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PROGRAM NAME: WOMANITY – WOMEN IN UNITY

GUEST NAME: NONDUMISO TEMBE – AWARD WINNING ACTRESS, SINGER AND SONGWRITER (PART TWO)

SPEAKER	TRANSCRIPTION
DR. MALKA	Hello, I'm Dr. Amaleya Goneos-Malka, welcome to 'Womanity – Women in Unity'. The show that celebrates prominent and ordinary African Women's milestone achievements in their struggles for liberation, self-emancipation, human rights, democracy, racism, socio-economic class division and gender based violence.
DR. MALKA	Joining us on the line today from Durban is Nondumiso Tembe who is a multi-award winning actress, singer and songwriter. Her acting credits stretch from South Africa to the USA with roles in SABC's Generations; HBO's Golden Globe and Emmy Award winning True Blood; the History Channel's military drama Six; her recent film work includes Zulu Wedding and she has just had a run in theatre with King Kong, to highlight a few. She has won a Naledi Theatre Award in 2014 for Best Actress in the supporting role and her debut album Izwi Lami, My Voice earned a Metro FM Music award for Best Music Video. Welcome to the show!
NONDUMISO	Thank you, sawubona thank you so, so much for having me.
DR. MALKA	Well we're glad to have you on home turf, as it were....
NONDUMISO	...yeah...
DR. MALKA	...and look forward to digging deeper in terms of some of your experiences, both from a South African perspective and also from a US perspective. So to start off with what would you say have been some of your most memorable roles thus far and why?
NONDUMISO	I suppose I think the last year of my life when I think about going from Na'omi Adjimuda in Six into King Kong as Joyce but I'd say those two characters that I played within the space of a year are definitely...maybe there was some sort of underlying or subconscious theme of strong women and lifting the voices of women who defy stereotypes and want to you know define themselves and not be defined by the world, want to be respected or recognised for their value and their works and their...whether it's their business acumen or their kind of activist work you know and contribution to society. So there has been that sort of theme, I think, kind of if I look at my career over the last year but I wouldn't....I'm sorry to say I wouldn't say that it's necessarily conscious, I try to stay just very open to what sort of the world and the universe is going to bring to me and then I just listen to my intuition and my instinct and I think....I will tell you this though, to answer your question probably a little bit better; what I'm always very conscious of is that I'm very clear that I never want to do work that perpetuates negative stereotypes about my people, about black people, about Africans and certainly about women. So maybe I know that sounds a little bit negative but it's not so much looking for a role that represent women in certain a way, but more being very clear that you want to be sure...you want to make sure that in whatever work that you do and whatever stories you are telling, you are not perpetuating negative stereotypes.
DR. MALKA	So ultimately looking at the roles, the elements that you look out for is not necessarily something which is particularly representing women but it is about not perpetuating negative stereotypes and...
NONDUMISO	...absolutely...
DR. MALKA	...looking at roles which speak to you?
NONDUMISO	Absolutely, yeah.

DR. MALKA	You mentioned King Kong and I'm glad that you raised that point because there's two things which come to mind; (1) in terms of recreating the role of Joyce which propelled Miriam Makeba to international fame in the original production which is whew, nearly sixty years ago...
NONDUMISO	...yeah....
DR. MALKA	...and at the time it was the first all black South African musical in Apartheid South Africa, so I wanted to ask you two questions; (1) what was it like to step into the shoes of Mama Africa and the second question is how did you feel to re-enact such an important part of South African cultural history and depicting lives and the sentiment of the era?
