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PROGRAM NAME: WOMANITY – WOMEN IN UNITY

GUEST NAME: BERITA – SINGER - SONGWRITER

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 in our Johannesburg studio today is multi-award winning singer, songwriter, guitarist and music producer, Berita. Welcome to the show.
BERITA	Thank you so much.
DR. MALKA	It's a pleasure to have you here.
BERITA	Absolutely!
DR. MALKA	To begin with you were born in Zimbabwe.
BERITA	Yes.
DR. MALKA	Immigrated to New Zealand and you have now navigated your way back to South Africa and you are pursuing a multi-faceted career in the music industry.
BERITA	Yes.
DR. MALKA	What first sparked your interests in the Arts?
BERITA	So, growing up, interestingly, I thought my career was going to go more the academic route. First of all, I am the daughter, the first daughter, of umm, a middle class, you know, household in Zimbabwe, where education is the foremost important priority. So my parents, both teachers, made sure that I went to the best schools they could afford. Umm, in terms of primary school and high school. When I was sixteen we moved overseas, my parents had hopes then that I would get an even better education and hopefully become a doctor or a lawyer or something of that nature [laugh]. Umm, I'd always loved school and I thought that was the path I was going to take until I started listening to radio and I discovered the likes of Oliver Mtukudizi and I started following the top forty most played artists on radio and every Saturday I would check what song was playing and what number is it, and from then onwards, little did I know, that I was sparking a fire, not for, for music but to do it at a very high level.
DR. MALKA	And as you were doing that, because you've got the academic stream, parents are both teachers. Were you doing part of the arts in conjunction or was it just the focus on studies?
BERITA	The focus was on studies. I was a part of the church choir but not really a particular star in the church choir. If the person next to me sang alto, I sang alto [laugh], if they sang soprano, I sang soprano.
DR. MALKA	So you were developing an ear as you were going along.
BERITA	I think I was developing an ear. I think when we moved to New Zealand, first of all I found myself now in a very different environment to the one I'd grown up in and I started asking myself questions about my identity and what it meant for me to be an African. Umm, then the music and the arts. I started painting, I started, um fashion designing and then I picked up a guitar and felt at home from that day onwards.
DR. MALKA	That's a wonderful development. Then coming back to South Africa.
BERITA	Yeah.
DR. MALKA	What, what was the trigger?
BERITA	So I finished my high school in New Zealand. I took a year off. My parents by the way are dairy farmers in New Zealand. So um, what that means is

	that in New Zealand, even from when your fourteen years old you can work in the dairy farm part time. You can, you know, go wake up early in the morning, go milk cows.
DR. MALKA	There's no day off on a farm.
BERITA	[laugh] No there's no day off. So if our parents are off then we are on and then that way I made my pocket money and that's how I bought my first guitar and I spent the year listening to music, playing a few chords, writing a few ideas down. And then um, because of complications with the visa paper work and all that stuff, I needed to now come back to home. Bare in mind it wasn't my parent's first choice. They would have loved for me to study you know, as they would want me to but now this was perfect for me because I grew up listening to South African music. And because my tribe is originally from Kwazulu. The Ndebele people um, fled the Shaka kingdom with Mzilikazi and came to Zimbabwe. So there's always been that link. It's a present link between Mataberland, Zimbabwe and KZN South Africa. So I knew that it would not be unfamiliar territory and I moved here in 2011 to study and secretly pursue music
DR. MALKA	And having made the jump from establishing your ground base.
BERITA	Yes.
DR. MALKA	Going in, developing your career, so far, what would you say have been some of the key land marks in your journey?
