

# JEROME KAKANDE: FROM STARDOM TO MONEYDOM

Money does not like noise, high-sounding economists told us. Many in entertainment did not listen, but Jerome Kakande, an award-winning cinematographer and director, did. The soft-spoken, big-bodied director gained popularity for his work in popular music videos and became every girl's dream and every man's envy. He, however, realised it all was empty-air – fame without money. He has since moved to the more commercially viable, although seemingly boring work of making documentaries and adverts. He talked to **Joan Nnassazi** about giving up the high broke life for the low richer one.

**C**inematographer, creative director, founder and chief executive officer of KJ Frames Production, you would have thought that Jerome Kakande would be satisfied with the glamour and praise the music industry rewards him with. Here is a guy who has shot music videos for the likes of Naava Grey, B2C, Pallaso, Bruce Melodie, Rema Namakula, Jose Chameleone, Victor Ruz, Flona, Ziza Bafana, Fik Fameica, Fefe Bussi, GNL Zamba, Karole Kasita, Weasel, Cindy Sanyu, Leila Kayondo... he cannot even complete the list. Kakande is giving all that up. He loves the fame it comes with, the parties and all the glitter. What he does not love is the headache of working with stubborn artistes, of being cheated out of work, non-payment, the disrespect of some clients and all that noise. It is money he has been chasing, but like the shadow of a fast runner, he does not get hold of it. This is why he has resorted to the more sombre, quiet work of documentaries and commercials. Among the big companies/brands he has so far worked for are Hisense and Stabex International.

## MUSICIANS AND ALL THE TROUBLE

Kakande's journey is a testament to the power of creative evolution and the pursuit of purpose-driven content.

As a film director, he achieved success in the crowded music video industry through crafting visually stunning music work that captivated audiences.

However, he began to feel a sense of stagnation, yearning for a deeper, more meaningful way to tell stories through his lens. The repetitive nature of music videos, with their formulaic set-ups and lack of substance, left him craving a more impactful approach.

Working with musicians is very unpredictable. For most, it is either late payment or less payment. Many are not disciplined and do not follow directions. Kakande remembers when he received a commitment fee only three hours to shooting a music concert.

"I had to assemble all equipment and team there and then. He took the job and trusted his instincts and experience to guide him.

"Working on that B2C concert was a defining moment in my career. With just a few hours before showtime, I had to mobilise my team and execute the entire production under intense pressure. It tested my leadership and creativity, but we delivered successfully and turned pressure into excellence," he says.

Katende also claims that several musicians do not fully pay directors for services.

"They toss you up and down until you give up," he says.

The music video space had become saturated and standing out required more than visuals.

"It needed purpose-driven content," he says.

Additionally, working with tight budgets forced him to think creatively and plan meticulously. He also had to build a dependable crew. Finding skilled, committed team members who could match his level of dedication and vision took time and trust.

Many of his clients (artistes) wait until the eleventh hour to confirm their bookings, leaving Kakande scrambling to assemble a crew and prepare for the event. He has had to tactfully navigate these situations, politely reminding clients that timely payment and advance notice are crucial.

As he puts it: "Prepare

yourselves and decide whom to work with early, and pay the workers in time."

This approach has helped him set clear boundaries and expectations.

Working with musicians is not glum all the time. Aziz Azion is one of those who has worked with Kakande.

"He is a very determined and strict individual and I have never had any issues with him because of that," says Azion.

However, more than income, it is the working relations that made Katende quit music videography.

"Some of the musicians are full of themselves. They will claim that working with them is an opportunity for you to grow so they should not pay you," he says.

It even gets worse, instead of the star musician letting the director do the work, the musician starts ordering everyone on set, giving different instructions.

"They waste a lot of time, which often does not result into good work. They make a bad name for the video directors," says Katende.

It is such conditions that convinced him to look for alternative work. Then first opportunity was to record concerts. That was a natural growth from music videos. He went straight to the deep end of the concert videos.

Katende has worked with Jamaicans Dexta Dabs and Konshens on their Kampala concerts.

Asked about the Dexta Dabs concert, he remained tight-lipped. What would he say for a concert that raised more than eyebrows. Soon after the

Continued on p30



Cinematographer Kakande

# KAKANDE: THE EVOLUTION OF A STAR

Continued from page 29

concert, the regulatory body, Uganda Communications Commission, cautioned promoters on performances that do not meet the minimum broadcasting standards, or what is deemed vulgar. It was a show on which a bed was brought onto the stage and there was a lot of hanky-panky. All Katende says is that his assignment was to capture footage and not to broadcast it.

"I captured what was acceptable," he grins.

After that, he got the opportunity to play it safe to the gallery. He was the video director at last year's Toro Kingdom coronation anniversary. That gave him an opportunity to try his hand at work that captures identity, heritage and African narratives – the phrases that excite tourists and tourism boards.

"As a filmmaker, the Toro Kingdom coronation anniversary was a deeply cultural experience for me. It went beyond work. Through my lens, I connected with Uganda's heritage, unity and traditions. It reaffirmed my belief that storytelling is a powerful way to preserve culture and celebrate who we are."

Katende continues to evolve as a filmmaker by embracing new tools, including AI, to enhance creativity and storytelling. His focus now is "impactful, purpose-driven visual content that inspires, educates, and transforms audiences".

It seems, in a very short time, he has developed a knack for such boardroom jargon. From talking "vibes" and twerking" to "purpose-driven content transforming audiences" is an indication of the sharp turn



Kakande (left) has won several awards

that he has taken.

"I do not just shoot visuals, I craft stories that move culture. My mission is to elevate African

creativity through every frame I create," he says.

He wants to "transcend fleeting trends".

## AWARDS AND MORE

With recent wins for Best Cinematography in Tanzania's Zikomo Awards, Best Cinematographer in Rwanda's Shinning Star Awards and Best Use of Drone in Tourism Awards in Uganda, Kakande has solidified his position as a leading creative force. His impressive portfolio spans music videos, documentaries, film and live event production, showcasing his versatility and skill in translating sound into compelling visuals.

He has not only stuck to the so-called Kidandali genre. His creative direction roles on projects like GNL Zamba's *Homecoming* album and Fefe Bussi's *HipHop Ku Nalubale* and *Uganda Dance Nights* further demonstrated his ability to shape full-scale artistic visions.

As he continues to push boundaries and tell "impactful" stories through visuals, Kakande's star is undoubtedly on the rise. His ability to weave compelling narratives, vibrant colours and captivating choreography has earned him widespread acclaim.

As a director, Kakande continues to push boundaries, exploring new themes and styles that showcase the richness of Ugandan music and culture. His contributions have undoubtedly enriched the entertainment landscape, inspiring a new generation of filmmakers.

Away from the glitter, chaos and the maddening crowd that Ugandan music is, Katende's new direction is a challenge he takes on with pride. It is like falling off the celebrity ladder, but happily landing where the money is.