ON OCTOBER 4, internationally renowned sculptor Andries Botha was in the audience when multi-award-winning singer Busi Mhlongo performed at the Rainbow Restaurant in Pinetown.

He was so moved by the performance and Mhlongo’s spirituality that the following week he contacted Nell and Nicola Comfort of the Rainbow and presented them with a proposal.

It related to the Human Elephant Foundation, an environmental awareness organisation initiated by Botha. The foundation is a visionary and collaborative organisation that initiates, co-ordinates and facilitates discussion and innovative problem-solving to create a better, more respectful and sustainable world.

Besides the herd of lifelike elephants Botha has created to spread awareness across the globe, another form of communication, music, was envisaged by him and his collaborators in the foundation as being key to spreading the word.

Another well-known Durban musician, Syd Kitchen, had already contributed a song entitled Human Elephant Song to the foundation.

Botha hoped Mhlongo would also be able to contribute a song and asked the Comforts to help facilitate this.

Mhlongo immediately jumped at the opportunity and expressed her long-held desire to again team up with London-based producer Will Mowat, with whom she last worked on her multi-award-winning 1998 release, Ubonzulu.

Apart from his sterling work on what is today recognised as one of the greatest South African albums ever produced, Mowat is also noted for his work with Vicky Sampson and her album, Ziz, that gave us the stadium anthem, African Dream; with Mango Groove; and as producer of Angelique Kidjo’s global hit Agolo.

Mowat did not hesitate in confirming his willingness to assist with the recording. Numerous phone calls and brainstorming sessions later and Mowat proposed a meeting with three-time Grammy Award-winning act Ladysmith Black Mambazo (LBM) that, without a doubt, is the most globally recognised music brand from this country KwaZulu-Natal and from Durban – the birthplace of the Human Elephant Foundation.

Their participation was confirmed with an unequivocal yes.

Just two months since the seed was first sown in Botha’s head at the Rainbow, those two iconic Durban-based acts yesterday headed into Studio 1 of the recently launched KZN Music House to create magic.

The Music House is an initiative of the KZN Department of Economic Development that has provided the province with a state-of-the-art recording facility that is set to change the face of the music industry in this province. The facility is managed by Committed Artists for the benefit of all KZN-based musicians.

Auspiciously yesterday’s was the first-ever recording in the facility and chief engineer Richard Mitchell moved heaven and earth to accommodate it, as today LBM heads off to Joburg to record its 53rd album.

The management of the facility donated the studio time in celebration of the fact that the first recording will feature the names Ladysmith Black Mambazo and Busi Mhlongo.

The hope is that the song that results from the chemistry between the artists will feature on future albums from LBM and Mhlongo, as well as carry the message of the Human Elephant Foundation to a global audience.

In another first, it is also the first collaboration between Mhlongo and LBM.