NONDUMISO	<p>Wow well it was a pretty daunting task and a little bit...actually a lot than a little bit intimidating initially. I do have to point out though that I was not playing Miriam Makeba, I was playing Joyce and I think because of who Miriam Makeba was and who she is to us and what she means to us, there's...there was naturally that hype and that excitement of sort of who's going to be the next Mama Africa and you know a lot of questions about...I think people almost looked at it as if I was playing her and telling her story but I was playing the character of Joyce, which is a character, a role that I shared with her, so it was Joyce's story that I really needed to bring to life and Joyce's voice that I had to find and in understanding that and kind of unlocking that very early on, that really empowered me and helped me because it removed the, you know, the nerves and just the pressure of one kind of being compared to one of the greatest vocalists of all time who was just absolutely brilliant and also it meant that I didn't have to mimic or try to recreate someone else's performance. My task was to tell Joyce's story and to find her voice, the music was exceptionally hard, some of the hardest that I'd ever sung in my entire career so I was incredibly challenged musically and vocally which made the triumph of opening night and of really performing this show and finding my feet as Joyce, an even sweeter victory because you know when something has really pushed you to your limits and challenged you and pushed you out of your comfort zone, when you triumph in it, it just feels so much better and you come out the other side just having grown so much as an artist. So as challenging as the music was and as intimidating as it was I conquered it, you know, and I really made the role my own and I feel incredibly proud of the work that I did and the performance that I crafted in that role. So yeah, so the first step for me was really kind of releasing myself from the pressure of having to try to mimic her or what we would have imagined was her performance because remember this is a performance that was staged about sixty years ago, very few people saw the original and we have recordings of her singing the role of Joyce but....and some archival footage in terms of old production photos but we don't really know how that performance was manifested and so that was sort of helpful in the sense that I think audience members and people maybe and myself included had an idea what she would have sounded like or how she would have breathed life into the role, but I also then had the freedom of because of so much time and not really having a recording or a movie version of her as Joyce it sort of did allow me artistic freedom and then also you know our wonderful director Jonathan Munby very early on, you know, made it very clear that our approach in this production was that this was a re-imagining of the original, not a revival or a restaging...a restaging of the original which means that we all had a, you know, the gift of artistic and creative freedom and could really sort of approach all of our roles, you know, with our own kind of artistic instincts and interpretations, of course staying true to the original, but I don't know if you're aware but some new music was written for our new staging,</p>

	<p>our new show or our new version of King Kong and of course we had the wonderful and brilliant Gregory Maqoma doing the choreography which was brand new, so there was a lot of fresh blood and fresh ideas and fresh energy kind of comes into this new incarnation of King Kong and so, yeah, that allowed me a lot of artistic freedom otherwise I think I would have been very inhibited and overwhelmed in being compared to or trying to live up to Miriam Makeba, you know. But I like to think that every night, you know, on stage I'd sort of blow kisses up to heaven to her, just before I got on stage to start our big number, the very famous Back of the Moon and I'd like to think that she was smiling down on me from heaven as well and that she knows that I did my best to honour her legacy and to celebrate her and while still making the role my own but you know artists like that paved the way and made it possible for young black female artists like myself to have a gliding and successful international career. So I owe her a lot and she means a lot to me as well so I wanted to celebrate her in small ways in the performance.</p>
DR. MALKA	<p>And I think that also gives the opportunity to a new generation to experience King Kong and for what it is and what it was.</p>
NONDUMISO	<p>Yeah. You had a second part of your question...</p>
DR. MALKA	<p>...yes and that for me is almost like the more serious part and I suppose it's a bit of the way we're reflecting in terms of South Africa on our history, so the second part was really about the fact of the culture of how life was in that time and to experience it, although obviously it is an imitation of it, but context I think plays a tremendous role in terms of what is happening in an environment, it shapes societies.</p>
