



GOAPELE COMING FULL CIRCLE

BY NNEKA SAMUEL

IT'S NOT EVERY DAY THAT WE GET TO EXPERIENCE A FULL CIRCLE MOMENT. LIKE DÉJÀ VU TO THE NTH DEGREE, IT CAN BEST BE DESCRIBED AS THE RECOGNITION OF GROWTH AND DEVELOPMENT OR REALIZATION OF A PERSONAL DREAM YEARS IN THE MAKING. FULL CIRCLE IS EXACTLY WHAT SINGER GOAPELE FELT WHEN SHE PERFORMED AT THE SECOND ANNUAL SURVIVOR'S FASHION SHOW IN HOLLYWOOD EARLIER THIS YEAR. AN EVENT BENEFITTING BOTH THE AMERICAN CANCER SOCIETY FOR RELAY LIFE AND THE CANCER CONCIERGE NETWORK, THE SHOW TOOK BREAST CANCER SURVIVORS TO THE RUNWAY AND GAVE VOICE TO THEIR TRIUMPHANT, INSPIRATIONAL STORIES AS THEY ROCKED DESIGNER FASHIONS.

In spite of these somber statistics, you Goapele, who hails from the Bay Area, a unique melting pot of arts, activism, music and social justice, is no stranger to girl's and women's empowerment. Having performed at numerous community events and conferences as a youth where health and awareness were often the primary focus, her participation in the Survivor's Fashion show was a no brainer. Goapele's song "Closer," off her 2001 self-released debut album of the same name, is a favorite in the survivor community. She sang it at the event, where she was also honored with the 2015 Best Survivor Inspiration award. Determined to give back and actively seeking collaborations that blend positive change and spread awareness in a fun way, Goapele tells Heart & Soul, "I want to help bridge the gap to make general health and awareness be more attainable and easily achievable by more women and girls."

In addition to early detection and getting support, Goapele says it's also important to break the silence that



sometimes accompanies a cancer diagnosis. "A lot of people are trying to do it on their own, or they don't want other people to worry. Or it's just scary and it seems like maybe there's nothing that you can do." Goapele's father, Douglas Mohlabane, a South African political activist, lost his battle with cancer several years ago. He, along with Goapele's mother, ignited her activist spirit and belief that everyone can make a positive impact on the world. Goapele is doing her part to encourage prevention and healthy living, and to see people live long, vibrant lives past cancer.

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Breaking silence, effecting positive change, moving forward – these are all themes that can be heard throughout Goapele's fifth and latest album, Strong As Glass. The title track, co-written by fellow singer Estelle and actor Omari Hardwick, shines a light on issues she feels a lot of women struggle with, like balancing "being strong and empowered, needing support and encouragement, and feeling fragile," says Goapele

"Perfect," another song on the album, was written after the songstress heard story after heartbreaking story about shootings in Chicago, as well as her na-

tive Oakland. This, coupled with police shootings of unarmed youth throughout the country left her feeling sad and frustrated. "Perfect" suggests that not only are we all "worth fighting for," but that "we all have a ripple effect on the people [and] the world around us," says Goapele. Moreover, the singer believes, "You don't have to consider yourself political to speak up about something. And you don't have to change your whole life to change one thing."

That same thinking can be applied to health. Goapele, who meditates, exercises and surrounds herself with people that ground her as part of her mind, body and soul regimen, suggests we should "stop feeling like we have to start off perfectly or be a certain type of person to accomplish who we want to be." Instead, she says, we can implement small steps, like choosing to eliminate soda for a week, or meat. Smaller steps can be more lasting and realistic. "Don't beat yourself up about what you can't do," Goapele adds. "Just start doing little things you can."

Goapele puts that patience to practice in her home and work life. As a mother, the balance can be tricky, but Goapele asserts, "I really want to give 100% in being a parent and I want to give 100% in the art and music that I do. If I'm feeling happy and feeding and fueling myself, it's going to make me a better person and a better mom."

Ever the conscious evolver, Goapele extends her artistic expression to visual arts as well as acting. In 2013, she co-starred in "The Door," a short film directed by Ava DuVernay as part of designer retailer Miu Miu's Women's Tales. The fashionable film expresses the beauty and power of women supporting one another. Goapele hopes to get more opportunities to act, as well as to travel and collaborate with artists internationally. No doubt the result will spawn more full circle moments and powerful music that continues to inspire and uplift.

