

Nkulee Dube

“My dad’s legacy is the greatest inheritance”

Just like her late father, the irreplaceable Lucky Dube – who was tragically killed in 2007 – South Africa’s Nkulee Dube is as mesmerising and as powerful a performer as he was and her goal is to keep her father’s flame burning for a long time to come.

Indeed no female artist has managed to fuse ethno-soul and jazz with ragga in their songs as has this 24-year-old singer/songwriter. As the daughter of one of Africa’s biggest music icons, Nkulee has big shoes to fill to sustain her late father’s name – and she is not letting him down.

Nkulee is no stranger to the performance circuit and the music industry – for example, she has been a backing singer and dancer for major South African performers such as the late Lebo Mathosa and Ntando Bangani.

Nkulee was born to be on stage. She has been part of her late father’s performing band *One People* as a guest artist and backing vocalist for years.



She has also appeared on a compilation album released by Sillywalks Entertainment in Germany, where her song 'Give it to me' is considered one of the world's greatest reggae and ragga songs.

Nkulee is definitely the one to watch and can easily fill the shoes of some of the greatest South African performers, such as Brenda Fassie, Lebo Mathosa and of course her beloved dad Lucky Dube.

Nkulee – whose music can be classified as 'ethno-ragga' fused with soul and jazz – is a talented artist in her own right, with her own distinctive style. Hence her recently-released debut solo album is appropriately called 'My Way' and has been received with widespread critical acclaim.

What do we expect from a child of a legend? Nkulee, who was recently named "Youth Leader and International Goodwill Ambassador" by the ENCO Foundation in South Africa, speaks exclusively to *NAW's* Arts and Features editor, **Belinda Otas**.

New African Woman: You have a famous last name; in what ways did your late father influence your music and what impact has his legacy had on you?

Nkulee Dube: My father influenced me in a big way. He taught me how to see myself within myself and write about what I see around me and not what I think people should see around me, for example all the material things. My music became more focused and I began writing about issues that affect me: love, crime, peace, anger, etc. My dad basically helped me find my voice.

Also my father's legacy is the greatest inheritance a parent can leave for his kids. He left us a key to open any door in the world without limits.

The name can be tough to carry at times because everyone knows who you are. When I am performing, it feels like my dad is there watching me. That's the reason I love my dad's fans. I see him in their eyes when I'm performing and feel him close to me.

Your dad is legendary, there was only one Lucky Dube. Are you nervous about having such big shoes to fill?
Not really. My father made his own name and left a platform for us to

introduce ourselves to the world. No one can fill his shoes. The best we can do is keep the Dube name alive in whatever path we take.

What does music mean to you?

Well, music is my life and I can't imagine my life without it.

I've been singing for as long as I can remember, although I nearly stopped during my high school days when music affected my grades and my mum threatened that unless I improved my grades, the only music I would be hearing would be from birds singing in the morning (laughs)! The thought of being stopped to sing was terrifying.

What attracted you to reggae music? Was there a defining moment when you knew that this was the genre of music you wanted to follow and how would you describe your journey to date in the

music industry?

I was watching television when I was about 16 years of age and I saw Tanya Stephens performing on stage, then Queen Africa followed after her and I knew that reggae was my first love.

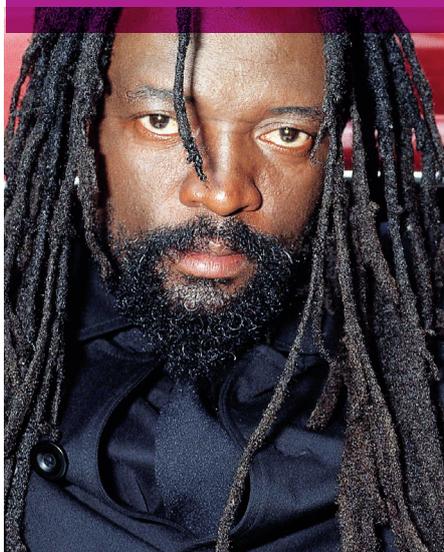
They made it very clear for me there and then. The tone from both artists was unique and cunning, I became obsessed with reggae before I met my dad, then when we met we connected through the love of reggae music.

