Beyond Memory
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CHAPTER TWELVE
FINE MALE VOICES

One of the finest male voices of the eighties belonged to Bibi Msomi, the son of Noshukela and Mantombi Msomi. From a young age, Bibi was inspired by vocalists like “Mama Africa”, Miriam Makeba. He released his maxi single You Are The Flower/Frustrated Mind (Wea, 1985) co-written with Almon and Thokoza Memela who also produced it. It was arranged by Almon Memela and engineered by Philip Nel. His album What Kind Of Love Is This? (Right Track, 1987) was produced by Peter Moticoe and engineered by Humphrey Mabote and Lee Short at RPM record company. By 1990 he was with Dephon Music where he released an album that paid tribute to the continent’s female superstar, Miriam Makeba titled Makebamalitis. Banzi Kubheka and Cyril Mnculwane co-wrote and co-produced it. It was engineered by Bruce Williams on the Roy B label. Guest artists included Cyril Mnculwane (keyboards and drums), Khaya Mahlangu (saxophone) and Larry Amos (guitar). The producers employed the star-studded backing choir of Faith Kekana, Beulah Hashe, Phumzile Ntuli, Star Mabaso, Deborah Fraser, Marilyn and Tu Nokwe.

The childlike yet selling voice of Michael Jackson motivated many youngsters to sing like him in many contests in South Africa. Producer Richard Siluma saw an opportunity in the trend and went into the studio with Ruben Beewa in 1985. They came out with a maxi single, Baby You Turn Me On/Free Your Love written by Ruben and Lloyd Lelosa on the Plum Records label. The success of the project in a category that had no real local challenger encouraged Ruben to release a self-written 1986 mini album titled Ring My Bell. It was co-arranged with PH Phaaake who was also the producer on the Racey Records label.

Joe Nina aka Henry Makhosini Xaba grew up in Kwa-Thema, Springs, East Rand (now Ekurhuleni) surrounded by music. At the tender age of three he
was already accompanying his parents on music tours. His father Solomon Xaba was a guitarist and saxophonist in his day. Solomon had a band called The Shammings in which his mother Lettie was a backing vocalist. Amongst Bra Sol’s albums was *Khamba*.

Henry produced the music of his sister, Nhlanhla Xaba aka Nina Sista including the album *Baba Ka Boy*. He also produced the Nina Brothers, a band consisting of his brother, Vusi Xaba and cousins Thabo Mokone and Jeff Mhlongo. They released three albums including *Sgubhu*.

I first met Henry in the Crown Mines building of Tusk Music. He was under the supervision of a PRO called Chessman who fell under the Diamond Music label. At that time his recording name was King Rap, the name I still call him to this day. A few years back when he lay in hospital after a car accident, at his bedside I just called the name and without turning he knew it was me as he responded “Hi, Bra Max!” Henry’s 1990 album with the label titled *Midi* (Tell Me) was composed and arranged by him and Chessman. Above his super talents as a multi-instrumentalist, producer, songwriter, arranger and performer, Henry possesses one of the most magnetic voices. He first got into music when the drummer in his father’s band left the group. He later had to substitute the lead vocalist who had also left the band and played piano as well. Henry’s debut album *Makoti O Tshwana Le Pere* (EFP) was released under the name T. McCool. After joining Tusk Music he also released music as Hot Slot Machine, but the name was changed to King Rap in 1990. When Taso Stephanou launched the Coca-Cola Full Blast Music Show in the early nineties, King Rap worked with Arthur Mafokate and entered the talent search with two songs, *I Need It* as Q-Face and *Let’s Dance* as Out Of Control. After this project he joined CCP Records and released *Brokee* using the name Salimaya, which was inspired by the mensah of Mali, Salif Keita. It was when Makhosini released the album *One Time, One Vibe* featuring the track *Boza* that he changed his stardom name to Joe Nina. It stuck. One of his passions as a young Kwa-Thema boy was soccer. He played for a promising football club named after its sponsor, Creepy Crawly. It was as a hot foot player for the club that he earned the name Joe. When he broke his knee his parents were only too glad to remove him from the soccer pitch and place him on stage behind the drums. His second album as Joe Nina was the massive hit, *Ding Dong*. His 1996 album *Joy* (Kuya Sheshwa La) won SAMA 2’s Best Township Dance Performance category. Other township pop albums include *1-2 One Two* (I-Life Inzima), which was nominated for SAMA 3’s Best Township Pop category, *Rain Down R&B* (1997), *Egogogweni* (1998), *Sbali* (1999), *Mababasa* (2000) and *Nomthandazo* (2001), winner of SAMA 8’s Best African Pop Album category. His 2005 release was *Moments*, a 12-track album featuring the hit *Ebunzimeni*. It also included our South African national anthem. Some of his memorable hits were *Ding Dong*, *S’Bali*, *Zodwa*, *Pascalina*, *Maria Podesta* and *Phuma Kimi*. Around 1997/98 the music industry changes that swept the country
with kwaito music accompanied by bashes included performing to back-tracks. Joe Nina who also boasts a Smirnoff award openly challenged the trend and chose live performances as he argued that “miming” was undermining concert revellers and stifling artist creativity and flexibility on stage, as musicians could only sing a song the same way every time if they were on record.

