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***Ndiphilela Ukucula: I Live To Sing* Spotlights Rising Stars of The University of Cape Town Opera School, Premiering on July 18 at 9 p.m. on THIRTEEN**

New feature-length documentary introduced by Grammy award-winning bass-baritone Eric Owens follows three of the top opera school students through a year in the program

Nearly two decades after the end of apartheid in South Africa, the nation struggles to fulfill the promise of a transformed society. ***Ndiphilela Ukucula: I Live to Sing***, following three gifted African singers studying at the University of Cape Town, is a new feature-length documentary by filmmaker Julie Cohen about the power of art to change perceptions and transform lives.

***Ndiphilela Ukucula: I Live to Sing* airs on Nelson Mandela's 95th birthday, Thursday, July 18 at 9 p.m. on THIRTEEN; Sunday, July 21 at 11 p.m. on WLIW21; and Thursday, July 25 at 9 p.m. on NJTV.**

At the University of Cape Town's once all-white opera school, both the struggle and promise are embodied in an enormously talented group of classical singers from the nation's black townships. After the end of apartheid, the school opened its doors to black students, many of whom had learned opera in competitive community choirs in the townships, others there inspired by television advertisements. The wave of gifted singers who came to audition awed faculty members. The school, now comprised of two-thirds blacks and mixed race students, is achieving greater success than ever propelling students to world opera stages including The Metropolitan Opera in New York and La Scala in Milan.

Three rising stars of the opera school — Linda, a beautiful, shy soprano with a powerful voice; Makudupanyane, a Pavarotti-loving tenor; and Thesele, a bass baritone whose discipline and ambition matches his extraordinary talent — are seen as they prepare to perform in Cape Town's main opera hall, once a flash point in the anti-apartheid struggle.

The filmmakers travel with the students from their home townships, where they have faced financial hardship and in some cases health struggles, to Cape Town where they study. During a year in the program, the students prepare for their performance of *The Tales of Hoffmann*; travel to New York where they spend a summer as apprentices at the prestigious Glimmerglass Festival, working with some of the best American opera performers and directors in the business; and visit Robben Island, the prison where Nelson Mandela was held for decades, on a school trip that has a profound effect on the students.

The documentary includes interviews with Thesele's parents, who worry about their son's chosen profession; some of the white students at the opera school who offer their reactions to being part of the opera scene in the 'new South Africa'; and the teachers and mentors guiding the students during their opera studies, including the current director of the opera school American Kamal Khan, who previously served as James Levine's assistant conductor at The Metropolitan Opera.

Also featured is South African soprano Pretty Yende, a recent graduate of the University of Cape Town Opera School, who made her debut at The Metropolitan Opera in January 2013. The program is introduced by American bass-baritone Eric Owens, winner of two Grammy Awards, who starred in The Metropolitan Opera's critically acclaimed production of *Das Rheingold*.

Julie Cohen is a veteran television news and documentary director and producer. She has directed, produced, and written seven documentaries for WNET and other PBS affiliates, including two which won New York Emmy Awards in 2012 for Best Arts Program and Best Historical Program.

Ndiphilela Ukucula: I Live to Sing is a co-production of BetterThanFiction Productions and United Nations Television. Julie Cohen is director and producer; Alex Lowther and Martha Yuan Tao are editors; Mary Lockhart is executive producer; Neal Shapiro is executive-in-charge.

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About WNET

In 2013, WNET is celebrating the 50th Anniversary of THIRTEEN, New York's flagship public media provider. As the parent company of [THIRTEEN](#) and [WLIW21](#) and operator of [NJTV](#), WNET brings quality arts, education and public affairs programming to over 5 million viewers each week. WNET produces and presents such acclaimed PBS series as [Nature](#), [Great Performances](#), [American Masters](#), [Need to Know](#), [Charlie Rose](#) and a range of documentaries, children's programs, and local news and cultural offerings available on air and online. Pioneers in educational programming, WNET has created such groundbreaking series as [Get the Math](#), [Oh Noah!](#) and [Cyberchase](#) and provides tools for educators that bring compelling content to life in the classroom and at home. WNET highlights the tri-state's unique culture and diverse communities through [NYC-ARTS](#), [Reel 13](#), [NJ Today](#) and [MetroFocus](#), the multi-platform news magazine focusing on the New York region. WNET is also a leader in connecting with viewers on emerging platforms, including the [THIRTEEN Explore iPad App](#) where users can stream PBS content for free.