In terms of artists, old and new, within the reggae genre and other music genres, in South Africa, within Africa and globally, who are your influences?

I am influenced by a lot of artists: Sizzla Kalonji (Jamaica), as he talks a lot about life's challenges and issues that affect him and the world; Lebo Mathosa (South Africa) – when she was on stage she made me want to

Nkulee Dube is immensely proud of her late, great father, the legendary Lucky Dube (below)

"That's the reason I love my dad's fans. I see him in their eyes when I'm performing and feel him close to me."



Music and culture

be a performer and not just a singer; Thandiswa Mazwai (South Africa) because she represented success in my eyes, she is so humble and that showed me, no matter how 'big' you become as an artist, you should never see yourself as the best there is because we were given these gifts to help build our nations through music – it's not our glory but God's!!

What kind of music speaks to your soul and spirit?

It doesn't matter what type of genre it may be, I connect to what the artist is trying to portray in his/her music.

Reggae is not all that you do, you also cover ethno-soul. First explain to our readers who may not know, what ethno-soul music is. How does this genre differ from reggae and what do you think has helped you to successfully cross-blend both genres in your music?

Ethno-soul is a mixture of country and soul music, the traditional sounds put nicely together with smooth classic sounds. It's slightly different from

Nkulee's debut album 'My Way' has been widely acclaimed

reggae because the latter has more skank (guitar repetition) and ethno-soul has more of a smooth clean sound.

In my 10 years of performing, I got the chance to work with artists who made such music, Lebo Mathosa (dancehall) Ntandi Bangani (traditional/country) and Thandiswa Mazwai (soul).

I took a piece from each of them and blended it together to create my own sound. They introduced me to this industry at an early age, so their sounds had to be part of my work.

What themes or topics do you like to examine through your music?

I like to talk about what I see and feel around me, I have songs about



abortion, love, lust, pain and just plain fun. I don't sit and think about topics to write about, the songs just come to me and I put it on paper. My new album is not themed because I myself didn't know what I had written about until I read it back to see if we could use it. I call the album 'My Way'.

What has been the audience response to you as an artist in your own right?

Wow, the response has been amazing so far, knowing that people try to learn my songs before I get there to sing along with me when I perform is a humbling and emotional experience for me.

You were recently nominated in six categories at the 31st International Reggae and World Music awards. What does the recognition from your peers mean to you and your musical journey, given that you are the first non-Caribbean entertainer to have been nominated in multiple categories?

This has been the most exciting time of my young life, knowing that my work is counted amongst such great artists whom I look up to. This means a lot to me and my musical journey because more doors have opened for me through these nominations. For example, this interview! (smiles) and a lot more tours to come my way, with the opportunity to fly my African flag higher.

Where do you feel at home and at peace the most, writing your songs and playing on your guitar or being on stage and singing to people?

I feel most at home when I am on stage performing for the people because that's where I see all the work we've put in come alive and see the impact I make on people.

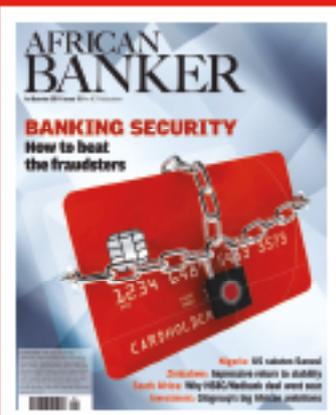
What do you want your music to evoke in your audience and those who come into contact with you via your music?

That they find their true selves. They have to know that with hard work and prayer, nothing can stand in their way.

Love, faith, and blessings always, to everyone, everywhere... ■



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