. Just after, "Pata Pata," because of that.

So I left, and I think I did the right thing, because I didn't allow myself to sink. I just went away, being that the world is big and round. And I'm back, and I'm here. I was very fortunate that when Paul Simon decided to do his tour, he called on me. Hugh Masekela called me and said, "You know, Paul would like you to tour; I'm going to tour with him too," so I came, and that was another door to come back into the United States. And I was happy that I didn't come back crawling. I came back

have that lets you get up off the canvas and back into the ring constantly, and has kept you among us right through the late 1980s—and I hope for many decades to come. What's the source of your inner strength?

A: I don't know. I guess when I look into South Africa from outside, and I see the people at home fighting so hard, fighting back—when I see little children facing tanks and guns with stones, or nothing at all, and see little babies being teargassed, children from the age of 8 being thrown in jail—ah, I say to myself, "Hey, I'm here, at least I can have a piece of steak whenever I have two dollars to buy it!" Sometimes I don't have it. But I say they can't do that! I have no right to lay down in the mud like a pig and just drown. I have to get up and have the strength to say, "I'm here." And to be with them in whatever way I can.

I've always been branded as a political singer. I never set out to sing politics; I just happen to come from a country that is oppressing my people. And I grew up under that oppression. And so I sing about my own life and the lives of my people. It still hasn't stopped, and I cannot stop. Because it is difficult for me to forget where I came from. If I did that, I wouldn't know where I am, and I would not know where I am going.

So, the strength I get is from my people. And I get it from my mother, my ancestors. Because, to us, even those who have died are still with us. They live among us. We talk to them. When I'm in deep trouble I kneel down, I say to my mother and my father and my grandmother: "You've gone to the other side. Wherever you are, ask the Superior Being to help me. And help me to be strong."

And I get strength from all the people who have given me their love in different countries. Wherever I have appeared, wherever I have lived in this rolling stone life of mine...because sometimes people ask me, "Where do you

live?" I have to think twice, because I really don't know where I live. I have the rest of my clothes in Guinea. I have some in Brussels. I have some in Washington, where my grandchildren are. So, I'm just everywhere.

Q: I'm struck also in reading your book that it is written entirely in the present tense. I think this illustrates the African concept (of time) that is alien to many in the West, where time is linear. You have a past, and it's over; you have a present, and you have a future. And the future is unknowable, and the past is irretrievable. But to an African, as you have said, the past is very much alive. And so my next question is: Can you see the future?

A: I try to see the future. I may be wrong, but I try. And for me, the future has to be that I will return home. My people will be free. And we shall live as human beings like all other peoples in the world, because if I ever stop thinking that way, or looking to the future that way, then it would be very detrimental to me. I may just as well lay down and die. To me, my future is a free South Africa where everyone can live in peace and harmony, where we can all build our country together and live as normal human beings.

Q: There is another country in Africa where it was said the races could not coexist in peace, and Zimbabwe has proven that to be false. Tell me about the day you went to Harare, Zimbabwe, with the *Graceland* tour.

A: Normally I sleep on planes. Maybe it's because I'm really afraid to fly, but I have no choice, I have to fly all the time. So I usually get on the plane, fasten my seatbelt and go to sleep. But I could not sleep when we were going to Zimbabwe, because I just could not believe that I was going there. During the Ian Smith government (I when Zimbabwe was still called Rhodesia), I was banned in Zimbabwe, I could not go to Zimbabwe. And during independence, I would have liked to be there; even when Bob Marley was singing there, I couldn't go because my name was still on the list of those who were banned.

Q: That was virtually the only country-achieving independence that didn't invite you to sing at their independence, isn't it?

A: Exactly. It was completely overlooked until recently. So when I was going there with the *Graceland* tour, I couldn't sleep, I was so excited! When we arrived, and I got off the plane, I said, "I'm really in Zimbabwe!" And I looked around, I listened and I heard people talk in a language I can't understand. I don't speak Shona, but I do understand a few words, and of course Ndebele is quite a lot like Zulu, and I was just so happy.

And then, when we performed and I came out on that stage and looked into the audience and saw all kinds of people, black, white, Indians and whoever, just swaying together. And when I did talk, I said: "I'm so happy to be home, I can't even explain how happy I am." And then I said, "I hope that someday, we in South Africa will have a chance to invite Paul Simon to a free South Africa." And people just screamed. And all people, white and black, everyone was so happy. And it made me

happy, and sad in a way, that I was so close to home and yet so far. And I said to myself: "Why can't we be like this in South Africa? Why can't people just be like that. Why can't I go home and sing to all the people together, in any stadium, be it in Soweto, in the middle of Johannesburg...."

