

African Arts Safari

Autumn 2015



This unusual sculpture stands at the Great Lake Museum in Kibale, near the shores of Lake Victoria, Uganda



Philip Weiss (SEMEA training director) with the director of the Selam Festival, Ethiopia at DOADOA, Jinja, earlier this year

After a busy time in Uganda as reported in the last issue, SEMEA has been considering how best to plan the future. The pressure on public funding has been intense with massive cuts to schools budgets and local community funding. This has had a knock on effect to the amount of work our artists can do in schools. Even the invitations to our local community choir-SOSA-XA! have reduced accordingly despite the choir being largely volunteers!

Many local festivals have had their grants slashed and the pressure on the choir and its lead artists to perform for free has increased exponentially. We are, for obvious reasons, reluctant to encourage this. The SEMEA project was set up to support professional artists in and from Southern Africa to engage in a professional way with the community. Organisations will often pay for sound equipment, tents, city licenses, printers, security and toilets but they believe artists should work for free. I am often accused of having a real hang up over this.

Most of the people engaging in organising such activities though have alternative full time jobs with salaries attached whilst artists are self employed. Many have families and young children.

Our request- stop it- get real. I am happy personally to volunteer on many occasions but all choirs have to cover hall rental, artistic fees, publicity and insurance so please why do people expect artists to work for free? These same people who make such requests also vote to support unions, and are often members of Unions.

Why do some charities believe their own cause is so much more important than ours? National charities often have massive marketing departments and full time paid employees. Our artists are not necessarily rich and famous- they are often starting their careers. PRS fees should be paid. Music is usually copyright even if it is from Africa and labelled "traditional". Just because it comes from Africa does not mean its free.

The argument that "we are promoting ourselves" does not wash. People promote themselves at their place of employment, an artist is employed on the stage rather than an office.

Yes there are many worthy causes but most people regard their own personal salary as the "me first" cause. why might you as a reader or a promoter expect artists to be different?

There are of course some events where artists attend to show producers and promoters their work in anticipation of great interest to come. That is probably rather different.

Common Purpose

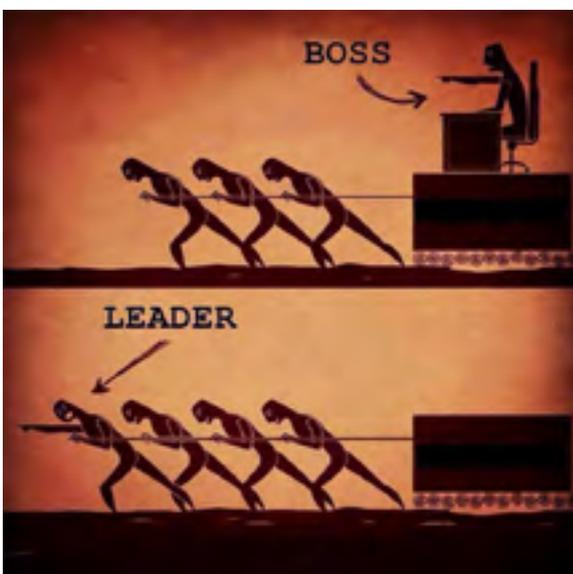
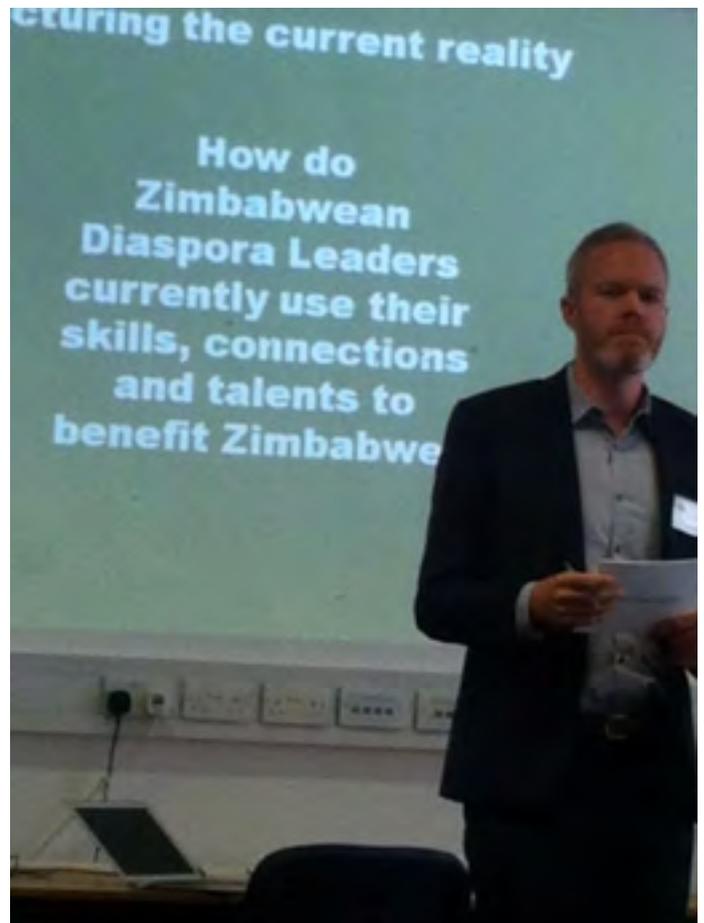
Thanks to the timely intervention of Lucky Moyo (formerly with *Black Umfolosi* and currently with *UZambezi*), Philip Weiss (CEO) was invited to participate in a special week of training activity through Common Purpose- a Changemakers Organisation. This leadership organisation had created a new challenge for those associated with Zimbabwe working on linking and community support projects in the diaspora community. The objective was really to see how we might increasingly work together to support a range of community support initiatives in different parts of the UK and often on very different kinds of projects. Politics for once was left outside the door so the projects could focus on investment and entrepreneurial ways of working.

