



Life of the party. How Etania Mutoni evolved from a high energy MC to spinning discs. **P.30**



Why Uganda's poetry never fades

Keep up with poetry. When Linda Nunu Umuringa Butare launched Kwivuga in 2011, she pulled poetry from elite corners into Kampala's electric nightlife. Fifteen years on, she takes the art to universities.

BY PHILIP MATOGO

In 2011, when Kwivuga Poetry Session was born, Linda Nunu Umuringa Butare was driven by a single conviction: poetry deserved a bigger stage. She loved it fiercely and believed others would too—if only it were freed from the narrow corridors of academia and elite literary circles.

Nunu drafted a simple but radical blueprint. Poetry, she believed, could spread its wings by blending emotional honesty with modern platforms. It needed a social media presence, oral performance, and storytelling that was concise, relatable, and rooted in everyday life. In the digital age, poetry did not have to remain confined to lecture halls and slim anthologies. It could breathe online. It could pulse on stage. It could belong to everyone.

"I have always been an artist, but growing up, society trains you to act a particular way and do things that are deemed right and legitimate in their eyes," Nunu said in a 2022 online interview. "For me, it was the normal process: go to school, graduate from university, and get an office job. I failed to fit in and never worked at a job for more than six months. That was just not my thing."

Friends and colleagues noticed her restlessness. They urged her toward the arts, sensing she was

misplaced behind a desk. Then, almost by accident, her aunt secured her a job at Fast Track Records, a creative space where films were made and scripts written.

"I immediately felt at home and knew I had found my sweet spot," she recalled.

Emboldened, Nunu told her new colleagues she was a poet, half afraid, half hopeful.

"I didn't know how they would receive it, but I still told them. My workmates, Cathy Bagaya, Kwezi Kaganda, and Frank Bisaso, teased me about it, but they were also

quick to support me."

Together, they christened the idea "Kwivuga," a Kinyarwanda word evoking rap, storytelling, and expressive oral tradition. Nunu opened a Facebook page and began inviting people to follow it. What started as a page soon became a movement.

Kwivuga erupted into life as a high-energy poetry show that transformed written verse into visceral performance. It fused theatre, music, and storytelling, turning poetry from a quiet, solitary craft into a communal spectacle. The stage became a space of confession, confrontation, and celebration.

Before long, Kwivuga was one of the most anticipated events

on Kampala's social calendar. Poets once confined to highbrow circles found themselves embraced by a cross-section of Ugandans. Figures such as Jason Ntaro and Lindah Nabasa became recognisable beyond literary spaces. Poetry had moved from the margins to the mainstream.

The impact was seismic. Spoken word, once sporadic and niche, gained legitimacy as a serious art form. In the years that followed, venues such as Gabiro, Gattomatto, and the National Theatre hosted regular poetry nights, allowing artists to hone their craft before live audiences.

What had been rare before 2008 became a defining feature of the city's cultural life in the decade after.

Kwivuga was not

alone for long. Other outfits, including Kitara Nation, helped sustain the momentum, shaping the tone and texture of Uganda's contemporary spoken word scene.

While the poets of the early 2000s leaned heavily into social commentary, often cynical and defiantly anti-establishment—the post-2010 generation has experimented with lighter tones, sharper punchlines, and a blend of optimism and critique. The style has shifted, but the impulse remains: to speak truth, to question power, to tell stories that matter. Today, the revolution Nunu helped ignite continues to echo in university halls.

Nurturing poetry at UCU

Suzan Kantanzi, an emerging poet and student at Uganda Christian University (UCU), believes the past and present of Ugandan poetry are intertwined.

"It has often been said that the line between crazy and intelligent is obscure," she reflects.

"Great minds bend the illusion of sanity to create magnificence. Now imagine a hub of energised young minds with the power to turn impossible realities into a new norm. That is the reality of universities." At UCU, poetry is nurtured deliberately.

Kantanzi describes the university as an ecosystem designed to cultivate raw talent. The Azania Poetry Group has become a heartbeat for students eager to tell their stories. Weekly recitals provide a platform where emotions are channelled into something powerful and profound. "Students laugh, cry, bleed, and patch each other up with words," she says.

"Every piece recited carries deep purpose." Poetry at UCU is not confined to performance alone.

The university newspaper, *The Standard*, regularly publishes students' creative work and promotes poetry events. In collaboration with the UCU Writing Centre, competitions and workshops offer young writers tools to refine their craft. For Kantanzi, these spaces matter because they prioritise community over spectacle.

The excitement of gathering for Azania recitals, the anticipation of competitions, and the willingness to test one's voice in a supportive environment all signal something enduring: poetry is alive because it belongs to people.

More than a decade later, the rhythm may have evolved, and tone shifted, but the essence remains unchanged.

Ugandan poetry continues to reinvent itself, online, on stage, and on campus, proving that while the performance styles may differ, the hunger for expression endures.

Linda Nunu Umuringa Butare has kept the soul of spoken word alive. PHOTO/ COURTESY OF NUNU

Poetry landscape. What had been rare before 2008 became a defining feature of the city's cultural life in the decade after. Kwivuga was not alone for long. Other outfits, including Kitara Nation, helped sustain the momentum, shaping the tone and texture of Uganda's contemporary spoken word scene.