Q: In practical terms, how soon do you think freedom will come to South Africa?

A: Well, I don't know. My people have been going through this [since] before I was born. I am 55; I'm going to be 56 in March '88. All this time my people have been always saying: *Please let us live like human beings*. It seems as though the white people in South Africa in the government, they just turn a deaf ear. There is nothing that our people haven't tried—through the U.N., through peaceful marches, through this and that. And everything seems to fail, and things seem to go worse every year.

We could be independent soon in South Africa if some of South Africa's best friends, who are really the superpowers, wanted us to be free. They can put pressure on South Africa, because they are the ones that are propping up South Africa. And it's very hard for us, because we are not just fighting a minority government in South Africa; we're fighting the whole Western world.

Sometimes I say to myself, "I wonder what they would do if we were the black minority, oppressing and doing all the nasty things that are happening to us, to a white majority." I am sure that all these countries would have run to the aid of South Africa. Which, to me, becomes a very racist kind of thing.

I know that blood is being spilled. People say, "No, you have to do it peacefully." We want peace! Nobody wants to die. But our blood is spilling every day. It is spilled by them, we spill blood amongst ourselves, but it's still them, because they are behind all the factions fighting within our own community as well. So I don't know when it will come, but it has to come.

Q: Let's get back to some of those songs. Let's talk about "Kulo Nyaka" (This Year). Because in the notes, you say that it's a look back at the misfortunes of the year before. Is it only a look at misfortunes, or does it also look at some of the good things that might have happened within the previous year?

A: I think it's a look at everything. But I said the misfortunes, yes. I guess that I think more of those. But I can say that there are some very nice things that also happened to me during those years, which is what has kept me going. I did say that everywhere I go, people open arms, and they let me in. And it takes away some of the pain of all the misfortune that has happened to me.

Q: Miriam, the next track I want to ask you about comes in a way from a line from Ernest Hemingway that you quote in your book, because it's about a spotted leopard. And you talk about the remains of a leopard that had been found high up on Kilimanjaro, far out of the habitat that the leopard normally would have. You quote Hemingway, wondering what

it was he was seeking at such an altitude. Are those two thoughts connected by the song "Ingwemabala"?

A: Sometimes we say things indirectly. The way I am interpreting "Ingwemabala" on this album has to do with us. We in South Africa are like a spotted leopard which is in some territory where there are no other leopards. There are no leopards and then there you are, so you are conspicuously there; thus, you don't belong to the rest of the people that are there. And that is our situation at home. So I am saying, "What did we do to be in this situation where a spotted leopard that is where it shouldn't be?"

Q: To be a sangoma is a blessing and in some ways it's a curse, is it not? You have a song about that, "Angilalanga," that translates "I don't sleep." And the person doesn't sleep, because they have received the call of the spirits; and the responsibilities and challenges now being faced are almost too much. Would you talk about that?

A: Well, it's not a curse, it's like anyone who is called upon when they're supposed to perform their duty, they have to do it. A medical doctor could be sleeping in the middle of the night, and somebody is hurt or very ill—he has to get out of bed and go. I don't think you would look at that as a curse. It's his duty.

Q: And yet your book is filled with stories, in many different countries, of people who are called by the spirits. And some of them fight that call, and they end up having disasters in life because they've avoided that call. And in one very moving part of your book, you talk about your niece, Yvonne, who points out that perhaps when you perform at times, you too are literally possessed. Is there a curse to that possession for you?

A: There are times when I perform, and I sing like I make out my program. I do the pacing of my program. When I write down the songs, I give them to the bandleader, and he leads me into each song and every applause. And I sing, I do my show, I come off, and there are times I ask them, "Did I sing this or that song?" And they look at me and say: "Yeah, we did!" I say, "Did we play that? I don't remember doing that song! Or did we jump that song?" Everybody says, "No, we sang it." I always sit down and say, "Well, maybe someone else was singing for me at that time, and I was completely gone."

Q: There is a word that you use several times in the book, and I cannot pronounce it, but it is the course of instruction that the sangoma goes through.

A: Ukuthwasa.

Q: Does it mean anything, literally?

A: Yeah, it's like—you find out that you do have this kind of a thing within you—you have to go through training, like a doctor goes to university. You go to those isangoma who have already been through that, who are practicing healers, to be put through the training.

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and to be taught how to deal with certain things when that comes, and so on.

