

The voice of the guitar community in Africa

I only have one quitar which I

PLUS: Alif Ahmad, Gear Reviews and more!

**Artist: IVY ALEXANDER** 

gave a name...

NAIROBI GUITAR FESTIVAL

Dear Reader,

Welcome to our first edition of Gita Africa magazine!

We are delighted to share this magazine with you which highlights some of the achievements over the last few years of our growing guitar community. This cuts across and beyond NGF's team of Trustees and friends, who've worked behind the scenes in advancing our mission of bettering the music industry and experience especially for guitarists. NGF is supported and enhanced by internal and external networks that guide direction, bring new connections and offer platforms to generate opportunities to help deliver the ambitions as defined under our parent outfit – the RSK Trust.

It's a privilege to be part of a community where, as guitarists, we can have a magazine that understands our preference. Despite the general consensus that the guitar is the very essence of modern music, there seems to be a lack of published material focused around African guitarists. Well, here you have it: Gita Africa - A dedicated and logical magazine that seeks to deliver in-depth and up-to-date articles that celebrate the instrument you are most passionate about: the guitar.

So, whether you want to catch up on your favorite guitar heroes or read candid reviews that help you choose your next guitar gear, Gita Africa delivers. We aim to make this an excellent source for people who want to delve deeper into the never-ending realm of guitar world, all presented with meaningful context that makes for insightful reading.

With all best wishes,

Amos Kiptoon, Founder & Artistic Director Nairobi Guitar Festival

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# **INSIDE**

# The City of Seven Hills: Alif Ahmad





**Guitar Guru Winner:** Ivy Alexander

# **Our Story:**Nairobi Guitar Festival





**Andromeda Music:** Nick Wathi

**Spotlight:** Wandiri Karimi





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# THE CITY OF SEVEN HILLS

Nicknamed as the "Pearl of Africa", Uganda is a landlocked country lying astride the equator with a number of successful musicians on the African continent. It holds the flag as a nation with the youngest population on the continent. We spoke to one active string bender from the City of Seven Hills spreading positivity in a changing world;

How and why did you first pick up the guitar?

I picked up the guitar when I was in 14 years old; I was hanging out with my peers at secondary school who had already been playing guitar. For some reason which I do not know to this day, we were allowed to bring our acoustic guitars to school. We'd be jamming or playing the latest hits of the day during the long afternoons while waiting to be picked up from school. In retrospect, it was the camaraderie among friends that sparked my interest in the guitar.

Who were your main early influences?

Jimi Hendrix was one of my earliest influences; the moment I heard the opening riff to "Voodoo Chile

by the power of the guitar to captivate. Thanks to my dad, I also had my dose of classic rock through bands such as Led Zeppelin and The Scorpions.

Malay rock from the Eighties was also a big part of my formative years whichhadalotofamazing guitarists;

Kid and Hilary Ang (both had been in malaysian rock band Search at various points of the band's history) were early influences.

Akira Takasaki (Loudness) from Japan was another guitarist who I looked up to; at his peak, he was touted as the best guitarist in Asia. Speaking of guitar virtuosos, I also looked up to Joe Satriani and Steve Vai as inspirations

Later down the line, I was turned on to Andy Summers (The Police), Eric Clapton (Cream, Derek & The Dominoes), Peter Green (Fleetwood Mac) and Kirk Hammet (Metallica).

# What was your first guitar and do you have a name for any of your guitar(s)

It was a second-hand copy of a Fender Stratocaster which was based on David Gilmour's (Pink Floyd) black one. Currently, I only have one guitar which I gave a name: it's a 2005 Gibson Flying V which I simply call "Red".

#### What are your live rigs like?

I currently run a pedalboard through an old Roland Micro Cube in the following order: Dunlop Crybaby Wah

"Akira Takasaki (Loudness) from Japan was another guitarist who I looked up to" Classic, Blackstar Dual HT overdrive / distortion pedal, Full-Drive 2 Mosfet, Fuzzface Mini Silicon, Electro

Harmonix Micro POG, MXR M169 Carbon Copy Analog Delay and a Digitech Jamman Stereo looper pedal. For guitars, I have the aforementioned 2005 Gibson Flying V in faded cherry which had been heavily modified with Suhr pickups and a Stetsbar tremolo system, along with a Cort acoustic guitar.