BERITA	I have to say, my album was released way earlier than I thought it would be. I came to South Africa in 2011, started performing at community halls, drama classes and all those things and I never thought that within a year I would be able to record my first album. Um, so I think recording my first album "Conquering Spirit" was the highlight. It happened so quickly and soon after then um my first song is considered a hit, Thandolwethu , which is the song that no matter where in South Africa I have played everybody sings along. It comes from that album as well. So and then going on to collaborate with Bra Hugh Masakela and Oliver Mtukudizi. And of course winning some awards along the way, which you know, I feel grateful to, to win them. They not really what I aim for when I make music. And now getting to a point whereby I have three albums under my belt and I become a self-sufficient, independent artist who is learning how to produce, write and release music.
DR. MALKA	And we'll definitely touch more on the independent artist piece a little bit later. So "Conquering Spirit" was the first album. Music is always such a big inspiration to people. What influences your song writing?
BERITA	For me, I started writing songs because I had emotions in myself that I could not express out to the world. I am a naturally very kind and respectful person, so sometimes I leave a lot unsaid and through my music I'm able to say things that I would not under normal circumstances be able to voice out. So I find it as an outlet and a voice for myself. And I also observe life and I'm also very emotional, So um I'm able to write about love and life and umm what's happening in our continent from an emotional space.
DR. MALKA	How would you classify your genre music?
BERITA	My genre of music. The core genre that I mostly produce and play in is called afro-soul. And this is a genre that has a mixture of jazz, gospel elements umm, with a fusion of African guitars and sometimes um African languages. I sing in different African languages. It's Xhosa is the main one I sing in or Ndebele or it's Shona, sometimes in Swahili and other African languages. Um, I'm also influenced by pop music having spent a bit of time in New Zealand I got to listen to the music of Ed Sheeran and Taylor Swift, which dominated the airways when I was a teenager. That has also inspired how I,

	my music, I make music that is easily accessible. The melodies are easily accessible to any one ?? understand the language or not.
DR. MALKA	So you've got this fusion affect combining pop with some of the traditional aspects coming through!
BERITA	Yes.
DR. MALKA	And do you find you think differently in different languages?
BERITA	Well, I think the thoughts are the same it's just how it's expressed um in a different language. I found when I did this song with Oliver Mtukudzi and bra Hugh Masekela um, he actually had to teach me how to, I knew how to speak Shona, but to get the song to sound the way it does in the chorus we actually had to have a training session of what does it mean when you say "Pengaudzoke" and how do you express it.
DR. MALKA	And every language, I think, is reflective of culture, it's reflective of emotion.
BERITA	Oh yeah.
DR. MALKA	It's the food of the soul.
BERITA	Definitely. I find that there is a song called "Milele" that I sing in Swahili, and that song, um, whenever I play, I played it this past weekend in Durban at a show, and it's rhythmic so people sing, people dance but they don't necessarily know what the song is about and I think that's where the magic is.
DR. MALKA	We've spoken about various languages that you sing in.
BERITA	Yes.
DR. MALKA	You've toured Southern as well as East Africa. To date what would you say has been a stand out performance or show.
BERITA	I love performing, so every show is a stand out show. I think what I enjoy is being able to um, conduct the audience. Be it just me and my guitar or it's me and my full band. I think I recently did a show at Carnival City alongside Lira and Syleena Johnson as, by, as part of the previous month, women's month um, shows that I did. And with that show I really, really enjoyed um, commanding the audience in an arena. It was really a highlight show for me because I then got to think back seven years ago when I was starting out and I looked up to Lira and now here I am sharing the stage with her.
DR. MALKA	How does it feel after that, you know, going from being unknown to coming into the public. Sharing the stage with people that were, were your idols.
BERITA	I think for me it's happened gradually and also I have worked hard and continue to work hard to be in the spaces that I'm in. It used to be a surprise for me but now it's not anymore. Now it's like I belong here. This is my home [laugh].
DR. MALKA	You've mentioned a couple of collaborations that you had with legends on the continent...
BERITA	Yes.
DR. MALKA	Are you looking towards the future with, with collaborating with more people?
BERITA	Definitely. What's exciting for me now is also is that I write songs for different artists. Umm, I've had the opportunity to write songs for artists that you know, I are upcoming, that are in my league. I recently wrote a song that's out for Thabsie. Recently a song I wrote was sang by Yvonne Chaka Chaka and Zolani from "Freshly Ground". That was the most amazing moment.
