



Brenda Fassie, the African Queen of Pop

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On 3 November, 1964, in Langa Township, Cape Town, a brilliant singer was born. Her name was Brenda Nokuzola Fassie.

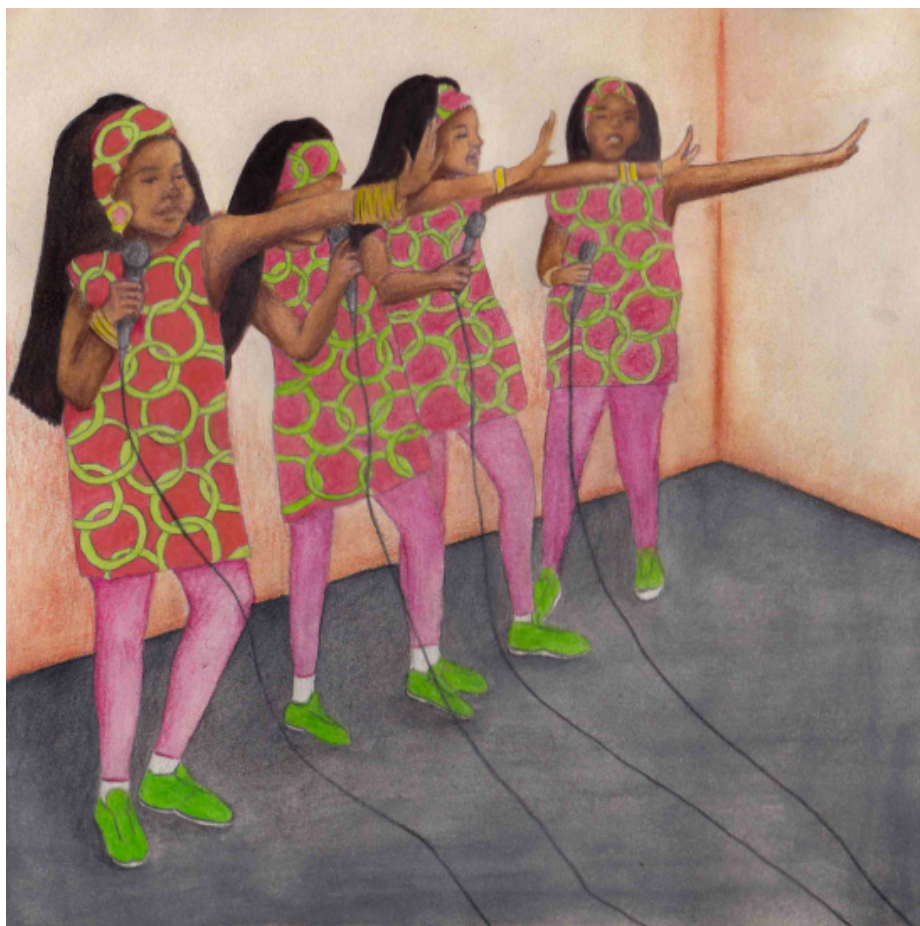
She was nicknamed 'MaBrrr' by millions of her fans.

Her family was poor. Her mom was a cleaner and her dad died when she was only two years old.



