

MAGAZINE

When he came up A positive, he set out to help save others

The Aids victim with a mission

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in Kampala

'I did not believe doctors can shun a patient until some did it to me'

For a month, he received VIP treatment that even Ugandan Ministers do not get.

Police escort and motorcade accompanied him whenever he went. The Police Airwing too, was his. And his last journey abroad was spectacular. Thousands thronged the road to the airport to have a glimpse of him. And he was always in the media.

Because he was an Aids victim? Yes! But thousands have and continue dying of the dreaded disease.

Probably he received the biggest dose of the virus. No. So why that treatment? Because when the late Philly Bongoley Lutaaya was declared HIV positive last April, he dedicated his remaining life to fighting the spread of the killer disease.

Philly hated to see others die of the tragedy that befell him. He loved humanity. And the last seven months until he died on December 15, saw an ailing but courageous Philly in the struggle against the Aids scourge.

He launched an LP last September that was dedicated to the struggle. And March next year, the world will watch *Alone. The Life and Times of Philly Bongoley Lutaaya*, a documentary film in which he took a central part aimed at preventing and reducing the spread of Aids.

The documentary film and the Philly Foundation, thanks to KA Production, Toronto, being set up in Canada, the US and Uganda, will assist organisations engaged in Aids control plus the victims themselves, when proceeds are obtained from the Philly Projects.

According to the Director for Global Aids Programmes, Dr Jonathan Mann, the late Philly who died at 38, was the first African self-confessed Aids victim. And the first ever victim to

launch a struggle to help those who are not infected yet, to avoid and to care for the victims.

Dr Mann said: "In some communities, some Aids victims have been known for spreading the disease deliberately saying, 'I will not die alone.'" Dr Mann said the likes of the late Philly are rare as most victims deliberately spread it to avenge on the society that isolates and mocks them.

For the late Philly, coming out of the closet meant giving Aids a face and a hope that people would take more care in their day-to-day habits to protect and prevent the dreadful disease.

He told Ugandan performing groups soon after he flew home from Sweden where he was declared a victim: "Now I stand before you... I'm dying of Aids. Take care in your compositions.

Take care of the Aids victims. Give them hope and confidence. Educate and sensitise society on Aids, who often reject them," he concluded.

"This is the road I chose to take with my personal tragedy". He was talking about his involvement in the Aids struggle.

However, his struggle against the spread of HIV has not been smooth all the way. For when the renowned musician, "felt it his duty to tell the nation of his numbered days," few Ugandans believed him.

It was construed to be a shame contrived to make money or become famous or both. Some feared and booed him. While others had the guts to ask him point blank: "Tell us who you got it from". In some circles, he was referred to as a moving ghost.

The government of Uganda too, said to be among the first to talk freely about Aids, gave him a cold shoulder when he first sought recording a film of his life and times in Uganda.

Although the Director of Aids Control Programme, Uganda, ACP, Dr Sam Okware, had recommended to the government that Philly's film idea will go a long way in the fight against Aids, it was after some months when the government responded positively and gave him permission.

Many people here believe the positive attitude from the government was inspired by Philly's last emotional letter to the Minister of Health: "I am an Aids victim and have very limited time to live. The more we expose this killer, the more our countrymen will be safe. I wish the film, when finished, will be my legacy to the world. The film will be watched by an estimated 40 million people. It will be shown free in



The last home-coming. Philly arrives in Uganda from Brussels on a stretcher just two weeks before he died. "I know how it feels to be a patient so I warn you all..."

Uganda with 50 VHS tapes distributed free.

When Philly learned that he could make the film, he is reported to have left his bed with joy to the surprise of his doctors who were sure Philly would never walk again.

During his brief stay in Uganda in April and October, last year, Philly had "graduated" to a lecturer. He met, discussed and advised on Aids to individuals, non and professional groups. And the public at large.

