

Q&A

with **SIPHOKAZI JONAS**

Siphokazi Jonas, a highly respected producer, playwright, performer and UCT Masters graduate, opened South Africa's State of the Nation address this year with an inspired verse. We get to know her a little better.

TEXT JASON CURTIS

Q. WHAT WOULD YOU SAY IS THE DEFINITION OF A PROFESSIONAL POET?

It can vary, based on where you are from, but for me it's someone who can make a living from writing, performing or doing anything poetry related. Some poets publish their work, others teach it, so you may never see or hear them perform, but they're out there creating original work that feeds them and their families.

Q. WHAT DID YOUR 2021 STATE OF THE NATION POETRY READING MEAN FOR YOU?

I focused on the audience the piece was intended for. My job was not to celebrate Government, but rather to acknowledge its constituents, the communities that make South Africa the extraordinary country it is.

Q. WHAT DO YOU SEE AS YOUR ROLE IN SOCIETY?

The contemporary place of poetry is linked to the tradition of poets, be they the Greek poets in Europe or Ebonyi poets in Africa. It's all anchored in oral tradition. The artist is a teacher in terms of

storytelling in the societies they move in or are touched by. They reflect the world around them, speaking truth to power, asking questions, and presenting it all in a way that speaks to those who hear or read the written words.

Q. WHAT DO YOU HOPE TO ACHIEVE WITH YOUR WORDS?

I aim to create an emotional bond with the subject I am writing about, and to have those words promote a pathway to empathy and understanding.

Q. WHAT ADVICE WOULD YOU GIVE TO SOMEONE STARTING OUT IN YOUR PROFESSION?

Be creative about the opportunities available to you. Also be aware that what you put out into the world will be counted, good and bad. Manage your space and watch your voice. Above all, hold your audience in high regard and always be accountable to them.

Q. WHAT'S NEXT FOR YOU?

I have big ambitions (*laughs*). I want to continue promoting the power of poetry, on



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stage and in film, so that's a focus for me. I am also looking forward to my short film, *#wearedyinghere*, being released in South Africa. That, and hopefully returning to live performance. ■

GET SOCIAL WITH SIPHOKAZI

f siphokazijonas10
@ siphokazi
📧 siphokazi_J