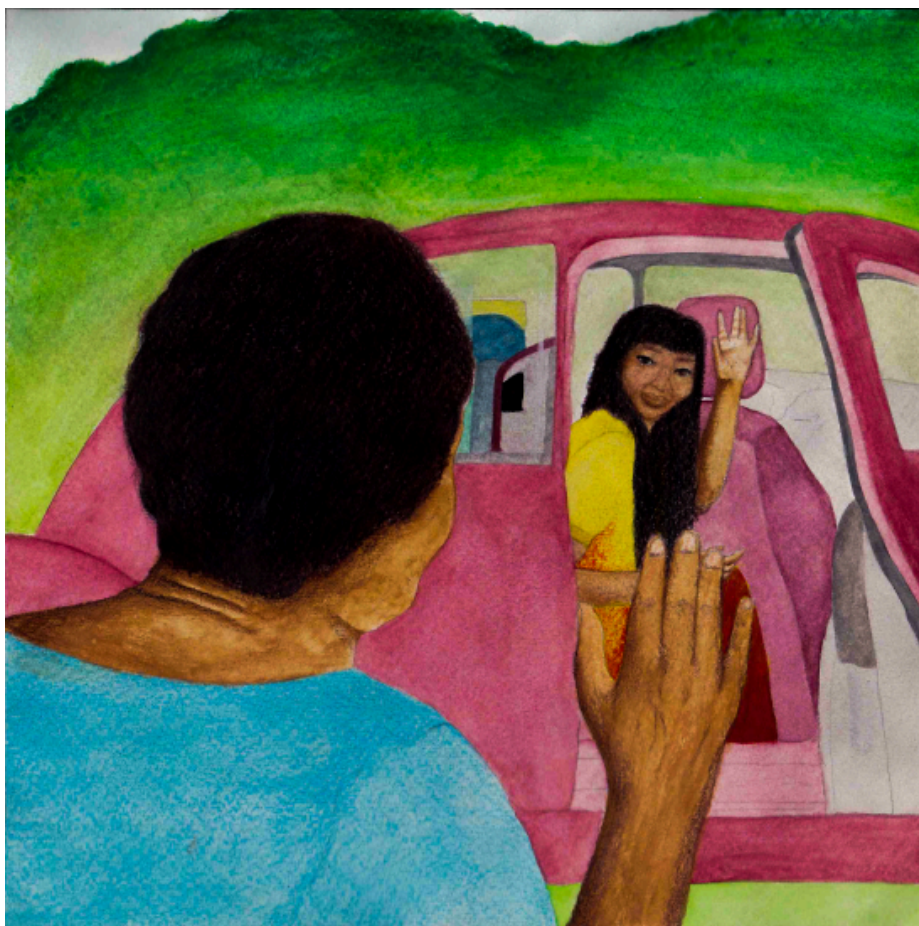
Brenda was the last born of nine children. Her mom thought that she was expecting a boy. When Brenda was born, she had to think of a girl's name quickly.

As a musician herself, Brenda's mom decided to name her baby after an American singer called Brenda Lee.



By the age of four, Brenda was performing at church events. Her mom played the piano and Brenda sang.

By age six, Brenda was already in a band, named 'Tiny Tots', singing and getting paid by tourists.



When she was a teenager, musicians in Cape Town started to rave about Brenda.

Famous music producer, Kolozi Lebona came to visit her. He was very impressed by her great voice.

Brenda then moved to Johannesburg and soon formed the group, 'Brenda and the Big Dudes'.



The group released the fastest selling single in South Africa, 'Weekend Special'.

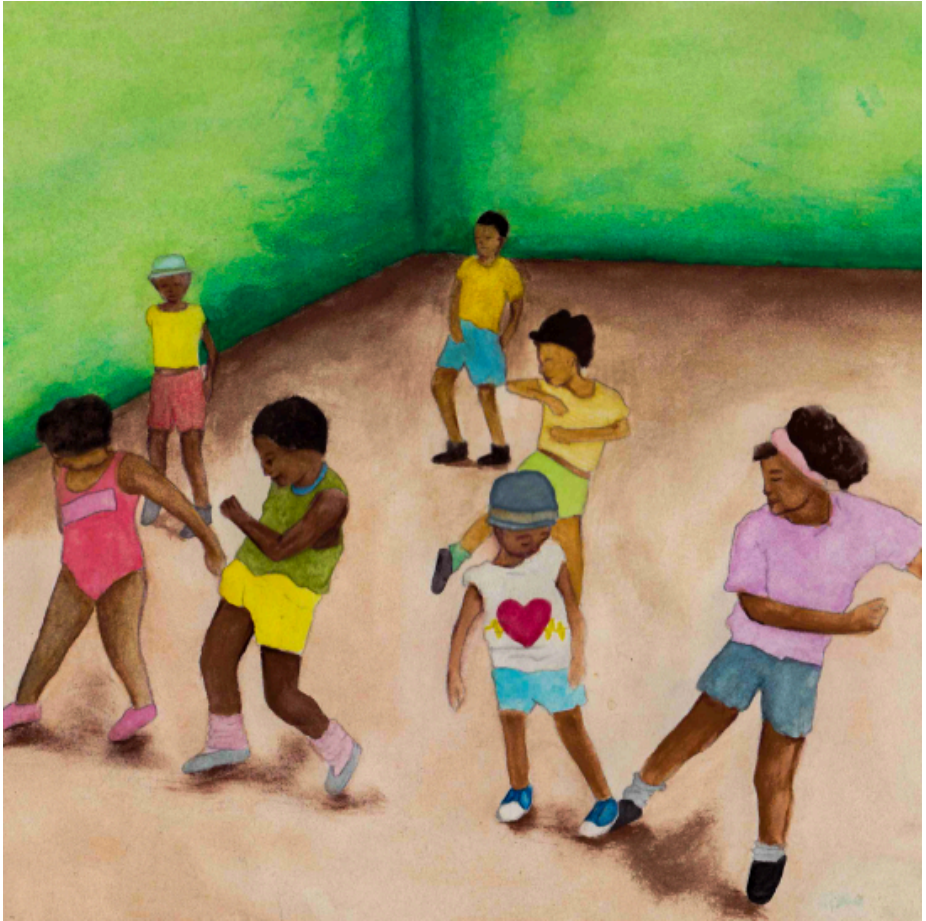
Fans all over the world, black and white, young, and old, were seen dancing to the song.

