

In a distinguished ceremony, Rhodes University will confer upon Ambassador Barbara Masekela the honorary degree of Doctor of Laws (LLD). This accolade is in tribute to her exceptional, enduring contributions as a cultural activist, literary scholar, and an unwavering advocate for social justice, human rights, and dignity.

Barbara Masekela, born and raised in Witbank and Alexandra Township in Johannesburg, is a figure of substantial influence and accomplishment. Her journey from a politically aware household, where discussions on South Africa's political climate were commonplace, to becoming a vanguard of the African National Congress's Arts and Culture Department, sketches a narrative of dedication, resilience, and passion.

Educated across continents, from the University of Lesotho, Fordham University, the University of Zambia and finally, Ohio University in the United States, Masekela's academic path was as diverse as it was challenging. Despite facing racism, a 27-year rupture from South Africa and overcoming tuberculosis, her spirit remained undeterred, propelling her towards significant achievements in education and activism. Masekela taught in the English Department of Livingstone College, Rutgers University, from 1972. In 1982, she returned to Zambia to join the ANC full-time. She was appointed administrative secretary in the newly established Department of Arts and Culture in Lusaka, which was to play a significant role in the international boycott of the apartheid regime and the promotion of South African Arts and Culture.

After the release of Nelson Mandela in 1990, she was in the team arranging his first visit to the United States and he subsequently appointed her Head of Staff in his office.

Her ambassadorial appointments in France, UNESCO, and the United States, alongside her leadership roles in public and corporate affairs, are an example of the growing influence of women as equal partners in our society.

Masekela's poetry has been published in *Confrontation: A Journal of Third World Literature* (1971), Edited by Quincy Troupe, and *Somehow They Survive: An Anthology of South African Writing*, Thunder Mouth Press 1982. In 2021 her childhood memoir *Poli Poli* (Jonathan Ball Publishers), was released. It offers

insights into the interplay of art, culture and society. These works not only celebrate her personal journey but also underscore the collective memory and struggles of South Africa.

In 2022, she was selected to become a Writing Fellow at the Johannesburg Institute of Advanced Studies (JIAS). The Johannesburg Festival of Women Writers, founded by Masekela and supported by the University of Johannesburg, had its second iteration this year and further attests to her commitment to literature and societal progress.

Rhodes University's decision to honour Masekela is underpinned by her invaluable role in using the arts as a cornerstone of the national liberation struggle. As one of the first female ambassadors of the new South Africa, her pathbreaking endeavours have paved the way for future generations. Her leadership and vision have fundamentally shifted the landscape, ensuring that South African women's roles in leadership and global governance are not only acknowledged but celebrated.

The honorary degree also acknowledges Masekela's significant contributions beyond the public eye, including her meticulous care for Nelson Mandela during South Africa's transformative years and her influential positions in both governmental and non-governmental organisations.

Masekela's receipt of the Order of Luthuli in Silver for her "excellent contribution to the eradication of apartheid and contributing to the development of the new South African values" is a testament to her life's work.

Ambassador Masekela will receive her honorary doctorate on 03 April 2024 during the 09:30 Rhodes University graduation ceremony.