

# Mokoomba

Mokoomba hails from Victoria Falls, Zimbabwe, where the band's six members — Mathias Muzaza (lead vocalist), Ndaba Coster Moyo (Drummer, backing vocals), Trustworth Samende (Lead Guitar, backing vocals) Donald Moyo, (keyboards, backing vocals), Miti Mugande, (percussion & backing vocals) and Abundance Mutori (bass, backing vocals) — grew up as friends in the Chinotimba township.

While the majority of Zimbabweans belong to the dominant Shona ethnic group or the large Ndebele minority, the members of Mokoomba hail from a range of different ethnic groups represented in this border town, including the Luvale, Nyanja, and Tonga peoples; and it was the Tonga who gave mighty Victoria Falls, the world's largest waterfall, its original name: "Mosi-oa-Tunya" (the smoke that thunders).

Living in a border town that attracts tourists from all over the world gave Mokoomba's music an international outlook from the beginning, embracing everything from soukous to ska, hip-hop to salsa. At the same time, local music and traditions keep Mokoomba's music rooted, giving it a unique perspective that's unlike anything else you've heard from Zimbabwe before.

The members of Mokoomba began playing music as teenagers, with the help of a local bandleader, the late Alfred Mijimba, who gave the young musicians the experience they needed by hiring them to play local gigs with his band. Though he was never an international star, Mijimba was a respected local musician, and the members of Mokoomba gained considerable experience under his guidance.

The group's members began playing together in 2001, and Mokoomba was officially born in 2008. Their first major success came that same year, when they won the Music Crossroads Inter-Regional Festival Competition in Malawi. In 2009 Mokoomba recorded their first album, *Kweseka — Drifting Ahead*, produced by Dutch DJ Gregor Salto, as part of the Stand UP anti-poverty campaign funded by AfricaUnsigned. The album yielded up a local hit "Messe Messe", and the group's first European tour. Mokoomba would go on to record a second EP, *Umvundla*, with Salto in 2011. But their big break came in 2012, when they released *Rising Tide*, produced by pioneering Cote D'Ivoirian bassist Manou Gallo (Zap Mama, Kiyi M'Bock) for the Belgian label ZigZag World.

The runaway success of *Rising Tide* would propel Mokoomba to tour over 40 countries worldwide in 2012, 2013 and 2014 from Zimbabwe to South Korea, from Norway to New Zealand, Canada to Australia, and almost everywhere in between, including performances at Denmark's Roskilde festival, the UK's WOMAD festival, Belgium's Couleur Café festival, Morocco's Gnawa festival, and an appearance on the BBC Two television program "Later... with Jools Holland".

Hailed by critics, *Rising Tide* received rave reviews in such outlets as The Guardian, NPR, Songlines Magazine, fRoots Magazine, and Afropop Worldwide, The album also made many "Best of 2012" critic's lists, and scored the band a string of awards at home and abroad, including the Songlines Music Awards – Best Newcomer 2013, NAMA Arts Personality of the Year 2013, ZIMAA Top Touring Artist of the Year 2013, the Zim Achievers – International Best Touring Artist 2014 and the ZIMA award 2014.

Since then, Mokoomba has continued to tour widely in Asia, Europe, the Pacific and especially in Africa, where they've solidified their standing at home as one of Zimbabwe's most popular bands, playing with such icons as Hugh Masekela and Baba Maal at Zimbabwe's annual Harare International Festival of the Arts. Mokoomba's popularity in Harare and the rest of Zimbabwe cuts across cultural and ethnic lines and demonstrates the joyful, transcendent power of their sound and vision.

In April, 2016. Mokoomba made a whirlwind tour of the U.S. and Canada, which took them from New York's legendary Apollo Theater to the Savannah Music Festival, and garnering rave reviews from The New York Times, The Washington Post and even Voice of America radio.

Mokoomba are also the subjects of a documentary called *Mokoomba: From One River Bank to Another*, by Frank Dalmat and Francis Ducat. The film tells the group's story in the context of the relationship between culture and economic development in the global south

In 2015 the band went back to basics, digging deep into their own local traditions and writing and recording their self-produced third album *Luyando* — a stripped down, largely acoustic album that gets to the essence of Mokoomba's sound. The album, set for a 2016 release, balances the group's love of pan-African and international sounds with the local and traditional sounds they also grew up listening to; steering a course between the demands of the international market and what audiences want to hear at home.

*Luyando* translates as "Mother's Love" and takes its inspiration from the Makishi masquerade ritual practiced in parts of Zimbabwe and nearby Zambia, which the members of Mokoomba participated in as boys. The Makishi masquerade is performed at the end of the Mukanda, an initiation ritual for boys between the ages of eight and twelve, when young boys leave their homes and live for one to three months at a bush camp away from their villages. It's a pivotal and often lonely time in a boy's life, when they learn the self-reliance required of young men in their community, while still often yearning for the tenderness of their mother's love. But the end of the Mukanda is marked by a joyous graduation ceremony called Chilende, full of colorful masks, music and dancing.

(More on the Makashi masquerade here: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2FVSFE5pRks>.)

*Luyando* draws on both sides of this tradition, with thoughtful, introverted acoustic songs, as well as joyous, life-affirming dance tunes, offering up essential life-lessons from their corner of Africa to the whole world.