

# iiiiii ABAVUKI

## EXTENDED PROFILE: 2001 - 2025

**Abavuki are a powerhouse Afro-fusion world music ensemble, from Langa, Cape Town, South Africa.**

In December 2024, Abavuki celebrated 23 years of playing together, and just a month earlier, they released their vibrant new album of original music, *The Right Key*, to a packed amphitheatre of more than 3000 people at Cape Town's landmark V&A Waterfront. [See the video here.](#)



Abavuki's music is based on traditional African instruments (marimbas, drums & percussion) overlaid with brass (trumpet & saxophone) and vocals to create their energetic & contemporary Mzansi sound, firmly grounded in African music principles & influenced by kwaito, jazz and Latin American rhythms.

Their live performances have been described as "riveting", "amazing" and "an incredible rhythmic sound storm" and so it was full circle for the band who use to busk for tips at the Waterfront, known as one of Cape Town's top tourist attractions, as they took to the stage as now seasoned and well-travelled performers, playing for a wide variety of fans who had travelled from near and far, to experience the passion and power of Abavuki's exciting and uplifting music.

It's truly cathartic for the band to finally have released their latest album as it's been a long and winding road.



In December 2001, with ages varying from 13 to 20 years old, the ten original young musicians came together through the intervention of **Beverley Gough**, who went on to become their longtime manager.

Abavuki's first gig (after a hasty rehearsal in a train station restroom), was for 40 000 people, at the open air "Festive Lights Switch On", an annual tradition at the beginning of December in Cape Town. They blew everyone away - securing a 7 day contract to play at various events after the Switch On.

And from there on, they were musical brothers, guided by Beverley. They started to play regularly at venues around Cape Town such as Mama Africa, an African themed restaurant, and other private functions.

In 2002, Abavuki recorded their first album, *African Rhythms*, and sold hundreds of copies to visiting international visitors, some of whom went on to become lifelong friends.

In 2006, they travelled to China, where they spent a week in Ürümqi, Xining and Beijing. Their second album, *Live in China*, was recorded in Xining and released that year.

In 2009, Abavuki was commissioned by UK producer Barney Rattle to record the album *Africa got Soul* to celebrate Motown's 50th anniversary, and featured in an extensive BBC4 documentary with Midge Ure (ex Ultravox), discussing this and their music, included on his website here <http://www.midgeure.co.uk/life.html>

In 2010, South Africa hosted the soccer World Cup and Abavuki played every kind of gig, and then went on to be the resident band for 2 months on the Viking Line ferry between Sweden and Finland.

Things were starting to heat up:

In 2012, Abavuki played at the inaugural World Music Festival in Cape Town and recorded their next album, *Decade*, celebrating ten years together.

In 2013, they played at the legendary Rocking the Daisies festival (SA) and at the "Africa Connect" festival.

2014 was a game changer - with their now fixed 8 piece format, they played an offWomex showcase to rave responses and were picked up for multiple festival performances in 2015.



Abavuki's 2015 European tour saw them performing at:

- Ethno Port, Poznan, Poland
- Respect Festival, Prague, Czech Rep
- Oerol, Terschelling, the Netherlands
- Houtfestival, Haarlem, the Netherlands
- Fusion-Festival, Larz, Germany
- Afrikafestival, Hertme, the Netherlands
- Zomer van Antwerpen, Belgium
- Colours of Ostrava, Czech Rep
- Okarina Etno Festival, Bled, Slovenia

- Festival der Kulturen, Augsburg, Germany
- Folk Holidays, Náměšť nad Oslavou, Czech Rep
- Bardentreffen, Nürnberg, Germany
- and recording another live album - *One Summer in Europe*.

At the Okarina Etno Festival, they were seen by Davy Sims, the renowned broadcaster, ex-BBC editor and Member of the World Music Chart Europe jury panel. He summed up their performance with this review: "Abavuki are the most energetic band I have ever seen... they weave traditional African rhythms and melodies into a contemporary format which is highly accessible to a wide audience. Their high-energy style of music is uplifting and very danceable."

In 2017, they continued their international travels, performing at the Rainforest World Music Festival, Sarawak, Malaysia.



Unfortunately by then, the ever feisty and incredibly hardworking Bev was starting to struggle with her health, and was eventually diagnosed with cancer. She sought treatment and Abavuki supported her as much as possible and continued to play regularly around Cape Town at venues and private events.

In 2018, Bev realised that her cancer was terminal and began to make arrangements for a transition. By then, she had worked with Abavuki for 17 years, and was deeply attached to all the members, as they were to her. She looked for a new manager to take up the baton where she left off, and found that in Nikki Froneman and Arte Viva Management. Bev and Nikki and Abavuki spent some time together and Bev was satisfied that she had found the right person to take care of her beloved Abavuki.

