

# The voice behind Uganda's radio adverts

Within Uganda's radio and advertising circles, Jumba's reputation is unmistakable. He is the voice behind countless adverts, the creative mind behind jingles and a producer who understands how sound can shape identity.

BY EDGAR R. BATTE

Timothy "Timo" Jumba's journey has been driven by curiosity, resilience and a relentless ear for sound. Once a music producer for emerging artistes, he evolved into one of the creative voices behind radio jingles, adverts and station imaging that listeners across the country recognise, often without knowing the man behind the microphone.

As a teenager in Mutundwe, Jumba and his friends built a makeshift studio. It was stocked with a borrowed computer, mismatched speakers and a few cables. One day, while trying to record vocals, they discovered the microphone kept capturing harsh bursts of sound whenever someone pronounced certain letters. They needed a pop filter but they had no money. Jumba improvised by cutting mesh from a pair of shorts, stretching it across a wire frame and placing it in front of the microphone.

That spirit of experimentation would become the foundation of his career. That was before he ever became a voice artiste. For nearly a decade, he worked behind the scenes producing songs for a generation of artistes who would later shape Uganda's urban music landscape. Artistes such as Navio, Myth, Bafana, Maro and A-Pass passed through the studios where he worked; some as established names, and others as hopeful newcomers trying to find their sound.

Jumba and his collaborators had little formal training. Instead, they paid professional producers simply to observe how beats were layered, how vocals were mixed and how engineers shaped the final sound.

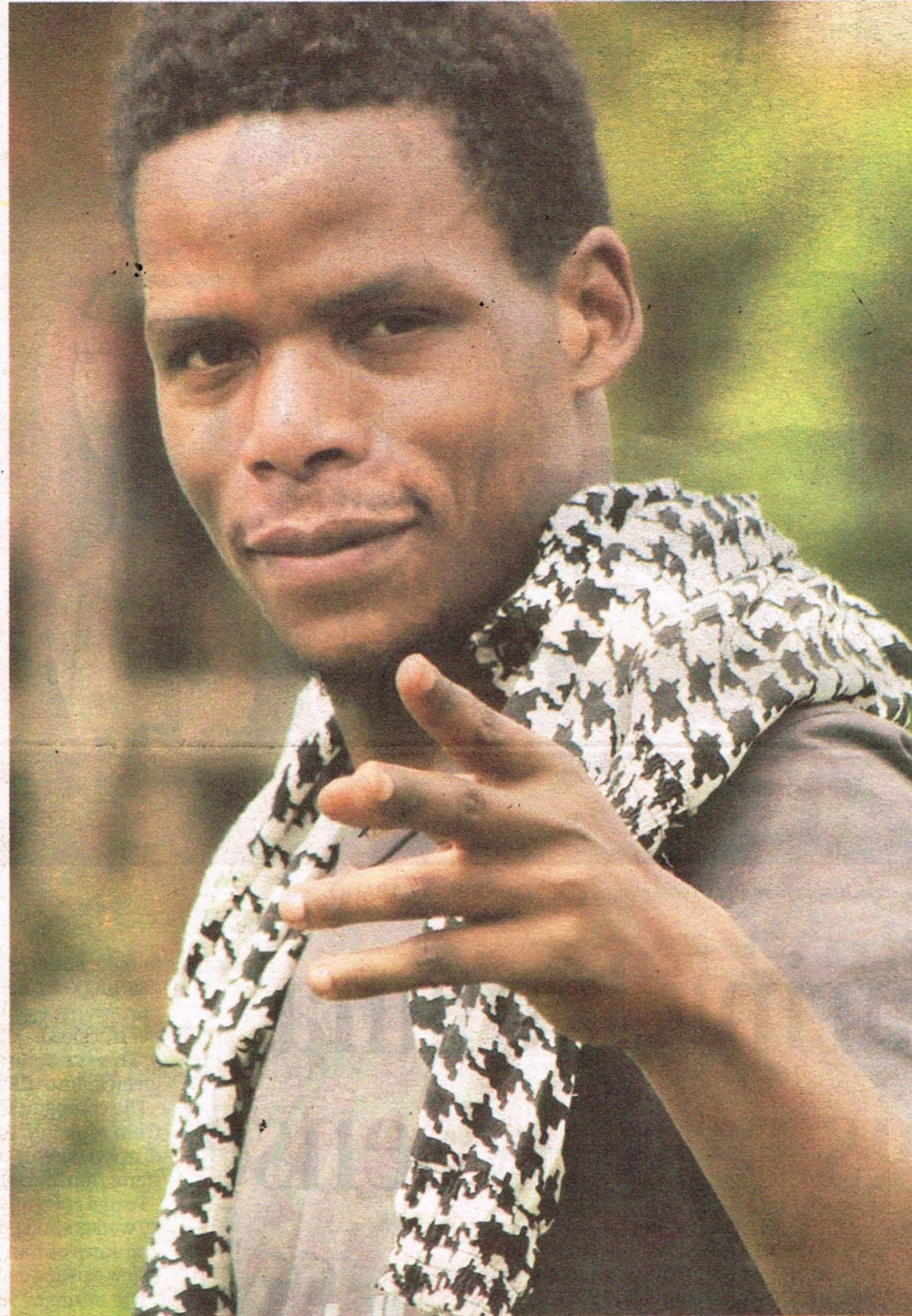
Then, late at night, they returned to their own modest studio to try replicating the techniques. The process was slow, messy and occasionally chaotic. But it sharpened their instincts and built the technical foundation that would later define his career. Music production was never meant to be temporary for Jumba.