Q: Now your mother received two years of instruction in Swaziland, was it?

A: Yes.

Q: You in effect are a graduate of the instruction just by the fact of your career, and the fact that you often, as you've said, are taken by the spirits in performance, so that you are satisfying the need of the spirits for a physical outlet.

A: I guess so; if I didn't have that outlet, I'd probably have to go through what she went through or have some kind of misfortune.

Q: Do you think your daughter was affected by the fact that she didn't take instruction?

A: I have been told so. She didn't want to do that. She sang sometimes, but she was doing it as a ... just whenever she felt like performing, she performed. She sang very well; she wrote most of the songs I sing. She used to write beautiful lyrics for me.

Q: Among all your nicknames, I think the one that fits you best is "Mama Africa," and it is such a joy for me to see you here, because I saw you first about 28 years ago, when you were an ingenue. You were a shy young woman who was transformed when you sang, and when you were speaking, you were almost like a coquette, or a geisha—I mean there was something so charming about the humility with which you carried yourself. And now I see you almost 30 years later, and you're a matriarch. You're from the mother continent of Africa, and you in fact are called Mama Africa, the mother of the mother continent. How does that make you feel?

A: I often wonder why they call me that!

Q: Do you remember who first gave you that name?

A: I think it was in Guinea. Some Swiss people came to do a profile on me...no, it was in Europe. Every year they choose one French-speaking country in Africa to do a film on something. And they take those films to a competition, and then, whichever film wins, it means those twin countries have won for that year. And this particular year, the Swiss Romagne television, which is French, came to Guinea, and they chose to do a film on how I lived in Guinea. And when they asked children and people what they thought of me and so on, the people said I was Mama Africa. So when that film was shown all over French-speaking Africa, it was called *Mama Africa*.

Just recently, I was in Guinea and somebody was shouting, "Miriam! Miriam!" And I didn't hear them; I was in a car. They finally said, "Mama Africa!" And when I looked around, he waved. And I said: "Isn't that strange? I heard somebody saying Miriam and I was just not paying attention." He said, "Mama Africa!" I looked around and I saw somebody waving. So that name stayed. It's like the other name, which appeared on an album I did live in Guinea. The late president (Sékou Touré) said, "She is the Empress of African song." Or "L'imperatrice des chansons africaines" in French. So they gave that title to the album I did at the Palais du Peuple,

which is the People's Palace in Guinea. And so I get names like that. Sometimes I think it's too much for me. I'd rather just be me.

Q: You talk about women eloquently, and one of the songs has specifically to do with that: "Mosadi Ku Rima." Woman who cultivates, while her lazy husband is home sleeping in a hammock. Why did you record that song? What's the hidden meaning there?

A: There's no hidden meaning. It's true! (Laughs) Because even now, in the villages the women cultivate, and the men used to go hunting, but you know, it's not so anymore.

To me, my future is a free South Africa where everyone can live in peace and harmony . . .

Q: Is the feminist movement....

A: These are very old songs! And they may not even just be talking about today. But they are old songs, and in the olden days, it was like that. Of course, things have changed. Women have made quite some progress too.

Q: Well, you're a feminist leader too. I mean, you've done things that virtually no other South African women did before your time.

A: Well, they never had the chance to come out of South Africa. Even when I was here before this emergence of South African artists, I've always said that I am not the only artist in South Africa—there are millions of others who are as talented, if not more so. But the tragic thing is that we can't just go out as we please; we can't just go out and perform where we want. And so all this talent has been suppressed.

If the people at home did not get up and say, "Enough is enough," and get shot at, and then all that comes through the news media into the living rooms of people around the world, there wouldn't be all this talk about South African music. So, what the people are doing at home is helping us also to make the same statement in song, in plays, and so on. I was here since 1959. I've always been saying: "Look at me! Look at my people! We are suffering!" But I was just one little voice. And some people heard, some people didn't. But now, we are many.

Q: Why is it taking so long, Miriam? You've been saying these things since November 1959 in the United States. Why?

A: I guess because there wasn't enough information coming out of South Africa.

Q: So it's the fault of us in the West, as much as it's the fault of South Africans, isn't it?

A: Well, I would say right now, I think somebody must have told Botha: "Hey, stop these news people! Because we are beginning to feel pressure." Because when all the news of how they killed the children and so on was present in every living room through the televi-

sion screen, that's when people here got up and marched all over, to the South African embassy, everywhere, and said, "No! You can't do that!" That's when people went to the big companies and said, "Disinvest, don't put your money in South Africa," and so on. That probably prompted some people to advise Botha to say, "No more television here, and the only news that comes out of South Africa must be censored by the government."

