

mozuluart – at the end of the day, we are one

Mozuluart is Ramadu (vocals and percussion), Vusa Mkhaya Ndlovu (vocals), Blessings Nqo Nkomo (vocals), from Zimbabwe and Roland Guggenbichler (piano) from Austria. In the following interview, Ramadu talks about this fascinating, culture-combining project.

jaws: Your 2006 project Mozuluart combines two very diverse musical styles. It is a fusion of traditional Zulu music with classical music based mainly on Mozart’s compositions. Where did the inspiration for this project come from?

Ramadu: Vusa, Blessings and myself have been living in Austria for almost ten years now. We usually get the inspiration for our projects from where we are, from the culture and music that surrounds us and because we’ve been here for so long we wanted to incorporate a bit of Austria into our music. Mozart seemed a good idea because he is such an essential part of Austrian culture. Well, after the idea was born, all we needed was a pianist, somebody who would push all this to another level, as our classical knowledge was rather limited at that time.

jaws: How did you settle for Roland Guggenbichler?

Ramadu: We knew Roland from when we toured with the Hans Theessink Band way back when. He was a member of the band and we became friends. When we spoke to Roland about our idea he was immediately enthusiastic and supportive so we decided to go for it.

jaws: What characterizes Zulu music?

Ramadu: Zulu music actually comprises many different styles, like gospel or choir music. We use a variation of Zulu music, which is sung by men only and seemed the most suitable for our project. The language we sing in is a mixture of Zulu and Ndebele: Ndebele being to Zulu about what Austrian is to German, if you know what I mean...

jaws: Now to the other component of Mozuluart, classical music. When did you discover classical music for yourself?

Ramadu: Actually there was this radio station in Zimbabwe, called ‘Radio One’, which always played classical music. It was mainly for English speakers but I used to listen to it sometimes and I liked it. So I’ve been listening to classical music sort of in the background for quite a while, but actively only since our project started. I now own quite a couple of classical CDs, mainly Mozart.

jaws: You “try to fuse these two music styles in a way that leaves room for the original song and style and not absorb

a lot from it so that it stays with its authenticity". With two styles that I think have never before been combined in this way, how did you manage that?

Ramadu: Well, Roland gave each of us some Mozart compositions amongst them was *Die Zauberflöte*, of which I translated the text into Ndebele and tried to sing to it. In order to properly fuse Mozart with Zulu, we also had to add some percussion, some djembe and some... groove, you know? So we added some groove to the songs and this is how the fusion happened!

jaws: *In your stage performance of Mozuluart you use traditional movements of African Dance but wear some sort of old-school European clothes. How did you come up with the mix?*

Ramadu: Well we came up with this mix because tried to think back about a hundred years or so, when white settlers came to Africa and somehow we tried to recreate that atmosphere a bit and also to make our performance more appealing for the audience. I actually feel quite comfortable in those clothes! I like dressing up in something different on stage.

jaws: *Do you choreograph the movements according to the musical feeling of the song or the lyrics?*

Ramadu: It's all about the message. Some of the songs have a sad vibe, so you can't dance to them a lot but really, it depends. I mean, if the music is groovy, you automati-

cally have to move. Actually, this is one of the few productions where we don't move a lot on stage, usually we sing and dance from A-Z, but with this one, we reduced the choreography to a minimum and concentrate on the mood and the lyrics.

jaws: *Where do you get the inspiration for the lyrics from?*

Ramadu: One song, as I told you before, was basically a translation of the original content, but with the others it depended mostly on the melody. We would listen to the music and see what feelings it evoked in us. "Bheka kimi", for example, reminded us of a gospel song, a prayer, so Blessing arranged the lyrics accordingly. Some sonatas reminded us of a funeral song, so Vusa used a funeral theme in his lyrics. Usually, when you listen to a song, it provokes certain feelings in you. We then use our imagination to create the lyrics.

jaws: *You premiered some songs of Mozuluart in 2004 at the ORF Radiokulturhaus in Vienna. What were the reactions to your first performance?*

Ramadu: This was on the occasion of the celebration of the South African Liberty Day. The reactions to our performance were extremely positive. Many people came up to us and encouraged us to continue this project. This reaction was actually what pushed us to do more.

jaws: *In 2006 you performed Mozuluart at the opening of*



Photo: Manuel Zetill

