

THE STRUGGLE OVER THE OBSTACLE
IS THE GATEWAY TO SUCCESS



CEPHAS MASEKO BY MARCUS DEISS

I was invited to meet the legendary Cephass Maseko during an intense travel period. Eager to uncover the secrets behind his remarkable legacy as a Zambian-Zimbabwean entertainer, I tracked him down to a cottage on a large farm nestled deep within the woods of a small township outside Lusaka, Zambia.

When I knocked on the wooden door, to my surprise, it swung open, revealing a lit room decorated with books and peculiar artefacts. There, sitting in a comfy chair, was Cephass himself with a glint in his eyes.

"Hello, Uncle Cephass?" I called out, my voice echoing through the quiet surroundings. Cephass, an elderly man with wise eyes and a kindly smile, said, "Come in, come in, Marcus," and greeted me warmly.

As I entered the house, taking in the cosy interior filled with memorabilia, my heart was pounding. I could not help but feel a mix of nervousness and excitement.

He offered me a seat across from him, my mind and pen ready.

Captivated by his piercing gaze and the marks that adorned his face, each telling a tale of battles fought and won, I wanted to learn more from his past. I asked him about his time during the Zimbabwean bush war and listened carefully, eager to hear his story.

"Oh, the memories. The laughter, the tears. We helped forge a country, piece by piece. It was a labour of love," he said.

He leaned back with a faraway look in his eyes and said, "It was a time of great struggles and triumphs. We fought for our freedom, for our people. The journey was difficult, but the spirit of unity carried us forward." I nodded, captivated by his words.

He talked about how he became a close, trusted friend to Nelson Mandela through his appearances on TV, radio, and stage.

As he delved deeper, I quickly realised his recounters were laced with riddles and cryptic metaphors, leaving me more perplexed than when I had started. It was as if I witnessed history in the making as he revelled in storytelling, weaving intricate tales and hidden narratives waiting to be unravelled.

His words painted a vivid picture of a world controlled by colonial powers, in which a young man at the age of 18 in

Southern Rhodesia (now Zimbabwe) learns that he is in a country that is not his. After painting vivid pictures of a bygone era, I realised that the true story lay not in his tracks but in the enigmatic labyrinth of his mind. And so, my quest for answers transformed into a quest for understanding Cephas's enigma.

I asked, "What kept him going during the most difficult times?" He replied that he was motivated by his belief in justice and freedom. He wanted to ensure that all people of Zimbabwe were treated with respect and dignity. He hoped to inspire others to stand up and fight for liberty.

I listened intently, scribbling notes as he recounted tales of bravery and sacrifices. Slowly, I began to piece together the fragments of his life, connecting the dots between his disappearances and the secrets he held.

When I asked what he hoped to see in the next generation of musicians, he said, like most musicians of yesteryears he understood that although music evolves in many ways, he believed music is an art that should be expressed with instruments.

The feeling of brotherhood grew stronger as one got into his background. He was the sort of guy you would instantly like, a fellow with varied musical talent and showmanship. He was very humble about his success when we spoke about his legacy as an entertainer, a master of ceremonies of more than 500 state and private functions, including his cabaret appearances in many of Zambia's top hotels.

As our encounter came to an end, I could not help but feel inspired by this remarkable individual's resolute spirit and stories. I thanked him for his time and stood up to leave, promising to honour his story.

The door closed behind me, and as I drove away, the weight of his words echoed in my mind. The responsibility of telling his story hung heavy on my shoulders. Still, I knew it was a privilege, and I was determined to do justice to the life of this extraordinary man. I felt inspired by his courage and determination. I realised that one person could make a difference and that no matter how difficult the fight may be, it was always worth it in the end.

THE LIFE OF THE ENTERTAINER CEPHAS MASEKO

The tale of the late Cephias Maseko (25.12.1938–10.12.2024) is biographical in context and describes the life of a prominent entertainer.

Based on research from various articles and interviews conducted, the history of Cephias covers the period and events that led to the attainment of self-rule in Zambia and Zimbabwe.

During his lifetime, Cephias even survived an assassination attempt, including a failed plot to charge him with treason instigated by the colonial administration and local politicians in the then Southern Rhodesia.

A shocking turn of events altered the life of Cephias. Born into a world filled with promise, he had achieved much. Yet, the shadows of colonialism loomed large over Southern Rhodesia. Cephias was an active participant in local political activities. He believed in justice and equality for his people. His passion for change, however, caught the attention of authorities.

One fateful day, he found himself arrested by a local magistrate. The interrogation was intense. Questions flew at him like arrows. Each inquiry dug deeper into his involvement with political movements. Despite his successes and aspirations, Cephias faced a harsh reality: his rights were stripped away.

Colonialism had a way of erasing identities. It dictated who could speak and who could act. For Cephias, this meant losing his status as a Southern Rhodesian citizen—a painful irony for someone born free. His deportation to Northern Rhodesia (now Zambia) was not just an end; it was a symbol of resistance against oppression. Cephias became part of a larger narrative—one that echoed through generations fighting for freedom.