What really hurts and shocks us is that, when this happened, there was no outcry of: "Look at that fascist government! They don't

let news come out. They're not democratic." Instead, they are being helped! And yet, if it happened in any other country, it would be considered undemocratic to block news. And I saw newsmen being shot at in those clips that came out of South Africa a year ago. But since the State of Emergency, nothing is coming out!

People here are so media-oriented that, when they don't hear anything in the news or see it on tv, it doesn't exist anymore! I was blocked out from the radio here and from television. So most people felt: "Oh, Miriam Makeba is not a singer anymore. She's dead!" Yet, in Europe, it's a little different in that I had not made an album, a record, in seven years. But when I go to Europe, I never sing to an empty hall. But that wouldn't happen here, because they must hear you, they must see you. And if you are unknown, unseen, unheard, it's very difficult.

Q: Well now we have the "second coming of Miriam Makeba." We have an autobiography in the stores, a new album, and a recent album was done by your colleagues on the *Graceland* tour, Ladysmith Black Mambazo, titled *Shaka Zulu*. I want to ask you about him, because he is the focus of one of your songs "Ungakanani," which translates, "How Big Is He?" It's a traditional song celebrating Shaka and his victories. Tell people a little bit about who Shaka was.

A: Shaka was one of the greatest kings we ever had in southern Africa. He predicted the takeover of our country by the invaders of our country. He was killed by his own brother, Dingaan.

Q: Why?

A: He wanted to rule, I guess. There is jealousy among brothers sometimes too. Shaka was one of those people who did say, "This land will be ruled by foreigners, and the only thing free will be the birds," which is true. You shoot a bird in South Africa, you go to jail; "you shoot a nigger, it's all right." And to us, he was

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TOUR NEWS

Burning Spear Spring 1988 Tour (Fast Lane Productions)

April 2, University of Florida, Gainesville; April 3, Jannus Landing, St. Petersburg, FL; April 4, Villanova, Orlando, FL; April 7, Metroplex, Atlanta; April 8, The Moon, Tallahassee, FL; April 9, Cameo Theater, Miami; April 13, Tipitina's, New Orleans; April 14, Caribana, Houston; April 15, Liberty Lunch, Austin, TX; April 21, El Casino Ballroom, Tucson, AZ; April 26, Belly Up Tavern, Solana Beach, CA; April 30, Olympic Velodrome, Carson, CA; May 12, Redford Theater, Detroit; May 14, Graffiti, Pittsburgh.

Culture Spring 1988 Tour (Fast Lane Productions)

April 1, Liberty Lunch, Austin, TX; April 3, Pyramid, Houston; April 5, Mesa Inn Ballroom, El Paso, TX; April 7, El Casino Ballroom, Tucson, AZ; April 8, Hopi Civic Center, Hopland, AZ; April 9, Starlight Amphitheater, Burbank, CA; April 10, Santa Cruz Civic Auditorium, Santa Cruz, CA; April 13, Kennel Club, San Francisco; April 15, Moore Theater, Seattle; April 16, Pine Street, Portland, OR; April 24, University of Massachusetts, Amherst, MA; May 6, Hamilton College, Clinton, NY; May 7, SUNY Buffalo, Amherst, NY.

Miriam Makeba/Hugh Masekela (Imaginary Entertainment)

April 1, Bushnell Auditorium, Hartford, CT; April 2, Front Row Theater, Cleveland, OH; April 3, Power Center, Ann Arbor, MI; April 5, Madison Civic Center, Madison, WI; April 6, Riverside Theater, Milwaukee, WI; April 8, Vic Theater, Chicago, IL; April 9, Northrup Auditorium, Minneapolis, MN; April 10, Fox Theater, San Diego, CA; April 12, California Theater, San Diego, CA; April 14, Wilmett Theater, Los Angeles; April 15, Orpheum Theater, San Francisco; April 17, Warner Theater, Washington, DC; April 18, Radio City Music Hall, New York City.

Bhundu Boys (Third World Talent Agency)

April 2, Seattle; April 4, Vancouver, Canada; April 8, Kennel Club, San Francisco; April 10, Santa Cruz Civic Auditorium, Santa Cruz, CA; April 15, The Tree Cafe, Portland, ME.

Salif Keita (Third World Talent Agency)

April 15, Kilimanjaro Club, Washington, DC; April 16, Montreal, Canada; April 17, Nightstage, Boston; April 19-21, SOB's, New York City; April 22, Kennel Club, San Francisco; April 23, Savoy Theater, Santa Barbara, CA; April 26, Vancouver, Canada.

