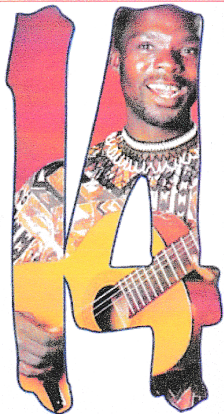




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Another great South African musician passes on.....**Mlaheni James "14" Shabalala** sadly passed away last week at his home in Bergville, kwaZuluNatal, South Africa. Neville Dube - 14's adviser and friend - called to say that the funeral will be held in Bergville, kZN on Saturday 16th June (Youth Day).

14 was much loved and admired by musicians and all who heard him perform were mesmerized. He was utterly unique... one of a kind and will be sorely missed by all. He will perhaps best be remembered for his amazing live performances and his trade-mark whistling words - personalising each song with a string of deep Zulu singing clicks and percussive whistles. 14 played his own style of guitar, 5 nylon strings, self-tuned with the top high E string missing.

In the true tradition of the Maskanda (Travelling Zulu Troubadour / Minstrel), 14 would wander around the Drakensberg Mountains sharing his poetic observations and songs with the people, backed with his 5 string rhythms and sounds that he drew from a range of influences; American Country Rock (a percussive strum), to strains of Flamenco, mixed into the familiar Zulu walking-pick (with the main tune slapped out on the bass strings), across the rhythms of Hi Life (East African) and Zimbabwean Chimurenga. And 14 had never been to any of these places - in person. He would travel, word-of-mouth with mind-and-heart, wherever he wandered.

He was the first Maskandi to be booked at Splashy Fen (1990) and only made one recording (with 3rd Ear Music in 1990 - which was seldom, if ever heard on radio; Richard Haslop's **ROOTS TO FRUITS** on SAfm, was the soul exception)

14, with his infectious sense-of-humour worked hard. He could not read or write and spoke only isiZulu and Afrikaans, but Neville Dube (a kZN School Headmaster), who, when he had the time, would drive 14 to events, festivals and meetings. 14 did feature on a number of recorded compilations, the most notable being his dedication for **Nelson Mandela (uMandela uMose Wesibili - Mandela is the second Moses)** which featured on the **Mandela Peace Rally**" recorded at Kings Park Stadium in Durban 26 February 1990 - not available commercially.

14 toured the UK as an opening act with **Joseph Shabalala** (no relation) and **Ladysmith Black Mambazo** in 2002. Despite having recorded an album of songs produced by **Joseph Shabalala** (for Gallo Records) in 2002, the CD has never been issued.

To quote from a 14 song:

WAKE WAMBONA UMFUNDISI EPH ETHE IPIKI (You Don't see The Preacher carrying a Pick.) - People in the village always (politely) comment that I only seem to concentrate on my music; that I do nothing else but make music! Have you ever seen a preacher with a pick? The preacher, like myself has a gift (a talent) to conduct the sermon - he doesn't have to dig the hole.

David Marks (*3rd Ear Music / The Hidden Years Music Archive Project, kwaZulu, South Africa - 11th June 2007*)

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Biog notes courtesy **Muule Joyce Mtembu** – Free State (Harrismith) Marketing Bureau:

Mlahleni James "14" Shabalala was born on a farm called **Mantosi** - nobody seems to know the exact date. The farm is situated in Drakensberg area, 25km away from Bergville. James was given the name 14 by his grandmother, because he was abandoned by his mother when he was 14 days old.

He grew up on the Bergville farm, and acquired a love for music when he was very young. He was never educated and he went to look for jobs in Johannesburg. In 1981 he bought his first guitar and started singing songs about his people. While in Johannesburg he met well known musicians like **Blondie Makhene** and **Brenda Fassie** who told him to go back to KwaZulu Natal if he wanted to be a successful Maskandi musician.

14 performed in the 1989 Maskanda competition - arranged by the late **Professor Bongani Mtetwa** - held at the University of kwaZuluNatal.

He won, and the prize was a recording with 3rd Ear Music who promoted and booked him at many festivals. Because of politics (at the SABC) and favouritism within the record industry his music has not been heard as it was generally expected it to be. **14 Shabalala** performed in many events and has written many new songs which he always wanted to record.



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