



Masha Mapenzi is a Kenyan Gospel star. In this interview with Tecla Ndambuki, Masha who shot in the limelight after she won the M-Net POP Idols in 2003 tells her story.

Background

I was born in Malindi, a place known as Watamu, to Giriama parents. However, I grew up in Nairobi's Buruburu Estate. I have a diploma in finance from Buruburu Institute of Fine Arts and a bachelors degree in ICT from Jomo Kenyatta University of Agriculture and Technology where I graduated in 2006.

I am the first born and the only girl in my family. For sometime I had to be like a man and compete with my three brothers but with time I had to rediscover the woman in me!

I am married to Steve Biko and together we have a son called Mfalme Huba.

Church and Ministry

When I was young, I spent most of my time in church and also in theatre. My father was a church elder at ACK St. James in Buruburu and as a result we were rooted in the word of God from the beginning and would be involved in many church activities. I got saved when I was in Form I at Parklands Arya School.

All along I have been very bold and energetic. The Word of God has been part and parcel of me. While in college we united to ensure the fire of the gospel kept burning. Together with this group we would meet in town and preach the gospel to the public. Our target areas were the bus stations at Kenya Bus, Railways, Ambassador and Kencom. I mainly acted as the Kiswahili interpreter of the message. Often, when going home, I would also preach in route 58 matatus but I did not ask for offering. At times, I would realize the passengers were tired of preachers and instead start singing. It was also at this time that together with another group, with Evangelist Mama Mwai of Karisma Ministries as our patron, we went out two by two's witnessing the love of Christ to people in various places in Nairobi.

I currently attend church at Winners Chapel.

Professional Singing career

As a young girl I was an excellent athlete, actress and was also good in public speaking. I was the kind of pupil who is in every club. I later did theatre and background vocals for various artists

My long journey to a professional singing career started during the first Kenyan Chapter of M-Net Pop Idols in 2003 where I emerged the winner after performing my own original re-edition of a well known church hymn 'when peace like a river'.

I believe that God uses other people when He is about to do great things for us. A cousin and a friend had heard of the auditions and encouraged me to try out since they thought I was confident and bold enough to do a solo given my experience in theatre and singing in church.

I was lucky since the auditions were held only a few metres from the United Nations offices where I worked then. My friends helped me to rehearse during lunch hour and I must have impressed the judges because I was picked to represent. The auditions were aired on Nation TV.

The UHIKO Album

UHIKO is my first album and I attribute its success and especially that of the title song Uhiko to God. One truth about God is that when we lift Him up, he draws many people to Himself. Uhiko means “where are you?” in Giriama. Jesus is asking this so that He can save you. The song seeks to encourage all to turn to God because He is the only one who can save and deliver His people. 3 of the songs are in Giriama, a language that only a few people understand, my duty was to sing and lift him higher, and leave the rest to the originator of all ideas. The other seven songs in the album are in Kiswahili. I wrote one of the Kiswahili songs “Nainua Macho yangu” in full acknowledgement that God is our most present help in times of troubles and the only person we should be focus on.

I believe my style of music has also contributed to the success of the album. The songs have got a rich blend of Taarab, Nzele, Chakachaka and Bango which make one want to stand and dance for the Lord!

During the production, I worked with R. Kay and Chris Adwar.

My opinion on collabos

Stars twinkle at different times and that is what makes the sky so beautiful. Likewise, the birds are created different they don't collide over the sky. They fly at different paces. There is no room for competition. Diversity is what makes us beautiful.

What people need to focus more is the goal/purpose of a particular song. Any gospel song should purpose to reach out and witness the true gospel of Christ. Again, I wish people would distinguish we are all gifted differently and as a result people are good in different areas of life. By saying this I mean, some singers will be excellent in Solo while others and that all can be good in singing choir but not in solo.

I have only done one collabo with Daddy Owen, Emmy Kosgei, Esther Wahome, Kambua, Jackie Kotira and Carol Nanji, in '**Piga Saluti**'.

