

# Benefit concert to feature exiled South Africans



Miriam Makeba

By Rob Cullivan

Like the Old Testament Israelites who brought down the walls of Jericho with a tumultuous chorus of instrumental attack, Hugh Masekela plans to keep blowing his horn until the walls of apartheid come tumbling down.

The South African trumpet player has already blasted his country's white minority government for nearly three decades in the service of the anti-apartheid movement. Yet he remains puzzled by white South Africans' belief that God ordained separation of men by race, with the whites ruling Masekela's non-white brethren.

"They seem to think they have a direct line to God," the black South African musician said. "If they do, I'd like to get a hold of that number."

Masekela and fellow black South African Miriam Makeba, a world-renowned singer, will perform at the Eastman Theatre on Thursday, Sept. 22, at 8 p.m. The duo will donate the show's proceeds to the Rochester Committee for Justice in Southern Africa, a project of

Genesee Ecumenical Ministries (GEM), of which the Diocese of Rochester is a member. The committee works to inform the local public about the anti-apartheid movement in South Africa through newsletters, educational efforts, and the recent distribution of the *Cry of Reason*, a documentary about a white South African clergyman, Beyers Naude, who works against apartheid, and who has suffered government persecution for rejecting the Afrikaner Dutch Reformed Church's belief in white racial supremacy.

Like Naude, Makeba and Masekela have suffered for opposing apartheid. Makeba has been forcibly exiled from her homeland, and Masekela has refused to go back despite a government offer of amnesty. "We (South Africa's exiled musicians) don't want the amnesty because we don't recognize the government," he said.

Masekela and Makeba have been acknowledged by another source whose legitimacy they recognize — American pop musician Paul Simon.

Both performers appeared with Simon on

his recent Graceland World Tour. Simon's album of the same name featured several South African musicians as well as songs influenced or directly drawn from the music of South Africa's black townships. Although the Graceland tour introduced Masekela's music to a vast new audience, he speaks of his and other South African musicians' careers as more than work, more than an attempt to advance themselves. "We don't have our own careers," Masekela said. "We're community workers. We commit a substantial part of our lives to the situation."

Masekela noted that much of his music is drawn from the desire to express the spirit of South Africa's oppressed blacks. "Every little note is not ours, but it comes from the townships," he said.

Ironically, Masekela grew up listening to American jazz. Because there was little opportunity for a black person to study music in his country, Masekela left in 1960 to study in London and New York. His successful recording career in the U.S. during the 1960s culminated with the pop hit, "Grazing In The Grass" in 1967.

Masekela traveled throughout Africa during the 1970s, soaking up its traditional music and releasing several albums that reflected his journey. In the early '80s, Masekela penned dance hits in the U.S. and England, but it is the hit musical, *Sarafina*, that has garnered him recent publicity.

Based on life in the black South African townships, the musical was written by Masekela and Mbongeni Ngema, a fellow South African. Currently playing in New York City, the show is serving its authors' purpose of showing people the horrors of life in their homeland, according to Masekela.

"Eighty-five to 90 percent of the audience has been black," he said. "Black people in general in the U.S. in the last four or five years have become infuriated with the government of South Africa."

Some of that fury has been directed towards entertainers such as Linda Ronstadt and Frank Sinatra, who have ignored the United Nations cultural boycott of South Africa by performing there. American anti-apartheid activists have also criticized Simon for recording part of the Graceland album in South Africa. Masekela believes that such criticism is misguided.

"Paul treated everybody justly," he noted. "He didn't wave banners, but he opened people's eyes to the musical and underground culture."

The duo considers their current tour as serving a similar purpose. Masekela noted that their concerts often draw the "unconverted" — white listeners who may be unaware of the situation in South Africa, but who become interested after hearing its music.

"People are surprised that our concerts have more of a musical than activist stand," Masekela said. "We don't hit people over the head with a hammer." Nevertheless, politics and its human consequences have been a hallmark of Masekela's and Makeba's careers.