Though government to government aid can be very valuable it amounts to about 2% of all the financial inflows given to Africa by donors. The rest all comes from Africans living in the diaspora. And we think direct community to community support is often more accountable achieving within a short space of time modest but achievable objectives leading to sustainable benefits.

It proved to be a most a critical week bringing us into contact with people even in our own city (Sheffield) with whom we previously had no contact. Most important it engaged us in methodologies which would lead to stronger team building.

The immediate consequence was a partnership between SEMEA and the Mopane Foundation working in Matabeleland. Their task is to raise funds for orphaned children under the able guidance of Nomsa Nekevane- who is a health worker with boundless energy and enthusiasm. The funds specifically support orphaned children and attend rural and district council schools in Zimbabwe.

SOSA-XA! Sounds of Southern Africa Choir was asked to perform in a mixed line up of Zimbabwean artists at a Black Tie dinner held at the Hilton Hotel in Sheffield that raised over £2300. The artists also included uZambezi, Busi Mhlanga, Tsungai Tsikirai from Flame Lilly, and young dancers from eJive in Doncaster. It was attended by over 100 people - an astonishing first event. Well done Nomsa and the whole team!



Just a few ways arts is used to express complex ideas in the project

Its not just for the Diaspora!

The ideas were so rich that came from the Common Purpose week. Some of us subsequently participated in a linked course run online by MIT in the USA connected to transforming the way we operate in Society. It has over 35 000 subscribers all over the world. The beauty of this marvellous interaction was that members in Bulawayo could also apply, for free, to attend the course online and get a recognised University certificate as adult learners .They did not necessarily have to have a really strong academic background to get the benefits. There are many artists who are leaders and many people without university qualifications who need practical knowledge to extend their abilities. We believe that this is a vital ingredient so many people can benefit from the transfer of vital knowledge.

With a massive shortage of imported advanced text books in Zimbabwe and the financially strapped government threatening to impose a 40% import duty on books, on-line learning is providing a crucial window of opportunity. I must also add that Zimbabwe is one of several countries in Africa with a really boyant local publishing industry which survives mainly through textbook sales and small amounts of fiction publishing. So though import duty copuld be regarded as protectionism to the local publishers they are still limited by the local market in what they can really put to print.

Duty on books is very depressing considering the huge educational achievements since independence with over 93% literacy rate and a huge expansion of higher education. Duty has not been previously imposed on books.

SOSA-XA! Sounds of Southern Africa New Choral Director

Its all change! Richard Mahachi,formerly of Umkhathi Theatreworks, who had held the role for a year retired in December 2014 due to family pressures and we thank him for all his hard work. We hope his absence will not be permanent. This followed a superb show at Hagglers Corner supporting two visiting drummers- the Sidiki brothers from West Africa.

Tonderai Phiri has graciously and ably stepped in to fill the role and is proving an exciting performer and most able director. That's him at Bakewell day of Dance below.



Members of Common Purpose pushing the boundaries at the end of course supper.



Tonderai Phiri leading the adoring crowd





Photo: Courtesy Anwar Suleiman

Asambe-Let's Go!

