

Performing Notes on “Ke Na Le Modisa”

Musical and Textual Origins

This transcription of “Ke Na Le Modisa” is from the Soweto Gospel Choir’s album, *Live at the Nelson Mandela Theatre* (2008), available on DVD, CD, and YouTube. The original version of the piece appeared on the group’s studio album, *African Spirit* (2007). (Those two recordings feature different soloists, and the *African Spirit* track is longer, including an extra verse as well as a slightly different structure from the later live album.) Listening to and imitating the Soweto Gospel Choir recordings of this piece and others is one way to uncover a rewarding and authentic performance.

Beginning at bar 41, the solo part is entirely improvisatory. Either soloist from the opening of the piece could continue as the improvising soloist, or (as in the Soweto Gospel Choir recordings), a third singer could be used. The improvisatory part is written out for reference in this arrangement, but the soloist should not feel limited to what is written. Soloists should note that during the improvisatory sections, the soloist nearly always front-phrases, i.e. singing the text that the choir is about to sing, before the ensemble does. Also, Soweto Gospel Choir improvising soloists usually sing during the rests between choral sections.

Like most South African choirs, the Soweto Gospel Choir rarely stands still when performing. Their music works well as a processional or recessional, and limited choreography (usually still on the risers, in a choral formation) can be added. The music should be performed with authentic joy, a quality they bring to everything they do.

Text and Translation

The Soweto Gospel Choir website describes the text of “Ke Na Le Modisa” as a “Sotho Interpretation of Psalm 23,” and lists the text and partial translation there. A founding member of the Soweto Gospel Choir, bass Mulalo Mulovhedzi, provided the remainder of the translation.

Sotho lyrics and translation

Ke na le modisa – ke tla be ke hlokang?

The Lord is my Shepard I shall not want

Ke ya ipitsang Jehova – molimo o phelang

His name is Jehovah the forever living God

O nkisa botaleng, lijong tse mphelisang

He brings me to the depths, to the food that gives me life

O nkalosa dinokaneng – metsing a nkholisang

He leads me to the river and the water that heals me

Lira li ka ntlhoya – ke sa ja monono

Enemies can hate me but I can still eat

Mohope oa khaphatseha – ke dutse ka thabo

My cup is overflowing, I living happily

Pronunciation

“Ke Na Le Modisa” is sung in Sotho, one of South Africa’s 11 official languages.

Ke na le modisa – ke tla be ke hlokang?
Kee nah lee moh-dee-sah; kee thlah beh kee loh-kan?
[ki na li mɔdɪsɑ ki θlɑ bɛ ki lɔkɑn]

Ke ya ipitsang Jehova – molimo o phelang
Kee yah ee-peat-sahn Jeh-hoh-vah; moh-dee-moh woh peelahn
[ki ja ipitsɑn dʒɛhɔvɑ mɔdimɔ wɔ pilɑn]

O nkisa botaleng, lijong tse mphelisang
Oohn kee-sah boo-tah-lehn; dee-zhohn sehm pee-dee-sahn
[un kɪsɑ butalɛn dɪʒɔn sɛm pidɪsɑn]

O nkalosa dinokaneng – metsing a nkholisang
Oohn kah-loo-sah dee-noo-kah-neh; meht-seeng ahn koh-dee-san
[un kalusɑ dinukɑnɛn mɛtsɪŋ ɑn kɔdɪsɑn]

Lira li ka ntlhoya – ke sa ja monono
Lee-rah dee kah tloh-yah; kee sah jah moo-noh-noh
[lɪrɑ dɪ kɑ tlɔjɑ kɪ sɑ dʒɑ munɔnɔ]

Mohope oa khaphatseha – ke dutse ka thabo
Moo-hoh-peh wah kah-pah-tseh-ha; kee doo-tee ka tah-boh
[muhɔpɛ wɑ kɑpɑtsɛhɑ kɪ dʊtsɪ kɑ tɑbɔ]

For the Djembe Player

Most South African djembe players play a steady rhythm (putting a note on every subdivision of the ongoing rhythm) while accenting and shading the most important rhythms with volume and by using different parts of the drum. This applies throughout most of “Ke Na Le Modisa,” and the notation indicates where the note is low, high, or a middle note. The neutral middle notes are always unstressed and soft while the low and high notes are played more loudly, and function as rhythmic drivers. Low notes are in the middle of the drum; high “slap” notes are near the edges.

Always, though, the djembe player(s) should feel free to improvise freely, reacting to the vocal soloist and the choir’s musical material. Use the Soweto Gospel Choir’s recording(s) as an aural guide.