NONDUMISO	<p>Yeah well you know I think you kind of hit the nail on the head just now when we were talking about giving a new generation an opportunity to experience the show and the story. I think what was really exciting about this production and also just our approach of it being a reimagining, not a strict restaging of the original is that we were able to re-introduce this iconic and classic and very historical and incredibly important piece of work to a new generation, to a new audience and we did take some creative and artistic liberties by re-contextualising the show, for example in the original,.....; the story's narrator, tells the story to a group of washer women in 1950 Sophiatown, the story of King Kong. In our production...our 2017 production he encounters a group of young boys in 2017 playing soccer and you know boys that are kind of potentially about to go down the same negative path that King Kong did and he recognises something in one of the boys that reminds him of King Kong and then sort of tells the story then and takes them on this journey, tells them the story of the rise and fall of this great man, Ezekiel Dlamini, which is what takes us back in time into the 1950's. So I think that was a very clever way to kind of re-contextualise and maybe draw in a younger audience and just keep things kind of fresh and up to date and exciting and that worked really well, but yeah, in terms of telling the story of the period, it was painful at times, it's a very dark and painful time in our history, especially for a black South African cast to have to revisit. Sophiatown in the 1950's, this is around the period when you know the bulldozers were coming through and demolishing the place and displacing so many people illegally and the lives of so many black people, so many black families were trampled on and their hopes and dreams kind of just kind of just dashed and that was painful. I think what helped was that...what helped this from being such a dark and heavy story in the world is that there is so much life and joy and music and art and dance and love bursting through Sophiatown itself, I mean if you know of a chorus and we all kind of know of and remember Sophiatown, it was legendary, it was the South African...or the African version of you know</p>

	<p>the Harlem Renaissance, Harlem in the 1920's, it's the place that where art and intellectuals and you know young activists and writers and singers and songwriters sort of thrived and it was this kind of secret world of against a backdrop of a very dark socio-political reality and the ugly and icy grip of oppression that was apartheid. This was a space where black people could go and sort of during...at night at least, escape the pain of their daily reality and so my character in particular, Joyce, was sort of the vehicle for that because she created this Shebeen, Back of the Moon, for her community, of course to be a business woman and to provide for herself but also as sort of a gift, an escape for her community and so I think finding the joy in that, in the music and the dance and the life of these people, the story itself not being a political story at all. I mean of course we understand the backdrop and the socio-historical sort of backdrop and reality of the time but the story itself is not a political story, it's about the rise and fall of a complicated man. It's about love, it's about watching these complicated characters navigate through the ups and downs of life which is very universal and relatable for anyone of any background from any race or age group and I think that's kind of the magic of the piece and why it is able to stand the test of time. You get, you know, a good love story, a good love triangle no matter where you set it in the world, whether it's Shakespeare in Venice in the 1600's or Sophiatown South Africa in the 1950's; I think you know a good love story and great characters and just watching interesting relatable human beings kind of just fall and fumble and fail and...</p>
DR. MALKA	<p>...it...look those stories absolutely transcends time and I think that's one of the important aspects of reproductions. I mean look how long Shakespeare has lived in terms of all the different renditions of his plays.</p>
NONDUMISO	<p>Exactly...</p>
DR. MALKA	<p>Today we're talking to Nondumiso Tembe, a multi-award winning actress, singer and songwriter. We would love to receive your comments on Twitter: @WomanityTalk.</p>
DR. MALKA	<p>Turning more towards a personal perspective; you hold a Masters of Fine Arts in Acting from Yale School of Drama and you also did a Bachelor of Fine in Theatre and Political Science with a focus on Africa from New York's New School University and you've naturally continued your education within your trade and as such, I would say you know that education is critical to empower individuals in societies,...</p>
NONDUMISO	<p>...yeah...</p>
DR. MALKA	<p>...what I'd like is if you could expand a little on achieving your academic education and qualifications, especially to young women and girls who perhaps may be at a crossroad in their life and not certain what role academics plays in their future?</p>
NONDUMISO	<p>Wow...Doctor did not come to play today; she did not come in to play. That's a very serious question and a very important one but I'm glad that you're challenging me and you're asking me that, I don't think I get to talk about the importance of education enough....</p>
DR.MALKA	<p>...and I ask this because sometimes, you know, when people see you on the screen or in theatre they don't understand the hard work that's gone behind making who you are and what put you in that situation as opposed to it's just the gloss and the glamour and I'll be a pretty face and that's how you're going to get in...</p>
