

SIERRA LEONE'S ARTS LEGENDS



**Raymond
S. Easmon**



**John
Akar**



**Yulisa Amadu
Pat Maddy**



**Raymond Caleb
Ayodele Charley**



**Miranda Olayinka
Burney-Nicol**



**Salia
Koroma**



**Ebenezer
Calendar**



**Sooliman
E. Rogers**



**Lucilda
Hunter**



**Samuel
Samei Marco**



**Alhaji M.
Hassan Bangurah**



**Geraldo
Pino**

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Raymond S. Easmon (15/01/1913 - 02/05/1997) was a famous playwright, novelist and physician to whom the beginning of modern theater in Sierra Leone is attributed.

His first play 'Dear Parent and Ogre', first produced by Wole Soyinka in Lagos in 1961, won the Encounter Magazine prize. His second play, 'The New Patriot' (1965), was performed in several West African countries. He also wrote a novel called 'The Burnt-Out Marriage' (1967), as well as short stories that were collected in 'The Feud and Other Stories' (1981).

He became politically active during the regime of President Siaka Stevens. Easmon criticized the rampant political corruption that occurred during the period and in 1970 was arrested and detained (1970- 71) for his opposition to the government. In the words of Simon Gikandi: "Easmon's plays are semi-comical commentaries on politics and culture in a community undergoing the birth throes of independence and corruption in the institutions of government."

Published Works:

- Dear Parent and Ogre (Oxford University Press, Three Crowns Books, 1964), play
- The New Patriot: a play in three acts (London, 1965), play
- The Burnt-Out Marriage (1967), novel
- The Feud and Other Stories (1981)



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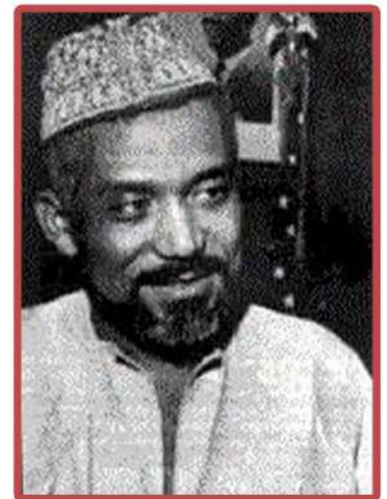
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John Akar (20/05/1927-23/06/1975) was an entertainer, broadcaster, playwright and diplomat. He served as Sierra Leone's ambassador to the United States.

Today, he is probably best known for composing the music of Sierra Leone's National Anthem. In 1960, Akar became the first non-Creole and the first Sherbro to be appointed Director of Broadcasting of the Sierra Leone Broadcasting Services (SLBS).

In 1963, Akar founded the National Dance Troupe to encourage Sierra Leoneans to have pride in their cultural heritage. In 1964, he and the National Dance Troupe were invited to the United States to perform at the New York World Fair. They were presented with a plaque won for giving the best performance of the fair. In late 1964, they performed at the art festival in London. In 1965 they performed at the Negro Arts Festival in Dakar, Senegal. In 1966, they went on a four-month tour. John Akar wrote 'Valley Without Echo', 'Cry Tamba', which won 2nd best play in the Independence Play Award and acted in several TV series including: 'A Time to Be Born' (1953), 'BBC Sunday-Night Theatre' (1950) and 'The Queen's Admiral' (1953). Akar was a repeat guest on the Merv Griffin Show on television.



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Yulisa Amadu Pat Maddy (27/12/1936 - 16/3/2014) was a famous playwright, novelist, actor, poet, dancer and director. He was sometimes called Pat Maddy, sometimes Kotor YAM, or just 'Prof' by his friends and colleagues. Born in Freetown he went to St. Edward's Secondary School. In 1958 he travelled to France and in Britain studied at the Rose Bruford College of Speech and Drama. He had opportunities to write and produce radio plays, broadcasting them in Britain and also Denmark. At the Keskidee Centre in London, he was Director of Drama. In 1966 his group, the Pan African Players, represented the UK at the first World Festival of Negro Arts in Dakar, Senegal. On his return to Sierra Leone in 1968 he was given the position of Head of Drama on Radio Sierra Leone.



