



*The Office Of The Principal and Vice - Chancellor*

**PROF MS MAKHANYA, PRINCIPAL AND VICE CHANCELLOR**

**UNIVERSITY OF SOUTH AFRICA**

**THE SOUTH AFRICAN JAZZ SONGBOOK**

**OPENING ADDRESS**

**ZK MATTHEWS HALL, MUCKLENEUK CAMPUS**

**9 JUNE 2018**

- President Thabo Mbeki, Chancellor of Unisa
- Ms Jessica Lapenn – Chargé d' Affaires of the U.S. Mission to South Africa
- Ambassadors, High Commissioners and all the members of the diplomatic corps
- All our dignitaries, distinguished guests, ladies and gentlemen

It gives me tremendous pleasure to welcome all of you to this historic event which marks the culmination of almost two weeks of activities and forms part of Unisa's 145 year celebrations.

Duke Ellington once said, and I quote:

*"Jazz is a good barometer of freedom....in its beginnings the United States of America spawned certain ideals of freedom and independence through which jazz eventually evolved. The music is so free that many people say it is the only unhampered, unhindered expression of complete freedom yet produced in this country".*

The development of jazz in both the United States and South Africa share striking similarities when one considers the struggle for freedom endured by people from both nations. In the early 1900's slaves gave birth to jazz on the plantations of New Orleans, singing of their pain, oppression and wanting for freedom. In South Africa, the situation was echoed during Apartheid with jazz sustaining the masses of the people who sought the very same ideals. From the beer halls and dance halls of Sophiatown to District Six, jazz was the music that enabled our people to freely express themselves, and find some measure of social pleasure during Apartheid. Similar to the development of jazz in the USA, jazz in South Africa crossed racial, gender, economic and cultural barriers and

enabled people to communicate freely within the confines of this unique art-form.

South Africa and the United States have shared their passion for jazz and their desire to collaborate for many decades. When South African jazz artists were forced into exile, their American counterparts welcomed them into their homes and performance halls. Hugh Masekela's first trumpet came directly from the lips of the iconic Louis Armstrong, Harry Belafonte ensured that Miriam Makeba was a household name in the US by opening doors to her career that otherwise would never have been opened and in 1966 Abdullah Ibrahim substituted for Duke Ellington and led his legendary orchestra. South African and American jazz artists have collaborated on countless concerts and recordings during the growth of jazz in both of our countries. The bond that our artists share is firmly embedded in both of our countries.

Many of South Africa's leading jazz artists, past and current, have a unique relationship with Unisa, with our institution having awarded honorary doctorates and one of our performance halls being named after an artist such as Miriam Makeba. In recent years Unisa has taken the lead in promoting jazz in South Africa with the inclusion of jazz in

our music examinations, in our music competitions, in the transformation of our concert series to include 50% jazz concerts and in the fostering of jazz studies in our community engagement programme that currently serves over 1000 disadvantaged youth. Unisa has successfully hosted the Unisa International Jazz School, national jazz workshops, jazz symposia, and in April of this year we hosted the very first Unisa Jazz Festival. Unisa's collaboration with US jazz artists spans many years with national jazz workshops by members from Unisa and Oberlin Conservatory, collaborative concerts between American and South African jazz artists on our concert series and several high profile American jazz artists and teachers from esteemed institutions such Berkley College of Music and Temple University have served on the jury of our international jazz competitions.

This project, which we have named *The South African Jazz Songbook* will once again bring together jazz artists from the USA and South Africa in a unique collaborative project. Thanks to the financial support of the US Embassy in Pretoria, this project has enabled artists from both of our countries to conduct jazz workshops and concerts at three South African universities in Durban and Pretoria, jazz outreach in our community engagement programme in Soshanguve, a CD recording of 14 historical South African jazz compositions with full orchestral

backing, and this gala concert which will include a live DVD recording. The goal of the project is the cultural collaboration between artists and the cultural preservation of some of South Africa's landmark jazz compositions that have been arranged for saxophone, jazz rhythm section and full orchestra. This project has also involved skills development in the area of music recording with music technology students from the Academy of Sound Engineering and Pretoria University involved on the technical side of this production. Unisa is also proud to have some of our community music engagement students perform with the Johannesburg Festival Orchestra this evening, a truly rare and unique opportunity for our young students to be involved in such a landmark project alongside such world class musicians.

Over and above this project, I am most pleased to see that the warm and collaborative relationship enjoyed between Unisa and US Embassy continues to thrive and grow. Our two institutions have collaborated on a number of projects in various areas ranging from education and research to leadership and the arts. Unisa is indeed fortunate to have such a supportive partner and I wish to extend my sincerest gratitude to the Chargé d' Affairs of the U.S. Mission to South Africa Ms Jessica Lapenn and her incredible team at the US Embassy who were instrumental in making this project a reality.

It is envisioned that the South African Jazz Songbook will be a landmark project that will preserve the works of some of South Africa's most prolific composers for many generations to come. Tonight we will recognize and honour some of our country's greatest composers by performing their music in this truly rare and unique setting. I keenly await the performances that are about to be rendered by our esteemed American and South African artists.

In conclusion ladies and gentlemen, I would like to place on record my sincerest thanks to everyone that was involved in the project, most notably Professor Karendra Devroop, Professor of Music and Director of Unisa Music Foundation, who initiated this project many years ago and painstakingly went about seeking the funding to make this project a reality. The preservation of our culture is vital to our country because it will ensure that future generations will understand who we are as a nation and hopefully build upon the legacies of the generations that have passed. I trust that all of you will have an enjoyable evening.

Thank you.