

# ENTERTAINMENT

## South African township rhythms to visit Eugene

By Ming Rodrigues  
Emerald Reporter

Before 1962, "Mbaqanga" simmered in its status as a poor-man's stew in South Africa.

Then a Johannesburg band came along and gave the dish a new lease of life, capturing the hearty "Mbaqanga" flavor in a musical melting pot of traditional African rhythms, street music and international Afro-pop.

Right away, township people recognized it as their own. Though derived from traditional wedding music, it was modern and electric, and "Mbaqanga" fever was soon spreading rapidly across the country.

Saturday night at 8, "Mbaqanga" pioneers Mahlathini and the Mahotella Queens, backed by the Makgona Tsohle Band, will bring their throbbing, exuberant sound and dance from the streets of Soweto to the Hult Center.

Playing together on and off since 1965, Mahlathini and the Queens are one man and three women who joined the Tsohle band, first as dancers. But the growing popularity of vocal groups in South Africa compelled Mahlathini to begin singing his rumbling, raspy lead, and the Queens their hot, ringing background.

Just by himself, Mahlathini, known as the Lion of Soweto among his fans, is a powerhouse performer.

Born Simon Nkabinde, he grew up in the South African country side where he got his professional name Mahlathini

meaning "forest" or "jungle on his head."

By the age of 10, he had an amazingly deep and heavy baritone voice.

"Everyone was so worried about my voice," he said. "No one knew what to do about this loud and deep noise coming from my mouth. Then my mother took me to the witch doctor and it was discovered that this was my natural voice. So we all stopped worrying and I started to sing like a new man."

"Amazing on record, this voice is unreal live," the *Village Voice* said. "Mahlathini makes you gasp and pound the wall ... the show carries over all linguistic and cultural barriers."

Hilda Tloubatla, Mildred Mangxola and Nobesthu Mbadu are the Mahotella Queens, whose sweet female harmonies complement Mahlathini's roar.

The group's sound is at once traditional and contemporary, with electric guitars, penny-whistle and drums creating a modern dance beat with the singers prancing about energetically in true African tribal dance tradition.

As Savuka's Johnny Clegg, who performed at the University last term, said, "If anyone is looking for the music which brought hope and represented a humanizing force during the darkest de-humanizing days of apartheid, they should look no further than the incredible Mahlathini and the Mahotella Queens."

Tickets are \$15, \$12.50 and \$10 at the EMU Main Desk with limited student and senior discounts.



Courtesy photo

Mahlathini and the Mahotella Queens will bring their South African sounds to Eugene's Hult Center on Saturday night.



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