

African Arts Safari

Summer 2016



Mural at the Es'phakeni Open Air centre

2016 has really seen some powerful and positive developments in our projects despite the funding situation. Much of the work is of course aimed at artists overseas as well as partnerships with artists in the UK. Thus our training director, on arriving in Bulawayo in December 2015 was quite surprised to see this completed mural (above) finished on the stage wall of the Es'phakeni Open Air Theatre. It celebrates the partnership between *Sunduza Dance Theatre* who are the principal company based at the centre and the link with our Sheffield based choir *SOSA-XA ! Sounds of Southern Africa*.

In homage to the choirs' efforts to bring about change through the *Singing for Change* initiative the two front row figures are the late Mandla Sibanda who led the choir for ten years and the late Simon Banda the former artistic director of *Sunduza* and who helped *SOSA* develop in its formative years. The *Singing for Change* CD and DVD package can still be purchased from the *SOSA-XA* web site.

It is easy to forget the project celebrates the Millennium Development goals which more appropriately and recently have become the Sustainable development Goals. The work at the Open Air Theatre continues. The Offices have been repainted, as has the Box Office and our administrator donated funds for a large office desk and chair.

In the UK, SEMEA and the Choir have been reaching out more successfully with UK Zimbabwean initiatives. This has included a link with the Mopane Foundation (<http://www.mopanefoundation.org>) based in Sheffield founded by Nomsa Nekevane to raise funds for orphaned children mainly in Matabeleland South. *SOSA* choir has helped to raise funds- more than £2000 last December 2015. It was well supported by artists such as *UZambezi* and others. The project will be repeated in October 2016. Up to eight children are being supported.

The choir has also been fund raising for the Zim Position Club based in Sheffield. This was started a while back but really has pulled the Zimbabwean diaspora in Sheffield together mainly for social activities and networking but also to provide other support to deal with many social problems arising from dislocation of Zimbabweans from their original home country.



Philip Weiss with Nomsa Nekevane (above) at the Independence day celebrations held at the Zim Position Club with SOSA (below)





The financial situation in Zimbabwe is still in turmoil as the country wrestles with debt and the need to succeed with major economic reforms by probably switching from the American dollar back towards a Zimbabwean bond dollar. Artists have a powerful role to play in communicating social and civic and development issues.

We were pleased to be able to have a full Skype link up with the Sunduza group in July and to entertain each other online with songs. Really Zimbabwe has done well to develop its digital and WiFi services. That is positive news in a nation where landlines were hugely expensive to install. Thieves can no longer so easily steal copper wires that were vital for landlines. WiFi and mobile phones have transformed the ability of people to communicate from even some remote rural areas

Welcoming Tonderai Phiri

In early 2015 SOSA-XA! took on board a new musical director to replace Richard Mahachi who retired to Leeds to look after his family and temporarily leave a difficult arts funding situation. We hope however to revive our Leeds based group *Songololo*. As a former member of *Siyaya* Dance Theatre who has toured the world for several years the choir have lapped up Mr Phiri's dynamic and enthusiastic choreography. It really helps to have a leader with stage experience when you are working in a foreign language such as iSindebele or Shona whilst trying to dance at the same time. Well done to him for continuing to support, at times, some awkward students!

We are also delighted that Lizwe Jele originally from *Umdumo we Sizwe* has enthusiastically been supporting our bass line section and teaching us some songs. The cuts have effected the choir's ability to perform and raise funds for our own projects as so many local festivals and initiatives have collapsed or have no funds to sustain artists. It is the sustainability factor that is crucial to our work and we also are aware that relying on public grants is not an option. Also as volunteers travelling long distances beyond Sheffield can be difficult outside the weekends.

This sad tale of economic destitution in the present economic climate in the UK did not prevent the choir performing at *Chance to Dance* in Sheffield or the *Bakewell International day of Dance*. The group have also been invited to perform again at the Sheffield Cathedral on 8 December. I can also report that we gave a good account of ourselves at the Born Free Foundation fundraiser in Derby. Over £39,000 was raised in one night such is the British love of wildlife. Lions have certainly been in the news after poor "Cecil" in Zimbabwe's Hwange National Park met an untimely end. Far more than his teeth were being extracted by an American dentist. Poachers go to jail but white hunters go home with trophies. Now therein lies a story.



