

Mafikizolo – 20

For 20 years Mafikizolo have been South Africa's best Afro-pop export to the world. The duo of Nhlanhla Nciza and Theo Kgosinkwe has occupied the enviable position as cultural ambassadors due to the major inroads they have made on the African continent and beyond. They are not about to slow down as they continue to ride the crest of a wave. This summer they continue their domination as they mark the 20 year milestone with the highly anticipated release of their new album, aptly titled 20.

Boasting 16 tracks, the release is a celebration album that is not focused on any specific genre, instead it's a smorgasbord of sounds and influences indicative of a cosmopolitan and modern pop group. More significant are the collaborators and producers they turned to - a youthful breed of hip hop artists as well as some known names. For some youthful exuberance they brought in Kly who features on two songs, Gemini Major and Howard. Nokwazi Dlamini also lends her voice.

They have managed to reinvent themselves over the years and this new approach is sure to pleasantly surprise the fans. Explains Theo: 'We are pop artists, which means to be popular our sound needs to stay current and relevant. On 20 we are influenced by our travels in Africa and our producer DJ Maphorisa travels a lot and knows what's current in the clubs and streets of Europe, America and Africa.'

The first single out of 20 is Love Potion a laid back scorcher which is inspired by Undenzantoni one of the songs they released in their 2004 album Six Mabone, which they believe didn't get enough attention. The song has been spruced up and reinvented with a different sound, the music is also changed, they have added some English lyrics and the accent is new too. Nhlanhla shares: 'We did this to capture our older audience. The song has a crossover appeal. As we celebrate 20 years we remind people of where we come from, the sound that moulded Mafikizolo.'

Ofananawe featuring Yemi Alade one of Nigerian's biggest and talented female artists represents a cultural exchange between Nigeria and South Africa. It was produced by Masterkraft, also from Nigeria.

US R&B singer Syleena Johnson also had some studio time with the duo after they met at a show in South Africa and her manager shared that she loved the group and would like to record with them. No time was wasted as the musicians got together in a few days and DJ Maphorisa created something magical with the Caribbean steelpan resulting in a thrilling calypso hit in which Johnson sings in Xhosa.

On Don't Go, they step out with Harmonize from Tanzania which sees the distinctive South African sound as inspired by the late Joe Mafela's hit Congo, that they fuse with the East African aesthetic. Nhlanhla believes this is an effort to embrace different cultures on the continent. 'We are trying to bridge the all these gaps. We believe that in the next three to four years African artists will be able to work on the continent and make money. We are following in the footsteps of Miriam Makeba.

Gemini Major produced Best Thing featuring Kly which is inspired by Marvin Gaye's iconic Let's Get It On. It is an exciting love song in which they extol the beauty of a woman as they toy around with figures of speech.

On Catching Feelings they collaborated with Zingah as they sing about the evolution of love as one wants more out of the relationship than what is served.

Zimbabwe's Jay Prayzah features on the Shona song Mazuva Wa Kanaka.

Things go a tempo up on Yekumona featuring kwaito star Professor, legendary house DJ Ganyani and Nokwazi Dlamini, some of the artists Mafikizolo have wanted to work with and are now part of the celebrations of their landmark release.

It would be incomplete for the band to mark their two decade journey without acknowledging those who have fallen along the way, specifically Tebogo Madingwane who was a third of the band before his death in 2000. The band reprises their hit song Sijaiva Njalo in his honour. 'We went for a song which boasts Tebogo's vocals strongly. We needed to remind our followers old and new that Mafikizolo was made up of three members originally,' says Theo.

'We are not losing our sound, we're blending the sounds with different influences,' says Nhlanhla.

'Miriam Makeba was not boxed. Her sound changed with her travels and even spoke the language. We have also been pushing for unity and collaboration with African artists and this is finally happening,' adds Theo.

Mafikizolo continues to fly the South African flag in different Africa countries including Sudan, Zambia, DRC, Rwanda and Ethiopia. Their imagery and branding celebrates all things fabulous and vibrant about African cultures as they dabble in Herero headgear from Namibia and the pleated Tsonga skirt from South Africa. They are proudly African and better positioned than any other band to take African music to the world and unite the continent under their banner.

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Discography

1. Mafikizolo (1997)
2. Music Revolution (1998)
3. Gatecrashers (1999)
4. Sibongile (2001)
5. Kwela (2002)
6. Van Toeka (2003)
7. Six Mabone (2004)
8. Reunited (2012)
9. 20 (2017)

Social media handles

Instagram: @mafikizolo_africa

Twitter: @MafikizoloSA

Facebook: Mafikizolo_Africa