

Laduma Ngxokolo, Rina Chunga-Kutama and Sindiso Khumalo shine at 2019 Durban July

 By [Meagan Duckitt](#)

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The Vodacom Durban July is 'Africa's greatest horseracing event' and an iconic South African sporting occasion that was first run in 1897. It attracts a variety of prestigious and well-known visitors including Bonang Matheba, DJ Zuma, Maps Maponyane and Minnie Dlamini.

The theme this year was 'Once Upon An African Future' and designers made use of visual vibrancy and cultural significance in their designs. In collaboration with Vodacom Red, the designers each created five different Afrofuturism-inspired looks – presenting their idea of an African future that is optimistic, chic, vibrant and relevant with powerful symbols of cultural transference appearing within their individual aesthetics.



Three of SA's most accomplished designers Laduma Ngxokolo of Maxhosa Africa, Rina Chunga-Kutama of Ri.Ch Factory and Sindiso Khumalo of namesake label created five runway collections – which showcased elegance, gracefulness and sophistication at the Vodacom VIP Paddock on Saturday.

We caught up with the three designers to discuss their background, theme interpretation and realisation.

Rina Chunga-Kutama

🔱 ***What an exciting opportunity to have been selected to showcase at the prestigious Vodacom Durban July, how did you interpret the theme?***

Super exciting! I mean last year it was David Tlale and this year we have been put on the same platform, that's amazing. I think Wakanda, so think Africa if it wasn't colonised but somehow we still ended up with this fabric we now call African prints. So very proud and regal, no-one having to rebuild their love and pride for their heritage. And, as always, very bold and fun because it wouldn't be a Ri.Ch Factory collection without bringing plant clashes and a daring mix of textures.





▣ ***How did your brand originate?***

I always liked art and design, I was lucky enough to have some traditional Zambian fabrics I could play around with at home. During fashion school, I needed to make some extra money so I began to establish my brand. I experimented with many different types of fabrics until I settled on my true love, Chitenge.

▣ ***You updated traditional prints while playing with colour and feminine silhouettes and, in the process, have become an extremely sought-after designer. What drives you?***

Making people feel good about themselves. My clients light up when they wear a Ri.Ch Factory piece. Nothing makes me prouder of my work. I believe we tell stories through clothing so I'm happy to help someone express themselves through their pieces.



■ ***Does your diverse heritage and exposure affect your brand?***

Most definitely. I have been able to soak up many different cultures and they influence my love for the continent, its people, fabric, music, food and stories. This plays a big role in how proudly and boldly I work with print

■ ***You were listed amongst the Forbes Africa 2018 under 30 and the Destiny Magazine's under 40, just to name a few. What can we expect from you going forward?***

I believe in fate, so the universe will guide me to my next adventure.

Sindiso Khumalo

■ ***You studied architecture at UCT and furthered your studies at Central St Martins as a sustainable textile designer. Both are different forms of design. Was your plan always to transition from one to the other and apply it in fashion?***

No, this was never my plan. I studied architecture and while working at an architecture practice my boss Sir David Adjaye noticed that I was more interested in *Vogue* magazines. He involved me in more fashion projects, related to more interior. I did a project on Selfridges for *Vogue* magazine and he continued to assign me to more fashion-related projects. I realised that textiles would be a good transition to fashion while still applying my architecture in some way.





■ ***Your prints are authentic and vibrant and your fabrics are elegant. What inspires you as a designer?***

Everything inspires me. I'm a bit of a vintage, nostalgic kind of gal, so I'm always looking at old textiles from the past. I look at Bauhaus textiles from the 1920s for inspiration and old fabrics that were made in Senegal and West Africa.

I'm also hugely inspired by my mother's wardrobe. She has a very cool treasure trove of 1970s items, so you'll see in my work that there's a lot of '70s inspiration and I think, most importantly, with my prints, I am inspired by where I grew up and I grew up in Durban – the flora, the city, which contrast of the grit vs the cool and my other obsession is colour! I am based near the ocean and enjoy taking pictures of the sunsets, I admire and enjoy so much.

■ ***Your range has African elements, but there seems to be a fusion of Europe. Does the fact that you are based in the UK and South Africa affect your design?***

I lived in London for 18 years so I definitely think that living in a city like London will always affect your work. I think there is an amazing diversity of people who live in London, so I think that how I look at design is definitely from so many diverse cultures. I'm also a very personal designer, I like to tell a personal story and my story is one of an African female living in the world today and how I integrate my culture into my experiences in life.



■ ***It's very exciting having you part of this year's Vodacom Durban July. How did you interpret the theme?***

I'm very excited to have been selected for the Durban July. It is a combination of cool prints and vintage styles but in a modern way, with a little nod to streetwear. It's a presentation of the future of young Africans and we are so many things – we are so diverse, we are so individual and unique.

■ ***Your many accolades include showcasing at Milan Fashion Week for three consecutive years, exhibiting at The Royal Festival Hall in London, The Smithsonian Museum of African Art in Washington and so many others. What is next for Sindiso Khumalo?***

My biggest, scariest thing that I'm working on at the moment is starting my online store and building and maintaining the online business. We are going to be retailing outside of London and Cape Town so it's like two warehousing structures, so it's a full-on project and I'm excited and quite nervous. There are more corporate collaborations coming through, which always interests me. I have an interesting project that I can't talk about, so lots of cool things happening for the brand and I'm looking forward to taking the brand to the public with our online store.

Laduma Ngxokolo

■ **Laduma, you are best known for your brilliance in knitwear design and the use of interesting prints. What is your design ethos?**

My design ethos is based on three principles: innovation, precision and creativity. In every aspect that I touch I try to maintain those three pillars. Knitwear just happens to be my speciality, but I touch various aspects of my work.





❏ ***You achieved so many different awards, including the 2015 Vogue Italia Scouting for Africa Prize. How have these awards impacted your design career?***

It has earned me and the brand credibility to be positioned into high events such as the Conde Nast International Luxury Conference and being featured in historical publications. Also being part of the high school and university curriculum, being featured in various students' theses around the world.

❏ ***The Afrofuturism-inspired theme is in line with your ethics. How did you interpret the theme this year?***

I interpreted the theme naturally as Afrofuturism is where I have defined the brand aesthetic, more especially in isiXhosa. But I used this in a futuristic design context. I approached the theme for the Durban July as opulence as this has been part of our move as a company. We have also explored other design ideas that I have had in my head with designs that are see-through.



■ ***You revolutionise knitwear and seem to continuously evolve and never run out of ideas. How do you remain being inspired?***

I remain being inspired by travelling around the world, looking at art from different museums and looking at ideas at various other online channels. I try to keep abreast of how trends are changing.

■ ***Although you have been recognised by fashion lovers in London, Paris, Amsterdam, Oslo and many more, you do not deviate from your Xhosa theme. What does the future hold for your brand?***

The future for Maxhosa is to move into the lifestyle space and go into other products that people never predicted we will go into such as resort wear as well as move towards the interior decor space and being involved in the Xhosa culture more. The aim is to also archive the historical information that we would like our great-grandchildren to remember.

For more information, or to contact the mentioned designers follow them here:

[Laduma Ngxokolo of Maxhosa Africa](#)

[Rina Chunga-Kutama of Ri.Ch Factory](#)

[Sindiso Khumalo](#)

Photography by Hannes Roodt Photo

ABOUT MEAGAN DUCKITT

Meagan is a fashion designer, stylist, writer and public speaker. She owns a small clothing business called Calista Clothing and enjoys using her knowledge to empower women.

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