People who have influenced my career

One lesson which I have learnt in my music career is that God can strategically use other people around you to help you recognize your talents. While I had no idea that I could do well in music, several other friends had already noted the gift in me. I attribute my going into music to Margaret Wambui Mwithukia who took her time to nurture my music talent with a gospel accapella group called 'Flame' in my local church. I also thank my cousin and friend for encouraging me to audition for Pop Idols. More recently I went to the studio with only one song and my husband immediately told me that I was going to do an album. The producer seconded his words. That very day I went home with a complete song and I sang all the voices in it. Another thing I have observed is that to be successful we need to have a learning spirit.

On Coast Awards

Though I was absent on the event day, my close family members and friends who showed up said it was a colourful occasion. I bagged two awards in the Gospel female artist of the year and Diaspora artist of the year. I was very happy and can say it was not my win but God's since I was new in the Industry. I would like to thank my fans for voting me in tirelessly. The awards was a big stepping stone to my music and can now confidently say for sure God equips fully all those He calls.

On Groove and Other Awards

I got my first ever singing trophy at City Cabanas as "artist with the most promising talent". That was a long time ago before I went professional.

Surprisingly, I was less than two weeks old in the music industry when I was nominated under the new artist of the year category in last year's Groove's Awards. Though I did not win, I am grateful and thank God for such an opportunity for it was a great lift in my career.

Plans for another album

I am seeking the Lord on the way forward. Am listening and waiting on Him and I will do as the spirit leads.

What inspires you to sing?

The word of God. It will never pass away. It is my source of inspiration and a source of light to all those in the dark. Again, it is only through God's word that men and women can change their bad ways. I see music as a flat form to bring the word of God to all people and as a way to share the love of Christ.

On Marriage

Marriage can be another open door for opportunities. One need not fear that it will limit somebody from living life to the fullest.

There are people who are in marriages and enjoy every bit of it. What is of importance is to commit everything and every situation to God. You only need to open your eyes and see what God has in store for you.

Other Passions

Being a mother, I have passion for young children and love working with them. I will not mind when they give me funny names such as 'Mama Nyama' simply because we shared a meal together. I also have a zeal for counseling though I am not professionally trained.

In future, I would like to work closer with fans to help those in need. I would want to be in a position to work with widows, orphans and the less fortunate in the society as a way of sharing the love of Christ. I look forward to identify projects for those in need and work together with my fans to help them out. I would love to host shows and have things such as love offerings where everything will be channeled to the less fortunate.

Favorite Bible Verse

Psalms 50:15 has kept me on the move. It says "Call unto me on the day of trouble, I will deliver you and you will glorify me" According to this He will deliver us. His role is functional not a cosmetic one (only there to be seen only?). He is our Saviour. We need to learn to call upon the Lord at all times for He knows how to deliver and save. Ours is just to call Him at any time, place, and circumstance.

Message to Other Women

We need to cover our fellow women and protect them. Whether a widow, divorcee or single, let's protect each other for only in our fellow women we find the whole society. Take care of a

woman and you will be taking care of the whole generation. We need to know by impacting our fellow women, we are impacting a society. As women we need not shun one another or their problems but help one another stand on their feet. Let's show love to all as a responsibility.

All should know there is a place for everyone on this planet and that we only need to hear God in order for us to be able to trace our place on the planet. Let's learn to wait upon the Lord for guidance for it is not foolishness to wait for His guidance. It is good to seek God first for in Him lies all treasures.

Something Most People Are Not Aware Of

A left handed child is a special child! In our laws the definition for special needs does not include those who are left handed. A child who is left tries to cope with the unaccommodating environment especially in school desks, and door knobs which are mostly fitted in the right hand side only to mention a few. I know this because I am left handed.

The year is still young and most people have made certain resolutions. What advice do you have for them?

As we lay down our resolutions we should not forget to involve the most important guest who is God for this matter. Before any resolution, He must come first and know that whatever bothers us bothers God. If it is loosing weight, ask him for direction on the necessary diet and exercises and He will direct you.

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