On the amp (the Micro Cube or any other brand), I'd use a clean tone (based on the Fender Twin Reverb or Roland Jazz Chorus) and get all my sounds from the pedals. I've also been running the same pedalboard through a laptop via a soundcard where I would use Amplitube 5 and have a Fender Twin Reverb-style amp emulation activated. On both the



and the laptop, this would go straight into the mixer. If I were to use an amp with a good distortion sound such as a Marshall, Blackstar or Orange, I'd plugged my guitar straight into the amp with only an Ibanez Tube Scream TS7 in between.

What is your journey like in venturing out as a professional musician, playing gigs, releasing music? Do you feel you've reached your goals thus far?

I am a father and a full-time teacher, so it has been a tricky act to balance between music, teaching and parenthood. Saying that, I've been writing and recording original music prior to coming to East Africa, starting with a band (Eda Brig) I formed back in Brunei (where we recorded two LPS and several EPs) and then carrying on as a solo artist

When I taught in Tanzania for three years from 2016, I had the opportunity to meet and perform with musicians such as Swahili blues guitarist Leo Mkanyia and Gogo musician Msafiri Zawose. It was only upon arriving in Uganda during 2019 that I had the opportunity to focus on music full-time which unfortunately occurred around the time of the COVID-19 epidemic.



Despite not being able to do much live shows due to the strict lockdown, I was able to record a self-titled EP (ALIFCHIEF) of five tracks and had the good fortune to sign a digital distribution deal with East African Records. I was also able to record my solo debut LP (nusantarafrika) shortly afterwards; both releases gained rave reviews from online radio stations and music websites.

I've had to revert back to teaching full-time in 2021 but I committed myself to do as many live shows and record original music as much as possible in Uganda and abroad. As part of this commitment, I did a show in Kenya playing my original compositions with an exceptional

band of Kenyan musicians (Victor Njagi on bass and Phillip Njihia on drums) at Geco in Nairobi; the reception was amazing! Apart from performing in Kampala, I managed to do some dates in France during the summer where I was received warmly. It was only in the last six months that I've slowed down with live shows as I wanted to focus on recording my upcoming EP due for release in July 2023.

I am relatively happy with the output of recordings that I've made so far and I am motivated to continue recording new material. However, there is one thing that I have not achieved so far which is to do a tour, even if it's for three or four dates. I find that live shows are my main strength and they resonate well with my audience. This is something that I would like to build upon to have a stronger fan base; festivals and bars are ideal shows to start with.

### How is the music scene in Uganda especially for you as a quitarist?

As a guitarist, I find it exciting yet limited at the same time. As someone who's not from Africa. I am a huge fan of the African guitar styles, with Congolese rumba being one of my favourite, and it is always a treat to see them being played right in front of you.

Just for that is a whole other education! Saying that, a lot of Ugandan pop music is mostly based on dance hall and afrobeats so that you don't really see the guitar being at the forefront which isn't necessarily a bad thing. Most guitarists that I've seen here come from either a RnB or gospel background, so I don't see much rock or blues playing in their repertoire. From my observation, there is a lack of original live music being performed here and the music scene here is saturated to the brim with countless band playing covers of other artists which can be depressing at times.

#### How often do you gig and what do you do to warm up your fingers before taking to the stage?

These days, I perform at least once a month either on my own or with my band. At one point, I was doing two to three gigs in a month over a six-months period which mostly took place during the weekend. I no particular warm-up have exercises for my fingers other than hold the guitar, do some chromatic runs unplugged, play some barre chords and absorb the

## "Congolese rumba being one of my favourite"

vibe of the audience so that I can hit the stage full of confidence.

#### Which players should guitarists study and learn their licks from?

In no particular order, Jeff Beck, Franco (TPOK), Django Reinhardt, Eddie Van Halen, Dimebag Darrell, Ali Farka Touré, Vieux Farka Touré, Eric Clapton, Nile Rodgers, Jimmy Page, BB King and Albert King. These guys have a wealth of licks to learn from!

