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FULL WOMAN | September 6, 2008
Omega Bugembe Okello

Tell me about yourself

I am a singer, songwriter, a health advocate and a wife. I love people and care about excellence in everything I do.

What inspired you to become a health advocate?

When I was young, I met a female doctor who was also a singer and I actually thought one day I would be like her, but I didn't end up in medical school though I ended up doing my premedicine and majored in biology. I later took a year working in a hospital and that's when I discovered that there are a lot of inadequacies in the health system even in the US. I also learnt about a course in health advocacy and took it up since I had a desire to bring healing to people. I figured if I couldn't bring healing as a physician, I could help change policy and help thousands.

Why did you target maternal health as a way to give charity this time?

I am at a point in my life when I am thinking about having children. I realised that while I have the privilege of good health services, many back home don't. Child birth is not a disease, it's something wonderful that no one has to die from. Sometimes when women have high risk pregnancies, all they need is a C-section but can't have it due to inadequate facilities. So I am fundraising for surgical beds in Mulago because it is a major hospital for the average person. I have also donated a heart monitor, suction vacuum and foetal monitor. You are very passionate about children; I'm surprised you don't have any. (Laughs) not yet. My husband and I are big planners. People keep laughing at us and saying that you can never plan everything. We have been married for four years. I believe that it is important to have a good foundation in your marriage first.

Nothing against those who have children immediately though, we just think it's advisable to get to know each other better first as a couple and plan both time and finances.

So what would you say is the secret to a happy marriage?

I don't know that there is just one. But I believe it is a choice by both parties to be deliberate about what they do in a relationship. That forces you to reassess what is going on. They shouldn't just sit back and wait for it to work but decide they want it to be exciting so work towards that.

When did you start singing?

When I was four years old and professionally when I toured with African Children's Choir and at college too where I had a voice scholarship, but it was two years ago when I started my record label.

What inspires your music?

I write about personal experiences, things that people in the world can relate to, about God and taking care of the world. I want to give people hope and encouragement that they can relate to my music and feel some kind of spiritual healing.

What is it like being a Christian artiste in highly a secular world?

It's not that hard because I sing in my native language. In US they call it world music; it's a fusion of jazz and afro ethnic sounds. The way that I sing about God is not in a dogmatic way but a way that I reveal my experience. I stay away from typical evangelical jargon because the rest of the world doesn't understand that language.

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Isn't it hard for you to be in such environments?

Yes it is, but I pray a lot to be covered and I am deliberate about guarding my heart and marriage and not putting myself in a situation that I can be compromised.

Women in the entertainment industry are often portrayed as sex sirens. What is your comment on this?

I believe that if you sing well enough, you don't have to be naked for people to receive your music. Modesty works. I own my label because I want to have control of my image. Most cases it's the labels that decide how to sell your music and hence make you get the look they think sells. You can be sexy and covered up or chic and stylish with out showing all the flesh or leaving nothing to the imagination.

Is it hard in the industry as a woman?

It is hard. They look at you as a woman and wonder what you know especially if you don't have the theoretical background and the lingual. But when they hear you and see that you can sing, they pay attention to you. You have to be firm in your expectation and have control over your music, so I know the chords and have developed thick skin to have my way and music how I like it.

What has living abroad taught you about life?

I learnt that our culture here is very communal unlike out there so I know that I don't have to wait for someone to help me. It has taught me the kind of independence that allows one to progress in life, not that you don't need other people. I have also been exposed to many cultures and the exposure has made me think big.

And about yourself?

To love and appreciate my country. Until you go out of the country you never realise how beautiful it is. Now I tell people the good things about Uganda all the time because all they know are terrible things like Idi Amin. Your philosophy in life. Don't settle for less that you can get in life.

Last word

I want women to know that they are beautiful, valuable and capable of great things. Every single Ugandan woman is capable of great things.

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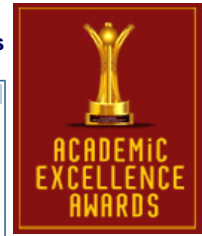
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