At a time when Zimbabwe was seeking ways to liberate itself from colonial rule, Cephias stood to promote liberation rights through music. His passion for music echoed through the halls of Zambian music history, revolutionising the growth of genres like jazz, gospel, and choral in Zambia.

Principled by “The Struggle Over the Obstacle is the Gateway to Success,” Cephas Maseko was one of the longest-serving entertainers in Zambia.

He knew music could bring people together and create social cohesion. Music for Cephas was a powerful lens through which to examine and preserve cultural heritage. It fosters a sense of belonging, improves community reach, and reinforces social unity while ensuring that future generations have access to and can appreciate the cultural narratives that shape their identities.

Tall and charming, with dark brown eyes and a short afro, his daily habits were found upon a tight, disciplined schedule. His diet consisted of fish, chicken, nshima, rice, sweet potatoes, eggs, vegetables, and fruits.

Married, with ten children, 12 grandchildren, and four great-grandchildren, the great-granddad soldiered on with his zeal and wanted to introduce the young generation to the original and genuine sounds of Zamrock. The great soloist, instilling an era, reckoned he could play anything above and below the sun, so long as it was music.

His areas of study were journalism and political science, culminating in military science. He spoke Shona and Ndebele and could even sing in Russian. Not only is his music barely present in the national archives, but their traces are fragmented and are, for the most part, misplaced tastes of music of a past time.

Born in Insuza near Bulawayo in Southern Rhodesia in 1938, Cephas Maseko was the second born in a family of nine siblings.

His mother was Zimbabwean from Bulawayo, and his father was from Katete in the Eastern Province of Zambia. His upbringing by his mother, Mrs. Selina Sibanda Maseko, demanded excellence from her family.

As a family of church choir members this benefited young Cephas. Mrs. Maseko was an excellent singer and taught all family members how to sing, including teaching Cephas the Tonic Solfa.

From a very young age, Cephas’s interest in music was also built and developed by his uncle, Phillip Gulu Sibanda, who taught him a rare style of the “double whistle.” This unique act in which you twist your mouth and tongue at a certain angle while

blowing out air resulted in a sound as though two people whistled simultaneously.

As a teenager, he was sent to boarding school and went through a rough time. Still, with his musical interest and talent, he was the obvious lead singer at the local primary school.

His voice was in demand at weddings, and he was the star of many local functions where his payment was usually a pocketful of sweets.

In the 1950s, Cephass went to Mundi School and was introduced to the music of the Manhattan Brothers, the Milles Brothers, the Golden Gate Quartet, Nat King Cole, Ray Charles, Charlie Parker, Duke Ellington, and Diana Washington.

Still in his lower grades, Cephass was sent to Bulawayo to continue his education. His love for music continued when, in 1953, he went to Lobengula School for Standard Three, where he joined the school choir. There, he found the music scene totally different and expected to learn classic stuff from renowned artists like the late Todd Matshikidza, who penned that evergreen gem titled “Hambalashle.” Cephass was now moving into the upper state of real music as time rolled to the late 1950s when other things started happening.

In 1958, he enrolled in a school leavers certificate correspondence course with Lycoum College. Upon graduation in 1959, he was hired in the evaluation department of Kentucky Airlines (then Zimbabwe Airlines) and joined Kodak.

During this time, Cephass also worked as a TV presenter on Northern Rhodesia Broadcasting Services in 1960, which paved the way for more exposure, making his debut first as a soloist while keeping options open.

He pushed his way through a band called Bantu Actors, a Salisbury (Harare)-based township outfit in 1961. He was about 23 years old when he joined the group specialising in African jazz and twist-type music.

In 1963, to his surprise, he was arrested and interrogated by a local magistrate, which finally led to his deportation due to getting involved in South Rhodesian political activities. Despite being

born free and having great success, Cephas lost his rights as a Southern Rhodesian because of colonialism.

The following year, he left for North Rhodesia, where he secured a job in Lusaka at the Central African Mail (forerunner of the Zambia Daily Mail) as assistant circulation manager and rose to the rank of circulation manager in 1964.

Between generating sales and returns of the popular Daily Mail, Cephas backed the blue-noted radio programme called “Listen to the Golden Voice of Cephas Maseko,” then presented by Cosmo Mlongoti.

Despite these achievements and being in the mix of swinging jive, Cephas decided to further his studies and left Zambia for a journalism course in Czechoslovakia early in 1965. In 1966, he returned home with a diploma to join the Zambia News Agency as a senior reporter.

A month later, he went to the USSR (Union of the Soviet Socialist Republic) to study political science, culminating in military science. When Cephas returned to Zambia after his studies in the USSR, his love for the mike was greater than ever. It led him to team up with his sisters to introduce two popular musical television shows called “Maseko Variety” and “Sweet Souls Show.” His shows welcomed singers to present their skills and promote local talent on the international stage.

The Maseko Variety show with the Blue Notes sounded new vibes when they clinched a contract at Blue Boar as a resident band and played regular gigs at the Lotus Inn and L’Apertif. The Maseko Variety show started in 1969 and wound up after five sessions due to a lack of sponsors, while the Sweet Soul Show began in 1983 and was an immense television success.