DR. MALKA	Tell us more about that because they've both been on the show and I think they're fantastic as individuals...
BERITA	Yes.
DR. MALKA	Beyond their singing talents. Also the philanthropic efforts that they do.

BERITA	Definitely. In terms of Mam Yvonne Chaka Chaka she's also my mentor. So she's someone that I have a very close relationship with and has taught me a lot about life and music. And for her I love how she's taught me how to respect and honour myself as a young woman in the music business. So um, having her sing my song and um, be so present in that moment is something that is beyond my wildest dream. Mam Yvonne Chaka Chaka is my mom's favourite artist and I grew up listening to her music. And then for Zolani as well, she an artist that, when I was starting out I looked up to. I find her gorgeous. Like she has a voice that I truly admire. And I actually think that some of the characteristics in my voice are a bit similar to hers. So when she sang that song, that was like, that took me aback.
DR. MALKA	Now talking about your varied talents. So we've spoken about you writing songs for other people. We've spoken about writing songs for yourself obviously, playing the guitar. You have established your own independent record label "Assali Music", with the core focus on developing female talent. Tell us a bit more about how your grooming, not just your talent but nurturing the talent of upcoming young ladies for the record label.
BERITA	So umm, having spent seven years in the industry and releasing the work that I've released one thing that I did struggle with when I first walked into studios was that they were all male dominated and when I sat in meetings with big record labels, the executives are all males. It's changing now compared to what it was seven years ago. I've found that as, as an independent record label, I've dealt with partners in my business that I know seven years ago those roles did not exist. So there has at least been a bit of change. With Assali Music what I really wanted to do, I wanted to create a space that is inclusive, um, that does not prejudice or bias, umm, in terms of gender and in terms of sex. And that's something that um, I'm working on; we try first and nurture ourselves. It's our first year in business umm, and we've learnt so much, you know just by handling my brand. And now I've started getting demos from a number of female artists across the country. I am constantly in talks. I'm trying to see umm, who would be best suited to be the artist that we work with, but even those that I cannot work with I am always willing to share that knowledge because umm, I long ago found out that male artists assist each other. They share beats, they share music, they share ideas.
DR. MALKS	It's a network.
BERITA	They have networks, but female artists are on their own. So it's that, I'm working a lot and there's also established artists that are dear friends of mine and I'm really trying to force the spirit of collaboration. And to really, yes there's something called competition, and yes we are in a competitive umm, industry but beyond that umm, we are all just one ecosystem. So if there's female promoters, female artists, female record label owners, female PR umm, publicists, then we are all a network that can assist each other without intimidating each other and without umm, the, the, you know, the gender play.
DR. MALKA	And there is the construct of collaborative competition. And there is such a thing as win-win.
BERITA	Absolutely.
DR. MALKA	Not a case where, because you are advancing that, that someone is losing. There's opportunities of expanding, and I always remember one of the interviews we had with um Geraldine Fraser-Molaketi where she was speaking about people, you know, think we have this pie as a bakery and if you keep taking out a slice you are diminishing, but she said this is about thinking in terms of abundance. That if

	you keep adding to this and having the diversity and the mix you're growing the pie.
BERITA	Definitely.
DR. MALKA	Not shrinking the pie. I think this is another perfect example. What would you say now that you know are the current strengths for woman in the music industry in South Africa?
BERITA	I think that umm, over the past couple of years I've observed women be resilient umm, it's not easy to be on the road playing five shows a weekend all around South Africa. Umm, I've seen that woman are taking on roles not just in front of the music. You know, back in the day we had artists that we looked up to like Brenda Fassie who did not write their own songs. Who umm, umm, who did not have access to the, the publishing royalties of the music they sang. So which meant that they were getting the least pie you know, the scrap of the pizza, really. Umm, but now I find that when I talk to my friends, you know, they write their own music, they produce or co-produce the music. They own record labels or are in partnership with records labels where they have a say about what the final product of what their music is.