Clapping

In the *African Spirit* recording of “Ke Na Le Modisa,” the choir claps on every main beat (4 to the bar) in the “Woo woo” section, bars 81-100, and the djembe rests entirely. In the live performance at the Nelson Mandela Theatre (this transcription), part of the choir appears to clap on beats 3 and 4 during this section, and possibly with some syncopated clapping as well. The director may experiment with this section and employ clapping as desired.

Soweto Gospel Choir

In 2002, Soweto Gospel Choir was formed in Soweto, South Africa, by two choir directors, David Mulovhedzi and Beverly Bryer. The group's first album, *Voices of Heaven*, was released in 2005, and reached the No. 1 spot on Billboard's World Music Chart three weeks after its release in the United States. The group tours worldwide and has appeared in nearly all of the world's most prestigious venues and festivals, including Carnegie Hall, the Sydney Opera House, the Nelson Mandela Theatre, the Montreal Jazz Festival, and the Royal Festival Hall in London. SGC has performed for such world dignitaries as President Bill Clinton, Archbishop Desmond Tutu, and Nelson Mandela. They have shared the stage with such diverse artists and groups as the Black-Eyed Peas, Johnny Clegg, Celine Dion, Kirk Franklin, Josh Groban, the Harlem Gospel Choir, Herbie Hancock, Mark Knopfler, John Legend, the London Philharmonic Orchestra, Ozzy Osborne, Andre Rieu, Diana Ross, Shakira, U2, Bebe Winans, the Red Hot Chili Peppers, and the South African sensation, Zahara.

Soweto Gospel Choir has won nearly every award available in the gospel and world music categories, including three Grammy Awards: for their 2007 *Blessed* album, their 2008 album *African Spirit*, and their 2018 album *Freedom*. They won a Sports Emmy in 2010 for their collaboration with U2 for ESPN's promotional campaign for the 2010 World Cup. They have also received three "associated" Grammy Awards, three SAMAs (South African Music Awards), and an Oscar nomination.

In March 2013, the choir's fifth album, *Soweto Gospel Choir and Friends—Divine Decade*, was released as a celebration of the choir's 10th Anniversary. In December 2013, Soweto Gospel Choir teamed with Woolworths for a YouTube video tribute to Nelson Mandela, as part of a flash mob event, with the song "Asimbonanga". The clip went viral and received over 3 million hits in its first week of release.

The choir's newest album is its 2018 *Freedom*, which won the "Best World Music Album" Grammy in February of 2019.

Soweto Gospel Choir has founded its own AIDS orphans foundation, Nkosi's Haven Vukani, to assist organizations that receive little or no funding. In South Africa, the choir performs for a variety of charitable organizations.

For more and current information on Soweto Gospel Choir, including updated touring information, please visit their website at <http://www.sowetogospelchoir.com>. The choir's Twitter feed is @sowetogospel and their Facebook page can be found by searching for "Official Soweto Gospel Choir." Recordings of the group can be viewed on YouTube and purchased at all the major online music retailers.

Arranger David Mulovhedzi

The Soweto Gospel Choir was co-founded by two choir conductors, Beverly Bryer and David Mulovhedzi. Mulovhedzi was a manager for South African gospel groups from 1986 until his death in 2009. A creative and enterprising Soweto resident, he was a member of the Holy Jerusalem Evangelical Church, and his choir, the Holy Jerusalem Choir, performed at a Miss World Pageant, and also performed for Michael Jackson during his 1997 South African tour.

During Mulovhedzi's life, he also entertained the President of China and former South Africa President Nelson Mandela. His extensive knowledge of African gospel and traditional music was extremely influential in the selection of the repertoire for the Soweto Gospel Choir. He was a father figure to many singers in the group.

Transcriber / Arranger Dr. Kurt Runestad

American choral conductor Kurt Runestad has been privileged to teach at Doane University (Crete, Nebraska) since the fall of 2004. In the summer of 2010, Runestad transcribed Soweto Gospel Choir's "Khumbaya" for use with his choirs at Doane the following academic year. This first partnership with the Soweto Gospel Choir has led to several additional collaborations; he has attended several concerts, transcribed additional pieces, and in May 2018 had the great pleasure of bringing a group of Doane singers to Johannesburg, South Africa, where the Doane singers and the SGC spent a couple of hours together in a rehearsal and clinic. At Doane, Runestad conducts several of the college's choirs, including the acclaimed Doane Choir, which under his direction has performed in fourteen countries on four continents, and throughout the United States. Runestad graduated from St. Olaf College (Northfield, Minnesota) with a B.A. in music education, taught 10 years in the public schools of Iowa and Minnesota, and earned two graduate degrees in choral conducting from the University of Iowa (Iowa City, Iowa). He is a frequent clinician, arranger, and adjudicator for choirs throughout the Midwest. He and his wife, Carly Woythaler-Runestad, have two children, daughter Avery and son Owen.

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