

# 'JERUSALEMA' HIT-MAKER SAYS AFRICA NOW HITTING ITS STRIDE

"Now is the time for Africa to shine, to present our culture to the world." Master KG, the South African DJ-producer behind global hit "Jerusalem", sees bright prospects for Afro-pop. Even at 25, he knows what he is talking about. He made the whole planet dance with a song in a Zulu dialect which he composed while his compatriot Nomcebo Zikode laid down the yearning lyrics, a plea for unity and the coming of the New Jerusalem. The day AFP met Master KG in Paris on one of his trips to Europe, the musician is wearing a yellow-and-blue jacket emblazoned with the words "Wake up Afrika".

"We're just getting started. We're getting on the right path ... with Afro-beat and Afro-pop, we will hear more and more African artists around the planet—there is room for everyone," enthuses the young man, still a little shy, his bespectacled face tucked inside his hoodie. Indeed, the term "Afro-pop" often comes up in the mouths of prominent DJs such as America's Diplo, the powerhouse of the Major Lazer electronic-dancehall hit machine. Artists like Burna Boy from Nigeria or Fally Ipupa from the Democratic Republic of Congo are building reputations far beyond Africa. Master KG, whose real name is

Kgaogelo Moagi, has been ranked by Forbes Africa as being among the 30 most influential personalities aged under 30 on the continent. And he has just released a new track, "Shine Your Light," with two star DJs, the Frenchman David Guetta and the Senegalese-American Akon (on the Elektra/Warner label).

## Life-changer

"Yes, 'Jerusalem' changed my life," Master KG told AFP. "I am here in Paris talking to you! I would not travel the world like I am now without this song." The hit has racked up more than 210 million plays on Spotify and more than 415 million views on Youtube. Stars like Cristiano Ronaldo and Janet Jackson have praised him on social networks. "When I look at the statistics, the numbers, it always surprises me, no one could have predicted this," he comments. For eight weeks towards the end of 2020, "Jerusalem" was the most frequently searched track on Shazam, a software program that identifies a song that is playing.

The success story is well known. Released at the end of 2019, the single got a new lease of life when it went viral on TikTok, garnering seven billion hits. The choreographic dance challenge in the



Master KG (right), the South African DJ behind the global pop hit 'Jerusalem', performs at the Sand Festival held on the beaches of Lake Malawi, in Salima on November 1, 2020. — AFP

video then spread across networks, from nursing assistants in France to monks in Italy. "I would never have thought that the police would be able to dance to my music," laughs the musician, who shows no signs of developing a big head, despite the luxury cars exhibited on his social network channels.

"I already had success before

'Jerusalem', unrelated of course, but then everything becomes more comfortable. The song is gonna generate income for the rest of my life," he said frankly.

## 'Village kid'

In South Africa, Master KG has bought a house for his mother and built one for his grandmother. And life has also

changed for his chosen singer, Nomcebo Zikode. When he contacted her to lend her voice to "Jerusalem", she was thinking of giving up music. Instead, she has just released an album. Master KG also has a recording studio near Johannesburg, which is an unexpected success for one who describes himself as a "village kid", born in Calais, a small town in the northeast of South Africa. He is amazed when he is told that a French town has the same name.

Master KG lived with his mother, a hotel employee (his father is a teacher), and got into music when an uncle gave him his first computer in 2013. He has already released two albums, which he considers more like a cluster of singles. The third, which he hopes to present at the end of 2021, will be more "constructed, prepared". "For the title of the album, the fans must help me, help me find a title, it will be an album from South Africa to the world, rich in the encounters I have had," he says. When told that he risks receiving a colossal number of proposals, he laughs. "There's bound to be one that will stick". — AFP



People exercise at a gym in Seoul, as South Korea announced implementation of level 4 social distancing measures amid concerns of a fourth wave of the coronavirus pandemic. — AFP

## No Psy but BTS play on as Seoul bans fast gym music

South Korean mega-hit "Gangnam Style" may be taken off gym playlists in the greater Seoul region—but K-pop giants BTS can stay under new rules aimed at stemming a rising tide of coronavirus infections. The regulations, aimed at stopping gym-goers breathing too hard or splashing sweat on others, ban gyms from playing music with a faster tempo than 120 beats per minute during group exercises like zumba and spinning. They come as tighter social distancing rules—such as smaller gatherings and shorter store hours—begin to bite this week.

