

what we love

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The secrets of a Swazi soul man

We felt a searing message of hope and love being indelibly imprinted on our collective consciousness while watching Swazi musician and messenger-of-hope, Bholoja, perform at Bushfire 2010. The Good News is he's due back on centre stage this coming weekend!

Photographs: Pippa Hetherington | **Words:** Kim Chaloner



On the final night of Bushfire 2010, Pippa and I approached Swazi music star Bholoja in his dressing room, shortly before he was due to step out on stage, to request a quick photo call. Expecting a curt rebuff to our cheeky proposal, he graced us with an intimate half-hour interview. 'My music is none other than giving hope to people, motivating people, encouraging them to do good things,' he said gently, and I felt the hope rise in my soul. Later — as Bholoja (aka Mbongiseni Ngubane) surprised his beloved fans by inviting South African jazz musician Ray Phiri to perform with him on stage, in an electrifying, close-knit collaboration — Pippa roamed the stage taking photographs, while I took up my seat in the wings.

As warm winter rains doused the festival showgrounds, we witnessed first-hand the unified body of love-and life-drenched music lovers raising their arms — and their voices — in sold-out celebration. Bholoja proceeded to take our breath away, his searing message of hope and love indelibly imprinted on our collective consciousness. Here, in that exclusive interview, he opened his heart about the Swazi music festival that launched his career...

'Swaziland wasn't exposed to the world in terms of the arts. Bushfire has done a lot for Swazi music, it has brought the world to Swaziland. It makes things easier for the artists in Swaziland to get a network. That's how I get invited to other places to perform. At Bushfire somebody spots your game and takes to your work and, by that, attention to Swaziland has been raised.



Bushfire is my music home. I was given the chance here when I was just out of school to open the stage for many musicians, including South African musicians. Today I'm sharing the stage with them. And today they [Bushfire] are not only helping Bholoja, but they are supporting Swazi musicians in this country, as well as other types of arts.

My music is none other than giving hope to people, motivating people, encouraging them to do good things. I believe that being a musician you are a messenger. It is always good that in the eyes of God and the eyes of the nation the message you are sending must be something that can build a nation. It must send peace. It must be a message of hope. It's all about that.

I'm a person who is very observant, and I like a challenge. I believe that God sends you. You need to be committed to your work and if you do something you love with passion, believe in yourself and let no obstacle get in front of you. I've always told myself that Swaziland has potential just like any other country that is successful in the arts. I'm still fighting to change that [the perception that Swaziland is a cultural desert]. [The arts] have the potential to lift people up. That is why I'm doing this.

Swaziland is a Christian culture. We believe in God and I'm one of those people. I'm a Christian and I believe in God, there's nothing else I do other than pray. God is great, He helps me a lot, He has made me what I am today. That's the secret – actually, it's not a secret! I am telling you!

Without other artists I wouldn't be where I am. I learn a lot from other artists. If you're selfish you're not going anywhere. You need to give in order to be given. That's the principle and I thank God [for it].

Catch Bholoja at Bushfire 2011 from 27-29 May in Swaziland. Visit www.bush-fire.com and www.house-on-fire.com for more info.