Kassav' (Third World Talent Agency)

May 27, Golden Pavilion, Brooklyn, NY; May 28, The Ritz, New York City; West Coast, June 20-28.



NEW L.A. REGGAE RADIO SHOW

Barbara Barabino and Louise Foster will begin hosting a new Los Angeles-area radio program, to feature reggae, calypso, soca, and African music, on KFOX, 93.5 fm, Thursdays from 9-11 p.m. starting in April. *

MAKEBA

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one of the greatest people, a great strategist—he had one of the strongest armies of his time. The British often compare him to Napoleon. They call him the Black Napoleon. To which I always say, Napoleon was a white Shaka. And in this song, we say: "How big is he? He is as big as the grass. He is as big as the hair on the skin of a cow." Can you count it? Who can count all the hair on the skin of a cow? Or, who can count every little strand of grass all over? It's impossible to count! So that's how big he was for us.

A: You have a fascinating song on here called, "Ummam Uyujabula" (Mama is Happy).

A: Usually, people who are in prison sing this song and say, "Mama will be happy when I get back home." Because they sit in there and they're hoping to come out and go back home. Because at home, even during the time I was still young, when you are missing, if you just go from home, and you don't come back that evening, the first place your parents will go...they will go to your friends, of course, and ask, "Where is she (or he)?" If no one knows, they will go first to the hospital, to the mortuary, to the police stations and jails, to look for you. And they are most likely to find you in one of the three—in jail, in the hospital or in the mortuary.

Q: And that's a fact of life in South Africa.

A: Yes.

Q: And there are songs that are laments as well—the song called "Nyamuthi" (Today)—the lament that you can understand regardless of the different languages. A song like "Congo," about drowning in a river. Why did you choose "Congo" for the album?

A: Because I like the song. I like the melody. It's the lament of a mother, and I am Mama Africa, aren't I?

Q: I think you are! I have to ask you about the final track, which is "Icala." It means "trouble." And it's about a bird, but I think it's about sex.

A: (Laughs) We do talk indirectly because we cannot say certain things directly in our tradition. So this is a warning to young men and women that—of course, more to the young men—in this case, the young lady is a bird. You take your sling, you hit the bird. OK, you hit it, and then you barbecue it, and then you eat it. After you've eaten it, you have eaten trouble! But actually it means that young men should not have sex with young ladies before they go and ask for their hand. And his parents go to your parents, and they say, "We have seen someone we would like to bring into our family." And then they explain—they call the girl, and they ask her, "Do you know these people?" Of course she will say yes, because the young man has told her they will be coming. And then they ask for the hand, and they go through all those traditional rituals, and then they can be married. And then he can hit the bird! And barbecue it, and enjoy it!

Q: Now could I say that this is the most autobiographical album you have ever done? The one that's closest to the real soul of Miriam Makeba?

A: I think so.

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MICHAEL ROSE

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A: Them all right! Good musicians. Them know their thing. But there's a lot of youth comin' up who need a break too. You know, Sly and Robbie, they're good.

Q: Who are the up-and-comers you're talking about?

A: Squidly, he plays with Mutabaruka, the High Times Players. Some fresh young youth them.

Q: All the kids who grew up listening to Bob Marley?

A: Yeah, well it's music. Bob Marley is one. You have many more youths who come even greater, but them have to try it. You just don't sit down and expect suddenly you're gonna get a golden spoon in your mouth. You have to try. 'Cause Bob, he try. Bob never wait on nobody. Bob keep tryin'. It's like if me, I stop try. Somebody got to do it. It's like the dj, them pick it up, but they can't take it where it's supposed to go. It just end up on a string like a punany thing. It doesn't go anywhere. Punany not gonna sell a million. Well, they say, it's up to the public and the public up to the garbage. That's it. Truth and rights are always going to triumph over evil. *

AFRICANA

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it possesses the rare capacity to completely absorb the listener. One can never simply "hear" this one; it has such magnetism that it forces the person to really listen. In short, it mesmerizes.

Since the early part of this decade, Keita's "new" records have been reissued material. Soro is his first thoroughly original work in more than five years. His style remains intact, despite overplayed percussions, horns and synthetic effects. And, once again, this remarkable musical giant effortlessly outshines many of his peers at their very best.

Keita's return to recording is the best thing that has happened to African music in years. We can hope for nothing more rewarding than a second 20 years of music as bright as his first. *

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