The musical diktat has prompted ridicule and fury, and a list of "safe" K-pop songs is circulating online, which includes the latest hits from BTS including "Dynamite" (114 bpm) and "Butter" (110 bpm). But Psy's "Gangnam Style", at 132 bpm, will have to stay off the workout playlist for now. South Korean infection rates remain low by global standards at little more than 1,000 a day, but are at their highest of the pandemic, with new records

set on three consecutive days recently. That has alarmed authorities in a country where the vaccine rollout has been slow and convoluted, hampered by a failure to obtain supplies.

And while the restriction allows businesses to remain open, gym owners and users alike poured scorn on the measure. "Now I have to worry about the bpm of the song I'm playing," wrote a user in an online club of gym owners. "I guess the virus spreads faster depending on the tempo of the music," another added. And 35-year-old gym-goer Kim Hyun-joon questioned the rule's effectiveness. "I'm grateful that I can still work out at a gym," he said, adding: "Wouldn't most people listen to their own music on their airpods anyways?" The new rules also put a maximum 6 kilometers an hour (3.7 mph) speed limit on treadmills. "Are we going to get speeding tickets?" wrote an online user.

Another user added: "Maybe they'll start placing limits on how fast we walk or run outside." South Korea had previously been held up as a model of how to combat the pandemic, with the public largely following social distancing and other rules, but adherence has waned over time. The country reported 1,100 new infections yesterday, most of them in the capital and its surrounding areas, which are home to around half the South Korean population. The resurgence prompted President Moon Jae-in to apologize to the public on Monday for the tightened rules. — AFP

## Injured baby elephant abandoned by rogue Chinese herd saved

A heavily injured baby elephant left behind by a migrating wild herd in southwest China has been rescued, state media reported yesterday, the latest twist in a chaotic odyssey. The herd of Asian elephants has spent months roaming across Yunnan province, traveling more than 500 kilometers (310 miles) from their home nature reserve in one of the longest ever animal migrations of its kind in China. Since setting off last year, the meandering mammals have stolen villagers' food and trampled crops worth over \$1 million, with thousands of residents evacuated from their path.

Locals sighted the baby elephant—weighing 180 kilograms and born on the lumbering trek—alone on a tea plantation Saturday morning, struggling with an infected injury on its leg. The elephant's wound could have been life-threatening if authorities hadn't arrived and given treatment, state broadcaster CCTV reported. "We gave it anti-bacterial and anti-inflammatory drugs, because its wound still

looks pretty bad," Bao Mingwei, director of the Asian Elephant Breeding and Rescue Center, told CCTV, adding that with a longer period of care it should be able to fully recover. "It's possible that something like rattan spines pricked it and the injuries slowly became infected."

State media footage showed around a dozen rescuers and police surrounding the animal in a rainforest clearing, as they tied its thrashing limbs with rope and loaded it into a van. The elephant was then driven 100 kilometers to a rescue center. Last week, a 10-year-old male elephant who broke away from the herd a month ago was captured and returned to



This handout photo shows a part of a herd elephants which had wandered 500 kilometers north from their natural habitat, walking near Yuxi city in China's southwest Yunnan province. — AFP

## Star says Hollywood must move beyond tokenism for black people

Hollywood star Jodie Turner-Smith said the film industry must go beyond having token black faces on screen and have people of color at every level of the business. The British actress—who played Henry VIII's wife Anne Boleyn in a new television series of the same name—said she had been struck by how few people of color work behind the scenes.

Hollywood should stop trying to tell black people's stories without hiring people of color, she told a "Women in Motion" talk at the Cannes film festival—where her latest sci-fi movie "After Yang" was premiered. "You have to hire producers who understand what kinds of stories we're trying to tell and how to honor those stories so that you don't end up with things that feel like tokenism or strange stereotyping," the "Queen & Slim" star said. "So many times, it's like (producers say), 'We are going to tell a story that involves black people', but there are no black people in the writers' room, and there are no women in the writers' room." She said that some basics were also sometimes lacking.



British actress Jodie Turner-Smith poses during a photocall for the film iAfter Yangi as part of the Un Certain Regard selection at the 74th edition of the Cannes Film Festival, southern France. — AFP

## 'Hire people who know'

"When you make casting choices and you hire actors of color in something, you have to hire people who know how to do their make-up, who know how to do their hair, who know how to light them properly," she said. Turner-Smith, 34, who is making "White Noise" at the moment with "Marriage Story" director Noah Baumbach, said film and television had a way to catch up on theatre in the way they used black actors. She won plaudits for playing the fated English queen Anne Boleyn, who was white, in the series for Britain's Channel 5. "I definitely anticipated that there were going to be people that felt a certain way about it," she said.