Our experimental "a cappella" group started to meet in 2013 working on a wide variety of World music, jazz, folk and self composed works including Southern African material. For those of us who work in the arts full time and have several decades of singing experience it has been frustrating to be limited largely to Sheffield. When ready to perform we want to be able to go anywhere at any time whereas currently many restrictions are placed on community performances within SOSA-XA! by reasons of people's jobs and varying expertise. The group has done a first demo recording with Bret Wormersely mainly to hear what we sounded like- and to our delight its not that bad. A lot of development work still has to be done before we will be ready for a performance because Philip has been in Zimbabwe and Uganda!

The idea is to do performances that SOSA-XA! cannot do in Sheffield because of work commitments by its volunteer members. Principally we will perform country wide and support the sale of Southern African music projects by SOSA-XA! and others to a broader audience.

However we still have a long way to go. We had our first outing earlier in the year for the funeral of Yvonne Cass -a former ANC activist in the community who was so active in supporting the cause of refugees through the Northern Refugee Centre and other initiatives. She had also invited and found funds to pay SOSA-XA! to appear at her "Taste of Africa Festival" in Barnsley some years ago.

We are grateful to Darlene Elliott for turning up at a moments notice, giving up her self employed income for almost an entire day for the event held in commemoration of the life of Yvonne. All members of the group are self employed and currently volunteers. You may know them they are in the picture (from left to right: Tonde, Philip, Zoe, Richard and John)! Darlene will also be joining us from time to time depending on the well being of her youngest child!

The group will come ready equipped with its own PA system so don't worry. Watch this space.

Richard Mahachi with Dr Tony Frascina at a recent E Learning Network event.



Networking Blues.

People often think I just sit in an office. Most of the networking meetings have to be paid for without public grants and are not attended necessarily with the idea of just bringing in money but rather to develop new ideas and possible partnerships.

SEMEA have long been members of Sound Sense and the Foundation for Community Dance. We attended the first FCD International Community Dance event held in Cardiff in November 2014 as part of our work with Kutamba. FCD has rebranded itself as "People Dancing" which trips more easily off the tongue. This rebranding is something that SEMEA has been considering as our registered name is really a mouthful! No decision yet reached. It was very purposeful allowing us to make contact with a variety of education colleges and individual dancers from minority groups.

SEMEA is a member also of Making Music which increasingly is offering wider services to the musical community it serves as well as its public liability insurance scheme. We were again represented at the recent meeting held in Sheffield that focused on issues related to copyright and the relationship of PRS to promoters and musicians.

We have also been able to re-engage with BOND as part of the Southern African diaspora network which held a launch day in London recently. BOND is a network of NGOs drawing links to other countries in the community sector.

Significantly we have close links with the Britain Zimbabwe Society that has had a research role for many years under the able leadership of the late Professor Terry Ranger and is largely London/Oxford based supporting an annual research day.

In 2016 we hope to be able to support the Zimbabwe Refugee Association in their bid to engage schools in the dissemination of their lottery funded exhibition with stories of refugees and migration which is an area of interest that is cross curricular. Our role is to link it to artists best able to support the exhibition.

We were also delighted to be invited to support a drumming workshop for the E-learning Network in 2013 through its then chairman, Dr Tony Frascina. Certainly got those computer chappies (mostly!) away from their desks!

SEMEA is also represented at WOMEX every year. In 2014, we attended the programme in Santiago de Compostella in Galicia, Spain and most recently in Budapest, Hungary. Here the world music industry (producers and agents) come together to trade in international artists. However there is also an exposure to musical films and a variety of conferences including seminars that focus on education projects. This networking is proving very valuable for our future work in education. Much of the possible touring will be done through our partner agency which operates on a cost recovery basis. This is being rebranded and relaunched as "Matopos Music".



N A M V U L A !

We are delighted to be working with "Namvula" on Saturday 5 December. TheZambian/Scottish artist recently launched her first album that was widely acclaimed in the music press and on BBC Radio World Routes. We met Namvula at the Africa Utopia Festival in London in September and asked her to come and give a rare singing workshop with SOSA-XA! Choir and friends. Then we were even more pleased to discover she was coming with her band to Sheffield University as part of the concert series. Regret the two could not coincide but do join us on Saturday December 5 2015 from 1.00p.m. at the Sheffield Friends Quaker Meeting House. Book online through Ticket source via the SOSA-XA! web site for significant ticket reduction www.sosa-xa.org.uk



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