DR. MALKA	Artists now days seem to have greater ownership of, of what they are producing.
BERITA	I actually, speaking on that, um, um I'm a brand ambassador for this year's Moshito Conference and I've been paired up with the phenomenal Thandeka PJ Powers and me and her had a conversation two weeks back where she said to me "It's unthinkable that as a young woman I own my own music", because when they were my age they could not even fathom, they could not even think that was possible.
DR. MALKA	And they were always tied up in these ridiculously long contracts, that they physically bound them for their entire careers.
BERITA	Oh yeah, definitely.
DR. MALKA	Tell us more about Moshito as a music conference.
BERITA	Yes. So, Moshito is a gathering of umm, Africa's and the, the rest of the world's delegates from different parts of the music industry, be it the intellectual properties, or it's the master rights, it's the promoters that do the shows, or the agents or the record labels and the radio stations.
DR. MALKA	So it's like the business side of things.
BERITA	Oh yeah. Oh yeah. It happens once a year and there's different, there's show cases for upcoming artists, there's show cases for developing artists. And it's really a gathering, you know, to come together and see how we can make the music industry better. And I know this year the theme is Inzalabantu Unchained. It's really a female agenda and we are talking about the inclusivity of in the different aspects of the music industry. And most of the panels are going to be female led this year.
DR. MALKA	Given what you know now, what would be your advice to young ladies who aspire to be involved the industry in some shape or form.
BERITA	I would say that first and foremost important thing is to know that you matter. I think when I started in the music industry; I always put someone else first before me. I put the record label first, I put the manager first, I put the musicians that I worked with first and I found that because of that umm, in the long run I'm building a legacy that's going to last over fifty years. And all these other people have the opportunity, nonexclusive opportunity to work with other people and develop other narratives for themselves but I'm exclusive to myself for the rest of my life. I find that a lot of female artists umm, are empathetic for themselves, they like "Oh but I was trying to say this song must go this way, but the producer would not let me speak or", you know, whereas I think that I would assert myself more. I would make sure

	that I am confident in my craft and I would know that umm, my music and my craft is, that's my CV you know. No matter, it doesn't matter how much money the other partner has but if I have full ownership of my music and my craft I am much more wealthier than that person.
DR. MALKA	That gives you your authenticity and it's your identity. We go back...
BERITA	Definitely, definitely. What happens is that times change, years pass on and you realise that you've lost yourself and you've not filled up the cup from where you took from
DR. MALKA	You are listening to Womanity, women in unity on Channel Africa, the African perspective, on frequency 9625 kHz on the 31 meter band. Also available on DSTV Channel 802. Today we are talking to multi-award winning singer, song writer, guitarist and music producer Berita. We would love to hear your comments on twitter at Womanity Talk. Now coming back to our conversation, in August you released a brand new single called "Yours". Please, tell us more about this exciting new release.
BERITA	Yes. "Yours" is actually the second release from my record label. It's a single that I released in celebration of love umm, I find that most of my songs lately are quite romantic [laugh]. It's a feel good spring, summer song and I really wanted umm, to capture innocence in love and be jolly and happy. I also happen to produce this song. Initially um, I'd written it thinking I was going into the studio with another producer. I then worked on the production which makes it the first song which I fully produced. Umm, and I've really enjoyed the response I've received since the song has been out.
DR. MALKA	So this one woman, written song and produced. Can you share a little bit of the song with our listeners?
BERITA	Yes, I'd love to do that. The chorus goes something like [singing] "I just wanna be yours, be yours, your... I just wanna be yours, be yours, your ...".