"We've seen for years and years that in theatre characters being played by people of all different ethnicities, but in TV or film it's something we see much less." The actress fell victim to cat burglars while at Cannes, with police investigating a theft of jewelry from her hotel room. Turner-Smith wore eye-catching gold and diamond jewelry loaned by Gucci to the red carpet premiere of "After Yang" on Thursday. It is unclear if the missing jewelry was Gucci's or the actress's own. Her mother's wedding ring is reported to among the haul. "I didn't think I would be spending 2.5 hours in the police station on my final day in Cannes, but here we are," the actress tweeted late Sunday. — AFP



US rapper Freddie Gibbs smiles as he arrives for the screening of the film "Tre Piani" (Three Floors) at the 74th edition of the Cannes Film Festival in Cannes, southern France. — AFP

## 'Only good rapper in Cannes': Freddie Gibbs makes movie debut

Grammy-nominated hip hop artist Freddie Gibbs has made his movie debut at the Cannes film festival playing a rapper who finds more meaning in country living than in music fame. "Down with the King" stars the 39-year-old American as "Money Merc", a rapper who goes to rural Massachusetts to produce a new album, but instead befriends a local farmer who teaches him how to skin pigs and herd cattle. Written and directed by Frenchman Diego Ongaro, the film and its improbable plot allowed Gibbs to avoid the cliché rags-to-riches role of an urban rapper who makes it big.

"I didn't want to do that shit, because people typecast you," Gibbs told AFP in an interview. "I never wanted to play a rapper in a movie, but this was far more significant than just a rapper movie." Gibbs and his character are alike in many ways, he said, but "Money Merc is an emotional kind of guy. He kind of wears it on his sleeve a little bit more than I do," he said. Director Ongaro, who lives in western Massachusetts, told AFP that "I wanted to make a film with an outsider coming to this place. And I thought it could be a rapper, if possible a real one." Gibbs accepted the role although he acknowledged that rappers and the countryside "don't match at all" and that he wasn't sure the plot would work, but Ongaro "made it happen", he said.

## He doesn't do modesty

"I was doing the thing on the farm and I went, 'OK this shit is real.' And as we went along it just became more real," Gibbs said. "Diego laid this shit out on a platter for me, and all I had to do was bring some rap elements to this character." The film's music is by Gibbs, most improvised during shooting over soul-inspired samples and loops. Gibbs said rapping had always helped him deal with a checkered past—which includes brushes with the law for theft and drug offences—and "Down with the King" turned out to be yet another outlet. "This film was definitely therapeutic for me."

Director Ongaro agreed. "He brought things from his own experience to the table, his upbringing, his past as a dealer, and that all strengthens the authenticity." Next the rapper, who is releasing a new album in the autumn ("probably my best"), plans to play a gangster in a television show. "I can slide into that role kind of easily," he laughed. But he could also see himself as a banker, "or a cop or a lawyer. I can do it all." In the meantime Gibbs said he was not only "the freshest motherfucker on the red carpet" at Cannes, but also the leading rapper in town. "I'm the only good rapper in Cannes. If there's a rapper here he ain't as good as me," he said. "Down with the King" premiered at the festival's ACID sidebar event. — AFP

## Sumatran elephant found beheaded in Indonesia

A critically endangered Sumatran elephant has been found decapitated with its tusks missing in Indonesia, the conservation agency said Monday, as it opened a poaching investigation. The rotting carcass was discovered Sunday at a palm oil plantation in Sumatra's Aceh region and a subsequent autopsy found that the animal had also been poisoned. "The remains of the wild elephant were found in a tragic condition with its head gone," said Rosa Rika Wahyuni, a doctor at the Aceh conservation agency. "We found poison in its digestive system," she added.

It was not clear how long the male elephant, estimated to be about 12 years old, had been dead. Rampant deforestation has reduced the elephants' natural habitat and brought them into increasing conflict with humans, while their tusks are prized in the illegal wildlife trade. There have been several elephant poisoning cases in recent years, including one in 2019 when a Sumatran elephant was found decapitated with its tusks ripped off. — AFP