



SAHWIRA SPOTLIGHT

Vol.1 Issue 1
FIRST EDITION



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“NYARADZO GROUP SALUTES ARTS LEGENDS”

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FIRST EDITION EDITOR'S NOTE

This is the first in a series of congratulatory newsletters that Nyaradzo Life Assurance Company (Nyaradzo) will run in recognition and honour of the outstanding men and women whose contribution to different sectors of Zimbabwean life – be it social, political or economic, has made a positive impact.

In this first edition and the few next ones, we take a glimpse at the icons in the arts industry who received the Living Legends Awards at the last National Arts Merits Awards (NAMA) held last year.

The individuals that Nyaradzo is congratulating excelled in different categories with various institutions honouring them for their work. In this issue, we congratulate the various men and women who were honoured by NAMA as legends in recognition of their sterling contributions towards the development of their respective arts disciplines, in particular and Zimbabwean arts, in general.

Institutions, must therefore continue to run these awards and perhaps introduce more categories, a development which will spur Zimbabweans into aiming to perform better with the knowledge that their efforts will not go in vain. On the other hand, such stellar performance in any field, be it politics, business and the arts, among other categories, will inspire other Zimbabweans.

In a way, the stories that Nyaradzo is telling about the different men and women who are doing well in their different vocations should inspire other Zimbabweans, especially the younger generations to emulate and even improve on past performances.

There are many young men and women out there who may remain in their shells as fear of the unknown makes them doubt

their potential. It is for such people that these stories are being put in the public domain.

In this issue, we look at NAMA Living Legends who have made tremendous strides in music (Alick Macheso, Bothwell Nyamhondera and Albert Nyathi); the literary arts (Barbara Makhalisa-Nkala, Aaron Chiundura Moyo, Musaemura Zimunya); theatre and film (Jesesi Mungoshi, Ben Mahaka, Jasen Mphepo and the spoken word (Chirikure Chirikure) among others. The categories do overlap. For instance Albert Nyathi would also fall under both literary arts and the spoken word, while Aaron Chiundura Moyo also made his name with television drama.

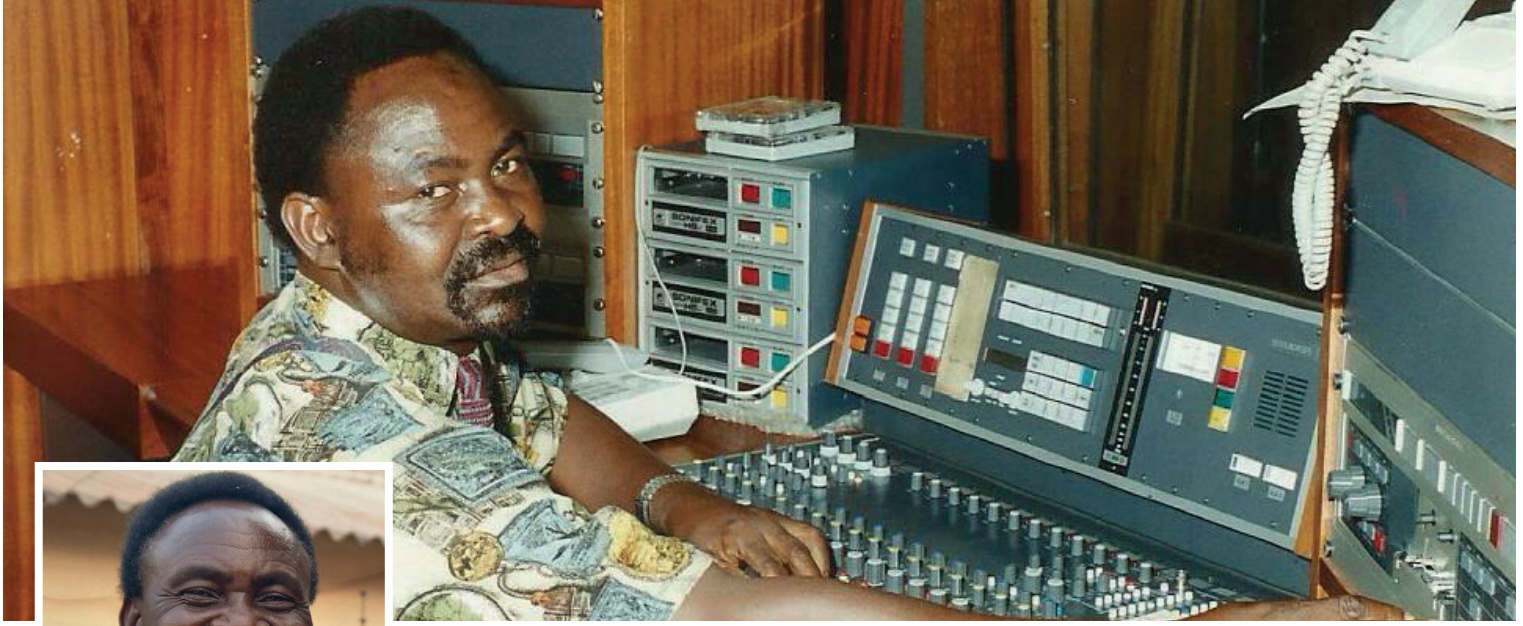
For the recipients of the different awards, Nyaradzo is saying congratulations to them and is encouraging them to work even harder to ensure that this stellar performance continues and that it inspires others, especially the younger generation.

Nyaradzo is also calling upon different Zimbabwean and global corporates to continue looking at those who are doing well and honouring them for their work. We hope more and more corporates will come on board so that these awards will expand to cover all geographical corners of the country. The country is big and there are other outbacks like rural areas which have not been adequately covered when it comes to these awards.

