

STEPHEN JOEL CHIFUNYISE



The lion of Gutu, Stephen Joel Chifunyise, Shumba Sipambi is no more. At around 18:30 hrs on Monday 5 August 2019, Stephen peacefully succumbed after a brave battle with cancer at his home, surrounded by his family.

Stephen represented the best of whatever he had set his mind at yet remained humble, good humoured and accommodating regardless of who sought his counsel or friendship. Stephen was equally comfortable among artists whom he regarded as his peers, government ministers and other officials when he was director of arts and culture and when he was permanent secretary for the Ministry of Education, Arts, Sports and Culture. He was at home in the vaunted environs of leading world bodies such as UNESCO where he was a respected expert on culture, heritage, conventions and policies.

It is to his credit that through his generosity, Stephen has left a colossal legacy as a globally celebrated playwright with a remarkable output of performed and published plays which are over 70. Under his aegis, the Mbende Jerusarema dance was declared an intangible cultural heritage. In the 1980s, Stephen played a leading role in the introduction of Theater for Development in Zimbabwe. At the same time, he together with another iconic late figure Ngugi wa Mirii and friends, was instrumental in the formation of the Zimbabwe Association of Community Theatres (ZACT) which saw an exponential growth of community theatre in many of Zimbabwe's high density suburbs.