

## On Melody Makers

### Mombasa-based Tanzanian singer out with new CD

**M**ombasa: Coast-based Tanzanian musician Frank Masamba continues to ride high with his latest CD titled, *Sukuma Wiki*.

His songs emphasise the need for peace and the importance of peaceful co-existence in the world.

"We should stop fighting among ourselves and learn to live together as



Massamba

brothers and sisters," he says

The four-track CD has all the songs in two parts. They are *Massamba*, *Kunguni*, *Dunia ina Mateso* and *Sukuma*.

The music was recorded at the Andrew Crawford Studios in Nairobi and later digitally mastered by Nabil Sound Studio in Mombasa.

Massamba, whose career dates back to 1969, is the lead singer and saxophonist of his group, *Zebra Trio*.

The band has been performing at beach hotels and is currently based at the Whitesands Beach Hotel, where they perform every Saturday from 3 pm to 5 pm.

Other members of the group include guitarist George Odhiambo, Khamis Mulenge and Adam Yaa.

Massamba plans to tour Nairobi and other up-country towns on a promotional campaign of the new CD.

### Werrason the point of focus at festival

**K**isumu: When the 10-day Guinness Music Festival-Kisumu at the Maendeleo Park, enters its third day today. On Saturday, the focus will be on Congolese crooner Werrason (Ngiamakanda) and his Orch Wenge Musica-Maison Mere.

Werrason is expected in Nairobi on Thursday and will perform on the show's second last day. He will alternate on stage with local artistes, including Redsun, who, with rapper Chameleon, sang the chart-buster *Mama Mia*.

It will be a chance for Werrason to compensate his Kisumu fans, who failed to watch him following a poorly organised show in the lakeside town about two months ago.

Tomorrow, the Extra Kimwa Band and Ken Musica will perform. On Tuesday, it will be the turn of rapper Poxi Presha and Tom Kodiyo's Metro Dumbe Dumbe Band. Others to entertain include veteran singer Daniel Owino Misiani, Jack Nyadundo, Benga songbird Princess July, Bag-gofunny Comedians and Orutu Kenge Kenge traditional troupe.

The show is being attended by revellers from Kisumu and the neighbouring towns of Kakamega and Eldoret.

### Show of beauty, music at varsity

**E**ldoret: It will be action galore on Saturday at the Shakers Club during a night of beauty and music. This will be the inaugural "Mr and Miss-PSSP Moi University" beauty contest.

The organisers have invited models from Moi University to take part in the event to start at 8.30 pm. Kenyan beauties from previous events are also expected to attend.

The event will also feature a music extravaganza by rappers, dancers, singers and disc jockeys.

There are several sponsors, including world famous track star Daniel Komen, the chief guest.

The entrance will be Sh100 (students), while the rest will pay Sh150.

Meanwhile, for the lovers of Rhumba and *Zilozpendwa* music, the Bana Kutana Band will stage an oldies extravaganza at the Kutana Club, Eldoret on Saturday.

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## ARTS PERSONALITY OF THE WEEK

# He's a scientist, director, writer all rolled into one

By ANTHONY NJAGI

**N**othing about this man who loves to dress in simple flowing shirts and canvas shoes looks theatrical.

But JPR Ochieng'-Odera, who works full time as a scientist with

ICIPE, has had an active creative life in theatre for the past two-and-a-half decades, where he has excelled as an actor, director and writer.

His creative writing goes as far back as 1975, when, while in high school, he wrote his first play, *Me, Myself and I*. The play won awards in the schools' drama festival and was filmed for and screened on the then Voice of Kenya Television in 1978.

And yet the fire keeps burning many productions down the line. JPR's latest work is the play, *Kahora Mwarimu, ni Woka Muno!* (Slow down my teacher, you've gone too far!). It explores the relationship between a teacher and a student. It has been staged at the French Cultural and Cooperation Centre, Nairobi.

It is based on a Kikuyu hit song by the same title produced by popular musician Joseph Kamaru in the 70s.

In May, 1984, JPR won a Kenyan Radio Play Writing competition organised by the Westdeutscher Rundfunk, Cologne, and the Goethe Institut, Nairobi, with his play *Why? In the Name of God*.

He was then awarded a three-month cultural scholarship to the then West Germany by the Institut. The play was later translated into German and broadcast by the DLF Radio in 1986. In July, 1988, it was translated into Norwegian and broadcast in Norway.