Nyaradzo would once again want to say to the recipients of the different awards Congratulations! Makorokoto! Amhlophe!

Prudence Muganiwah

Editor



Aaron Chiundura Moyo

Vital cog in Zimbabwe arts sector

The Zimbabwean stage and small screen have never been richer than when this generation of actors and playwrights were part of the theatre. Back then, the only shortcoming was that there were not many opportunities for blacks who wanted to pursue the arts.

Theatre then seemed communal and families that did not have television sets typically watched drama series at their neighbours' houses. It was perhaps more interesting to watch as a group and retell the episodes later with friends and family.

The actors who graced the stage then did not do it for the money but to enhance their profiles and personal pride. Little did they know then that their counterparts in other parts of the world were raking in millions of dollars for their roles in films.

Novelist, actor and playwright, Aaron Chiundura Moyo – a recipient of the NAMA Living Legends Award - has a similar story. After joining the national broadcaster, the Zimbabwe Broadcasting Corporation (ZBC), in 1987, Aaron subsequently produced his first local drama, *Chioko Muhomwe*.

The prolific artist was born at Guinea Fowl in Gweru in 1950 but only started school at 15, earning him the nickname “two boy” as he was one of the oldest in the school. This forced him to alter his years, with his current birth certificate recording that he was born in 1954.

Aaron attended Shoe Shine and Connemara for his primary education after St Patrick's, Ascot and Bumbirwu schools had rejected him over his age. He proceeded to Mambo High School for his secondary education.

Aaron then worked at Clifton Down Farm before relocating to Salisbury (now Harare) where he was employed as a garden boy. His writing career began while he was still in primary school with his greatest inspiration being his father who used to tell his children folklores, as well as the now-defunct Literature Bureau which toured schools, educating learners on the importance of reading and writing.

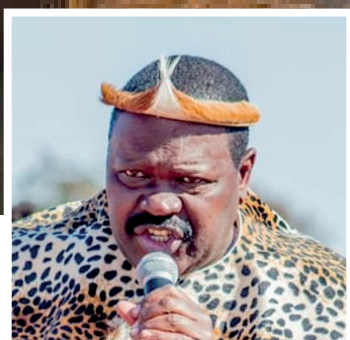
His first short story, *Mahwekwe NaSarudzai Patsime*, penned in 1969 was aired on Mabhuku NeVanyori - a Rhodesia Broadcasting Corporation programme organised and run by the Literature Bureau in 1970.

The manuscript for his first novel, named *Sarai Mugarike*, was dismissed by Mambo Press, arguing Aaron was an amateur novelist. The same manuscript

was rejected three times by the Literature Bureau before finally being published after it was referred to Hosiach Charles Singende who was chief editor, resulting in its publication in 1975. Aaron went on to publish several other Shona novels and a collection of short stories in English as well as several plays.

Aaron's stint with ZBC, which followed the success of his play *Chioko Muhomwe*, resulted in him being sent for further studies.

A holder of a Bachelors Degree in English and Communications from the Zimbabwe Open University, Aaron has made an immense contribution to the development of Zimbabwe's creative space.*



Albert Nyathi

Putting an indelible mark on cultural development

Traditionally, an Imbongi was found in the Nguni kings' courts. He was a composer and orator of poems and would sing praises to the king or whoever was being honoured.

They were no ordinary poets but like court jesters in the medieval European courts, they took the role of social commentators. They would remind their audiences of the accepted norms and traditions.

To get the prestigious role of the Imbongi, one needed to be able to have the ear of their ancestors.

Traditionally, the Imbongi was not an entertainer but rather had the role of addressing issues that the regular citizen could not present to the king through the use of skillfully crafted words.

The delivery of these poems were usually dramatic, often aggressive and intimidating, with the Imbongi jumping up and down, carrying spears and performing traditional dances.

The modern Imbongi's role has changed to become more of an art performance due to the disintegration of the African royal courts. Today's Imbongi's are not only educators, they are also custodians of the Nguni traditions which they are passing on from generation to generation by word of mouth during performances. They are still social commentators touching on many issues affecting society, including political, social, health and cultural aspects.

After the Mfecane, the historical trek of groups from South Africa to escape the rule of Tshaka of the great Zulu Empire, most groups took with them several of the Nguni practices, includ-

ing those who moved into Zimbabwe and settled in the southern part of the country.

Over the years, these practices have been passed down to their descendents and one such beneficiary is Albert Nyathi.

The modern-day Imbongi was born in 1962 in Kafusi, Gwanda in Matabeleland South Province. His earliest memory of being a poet was when he used to recite poetry as a young boy, herding his family's cattle at his rural home.

Growing up, going to school was not one of his favourite pursuits and at one time he ran away from school to go and herd cattle in Botswana.

Albert attributed this mainly to the lack of mentors while growing up and consequently, the majority of males in his community would either go to

South Africa or to Botswana in search for greener pastures.

This experience taught him the need for mentors in the community and he has done so much in this regard.

In the early 1980s, he went back to school, a man among boys at Msitheli Secondary School and Matobo High where his love for poetry grew.

At the University of Zimbabwe, he once played the role of iconic Nelson Mandela in a play titled *Mandela – The Spirit of No Surrender* along with Zambuko/Izibuko.

While at the university, he formed his first poetry group, ALCYTI, acronyms from the first letters of the names of the group's members being Albert, Cynthia and Titus.

They drew their

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inspiration from the likes of Linton Kwesi Johnson (LKJ), Benjamin Zephania and Mutabaruka. They started rehearsing with a live band but the union did not last long as the other members drifted on after graduation.

Titus Moetsabi is a lawyer whilst Cynthia Mungofa is a social worker who left for Austral-

ia to further her studies.

