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Internationally acclaimed UCT musician retraces trading history through song

A three-part musical by internationally renowned UCT composer, cellist, and cultural thinker Dr Thokozani Mhlambi will be [virtually staged](#) from the Baxter Theatre on Thursday, 23 July 2020 at 20:00.

Titled "Indlela ebheke e-Azania"(A journey to Azania), this journey through music is based on a historical African legacy and will feature performers from Africa and Europe. It tells the story of trading in Rhapta, the southernmost trading port of Azania in the first century AD. The people of this place were great in stature, proud agriculturalists and great innovators in terms of metal working science.

Said Dr Mhlambi: "This is a very important story about our African internationalism, which is important to tell at this time given the global movements such as #BlackLivesMatter, what people of African descent are saying all over the world, is that they want to be seen, and recognised even in the content they view. The digital format of the concert allows people anywhere in the globe to check it out."

The people of Rhapta traded with the ships anchored on the bluffs of the city, who came from many parts of the world including places like Iran, Rome, India, and Egypt to mention a few. Ancient ships relied on the movements of the monsoon, a seasonal change in direction of the strongest winds in the Indian Ocean. These winds would then act as a natural motor-power for steering the ships southwards and then reverse movement later in the year.

They came to Azania for gold, ivory, palm-oil, rhino horns, and iron bloom – items that were in abundance in south-east Africa. In return the Africans would receive glass beads in all kinds of colours, copper, cloth and sometimes even wines, which they had no practical use for. The communities valued more the cattle that they traded with each other, significant in uniting families and building multi-lateral relationships.

The people responsible for the movement of such goods down from the area now called KwaZulu-Natal (KZN) were known as 'abahwebi' (traders) who had a responsibility to observe the protocols of royal families, whilst still supplying the general population.

Esteemed craftsmen in metal, thunder-herding and music composition were well known and exerted considerable autonomy, testifying to the value of their talents and expertise, from the land of the Thonga, to the Highveld, and right down the mountains to KZN and eMampondweni.

This continued right up to 700AD. By this time Inanda (KZN) had a considerable population of iron-producers (metallurgist) families, who lived on the hilly slopes, around the river Umngeni.

The three-part musical journey

- The first part of this musical work is 'Indlela', which covers the journey traversed by abahwebi (traders) to distance lands in the region.
- The second part is called 'Rhapta', which remembers the city-life of this trade port, as well as its strong communities surrounding it.
- The third part is called 'Kuumbi', which is about the cave which acted like a hotel, where sojourners would stay whilst conducting their business in the trade vicinity.

The musical is presented through the partnership of Afropolitan Explosiv, Baxter Theatre, Goethe-Institut and the Re-centring AfroAsia: Musical & Migrations in the Precolonial Period (700-1500AD) project at UCT.

[Watch the show here.](#)



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Issued by the Communication and Marketing Department

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