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## **‘Songs of Lozikeyi’ - A Celebration of the great Queen**



‘Nkwali’



Thandy & dancers

*[Photo credit: Mgcini Nyoni]*

Born at the Bulawayo Arts Festival 2021, the musical production **‘Songs of Lozikeyi’** - a collaborative effort featuring highly rated artists of Bulawayo - stole the show at the annual festival in ‘the City of Kings’ in Zimbabwe, and is now headed to the studio.

An initiative of Nhimbe Trust, **Songs of Lozikeyi** celebrates the powerful Queen Lozikeyi Dlodlo, senior wife of the great King Lobengula, and later Queen Regent of the Ndebele people; warrior queen of the 1896 Anglo-Ndebele war, champion of women and justice.

With vibrant performances in song, dance and poetry, the festival production featured 21 acclaimed artists of Bulawayo, working together to create a vivid musical tribute and celebrate the life and history of the great Queen. Guided by the writings of acclaimed Bulawayo historian Pathisa Nyathi in *Lozikeyi Dlodlo: Queen of the Ndebele* and other research, the production was written by Noma Damasane (‘Lady Tshawe’) and Thabani H Moyo, conceptualised and directed by Phiri, with Josh Nyapimbi, Executive Director of Nhimbe Trust as executive producer.

The music recording will involve part of the original cast and others – lead singers Thandy Dhlana and Nomathamsanqa ‘Nkwali’ Mkwanzani, poets Sithandazile Dube, and Thandokuhle Sibanda, Prince Joel Nyoni (guitar), Obey Mudiwa (drums), Paul Maseko (bass), Mthabisi Moyo (guitar), Gomez Dube (percussion), Vuyile Qongo (saxophone), and Laura Ngwenya on backing vocals. The recording is under the hand of engineer Erustus Nleya of Loud Records and Prince Joel Nyoni.

**Josh Nyapimbi** said “It feels great to get back into the studio for Nhimbe Trust’s second music studio recording after the 2017 *Blood Tongue THE Musical*. This time it’s the Songs of Queen Lozikeyi,

working with some of Bulawayo's finest musicians. We believe the music will cut a niche for itself on the world stage both live and digitally."

Featured in the six track recording is the song *Halala Lozikeyi* by Nkwali which was commissioned by the Queen Lozikeyi Trust, set up by her descendants to preserve her legacy. The song salutes the queen with evocative lyrics, a fitting tribute.

**Sihlangu Dlodlo**, Chairman of the Queen Lozikeyi Trust, said:

"As the Lozikeyi Trust we believe that this is the time now to celebrate the Queen as a national icon, a national heroine, and to use her name to motivate young women, especially from the disadvantaged sectors of our society to stand up and be counted; to draw some inspiration and motivation from who Queen Lozikeyi was, because she stood up when the king had disappeared and took leadership and pushed people to achieve something. So this is the kind of thing we expect, we expect our young people and especially young women to stand up and be counted and not to be intimidated by circumstances.

"Songs of Lozikeyi was a brilliant show... first of all the artists selection was very special because and Thandy Dhlana and Noma Nkwali are some of the best voices we have around. Their music is slightly different but very complementary, so this enabled the music of Lozikeyi to have that necessary variety. Thandy came in with this jazzy touch, Nkwali came in with the traditional touch and it all blended very, very well. The dancing was fantastic, I think the young choreographers did a splendid job in managing to capture the mood of the songs and the story of the songs. For me the balance was well done and the whole thing came together to present the strength and the focus that is the story of Queen Lozikeyi herself. I say "Hats off!" for a job well done".

The Queen Lozikeyi Trust also costumed lead singers Thandy Dlana and Nkwali, designed by Vuyelwa Mabhena who is a member of the Trust.

**Nkwali** said: "It's such a great honour to be part of the Songs of Lozikeyi production. When writing the song *Halala Lozikeyi* two years ago, I had to consult the elderly to learn more about Queen Lozikeyi. I spoke to Khumalo who is also from the royal family and he told me a lot about our Queen; she was a very powerful woman and an inspiration to us today.

I have learnt so much already from when we started working on the production, and now looking forward to getting into the recording studio, trying out new things, working with different artists from my city. I am very grateful to Nhimbe Trust for this opportunity."

**Thandy Dlana** said: "I'm so humbled to be one of those chosen to be part of this initiative. It is indeed an honour. Music is my passion, my drive and my vehicle to reach out to people. It is a pivotal platform where I can table critical, controversial and unspoken issues, as well as to teach and share knowledge with communities to empower them. The creative process was an interesting journey in which I've learned a lot, rediscovered myself. It opened my eyes to the power that women hold, as well as their responsibility in protecting their families, communities and nation. We should all know about this".

In an interview during the June festival by Mthabisi Tshuma for the Chronicle newspaper, producer **Saimon 'Mambazo' Phiri** said: "This is a work in progress. What we have been doing over the last two months has been making The Songs of Lozikeyi to celebrate the life and history of *uMama uLozikeyi*. Our idea was to pick the best of a city which is endowed with so much talent. ... [But] It is not just about the singing: it is also about the knowledge that we received. We got together with Pathisa Nyathi, we got together with the Lozikeyi Trust to talk to them and understand what we can create for our own people," he said. The stories of historical figures were intriguing, and the stories of legends, both living and dead, would be resurrected and brought to the stage to retell the city's history, said Phiri.

"Wherever I go in the world, the biggest players in those industries celebrate their own stories. If you look at the British, they celebrate King George and even if you go across to South Africa you will see the way that they celebrate King Tshaka and others. It is different for us. We are a country that is not telling its own stories. So, this is the start of telling our own story, our trial attempt to track the biggest symbols of our history, the women," he said. <https://www.chronicle.co.zw/power-of-unity-21-artistes-unite-in-the-making-of-songs-of-lozikeyi/>

### **The Original Cast at BAF 2021**

The stage production (pictured) at Bulawayo Arts Festival 2021 brought together 21 artists of the city, directed by Prince Joel Nyoni of the band *Ngoma Ingoma*; with fellow musicians Paul Maseko (bass), Raymond Takawira (guitar), Caleb Mujere (drums); lead vocalists Thandy Dhlana and Nomankwali 'Nkwali' Mkhwananzi, supported by singers Thandeka Moyo, Zanele Manhenga, Duduzile Sibanda of the famed women's acapella group *Nobuntu*; poets Thandokuhle Sibanda, Sithandazile Dube; choreographers Makula Moyo and Gomez Dube, and dancers of the *Iluba Lemvelo* traditional dance group - Lethisiwe Mafu, Muchaneta Dube, Rejoice Chauke, Senzeni Dube, Samkeliso Bhebhe; and Alice Gurure, Dorcas Ngwenya and Cheryl Mabaya of *Iyasa*.

WATCH the BAF2021 performance here: <https://fb.watch/v/F9yyETPZ/>

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