Albert recorded his first album in 1994 which contained the hit song Senzenina - a poem he wrote when Chris Hani, leader of the South African Communist Party and chief of staff of Mkonto Wesinzwe, was assassinated. The song became a hit overnight both at home and internationally.

Albert works with talented musicians who always bring a unique dimension to his stage act.

He has been on many international stages individually, as a poet, and as part of his group, Imbongi.

In 1999, his group was invited by the United Nations to per-

form at the Hawaii Millennium Young People's Congress and in 2019, he, together with Dereck Mpofo, performed at the World Health Assembly in Russia, whose theme was 'Ending Tuberculosis'. The conference was officially opened by President Vladimir Putin, of Russia.*



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Alick Macheso

Creating, immortalising own sungura brand



The sungura music genre has had many twists and turns over the years, although the fast beat that gave it prominence amongst the Sungura Boys after its importation from the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) remains.

Various artists have experimented with their additives and refinements, earning fame through it. Alick Macheso, however, has created a unique type, and his invention mainly hinges on the bass guitar – where the bass guitar assumes the role of the lead, producing an unmistakable emphatic sound.

It was the bass guitar, which led to Alick emerging from the shadows of greats such as Nicholas Zakaria and Tineyi Chikupo during his time with the Khiama Boys.

Adept with other instruments, Alick's love for the bass guitar has led to the improvisation that defines sungura today with the bass guitar, usually played by the lead vocalist, leading the rest of the instruments.

After inventing this exciting beat, Alick recruited other instrumentalists to help propel the genre – which has earned permanency in cultural memory - to the level he wanted.

The sungura ace's influence has been far-reaching as many upcoming sungura musicians such as the Njerama Boys, Romeo Gasa, Simon Mutambi and Obvious Mutani, among others, followed his footsteps.

They have not only followed his beat but adopted his dance styles *Zora Butter*, *Chikopokopo* and *Borrowdale* - named after

the popular Borrowdale Race Course. The sungura icon's dance moves are akin to horses racing.

After leaving the Khiama Boys, Alick formed Orchestra Mberikwazvo in 1997 and never looked back, churning out hit after hit after the release of *Magariro* (1998), which carried the track, *Pakutema Munda*.

When the band toured the United Kingdom in 2003, some of its members opted to stay behind. As a result, Alick took new members onboard, including Noel Nyazanda, Innocent Mjintu, Lucky Mumiriki, Zakaria Zakaria (brother to Nicholas Zakaria), Franco "Slomo" Daka, Obert Gomba and several dancers.

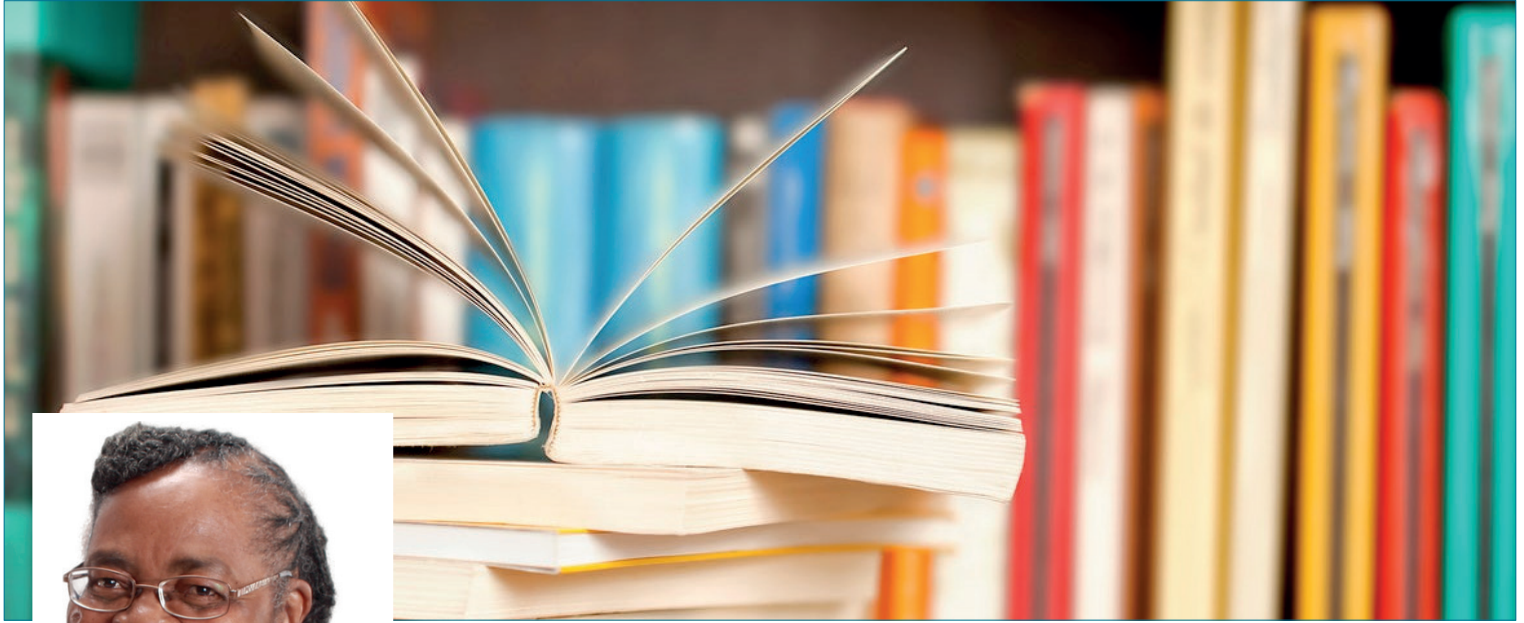
His chanter, Jonasi Kasamba, from the DRC, popularised the

style of calling out band members' names during performances as well as in the recording studio, leading to the sungura ace continuing to excel.