DR. MALKA	Thank you for sharing. We can definitely hear the love in the air and the passion that's coming through. Now despite, because we know that you come from a family of academics, as teachers and despite being busy with your music, you still managed study at Walter Sisulu University. Education is a skill and resource which really contributes to women's empowerment and the betterment not just for themselves but the lives of their families. Looking at what you've shared with us today, you're not just about singing, you are looking at your presence in the entire industry. So could you share with us what it means on achieving your academic qualifications? Particularly for young women who maybe at the cusp where they are not sure. Should I go and study, should I go and work. What their choices are in life.
BERITA	I really think that when you are young you must do all you can. I went to school to study. I would have loved to study music but umm, I was accepted for an accounting course and started my career whilst I was studying but I always vowed to finish what I started you know, and I finished at the top of my class. And I found that I've continued to instil that discipline in myself. Umm, there's still so many skills that I want to acquire and I feel like in the 21st century as well there's skills that one needs to know if you going to run a business. You need to know about marketing, financial management, human resources, those are things that you need to be aware of and with the way that umm, everything works now in the music you really can't just get into it with the talent. It's so much more than that.
DR. MALKA	But it gives you your ownership. It gives you your business skills, your acumen and you wouldn't have been able to achieve that if you hadn't studied.
BERITA	Definitely, definitely, definitely. And I would also say that if you perhaps not had the chance to study, it's never too late.

DR. MALKA	You're so right and you speak about your mentor. I think she was starting to do her MBA at fifty.
BERITA	Mmmm. Yes that's mam Yvonne Chaka Chaka.
DR. MALKA	So she is a perfect example, never too late.
BERITA	Definitely. I, I still have grand ambitions. I actually want to further my studies more in music. I want to learn about engineering. I want to when I hear sounds be able to isolate them. I want to learn how to sound design music. I want to learn how to score for movies. So I really believe than you can never stop learning
DR. MALKA	We believe that too this show. We are great advocates of education. We've just celebrated woman's month in South Africa and unfortunately in the last couple of weeks, once again we've had awful news about young women being raped, young women being murdered and we know that gender based violence is, is clearly and issue in the country. Broader a field there's been waves of movements like the "Me Yoo", "Times Up" campaigns which publicise sexual harassment and many musicians, many actresses have all been victims of harassment. What do you think the campaigns do in terms of helping advance our progress? Are they helpful, or are they harmful?
BERITA	I think the awareness is important. Umm, it can get a bit challenging, cause it can just go over people's heads, umm, especially with social media. Umm, and I've particularly been asking myself questions about what to do. What shall I do? Shall I throw a concert? Should I put on a concert and bring all women together. What's the best way to tackle the issues that we're dealing with? The reality is that women are not safe in our country. We are not safe and umm, it's an issue that's gone on for a long enough period. You know, it's an issue that I know that in my office, you know, it's something that we talk about a lot. We talk about our safety. We are always on the road rushing from one place to the next umm and what about that little school girl child who is walking umm, from school back home alone. What about umm, young varsity student who has just graduated and is an intern and has to cross the bridge to go catch the taxi so she can head to work. There is so much that is going on umm, that is really disturbing umm, and I think we need to do more than have the campaigns. I'm really from my, I'm also quizzing myself as to what is the best way. What shall we do?
DR. MALKA	I don't think we've got an answer yet. Umm, otherwise it wouldn't be the issue that it is but as you say awareness is part of it and it's, it's got to be a massive social aspect that rewires some of our thinking in society.
BERITA	Yes.
DR. MALKA	Going back to you. One of the questions I ask my guests who have all made tremendous achievements in their respective fields on this show, is about some of the factors that they consider have been key contributors to their success. Some people speak about hard work, perseverance, a fear of failure. What would you say have been some of your guiding factors?
BERITA	I think for me it has always been important to move forward. To have a sense of urgency. I think that has always been a guiding factor where I wake up every day and try and do better than I've done the day before. I monitor. I love information. I love to know why umm, I'm receiving the results that I'm receiving. So I'm always going back into the finer details and trying to pick up umm, what it really is that I need to do, so I've, I've taken a lot of responsibility to myself umm, to achieve the dreams that I have, I have for myself. Then I think also the importance of surrounding yourself with people that are for you. I found that whenever I'm not sure about the decisions I'm making or I'm feeling uneasy, I always go back and look at the times that I've done really well and asked myself what I was doing right and I found

	that most of the times it was because I've had people around me that have my best interests at heart.
