

# SIGANA INTERNATIONAL STORYTELLING FESTIVAL

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FESTIVAL REPORT

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# Introduction



The 5th annual Sigana International Storytelling Festival (SISF) was held from 7th to 14th June 2013. Hosted by Zamaleo ACT, the Festival has fast gained a reputation for being a vibrant gathering in Kenya of exceptional purveyors of performed words, atmosphere and movement celebrating the age old art of storytelling.

Zamaleo ACT is a registered arts & culture public trust organization with a focus on creation and presentation of African creative performance expressions. The word Zamaleo is a coinage from two Kiswahili words, Zamani (old times) and Leo (Today). The organization seeks the achievement of harmonious social co-existence celebrated through expressive forms cultural arts.

The Sigana storytelling performance is an art form developed over the years through relentless work by contemporary Kenyan purveyors of African oral traditions heritage. Diverse African performance elements consisting of dramatic narration, banter, chant, recitation, song, riddling, music, dance and movement are seamlessly woven to form highly interactive contemporary Storytelling theatre performance experiences. The spoken word as expressed in wit, wisdom, proverbs, riddles, sayings, dilemma impasses come to life in dramatic presentations that seek to integrate performers and audiences into a participatory mutual sharing of art.

Started in 2009, the Sigana International Storytelling Festival (SISF) has in the past featured world class Storytellers from Canada, USA, Sweden, Uganda, Tanzania and India. In 2013, Kenyan audiences were treated to a series of performances, workshops, networking seminars and school orature sessions. The festival climaxed with a live recording of 26 stories intended for a TV show dubbed Sigana Moto Moto (Fireside Tales).

The Festival provides Kenyan audiences and lovers of the age-old storytelling art the rare opportunity to experience both homegrown and international performances from other cultures especially out of Africa. The hallowed cycle stage of stories features reputable and world renowned Storytellers coming from different countries, settings, cultures and storytelling backgrounds. It is a guaranteed promise of sublime fun, excitement and memorable moments!

The 2013 edition was no different as it showcased storytellers from several countries that included Kenya, USA, Denmark and Romania. A total of 13 storytellers took to the stage over the one week duration, performing to various audiences at different venues.

# The storytellers



**Marianne Christensen** is a Danish storyteller. Her stories have a wide span from her childhood at the island Lolland, to tales from the world. Marianne's stories create images in the listeners' minds couched by her unique personal intimate contact with audiences.



**Hellen Alombe Namai** perches at the apex of modern Kenyan developed Sigana storytelling practice. She performs as an integral part of Zamaleo Sigana Storytellers whose signature revolves around uplifting Storytelling beyond words. The art of animated banter, chants, music, sing along tunes, narration, persuasive dramatics, dance and movement are all weaved into infectious voyages of fictionalized worlds that are immediately grounded upon varied realities informing our everyday lives. Alombe has performed internationally in Sweden, South Africa, Re-Union, Uganda, Ethiopia and Tanzania. She started off as an actress and soon turned into full time professional Storyteller over the past ten years. Alombe is a well-known creative within Kenyan educational circles as a persuasive Storyteller-Teacher with unforgettable impact on young learners. In addition to her often-busy performance schedule, Alombe runs Master storytelling workshops besides mentoring young tellers into future professionals.



**Ogotu Muraya** is a writer, theatre-maker and storyteller. In 2012 he translated and adapted William Shakespeare's *The Merry Wives of Windsor* into the Swahili *Wanawake wa Heri wa Windsor*. The adaptation premiered in April 2012 at Shakespeare's Globe Theatre in London as part of the "Globe to Globe Festival", a build-up to the 2012 London Olympics. His works have been performed in Kenya, Tanzania, Zimbabwe at HIFA 2013, India, London and at La Mama in New York City. His storytelling has featured at The Storymoja Hay Festival, The Sigana International Storytelling Festival, Anancy Festival, The Hay Festival (Wales), The Durham World Heritage Center, Durham University (UK), NuVo Arts Festival (Kampala), and recently at the Brakke Grond (Amsterdam) as part of *Nieuwe Helden's 'The Synergetic City'*. He co-produces *Tales & Stories*, a storytelling concert held annually in Nairobi. Ogotu holds a BA in International Relations, is an Associate Director of The Theatre Company Ltd and works with Kwani Trust as an Editorial Assistant.