Over the years, Alick's success has been capped by being the advertising face for several companies and organisations.

One of his major strengths is his ability to speak and sing in five languages; Shona, ChiChewa, Sena, Venda, and Lingala.

Macheso's mastery of the bass guitar and his ability to introduce and maintain his brand of sungura will forever remain a marvel for music lovers.*



Barbara Makhalisa-Nkala

Taking pride in the development of local languages

In the feminist sphere, the notion that one can have it all is a myth.

Many women still feel it is impossible to have a successful career and serve the community well while remaining a good wife and mother.

There seems to be the notion that to gain some, one must shed off a lot, especially in the literary world where immense time sacrifices and self-absorption are needed to produce a masterpiece.

The story of legendary writer and publisher, Dr. Barbara Clara Makhalisa-Nkala is one such amazing story of triumph over adversity.

Born in colonial Rhodesia in 1949, and like most women then, Barbara faced struggles

placed by both the colonial government on the education of natives, as well as the widely-held belief of the then patriarchal society that education was a waste on women.

Luckily for her, she grew up with progressive male influences such as her grandfather who was an advocate for women education. He had made sure that his own daughters, Barbara's

Her father also did everything to encourage her to get an education. Throughout her childhood, Barbara loved books, and says the discovery of books in her native language was a game-changer for her.

When she read books by early Ndebele authors such as Isaac Mpofo, Ndabezihle Sigogo and Lassie Ndondo, she knew she was destined to be a writer.



Barbara, who is married to Shadreck Nkala, trained to be a teacher at Mkoba Teachers' College in Gweru, at a time when everything colonial was considered to be more superior. Everyone was emulating white culture from fashion, hairstyles and language.

aunties, had gone to school and pursued careers.

Barbara, who is married to Shadreck Nkala, trained to be a teacher at Gweru Teachers'

College in Gwelo (Gweru), at a time when everything colonial was considered to be more superior. Everyone was emulating white culture from fashion, hairstyles and language. Because of the fad at the time, it would have been pretty normal for Barbara to choose English as the language of her novels. Not only was this going to make her appear more sophisticated but it would have boosted her profile, internationally. She, however, chose to use her mother tongue, becoming the second woman to publish in her native language after Lassie Ndondo.

Her first published work, *Qilindini* (1974), was in response to a call by the Rhodesian Literature Bureau literature competition. She was first place in the African languages section. Her themes on education and

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Christianity were highly visible and this was the same in her subsequent works that included *Umendo* (1977) – which has remained a classic Ndebele novel to this day. *Umhlaba lo* (1977) and *Impilo Inkinga* (1983) also followed the same theme.

Although she has been criticised for portraying Christianity as superior to the local religion, Barbara has been adamant that she was born again in 1961 when she was just 12 and therefore Christianity is her way

of life.

In 1981, she left teaching and became an editor for Longman Publishers. To her credit, she did not confine herself to only using Ndebele, but also published collections of English short stories that include, *The Underdog and Other Stories* (Mambo Press 1984), *Eva's Songs: A Collection of Short Stories* (Harper Collins, 1996) and *Beasty Bones and Other Stories* (1992).

Her short story, *Different Val-*

ues, appeared in Margaret Busby's anthology; *Daughter of Africa*.

She runs Radiant Publishing and also established the Barbara Makhalisa Nkala Trust for the preservation and growth of her mother tongue, Ndebele.

At the ripe age of 72, Barbara is still an active member in her church community and has three children and several grandchildren.

She was awarded an Honor-

ary Doctorate by the National University of Science and Technology for her contribution to education and literature, after attaining her Bachelor of Arts degree in English with UNISA in 1989 and an MA for Leadership and Management in 2007.

She remains a grounded mentor to many younger authors. It is only befitting that NAMA honoured her with the Living Legends Award.*



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Benjamin Mahaka

The epitome of acting finesse

For a very long time, Zimbabweans have had to be content with being consumers of foreign-made film products as the country itself had close to nothing to offer.

Hollywood (USA), Nollywood (Nigeria) as well as Bollywood (India) have, over many years, remained favourite sources for the country's screens.

It is only after productions such as *Neria* that the country's potential comes to the fore.

Today, many people marvel at several high quality performers that Zimbabwe has produced. Among them, Danai Gurira who has made a name for herself in the USA as well as Tongai Arnold Chirisa.

But the story does not end there, neither does it suggest that nothing has been or is hap-

pening locally as, especially after independence, the country's film industry has offered Zimbabwean viewers something, no matter how small, thereby moving the country from being a net consumer of other cultures to at least being a producer of some sort.

While the imposition of Covid-19 restrictions might have impacted negatively on all sectors of the economy, the arts were dealt a very heavy blow since most of them rely on crowds for the content creators to get monetary benefits for their work.

A name that needs no introduction in the field of acting is that of Ben Mahaka born Benjamin Mahaka, who cemented his fame through College Central.

Around the time of Covid-19 restrictions, College Central had just started to make it, with advertising support beginning to trickle in. For many viewers, Ben, who acts as Chido's father

is not his first stellar one, with the actor, director and producer rising to fame while playing the role of Tom Mbambo in local soapie, *Studio 263*.

Working with a largely inexperienced cast drawn mainly from the Midlands State University, Ben's acting finesse cannot be missed in *Wadiwa Wapamoyo* where his role is testimony of his interest in the development of Zimbabwe's creative talent. The script is an emotional one.

The marital problems in his union to Chido's mother, which culminated in divorce proceedings at the courts make the story real-for-life but perhaps even more touching because Ben's wife – a role played by Lee McHoney – is pregnant.



Ben Mahaka rose to fame while playing the role of Tom Mbambo in the popular Godwin Mawuru-produced Zimbabwean soap opera, *Studio 263*.