The song was enjoyed by many people, especially from Fridays to Sundays!



In 1998, Brenda partnered with music producer, Chicco Twala. They produced records that sold many thousands of copies and were platinum hits. 'Too late for Mama,' 'Memeza', and 'Nomakanjani' were some of these best-selling hits.

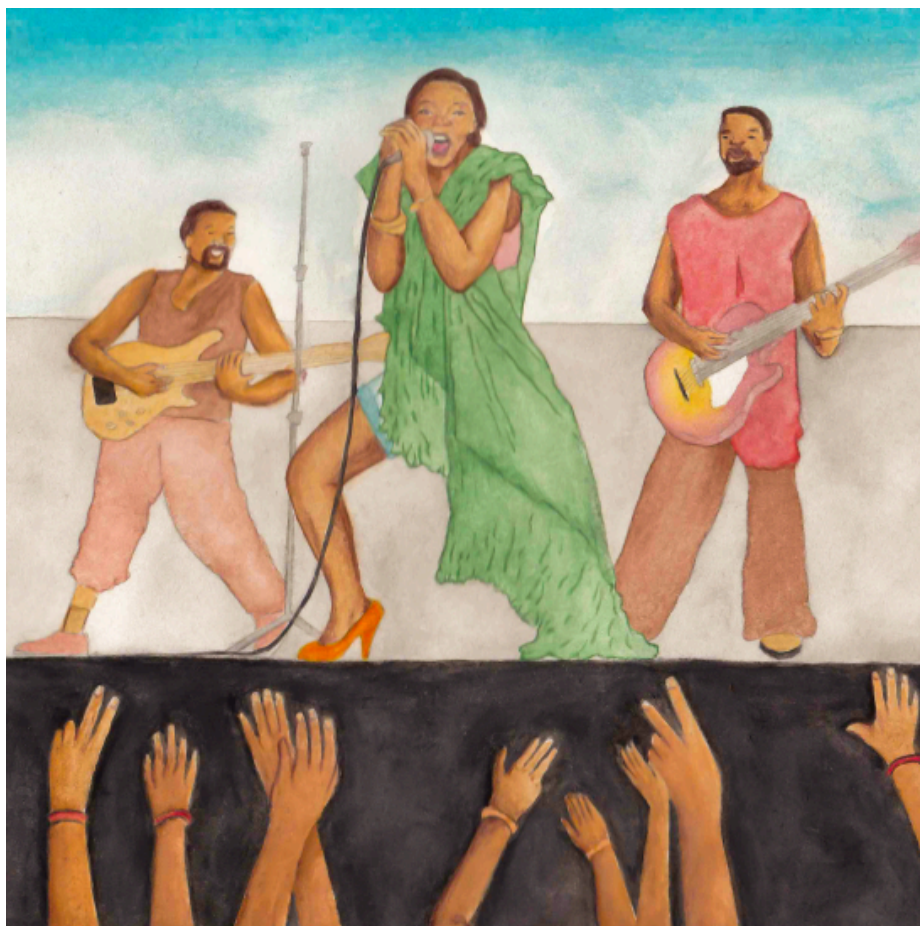
This success was followed by music awards in South Africa and internationally. Ma Brr was now famous around the world!