#### Any tips you can share with musicians out there?

The fastest way to develop one's craft and grow as a musician is to jam or perform with others as much as possible; you will gain invaluable experience by learning from others and expand your taste and vocabulary in music. Also, musicians who'd like to release original music commercially without the support of a record label should look into crowdfunding as another way to do so; all my solo recordings have been funded solely by friends, family and fans of my music.





# INTERACTIVE GUITAR Morkshops



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Guitarist Ivy started playing guitar at an early age and is one of the most sought after female session guitarists in Nairobi. Inspired by various artists, she has refined her sound overtime and even won the first edition of Ultimate Guitar Guru 2020 (online) competition. The guitar has become an extension of herself.

Tell us a bit about your music background & how old were you when you first developed interest in playing the guitar

y interest in music was nurtured by the fact that I was born into a musical family. My parents have a vast collection of cassettes and CDs that were in constant play in the car, or in the house, so music has always been all around.

I first started off with the recorder in primary school; then took to guitar after watching my dad playing which was when I was around 12 years old, I learnt my first few chords but never pursued the instrument until later on in my teenage years, where I got enrolled in the church music camp program during the holidays International Christian Centre (ICC), and got to form the first "Teenz band" with my brothers and good friends.

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later joined the Kenya Conservatoire of Music under Mr. Manasseh Uzele and the rest is history (He is still my mentor to date). I've played for around 9/10 years.

What motivates you to wake up every day and continue pursuing your dreams?

It is my God-given gift and I find strength in that. I want to be really good and continue making an impact.

"Besides that. a bit of my music is based off some kind of happens emotions"

Besides that, the love for music and the joy it brings me; and the fact that you never stop learning makes me keen to continue working hard. I read this somewhere, the guitar is a very defiant instrument, the more you play it and think you've gotten a hang of it, the more you realize you actually don't know much, and you're stuck in a cycle of figuring it out (a good cycle) and I resonate with this.

Run us through your songwriting process, when do you feel most creative?

My song writing process has mostly been spontaneous, I usually hear a melody sing it out (well try to lol) and build a chord

progression around it; always record your ideas even if it's on voice memos because you will forget!!

Besides that, a bit of my music is based off some emotions or an important event to me that's taken place; for example "Pacha" cause of my twin brother, "Solemn" off Majira was coined after a transitional period in my life and when you hear the song

you can feel the tension release that with the choice of chords and melody;

and many more reasons for my different songs.

I feel most creative when I'm at peace with everything going on around me and when there's low pressure in my day-to-day life run ins.

What quitars are you playing right now & what guitar accessories do vou use?

I'm currently juggling between different quitars for different purposes but my main is Fender Stratocaster, I also have a nylon-string which I love to use for recordings you can hear its sound in my songs "Solemn", "Infinite" and off my new upcoming project



a song called "Tidal". For the more acoustic electric sounds I use a Seagull by Godin and a Yamaha F310. For my pedalboard I use a DigiTech Rp1000, and a home practice amp, Roland Cube 40.

# How would you describe your sound?

I'd describe it as textural and emotive with afro and RnB influences.

Who would you say has been your biggest influence when it comes to playing the guitar?

I feel like I have a lot of influences especially in different stages of me discovering what I like. There's Nigel Hendroff (Hillsong) when I first started playing in church this is all I'd listen to. And down the line various players with different touches to their playing; Paul Jackson Jr., Norman Brown, Mark Lettieri, Benjamin Kabaseke (Kenya).

Do you think the music industry is generally doing a good job by featuring particularly, female guitarists in more gigs and sets?

Yeah it is for sure.

Finish the sentence: The guitar...

My solace..



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# Line 6 Spider V 120 MKII

The Spider V 120 MkII allows players to connect wirelessly to their devices using Bluetooth, enabling them to stream music and use the Spider Remote app to control the amp's settings.

Line 6 Spider V 120 MkII is a powerful and feature-packed guitar amplifier that offers players a wide range of tonal options and connectivity features.