- a university lecturer - is just scintillating.

His role in *Wadiwa Wepamoyo*

Hard on the heels of....to page 8

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such dazzling creations, the veteran director and actor has set his sights on wooing viewers again with a new production, *Gaza*, a drama series which is set and made in the small eastern town of Chipinge in Manicaland Province.

Gaza is a product of the Zim Digital Migration programme, sponsored by the government through the Ministry of Infor-

mation, Publicity and Broadcasting Services.

In an interview with MultiChoice's Liz Dziva, the veteran actor said: "I'm working on *Gaza*, a minority-language television drama with a crew and cast almost entirely made up of first-timers from my home town, Chipinge. The series, shot on location in Chipinge, is an innovative training initiative for unemployed youths,"

he said.

That Ben chose to work with "first-timers" shows that his heart lies with imparting skills and knowledge to younger upcoming folks, especially those in disadvantaged communities.

His involvement in *Gaza* reflects just how much he may still have to offer to the development and growth of film and television production in the

country.

Currently, Ben, the director of Mahaka Media, spends time directing and producing advertising material and feeding content into development communication, corporate and entertainment circles. He has at some point been a judge for the MultiChoice Talent Factory Academy for Southern Africa.*



Bothwell Nyamhondera

Invisible power behind good music

When watching television or listening to radio, very few think there are any other people involved other than those on the frontline.

Like in all other media wherein those who work in the background are seldomly acknowledged, engineers and producers, rarely get mentioned, including when musicians re-

lease hit after hit in the music arena.

As for music engineers, their contribution is often acknowledged in reviews only and perhaps on the album sleeves.

Affectionately known as "African" in music circles, producer Bothwell Nyamhondera is the man behind the success of many of Zimbabwe's top musi-

cians, including Alick Macheso, Tongai Moyo (late), System Tazvida (late), Leonard Dembo (late), Paul Matavire (late), Zexie Manatsa (late) and Nicholas Zakaria, among others, during his tenure at Gramma Records.

The renowned sound engineer has also worked with several budding musicians.

Bothwell did his primary and

secondary education in Mutare and moved to Harare in 1978 upon completion of his studies.

During his early days in Harare, he formed a group called Octave, which was made up of members such as Ernest Sando, Louis Mhlanga, Chris Chabuka, Eppias Paradza and the late Alfred de Sousa.

In 1980, he joined ...to page 9

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Shed Studios as a trainee engineer, working there until 1982 when he joined Gramma Records where he stayed for 22 years as their resident engineer and later, their chief producer.

It was at Gramma Records that the talented producer made a name for his golden touch, making timeless hits. He worked with the *crème de la crème* of local music industry since the early 1980s until he left in 2004 to work as a freelance engineer /producer.

He had a stint at Last Power Media until 2011 when he left for the United Kingdom (UK) to join his family. Bothwell, who produced all but one of Macheso's albums, joined Diamond Studios on his return from the UK in 2013.

The former Gramma Records producer is credited for helping Macheso assemble the Orchestra Mberikwazvo outfit in 1998 and creating a signature sound, before seeking greener pastures after the release of *Zvinoda Kutendwa*, Macheso's eighth album in 2010.

Many observers have argued that Macheso's ninth album, *Kwatakabva Mitunhu*, could have excelled if Bothwell was

part of it.

Although working for Diamond Studios then, Bothwell vowed to help the sungura musician, adding that he understood



Bothwell Nyamhondera doing his thing in the studio (File Picture)

better the challenges that the sungura maestro was going through then and he would make sure that he would assist him, regardless of the limitations of his contract.

He is quoted as saying then: "Basically my contract does not allow me to work with Macheso. But I don't see why I cannot help him. I have worked with the sungura musician from the time he started music. In fact, I helped him set up that band (Orchestra Mberikwazvo) when I was still at Gramma Re-

ords. I have been there since the time he recorded his first album and I helped him overcome challenges then.

"Nothing, including my con-

history!

Bothwell is on record saying there is a huge gap between new and old school musicians, arguing that a lot needs to be