The Sweet Soul Show programme sponsored by various Lusaka companies, ran for 29 weeks with its noble cause to tap and promote local talent with international taste, which touched many souls, and some of the past local stars were born with the courtesy of Cephas. The songs sung on the Sweet Soul show were later released as an album LP. Fortunately, Ericson took up sponsorship of the Sweet Soul Show, followed by Building Society, Capital Agencies, and finally Motaxis.

As a vocalist, Cephas also formed a band called the Tall Stars, which included Moffat Ponseti, Times of Zambia statesman Duncan Malama, and Pilot Ndhlovu. The band socked audiences here and there, including Wankie (Hwange), singing cover band-maker (and mentor) of the era Kenneth Matala, who was managing Bantu Actors.

Cephas had passed through the various stages of entertainment life. Three-time Best Singer award winner, and accompanied by the Tall Stars band, the songster participated in the Zambia Trade Fair bands competition in Ndola, which was scooped by the Golden Rhythm Crooners; Rokana Melodies came second, and Cephas and his band a respectable third place.

In the same year 1969, Cephas led a powerful delegation of musicians to the first Pan African Music and Arts Festival in Algeria. The PAN-African Cultural Festival was a big event in Cephas's life and in terms of the political, cultural, and artistic scene in Africa, with 5,000 participants and different cultures from around the world.

Upon returning from Algeria, he joined ZANA (Zambian News Agency), where he was assigned as a senior news reporter and was respected by the Northern Rhodesian government. Three years later, Cephas left ZANA and joined an Italian consortium called Intersomer in 1971 as a public relations officer, which was a holding firm for companies like Livingstone Motor Assembly (LMA) and others.

In the early 1970s, he released the song "Days Are Never The Same," which was like a national anthem on the Zambia Music Palour (ZMPL) radio show presented by the late Charles Mando during the mid-1970s.

In 1976, there was a pause in his checkered career. He was now more into the gospel scene than live songs and began scouting for an outfit that could translate those sounds that lingered in his head.

In the mid-1980s, Cephas released two singles: "Tazara," which was flipped by "Kafue Gorge" and "Dzaka Ni Dzaka" which had "Guka Maxego Madala" on the composite side and were backed

by his sisters. His sisters were in fact the main catalysts of Cephas's music life, and he sang with them on many occasions.

Cephas continued to perform in various clubs where he became known by many names, including The Man with the Golden Voice, Summertime, and the Whistling Wonder. Most popularly known as Summertime, Cephas was in the same league as Dorothy Masuka and the Broadway Quintet, who entered the local jazz scene after the likes of Alick Nkhata and the Big Gold Six.

Cephas mingled and recorded with Zambian top bands and musicians. He worked with old, high-profile bands and musicians such as the Big Gold Six, Alick Nkhata, and Dorothy Musuka, who sang a popular song, Tinogara Musango, a liberation song dedicated to the Zimbabwean comrades who were at that time deep in the bush fighting for that country's freedom. He shared the stage with Miriam Makeba, Jonas Ngwangwa, Bestline Mwanza, Kieth Mlevu, and Champion Banda, to name a few.

In all productions, he was backed by bands like the Afro Mods, who were popular with songs such as Manyama Ya Mpelembe (Nasanga Ba Lelya) and Mwana Wa Malume (My Uncle's Child), including Tabale Samba and the Broadway Quintet.

Though he may not have put many of his compositions on wax, he continued to compose great songs talking about various issues affecting society.

As one of the most respected cabaret artists, Cephas was the highlight and main performer during the opening of the InterContinental and Pamodzi Hotel in Zambia. With his voice as sweet as ever, he performed with a band called Eklevators at Lusaka's TAJ Pamodzi Hotel and was the first Zambian to cabaret in a five-star hotel like InterContinental.

He did some commercials, the most popular being that of the Prudence Bank Limited, whose lines went like, "Papariya ba Yubi, Papariya ba Yubi, Prudence Bank." He also did commercials for Zambia State Insurance Corporation (ZSIC) and Magic Carpet Travel and Tours.

Cephas was musically gifted and multi-talented. His voice and always smart dress in suits with a hat to match, making his walk

elegant, was a testament to his character, that of a leader. Many drew energy from Cephas and the hope that they could incorporate aspects of a brighter future. His decent personality, intelligent ways and gentle voice naturally captured the hearts of many.

As we reflect on his life, soaking in the nostalgia and reminiscing on the good times he shared with his family and friends, this is a story honouring and celebrating his life as someone many admired and who notably contributed to the music era of his time.

We aspire to live in some way like Cephas lived, even as we note the limits. He will be remembered as a significant contributing artist and entertainer in the Zambian Creative and Cultural Industry (CCI).

We remember stories like Cephas's to understand our past better. They remind us that success can be fleeting under oppressive regimes. The struggle for rights continues to resonate in many parts of the world. Cephas's journey is a testament to resilience. It highlights the importance of standing up against injustice—even when faced with overwhelming odds.

In remembering him, we honour all those who fought bravely and its lasting effects on identity and rights. Their stories inspire us to advocate for change today. Let us reflect on these lessons as we strive for a more equitable future—where every voice is heard, and every right is respected.