

African Arts Safari

Winter 2013



Yes its BIG and its Beautiful.
The Esphakeni Open Air Theatre seats around 800 people and has been packed with projects since tragedy struck the Sibanda and Banda families.

*Below:
SOSA-XA and Kutamba with university students present a performance Dancing for Change reflecting issues around Climate Change for the Memorial concert.*

In April 2013 a large memorial concert was arranged initially for Mandla Sibanda at the Firth Hall, University of Sheffield who had passed away in March 2012. Tragedy struck the Banda/Sibanda family twice with the unexpected and tragic death of Simon Banda in December 2012- the musical director and choreographer of Sunduza Dance Theatre. With the help of the University Music department a gathering of several hundred people came together to commemorate the lives of Simon Banda and Mandla Sibanda.

The event was supported by SOSA-XA! Sounds of Southern Africa led by Keitu Motlogwa, the Sheffield Socialist Choir, led by Janet Wood, our friends in the Rotherham Red Choir, Kutamba School of Performing Arts led by Richard Mahachi, Kusanganisa edance project supported Tsungai Tsikirai, Nixon Nkomo, Richard mahachi et al , uZambezi led by Lucky Moyo, John-Weaver and his magnificent drummers. All these artists had been involved with the family and Sunduza. The Eulogy was offered by Duncan Mbonjani who was the former chairman of Harare based intercultural theatre Zambuko Izibuko Theatre who came over from Holland. The wide support reflects the many interactions between Harare and Bulawayo. Zambuko had a profound influence of the theatre work Sunduza would take overseas.

Lungani Sibanda(Rejoice Arts!), long term resident of Sheffield and former member of Amakhosi Theatre helped shoot a video of the event.

SEMEA's director , Philip Weiss, had first met Simon Banda in 1989 at the invitation of the the then Permanent secretary for Culture who asked if he would manage and promote the group. As a member of Zambuko Izibuko Theatre group and Zimbabwe All Stars Choir for many years the challenge to work with Simon Banda and Sunduza proved irresistible.



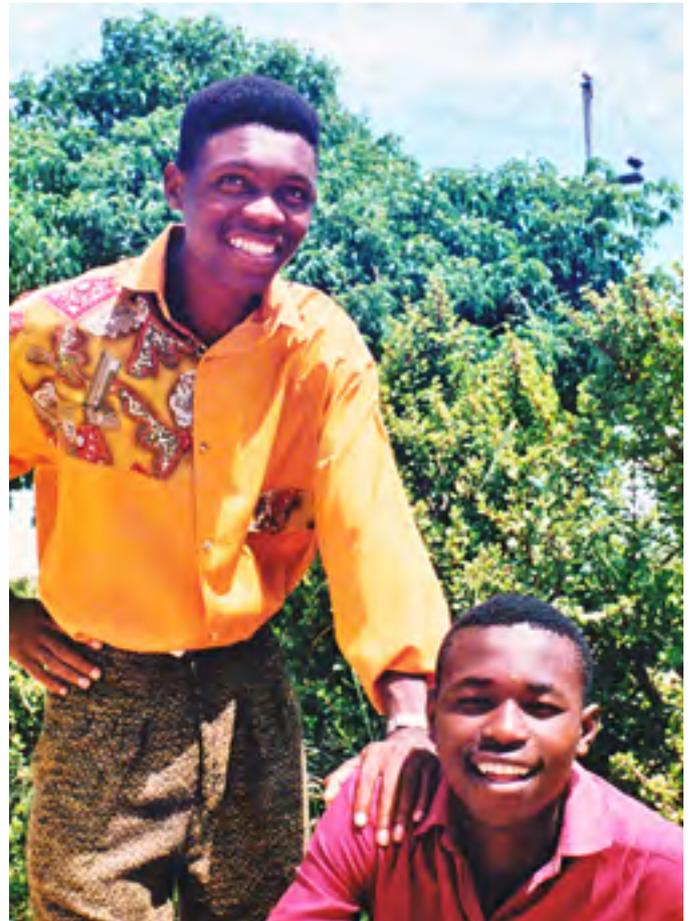
It was a working relationship that continued for over 23 years and continues today in working with the younger generation of artists. The event is available on video from the SOSA-XA web site www.sosa-xa.org.uk
Thanks to the BBC Performing Arts Fund for support in developing Kutamba's project.

