



Zimbabwe's Chiwoniso Reflects on Freedom, Equality and Love with Her Powerful New Album

Cumbancha to release *Rebel Woman* worldwide this September

US/Canada Release Date: September 2, 2008

Europe and ROW Release Date: September 29, 2008

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JUNE 2008 - "I am like a mirror," declares Zimbabwe's popular music star **Chiwoniso Maraire**. "I basically sing about what I see happening in the world. If someone comes up to me in the street to ask for money I'll sing about that. If people are jumping borders because their economic situation is too difficult, I'll sing about that. If the police are beating people up and intimidating them, I'll sing about that."

In recent months, Zimbabwe's political and economic turmoil has thrust the turbulent African nation into international headlines. Based in the capital city of Harare, Chiwoniso lives in the eye of the storm, observing firsthand as her beloved homeland struggles to overcome the enduring legacies of colonialism, war, social inequality and political oppression. A devoted advocate of free speech, human rights and social justice, Chiwoniso's music gives voice to the voiceless and speaks to the problems and joys of the world around her.

On ***Rebel Woman***, Chiwoniso's first internationally released album in over ten years, her soulful and deeply personal songs offer messages of hope, inspiration and resistance, serving notice that this gifted singer and songwriter merits recognition as one of Africa's greatest young talents.

While Chiwoniso's musical influences range from soul and R&B to reggae and rock, the entrancing sounds of the *mbira* serve as a central underpinning for the songs on *Rebel Woman*. Originating in the ancient Shona civilization of southern Africa, the *mbira* is a musical instrument made of metal tines attached to a wooden board. The player plucks the tines with their thumbs to create captivating interlocking melodies, which have accompanied ceremonies and celebrations for countless generations. While variations of the *mbira* exist across Africa, it is an essential element of Zimbabwean music tradition and carries deep historical, cultural and spiritual symbolism.

Chiwoniso has spent the last three years working with producer **Keith Farquharson** on *Rebel Woman*. Recorded in Zimbabwe, South Africa, England and Vermont (where Cumbancha and its partner company Charles Eller Studios are based), the album features some of Southern Africa's most respected musicians and an intriguing collection of guests.

The album opens with the raw electric guitar riffs of "Vanorapa", a song about the healing power of the elders whose lyrical theme is matched by a deep groove. Chiwoniso believes firmly in the power of traditional Shona spirituality and the ability of the elders to heal people even after they have died and entered the realm of the spirits. "Sometimes a person can die because there may be issues in their life when they were alive that weren't taken care of and that's when you have spirits roaming that need to be healed," she points out. "Vanorapa" is based on a song her late father, musician and Ethnomusicologist Dumisani Maraire, often performed, adding to its emotional depth.

The album's title track, "Rebel Woman," takes inspiration from a poem about the role of women in Zimbabwe's war for independence. "The song is about the physical conditions of fighting, and the price people pay," she explains, but it is also a tribute to strong women who suffer because they do not follow the restrictions society tries to place on them. "The truth is that when you're a strong woman you might lose our husband, your home, because the way the systems are structured you're not allowed to be strong as a woman, unless you follow the rules. This is a song about changing those rules."

The song serves as a moving epilogue to a masterful album and confirms that Chiwoniso will continue to speak out on issues important to her, regardless of the consequences. Recognizing that artists play a special role in society, she believes they must not be afraid to speak out against injustice. "We have a responsibility. We are not bankers, we are not doctors, we are not nurses. We have another part that we play in society that must be done. So, regardless of whatever world system is going to come in and say: 'Cut what you are saying', going to send riot cops in to your shows, going to come and arrest you and say 'We are going to try and put you in jail...' - it doesn't matter. We have a responsibility."