

# African Arts Safari

Winter 2014



## Open Air Blues

By the end of 2013 start of 2014 the Pumula Open Air Theatre was starting to look much more impressive after being left for many years in a state of semi neglect. SEMEA through the efforts of SOSA-XA! Choir and several Yorkshire based schools had raised funds for new toilets but with the collapse of the Zimbabwean economy the Council had switched off the water supply to prevent people using wasting water the supply for which went unpaid. This made the whole place rather unsanitary. In a city where water is in extremely short supply being located in a semi arid region, great care in public facilities over water management at this time was needed. However the new toilets had been installed under the guidance of Bekithemba Sibanda. 215 million percent inflation with old Zimbabwe dollars made it quite impossible to budget or continue any reconstruction work. People were for a period really desperate for funds simply to eake out a basic living.

Many thanks must go to the junior schools in Anston Greenlands and Anston Junior school in Rotherham who made a particular effort to raise funds- over £900 in a week to support the scheme that also purchased a notebook computer to enable communication. The story though has only just begun and their efforts will be extended as time goes on and the economy recovers. Communication has been a major problem but now with wireless communication available in Zimbabwe that even extends to Pumula things are looking better. We have even been able to have regular skype conferencing with the group and online tutorial sessions in supporting web creation and newsletter design.

*The Es'phakeni Open Air Theatre looking good*



*Forward with Music!*





*The National Gallery in Bulawayo*

The National Gallery in Bulawayo was to prove the first centre where mostly performing artists gathered for a training day sponsored by SEMEA in partnership with the Amasiko lemvelo Learning Trust. It was the first time apparently for many years that any organisation had arranged such an activity. Over thirty groups were represented each with more questions than the time available.



The second half of the morning involved a discussion around the themes each group had been working upon. Several looked at self help, the issues around managing aid money and so on as well as the application process to the immediate environment and how one might approach issues of sustainability.

The second half of the day looked at aspects of local and international production management. The groups worked around management structures at a community and arts production level. Thanks to Nonhlanhla, Melissa and team for organising all the lunches which is a rare treat for artists constantly on the move.

### **Come and share!**

In December 2013 Philip Weiss returned to Zimbabwe and instead of working with Simon Banda, sadly as was reported in the previous edition, was faced with his tragic death. This has been the first opportunity to report back properly on the many events subsequent to the funeral.

As part of the ongoing outreach at the centre Leroy Sibanda the Creative Director, and Zenzo Hlaseka responsible for communications had actively requested a whole day training around aspects of community engagement and the basics of organising an arts community. This was scheduled for January 2014. The first half of the day involved young people working on a series of exercises using short self created plays that took a particular theme as determined by the facilitators (Philip Weiss and Leroy Sibanda).



## Well done Sunduza and Janet Wood

At the end of December 2013 Janet wood came to the Esphakeni centre to work with Sunduza on a fine new tribute album. Her visit was sponsored by Arts Council England with the intention of developing and supporting her own folk music as an established music director of several choirs in the UK. She currently leads the Qwerky Choir in Doncaster, the Sheffield Socialist choir , the Retford Community singers and others! The idea was also to teach some of her songs to some of these choirs and to show how her music could be integrated with some of the late Simon Banda's songs.

It is a great tribute to Simon Banda and Sunduza's work over the years in Yorkshire. There they had become thoroughly established not only for stage performances but for the fantastic team work Simon and Mandla had developed in schools with support from SEMEA and Philip Weiss.

The album proved to be a tribute to Simon Banda's music with contributions from other musicians who had worked with him. These include the imbongi poet Albert Nyathi and Jeys Marabini who now leads his own band but shot to stardom for Sunduza's tour of the UK and Canada in 1998 when at the time he was Chairman.

Live performances involving the community were presented in Pumula and at the Bulawayo City Hall in early December 2014

The CD , Shine Like a Rainbow is available through Sunduza's web site [www.sunduza.org](http://www.sunduza.org) and from SEMEA directly (see address below )price £12.00 including postage and packing throughout the world! We can only accept on-line payments at present through PayPal.

## Amasiko Expo 2014

The first exhibition organised by Amasiko Lemvelo ran in Pumula for three days in August 2014 drew on the skills of many local artists including Sunduza's production of Mataka performed with lighting rig. It appears to have been one of the rare performances given under stage lighting at the centre.

There were training workshops in event management for the local community given by Philip Weiss, Leroy Sibanda and Peter Somaphi Ruwanga and these included a thorough evaluation day of the successes and issues the event raised. The event was attended by the Chairman of the local Residence Association and his team together with members of local HIV aids awareness organisations and local artists.

An informal launch of the Singing for Change CD/DVD recorded in Sheffield with SOSA-XA! Sounds of Southern Africa was arranged. An exhibition of photos from Mandla Sibanda and Simon Banda's work with the Sheffield choir was presented organised by Leroy Sibanda. One of the workshop rooms was used to screen some of the DVD material that linked the City of Sheffield to the City of Bulawayo. Both cities have been characterised by industrial decline and have sought to re-invent themselves through the digital and cultural industries.



Janet Wood with members of Sunduza at the Es'phakeni Open Air Theatre in rehearsal.



The organisers are grateful for help from visitors from Sheffield (Polly Lamont and twins) via Zambia, and Pete from Zambia in helping to put up posters and Pete for allowing the use of his truck for running errands as unpaid driver. Also grateful to Geoff Feltoe for his indirect help in lending his pick up truck that allowed the transporting of a tent and people. Also thanks to the local police for their cooperation and understanding of the need to support such events. We hope in future years the event will grow into an arts and trade expo supporting local artists through a local fair as well as performances.

Support was also provided through SEMEA towards the "T-shirts for volunteers, the hire of a generator and lighting for the event.





*Amasiko Expo workshop participants. They came from different sectors of the community and we hope their time was well spent to see what potential such an event could achieve.*



*Above: Zenzo Hlaseka an organising fundi.*



## **It looks like a busy year ahead!**

*Opposite: Visitors from Sheffield Wilf and Sadie with their brothers Bongani and Bonani Sibanda who came from Harare for the Expo standing alongside sister Melissa (right of photo) with Creative Director and Uncle Leroy Sibanda who principally organised the event.*

*Below: Watching some of the DVD Singing for Change about Sheffield and Bulawayo at the Expo.*



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