Simon Banda was considered the foremost exponent of *isicatamiya* or *imbube* a cappella harmony in Bulawayo. He had a major influence on all other younger groups often helping to teach and develop their own choreography. He had a brilliant ability to teach harmony to all age groups and to find the most effective choreography to go with any song. Remarkably though he spoke beautiful English he preferred composing and singing in IsNdebele his first language. His compositions were tactile, hugely energetic matching his own immense vocal range. He was also an exceptionally talented composer. This writer recalls in Canada when he composed a piece about Hydro Electric Power within ten minutes and had the group word and note perfect within fifteen minutes before a presentation to the sponsors of the Vancouver Childrens' Festival- British Columbia Hydro. Their tag line was all about power and hydro. The recording is available on the DVD made of Sunduza's tour in Canada. He was equally prolific in Singapore when asked by Singapore Airlines to compose a radio advert.

Referred to by one reviewer at the Edinburgh Festival Fringe after packed houses at the Fringe Club Theatre - Simon "rubber" Banda was so called because of his brilliant footwork linked to an amazing vocal ability. He seemed to prefer the title Philip Weiss coined as Simon "Rainbow" Banda after his many clashing colours he wore on the stage and huge array of colourful shoes.

Simon completed many musical projects in Zimbabwe with UNDP, Jeunesse Musicales as an adjudicator as well as proving to be a brilliant teacher of the youth in Zimbabwe and the UK. He also did various projects with Jamie Armstrong's Urban dance Theatre for Sky TV in Scotland and in the West of England. Maybe he showed his true brilliance through the production of David Fanshawe's "African Sanctus" both in the dance interpretation of the work and his own subsequent concert. This was achieved in collaboration with the Sheffield Oratorio Chorus and Firth Park Junior School. The reinterpretation in dance of the work reflected the passage of the three Chimurengas in Zimbabwe in the struggle for liberation which contrasted constructively with the composer's more Christian interpretation of the work. Over 1500 seats were sold- so many the Octagon centre could not accommodate any more people wanting tickets on the door. Certainly he will be missed by all who had the good fortune to work with him.

Simon Banda in characteristic pose as the traditional herdsman in his widely seen production Injabulo 2000 where he travels to Jo'burg seeking work in the mines



Simon Banda and Mandla Sibanda in a rare joint photo in 1992- a precursor of the fantastic teaching team work and collaboration that was eventually going to last ten years in the UK.



Dancing for Change

This experimental production started in 2011 with a grant for the Kutamba School of Performing Arts from the BBC Performing Arts Fund. With the many tragedies that beset the work of the SEMEA programme through the passing of both original lead artists it is amazing the project came together. It is unsurprising that the completion of the project was considerably delayed. It is true example of how people in Sheffield can come together to achieve experimental projects under duress. Particular thanks go to John Salway for coming up with the script and to Richard Mahachi (from Umkhathi theatre works) for teaching the dance work and Tonderai Phiri for leading the drumming..

The intention was to show the community how Southern African dance can be used to interpret modern themes. The theme- of great interest in Sheffield was that of Climate Change. It should not be forgotten that our overconsumption in the North has a massive impact on the dry savannah climates of the South- especially Bulawayo that lies on the margins of the Kalahari and experiences intense water problems.

It is also fitting that the performance as part of the memorial concert took place at the Firth hall of the University of Sheffield. This was where Sunduza had their first premier UK performance as part of the last Sheffield City Arts Festival in July of 1992.

We are most grateful for the BBC Performing Arts Fund for their support. The performance is freely available through the Kutamba web site www.kutamba.org.uk and via You Tube and Tumblr. The entire memorial performance of Kutamba and other groups is available via the web site www.sosa-xa.org.uk on a two hour DVD entitled "Inkanyiso" which means reflections.



Richard Mahachi from Umkhathi theatre works leads Kutamba (bottom left) and his own dynamic group Kusangana Dance supported by Nixon Nkomo, Tsungai Tsikirai and Tonderai Phiri

This year was an exceptionally busy year both in Sheffield and Zimbabwe. We are grateful to Richard Mahachi for revealing his many hidden talents. Apart from leading Kutamba he spent several months editing archival footage from Sunduza Dance Theatre and edited the video of the memorial concert. Again many thanks to Keitu Motlogwa for supporting the choir. He stepped forward from the group in great haste to fill the vacuum left by Mandla Sibanda and until a full time artist could take over the role as choir master for SOSA-XA!



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