In June, 1985, he was one of the 19 finalists in the Deutsche Welle-Wide Radio Play competition with the play *The Mad King-Beggar of the Bus Park*.

#### Pioneering play on Aids

The play was produced by the WDR in 1986, and in 1988, as an international joint venture between Deutsche Welle and Radio Zimbabwe.

JPR's pioneering play on HIV/Aids, *Beer...*, was broadcast by the African Service of the British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC) on December 20, 1987, and the WDR, in 1988 and produced by Nairobi-based Mijiza Players. In 1993, he wrote two plays, *Kachinja* and *No 15*, which were later produced by the KBC. His other works include, *The Passion* (1977), *Thim* (1978), *The Clash* (1979), *Faces of the Kiwi* (1987), *The Border Post* (1988) and *Who is in Control Here?* (1989).

In the 1990s, he wrote four episodes of a serial, *Towers*. His first episode was declared the third overall in the 1987 BBC African Playwriting Competition and was broadcast in March, 1997. Towards the end of 1997, JPR scripted the emotional drama that discusses the issue of tribal clashes in Africa titled, *The Night-Long Conversion of Shehu Abdin*.

Following the terrorist bomb that rocked Nairobi on August 7, 1998, JPR and some of his colleagues



Photo/Anthony Njagi

JPR Ochieng'-Odera (left) during the launch of the play *Slow Down My Teacher* officiated by Rwandese Ambassador to Kenya, Joy Mukanyange (right).

developed a memorial drama called, *Hopes Aflame*. The satirical comedy, *Falling into Space* was performed in conjunction with Arts Ablaze. The play won the Most Outstanding Creative prize in the Mbalamwezi Players Awards.

JPR's ProPerArt Creations does not stop there. He has been researching on effective methods of communicating social messages to a society constantly living with negative news.

He says productions aimed at communicating vital messages often fail because the communicators do not understand the mindset of their target audience.

"These days most people will 'turn off' as soon as they know that the play they are about to watch is

'loaded' with social-health related messages.

"Our brainstorming sessions identify a major communication impasse when trying to address real pressing social issues, such as, STDs, student pregnancies and drug abuse," he says. There is pressing need for more innovative strategies of communication, especially for youth and rural folk.

He has put together a special programme, called ProPerArt Creations, to identify, develop, nurture and reward creative talents. JPR continues to use proceeds from his creative writing to support deserving young artistes.

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## CELEBRATION

### Musical tribute to peace and prosperity

By ALLAUDIN QURESHI



Agomoni director Rimi Sinha goes through a devotional rendition.

**A**gomoni is a dedicated group of artistes who are keen to inject fresh blood into cultural activities in Nairobi. Their maiden presentation, a musical on the eternal struggle between the forces of good and evil, was held at the Indian High Commission auditorium at Highridge.

The show, titled *Mahishasur Mardani*, paid a religious and musical tribute to the goddess Ambe, considered the saviour of humanity. The goddess, according to the Puranas, subdued the mighty king of demons, Mahishura, with her godly attributes and brought peace and prosperity to the human race.

At the helm of Agomoni's presentation was Rimi Sinha, who as director, blended her narration with the recitation of the religious Shlokas and songs.

It has been inspired by an All India Radio presentation, *Mahalya*, broadcast every year on the eve of the Navratri Festival. Rimi adapted this popular radio presentation for the stage and her concept went down well with the audience.

The cast for Agomoni's musical debut included

some of Kenya's leading vocalists and instrumentalists. Rajashri Mukherjee of Ma Sharda School of Music and Mehul, Sailesh Savani and Umesh Pandey from Mast Mast Melodies. There was also flute maestro Kirit Pattni.

The maestros were backed by 10 singers who thrilled the audience with Hindi and Bengali songs and Sanskrit Shalokas to create a worthwhile religious fervour.

Rana Sengupta teamed up with Rimi as narrator and the couple had a pleasant impact switching over from Hindi to Bengali. The Indian Radio Station has broadcast this show for the past five decades as a pre-dawn recitation.

Meanwhile, with the successful conclusion of the Navratri Festival, preparations are now underway to welcome the Festival of Lights, Diwali. Theatrical and musical presentations will illuminate this very important Hindu festival.

In a separate development, Ram Sharda is working on a theatrical contribution to mark the arrival of the railway in Kisumu at the beginning of the last century.