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**Omega charms Serena**

Tuesday, 2nd September, 2008

E-mail article  Print article



By **Kalungi Kabuye**

NOT that many people showed up for the first concert by US-based jazz singer Omega Bugembe-Okello. But that was their loss, as we listened to one of the sweetest voices to come out of Uganda.

Jazz singing is not common in Uganda, where even plain jazz is just starting to get acceptance.

It is difficult to describe Omega's voice, but its restrained powerfulness can take you to the highs of emotive love; or bring you down to the suffering of the downtrodden. A product of the internationally acclaimed African Children's Choir, Omega toured with the group for years before taking a break to study medicine. But she eventually gave in to the calling of music, and studied jazz.

On Friday night, backed by her US band and two back-up vocalists, all those years came home to roost, even though the sound almost let her down. Without preamble she came on stage and started her rendition of George Gershwin's Summertime, only the microphone was not working. By the time the microphone started working she was almost into the last verse. And there was feedback throughout the concert. She smiled it off with the words "... this is Uganda."

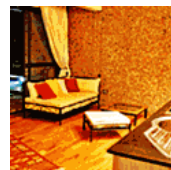
Apart from that hitch, the audience was wowed by Omega's versatility. At times she spoke of her love for Jesus Christ. Other times she sang of her love for life, Uganda, but mostly of her love for her husband, who surprised her by coming on stage when she did the song Gunyuma, written by Sylver Kyagulanyi.

She did songs from her new album Kiwomeera Emeeme, which is mostly in Luganda, and also all the songs from her first album. The way she sang Amazing Grace, partly in English and smoothly changed into Luganda, was just about the apex of the night.

There is an innocence and sweetness that comes out of Omega which, added to her voice, can be quite enchanting. And by the time the concert came to an end two hours after it began, the people in attendance declared themselves truly enchanted.

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