

## Citation for Madosini Manqina: Honorary graduand, Rhodes University, 2020

By Paul Maylam

She has been called ‘a national treasure’, and ‘the queen of South Africa’s indigenous Xhosa music’ – Madosini Manqina, generally known as Madosini – musician, composer, dancer, story-teller, teacher. And a true daughter of the Eastern Cape, born in a small village near Mthatha. She does not know the exact year of her birth, only that it was at a time when the monthly pension was worth half-a-crown.

Madosini received no formal western education, coming from a community where there had long been resistance to missionary education and Christian conversion. She never learnt to read or write, but she stands before you today as a highly educated person, steeped in the knowledge and culture of her people, and in demand as a teacher, having been seconded to the University of Cape Town Music Department, and to the International Library of African Music here at Rhodes, to instruct students. Much of her own learning came from her mother, who was also an expert in the playing and making of indigenous musical instruments.

Madosini plays three particular instruments: the *umrhubhe* – the mouth-bow; the *uhadi* – a calabash musical bow; and the *sitolotolo* – the jaw harp, often known as the Jew’s harp. Of these the *umrhubhe* the most important, Madosini calling it her ‘school of life’, as learning to play it as a young teenager was the core of her education. She makes the *umrhubhe* herself, out of branches from the *umbangandlala* tree, using brass wire for the string. It is played by friction, rubbing the string with a reed or stick, using the mouth as a resonator. Her speciality is harmonious singing, with the sound of the *umrhubhe* blending with her singing voice.

The *umrhubhe* is much more than just a musical instrument. Madosini tells us that it has an important function in the upbringing and education of a young Mpondo girl. Playing the instrument is a significant entry point into traditional education – learning to play it a way of developing respect and admiration for traditional teachers – respect for elders a behaviour and value constantly emphasised by Madosini. And mastery of the *umrhubhe* accords the player special status and recognition in Mpondo society.

The music itself is unique in its scope, its variety, and the range of feelings it evokes. Madosini’s first recording was made in Mpondoland in the 1970s, when a film crew paid her a mere R8 to record eight songs. And

it was played on the radio with no royalties accruing to her. After a few years one of her nephews, a migrant worker on the mines, told her that he had heard one of her songs being played in a music shop in Johannesburg. In the mid-1980s another of her songs, 'Nozimanga', was played as a backing track in a Radio Xhosa drama series. She was another of those performers whose work was simply expropriated without payment – lacking the means to seek legal recourse, she became disillusioned with the music industry.

Recognition did eventually come for her in the mid-1990s when the renowned music group, Amampondo, heard her recordings and joined up with her, bringing her to Cape Town where they combined to produce a CD, entitled 'Madosini', followed by other recordings and world tours with the group.

Her bow music was now drawing international attention, and in 1998 a UK-based company released, to great acclaim, a solo album of her songs, entitled 'Power to the Women'.

Further collaborations followed for her – writing songs with the British rock singer, Patrick Duff, and performing with him in concerts around the world. Also collaborating with South African musicians like Sibongile Khumalo and Thandiswa Mazwai, while joining with Hilton Schilder, Lulu Plaaitjies and Pedro Espi-Sanchis to record an African-jazz fusion CD under the name of AmaThongo. Madosini's music is said to represent some of the earliest roots of jazz in Africa.

She is, too, a composer, a dancer, and a teacher, passing on her musical expertise and the practice of bow-making to younger generations, most notably at the Centre for Indigenous African Instrumental Music and Dance in Pretoria.

Through her musical performances and teaching she plays a pre-eminent role in preserving and keeping alive the cultural traditions and heritage of the amaXhosa – a heritage that could so easily have been lost and forgotten without her lifelong contribution. 'The youth have forgotten their roots', she says. 'They don't know where they come from and it really saddens me to see our culture and traditions slowly die out'. But she is no rigid, narrow traditionalist, as shown in her readiness to collaborate with other practitioners of varying musical styles – jazz, rock, among others.

Madosini has performed at festivals around the world – in the UK, the US, Singapore, Australia, Spain – and most notably at the World of Music Arts and Dance festivals in 2008 and 2009. Many awards have been bestowed on her: in 2013 the South African Arts and Culture Trust

Lifetime Achievement Award for music; the Molteno Medal in the same year; the South African Ministerial Award for the outstanding contribution of women in cultural affairs; the 2018 Mbokodo Award.

Although showered with awards and international acclaim she remains a very humble person – and, I am told, blessed with a wonderful sense of humour – wholly committed to her Mpondo roots and heritage, wary of modernism and the lure of money.

Today Rhodes is proud to be the first university to award Madosini an honorary doctorate – and it is appropriate that we should be honouring a renowned Eastern Cape cultural figure who has instructed students at Rhodes' International Library of African Music, and has performed at the National Arts Festival in this town. Recognised as 'one of the greatest living exponents of the *umrhubhe* mouth bow', a legendary story-teller, singer, composer and instrument-maker; a supreme bearer and preserver of indigenous knowledge and culture.

Mr Chancellor, I have the honour to request you to confer on Madosini Manqina the degree of Doctor of Music, *honoris causa*.