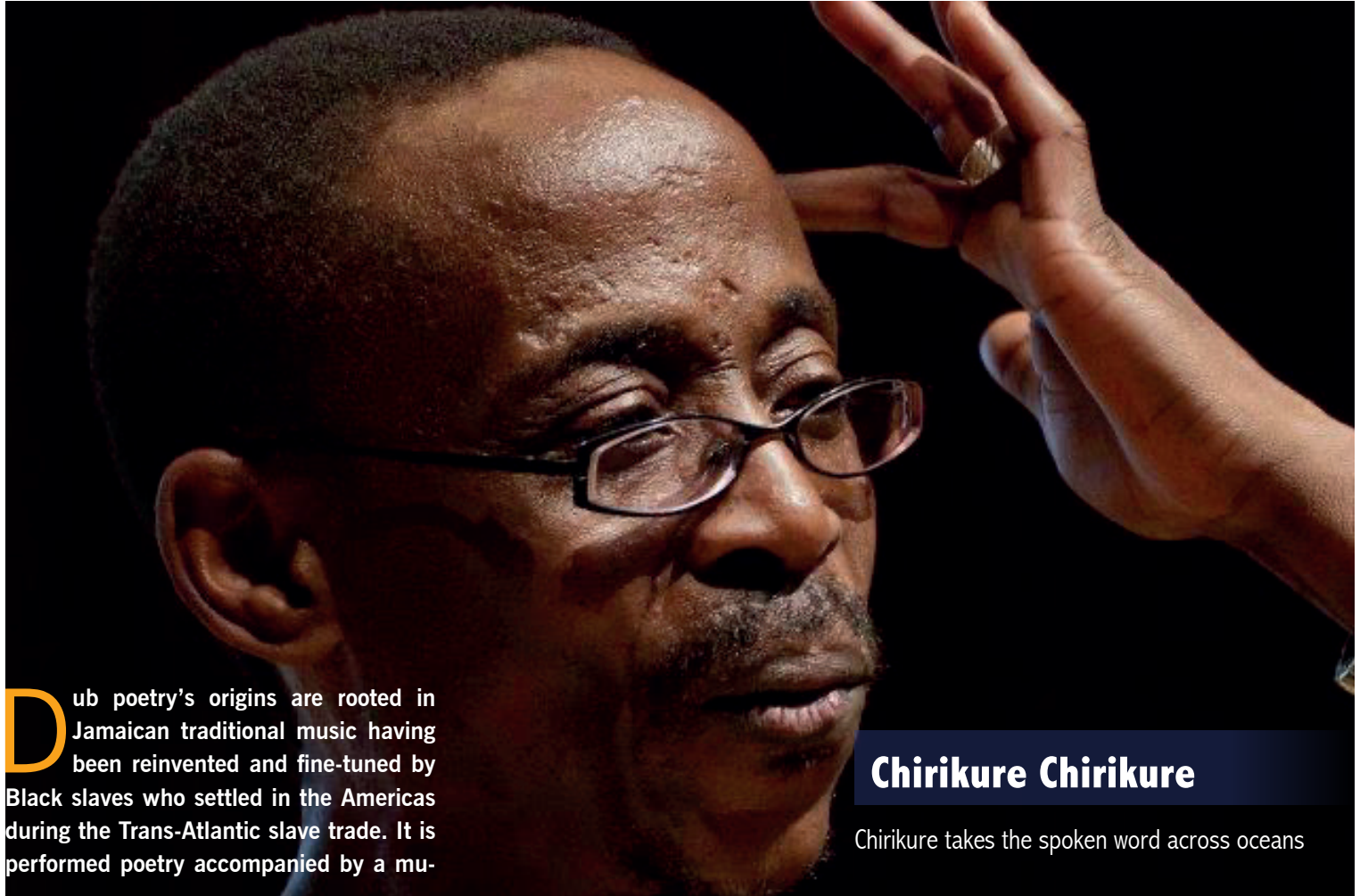
tract, is going to stop me from doing business with him. I feel I'm part of that group. Honestly, it's rare to have such relations in this industry."

With Macheso saying he would not release with any of the existing studios, adding that he wanted to set up his own stable at the Chitungwiza Aquatic Complex following the collapse of Last Power, there was an impasse which the veteran producer said could only be solved through compromise for the sake of progress. The rest is

done to improve the quality of music in the country.

It is through Bothwell's expertise and creativity that the sungura brand grew into a highly marketable genre and as such his work deserves acknowledgement.

His NAMA Living Legends Award is not only commendable but is also befitting for a man who spent so many years in the trenches, helping develop this branch of Zimbabwean arts and culture. *



Chirikure Chirikure

Chirikure takes the spoken word across oceans

Dub poetry's origins are rooted in Jamaican traditional music having been reinvented and fine-tuned by Black slaves who settled in the Americas during the Trans-Atlantic slave trade. It is performed poetry accompanied by a mu-

sical beat, originally reggae although every poet finds his own sound. It is protest art where the poet calls out the ills rampant in society, be they political, economic or social.

In Zimbabwe, Chirikure Chirikure, a poet, song writer and book writer born in 1962 in Gutu, in Masvingo Province to parents who were teachers, popularised this form of poetry during his days at the University of Zimbabwe (UZ).

He attended Zimuto Secondary School, which was closed down in 1979 by the Rhodesian government due to its participation in the Liberation Struggle, resulting in him finishing his "A" Level at Bernard Mizeki in 1981.

Growing up in the countryside saw Chirikure sucking in the traditions and cultural practices of his people. His interactions

with freedom fighters at pungwes or all-night vigils during the liberation struggle, exposed Chirikure to the use of music and dance to indoctrinate the masses towards their cause. More importantly, it showed young Chirikure the power of words, a power that he fell in love with and would shape the rest of his future.

He focused on Shona when he was doing his BA Special Honours. It was at this time that he would perform his work.

With the encouragement of a friend and fellow writer, Stephen Chifunyise, he tried to publish his work. At the time, he was working for College Press – with whom he spent 17 years as an editor.

College Press were at first reluctant to publish his poems and when they eventually came through, his works became one of the first Shona poetry books published by

one author. Traditionally, only anthologies of poetry in Shona had ever been published in the country.

When he took his work to the Ministry of Education, they initially thought his poetry would not be taught in schools because Chirikure mostly used free-style in his work which was unheard of then since most poets, even those writing in Shona, followed the more traditional Victorian style of poetry.

Chirikure wanted to break free, and he did. A few years later, the UZ adopted his books into their curriculum, with other colleges and tertiary institutions following suit. As it is, his books are now taught at both "O" and "A" Level.

He published his first book of poetry *Rukuvhute* in 1989 and it received an honorary mention at the Noma Awards ...to page 11

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for Publishing in Africa in 1990.

His second offering, *Chamupupuri* came in 1994. His third collection of poetry, *Hakurawi – We Shall not Sleep* (1998) was named one of the 75 important books of

the century by the Zimbabwe International Book Fair (ZIBF).

All these won first prize at the ZIBF. His fourth offering, *Aussicht Auf Eigene Schatten*, (original Shona and English poems with German translations) was published

in Germany in 2011.

Several of his poems have also been translated into various international languages. Chirikure, has also published childrens books and textbooks that are used in schools today.*



Jasen Mphepo

Taking theatre to the people.

Over the years, the Zimbabwean theatre stage has grown tremendously.