The next year, he formed his own theatre group, Gbakanda AfrikanTiata, which gave theatre audiences in Sierra Leone plays like 'Big Berrin', 'Gbana Bendu', 'Yon Kon', 'Alagba' and 'Life Everlasting'. His works showed the struggles which people had with human rights and political corruption in the country. 'Big Berrin' was first performed at Cathedral House and some shed tears in the audience. Because he was so outspoken and critical in his plays, being branded a trouble maker, he was imprisoned in Pademba Road Prison. He went into exile after his release. His Gbakanda Foundation was established to 'give a voice to the voiceless'. A whole generation of artists and performers were inspired by him. His love for the cultural heritage of Sierra Leone and Africa dominated his writings and productions. In 1970 he was in Zambia where he trained the National Dance Troupe to perform at Montreal's World Fair. He also worked in Nigeria, at the University of Ibadan and University of Ilorin, and later in the USA. He wrote one novel in 1973, 'No Past, No Present, No Future'. It is about three friends, one of them gay, growing up in West Africa and later in Europe. In 2007 he returned to Sierra Leone to lecture at Milton Margai College of Education and later, Njala University.

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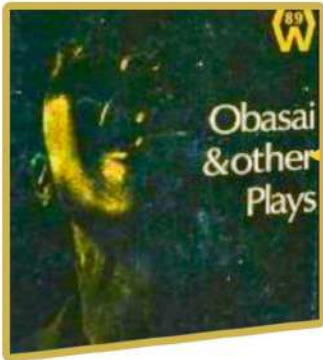
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He wrote, "As a native of Sierra Leone, a 'cultural traditionalist' and patriot, I sincerely believe in the Sierra Leone cultural identification of all our different cultures; the totality and oneness of the nation. I do not choose a province where I fight or an ethnopolitical sector where I give a battle cry. To fight for national culture means in the first place to fight for the liberation of the nation, that essential keystone which makes the building of a rich national culture possible".

He earned the following commendations:

- Sierra Leone National Arts Festival Award in 1973
- Gulbenkian Grant from the Calouste Gulbenkian Foundation in 1978
- Edinburgh Festival Award in 1979

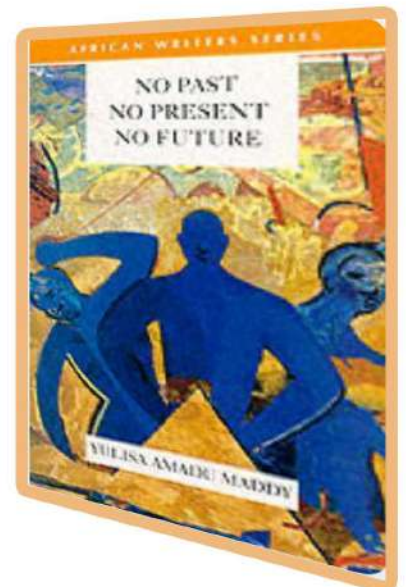
A very special stained glass window in the Pride Library in Canada is dedicated to him, very special because 135 other writers are also commemorated there for their outstanding contributions to literature, including William Shakespeare.

His works include:

- 'If Wishes Were Horses', 1963 radio play
- 'Big Breeze Blow', 1974, play, Freetown
- 'Take Tem Draw Di Rope', 1975, play, Freetown
- 'Na We Yone Dehn See', 1975, play, Freetown
- 'Put For Me', 1975, play, Freetown
- 'Big Berrin', 1976, play, Freetown

Books

- 'Obasai and Other Plays' 1968
- 'Drums, Voices and Words', 1985 pub McFarland,
- 'African Images in Juvenile Literature' (with Donnarae McCann), 1996



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Raymond Caleb Ayodele Charley (27/3/1948 - 8/5/1993) popularly known as Dele, was a writer, theatre director, playwright and sports educator. He was born and grew up in Freetown. As early as 1968 he founded the Freetown Youth Players. He studied at Milton Margai Teachers College in Goderich, and in 1988 he graduated with a Masters in Theatre Arts at Leeds University.

In the early eighties he directed the play 'Bohboh Lef' by Raymond deSouza George at the London International Festival of Theatre (LIFT). Through music and acting, the play is about an orphan boy and the struggles he faces and lessons he learns. Dele also worked with Dagarti Arts and the Puppet Centre while in London. He established Poda Poda Arts Collective which was an African Performance Group in London.

In Sierra Leone he was dedicated to the arts and sports. He taught both English and Physical Education in secondary schools and trained athletes and footballers as part of his duties at the Ministry of Education. He later accepted an appointment as Lecturer in Dramatic Arts at Milton Margai Teachers College (MMTC) in 1993, just before his death at a football match at MMTC.

He is best known for his contribution to the development of theatre in Sierra Leone. He championed the use of Krio in his dramatic works. He wrote 30 plays, as well as playlets, one-acters, poetry and articles. He was a leader in the development of indigenous theatre.

His group the Freetown Youth Players was reorganized as Tabule Experimental Theatre Company in 1968, which later became Tabule Theatre.

