

Zambezi Express

TRAILER

Zambezi Express is a musical about a young Zimbabwean footballer who refuses to let his circumstances stop him from getting to the top of his game. It recently premiered in London.

RUNTIME: 8:35

COUNTRY: UNITED KINGDOM

FILMING LOCATION: LONDON

LANGUAGE: ENGLISH

SOURCE: A24 MEDIA

COMMENTARY

In a small theatre in London, England, the final dress rehearsal for a new musical is underway. *Zambezi Express* tells the story of Mzilikazi or Zilli, a keen Zimbabwean footballer who dreams of taking part in the 2010 World Cup in neighbouring South Africa.

But Zilli comes from a mining township and the odds are against him. However, he is so determined to achieve his goal that he takes the *Zambezi Express* train into the big city anyway, and embarks on a rollercoaster ride to success on the pitch.

Saimon Mbaso Phiri is the director of Zimbabwean dance group SIYAYA who make up the majority of the cast. He wrote the musical after a British theatre company encouraged him to develop something based on the World Cup.

ITV, SAIMON MBASO PHIRI, Director, *Zambezi Express* (English)

“We've had a few problems, economic, administrative in terms of paperwork. Some of the artists we have didn't even have travel documents, so we had to really start from scratch getting them ID cards, passports, work permits and eventually visas and flights to get them here so it's been a really tough five, six months trying to put everything together.”

COMMENTARY

Most of the cast can easily relate to Zilli's story. They are all from Zimbabwe's Makokoba township, which is outside Bulawayo, the country's second largest city.

ITV, SAIMON MBASO PHIRI (English)

"We feel that we represent the dream not just of one poor person, but the dream of the young people of Africa wanting to touch the world. But wherever they go they face all these hurdles. In most cases people don't live their dreams but we are trying to have a happy ending because this is the happiest show on earth for crying out loud."

COMMENTARY

It's the kind of encouragement that is needed in Zimbabwe where a political crisis destroyed the once prosperous southern African nation's economy. Opportunities to earn a steady wage and take part in an international production like the Zambezi Express do not come often, so homesickness and culture-shock are considered a bearable cost.

25-year-old Briget Sipiwe Dube is a member of the chorus and a dancer in the show. Her mentor, Ishmael Muvingi has been acting for 16 years, and plays Zilli's drunken father.

ITV, BRIGET SIPHIWE DUBE, Dancer (English)

"You wake up in the morning you go to the shops, you'll be having friends there making barbecue in the back of the shops and the girls would be running around, making noise, playing games outside, so its quite different for me. Here the streets are quiet and there are no people playing around – so it's quite different."

ITV, ISHMAEL MUVINGI, Actor (English)

"We only get to see our family for a month and a half or two months but now Siyaya is like a family to me because I spend most of my time with Siyaya than with my family. So I miss my family a lot."

COMMENTARY

The hope is that Zambezi Express will be picked up by one of London's big producers and moved into the city's lucrative West End theatre district. The only hit African show there right now, is the Lion King – so the Zambezi Express team reckon there's room for more acts from the continent. Ultimately it's the reactions from audiences and favourable articles from critics in the next few days that will determine the musical's future.

ITV, NIGEL REYNOLDS, Theatre Critic (English)

“The story is slightly corny and needs developing but the performances are absolutely fantastic at the end of the show everybody in the auditorium was up on their feet. The singing the music the drumming and the dancing was just fabulous raw energy, very beautiful and even the most cynical person can't help but be sucked in by it. I performance was fantastic.”

COMMENTARY

It's half an hour before the curtains open. The cast however, is surprisingly relaxed, despite the high stakes.

ITV, TENDAI MUDIMU Drummer (English)

“Sometimes yes you feel nervous, sometimes you just feel normal and then you go for it.”

COMMENTARY

Any worries that Zambezi Express would not make an impact on audiences are soon banished.

ITV, SONIA COOK, Spectator (English)

“Lots of energy lots of movement and it was great because everyone on stage really seemed like they were enjoying themselves.”

ITV, ALICE WHITNEY Spectator (English)

“Bright colours, really energetic you kind of wanted to get up there and dance and things like that. Good fun.”

ITV, ROY KILLERLY (English)

“Loved it - the energy is fabulous. It's actually mind blowing absolutely mind-blowing and the choreography particularly is stunning, absolutely stunning.”

COMMENTARY

Behind the scenes Saimon is relieved.

ITV, SAIMON MBASO PHIRI (English)

“Well it's obvious, I mean you can tell from the smiles that everyone has, you can tell from the enthusiasm that I have that this has been worth it. Whether we make money at the end of the day is neither here nor there. Just being on this stage has been worth a life time really.”

COMMENTARY

After such a successful opening night, Zambezi Express has its foot in the door, and could go on to become a hit in London. But it's not just about profits, the people behind this production hope that it will remind those who watch it to passionately follow their dreams, regardless of the obstacles in their way.

SHOTLIST

1. DANCERS FROM THE SIYAYA TROUPE REHEARSING
2. FEMALE DANCER LEAPING
3. DANCERS STEPPING FORWARD
4. DANCERS KICKING HIGH IN THE AIR
5. FEMALE DANCER SPINNING AND YELLING

6. MZILIKAZI OR “ZILLI”, MAIN CHARACTER OF ZAMBEZI EXPRESS DRIBBLING BALL ON STAGE

7. ZILLI’S FEET/BALL

8. ZILLI TALKING TO HIS FATHER PLAYED BY ISHMAEL MUVINGI

9. ZILLI’S FATHER HOLDING SOCCER BALL AS ZILLI TALKS

10. MALE DANCERS PERFORMING

11. FEMALE DANCERS PERFORMING

12. FEMALE DANCER’S SMILING FACE

13. FEMALE DANCERS PERFORMANCE ENDS

13. SAIMON MBASO PHIRI, ZAMBEZI EXPRESS DIRECTOR, WATCHING REHEARSAL

14. VARIOUS OF MALE DANCERS SINGING AND DANCING WITH BAMBOO RODS

15. (SOUNDBITE) (English) SAIMON MBASO PHIRI, DIRECTOR, ZAMBEZI EXPRESS, SAYING:

“We've had a few problems, economic, administrative in terms of paperwork. Some of the artists we have didn't even have travel documents, so we had to really start from scratch getting them ID cards, passports, work permits and eventually visas and flights to get them here so it's been a really tough five, six months trying to put everything together.”

