



*“He was a voice during the revolution, a voice of hope, like a Woody Guthrie or Bob Dylan of South Africa, and he still is.” –Dave Matthews*

Vusi grew up in the Mamelodi township, just outside of Pretoria, South Africa, where he still resides. As Vusi tells it, he grew up a happy kid and was blind to the injustices in his country. His grandmother operated a Shebeen behind their home. Due to the cultural boycott inflicted by Apartheid, black South African music was hard to come by and was banned from being played on the radio. So, they played American records in the pub. James Brown. Motown. The Commodores. And whatever South African and African recordings they could find: Mahotella Queens, Mahlatini Queens, Miriam Makeba, Dark City Sisters, Fela Kuti. Young Vusi and his neighborhood friends formed a little band of their own and started making music of their own, inspired by the recordings they heard wafting out of the Shebeen. Vusi built his first guitar from fishing line and a cooking oil can and taught himself how to play. In 1976, Vusi’s political education began as he witnessed the devastating massacre of more than 200 black South Africans in the Soweto Uprising. Vusi responded through his music, inspiring other musicians and listeners around him.

Vusi began to write songs of justice, of freedom, of revolution, of love, of peace and of life. He joined a poetry group, The Ancestors of Africa, and also joined the Congress of South African Writers, a group of like-minded artists and writers, including Nobel Laureate Nadine Gordimer who paid for Vusi’s first guitar lessons. At this point, his political activism truly began. For the “crime” of writing songs of freedom and human dignity, Vusi was held in solitary confinement; he was harassed by the police repeatedly. Many of his friends fled the country. Through this struggle, his songwriting became not only prolific but also healing for himself and for his listeners. And as Nadine Gordimer so vividly puts it, “Vusi sings as a bird does, in total response to being alive.” He simply became known as “The Voice.”

At the fall of Apartheid, Vusi was signed to Shifty Records/BMG records and finally recorded his first album—a collection of songs he’d been writing his whole life. In the title track, “When You Come Back,” he sings to his friends and the political exiles who had left the country telling them that “we will ring the bells and beat the drums when you come back” and he also calls for humanity asking that we “give something to the world and not just take from it.”

This song and its altruistic message rang loud in cars, at parties, and in the homes of both blacks and whites. It truly became an anthem. In 1994, Vusi was proud and very humbled to perform this song at Nelson Mandela’s presidential inauguration. “The Voice” was soon heard all over the world. Since the release of that first album, Vusi has traveled the globe sharing his songs of truth and hope, and sharing his country’s past and promise for a better future. Americans first caught a glimpse of him in the 2002 documentary *Amandla! A Revolution in Four Part Harmony* that chronicles the strength of music during the struggle against Apartheid. Shortly after the debut of the film, fellow South African Dave Matthews signed Vusi to his label, ATO Records, and released “The Voice,” a collection of

songs from Vusi's South African releases. Guiding Star and 2011's Say Africa, produced by Taj Mahal, soon followed. His albums have received mass critical acclaim and celebrated musicians have taken note of his powerful voice and message. As the LA Times puts it, Vusi is a "rare and mesmerizing musical mind.. with a voice that seems to have few limits." Vusi has shared the stage with Dave Matthews Band, Sting, Josh Groban, Paul Simon, Ladysmith Black Mambazo, Hugh Masekela, Angelique Kidjo, Bela Fleck, Ray LaMontagne, Amos Lee and many more. He's also performed at two TED conferences, the Skoll World Forum, The Elders annual meeting, Nelson Mandela's 90th Birthday, Mandela Day and more. But perhaps his biggest gig was in 2010 when he helped ring in the World Cup in South Africa, at Orlando Stadium in Soweto; "When You Come Back" also served as the theme song for ITV's World Cup coverage in the UK.

Vusi was humbled this spring to receive an honorary doctorate degree from the prestigious Rhodes University in Grahamstown, SA; a couple of weeks later on Freedom Day, South Africa's President Jacob Zuma awarded Vusi with the National Order of Ikhamanga recognizing him for "drawing attention to the injustices that isolated South Africa from the global community during the Apartheid years."

This past year, the SAMA Awards (South African Music Awards) chose to honor Vusi with a Lifetime Achievement award to recognize his accomplishments both at home and abroad. The honor made the troubadour take a look back and realize that in what felt like a blink of the eye, it had been twenty years since the release of When You Come Back. In celebration, he got the band together and put on a big show at the Lyric Theatre in Johannesburg—and recorded it.

The result is Sing to the People, a live recording including songs from throughout the first twenty years of his career, out now on ATO Records. The album contains joyful performances and the visceral sounds of an audience that's hanging on every single note and already knows every single lyric by heart. It's toe-tapping and heart-thumping. It's Vusi singing to the people.