NONDUMISO	<p>...yeah...uhmmm, absolutely, absolutely especially today. Yeah look I think one of the most challenging experiences of my life but also one of my greatest triumphs was getting my masters degree from Yale. It was, you know, really a huge milestone in my life and it's something...you know it's an accomplishment that I get to carry with me forever, for the rest of my life,</p>

wherever my journey takes me and so one thing that is really wonderful about a great education is that it's one of those things that is yours, that the world cannot take from you, that you cannot be challenged, that no-one can challenge you on, that sort of speaks for you before you even step into the room and so perhaps on a more superficial level why getting a masters degree and especially from an idealistic institution like Yale was important for me is that I understood that, especially being very awake to understanding the biases and how the world is set up for a young black woman and the challenges that I faced, dealing with patriarchy and sexism and racism on a daily basis in every space and aspect of life, not just in my professional spaces. I understood that I...at a very young age that I needed to empower myself as much as possible. I needed to give myself as many tools and as much ammunition as possible to be able to really fight for my dream and to succeed and because I'm someone who's very ambitious and driven, I never just wanted to succeed in the sense that I do well, I've always wanted to excel, in everything that I do I aspire to excellence in all that I do. So if I was going to pursue a career in the performing arts or in medicine or in architecture I was going to try to pursue that at the highest possible level, which means I should study my craft at the best schools in the world. That was pretty logical to me and I really don't understand why a lot of young people don't...who are interested in a career in the performing arts don't approach it that way because I always say, you know, so much of the hype of my profession gets lost in the gloss and the glam of it as you say and people forget that it is a profession. We are crafts people so the same way as a young person if you have a dream of becoming a lawyer you would never in your wildest dreams dream of just walking into a courtroom, picking up a file and trying to try a case without having gone to law school. You would never...if you wanted to be a surgeon, you would never just, you know, put on your mask and go out and step into the theatre and perform surgery on someone; you would go to school for seven/eight/nine years and take the time to develop and understand your craft, technically speaking, but also just to develop your understanding and knowledge in it and to perfect it to the best of your ability. So I always sort of when I talk to young people I suppose who ask me for advice on how to break into the industry or how I did it, I always remind them of that; I always start with that which is to say remember that this is a profession and it is an incredibly important profession because what we do has the power to reach so many people and we really do change lives because the performing arts, whether it's in music, in film, in theatre, in lighting, in the fine arts, we shape culture which means that we have a huge influence and impact in shaping the minds of young people. That is a huge responsibility so you better know what you're doing and you better take it seriously and you better be in it for the right reasons because you have an enormous amount of influence and to whom much is given much is expected; with much privilege comes much responsibility. So it is a profession and it's important that you honour your talents and the same way you know a surgeon would want to make sure that they have all of the technical skills to perform a surgery really well, why wouldn't you as an artist, no matter what your particular discipline, want to arm yourself with excellent craftsmanship and an excellent understanding of your craft. So just from a very practical perspective one is part of knowing that before you walk into a room your degree already speaks for you and people are already sitting up and taking you seriously and they're expecting you to be a formidable force and that helps you fight the battle of being a young woman of colour walking into a room where you're often the only person of colour, the only young person or even the only woman. So that's one part of it, that's one way my education has been an advantage to me and

	<p>then the other part as I've sort of been alluding to is that because I've taken so much time to study my craft and all of my different disciplines; studying ballet for over 17 years and kind of every genre of music as a singer and songwriter and then of course studying acting from classical to modern and everything in between, it does give me an edge I think over other people that I may be in competition with who have a similar say package, fighting for the same role, because I have a more highly developed and a broader, more diverse skills set because I've taken more time than other people to develop them; if that makes any sense...</p>
DR. MALKA	...of course...
NONDUMISO	...I took the...
DR. MALKA	...and...
