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SUNDAY LIFE | August 24, 2008

Omega deserves diva status

BY MOSES SERUGO

Maybe Omega Bugembe Okello will put an end to the debate about which Ugandan artiste deserves to be called a diva. We have been treated to tone-deaf acts that mask their lack of talent behind charity causes they hope will catapult them to diva status.

Omega does not have to do that. She can carry a tune and has rallied her talent behind a cause that is at the core of human existence - maternal mortality rate. Those that have watched the TV ad that says no woman should die while giving life will understand why Omega is helping out the Mulago Maternity Wing in getting additional logistics like surgical beds and an anaesthetic machine.

Omega's vocal talent is in the same precision league as the Swiss luxury chronometer that boasts being this year's Olympics time keeper. She could very easily win any vocal Olympics.

Hers is a voice that has received training as part of the African Children's Choir when she was a child and her stagecraft dates as far back as Limit X's Makerere University Main Hall concert in 1993, where she was an opening act.

Omega's musical talent has matured over the years like a fine wine and those that have seen this petite songbird's growth will be glad at the promise she holds as a multi-genre artiste from East Africa. It is probably a protest at not wanting to be pigeon-holed that has seen Omega release an album that is part contemporary Christian music, part Afro-jazz, and mostly world music owing to its ethnic feel.

As she takes to the stage next Friday - August 29 at Kampala Serena Hotel, her brief will be to create health advocacy through the use of her voice. She is best placed to do that having quit her medical occupation to pursue her musical dreams. Her album, *Kiwomera Emmeeeme*, will provide her with this musical baptism as she holds her debut concert here.

The title track is a symphony of beautiful xylophones, a mild bass line and the deep pulse of African rhythms, which set the pace for the 11 tracks on this World Music gem. *Mujje* is an invitation to a jazzy track that is as churchy in its preaching of Jesus' love as it is groovy.

Yaye is sombre and mournful on which harmonica interplay with singly plucked guitar strings help Omega's soaring voice to replicate the cry of the people. She admits the song has political undertones although she would rather play it safe and admit that was not done on purpose.

There is more woe on *Zibasanze*, a gloomy song that plays out as a warning to those that think they can get away with murder. "Your day of reckoning is coming", is what this thumb piano-driven song says sternly.

The album is not all about doom and gloom even when the dark songs would easily earn nominations as soundtracks to haunting video projects. There is as much joy and joie de vivre on the song set. Omega is passionate about the institution of marriage and the smiley vocals on *Gunyuma* seem to be directed to the love cynics into believing that there is nothing better than love.

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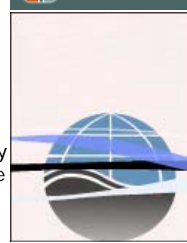


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Her relationship with husband Richard Okello is what defines this song and she says she at times has to pinch herself to see if what has come to her relationship-wise is for real. Definitely one of the standout tracks on the album, its Sylver Kyagulanyi-penned lyrics get a sweet makeover on a Swahili rendition Utama wa Mapenzi.

Songs like Tugilabilile give the album its much-needed World Music credentials thanks to its environmental conservation message, which is now a global concern. "If we are to guarantee that the rains will continue to wash and clean our planet and we should stop chocking mother earth!"

There is a bonus title-less track that has a rocky feel done against an Ekitagururo and Kinyarwanda percussion bet that is sheer genius. It is another of those I will never leave you Christian song with a brilliant arrangement.

Those who attend her concert next Friday will be looking at experiencing the exact purity of the audio output on her audio CD. Omega understands this all too well and is flying in her band of notable musical names. Kirk Williams will pluck the bass guitar while Brett Gaines will play duo on acoustic and electric guitar.

Cleshods "Cleo" Cook will definitely get so much attention as a female drummer while Salvador Hernandez will play percussions. Miguel Ponder will finger the keyboards while Shalilah Reynolds and Ashlei Garrison will provide background vocals to Omega's melody. Tickets will cost Shs85,000 and Daily Monitor and KFM are title sponsors.

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