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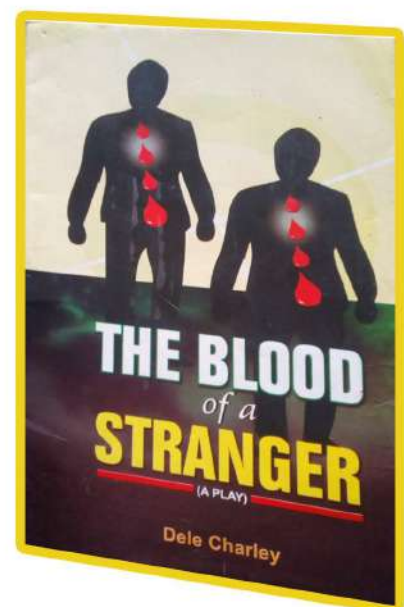
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It's about how a white man was able to capitalize on not only the ignorance of the villagers of Mando but also their greed and corruption, to exploit the rich natural deposit which was there. In the end justice prevailed. There is a bust of Dele Charley at St. John roundabout in Freetown outside the church.

Works:

- 'Titi Shine Shine', play, 1970
- 'Blood of a Stranger', play, 1977
- 'Ashoebi' play, 1977, produced in London 1992 to raise money for Connaught Hospital
- 'Petikot Kohna', play, 1982
- 'Fatmata', play, 1983
- 'Letters', radio play, 1990
- 'The Return of Kindo', play, 1993 (sequel to 'The Blood of a Stranger')



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Miranda Olayinka Burney-Nicol (1927 - 1996), born in Freetown, Sierra Leone, was a visual artist and a pioneer in modern African art. She signed her work 'Olayinka'. She was also a professional storyteller of African tales, and a singer and dancer. In fact she had her own African dance and musical career with her own group in 1954 in New York before she became a famous artist. With this group she choreographed their dances and presented their folk songs in three days of concerts.



She belonged to the first generation of African artists who did not only follow indigenous art practices, but drew on a variety of European media while experimenting with them, yet her images were generally drawn from Africa. The European artists who influenced her were the artists from the expressionist school, Paul Klee and George Rouault. Her work, like her life, can be described as a cultural fusion.

She won a scholarship to Long Island University, New York City to study the Arts and Humanities in 1949. She then studied for two years at the Central School of Arts and Crafts in London from 1955-1957. After this, she went on to France in 1964 to study a year at the Academy de la Grande Chaumiere.

She returned to Sierra Leone in 1958 when she was appointed Government Artist. Among her duties for the next ten years, she designed the costumes for the famous Sierra Leone National Dance Troupe for their world tour in 1964. The costumes were based on the indigenous styles of the various ethnic groups represented in the troupe. They went to New York Festival in that year. After that, the troupe also toured Russia and the USA in 1971. She has traveled to Europe, Nigeria, Lusaka and lived in England in 1988.

An artist's work is usually exhibited and sold, and Olayinka was no exception. She has exhibited in many US cities, England, Germany and other parts of Africa.

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The Harmon Foundation Collection has some of her works. Her interest in fashion resulted in a Fashion show at Kingsway in 1963, with 49 designs. Among her sold works is 'Mother Africa' which realized US\$737 at Bonham's New Bond Street (UK) in 2021. She created in a wide range of media including drawings, oil paintings, monotypes, woodcuts, linocuts, collages, constructions created out of materials from a Freetown market, incised wooden tablets and greeting cards. She decorated indigenous and commercial cloth, designed clothing, chairs, tables, house screens and landscapes, prints and textile designs.

As Government Artist, she made several school visits to encourage children's art, relating with art teachers and organized art exhibitions. She believed strongly that children had an inborn ability to draw. She thus lay the groundwork for the visual arts in preparation for the country's emerging Independence.

There is a large oil painting (1959) in the Office of the Minister of Education showing how education from indigenous rural life progresses with school. At the time of Sierra Leone's Independence, Olayinka contributed to the selection of color and design of the Sierra Leone flag. She felt it was important to have colors that were cool, calm and peace loving.

When she left government service in 1968 she set up her own private Olayinka Art Studio in Brookfields where she lived. There she gave art lessons and held art exhibitions. She was President of the Society of Sierra Leone Artists in 1972.

In 1977, she was in the Sierra Leone delegation to FESTAC 1977 in Nigeria, with her visual arts contributions. In 1971 she gave a public lecture at Fouray Bay College, University of Sierra Leone, on traditional and modern African art.

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Works include:

'Tobacco Story' mural, 1971 inside the Aureol Tobacco Company Office

'Looking Back', mural, 1980, at the entrance of the Radisson Blu Hotel

'Child Eating' or 'Child with Food', fresco, 1961 at Princess Christian Maternity Hospital (PCMH)

'Seated Figure', drawing in black and white, on the cover of the 10th September edition of the 'west Africa' journal no. 3243

Several greeting cards



According to Nigerian Professor of Art, Bolaji Campbell, Olayinka is 'one of the most intriguing, multi-talented, yet least celebrated and acknowledged artists to emerge from Sierra Leone in the modern era'. She was respectfully referred to as a 'cultural moderator'.

