

Impact Statement

Jason Peay, Grade 11

Malaika's Melody, 2025

Acrylic on canvas, 18 x 24 inches

Spring Valley High School, Columbia, SC

Unsung Hero: Miriam Makeba

The Unsung Hero I selected is the South African singer, Miriam Makeba. I chose her because there is something so alluring about the way she embodies the rich African culture. I admire her commitment to justice and the way she uses her talent not only as a singer but as an activist. As a creative individual, I deeply appreciate her ability to blend artistry with activism, creating a powerful platform for change. It is inspiring to me as a young artist to use my gift for something greater.

Miriam Makeba, often referred to as "Mama Africa" was born in Johannesburg, South Africa in 1932. She grew up facing the apartheid which is racial segregation. This deeply influenced her music. Her career took off in the 50s and she became internationally famous. But she was exiled from South Africa due to her speaking against the apartheid through her music. Although separation from her roots was rough for her, she took this as opportunity to raise awareness of the apartheid internationally. Makeba's activism inspired anti-apartheid efforts. The apartheid ended in the 90s and she returned to South Africa. She will always be remembered for her impact beyond her music.

My vision for this painting was to depict Makeba bringing about a brighter future through her music. I wanted to create a piece that was loud but also quiet at the same time. The faded bright colors in the background complemented by flowing musical notes, represent the profound yet soothing impact of her legacy. The painting is more symbolic rather than literal. Through artistic elements, I aimed to really bring out the beauty of her legacy. I think Miriam was like an angel. Her song named, Malaika, which means angel in Swahili, gave me the idea for the name of this piece which is "Malaika's Melody" an angel's melody. My painting style doesn't focus on too much detail but is enough to get the aesthetic point across. I paint very loosely for the look of authenticity so you can really see most of the strokes of the brush. I purposely did this because I think it gives this painting an extra boost on the aesthetic.

Miriam's heroism inspires me to fight against the injustices with the talents that I am gifted with. Her story remains a call to action for anyone seeking to create change through creativity. With this competition I hope to spread her story to other young people across the nation and inspire others to keep moving forward with your plans despite the obstacles. After I finished this piece, I was inspired to be more innovative

and self-expressive. I was able to deeply connect with Miriam because of her resistance to falling to a negative society. I really plan to move forward with a more open-minded approach to anything. Makeba's life is a reminder to embrace challenges and turn them into something meaningful. I am a young and upcoming artist with a spark. Her story came to me at the perfect time. It rekindled my drive to bring about positive change through representation and the celebration of people of color in my art.