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LIFE OF A KING

THE GOSPEL ACCORDING TO SINGER NALEDI KING

By Lauren Shapiro



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“ ONCE OUR OWN CUPS ARE FULL, THE REST OF THE WORLD BENEFITS ”

She has been singing since she was a toddler, but it wasn't until the age of 33 that Naledi King found the courage to record her eponymous debut album. In the lead-up to the release of her second album, we chat to the 39-year-old 'song-trepeneur' about her path so far and where she's headed next.

CHOIR GIRL

Born to a Swazi mother and South African father, Naledi grew up in Mbabane, Swaziland, visiting her grandmother in Soweto during the school holidays. Naledi confesses that she placed her late father, a pastor of the United Pentecostal Church and an inspector for the Swaziland Ministry of Education & Training, on a pedestal for the longest time. 'My dad had a strong influence on my life,' she says. 'He seemed invincible and always preached with such conviction.'

The family had no TV and the children were not exposed to what her father described as 'devilish' secular music, 'amarabi'. The girls were forbidden from having boyfriends, wearing earrings or even pants. 'School sports days were the worst because I would have to wear a skirt over my sports pants. Definitely awkward!' recalls Naledi.

Every evening before dinner, her father would lead the family in an hour-long devotion, which she describes as 'mini-church'. 'We would sing, my dad would read the bible and preach, then we'd sing some more ... every single night.'

At times, Naledi resented the strictness, but admits that her upbringing gave her grounding in family values, integrity and deep spirituality. She now appreciates the many times she was forced to sing, both at home and in church. 'A lot of singers owe their talent to church.'

The songstress hated school and didn't want to go to varsity, so in 1999, she enrolled in a two-year course at Rhema Bible College in Joburg. 'It was time to go and find myself, create a life and explore.'

TOP 10

Naledi reveals her favourite African musicians



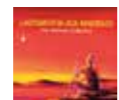
1 NAKHANE TOURÉ



2 BUSI MHLONGO



3 THEMBA MKHIZE



4 LADYSMITH BLACK MAMBAZO



5 PRINCESS MAGOGO KADINUZULU



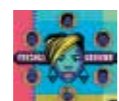
6 SANNIE FOX



7 THANDISWA MAZWAI



8 THE MUFFINZ



9 FRESHLYGROUND



10 JONATHAN BUTLER

BRAID HEART

After bible school, Naledi needed to make ends meet. She had been braiding hair for pin money since she was 12 years old, so she made some business cards and hit the malls. 'I approached women who were shopping and showed them my own braids. Soon the phone started ringing. My younger sister Zandi had also enrolled at Rhema and helped me braid after classes. Then a friend from Swaziland came to visit and just never left. I now had extra hands and the business, Braiding for Africa, grew.'

The three young women began attracting a high-end, celebrity clientele. 'We have braided Basetsana Kumalo, Dr Precious Moloi-Motsepe, Marianne Fassler, Bridgette Radebe, photographer Merwelene van der Merwe, singer Tamara Dey and even Don Cheadle's daughters,' she says, flying through the names as if she's ticking items off her shopping list. This exposure to the entertainment industry resulted in fun, random jobs on ad and modelling shoots, but the real value of her network would later help launch her music career.

ONE TRUE LOVE

In 2004, a client set Naledi up on a date with José Carpintero, a self-trained sound engineer, and within a year, the two were married. The kindred spirits do things their own way – their wedding reception featured some of their own music as well as performances by local artists, and Naledi's elegant fingers are bare of a wedding band. In lieu of a ring, José bought her a Yamaha grand piano.

ALL MADE UP

Naledi's go-to products – from the street to the stage

'Clinique everything! I just love their products.'

Clinique Dramatically Different Moisturizing Lotion + 125 ml R425



Clinique Quickliner for Eyes Intense in Intense Ebony R245



Clinique High Impact Mascara R230



'I love colour. I can't have enough of it'
Essie Nail Lacquer in Big Spender R125

'Red lips – enough said.'

Black Opal Color Splurge Luxe Matte Lipstick in Vampy Red R110



All available at selected Foschini stores

'Bleach helps me create my platinum-blonde hair.'
Dark and Lovely Color Intensity Anti-Dryness Permanent Colour in Amber Blonde R33

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- Naledi King
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'It is a symbol of my commitment to my path,' she explains. 'When you are happy within, all falls into place.'

FAMILY MATTERS

A few months later, the couple found out they had a baby on the way. 'Pregnancy was intense, but I loved becoming a mom,' she confides. She stayed home for two years taking care of baby Daniel, but soon began to feel restless: 'It was time to get out there again, to seriously consider this music thing.'

The couple also contemplated having a second child, but Naledi felt depleted from the rigours of her first pregnancy and breastfeeding. 'Every fibre of my being said "no!"' It wasn't an easy discussion, but Naledi maintains, 'I express my boundaries truthfully and I'm glad I stood up for my well-being and happiness.' So they decided to adopt and Elai joined the family in 2009.

Four years later, Naledi's eldest sister Jane passed away unexpectedly, leaving behind four sons: Kwazi, Andile, Caleb and Malaika. 'Now I'm a mom of six!' Naledi exclaims, barely concealing her delight. 'It's been quite an adventure.'

Naturally, there have been challenges integrating two families, as well as raising toddlers alongside teenagers, but Naledi says they run a tight ship. 'Everyone helps out and the older boys even cook.' But the driving force in the family is love. 'We want to raise well-rounded individuals with the emotional capacity to handle whatever life puts in their path.'

HER OWN TUNE

Although she had sung in front of 10 000-strong audiences at her church before, it was fear that kept Naledi from pursuing her talent as a career. 'I was running away – yet I was also living life in order to have something to sing about. I had to find my voice.'

Then, in 2010, she released her debut album *Naledi King*. Last FM called it 'world class', 'at once shining and subtle' was Artslink.co.za's review, and Mediaupdate.co.za thought that it was 'intriguingly diverse'. 'Music has guided me, challenged me and haunted me,' says Naledi. 'It has forced me to keep looking for my sound and my message. It's been my platform to express myself.'

She also believes in the healing power of music: 'Sound affects us deeply. My next album is infused



with healing frequencies and sounds.' It carries a strong theme of self-sovereignty too. 'I hope that my music will heal people and guide listeners towards themselves. It's all about changing minds, raising consciousness and opening hearts. Once our own cups are full, the rest of the world benefits.'

UNLOCKING SUCCESS

As part of her mission to change how people think and feel about themselves, Naledi and her sister Zandi founded leadership development company Eneegma Unlocked in 2010.

'Eneegma represents the mystery, potential and magic in all of us. Our mission is to provide people with tactics to unlock that potential,' Naledi bubbles excitedly. In addition to career and technical skills, her programmes empower the participants with the courage to live in alignment with their happiness, passion and dreams. 'That's the only way to achieve real success and live a truly rewarding life.'

Supplementing Eneegma's aim, she is currently writing an e-book about leadership development, which will be published next year.

But that doesn't mean her music will be taking a back seat. The end of 2015 promises a new single, with a full-length album and tour scheduled for 2016. 'I'm still setting up systems, changing my look and feel to match who I have become,' Naledi says. 'What people don't understand is that to be a successful artist, you have to be able to run a business.'

And she certainly has her platform in place: 'The internet is the next big thing. A lot of careers are being launched this way. But I can't share too much more or it will spoil the surprise!' ■