Its high wattage, full-range speaker system, and wide range of amp models and effects make it an excellent choice for live performances and recording. Some of its features include:

- *High Wattage*: The Spider V 120 MkII offers 120 watts of power, making it suitable for use in large venues or for rehearsals with a full band.
- Full-Range Speaker System: The amplifier features a full-range speaker system, which provides a rich and detailed sound across the entire frequency spectrum. This feature makes it suitable for playing a range of musical genres, from clean jazz tones to high-gain



metal sounds.

- Wide Range of Amp Models and Effects: The Spider V 120 Mkll offers a wide range of amp models and effects, including classic tube amp sounds, high-gain distortion, and modern clean tones. The amplifier also includes built-in effects, such as delay, reverb, and modulation, and can store up to 128 user presets.
- Wireless Connectivity: The Spider V 120 MkII allows players to connect wirelessly to their devices using Bluetooth, enabling them to stream music and use the Spider Remote app to control the amp's settings.
- USB Recording: The amplifier features a USB audio interface, which allows players to record directly to their computer or mobile device. This feature is useful for recording demos, practicing, or laying down tracks in a home studio.

• Easy-to-Use Interface: The Spider V 120 features an intuitive interface, with a color-coded control panel and LCD screen, making it easy for players to navigate and customize their sounds.



- 120 Watts Of Power
- Full-range Speaker System
- Can Store Up To 128 User Presets
- Wireless Connectivity
- USB Audio Interface
- Intuitive Interface

# STRING GAUGE BY GUITAR GURU

Guitar string gauges are measured in thousandths of an inch. For example, a 10-gauge string is 0.010 inches in diameter. The gauge of a guitar string affects the sound, feel, and playability of the guitar.

Thinner strings are easier to play and produce a brighter sound. They are also easier to bend, which can be useful for certain styles of music. However, thinner strings can be less durable and may not produce as much sustain as thicker strings.

Thicker strings are more durable and produce a warmer sound. They are also less likely to break than thinner strings. However, thicker strings can be more difficult to play and may not be as well-suited for certain styles of music.

The best way to choose the right gauge of guitar strings is to experiment and see what feels and sounds best to you. There is no right or wrong answer, and the best gauge for you will depend on your playing style and preferences.

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This Dean Vendetta XM guitar has a C-shaped bolt-on neck made of Black Walnut with 24 medium jumbo frets inlayed with pearl dot inlays. The body is made of poplar and has a tune-O-matic bridge with string-through-body design that provides for maximum sustain.

For the pick-ups, I swapped out the stock pick-ups for the classic EMG 81/85 set. The EMG-81s serve as the neck-pick and is really good for leads and solos. The EMG-85s serve as the bridge pick-ups, outputting quite a heavy sound that comes in handy for heavy metal.

I prefer to have it tuned a half-step down to E-flat tuning (D#, G#, C#, F#, A#, D#, low to high) with Ernie Ball Hybrid Slinky guitar strings. I prefer these strings for their balance. When tuned-down half-step, the lower strings are heavy enough to give the rhythm sound the heaviness of lower tunings (D-standard) and power and tightness of standard E tuning. The high strings also retain their tension guite well at the half-step tuning and don't get too lose and unwieldy. For plectrums I use the legendary tear-shaped Jim Dunlop Jaz III picks. They are designed to let your technique take over with precision and power.

See more of the Storm Bringer in action: https://rb.gy/akoei







The Yamaha THR10IIW Wireless guitar amp is a compact and versatile amplifier that delivers exceptional sound quality. With its sleek design and wireless capabilities, this amp offers freedom and convenience to guitarists. The amp's wireless connectivity ensures a seamless connection without the need for cables, enhancing mobility on stage and simplifying setup.

What sets the THR10IIW apart is its wide range of amp models and effects, faithfully reproducing the characteristics of popular vintage and modern amplifiers. From clean tones to high-gain distortions, this amp covers a diverse sonic palette. The built-in effects, including chorus, reverb, and delay, add depth and ambiance to the sound, providing ample room for creativity and experimentation.