Ever since the days of Safirio “Mukadota” Madzikatire with his *Mhuri YaVaMukadota*, this phenomenal growth has seen other big names emerge in the performing arts.

But while more and more people have been taking up acting as a career, it has not been as rewarding as in other countries, especially in the Americas and Europe.

In the case of Zimbabwean actors, it has rather been passion and not the dollar that continues to draw many to the stage.

Sadly, the rise in the number of performing artists has not been matched by the available performance spaces for the creatives. Since independence, very few spaces have been developed to cater for the arts and there has been no policy in place to address the gap.

There were, of course, theatres that had been built in cities such as Bulawayo, Harare, Gweru, Masvingo and Mutare long

back but they have now been run down and are barely functional.

Actor, filmmaker, writer and businessman Jasen Mphepo, has been making a difference in this space.

Jasen has worked on various productions such as the 36 television episodes of *Suburb D*, comedy *Ghetto Fellaz*, *New Dawn* and the sitcom *Waiters* over and above other more recent productions.

Jasen is the founder and director of Patsime Trust, which

owns and operates the Jasen Mphepo Little Theatre in Eastlea, Harare.

Having started acting in 1992 with a community group called Together as One in Highfield, a high-density suburb in the capital, Harare, the theatre personality says his role model was the late Safirio. This was before he established his own theatre group with the help of his brothers.

During those days, they would create theatre which entailed dance, poetry, music and drama and would . . .

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perform in schools.

In an interview, Jasen said: “We made our money from charging students to watch our productions. We also relied greatly on consultancy work that we did for government bodies, churches, companies and NGOs who wanted to use theatre as a platform for creating conversations with their constituencies. After many years of working as a community group, we then rebranded to Patsimeredu Edutainment Trust in 2002.”

Patsimeredu Edutainment Trust is an arts institution whose work includes developing mainstream theatre performed at the Jasen Mphepo Little Theatre.

In an effort to stay relevant in the industry and remain connected to audiences, it has since gone virtual in response to Covid-19 restrictions and protocols.

Since the theatre opened on May 8, 2019, it has been a hive of activity, staging about 10 productions, which include *Inside Out*, *A 1000 Miles*, *Imbokodo*, *The Storm*, *Sweet Opium*, and *Ukama*.

Jasen says: “The idea of the theatre was inspired by the need to develop a space where

theatre artists, dancers, poets and musicians alike can showcase their work and talents.”

The theatre, according to Jasen, is responding not only to the lack of performance spaces but also mentorship aspects which have been impeding the growth of the genre. As such, the Trust offers mentorship programs to students from the University of Zimbabwe.

He argues that students from tertiary institutions are loaded with theory but struggle with application, hence the theatre offers a place where they get



Jasen Mphepo on stage. (File Picture)

first hand experience.

Jasen makes the point that sustainability is the key factor affecting many arts institutions when donor funding fades.

“Unfortunately, funding is mostly the only means of sustaining

arts institutions the world over. We are trying our best to market the venue (Jasen Mphepo



The theatre itself was built for the purposes of creating more spaces of art exhibition. A space where new talent can be discovered and nurtured as well as to ensure growth of the arts industry.

~Jasen Mphepo

Little Theatre) as a multi-pur-

es normally focus on known theatre practitioners, this new space caters for all.

It has an open-door policy and partners other production houses to avail more productions and opportunities to audiences while ensuring that content creators are not working in isolation.

Resultantly, the venue has a mixed bag of events at any given time.

The trust has also employed full-time artists, tasked with developing new content.

Jasen, who won the NAMA Outstanding Screen Production award in 2011 for *New Dawn*, has been active on the stage over the years and the role he has taken up in training arts practitioners as well as opening his venue to other branches of the creatives

should be commended.

Consequently, him being honoured by NAMA with the 2021 Living Legends Award is commendable.*

pose facility that can be hired by different artists and other players for their functions and events. We are also working on audience building so that we can assure sustainability of the theatre,” he said.

While the few available spac-

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Jesesi Mungoshi

Jesesi Mungoshi an example of stage success

In our society, it is more commonplace that the man lays down the rules and is usually the breadwinner. The wife typically stands by the side and helps build her husband's dreams. However, once in a while, the luck comet strikes and power couples emerge.

That is the story of Charles (now late), an outstanding writer and Jesesi Mungoshi, one of the country's best actresses, who despite what was acceptable to society, carved their own niche in the country's arts industry.

Born in 1954, Jesesi grew up in Nyika, Bikita and attended Zimuto and Mashoko Secondary schools for her secondary education. The young girl, loved performing and oozed confidence that allowed her to dance even at townships, a past time many girls would not fathom. She also shared the love for music with her brothers who played the whistle flute.

She was always part of the drama groups. However, after school, she never thought she would pursue acting. She was staying with her sister and training to be an ac-

countant when she met Charles.

They married in 1975 and that was when Jesesi got useful insights into the life of an artist. At first, Charles was protective of his work and would not let her into most of his



Neria was a heart-wrenching movie and to get into character, Jesesi says she had to lose herself for more than six weeks, something Charles understood because he knew what it took to be creative. *Neria* got international acclaim and sealed Jesesi's fate as a great actress.

works, although he eventually reconsidered and allowed her entry into his creative process.

In 1985, Jesesi got her break when the ZBC approached Charles with the hope of turning one of his works, *Inongova Njakenjake* into a drama series. He was meant to work with a drama outfit from Mabvuku for which they had not cast the role of the

mother yet.

Since Jesesi knew this book intimately, she volunteered to play the part when the actress Charles had in mind fell through. Jesesi got the part and that heralded a new chapter in her life.

