

African Arts Safari

winter 2012



Mandla Sibanda 1974 to 2012

Tragedy struck on 26 March 2012 with the unexpected death of Mandla Sibanda.. He was born in Lupane, Zimbabwe in Northern Matabeleland but spent his secondary school years at St Bernard's High school in Bulawayo. After completing his schooling he joined the senior members of *Sunduza Dance Theatre* with whom he not only toured the world but eventually help to produce. The group toured the UK extensively but also India, Singapore and Canada as well as having invitations from Europe.

He was given a scholarship to attend Sheffield College for two years to train in audio visual design - a course he passed with distinction. This enabled him to contribute significantly to the development of the dance theatre group and complete several community video projects in Sheffield and Zimbabwe. He was also able to develop a part time career in Harare typesetting and laying out text books for various publishers covering books such as Science, Maths and primary English.

On returning to the UK he helped to co write Sunduza's production of *Matata* which was loosely based on the diaries of 19th century Scottish Missionary Robert Moffat and the effects of his prosletysing on the community past and present. He also adapted the book *Voices from the Rocks-the Story of the Matopos* for the stage with choreography and music by Simon Banda . It had its premiere at the Merlin theatre in Sheffield in 2002 and was attended by the historian and author Professor Terry Ranger, formerly professor

emeritus at Oxford University. On seeing his wonderful oral history of the Matopos National Park transferred to the stage through music and dance, he is reported having said it was one of the most exciting events of his career. He also attended the premiere in Harare at the Zimbabwe International Book fair.

Mandla Sibanda learned about production and co produced the 2002 tour that included a production of David Fanshawe's *African Sanctus* with the Sheffield Oratorio Chorus.

Shifting Sands

Mandla shared part of the programme with Simon Banda for ten years that reached out to over 45 000 children throughout Yorkshire, Nottinghamshire and Derbyshire and Leicestershire getting a fantastic reputation for delivering week long residencies in combined art projects that often ended with a support visit from Mandla's Community choir, SOSA-XA! Sounds of Southern Africa (www.sosa-xa.org.uk). The programme over ten years went to over 160 schools- sometimes for several years! we thank all of them for their great support. Between 2009 and 2011 he had completed a long residency with Philip Weiss at Grange Lane Junior School in Scunthorpe. It was part of a Change programme in collaboration with the Creative Partnerships programme set-up by Arts Council England. The project crossed over so many disciplines and created so many positive interventions bringing new modelling and arts techniques into the school. Thanks to Mrs Thorpe for encouraging and supporting the programme as head teacher at the school.

Singing for Change

On the day he passed away he had just helped complete a massive new project sponsored by Global Partnerships through the British Council. *Singing for Change (Sibemunye)* supports both a CD and DVD linking the work in Sheffield with his community project in Bulawayo based at the Esphakeni Centre in Pumula.



Mandla brought tremendous enthusiasm and charisma to everything he chose to do. He brought a long term vision to the project at the Es'phakeni centre and combined this with an extraordinary ability to listen and support everyone who engaged with the programme. He brought both artistic and intellectual rigour to the projects completing both a diploma in communication at Hallam University and part of a formal adult teaching diploma sponsored by the Life Long learning programme.

He will be remembered for his enthusiastic stories by thousands of children and by those who were part of the Kutamba Kids project in Burngreave that sought to bring performing arts skills into the community at all ages.

SOSA-XA! Sounds of Southern Africa Choir has proved a legacy to Sheffield bringing communities together and showing it is possible for an intercultural group to meet weekly and achieve a high standard of musicality working with African languages and harmonies and raising funds for African arts projects and other charities.

He also led Songololo an experimental choir in Leeds for several years.

A short memorial was held at the Circle in Sheffield prior to the funeral in Zimbabwe and a memorial concert is proposed for 2013. Our thoughts are with his family as he left behind a wife and four young children divided between the UK and Zimbabwe.



Mandla Sibanda working with Bradfield Junior school on a visit to Burngreave Vestry Hall in Sheffield in 2010

Singing for Change (sibemunuye)