Preparing for the online workshop at the Friends Meeting House



In the Winter Gardens some of our members: Joshua Nem, Lizwe Jele, Tonderai Phiri(left to right back row). Daniella Romano, Anna McCord and Sue Robb left to right front row



Leroy Sibanda, project coordinator for Amasiko Lemvelo Learning Trust

Developments in Bulawayo

Yes, the media carries mainly negative news from Zimbabwe. Yes, many Zimbabweans are refugees and inevitably most would like to return home if the political and economic situation permits. They have now also created homes in England and we need to come together to support their situation. Though colonialism has gone, the legacy of a British education system remains. Teaching in English which is a second language for Zimbabweans means we have ongoing responsibilities.

There are also many positive stories coming from Zimbabwe other than from the politicians. SEMEA has been supporting voluntary training work via Skype not just through volunteer visits. This includes regular links with Leroy Sibanda who is coordinating the *Amasiko Lemvelo Learning Trust* based at the Pumula hub.

This year we have been able to help him proof read their first online newsletter and to collaboratively design and launch a new web site. This was achieved through sharing screens online and using Word Press and Skype allowing for the sharing of technologies. Check out their new web site at <http://www.amasiko.net> and <http://www.amasiko.com>

Amasiko has extended its work not only with artists in schools but with groups of teachers. In July Philip Weiss was able, online via Skype, to support an experimental two day drama teachers workshop held in the rural growth point of Tsholotsho. Not quite as easy as being in the room but the connection was excellent and apparently the concepts exchanged were well received.

We hope to engage with more such links in the future



Sunduza Flies again

Well not quite literally but since our intervention by sponsoring some new work on the stage earlier in the year we have been able to support the revival of three of Sunduza's productions. *Voices from the Rocks - the Story of the Matopos* kicked off in February 2016 with support from the Natural History Museum in Bulawayo organised by Amasiko Lemvelo. Disappointingly it was rained off by torrential rain on the roof making the artists inaudible. Lessons learned it will be relaunched there in the dry season! We helped it transfer to the Bulawayo Theatre under the welcome leadership of Charlie Banda

Sunduza Powering up

There have been some unavoidable delays in the release of a new double album Sunduza recorded a while back. However we are continuing to support shows with funding from the record label. The album has been remastered in Sheffield by the team at Red Cloud Studios engineered by Brett Wormesley.

Whilst Voices from the Rocks told the story of the land around the Matopos Hills the second production “Matata” revived some old diaries. The story contained within was a meeting held between Scottish Missionary Robert Moffat and King Mzilikazi. It is based on the Diaries of Robert Moffat and contrasting that situation with events in the modern townships of Bulawayo. It was a production that ran in Edinburgh for ten days in 2002 and toured Canada. So with its new artistic director it was wonderful to be able to see its full revival for a Bulawayo audience with full lighting at the Bulawayo Theatre.



Peter Somaphi Ruwanga from the original cast reprises his role as Mzilikazi. Photo Source: Leroy Sibanda



Matata football team learn to dance at the Bulawayo Theatre; Photo Source: Leroy Sibanda



The colonial Agricultural Officer from Voices from the Rocks determines the quality of the land and how it will be used

The arrival of the police during Rhodesia in Bulawayo in a scene from Voices from the Rocks. Photo Source: Leroy Sibanda



Photo source: Leroy Sibanda

...and finally

Sunduza have also been working on a revival of Injabulo- the production that launched their international career in 1992. This has involved the remaking of several beautiful masks and several sets of new costumes including a recreation of Sunduza's favourite shirts all of which have been handmade and sponsored from Sheffield. You can catch it at the Bulawayo Theatre on 20 December.

The group are of course also in the process of developing a brand new stage production whilst working in regional schools and centres. Our producer will be supporting this from December 2016. Its aimed at future touring. We are pleased we have been able to support financially . We also provide some management services and with applications for local arts training through the Pan African Arterial Network held recently in Bulawayo, and the British Council.



Other SEMEA Activities

SEMEA continues to support other projects. It has recently completed a new web site for the Britain Zimbabwe Society supporting its Research day and online PayPal subscription system. Catch their next events especially the forthcoming Research day on 17 June 2017 via <http://www.britainzimbabwe.org.uk>



Dr Portia Manangazira, director of disease control, Zimbabwe Ministry of Health with Knox Chitiyo, President of the Britain Zimbabwe Society at a recent research day event open to the public

As a footnote we are delighted to announce that over 20 Southern African songs from our *Singing for Change* project have been put into four part harmony stave notation for the benefit of other international choirs using the equipment sponsored through Burngreave New Deal. The work has been carried out voluntarily over many months by John Salway. We hope to get these published in 2017

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