She went on to land a number of roles on ZTV from that time on. She starred in various dramas and daring roles which often went against societal norms. Angry, judgmental men would accost her, questioning her motives in the drama series, *Ndabvezera*. At one time, her in-laws discouraged her from acting, saying it was not proper for an upstanding wife to be on TV. Her husband, however, stood by her.

To show that nothing would stop her from her path to stardom, when the film *African Journey* (1989-90) was filmed, Jesesi was actually pregnant. Luckily, the character she portrayed was also with child.

She went on to nail the *Neria* auditions, wherein the auditioning panel, which included directors Godwin Mawuru and Tsitsi Dambarembga, were

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ARTS Legends

...from page 14

already impressed by her previous work. *Neria*, the country's largest grossing film of all time, led to the revisiting of Zimbabwe's inheritance laws. It addressed the injustices women and children were subjected to after the death of the husband and father, as the inheritance laws were biased towards men.

Neria was a heart-wrenching movie and to get into character, Jesesi says she had to lose herself for more than six weeks, something Charles understood because he knew

what it took to be creative. *Neria* got international acclaim and sealed Jesesi's fate as a great actress.

She went on to establish JM Productions and did a number of projects, notably documentaries such as *The Journey to the Ocean and Mysteries of Mt Inyanga*. She was co-producer of the documentary on the late Mozambican president Samora Machel called *Camarada Presidente*.

After *Neria*, she has been on a number of other productions, some of which have

made it to Netflix.

Together with her sons, Jesesi founded the Mungoshi Press to ensure that not only would writers publish their work, but would also receive their proper value. She remains one of the most iconic actresses to ever come out of the country and truly deserves to be celebrated and honoured with a NAMA Living Legends Award.*



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Musaemura Zimunya

Writing across genres and languages

Poetry is a unique genre of literature whose messaging is achieved using limited words. How good a poet is depends mainly on how effectively they use language and other stylistic devices to bring out meaning.

Whereas traditional English poetry puts extra attention on form, African poetry focuses on the message. Some of the continent's best poets such as Christopher Okigbo, Wole Soyinka and Gabriel Okara (all from Nigeria) have shown that the message is their main focus.

Musaemura Zimunya, who has taught at the University of Zimbabwe since 1980 before briefly moving to the Midlands State University, perhaps remains one of the best poets to emerge from the country.

Born in Mutare in Southern Rhodesia (later Rhodesia and now Zimbabwe) on 14 November, 1949, Musa, as he is affectionately known in literary circles, was educated locally and enrolled with the University of Rhodesia from where he was expelled in 1973 for "disturbing the peace".

He went into exile in the United Kingdom where he went to the University of Kent in Canterbury then, graduating with a Bachelor's degree in 1978 and a Master's of Arts in Literature in 1979.

Musa got a Fulbright scholarship to the Pratt Institute in New York in 1992 and served as Director of Black Studies at Virginia Tech.

Musa began publishing poems in literary journals in colonial Rhodesia when he was still at school. His early works often revealed an imaginative appreciation of the beauty of nature, underlining the deep romanticism within it.



His poems over the past three decades, in short, reflect on the physical beauty of his country, the people's struggles against settler occupation and racism, the meaning of African myths and traditions and the meaning of freedom to the individual.

Musa has also contributed immensely to the country's literary scholarship through his critical work, in essence his MA thesis titled: *Those Years of Drought and Hunger: The Birth of African Fiction in English in Zimbabwe*, which is widely considered as the pathfinder text on Zimbabwean Literature in English.

His poems over the past three decades, in short, reflect on the physical beauty of his country, the people's struggles against settler occupation and racism, the meaning of African myths and traditions and the meaning of freedom to the individual.

Musa has also appeared in group anthologies like *Gwenyambira* (1979) and Kizito Muchemwa's *Zimbabwean Poetry in English* (1978).

One of his most popular anthologies, co-edited with Mudereri Kadhani and titled *And Now the Poets Speak* (1981), is a collection of mainly liberation war poetry. As the title suggests, they were not free to publish earlier on, and it only became possible after independence in 1980.

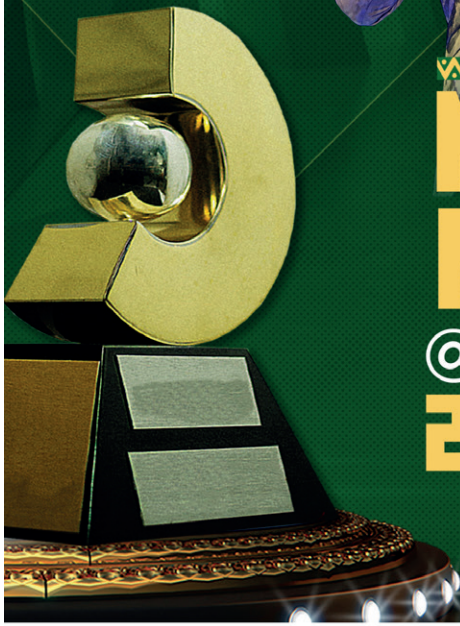
Later on, Musa published *Thought Tracks* (1982), *Kingfisher, Jikinya and Other Poems* (1982), *Country Dawns and City Lights* (1985), *Samora!* (co-authored in 1987), *Chakarira Chindunduma* (co-authored and edited in 1985), *Birthright* (1989), *The Fate of the Vultures* (1989), *Perfect Poise* (1994) and *Selected Poetry of Zimunya* (published in a Serbian language and English in 1995).





His anthology *Thought Tracks* dwells on a generation of Zimbabweans who felt marginalised by colonialism, while *Kingfisher, Jikinya and Other Poems* is a celebration of love and nature.

Country Dawns and City Lights takes a caustic look at the idealisation of rural life while at the same time confronting the difficulties faced by urban dwellers.*



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