

**J**oe Mafela, otherwise known as 'S'dumo' or 'Jabu' in his roles of the television programmes 'S'gudi S'nice' and 'Going Up', is a 51-year-old actor born in Venda, Sibasa. "When I was a boy my family moved to Sophiatown and later to Kliptown," said Mafela. It was while growing up in Kliptown that Mafela's love for acting began: "I started going to the movies at the age of three. I used to imitate everything I used to see in the movies."

Mafela says he believes: "even though talent is something you are born with, a gift from God, you have to work on it."

He is the eldest of four brothers and four sisters. Mafela never let go of his dream of becoming an actor.

"I used to have my own Penny Whistle band. We used to sing, tap dance and perform for our parents whenever we had a family day at school," remembers Mafela.

Straight after high school, in 1959 he went to Dorkay House. This was where all the black actors were based and where the drama school was.

"I was there when they began auditions for the King Kong musical, but I did not get a part because I was still very young and inexperienced.

"I was part of a small singing group. Our heroes were a group of American singers, the Manhattan Brothers. This was when I started gaining experience and getting some direction in my career," adds Mafela.

In 1960 he decided to go for speech and drama lessons.

"I went to classes for an

# S'dumo speaks about Joe Mafela

**Going Up! That is the way Joe Mafela's life and career has gone since the time he was a child imitating the stars of movies he used to watch over and over again. He tells *Rosalee Telela* about the road that led him to where he is today**



**"Today young people are lucky because opportunities are open for them," says Mafela**

hour every night — for three years.”

Mafela did his very first play in 1963. “This was my first break. The play was about news and I played the role of the editor,” Mafela remembers.

“After that, I did a traditional dance show called ‘Mzumba’, which I co-produced with the late Solomon Mda,” he adds.

Mafela believes actors are in the entertainment business not because they want to get rich but because they love

time when we could not perform to white audiences. You had to apply for a permit to do that. This actually killed the spirits of many of our artists. Very few continued after that law came out. It was when people like Gibson Kente

**“I never gave up my dream of becoming an actor.”**

turned to township theatre.”

Mafela did not follow the example of other actors who gave up. He believes “when acting is in your blood, you forget everything else.”

In the entertainment industry itself, the relationships between the different races were neither good or bad. “In that world you have to work together. One did not feel racism, particularly when we were working on movies with international actors. Of course, being black, we were always paid less than the whites,” said Mafela.

**A**t that time, there were very few black female actors. “We had a lot of women singers and dancers. It was, however, difficult for women in show-business. Many people called them ‘cheap women’,” Mafela says.

While Mafela was ‘going up’ in the world of show-business, he spent very little time with his wife and his three children: “It is hard being a father and an actor at the same time. My wife refused to work saying that if she did, the children would have nobody to look after them.”

He added “today young people who want to act are very lucky because opportunities are open for them, and parents know a career can be made out of showbusiness.

“In our days we were not allowed to take speech and drama in any university and we were not allowed to go to a film school. We had to teach ourselves.” ❄

what they do:

“even today, actors are not doing it for money, otherwise we would be having rich actors, which we don’t.”

**B**ut money was a problem: “there was a time when I used to get R35 a week. This was after my big break when I was already quite involved in the business.”

Mafela’s career began at a time when apartheid laws ruled in the world of entertainment like everywhere else.

Mafela says: “there was a