In South Africa, Brenda was so famous that there would not be any celebration without at least one of her songs.

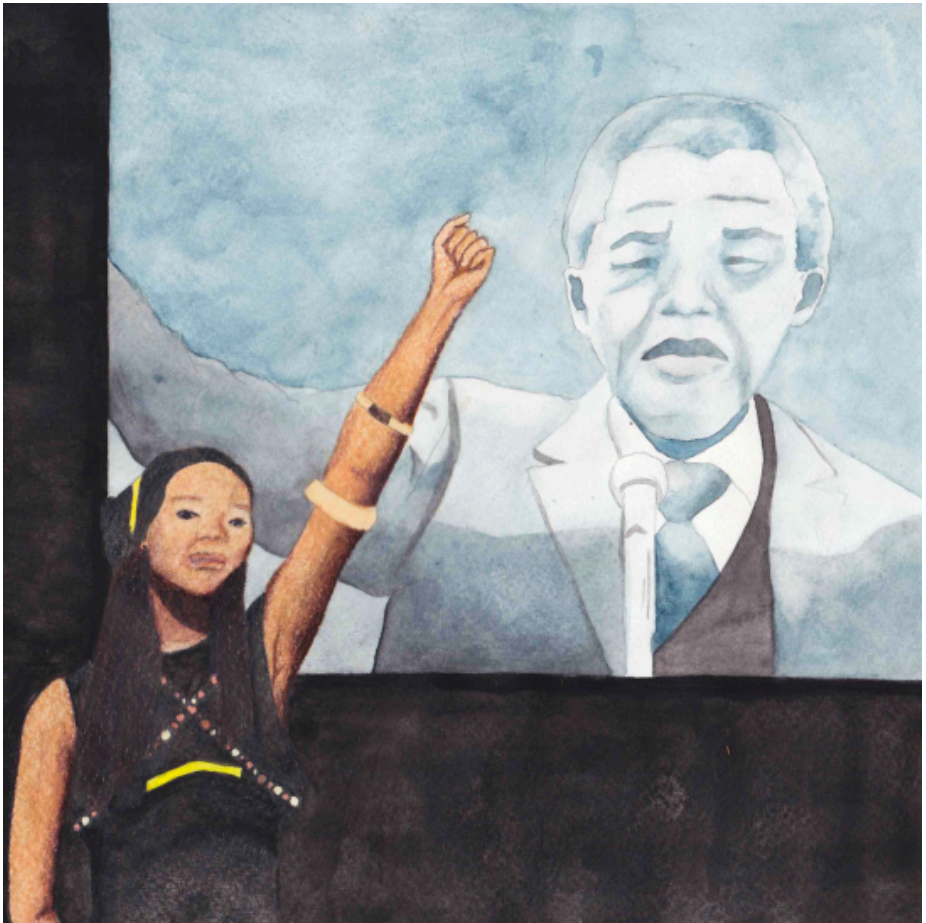
‘Vulindlela’, was particularly a hit during weddings.

‘Ag shame lovey’, was mostly loved by kids who would be seen imitating her dance moves and facial expressions!



Brenda's fans chanted her name at concerts while they waited for her to appear on stage.

Fans would sing and cry at the same time when she performed. Hearing her voice made them try to push through security with the wish of just touching her!



In 1990, MaBrrr honoured Nelson Mandela, with the hit song 'Black President'.

He was still in prison and the song was later banned by the apartheid government.

This made her decide to only sing in isiZulu, isiXhosa and seSotho. People loved her even more for this.



Although Brenda achieved her dream of becoming a pop star, she died young, at the age of 39, on 9 May, 2004.

It was a very sad day in South Africa. People were shocked by the news of her death. Many mourned the loss of this icon.