NONDUMISO	<p>...I took the harder road and the harder path and I'm not patting myself on the back, I'm saying that this is reality and I'm able to enjoy the fruits of my labour today because of the work that I put in, because of sacrificing seven years of my life to go to school when, you know, other young people kind of wanted to cash in on their looks and their height and their youth and kind of just roll the dice I suppose. So my goal has always been excellence, diversity and longevity in my career, it's never been to be...it's never been to be a, it's never been to pursue and attain fame and fortune, it's never been to get to wear pretty dresses on a red carpet and fancy jewellery and do photo shoots and be on magazine covers and have people knowing my name because those are all very fickle, very superficial things and they're very fleeting. My goal has always been to make a very meaningful impact on the world, do my work as an artist and to have longevity and you get to do that, you get to have longevity and diversity in your career when you look at, you know, some of our greats like Helen Murin and you know Angela Bassett and Meryl Streep and Daniel Day Lewis and Sydney Tyson and Denzel Washington; all of these people who are now you know sort of in the second half of their lives and probably doing some of the greatest work of their careers because their focus was on being great artists, not being famous and popular in the moment.</p>
DR. MALKA	<p>Absolutely, it was about establishing their careers, having the longevity and investing into themselves and their craft and from the names that you mention it's not just about investing into the self, it's also investing into other actors and actresses, so nurturing the next generation, as it were. One of the questions that I ask all my guests on this show is about the factors that have contributed to their success. So some people speak about hard work, others talk about perseverance; in your opinion what would you say have been some of the key drivers to your success?</p>
NONDUMISO	<p>Well those are two good ones. So I'll definitely...I'll definitely piggyback off of those. Oh so many things, you know what, I was blessed with an amazing family I mean really two incredible parents who have supported me and believed in me and my dreams from the very beginning and believed in me even at the moment when I didn't believe in myself, they have pushed me and challenged me to reach higher and dig deeper and do even better and strive for more and because they're very successful artists themselves, they've been phenomenal role models for me and really mentored me from a young age as a young artist, even though they're in a very classical kind of stricter world of opera and classical music and I'm in a more contemporary world, nonetheless, just the fundamental values and the work ethic that they instilled in me has been a, you know, a huge factor in my success I think and I am who I am because of them, you know. They are my.....family, they are my rock, my foundation and so I credit them a lot for my success because it's really their guidance and their mentorship and their example that's given me</p>

	<p>very solid foundations and kept me very grounded in a world in particular in Hollywood which is a world where it's very difficult to do so. I'd say self-discipline, consistency, a formidable work ethic and relentless single minded focus and drive are some of the things and also time. I think when you, you know, there's this saying that's very kind of prominent in my mind and in my spirit right now, something that's really resonated in a very deep way and that is "show up, dive in, stay at it" and it seems...it sounds so simple but it actually it is the thing it really is. It's one thing to be talented and to be passionate but this is an industry in particular in the performing arts where you're constantly facing the heartbreak of daily rejection, you're facing other people's biases whether it's the racism or the sexism or very narrow minded ideals of beauty and whatnot in an industry where you're judged constantly by the way that you look. It's a very competitive industry. It's an industry where you're in the public eye and you're exposed the world feels like, you know, people feel like they can bully you and target you in the media and social media without really taking any responsibility or being held accountable and dealing with all of those things; all of that can be kind of hard. So I think it's the staying power, it's the last part of that phrase which is "stay at it." Time has taught me...I've gained wisdom and a greater understanding and I'm glad that I stuck through it, even when it's been very difficult, even when the winds of the storm were blowing I held on because I really believed in my dream and in my potential and in myself and I knew that I had something really special and valuable to share with the world as an artist. So the staying at it part, the perseverance, the not giving up even when things are very challenging and you're constantly getting disappointed and your heart broken and the industry just itself which can be so ugly and superficial and fickle kind of reveals itself to you and sometimes you kind of get turned off and you ask yourself is this really the world that I want to be in on a daily basis? Do I really want to deal with people like this and my...this value system is so much against my own, is this really like what I want to....the space that I want to be in every day of my life for the rest of my life? So it's....but it's a...the reward of the work and remembering that because when you do get those amazing roles and you do get to do this incredibly meaningful work it makes it all worth it but you never get there if you don't kind of stay in it...stay in the game.</p>
DR. MALKA	<p>And that's it you've got...in anything with life you've got to take the good with the bad and sometimes the balance isn't always in the direction that you necessarily want it to be in.</p>
NONDUMISO	<p>Yeah. But staying....I promise you staying in the ring, you're absolutely right, you know, I don't know how many stories of really successful actors in Hollywood that I've spoken to who are, you know, legends now you know and their illustrious 30/40/50 year careers who talk about when they started out and how when they graduated from their...from drama school and their acting class, you know, maybe there were 15 or 20 of them and how when they look back, the majority, 95% of their classmates dropped out and went back home and chose to pursue something else because they just couldn't take it I guess and when they go back and they count you know someone like Dustin Hoffman for example or...so many; William Hurt, whoever, when they're often asked well what is it, what is the kind of magic or the trick of why have you been able to last to be successful and they look back and they count that one or two...the one or two classmates who stuck it through with them and usually that one or two...that you know those two people or that one person is a Clint Eastwood or a Meryl Streep or a Viola Davis, you know what I mean, or a Denzel Washington; it's these people who've gone on to do extraordinary things in their field but because they didn't give up you know, their full</p>

	potential was able to be manifested because they stuck it through. And I always...I often think about that, be the person who has the strength and the courage to stay in the ring and to keep punching and even when life knocks you down you still dusted yourself off, you got up, you put on your boxing gloves again and you kept swinging...
