



Yvonne Chaka Chaka Princess of Africa

From an unemployed single mother to a successful star. Yvonne Chaka Chaka tells her story to Thandeka Mbuli

Singer Yvonne Chaka Chaka has always been lucky — somehow she's always been in the right place at the right time. But good fortune and success has not made her selfish and vain. It has just made her more eager to help people who have not been as lucky as her. That is why she belongs to many organisations that raise money for the poor and needy. It also explains why she will never forget where her duties lie: with the mother who raised her, with the husband who loves her, with her children who depend on her and with her fans who made her what she is today.

But life was not always easy for Yvonne. She had to cope with two sad events in her childhood.

At the young age of 10, her father, her "favourite person in all the world", died. Her "strict but loving" mother had to bring up three girls all alone. It wasn't easy and Yvonne has

never forgotten what it is like to go hungry.

"It was really difficult after my father died. We were poor and only had my mother's R80 a month income to live on. My mother always said that as long as we all finished our matric she would be very happy. My mother saw education as the only way out of the slums," she says.

Yvonne got to matric, but sadly fell pregnant.

"I've always regretted falling pregnant so young. It was unfair to everybody: myself, my mother and my child. You shouldn't have a child if you cannot deal with it," she says.

However, very little money and a baby did not stop Yvonne. She finished matric and made up her mind that she was going to university.

However, Yvonne's search for knowledge and education led her to fame. "I planned go to university, but I could not get a bursary. But I did not give up. I went to the SABC looking for a job to pay for my university fees," she recalls.

While waiting to be auditioned, a young woman told Yvonne of someone who was looking for a singer. Yvonne agreed to go with her. When

she got there Yvonne was asked to give it a try.

"I did not take the audition seriously because I did not want to become a singer. I did not think I could sing."

Well, she was wrong.

When Yvonne heard the song she recorded, 'I'm in love with a DJ', playing on the radio, she could not believe it. Her song became a big hit.

Her mother was, however, not happy about her singing.

"I cut the single and took photos for the album cover in secret. I didn't have the courage to tell her."

“When my mother first heard the song and then the announcement on the radio that I was the singer, she was very angry. She hit me and told me I was dreaming if I thought I could make enough money to live on as a singer."

But Yvonne proved to her mother that she could make it as a singer. In just a few years, she went from being an unemployed single mother to the heart of the nation. And, when she took her music to the rest of Africa, the audiences loved her. She soon became one of the most popular musicians in Africa. People started calling Yvonne the 'Princess of Africa'.

A busy recording programme did not stop the young star from following her dream of studying further.

Last year she got a diploma in Speech and Drama from the Trinity College in London. Yvonne also studied Business Economics and English through Unisa in 1990.

She had to stop her studies

"I did not want to become a singer. I wanted to become a lawyer. And besides, I did not think I could sing." Well, Yvonne, you were wrong



for a while because she gave birth to her third son. But Yvonne is determined her education will not end here.

"Education opens doors for you. It is the basis of all knowledge," she says.

Yvonne would not change her career for a million rand, even though it's been hard to succeed as a woman and as a black person.

"I'm looking forward to April 27, because I see it as the time when blacks will stop being oppressed.

"I don't hate whites, but I think it's sad that they held us back for so many years. South Africa would have been a different place if we were all given equal chances," she adds. "But, at least, with the coming elections we will all be South African, united and equal."

"However, women still have a long way to go till they are free. Women themselves must realise and show men that their place is not in the kitchen. And men must learn that women can do things as well as, or even better, than men."

She feels very strongly about violence against women. This is her message she gave through the Women's National

Coalition: "Too often rape is blamed on the woman or girl who is raped. 'She is wearing a mini-skirt' people say. 'She always looked too sexy. What did she expect?' they'll say. We hear those words too often. Let me tell you, what we wear and how we look has nothing to do with rape. Rape is a crime of violence... it can happen to you, your child, grandmother... or anyone. So, women, let us stand together and fight this violence."


What is her wish for the New Year? "I want people to stop killing each other. We are all the same, there is no reason to fight with one another.

It is also her wish to feel safe on the streets if she wants to take a jog.

"I love jogging, but it's not safe out there. Anyone can just get you and rape you. That is why I say women still have a long way to go before they are free."

What are her plans for the future? "Well, I've just released an album called 'Back on my feet' and there will be more."

She plans to tour more countries in Africa — one place she would really love to visit is Egypt. ✪

A black and white close-up portrait of a woman with voluminous, curly hair. She is looking slightly to the right of the camera with a thoughtful expression. The lighting is dramatic, highlighting the texture of her hair and the contours of her face.

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