**Wangari Grace** is a seasoned Storyteller who has gained her skills performing in most unlikely places for quite often unpredictable audiences. She is much at home with both young and adult gatherings. Her performance style is grounded in open, interactive participatory storytelling approach. She is a regular Storyteller with Zamaleo ACT and has made appearances in all the past 4 editions of Sigana International Storytelling Festival. Wangari has also performed in Uganda, Tanzania and Sweden apart from being a featured Teller on the Jambo Toto children's TV program on Kenya's national television channel - KBC. She is also the author of 'The Forever Tree'. The swahili translation of the book is also available 'Mti Wa Milele'



**Kristin Pedemonti** is an Award winning Storyteller and Free Hug enthusiast. She shares true and traditional tales focused on building bridges between people and cultures. Kristin fervently believes that Stories connect us all through Hope, Understanding and the true realization that we are all Human Beings. She performs worldwide and is also the Founder/Facilitator of volunteer project called Literacy Outreach Belize which went global during the course of 2013 by being established in Kenya, Ghana and India.



**Jamlik Kogi (MC KJ)** is a seasoned professional storyteller with five years experience in the field. He is the founder of KEIJEI Entertainment Company. He was a finalist Storytelling competitor at the Annual Storymoja Hay festival in 2009. His contemporary, poetic, comical and breath-taking stories often render his audience into stitches. MC KJ is a social, down to earth young man. He usually performs around Nairobi as a Master of Ceremony in events such as garden weddings, church gatherings and other similar gigs. He narrates, thinks, dreams, and sings African living tales. MC KJ insists that he was born talking!



**Susan Kun'gu** has been telling stories to children since she was in her teens, which is quite a long time ago now! After many years of practicing the art with children as a kindergarten and primary teacher, she took to Nairobi stages with her first public performance at the Phoenix Theatre in 2001. Since then, she has entertained many audiences with her renditions of African folk tales, in schools, at weddings, parties, around camp-fires at night, as well as at several public venues in town. Her performance is driven by the belief that "Stories cross boundaries, touching the heart and drawing people together."



**Leonida Nanjala** is a Kenyan based storyteller who uses songs to enhance the beauty and power of her short stories. She discovered her passion for storytelling in 2010 while performing in a musical storytelling piece called Kigezi Ndoto. Leonida is currently working on a collection of storytelling pieces that she intends to use as a tool for Community empowerment and Theatre for Development skills training. Leonida harbors deep hopes of making contemporary storytelling into a highly celebrated, appreciated and well known form of art both for entertainment as well as tool for social change.



**Newton Kweya** is a Storyteller with Zamaleo Sigana Storytellers. Having been in the Story-field for several years, he says, "Once upon a time when I was young and knew very little in life, my life lessons were relayed to us in the form of stories which was told in a most captivating manner that ensured the lessons sunk in our hearts and minds. This art of storytelling is a journey I have decided to undertake to help people learn vital life skills and attitudes as they relax and enjoy themselves!"



**John Mukeni**, or Titi as he is fondly known is a young teller with Zamaleo Sigana Storytellers. He has been performing with them for about six years and believes that 'the Sigana way of storytelling has opened a window of no impossibilities through stories, a world of adventure and that the shortest distance between two people is a story.' He has recently returned from Denmark where he performed with the Quonga Theatre Artists.



Romanian actress and storyteller, **Giorgiana Elena Popan**, is a happy, dynamic girl with great sense of humor. After being awarded with the 3rd prize for the best international storyteller in the International Storytelling Festival Kanoon in Iran's city of Urmiah in January 2012, together with Mihaela Blaga, also a storyteller, Giorgiana started the very first Storytelling association in Romania. In year 2012, they organized their inaugural first International Storytelling Festival dubbed The Magic of the Word. She says "I tell stories because I love to talk...and love to share vitality, energy, wisdom and to make people laugh."

The festival also provided a platform for other young, up and coming Kenyan storytellers. This included Irene Mwangi, Jane Mboya and Yusuf. Irene and Yusuf are part of Sarakasi Hospital Trust Project and have taken steps into storytelling with mentorship from the Zamaleo team.