16. DARREN CHARLES, CHOREOGRAPHER, DIRECTING DANCE TROUPE

17. DANCE TROUPE CLAPPING AND SINGING

18. CLOSEUP UP ON BRIGET SIPHIWE DUBE, DANCER

19. CHARLES SHOWING DANCERS HOW TO STAND

20. DANCERS PERFORMING

21. DUBE DANCING

22. CHARLES WATCHING DUBE

23. DUBE LEADING OTHER DANCERS

24. DANCERS SINGING AS THEY REHEARSE THEIR MOVES

25. (SOUNDBITE) (English) SAIMON MBASO PHIRI, DIRECTOR, ZAMBEZI EXPRESS, SAYING:

“We feel that we represent the dream not just of one poor person, but the dream of the young people of Africa wanting to touch the world. But wherever they go they face all these hurdles. In most cases people don’t live their dreams but we are trying

to have a happy ending because this is the happiest show on earth for crying out loud.”

26. TROUPE SINGING AND SNAPPING THEIR FINGERS

27. DUBE SINGING AND SNAPPING WITH ZILLI

28. DUBE/ZILLI’S FACES

29. WOMAN SINGING

30. TROUPE SINGING TOGETHER

31. VARIOUS OF DUBE AND MUVINGI SITTING TOGETHER AT A CAFE

32. DUBE’S FACE

33. MUVINGI SIPPING

34. (SOUNDBITE) (English) BRIGET SIPHIWE DUBE, DANCER, ZAMBEZI EXPRESS, SAYING:

“You wake up in the morning you go to the shops, you’ll be having friends there making barbecue in the back of the shops and the girls would be running around, making noise, playing games outside, so its quite different for me. Here the streets are quiet and there are no people playing around – so it’s quite different.

35. (SOUNDBITE) (English) ISHMAEL MUVINGI, ACTOR, ZAMBEZI EXPRESS, SAYING:

“We only get to see our family for a month and a half or two months but now Siyaya is like a family to me because I spend most of my time with Siyaya than with my family. I miss my family a lot.”

36. VARIOUS STREET SCENES IN LONDON’S WEST END

37. POSTER ADVERTISING ‘THE LION KING’

38. LION KING POSTER/BUS/PEDESTRIANS

39. NIGEL REYNOLDS, THEATRE CRITIC, CHATTING WITH MEMBERS OF THE CAST AT A CAFÉ

40. REYNOLD’S SIDE PROFILE

41. CAST MEMBERS

42. REYNOLD TAKING NOTES

43. (SOUNDBITE) (English) NIGEL REYNOLDS, THEATRE CRITIC, SAYING:

“The story is slightly corny and needs developing but the performances are absolutely fantastic at the end of the show everybody in the auditorium was up on their feet. The singing the music the drumming and the dancing was just fabulous raw

energy, very beautiful and even the most cynical person can't help but be sucked in by it. I performance was fantastic.”

44. MEMBERS OF CAST IN DRESSING ROOM

45. CAST MEMBERS FIXING THEIR COSTUMES

46. CAST MEMBER LAUGHING

47. (SOUNDBITE) (English) TENDAI MUDIMU, DRUMMER, SAYING:

“Sometimes yes you feel nervous, sometimes you just feel normal and then you go for it.”

48. MEN IN TRADITIONAL WARRIOR OUTFITS PERFORMING ON OPENING NIGHT

49. DRUMMER/SHIELDS

50. WARRIORS DANCING

51. MEMBERS OF AUDIENCE SMILING AND CLAPPING

52. ZILLI READING NEWSPAPER DURING SCENE

53. ZILLI READING NEWSPAPER TO OTHER CHARACTERS

54. ZILLI AND HIS FATHER HUGGING

55. ACTOR DANCING ON TOP OF BARREL

56. VARIOUS MALE ACTORS SINGING AND DANCING

57. VARIOUS OF AUDIENCE OF CLAPPING

58. (SOUNDBITE) (English) SONIA COOK, SPECTATOR, SAYING:

“Lots of energy lots of movement and it was great because everyone on stage really seemed like they were enjoying themselves.”

59. (SOUNDBITE) (English) ALICE WHITNEY, SPECTATOR, SAYING:

“Bright colours, really energetic you kind of wanted to get up there and dance and things like that. Good fun.”

60. (SOUNDBITE) (English) ROY KILLERLY, SPECTATOR, SAYING:

“Loved it - the energy is fabulous. It's actually mind blowing absolutely mind-blowing and the choreography particularly is stunning, absolutely stunning.”

61. PHIRI HUDDLING WITH CHARLES AND ANOTHER CHOREOGRAPHER

62. (SOUNDBITE) (English) SAIMON MBASO PHIRI, DIRECTOR, ZAMBEZI EXPRESS, SAYING:

“Well it's obvious, I mean you can tell from the smiles that everyone has, you can tell from the enthusiasm that I have that this has been worth it. Whether we make

money at the end of the day is neither here nor there. Just being on this stage has been worth a life time really.”

63. VARIOUS OF FINAL SCENE FROM ZAMBEZI EXPRESS

END

Source: Africa Journal