

Yvonne Chaka Chaka - Princess of Africa

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Known as the "Princess of Africa", the glamorous Soweto-born South African musician, Yvonne Chaka Chaka, has matured from young African pop star to a singer of international acclaim.

She recently received an award in the Arts and Culture section of the Most Influential Women in Business and Government 2009 Awards. She also received the Lifetime Achiever Award at the 2009 MTN South African Music Awards.

Arguably best known for her popular signature song Umqombothi (meaning African beer) our home-grown music diva has produced 20 albums in a singing career that has spanned 22 years, while developing her own record label and expanding her repertoire to include talk radio and television shows as well as acting. But the road to stardom for the award winning Chaka Chaka, considered by many to be a South African and even African icon, was not an easy one.

Chaka Chaka's father, himself a talented musician, died when she was 11, leaving her mother who only had a standard six education, to raise three daughters on a domestic worker's salary. Chaka Chaka says she used to strum an empty tin and sing into a broom stick, pretending it was a microphone.

In 1981 she became the first black child to appear on South African television, and her career took off meteorically from 1985 with her debut album, "I'm in love with a DJ". The music star has produced popular chart-topping songs and dance music ever since. Her top selling songs are: Burning Up, I'm In Love With a DJ, I Cry for Freedom, Makoti, Motherland, Be Proud To Be African, Thank You Mr. DJ, and Umqombothi.

Chaka Chaka's warm and distinctive alto voice has won many music awards including the South African Music Awards, the pan-African Kora music award, OKTV music award, and Autumn Harvest music award, and acknowledgements in the form of platinum, gold and silver records which adorn the reception room of her studio.

She has shared the stage with international stars like Bono, Angelique Kidjo, Annie Lennox, Youssou N'Dour, the classic rock band Queen, and South African celebrities like Johnny Clegg, Miriam Makeba, and Hugh Masekela. Chaka Chaka has also performed for the Queen of England, US President Bill Clinton, Thabo Mbeki when he was the South African president, as well as for Nelson Mandela, and a number of other world leaders.

A role model for many South Africans, Chaka Chaka obtained a diploma in education and a second diploma in local government, management and administration from the University of South Africa, in addition to qualifying in 1988 in speech and drama at London's Trinity College.

Also a successful entrepreneur, she created her own company, Chaka Chaka Promotions, in 1989, and went on to create her own music label, Chaka Chaka Music in 1995, and has produced her own music ever since. Her first and most important mentor is her mother. Chaka Chaka says her mother taught her the importance of sharing as well as the virtues of honesty, generosity, faith, responsibility, and moral integrity.

Married to respected physician Mandlalela Mhinga, Chaka Chaka is the proud mother of four boisterous boys. Music talent abounds in the family, and several of her sons have either already had songs they've written produced in albums, or work in the fields of music producing and marketing.

Chaka Chaka's other business ventures include companies in the IT sector, the minerals and energy sector, as well as a motor vehicle retail outlet. She is also well respected for her humanitarian work and has taught literacy in South African townships, promoted women's rights, and worked to protect the rights of children in Africa.

Chaka Chaka is a trustee of the Tomorrow Trust, which focuses on education for orphaned and vulnerable children. She is also an ambassador for Nelson Mandela's 46664 Campaign, which uses TV drama to raise awareness of HIV/AIDS, as well as UNICEF's goodwill ambassador against malaria, and ambassador for the Roll-back Malaria Campaign sponsored by the World Bank, United Nations and World Health Organisation.

Having lost one of her backing singers to malaria in 2004, it is a campaign that Chaka Chaka takes seriously, and in March 2007 she formed her own organisation, the Princess of Africa Foundation, to complement her other work in the field of malaria prevention.

Her Foundation aims to improve accountability and transparency in the use of funds dedicated to fighting malaria on the African continent. It also offers communities access to education and information about malaria, appropriate medication, insecticide treated mosquito nets, and mosquito-repellent spray.

With credentials like this and staying power to match, it is not surprising that Chaka Chaka has won the heart of Africa.