His other productions include Twins’ 1994 self-titled album Khanyo Maphumulo’s Iyangibiza (1999) and the Nina Tribe album, Teddy Bear (Primedia Records, 2000). Nina Tribe was Kabelo, Mokete, Pholo and Tebogo. During our meeting in 2005 at a Hammanskraal hotel he told me that one of the highlights of his career was composing nine songs for the Brenda Fassie album Abantu Bayakhuluma and flying to the UK to record it in Butterfly Studios, London. The two musicians composed and arranged the music together and that was Joe’s first trip outside the country. The album won the first FNB SAMA’s Best Vocal Performance Female category. He was also requested to write the music score and theme song for Les Blair’s BBC Channel 4 movie production Jump the Gun and ended up appearing in the movie that starred Baby Cele. Together with Cele they performed the track Better Life. Other South African musicians featured on the soundtrack included M’Du, Bright Blue, Brenda Fassie, Karoo, Malombo and Mashamplani. Joe says the UK movie with the slogan “Bullets And People Don’t Mix” made him realise that acting was not for him. From there he focused on his passion – writing, producing, arranging and performing music. In the same year, together with Ray Phiri they wrote the music score for the soundtrack of the Ramadan Suleman film Fools. The film was adapted from Njabulo Ndebele’s book. Joe writes, arranges and produces for a variety of musicians and genres. The year 2006 saw the release of his CD Travel The Gravel, which was nominated for SAMA’s Best Pop Album: African. A befitting bonus for his loyal fans was a 17-track collection album titled The Best Of Joe Nina featuring some of the best musicians of our time.

Among some of the giants of South African music Nina worked with was Ray Phiri. Between 1995 and 1996 they created the record label, “Killa Joe Music” whose products included Joe Nina’s Talk To Me, as well as projects like D-Style and New Perspective. During that time they worked closely with musicians like Hugh Masekela and Mara Louw. Joe later teamed up with Steve Kekana and Nana Motijoane in a project called The Trio. The Trio performed at many venues and released their debut album titled My Pride, My Joy in 2004. His serious side as a musician is revealed in his 2001 project, Lakim, featuring Joe Nina CD titled African Cup. Lakim was inspired by a name he was given when he turned to the Muslim community for guidance in his life, Abdul Ragim. The late great Ratau Mike Makhalemele who also worked with him featured on the track Soulful Man (Song For Bra Mike) blowing his horn. The CD was released by the independent, bold and pioneering jazz label, Sheer Sound. It was produced, composed, programmed and engineered by Mr Henry Makhosini Xaba himself.
Just before the eighties could slip into the pages of history, Shandel Music unleashed *Mama’s Baby*, a hit by a young musician, with a sweet voice, called Sydney. His full names were **Sydney Mogopodi**. His albums included *Smoko Majita* (1993) and *Mama Joyce* (1997). Though he had other projects and featured on other musicians’ work, his monumental hit remains *Mama’s Baby*. He was part of the Golden Oldies Music Festival staged at Polokwane Showgrounds on 31 March 2007.

From the talented Bala family in Uitenhage, **Loyiso Bala** followed his brother Zwai into the music industry. He is the third born in a family of four. He too sang with the Drakensberg Boys Choir with whom he travelled all over the world between 1990 and 1995 as a young boy. After matriculating at St Stithians College in 1998, he furthered his music studies with UNISA doing Bachelor Of Music while teaching music at his former college. His first opportunity in professional music came when he was featured in TKZee’s *Guz 2001* singing tunes like the self-composed *Girl Without A Name*. BMG signed him to release his single *Mus’Ukukhala* (2000), which won him an award for Best R&B Artist and a nomination for Best Newcomer in the 2000 Metro FM Music Awards. It was followed by a self-titled album. Another single was released in 2001 titled *Silky Soft Skin*. Then followed a full album, *Wine, Women And Song*, which went gold in early 2005. I guess George Benson gave him the proverbial handshake for the excellent cover version of *Give Me The Night*. The album was co-produced by his brother, Zwai. It achieved gold status. In 2004 he released his fourth album, *Amplified* on the Creative Kingdom label. The album won SAMA 11’s Best R&B Album category. When Creative Kingdom moved to Dubai, he joined SonyBMG and released *Blow Your Mind* (2007), which won Metro FM’s Best R&B Album category. His song writing and producing talents were confirmed when he did songs for Mfundi Vundla’s television soap opera *Backstage* and the educational drama, *Tsha Tsha*. He also appeared in both. Together with his brothers Zwai and Phelo they released the CD *Bala Brothers…B3*. If his extensive travelling all over the world is anything to go by, Loyi is still going to blow us away with his own blend of R&B.