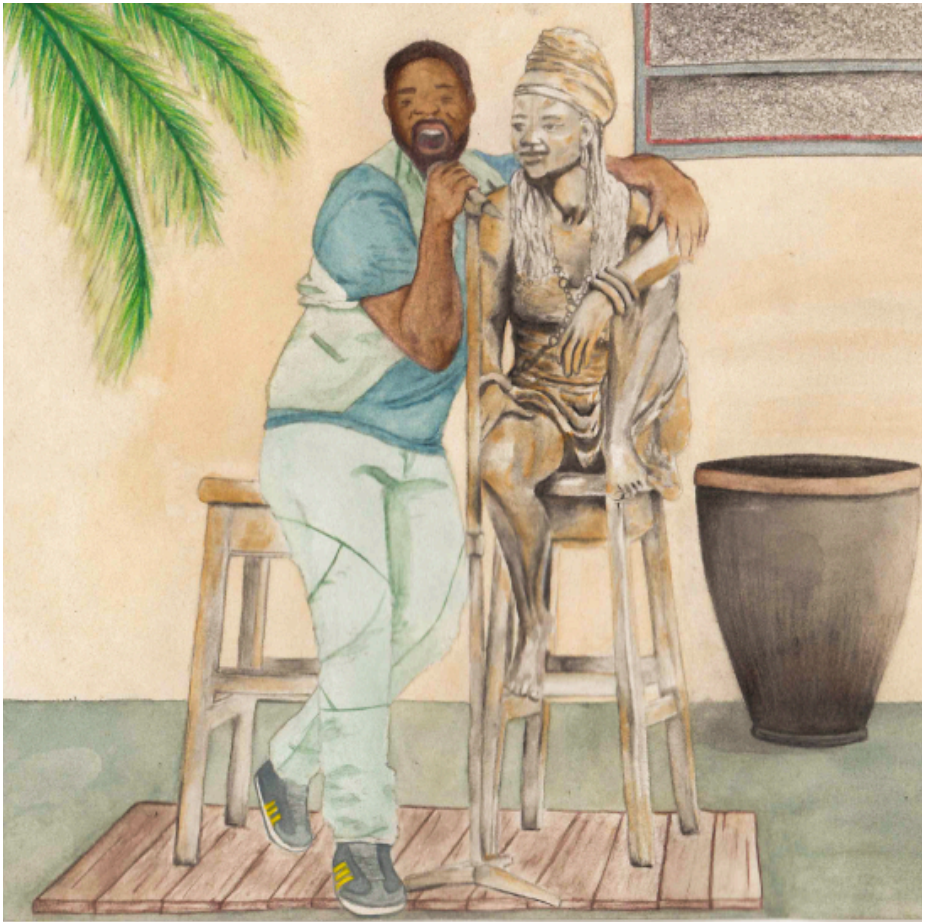
She left behind her son, Bongani.



After her death, large crowds of fans rushed to buy her music.

The fans believed that her records would not be available anymore.

It is believed the company sold thousands and thousands of copies of her albums.



In Newtown, Johannesburg, there is a bronze statue of Brenda. It was created to honour her.

Next to the statue is a stool for people to sit on, to spend time with the Queen of African Pop.



Brenda was a musical genius who is not likely to be forgotten.

She is one of South Africa's greatest pop stars and influenced many musicians.

Now, new generations are discovering the songs that made everyone want to dance.

—Questions

1. Where was Brenda born?
2. Why do you think they named the group, 'Tiny Tots'?
3. How did Brenda's music make her fans feel? Explain your answer.
4. What was the apartheid government? Find out more.
5. Draw and label your favourite part of the story.
6. Compose a three-stanza poem in honour of Brenda.
7. Which other African musicians have you heard of?
8. Explain any five uses of music.

—This storybook was created and written in Sepedi, as part of the Zenex Ulwazi Lwethu reading materials project in 2021.



Ulwazi Lwethu is a Zenex Foundation funded and initiated project to develop a series of graded and leisure African language readers and teacher support materials. This project is targeted at teaching and supporting learners in the Foundation Phase to improve their home language reading and understanding. The readers have been originated in nine African languages in collaboration with Molteno Institute for Language and Literacies, Nelson Mandela Institute for Education and Rural Development, Room to Read South Africa, and Saide. All resources are developed as Open Education Resources (OER).

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