

Trumpeting his love for SA languages

THEKISO ANTHONY LEFIFI

HUGH Masekela was terrified of losing his ability to speak South African languages during his 30 years in exile.

The legendary trumpeter, one of three musicians featured in the 21 Icons South Africa project, left the country shortly after the Sharpeville massacre in

1960 to study music in the UK and at the Manhattan School of Music in New York.

He received much assistance from another South African musical icon, the late Miriam Makeba, who was already living in the US. She introduced the then 21-year-old to international stars such as Harry Belafonte, Dizzy Gillespie and Miles Davis.

Much earlier, as a schoolboy, his band was given a trumpet by the legendary jazz trumpeter and singer Louis Armstrong.

"I was already crazy about Louis Armstrong. We sang all his songs," said Masekela.

"Trevor Huddleston, who had been the school chaplain, met Armstrong and told him about the band, and Armstrong sent

us his trumpet and we became famous here in South Africa. We even appeared on the cover of Farmer's Weekly — 'Black Boys get Louis' Trumpet'."

Stories such as these mask the pain of exile, but in a short film to be screened on SABC3 tonight at 6.57pm, "Bra Hugh", as he is affectionately known, describes his fear of losing his

ability to speak South African languages.

"I used to have a place in Central Park where I would go to talk to my imaginary friends. I was terrified that I was going to lose my language. So I would go there and I would start to speak in Sotho first, and I would change from that to Zulu and then to Xhosa, and then I would go into *tsotsi* Afrikaans."

He knew that he would be able to come home when fellow icon Nelson Mandela was finally released.

In 1991, Masekela launched his first tour of South Africa, which was sold out. Since then he has made Johannesburg his home.

This weekend he launched a national tour of townships and rural areas, the Hugh Masekela Heritage Festival.

The two-time Grammy nominee is tired of seeing core fans travel from far to see him perform. This time he wants to go to them — "just like I used to in the olden days".

Although the tour is billed as a heritage festival, the Stimela singer says the event is not about heritage month. In fact, he is perturbed that South Africans try to embrace their heritage on only one day of the year.



BACK TO GRASSROOTS: Hugh Masekela during the 21 Icons photo shoot Picture: GARY VAN WYK

He fears that parents will one day not be able to answer their children's questions about their heritage and culture.

"They [parents] will say: 'Once upon a time we were

Africans,'" he warned.

Masekela's portrait by photographer Adrian Steirn is published in the R16 edition of the Sunday Times today.

It was shot in a public park

near Masekela's home in Bryanston, Johannesburg, and plays on the musician's smash hit *Grazing in the Grass*. Released in 1968, it sold more than four million copies worldwide.

Why not a fuel levy?



It's just not sustainable

It all started in the 70's when the price of fuel increased sharply.

As a result, cars are getting more and more fuel efficient each year. So while the number of vehicles in South Africa has risen from 5 Million to 10 Million since 1995, the revenue collected from fuel levy hasn't kept up. The result is that the demand on road infrastructure is literally running away from us.

Death squad victim's family sues for R2.4m

Minister of police summonsed for losses after taxi boss's killing

MANDLA ZULU

THE cash-strapped family of a Durban taxi boss who was allegedly assassinated by the notorious Cato Manor organised crime unit is suing the minister of police for R2.4-million.

Five months after Bongani Mkhize was gunned down in February 2009, his widow, Fakazile, defaulted on repayments for his fleet of five taxis, valued at R1.4-million. Four taxis from the fleet have since been repossessed by the banks.

The remaining taxi generates less than R5 000 a month.

Fakazile Mkhize, who earns a "pittance" as a dressmaker, said this week that she just managed

dent Police Investigative Directorate's probe into 51 suspicious deaths.

Twenty-two unit members are on trial in the High Court in Pietermaritzburg for murder and racketeering. In the case, which resumes in November, they stand accused of committing the assassinations in retaliation for suspected police murders and other killings related to ongoing taxi wars.

According to the summons filed in Mkhize's case, she is claiming R1.3-million. Her chil-

Our children struggled to cope at school and the older kids were forced to drop out of Varsity College. As a single parent, I just could not afford the fees ... and the taxi business was collapsing," she said.

An actuarial report that details the family's loss of support says Mkhize had to retrench 10 people from her late husband's taxi operation, which paid its drivers R3 500 a month and spent, among other costs, R6 180 a month on fuel.

The family's remaining taxi "is not operating on the original profitable routes".

According to Mkhize, she struggled to take over the taxi business. "I was unfamiliar with

team, summons have already been issued against the minister of police.

In December 2011, the Sunday Times reported that Bongani had claimed to be aware that the Cato Manor organised crime unit wanted to kill him.

He took the bizarre step of going to court in 2008 to obtain an interdict to prevent the police from assassinating him.

In his affidavits, he said that he was "reliably informed by certain members of the South African Police Service" that he was being sought by the unit in connection with the murder of the police's taxi task team investigator, Superintendent Zethembe. Charges were

The money will never replace