

Theatre



Playing thought: (L-R) Owino (played by Samuel Ibanda) and Henry Opolot Opolo in one of the scenes in *In This City*. PHOTO/ BAMUTURAKI MUSINGUZI

Inconvenience. Owino says at the arcade it's not strange to pay for space and the places of convenience aren't included in your rent!

BY BAMUTURAKI MUSINGUZI

Henry Opolot Opolo's debut stage play *In This City* dwells on a successful trader called Owino (played by Samuel Ibanda), and how disaster struck and ruined his business.

The story revolves around how he navigates the situation, and his plan of recovery reveal his other side and what he truly stands for. It is a journey of self-reflection, discovery and love.

In the play that was staged at the National Theatre in Kampala on May 8, 2026, Owino narrates his escapades as he goes about his business, in a way that bears on traditions, culture, environment, governance and what he sees as good values for himself.

Owino's shop that deals in an assortment of apparels and other items is housed on the First Floor on the Harm-full City Arcade in the city.

One day disaster befalls him casting a shadow of destruction over his business and livelihood.

The play opens while Owino still sleeping in a makeshift bed in his shop. In his dream he has travelled to the village to pay his auntie a visit.

Auntie had lived in the city for some time before she went back to the village where she is now doing farming.

Owino and his auntie discuss the advantages and disadvantages of living in the rural areas compared to the city, the effects of climate change on food production.

A man hawking brooms surfaces. Owino discourages auntie from buying the fake broom. The man rebukes Owino accusing him of being so mean!

Handing back the broom to the man, Owino says to auntie; you need to get the real broom or may be the one made from palm leaves' margins/grooves. Those are stronger and better.

Never mind, the same may happen to you one day the man says as he leaves.

A loud crack of thunder comes through shaking the ground so violently that tremors run down his spine waking him up instantly before his sweet dream could end.

Opolot's play 'In this city' highlights infrastructure failures

Owino had spent the night at the shop after a late date. He did not want to go knocking on the door of his home late and waking up all the neighbours.

Owino says that at the arcade it's not strange to pay for space and the places of convenience aren't included in your rent! Therefore, you have to have an extra dime on you daily to use the toilets, just like you also need some for your meals and water for drinking.

A voice calling out sharply filters through into the room; Should the police and army just stand there looking on as we struggle with floodwater instead of going to bring trucks to drain away the water from our shops? What kind of disaster management is this?

Owino says that strikes him hard. The word floodwater in this city is synonymous with destruction.

"I run over to the balcony and looking over to the ground there is chaos. I cannot believe my eyes! There is murky rain water racing about multiple hu-

man legs wading over it. I am dumbfounded. Heartbroken! I run down the stairs troubled, having been in the upper room where I was sorting out merchandise but had paid less attention to the murmuring voices I could hear," he said.

He added: "Worse still it had rained without me hearing a thing – courtesy of my outing the previous evening! I am only imagining what is happening at the basement where I have a store. I get there and my colleagues are already there."

Owino where have you been? One of them asks.

"This feels like an indictment of me, so I have to defend myself in a way; you people you couldn't even inform me! What kind of comradery is this? Owino replied.

Another one of them says; "Owino you think with all this amount of shock you can have the mind to call some-

Then how were you able to converse all at once? Owino asks.

"Meanwhile I am trying to recover some of the floating items and keeping them in one stash – raising one item which is soaked in water; what mystery is in this, if not destruction?" Owino asks.

But we normally come about the same time, what delayed you this time? My colleague asks. I didn't go home. I was in the upper room unpacking merchandise so I went to bed late.

What! And you couldn't know that this is happening in the building? He cries out.

The tenants sweep the floor and scoop the mud debris water in buckets and carry it out. The broom he is using is the one he recommended to auntie in the dream.

"I struggle every day to run business under hard conditions and pay taxes but how much protection do I get from whoever is supposed to protect my business," Owino laments.

This sets him on a struggle to save his business, arriving at a plan for reviving the same once the disaster is gone. His struggle and plan lead him to several attempts at getting help from colleagues, well-wishers and authorities.

But it turns out that every attempt he makes yields nothing prompting him to question human nature and life.

Finally arriving at a conclusion that human actions are responsible for the destruction of their own existence and being.

Samuel Ibanda played seven roles, and he is not gifted to distinguish the voices of the different characters. Maybe the playwright will revise the script and introduce other actors and actresses.

Opolot plays the roles of the Owino's colleague, policeman, truck driver, and garbage collector.

When asked why he accepted to take on the role of Owino, Ibanda replied: "The furthest I remember I have always used Art to trigger and provoke conversation, awareness and conscious thought. Taking on the script and the role(s) is an opportunity to be on the right platform at the right time to share and talk about situation, we ignore, for them to come back and break everything else we stand for. And the fact that the director and writer thought me able to deliver his script and have me act 7 characters was exciting and a great challenging and being able to do it for the betterment of everyone else."

When asked to describe the character of Owino, Ibanda, said: "Owino is an adult who is a family man and a trader in this city, an observer that is overwhelmed by the mess that keeps happening as if no one seems to care and he is ready to voice his frustration.

He is a concerned citizen who loves community and believes in togetherness, he also appreciates that working together brings progress for everybody rather than a few. He believes in protection for everyone."

"I came up with this play because I wanted to mirror or reflect on us as a people or society and what we have become," Opolot says.

As to how long it took him to write the play, Opolot, said, "The actual writing took me one month but the process of development had started earlier."

Asked why he decided to make it a one-man play with another distant voice that speaks to the main character, Opolot responded: "I made it a one-man play because I was to be the only one to act it. I considered the fact that I am part of the very society that I am mirroring. So, the distant voice is of that world!"

“

Flooding
I cannot believe my eyes! There is murky rain water racing about, multiple human legs wading over it. I am dumbfounded. Heartbroken! I run down the stairs troubled, having been in the upper room where I was sorting out merchandise but had paid less attention to the murmuring voices I could hear.”