## The breakthrough

At one point, he even considered leaving school entirely to focus on the craft. But life often moves in unexpected directions. One opportunity came through a friend who introduced him to *Kingdom FM*, a Christian radio station that needed someone with a musical ear to assist with production.

The pay was modest. His monthly income, including transport, barely reached Shs400,000. This was for someone who sometimes earned close to a million shillings producing music.

"I felt as if my life had gone back 10 steps," he attests. Yet the radio studio would become the place where his career took a new direction. Inside those walls, he began experimenting with something he had never seriously considered before — his voice.



Timothy "Timo" Jumba left Mutundwe with a little more than ambition. He arrived with a voice that would help shape Ugandan radio. PHOTO/ EDGAR R. BATTE.

At first, the experiments were purely technical. He wanted to understand how the microphone captured sound and how voice behaved in speech compared to music. After everyone else had left the station, he remained behind in the studio, rehearsing lines and testing different tones.

Coming from a musical background, he understood rhythm and pitch. But spoken voice required a different discipline of clarity, pacing and emotional nuance. Gradually, the experiments started producing results.

One day, he created a full set of jingles for a programme called *Abafere be Kibuga*. When the station manager heard them, he immediately asked who had recorded the voice.

The answer surprised him. "You are a star," the manager told him. For Jumba, it was a turning point. For the first time, he realised that the microphone might become more than a tool for recording music.

## Building a reputation

Jumba quickly built a reputation for working fast. While presenters recorded programmes, he edited simultaneously, removing mistakes and assembling the final broadcast in real time. That ef-

iciency caught the attention of management.

Still, the environment was not always easy. At one point he found himself being paid through the church instead of the station, a decision that sparked criticism among church members, who wondered why someone who rarely attended services should receive the salary.

The controversy did not deter him. Instead, it strengthened his determination to master radio production.

After leaving *Kingdom FM*, Jumba entered a period of uncertainty. Jobs were scarce. Voiceover gigs were irregular. At times he relied on family support to survive. His sister, who ran a small kiosk, often gave him small amounts of money each day to help him continue searching for opportunities.

Eventually, opportunity appeared in Mbale. At *Open Gate FM* and *Step FM*, he began refining his understanding of radio imaging — the sonic identity that defines how a station feels to listeners.

He experimented with blending Luganda and Lumasaba, adjusting jingles and sound textures to resonate with local audiences. Within months, listeners began noticing the difference.

He notes: "Radio stations have a tone.

When the tone is right, everything else follows." The experience transformed him from a producer into a creative architect of radio sound.

Voiceover work gradually became Jumba's signature. He studied the industry carefully, analysing the voices that dominated Uganda's airwaves. Some excelled in storytelling while others were strong in rhythm or emotional delivery.

Instead of imitating one style, he borrowed elements from several and blended them with his musical instincts. "I realised I had something others did not," he says. "I had lived in music, in studio production and in radio."

That versatility allowed him to navigate different spaces, from corporate adverts to entertainment promotions and radio station imaging. Over time, his voice became a familiar presence across Uganda's media landscape.

## Turning point

The next major turning point came when *Galaxy FM* advertised for a producer. By the time he applied, the recruitment process had already been underway for nearly two months.

During the audition, candidates were asked to create a radio jingle. While others struggled with the software, Jumba finished his in 10 minutes. "Most of them were still learning the programme," he says.

Within days, *Galaxy* offered him the job. At the station, he would spend nearly eight years quietly reshaping its sound. He redesigned the station's imaging, streamlined promotional formats and introduced new creative approaches to radio advertising.

One of his most subtle yet significant changes was shifting many of the station's jingles from Luganda to English, without alienating the existing audience. The shift helped reposition *Galaxy FM* as both an urban and mainstream station.

"People did not even realise the transition," he says. "But the station started competing with both Luganda and English stations." For Jumba, every radio advert should tell a story.

Too many adverts, he argues, simply list dates, venues and ticket prices without giving listeners a reason to care. Instead, he builds emotional hooks comprising of small audio moments designed to capture attention immediately.

Humour and conversational storytelling often shape his productions. It is a technique deeply rooted in his early years as a music producer. Today, Jumba sees his work more as an ongoing conversation with himself.

"I compete with myself every day," he says. The mindset pushes him to keep experimenting with new sounds and ideas. The voice-over artiste believes radio production is evolving toward simplicity of shorter, sharper audio experiences suited to modern audiences.

"Short and sweet," he says. "That is where radio is going." Despite his influence, Jumba remains largely invisible to the audiences who hear his work. Voice artistes rarely enjoy public recognition.

As such, their voices become familiar long before their faces do. Yet within Uganda's radio and advertising circles, his reputation is unmistakable. He is the voice behind countless adverts, the creative mind behind jingles and a producer who understands how sound can shape identity.



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