

Mama Afrika's worldly music

By Cornelius Thomas

SOUTH Africa's mama of song, Miriam Makeba, has been nominated for a Grammy Award in the world music category for her latest album, *Homeland*.

This is not her first nomination. In recognition of her contribution to world music, Makeba, in 1965, won her first Grammy for *An Evening with Harry Belafonte and Miriam Makeba*.

Makeba told City Press: "The first Grammy was normal, but this nomination in my homeland makes it special because I can celebrate with my people. The nomination is sweet and wonderful and I deserve it."

When she received her first Grammy she was, although an unpolitical singer, in exile. Her songs told tales of her people's experiences. She writes in her 1988 autobiography, *Makeba: My Story*: "My life, my career, every song I sing and every appearance I make, are bound up with the plight of my people."

Born in 1932 in Prospect township, Johannesburg, Miriam experienced the trials and joys of the urbanising African. In the 1950s she sang with the Cuban Brothers, Manhattan Brothers, the Skylarks,

and performed with the other divas of the day — Dolly Rathebe and Dorothy Masuka.

Sophiatown throbbed with a mix of American jazz and African sounds. Makeba was there, singing *Pata Pata*.

In 1959, she played the female lead in the jazz opera, *King Kong*, and achieved national renown.

In 1960 she left to attend the Venice premiere of the anti-apartheid movie *Come Back, Africa*. Singing stints in London and New York followed.

But when Makeba tried to return in 1960 to visit her mother's grave, she was denied re-entry. Her passport had been cancelled.

For the next thirty years she remained in exile, placing South African music on the world map and apartheid on the agenda of the United Nations.

She returned in 1991.

Re-issues of old albums, a movie and live performances followed.

Last year she released *Homeland*. It offers tribute to those who contributed to South African music and the liberation struggle.

Makeba's granddaughter, Zenzi Lee, joins her on *Pata Pata 2000*.

This version is laid back, exuding the innocent voice of Zenzi, while Mama Afrika narrates and sings reminiscences of an era gone by.

At 68 Mama Afrika says: "I'm



MIRIAM MAKEBA

happy at home, eating my pap and chakalaka", and enjoying this fresh Grammy nomination.

She will also perform at the North Sea Jazz Festival in Cape Town in March.

At this festival, music lovers will have the chance to share in the essence of a woman who is more than a musician. She is a crusader for the rights of women and children, and dignity for all.

A sleeping legacy

DUDU Pukwana at The Downbeat Club, Hillbrow. For a few months in 1964 this bohemian patch in the all-white flatscape swayed to the sounds of avant-garde jazz by alto saxophonist Dudu Pukwana.

Whites interested in the alternative edges of music attended. A few blacks also came in. But the club struggled.

Maybe Dudu's notes soared just a tad over the souls of his listeners. "It was not just entertaining stuff," said his contemporary, photographer Basil Breakey, "it was ... very expressionistic, (and) reflected the society at the time."

The record companies gave this music no attention.

In 1964 Dudu Pukwana left South Africa.

Dudu was born in Walmer township, Port Elizabeth, in 1938. He first played piano for the Broadway Yanks, later the Four Yanks. After meeting East London saxophonist Nick Moyake, Dudu switched to alto sax.

He moved to Johannesburg, and soon played with Chris McGregor, the Blue Notes, and the Castle Lager Big Band.

The record industry showed lit-



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tle interest. Pass laws precluded safe movement to and from Johannesburg and the SABC's policy of airing only traditional and religious music on its seven ethnic radio stations had, by 1964, begun to choke jazz.

With the genre in danger, Dudu left with the Blue Notes to play in the Antibes Jazz Festival in France. In exile, said friend Louis Moholo, "Dudu was just the pillar of the Blue Notes."

He performed at Ronnie Scott's in London. In London he anchored the many exiles, setting them up, getting them gigs.

In a 1977 gig at the Club 100 in London, Dudu blew the alto sax, playing with Chris McGregor, Johnny Dyani and Louis Moholo to create the now-classic *Blue Notes in Concert Volume 1*.

Although the Blue Notes dispersed, Dudu maintained contact with them all.

He also formed his own bands, Spear and, later, Zila.

His personnel at one time

included the exiled East London singing sensation, Pinisi Sauli. In 1978 he and Dyani helped out as part of the Louis Moholo Octet to cut *Spirits Rejoice*.

He also formed part of the Dyani Quartet which that year brought out *Song for Biko*, and, in 1982, *Mbizo*.

In 1983 Dudu Pukwana and Zila brought out *Life in Bracknell* — compiled live recordings of the Bracknell Jazz Festival (England) and the Willasau Jazz Festival (Switzerland). In 1989 the group cut its last album, *Cosmic Chapter 30*.

Dudu played in the tribute to Nelson Mandela at Wembley Stadium in London in 1989, a highlight of his career. After 26 years in exile, Dudu died in his adopted home city in 1990.

He had held together the exiles who kept South African jazz alive, and kept Europeans "zapping" about apartheid.

Still, today, despite talk of an African renaissance and the 1990s resurgence of jazz, the music of Dudu Pukwana has not resurged.

But take heart, the grapevine buzzes about the imminent formation of a Dyani-Pukwana Jazz Foundation.

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