



**For immediate release**

## **PRESS RELEASE**

# **A Historic Moment for Ugandan Culture on the World's Most Prestigious Art Stage: Uganda's Nakibembe Embaire Group to Open the Venice Biennale**

*The Nakibembe Embaire Group originates from Busoga and are custodians of the Embaire, a large communal xylophone played by multiple musicians simultaneously. The music is built on dense, interlocking polyrhythms – complex, immersive, and deeply rooted in collective performance.*

**Kampala, Uganda: 5 May 2026** – In a landmark moment for Uganda's cultural history, the Nakibembe Embaire Group will open this year's Venice Biennale on Thursday (7 May 2026), bringing one of the country's most powerful musical traditions to the global epicenter of contemporary art.

The performance will take place at Palazzo Grassi in conjunction with an exhibition by Michael Armitage, whose work has become internationally recognized for its engagement with East African histories, mythologies, and contemporary realities.

Founded in 1895, the Venice Biennale is widely regarded as the most influential recurring event in the global art world, shaping artistic discourse across continents. To open the Biennale is a distinction typically reserved for some of the most significant voices in contemporary culture. For a traditional ensemble from rural eastern Uganda to take on this role marks a rare and profound shift in visibility.

The Nakibembe Embaire Group said: "To play the opening of the Venice Biennale is our greatest achievement. We are proud to represent Ugandan and Busoga culture on the global stage"

### *A Living Tradition, Reframed for the World*

The Nakibembe Embaire Group originates from Busoga and are custodians of the **Embaire**, a large communal xylophone played by multiple musicians simultaneously. In its home context, the Embaire is inseparable from community life, ceremony, and storytelling. On stage in Venice, it enters into dialogue with contemporary art, not as a relic of the past, but as a living, evolving form with a strikingly modern resonance.

### *From Village to Global Stage*

The group's presence at the Biennale reflects a broader evolution in how global audiences engage with African cultural forms. Increasingly, practices once categorized as "traditional" are being recognized for their conceptual depth, sonic innovation, and relevance within contemporary artistic discourse.

This trajectory has been supported over the past decade by the annual Nyege Nyege music festival, which has played a key role in amplifying Ugandan artists internationally. Through not only the annual festival but also Nyege Nyege's labels, residencies, and touring network, Nyege Nyege has consistently created pathways for artists – from experimental electronic producers to traditional ensembles like Nakibembe – to reach new audiences without compromising their identity.

### *A Moment of National Significance*

For Uganda, this opening performance represents more than international recognition. It signals a rebalancing of cultural narratives – where African artistic expressions are not positioned at the margins, but at the center of global conversations. At a time when the Venice Biennale continues to expand its scope beyond its historical Eurocentric foundations, the inclusion of the Nakibembe Embaire Group at such a pivotal moment

underscores a growing acknowledgment: that the future of contemporary art is inseparable from the depth, diversity, and vitality of cultures like those of Uganda.

**Notes for Editors:**

**Info:** <https://www.pinaultcollection.com/palazzograssi/en/nakibembe-xylophone-troupe>

**Performance Venue:** Palazzo Grassi – Punta della Dogana, Venice, Italy.

**Performance Details:** Shows are scheduled for May 7, 2026, at 10:30 AM and 3:00 PM.

**Context:** These performances are part of the cultural events surrounding the 61st International Art Exhibition of La Biennale di Venezia.

**Photos for Publication:**

[https://zбек.sharepoint.com/:f:/s/Zebek/IqCHBMp\\_7dEISbFX8gW4YPzdAVwpuEgomUmlmsSYbDIXtYE?e=Tyahq2](https://zбек.sharepoint.com/:f:/s/Zebek/IqCHBMp_7dEISbFX8gW4YPzdAVwpuEgomUmlmsSYbDIXtYE?e=Tyahq2)

**About the Nakibembe Embaire Group:**

*"A dense tangle of sound, from which distinct melodies, basslines, and rhythms emerge, each musician's abstract part combining into an entrancing whole." — Jim Hickson, Songlines*

The Nakibembe Embaire Group from Uganda performs on the embaire, a giant wooden xylophone played by six musicians, creating hypnotic, joyful music. They can perform on a stage or in the traditional village way, digging a hole in the ground to amplify the instrument's resonance before laying the keys over it. The embaire weaves polyrhythmic melodic phrases, vocals, and percussion into endlessly flowing, ecstatic grooves.

The troupe has built an international reputation through performances at WOMEX, CTM Festival, Bourse de Commerce (Paris), Holland Festival, Roskilde Festival, Forde Festival (Norway), and more. Their last album, *Phantom Keys*, was released on Nyege Nyege Tapes on October 20, 2025, documenting a Tokyo performance recorded last summer with Japanese dub innovator Naoyuki Uchida. It blends Uganda's trance-inducing

polyrhythms with experimental dub techniques, creating a hypnotic, otherworldly soundscape.

Video: Nabibembe live by Vincent Moon/Petites Planètes (Bourse de Commerce, Paris, 2022) – <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZCqLxz7gpNU>

Previous media coverage:

<https://www.songlines.co.uk/features/pit-bosses-nakibembe-xylophone-troupe>

<https://boomkat.com/products/nakibembe-embaire-group>

<https://faroutmagazine.co.uk/embaire-the-giant-xylophone-used-in-traditional-african-villages/>

<https://www.monitor.co.ug/uganda/lifestyle/travel/how-nyege-nyege-propelled-busoga-s-nakibembe-embaire-troupe-to-global-stage-4430262>

<https://www.matookerepublic.com/20231026/how-nyege-nyege-propelled-busogas-nakibembe-embaire-troupe-to-the-global-stage/>

<https://afropop.org/articles/womex-2021-rocks-porto>

<https://pan-african-music.com/en/the-10-best-albums-of-may-2023/>

<https://www.thewire.co.uk/audio/on-air/james-gormley-presents-adventures-in-sound-and-music-68204>

**About Nyege Nyege:** Nyege Nyege is a Kampala-based cultural platform dedicated to supporting and promoting innovative African music and art. Through its internationally acclaimed festival and year-round activities, it has become a leading force in shaping contemporary African cultural expression on the global stage.

**For more information or schedule interviews please contact Afsa Umutesi on**

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