Additionally, the THR10IIW is equipped with useful recording and practice features. The USB connectivity allows easy integration with recording software,

making it simple to capture studio-quality guitar tracks. The amp's headphone output enables private practice sessions, and the built-in tuner ensures precise tuning without the need for external devices.

In conclusion, the Yamaha THR10IIW Wireless guitar amp combines convenience, versatility, and exceptional sound quality. Its wireless capabilities, wide range of tones, and recording / practice features make it an excellent choice for guitarists of all levels.

#### **Features:**

- Realistic tube-amp tones and feel plus essential effects.
- 15 guitar amps, 3 bass amps, 3 mic models for acoustic-electrics, and flat modes for everything else.
- Bluetooth support for audio playback, editing via THR Remote, and more
- Built-in wireless receiver compatible with optional Line 6 Relay G10T transmitter.
- Built-in rechargeable battery lets you play anywhere.
- Hi-Fi audio playback with Extended Stereo Technology.
- Plug-and-play USB connectivity for recording and playback.
- THR Remote editor/librarian app for desktop and mobile devices.



# Nairobi Guitar Festival Our Story

BY LANE DAVE (Co-Founder – Nairobi Guitar Festival)

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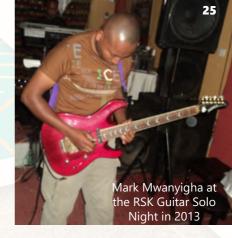
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#### COLUMN | OUR STORY

n the last couple of years, Nairobi Guitar Festival (NGF) has been committed to promoting the guitar and the string benders behind it. The guitar has always been a popular instrument in Kenya and continues to maintain its' glorious presence in the modern setting. When we look at the music industry today, we know with an extraordinary amount of certainty that it wasn't simply as-is, morphed to its present but dynamic configuration over the years with the guitar as one of its' pillar instrument.

So how did we get here? Without the talented guitarists, friends and partners – we would have never become what we are today. Our story goes back in time when the Trustees of our parent outfit at The Rock Society of Kenya (RSK) Trust, organized guitar workshops under the program banner of 'Clinics and Workshops'. Attempts to host a guitar clinic can be traced to as early as 2010 even though non-sufficed that year.

However, their (RSK) first successful guitar workshop took place three years later in 2013 on a Friday evening at a small welcoming Ethiopian delight known as Dass Restaurant, safely tucked away along Woodvale Groove in Westlands, Nairobi.



The event (dubbed Guitar Solo Night) was facilitated by one guitar slinger and shredder, Mr. Mark Mwanyigha, coming from the rock band power house - Rock of Ages. He would proceed to facilitate two more subsequent 'Guitar Solo workshops aka Nights' at the same venue in the following year, 2014. Two years later (2016) and with workshops between, in the program (Clinics and Workshops) was folded to give way to what we now know of today as Nairobi Guitar Festival.

Having thrashed out a befitting name, the drive towards advancing musicianship skills was renewed. This was to be accomplished through workshops, lectures and other complementary and related activities such as guitar competitions.

#### COLUMN | OUR STORY

nterestingly, it would take again another two years for the Trustees to refine the concept, engage friends and partners before the inaugural quitar workshop would take place at the Kenya Conservatoire of Music (KCM) on the 25th of February, 2018. The workshop could not have started any better than being facilitated by our Patron and brilliant guitar virtuoso - Mr. Manaseh Uzele (who was at that time the Head of Department -Guitar at KCM). There was a great deal of interest and positive feedback from this workshop that set the pace for future clinics.

Since that period, we have had some milestones. The Festival has a strong regional character having featured mostly guitarists from the region even as we seek to expand participation beyond our borders.



Manaseh Uzele (Patron Nairobi Guitar Festival) at a previous workshop





# **NICH WATHI**

"Passion forced me to keep going even when things got tough" BY GUITAR GURU

How did you start producing and what gave you the motivation to stay with it?

I developed an interest for music and Sound Engineering at a young age as I grew up in a musical family. I got serious with it around 2010 when, by proximity I was given the task of producing Parking Lot Grass' first album Shimo Mfukoni. The rest is history.