Another excellent isiZulu balladeer is **Matonto** aka Calvin Gudu. In 1997 he shook the local music industry with his isiZulu R&B ten-track album titled *Igugu Lami*, which was released by Mob Music. The multi-talented Matonto wrote, produced, engineered and mixed the whole album by himself in the Noize Box Studios, London. This is one album that has shown that, with determination and the right resources, South African musicians can produce the same quality music as foreign music, which has attracted our consumers.

In 1979 **Johnny Mokhali** arrived in Johannesburg from Mafikeng in the North West Province. His music career stretches back to the mid-seventies. Johnny hit the big time with a love song titled *Mpule*. From there he released many successful albums, some of which have been released in the UK. Most of
Johnny’s songs are in his home language, Setswana. He later released his self-written and produced album *Majasana* (Drum Rock, 1988). His other album *Modimo O Phala Baloi* (1991) features hits like *O Ntsosetsa Mahutsana*. His wife has been very supportive of him and can also be seen with him on the cover of his 1993 album, *O Manoni Wame*. Among some of the awards he won was SAMA’s Best Traditional Performance category with his 1996 album *Sediba Sa Mafoko*. It featured hits like *Ke Go Gopotse*. The album *Gankitala Ke Hloboga Morena* was nominated for SAMA 7. Most of his albums included gospel tracks. God saved this singing sensation from a terrible car accident and we hope to continue benefiting from his soul-enriching lyrics.

Former policeman, the late UMANJI aka Johannes Nkuna set the stage on fire at a 2006 show I attended in Boksburg. The crowd just couldn’t get enough of his live version of the hit *Moloi* from his 1999 debut album of the same name. *Moloi* (The Witch) was inspired by the many witchcraft-related killings in the province of his birth, Limpopo. The alleged man-manipulated lightning strikes resulted in the broad day-light burning of those “responsible” or even their houses. The album was nominated in SAMA’s Best Newcomer category in 2000. He had a deep rich voice that could surprisingly rise to the highest pitch. Besides his mother tongue, xi-Tsonga, this star from Zebediela also sang in many other languages. His penetrating voice sometimes reminds one of musicians like Vusi Mahlasela and Youssou N’Dour. Umanji’s other albums included *Wantolobela* (2001) and *Indlala* (2003), which was nominated in SAMA 2004’s Best Male Composer and Best Contemporary Album categories. His 2004 album *O Baba O Re Ha!* was produced by Selaelo Selota. It featured the hit, *Moruti Shumba* and won him a 2004 SAMA in the Best Composer category. In 2005 he featured in two categories of the Munghana Lonene FM Awards. After recovering from a TB attack related to his HIV status in 2007 he released a CD titled *Byala*. Unfortunately Umanji was lost to the music industry on 26 February 2008 and laid to rest on 8 March amongst his people at Mogoto cemetery, Zebediela.

The success of Boys II Men in the US inspired the formation of local groups like TWINS. The band was formed by two sets of twins: Brothers Percy and Lesley Sithatho from Alexandra and brothers Lucky and Nhlanhla Shabangu from Soweto. I remember the early days of the group very well because they’d pass by my house for a cup of tea and we would share their dreams – very determined! They even offered to record jingles for my programmes and when we went into the studio to do that, we just had a ball. At that stage they were under the supervision of Lucas Mahlakgane, one humble yet assertive professional. Their self-titled debut album featured the hit *I’m In Love*. They worked with Joe Nina to release the ten-track CD on RPM’s MGS label. Their hits include *Sengiyasha, Higher And Higher* and *Shona Phansi*, which was nominated for SAMA 3’s Best Township Dance category. In 1997 the Shabangu twins produced *Check No Coast* (Gallo Records), an album by a duet called Fire Jazz, which featured hits like
Siyabashosholoza. In 2007 Twins recorded four tracks that were included on the *Best Of Twins* album. They were also working on their new album to be released before the end of that year.

In 1999 Sony Music released *Sthandwa Sam*, an album performed by a quartet called *IVu*. The group’s members were Stephen Molakeng, Thabo Mdluli, Innocent Modiba and Brian Makiwane, all of Joyous Celebration fame. The title track sold the CD very well as it was charted on radio stations across the land. Thabo later became a TV presenter doing educational programmes on tourism as well as agriculture (*Ulimo*). He also released a solo CD titled *Wonderful Life*. By 2008 Mdluli was married to Nhlanhla and presenting Lindelani Mkhize’s brainchild, the television talent search titled *I Want To Sing Gospel*. Stephen became co-presenter of SABC 1’s *Gospel Gold* with Lerato Moloi of Muvhango fame.

Another group, *Canaries*, released *Kune Mbizo* in 1999 under the production guidance of Bheki Ngcobo. It was engineered by Felani Gumbi and released by Universal Music. The group was made up of Themba Herman Masemola, Sibusiso Clement Mngomezulu, Sibusiso Desmond Mnyakeni and David Maseko. Bheki also featured on a track titled *Melody From A Distance*.

*Denim* was an Afro-Pop outfit popularised by their handling of cover versions. The group membership was Baldwin Manye, Bobo Seritsane, Tumi Mashego, Leonard Moloi and Sangoma. Their 2007 release was the album *Full Circle*. Their strength lay in their stage presence and choreography.