



From the desk of

Deputy Minister Pinky Kekana

Closing Remarks
Launch Of commemorative stamps
SABC: 9am
08 September 2020

Good morning to

- Hon. Minister Stella Ndabeni-Abrahams, Ministry of Communications and Digital Technologies
- Hon. Minister Nathi Mthethwa, Ministry of Sports, Arts and Culture
- Acting Director General of the Dept. Communications and Digital Technologies, Ms. Nomvuyiso Batyi
- The SABC Chairperson, Mr Bongumusa Makhathini
- Acting Chairperson of SAPO Board, Ms Catharina Van Der Sandt
- The family of Mr Hugh Masekela & Ms Rosie Katz from the Hugh Masekela Heritage Foundation

- The family of Mr Willie Kgositsile & Professor Dison
- The family of Mr Phillip Tabane & Ms Phumzile Shabalala
- Executives from SABC, SAMRO, RISA, SAPO
- Ladies & gentlemen

Postage stamps have provided rich content for literature and legend throughout the ages. Tied inextricably to stories of colonialism, war, empire, and ambition, some of the rarest collector stamps from around the world are those that speak to a time, place, and people that have been lost forever. Stamps have been an integral way for nations to define their cultural identity.

Indeed, what and who a country decides to immortalise on a stamp is one of the most fascinating parts of philatelic study.

Today, in South Africa, we immortalise some of our country's greatest legends, under the theme "Poets of Words and Sounds". From Philip Tabane, known as the African musical genius who plays for the human spirit. Tabane worked with prominent jazz players such as pianist Herbie Hancock and trumpeter Miles Davis, and even in his later days, he relished Miles's music. But, he often told interviewers of Miles: "He plays to make money, and I play for the spirit."

It is said that his music was intimately woven into his cosmology and spirituality, and so complex that it was uncategorised. Tabane resisted the hybridising label "Malombo jazz", as his music was tagged. It was only after 1994, that the re-releases started happening, and fresh recording and performance opportunities. Mr Phillip Tabane was definitely not "like" any other player. One of his songs was featured on our very own SABC's popular soapie, Muvhango as the opening title sequence. His many doctorates, world-class craft, and legacy will remain one of South Africa's treasures which young aspiring musicians can draw inspiration from.

Who can forget Bra Willie being inaugurated as South Africa's National Poet Laureate in 2006. Keorapetse William Kgositsile, also known by his pen name Bra Willie, a South African Tswana poet, journalist and political activist, and very influential in the ranks of the African National Congress in the 1960s and 1970s. Kgositsile is the author of nine collections of poetry. An activist poet impacted by the conditions of apartheid injustice, Kgositsile's themes engage struggle for assertion of self. After graduating from Columbia in 1971, Kgositsile taught and pioneered poetry readings as performance art in downtown clubs as part of the Uptown Black Arts Movement. Jazz, central to black American culture, is embedded in the substance and rhythm of Kgositsile's poetry.

Bra Willie also became active in the New York theatre scene, founding the Black Arts Theatre in Harlem, giving a militant voice to black referential experience and aspirations. Forty-five years ago, Kgositsile returned to Africa to teach at the University of Dar es Salaam in Tanzania, in 1975. It would be years later, in July 1990, that he returned to our country, his home, after 29 years in exile. He returned a hero.

In receiving the National Poet Laureate Award for the contribution of his poetry to society which, Bra Willie believes that he contributed to the intellectual, emotional and spiritual dimensions of life. Keorapetse William Kgositsile defied apartheid odds to become one of the most accomplished poets not only in South Africa but across the African continent, and contributed significantly to the Black Conscious movement in the U.S. So many titles are attributed to the great Hugh Ramapolo Masekela. A trumpeter, flugelhornist, cornetist, singer and composer, but his greatest title must surely be "the father of South African jazz".

It was not fortuitous that his 30 years in exile would also result in him becoming one of the world's greatest, not just South Africa's. His talent allowed him to enrol at the Manhattan School of Music in 1960. He found himself in the throes of the golden era of jazz music and immersed himself in the New York jazz scene where he watched greats like Miles Davis, John Coltrane, Thelonious Monk, Charlie Mingus and Max Roach. A masterclass like no other. Under the tutelage of legends like Dizzy Gillespie and Louis Armstrong, they encouraged him to develop his own unique style, feeding off Africa, rather than American influences – his debut album, released in 1963, as we all know was entitled Trumpet Africaine. And so the legend that was Hugh Masekela was born.

Not many artists in the world can claim a solo career of making hits for 5 decades, and releasing 40 albums in a lifetime. He has been featured and collaborated with some of the world's greatest, from Fela Kuti, Marvin Gaye, Herb Alpert, Paul Simon, Stevie Wonder, Harry Belafonte, Dizzy Gillespie, The Byrds, and has performed alongside Janis Joplin, Otis Redding, Ravi Shankar, The Who and Jimi Hendrix. To name but a few. His greatest collaboration for us as South Africans will probably always be with the late, great Ma'm Miriam Makeba. In 2017, just a year before his death, Bra Hugh toured Europe with Paul Simon on the Graceland 25th Anniversary Tour and opened his own studio and record label, House of Masekela at the age of 75.

We are proud today, to immortalise these great legends in a way that will forever hold them close but place them in the world they thrived in. Just as they lived so shall we immortalise them, for all that they have given to us as a nation.

Thank you.