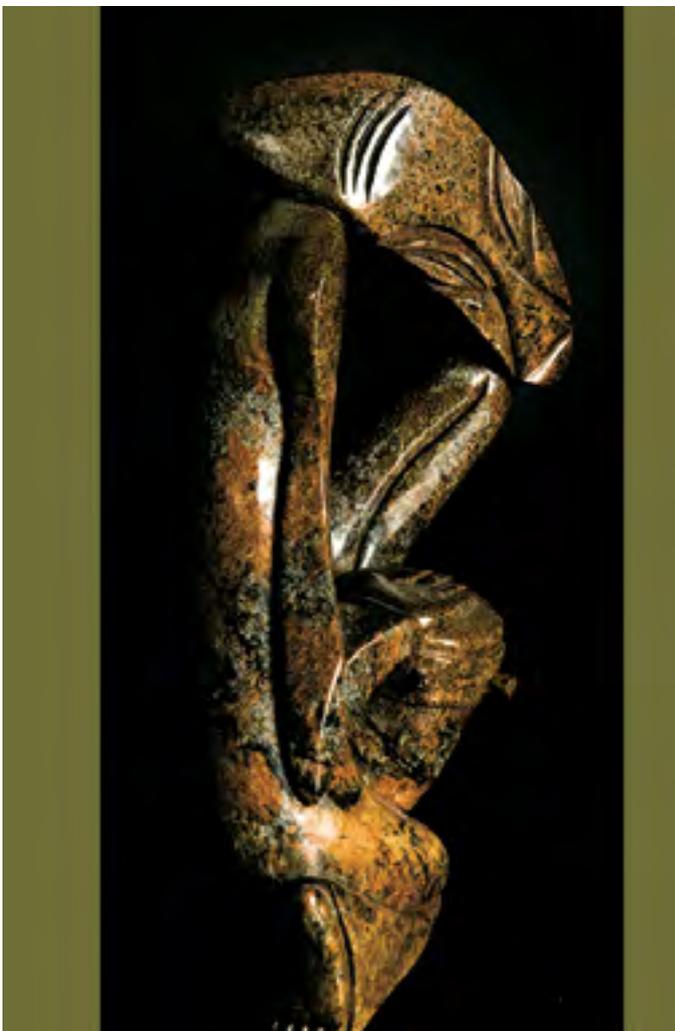
This was the third recording project steered by Mandla Sibanda. Sibemunye means "we are together". He had seen the final rendition of all the elements on the complex DVD comprising video clips and presentation on the cities of Sheffield and Bulawayo. The CD also contains transcriptions of some of the CD songs in four part stave notation worked on by John Salway for use by other choirs.

The content of the digipack was a joint creation between members of Sunduza and the Amasiko programme in Pumula, and members of SOSA choir and SEMEA in Sheffield and his joint project with Philip Weiss-Matopos Media. The CD is sung by SOSA-XA! Sounds of Southern Africa Choir led by Mandla Sibanda in Sheffield with some of the music composed by Simon Banda and Mandla Sibanda, and arranged and led by Mandla Sibanda.

The DVD aims to teach about the Millennium Development goals and contains material on Zimbabwe contributed by the project in Bulawayo and by post graduate geography students from the University of Sheffield. It has video material from Sunduza and the centre in Bulawayo as well as poetry from Zimbabwean poet in exile and actor Bart Wolfe. A large contribution from Year 9 students and media students at Dronfield Henry Fanshawe School in Sheffield explore their environment and a project with the artists. In helping to design and compile the DVD Mandla was supported in his efforts by Ethel Dlamini-Maqeda, Robin Raily, John Salway and Philip Weiss as producer and editor. All of it was produced and designed in house. The Sound engineer on the Cd was Brett Womersley at Red Cloud Studios in Sheffield and of course thanks to our sponsors at Global Partnerships.

We are grateful to Keitu Motlogwa, a member of the choir for stepping in to lead the choir following the funeral and a director of SEMEA. Keitu Motlogwa has also kindly filled a gap in leadership at some concerts.

The project is available on line through www.sosa-xa.org.uk as well as SEMEA by post or by cheque for £15.00 to include postage.





Choirs Rock in Leeds!

In february 2012 SOSA-XA was invited to perform at the Royal Armouries New Dock Theatre with many local choirs in a competition which raised £20 000 for a local cancer charity. Mandla Sibanda gave a stunning public performance The three judges were Kaiser Chiefs singer Ricky Wilson, Neil Robinson from the Adam Street Singers and the Rev Chunky.

The White Rosettes and Gay Abandon were the final choice and the audience chose Gay Abandon by text vote as the winner. They are Leeds based groups. Download the video of SOSA-XA! show from the web site.

Mandla Sibanda in full flight at the Peace Fair (photo courtesy Anwar Suliman



Report from Pumula, Bulawayo and the funeral

Zimbabweans of course sadly mourn the passing of family and friends but funerals can continue for several days as relatives gather from all over the country to pay their respects. Mandla Sibanda was brought up as a catholic and an appropriate service was held at his parents home in Pumula. By far the largest event brought many different artists to perform at the Open Air Es'phakeni centre for songs , prayers and poetry before people escorted the funeral procession to the Bulawayo cemetery several kilometres away. Performers included many local groups such as Umkhathi Theatre and the imbongi/ poet Albert Nyathi. Great support also came from Farai Mahoso from Masvingo who runs *Bahaso* (the Batanai HIV resource project) and who had worked with Mandla Sibanda on various HIV video projects in Zimbabwe and Sheffield These included that of Auxilia Chimusoro(Farai's mother) who was the first Zimbabwean woman to declare herself HIV positive.

In the coming days discussions were held as to how Mandla Sibanda's work through Amasiko lemvele could be supported particularly in the upgrading of the hall. During the years of hyperinflation money had become very short and very little development could be achieved after the new toilets had been installed. It was resolved to try and continue to renovate the hall

using a US\$3000 donation some of which was also used to fund a memorial concert locally in May 2012 Desmond Ntini who is a local arts facilitator and Mandla's youngest brother Mpumelelo(Leroy) Sibanda have been steering the Amasiko community project this year with The Rev Simango acting as interim chairman. Leroy had returned from South Africa where he had been working in the arts particularly supporting programmes involving disability. He resolved he would steer the Pumula project with its committee.

The result is an attractive frieze at the front of the hall to encourage local groups to participate in the project painted by local artist Lebani Sirenje



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