DR. MALKA	That's a really good retrospection to have and it's speaks about the enablers around us that we don't do things by our self.
BERITA	No we don't especially as women. I often say to my friends that umm, that the partner you choose is the most important decision that you'll ever make. I read a book by, what's her name, the COO of Facebook, Cheryl...
DR. MALKA	Cheryl Sandberg.
BERITA	Yes, Cheryl Sandberg. She actually talks about it. She I think goes deeply how she got married when she was young, in her twenties and quickly, you know, married the wrong type of person for her and then she remarried in her thirties. Married a man that is as driven as she is. She even talks about before you get married to someone umm, like basically, I'm trying to find the right way to explain it. Test, put test measures in place to check if this person umm, is this person going to work with your vision and your goals and your career. Umm, she talks about simple things, if you are a career woman umm, knowing exactly that you won't always be home at six pm. Sometimes I come back from the studio at two in the morning and sometimes you have to just stay with your friends up late until twelve midnight and rock up at your partner's place and say I was in the studio just to check, you know [laugh]. Just to check if this person is willing to be adjustable to the lifestyle that you have because of the dreams that you have for yourself and I definitely think all women should not just accept a partner. They should really test to see if this will be the person that will be for them when they have to further their dreams and their goals.
DR. MALKA	Otherwise it can be a complete inhibitor and those aspirations and dreams will never see the light of day. Which women would you say have been key influences in your life or role models?
BERITA	My mum. My stage name is actually my mother's name. I've grown to appreciate my mom as I've become a woman in my own right. You know she's a woman that's very savvy. She saves money, saves, saves and saves money. She invests. She's all about listening to your gut feel. Like if I call her now and I have a challenge and I, she's never going to decide for me. She'll tell me that I need to be still, sit with myself, the answer is within myself. And as I've grown older I've realised that she's always empowered me to be myself, to be more of myself. And of course there's mam Yvonne Chaka Chaka who actually showed me that it's possible, it's possible to own your own music. To you know; be in charge of your own career. To have a family and to be a respectable woman in your society. And I would say the other woman that I look up to obviously Oprah because she owns. You know, she has ownership of all her hard work, her intellectual property and umm, you know all the projects that she's involved in she fully immerses herself and fully invests herself into those projects.
DR. MALKA	Three wonderful ladies. And lastly as we close out today, could you share a few words of inspiration or wisdom that you would like to pass on to ladies that are listening to us on the continent.
BERITA	I would say to ladies, it's our time now. There's never been a more phenomenal time. Umm, it's the time to step up umm, you know. Our continent has the biggest number of youth compared to other continents and whose going to provide jobs for those youth. It's us and it's not just us as in us young ones, it's us women. We have the capabilities to work hard to put ourselves in position whereby we are changing our society and we are also um, providing economic value, you know to the ecosystem of the countries that we live in. Be it, you know, I'm originally from Zimbabwe but I proudly

	pay tax in this country. I proudly own a company that is staffed by people that are from this country and I proudly make my contribution umm, to this country and not just the country but to the continent and I feel like there's just never been a better time for women to do so.
DR. MALKA	I think that is such an awesome message. One that is routed in practical aspects, entrepreneurship at taking ownership for your life and responsibility
BERITA	I believe in. I am the DIY-er. I'm the queen of DIY [laugh]. I believe in doing it yourself
DR. MALKA	Great message be the DIY. Thank you so much for joining us.
BERITA	Thank you.
DR. MALKA	You have been listening to Womanity, Woman in Unity on Channel Africa the African perspective. And we have been talking to multi-award winning singer, song writer, guitarist and music producer, Miss DIY, Berita
	PROGRAMME END