As a youth, Makeba sang defiant songs in school and church choruses until she joined the Manhattan Brothers, a popular South African band, and began touring extensively. After appearing in the 1955 documentary, *Come Back Africa*, she was invited to the Venice Film Festival. Steve Allen and Harry Belafonte saw her singing in the film and invited her to the U.S. She remained in this country, touring and recording, until 1960, when her mother died in South Africa.

Makeba tried to go home for the funeral, but the government viewed her international stature as a threat, and denied her entry. To this day, she has been exiled from her homeland.

Makeba's personal life has been as tumultuous as her career. One of her four marriages was to Black Panther leader Stokely Carmichael, whom she wed in 1968. Because no promoter was willing to take on such a controversial figure, this marriage effectively prevented her from recording and touring in the U.S.

Makeba spent subsequent years based in the African nation of Guinea while continuing to tour throughout the world. She has also served as a U.N. delegate for Guinea in the mid-70s, and has been awarded the Dag Hammarskjold Peace Prize.

## Apartheid drove Namibian from home

Miriam Makeba and Hugh Masekela will be doing the performing next Thursday evening at the Eastman Theatre, but the concert's proceeds belong — at least in part — to a University of Rochester sophomore.

Jeptha Nguharimo, like the exiled South African musicians, was forced to leave his African homeland, Namibia. A leader of student protests against neighboring South Africa's system of apartheid and an insurgent in Namibian affairs, he has been imprisoned and tortured by South African police.

He'll receive better treatment at the hands of Masekela and Makeba, who are donating the proceeds of their concert to the Rochester Committee for Justice in Southern Africa, which in turn helps to fund the Cornelius deKiewit Scholarship, established by the University of Rochester to benefit political refugees from South Africa and Namibia. Nguharimo is the scholarship's first recipient.

Nguharimo was an organizer of student protests against white South African soldiers who taught in his high school in Walvis Bay. The soldiers were stationed in the all-black high school to teach classes and — according to Nguharimo — to intimidate its students into accepting South Africa's apartheid system and its domination of their country.

"(The South Africans) tried to justify their presence in Namibia by saying they were there to protect Namibians from the communists,"

Nguharimo said, noting that in the South African townships, many black opponents of apartheid were killed.

"I was in the school for a year, and the police would come and spray tear gas," he explained.

After the police arrested the students "off campus," Nguharimo said, "the police would come and spray tear gas." He explained that the police would then disperse, fleeing to their homes, where they would later be arrested. "You are not given a trial. You are guilty before you are proven innocent," Nguharimo said.

In prison, students were confined with up to 15 others in small cells and were fed only once a day. Interrogation was brutal. "They beat you one by one, sometimes in the cell, sometimes alone," Nguharimo said, noting that electric cattle prods were often used on the students. "Two of my friends are now permanently maimed," he said.

Following his release in June of that year, Nguharimo set his sights on admission to the University College for Tertiary Education in

Windhoek. But the government would not accept his application. He then decided to leave Namibia to pursue a higher education elsewhere.

In 1985, Nguharimo went to Botswana, a republic in the north of South Africa, to live in a refugee camp until late 1986, when he traveled to Zimbabwe, where he now lives in a refugee camp. He is currently engaged in a master's thesis on the role of the church in Namibia. He has been recommended for the Phelpe Stokes Award by the Phelps Stokes Fund, a U.S. organization that sponsors Namibian and South African refugees.

A student at the university since fall 1987, Nguharimo is pursuing a dual major in economics and philosophy. He remains politically active as a member of the South African Awareness Committee and the Black Student Union. "I see myself as a bridge between the two," he said, noting that he has served as co-chairperson of both organizations.

Nguharimo plans to pursue a masters program in international law following completion of his undergraduate studies. Armed with a law degree, Nguharimo wants to return to Africa, though not to Namibia so long as apartheid and South African domination continue. "I can't go back now. Nothing has changed for me."

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Tickets for Masekela and Makeba's September 22 show are \$8, \$12, \$17, and \$22, and are available at the Eastman Theatre Box Office and all Ticketron locations.