DR. MALKA	...oohh I can hear some King Kong influences coming through there...."stay in the ring"...
NONDUMISO	You know what I actually didn't think of that, that's very funny. That's very funny, you're right.
DR. MALKA	Nondumiso I think those are all really fantastic attributes and both from a point of view of having the right enabling environment, the foundation that's provided through from your family, the self-drive, the discipline, being able to deliver consistently are all really important factors to have longevity.
NONDUMISO	Yeah...
DR. MALKA	We unfortunately are running out of time so....
NONDUMISO	...oh but it's been so good, it's been so good. It's been great.
DR. MALKA	Can I ask you in closing if you can pleasure share a few words of wisdom or inspiration that you'd like to impart to young women that are listening to us on the continent?
NONDUMISO	Oh gosh. Okay, I'll be very, very brief. So one...ah two things, what I said before, show up, dive in and stay at it, whatever it is and the second would be find the courage and the strength to stand in the fullness of your truth and your power because that's where all of your strength lies, where all of your power lies, you know when I finally got to a point where I stopped apologising for myself, my accomplishments, my strengths, everything that I've been through in my life, the good and the bad and just who I am; as misunderstood as I often am and as different of a life as I have led, once I finally got to a point where I stopped apologising for myself and I realised that I didn't have to constantly explain myself and people didn't have to understand me or even accept me or even like who I was but, that who I was, was valuable and was worthy. I really, I was finally able to just stand in the fullness of my truth and my power and that changed everything for me. I'm really able to walk into any room no matter who's there with my head held up high, with pride, not with arrogance but with pride and with a sense of knowing that I have something equally valuable to contribute as anyone else in the room and I wish that for every young woman and I hope that women younger than me get to the stage, get to this point and this realisation much sooner than I did because it came to me much later on in life, maybe at 30 and I wish that when I was 20 I could have understood that and I had that level of self-confidence and self-worth and self-understanding. So I think that's the beginning of everything, I think that is everything. We talk about loving yourself and it sounds like such an airy-fairy kind of I don't know, sort of generic, esoteric idea but it really is everything because you teach the world how to treat you, you teach people how to treat you and when people see you treating yourself and carrying yourself with respect and dignity and self love and claiming your value and refusing to be treated in any way less than that, they follow suite and they treat you that way, believe it or not. So that's my wish, that's my hope for young women, is that they find that, the courage and the strength to stand in their fullness and power.
DR. MALKA	I think that's an incredibly powerful message and just so true. Stand up, be who you are, embrace yourself. It's been an absolute pleasure having you on our show today and we really wish you every success in the next endeavours that await you in the future to come and look forward to hearing more about them and to have you on our show again later in the year.

NONDUMISO	Oh I would absolutely love that and thank you so, so much for having me, I really enjoyed this conversation, I don't really get to really share in such a substantive and meaningful way in interviews often, you know, you try your best so I really appreciate and I admire the platform you've created for women to talk to each other and inspire each other and just share their stories. I certainly don't know it all...
DR. MALKA	...thank you...
NONDUMISO	...and I'm still pretty young and I have still so far to go on my journey and so much to accomplish but I appreciate being able to just a platform and a space to get to share what I have learned in my journey so far.
	PROGRAMME END