

CITATION: SIBONGILE KHUMALO (Posthumously)

Sibongile Khumalo was South Africa's first lady of song.

Equally at home in the genres of jazz and opera, she performed on the stages of The Royal Festival and Elizabeth halls at the Southbank Centre in London; The Kennedy Centre in Washington DC; North America's oldest music festival, the Ravinia in Chicago; the Het Muzik Teater in Amsterdam, as well as every major theatre and jazz club in South Africa.

Sibongile Khumalo was born on 24 September 1957 and grew up in Orlando West, Soweto. Her parents Grace and Khabi Mngoma were active community members involved in cultural upliftment, and instilled in her an abiding love and appreciation for South African music. Her mother, Grace Mngoma (nee Mondlane) worked as a nursing sister and what is known as a health visitor, a nurse who visits family to promote healthy lifestyles especially of young children. Her father, Professor Khabi Mngoma, was an historian and professor of music at the University of Zululand. In 1987 he was awarded an honorary doctorate by Wits in recognition of his service to the culture of the nation and its music.

Guided predominantly by her father's influence, Sibongile studied violin, singing, drama and dance from the age of eight under Emily Motsieloa, pianist, leader of an all-women's band and influential musical personality in township circles. At the age of 14, Khumalo knew she wanted to be an opera singer but her father discouraged her. There were no opportunities for black people in South Africa, especially opera singers. Khumalo decided to teach music instead. She completed a BA in music at the University of Zululand, did BA Honours at Wits as well as a Postgraduate Diploma in Management from Wits Business School. She worked as a music teacher, administrator and researcher at Fuba Academy and the Madimba Institute of African Music based at the Funda Centre in Soweto.

She started singing professionally in about 1991 and in 1992 performed her first series of concerts called Three Faces at what was then Kippies Jazz Club in Newtown, Johannesburg. This was a pivotal moment, which marked the genesis of her distinctive musical repertoire. Winning the Standard Bank Young Artist Award for music the next year launched her into the limelight and was a major steppingstone in her career. A highlight of this illustrious career was in 2002 when she premiered the title role of Princess Magogo in the first Zulu opera, Princess Magogo kaDinuzulu, composed by Mzilikazi Khumalo. This was later also performed in the US. Her debut album Ancient Evenings was released in 1996. This was followed by Live At the Market Theatre in 1998, Immortal Secrets in 2000, Quest in 2002 and Breath of Life in 2016.

Her exceptional contribution to music was realised by her being conferred with honorary doctorates from Rhodes University, the University of Zululand and the University of South Africa. Sibongile Khumalo was far more than just a singer. She served in various arts industry structures, which serve to uplift communities through arts. These include being Chair of the National Arts Festival, and a board member of Opera Africa.

She was the Deputy Chairman of the Southern African Music Rights Organisation, a Fellow of Africa Leadership Initiative-South Africa, and a member of the Aspen Global Leadership Network. She was the founding chairman of the Performers Organisation of South Africa and the association of the South African Business Women in the Arts. In 2007 she launched her own label, Magnolia Vision Records, which is involved in performance, production and management. She founded the Khabi Mngoma Foundation, a resource for practitioners of indigenous music and dance. She continued to be involved with the Khongisa Academy for the Performing Arts, an outreach project her father founded

in 1976 when he was at UniZulu.

Her accolades include winning the Standard Bank Young Artist Award for Music in 1993, which was a defining moment in her career, only about a year or so after starting to sing professionally. She also won four South African Music Awards for her light music and jazz recordings, and three FNB Vita Awards for her opera and concert work.

The South African government awarded her with the Order of Ikhamanga in Silver in 2008 in recognition of her "excellent contribution to the development of South African art and culture in the musical fields of jazz and opera". In 2013 the Naledi Theatre Awards bestowed Khumalo with the Lifetime Achievement Award in recognition of her talents in acting, opera, jazz, teaching and being a strong activist for the advancement of theatre in South Africa. Dali Tambo, then chairman of the Naledi awards, said at the event that she was an inspiration to all who witnessed her performances.

She graced many prestigious occasions. These include President Nelson Mandela's 1994 inauguration, his 75th birthday, and the Two Nations Celebrate concert welcoming him at the Royal Albert Hall in London in 1996. She also performed at SAA's 50th anniversary celebrations at the SA High Commission in London. She led the South African and New Zealand national anthems at the World Cup rugby final in 1995. And she was the mezzo-soprano soloist in Verdi's Requiem under the baton of Sir David Willcocks during the South African tour of the London Bach Choir.

She mentored young performers, and was an ardent proponent of arts education and how it can be used for social upliftment and justice. She was a legend who enchanted audiences. She inspired the creation of new music by South African composers, both in the classical and jazz genres. In recognition of Sibongile Khumalo's contribution to music and the arts, and her advancement of arts education, it is fitting that the University of the Witwatersrand should honour Sibongile Khumalo and her work by bestowing on her a posthumous Honorary Doctorate Degree in Music.