2019 was in many ways, Abavuki's *annus horribilis*. Beverley passed away in February, and Nikki was away caring for her parents until they also both passed away, for the first 6 months of the year. Nikki returned to Cape Town in July, and slowly, Abavuki began to rebuild, playing some local gigs.

Of course then, 2020 was an *annus horribilis* for the world, as Covid took hold and devastated so much. Just a year after Beverley's death, Abavuki then suffered a double blow of losing two of their members to

Covid-related causes. Thulani Mtyi, known as the tall and gentle giant, passed away in May, and the spectacular trombonist Guz Matsila passed away in October.



In 2021, despite 2 extremely tough years, Abavuki celebrated 20 years together with an incredible concert and global livestream from one of Cape Town's legendary theatres, at that point known as 44 on Long (previously the Space Theatre).

The show was made possible through a grant from Concerts SA, but also through a very generous sponsorship

from Dr Tom Hilliar and the Kiama Downs Medical Practice team in Australia - Tom had met and played with Abavuki many years before, when they were playing at Mama Africa!

Slowly, in fits and starts the world started to move through and beyond Covid, and Abavuki continued, under the management of Nikki Froneman, to seek out opportunities and to perform. A highlight from these last few years includes once again playing the Festive Lights Switch On in Cape Town in 2022 - this time for 80 000 people, some 21 years after their first performance!



The name "Abavuki" means 'Wake up, early birds!' in their native language, isiXhosa, and this attitude is palpable in Abavuki's energetic & uplifting music that reflects the band's optimistic outlook on life and their approach to music-making. It's testament to Abavuki's resilience and their powerful connection as a musical brotherhood that they have thrived despite coming from difficult socio-economic circumstances in South Africa and having weathered so many serious challenges over the years, only some of which are mentioned here.



In 2023, Abavuki was finally able to get into the studio again, the renowned [Milestone Studios](#) in Cape Town, and record a new album. There are now 5 permanent members of Abavuki remaining from the original lineup, and they invited some regular and special guests to join them as they recorded the album, with eight original tracks and spectacular orchestration.

Released in November 2024, *The Right Key* showcases Abavuki's signature sound, with the maturity and evolution of more than two decades of playing together. It's a showcase and sharing of their connection to rhythm, joy and life that has brought them thousands of fans across the world, whilst also including some

conscious reflection on social and humanitarian issues.

In April 2025, Abavuki will embark on their very first South African tour, as they celebrate the release of the *Right Key* and perform their music to audiences in Durban, Johannesburg and Soweto.

Abavuki continues to produce better and better music, and the reaction from audiences to their live shows is absolutely electric. The vibe and groove on stage is incredible and they are superb showmen, consummate professionals both on stage and off. Their repertoire resonates easily across cultures to bring people together for a fantastic party and get everyone dancing!

#### **BAND MEMBERS:**



#### **From left to right**

Thando Sishuba - trumpet & vocals

Ndim Makubalo - percussion & vocals

Sabu Jiyana - marimbas, mbira, percussion & vocals

Bongani Ngesi - marimbas, percussion & vocals

Kim Masala - marimbas, percussion & vocals

Not pictured:

Alizwa Tyala - trumpet & vocals (regular guest)

Rest in Peace:

Gaz Matsila & Thulani Mtyi (band members)

Beverley Gough (band manager 2001-2019).

## **DISCOGRAPHY:**

The Right Key - 2024

One Summer in Europe - 2015

Decade - 2012

Africa got Soul - 2009

Live in China – 2006

African Rhythms – 2002

## **AWARDS & MENTIONS:**

- Winner of IMEXSA 2015 Export of the Year

- Commissioned to record “Africa got Soul” to celebrate Motown’s 50th anniversary

## **About Arte Viva Management:**



Abavuki are managed by Nikki Froneman of Arte Viva Management, with a 20 year track record of artist, tour and production management. Arte Viva has worked with artists including Carnegie Hall's NYO Jazz (National Youth Jazz Orchestra), Bänz Oester & The Rainmakers (CH/SA), Coco Zhao (China), Hildegard Lernt Vliegen (CH), Adrian Iaies (Argentina) and many more. [See more here](#) and [references here](#).

Arte Viva strives to contribute to a thriving, ethical and sustainable live music industry and to increasing the international projection and export of particularly South African artists.

For more information visit [abavuki.com](http://abavuki.com)

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## **More information / bookings / media enquiries:**

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