With all the music producers in Kenya, what made you think that you were still going to be successful in this field?

I didn't pay attention much to an end goal of success at first but by mostly producing rock/metal records I automatically stood out as no one else was doing what I was doing and as well.

Did you have any doubts in your mind that you weren't going to be successful?

No.

If so, what did you do to prevent yourself from giving up?

Passion forced me to keep going even when things got tough. It was automatic as I was always creating music on my computer for fun from way back before the idea of working with musicians crossed my mind. I also had a day job and a support system, which is vital.

#### Tell us more about Andromeda?

Andromeda Music is a studio focusing on audio solutions, music production, mixing and mastering, sound design and film/tv scoring.

STUDIO | NICK WATHI

What is your greatest strength as a Music Producer?

An ear for live instrumentation and over a decade of experience working with East / West African bands and musicians.

How long did it take you roughly to start excelling with your career?

Around five years of consistency.

How did you build contacts and/or clients?

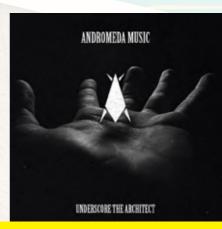
Referrals and word of mouth.

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If there was one word you could use to explain your experience so far while working as a music producer, what would it be? Accomplished.

Last but not least, is there any additional advice you can give me to help along the way to a successful career?

Persist and never quit.



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# WANDIRI KARIMI

**AFRICAN WOMEN'S ORCHESTRA** 

I was either the only woman playing an instrument and in few cases we were two women playing instruments while the rest of the instrumentalists were men.



y name is Wandiri Karimi a musician who studied law. I started my music journey at the age of 6 when I had my first music lessons and sat my first music examination for theory. I was fortunate to have had supportive parents who encouraged my music education along-side my academic pursuits.

During my university education and thereafter I took lessons at Kenya Conservatoire of Music in Guitar and sat guitar exams, I hold a Grade 8 Associate of Music of the Royal Schools of Music in Classical Guitar. I had the opportunity to teach guitar for a period to students from the age of 6-18 in various Nairobi schools as part of the peripatetic teaching team.

I also played with different ensembles including Zikiya, Kachumbari 7 and Ma3 playing rhythm and acoustic guitar parts on various stages including the Goethe Institute Muziki wa Kenya Program, Diani Music Festival, Kigali Up Music Festival and Sauti Za Busara as well as recording music for Kachumbari 7 and Ma3.

In majority of the opportunities I had to perform I was either the only woman playing an instrument and in few cases we were ISSUE1 | JULY 2023

two women playing instruments while the rest of the instrumentalists were men. When I would introduce myself as part of a band, the assumption was I was a singer and not an instrumentalist. Having worked in the music industry as a performer I had a front seat to the challenges that women had as performers and the discrimination they faced.

In 2016, Keziah Ntwiga a violinist and conductor had a conversation about being minority in our fields and how it would be great to have a safe space for women to perform on their own space where we could celebrate ourselves through music and then the idea of the Women's Orchestra was born putting up shows featuring an all women orchestra in the month of March since 2017. Through support of several organisations and other women musicians and groups including the Nairobi Girls Chorale, Spellcast Trebles, Redforth Ladies and Motra Drummers.

The International Women's day event has grown over the years having had events in several venues including the Kenya Cultural Centre, the Nairobi National Museum, Karen Blixen Museum grounds and the Movenpick Hotel.

The African Women's Orchestra has featured musicians such as Lisa Noah-Oduor, Olivia Ambani, Kasiva Mutua, Mayonde, and Fena.

Meeting like Minded women who have supported my work and I theirs has been a confirmation that together, everything is possible. I look forward to working in the Women in the Creative Arts sector and growing a safe and sustainable environment for women who choose to share their talents with the world to thrive.

#### **CHECK OUT AFRICANWOMEN'S ORCHESTRA**

https://rb.gy/wv0sr

#### **VIBE NA QUEEN WITH KASIVA MUTUA**

https://rb.gy/1k2r4





More Rock More Life







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