At the biggest national hospital, Mulago, Philly lectured medical students. He urged doctors not to ignore or reject Aids victims. Philly himself said he was avoided by doctors in September when he was desperately in need of physiotherapy. He said: "I used to be told that some doctors in Uganda need to be educated and sensitised towards Aids patients. I did not believe it until some doctors shunned me".

To the Association of Performing Artists in Uganda, who launched a campaign for the eradication of Aids, he said: "We must marshal all of our efforts to fight Aids by giving out the correct information. Think of our power to communicate. Our messages will be better taken than information in some medical pamphlets. Our messages are vivid, our messages are living, people will take them."

In his last Free For All Show at Nakivubo Memorial Stadium, the message was the same: "Give Aids victims a chance. Today it is me, tomorrow it is you". He urged victims to offer themselves to the medical circles. And according to sources at ACP, some victims have already taken the cue. They have offered themselves to serve in the struggle to control the scourge.

The public here, also notes that Philly's concern has not only contributed to eroding the stigmatisation of the disease but has also made some people grasp that if one is infected with Aids... "It is not the end of the world."

Where and when did the late celebrated Uganda musician

catch the deadly disease? Some say from a Ugandan woman who he met in Kenya in the seventies. Reports say the woman died sometime this year. But he said: "From a world where we all know, we are all mortal and have to step up joint efforts to reduce our mortality rate".

The late Philly Bongoley Lutaaya, was the son of the late Lutaaya. His mother Justine has been with him in the most difficult times.

Twenty years ago, Philly was a small time musician in Kampala. A Form Four leaver, he was then part of a rising generation of musicians. His major hit was *Philly Empisazo*. Your manners Philly... a satire on the flamboyant behaviour of young married men.

In the seventies, he travelled to the then Congo, seeking to realise that dream of every African musician visiting Kinshasha, the *de facto* capital of African music.

Show

He came back home... a despondent man. His family had scoffed at his Congolese venture. The years that followed, saw Philly a troubled man. No wife. He joined several bands. Then he fled to Kenya in 1979, where he found no better times although he joined fellow Ugandan musicians. In 1984, he left for Sweden to combine efforts with other Ugandan musicians. The group became very powerful that he led his colleagues back home in mid-1988 to tell a success story.

He then left for Sweden soon after launching his album only to come back last April and declare he was an Aids victim and would dedicate the rest of his life to the Aids crusade.

Beside those who jeered at him, others believed he was wearing a mask, which they kept telling him to remove. Nevertheless, many believed him during his

month stay in Uganda last October, when he came back to launch a new LP dedicated to Aids victims. Then he went back to start on another one which he did not finish.

That month-stay was characterised by such words as "My work is nearly over ...

"I have gone over the shock and I realise that despite all that, the world must go on. At a time when a country is under reconstruction, it needs us all, the sick and the healthy. I don't know the time I shall leave this world but soon... For those who still believe I am wearing a mask, it is a question of time. They will believe when time comes." And sure the time was to come after another month.

When he left for Sweden at the end of October, Philly promised to come home in December. And he was in Kampala on December 2, but on a death bed. All the way from Europe he flew on a stretcher. At a stop-over in Brussels, Philly had to spend four hours at an airport clinic before he continued on the journey.

Escorted by a volunteer nurse Mrs Mary Nardolf and his three children who range from 8 to 15, Philly was whisked off to a private hospital in a waiting ambulance. Philly spent two weeks in hospital where he was fed intravenously.

Until Philly died on December 15, at 11 o'clock, his mental faculties were still at work for even when he was provoked by the unruly crowd, he remained calm, and serene.

But most of all, his courage was exception.

He never showed any signs of weakness even during his last trying days when his body was giving away. He tried to stand tall and proud without apparent shame or fear. His heart was strong. He accepted Jesus Christ as his personal saviour, and said the struggle must continue.



In his hey day, Philly belts out a number surrounded by a bevy of beauties. At the sunset of his life, he sung for the salvation of others.