

# **The Robben Island Singers Factsheet**

For media inquiries about The Robben Island Singers, please contact Jennifer Spitz:

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## **Fast Facts**

- This uplifting South African trio were once incarcerated on Robben Island Prison with Nelson Mandela because they had the courage to fight Apartheid
- They have toured at over a dozen Chicago-area schools, using the songs and stories of their struggle to inspire youth
- Their message is the importance of standing up for what you believe in, the universality of struggle, and the importance of forgiveness to achieve peace
- Their names are Thembinkosi Sithole, Grant Shezi, and Muntu Nxumalo
- Chicago award-winning documentary filmmaker Jeff Spitz is now creating a film about the journey that brought them together and across the world to Chicago

## **Key Biographical Information**

### ***Thembinkosi Sithole, Robben Island Singer***

- Born 1956 in Durban, South Africa
- Joined the banned ANC's underground movement in 1975
- Arrested in 1977, charged with attempting to leave South Africa illegally, and sentenced to 9 years at Robben Island Prison as prisoner # 15/3271
- Released from Robben Island Prison in 1986

### ***Grant Shezi, Robben Island Singer***

- Born 1956 in Durban, South Africa
- Joined the banned ANC's military wing, Umkhonto weSizwe ("MK") in 1977
- Arrested in 1980, charged with treason, and sentenced to 15 years at Robben Island Prison as prisoner # 20/9420
- Released from Robben Island Prison in 1990

***Muntu Nxumalo, Robben Island Singer***

- Born 1957 in Durban, South Africa
- Joined the banned ANC's military wing, Umkhonto weSizwe ("MK") in 1977
- Arrested in 1978, charged with treason and attempted murder, and sentenced to 22 years at Robben Island Prison as prisoner # 18/1898
- Released from Robben Island Prison in 1991

***Jeff Spitz, documentary filmmaker***

- Born in Hollywood, CA
- Now lives in Chicago, IL
- Previous work includes Sundance Film Festival Official Selection The Return of Navajo Boy (2000)
- First heard the voices of the ex-political prisoners singing on a CD called "Prison Songs Cell Stories" which he purchased in the gift shop of the Robben Island Museum as a tourist in May 2001 (Spitz was in South Africa to present The Return of Navajo Boy at the INPUT 2001 Public Television Conference)
- Inspired by the music, Spitz went looking for the stories of the three singers

***Mickey Madoda Dube, South African Contributing Director***

- Born in Johannesburg, South Africa
- Lives in Johannesburg, South Africa
- Previous work includes Movements in Black, a documentary on South African Black ArtExperiment, a half-hour documentary for ABC-TV

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