# Schools Orature Programme



The schools programme is a major component of both Zamaleo ACT programmes and the Sigana International Storytelling Festival. Sigana Schools Orature Performances is a Participatory Educational Theatre (PET) program conducted as an outreach to high school students across Kenya. Students and their teachers are taken through practical and highly participatory performance based learning process of African Oral Literature. The program creates a platform for participants to take the chance of sharing diverse performance traditions, approaches, techniques and styles within Oral literature. It is highly interactive, brings oral literature to life and was developed as a supportive addition to schools' study curriculum syllabus.

Contents of the orature program revolve around participatory dramatic storytelling rendition of known Myths, Legends, Animal Tales, Dilemma Tales, and Human/Ogre adventures. Contemporary written African Short Stories are also covered under this program. The performances are prepared and presented to schools on invitational basis.

A specially designed schools programme was conducted in three different high schools during the festival. On Saturday 8th June, the storytellers made their way to Alliance Girls High School, Kiambu. The school has been hosting Zamaleo SS for Oral Literature sessions since 2006 and has been part of the festival program since its inception in 2009. The girls were treated to a fantastic performance from the team of tellers. Mid week, the team made its way to Bomet County and delivered a powerful performance at Saseta Girls High School. Then they returned to Nairobi and brought the festival to an end with a performance at Aga Khan High School, Nairobi.

Two family shows were conducted at the Kenya National Theatre's Ukumbi Mdogo auditorium on Harry Thuku Road, opposite the Norfolk Hotel. The attendance was impressive with the concert hall packed to brim.

There was also a number of workshops and networking seminars where storytellers got to meet one another while bonding, sharing experiences, telling techniques as well as other tools of trade.

### **The Audiences**

As always, the festival enjoyed attendance by diverse audiences in all the shows. They comprised of ranged from young people from colleges and universities whose choice was the Friday evening show to young children and families who attended the Sunday afternoon session. There were over 1500 high school students from 3 different schools who took part in the festival's activities.

# Sigana Moto Moto Live TV Recording



As a climax to the festival, the Kenyan storytellers invited their international counterparts to join them as part of a live recording of stories intended for TV. Now in its second season, Sigana Moto Moto is a television series on African Traditional story telling that is recorded by Zamaleo ACT in partnership with Cinematic Solutions, a leading local Kenyan film company. The recording was done outdoors over two nights in a serene, picturesque location in Ongata Rongai, in the outskirts of Nairobi.



# The festival in pictures





*“It is a beautiful festival that showcases light, culture and a sense of belonging” – Reagan Oduor, Percussion Artist*

*“A good show for the family. My kids enjoyed it. They can see there’s a future in the ARTS!” – Nancy, a parent.*

*“Kudos for giving young and upcoming storytellers a platform to showcase their talents” – David Kavasha, a performing artiste-dancer.*

*“It was fun and also educational” – Max, a primary school pupil*

*“Made me feel right at home!” – James Ouma, writer and children’s mentor*

*“It was so good that it was worth seeing for the second time” – Catherine Odongo, an arts enthusiast*

*“I loved the festival! It was thoroughly entertaining as well as a learning experience. I would definitely love to attend next time!” – Rose, a University student*

*“It has been a great pleasure to be here! Next time I will bring the children!” – Joshua, Parent*



# Milestones

No. of nationalities involved

4

7

Days

Venues

5

Over  
2,000

Attendees

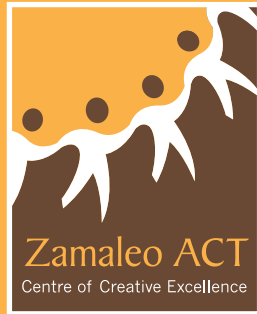
# Looking Forward

2014 will be bigger and better!

In 2014, the festival will be taking place on 6th – 15th June. Already storytellers from Canada, Denmark and South Africa have expressed interest in being part of the festival. We plan to host school and children parties, corporates, families and other institutions to enjoy workshops, storytelling performances, music, dance and other fun activities.

We intend to continue encouraging new storytellers to go out there and tell their stories. In the words of Kimani wa Wanjiru, the SISF 2013 Guest of Honor who officially opened the festival “Everyone has a story; it is just a matter of finding the best way to tell it!”





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