Professor Simon Ottenberg has written her biography in 'Olayinka - a woman's view: The Life of an African Modern Artist'.



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Salia Koroma was a famous accordionist, singer and poet from the Mende ethnic group. He was born in 1903 in Segbwema in southeast Sierra Leone. His father was an accordionist too, and Salia learned from him and his apprentices. Even though Salia wanted to go to school he was not given that opportunity. His father believed that the accordion would be Salia's teacher. The accordion would be his 'school'. Any time he broke one, his father would buy him another. He played the accordion so well, like a true Mende musician, making it sound familiar and lovable to his people. Even though the instrument was a western instrument, in Salia's hands it became a Sierra Leonean iconic sound. His songs had subjects of love, war and death.

He would use the Mende language in a classical way. In Kenema where he lived, people called him Salia Mbaka, 'mbaka' meaning 'accordion' in Mende.

When he was in his twenties, he decided to travel from place to place, entertaining Mende chiefs who liked to hear his praise songs, like a minstrel. When he was in Rotifunk he was court entertainer to Chief Albert Caulker. When he moved to Moyamba, he played for Chief Julius Gulama. In the 1950s, the Sierra Leone Broadcasting Service (SLBS) invited him to Freetown to make recordings of his music. In addition, a Nigerian business man called Jonathan Adenuga also invited him to record his songs on RPM discs in his recording studio under the Nugatone label. The Bassoon brothers also made recordings of his songs, under the Bassophone label. He joined the police force in 1939 (#377), but continued to play and compose. Salia also composed songs based on what life had taught him. After a short time, he left the police after the Second World War and returned to Kenema.

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He played at the opening of the 1980 OAU Summit, hosted in Sierra Leone.

Gary Schulze says of him: 'When Salia appears in a chieftom, people journey from many miles around to hear him. He travels in his own Land-Rover, is in great demand by the Paramount Chiefs of Mendeland, and has made many commercial recordings of his songs, which he composes himself'.

He was awarded an honorary Master of Arts (MA) by the University of Sierra Leone for his contribution to the music of Sierra Leone in December, 1993. Salia believed there is dignity in art. He himself said, 'I'm cultural but I'm not primitive'. He lived to the age of 90. Salia has been the symbol of the artist in our traditional society.



To learn more about him, see/hear:

- 'Salia Koroma, my life story' in 'Stories and Songs from Sierra Leone', Freetown: People's Educational Association of Sierra Leone, 1985

Youtube videos:

- Salia Koroma's Spirit lives on in Maada Bio Pt One
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?app=desktop&v=NW1SzWhbsEI>

- Salia Koroma Live: Bondo Gbakpa/Salia Bondesia (1993)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=AxrZy1LKzto>

- Salia Koroma: Flight from the Wonde (Mamagoe)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=k7YQhBvZSnc>



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Ebenezer Calendar (1912-1985) was born in Freetown. His father was from Jamaica and his mother from Sierra Leone. He attended Bishop Elwin Tabernacle and UBC primary schools. He left school at 15 because his mother couldn't afford his fees. He was a composer, singer and guitarist, who popularized the Krio 'Goombay Music' and 'Maringa Music'. He started playing in a goombay band while he was still a boy. He taught himself how to play the guitar. He had a job with the Public Works Department (PWD) as a carpenter in 1927. After years of experience, he worked for Pa Alimamy Bounge who was a coffin maker. Around 1933 he formed his group called 'Ebenezer Calendar and his Maringa Band'. They played at weddings, wake keeping ceremonies and funerals, and were often heard marching along the streets of Freetown.



His band was made up of guitar, banjo, mandolin, trumpet or flute, small drums, a tuba, a triangle, tambourine, and bass box. He recorded for Decca the British company. Later on he also recorded for His Master's Voice (HMV) and Bassophone. His most famous song was 'Fire, Fire, Fire'. There are many songs he composed. Some were 'The Stolen Chicken', 'Double Decker Buses', 'You Eat me Money, you say you nor want me'. His songs described what everyday life was like, so he was a social commentator.

On April 19, 1983 the President of Sierra Leone gave him the award of Certificate of Honour for his services in the field of indigenous music. Calendar worked as a programme officer for the Sierra Leone Broadcasting Service (SLBS) in 1952. At SLBS he had his own radio show. He later became Director of Traditional Music. He performed with the Sierra Leone National Dance Troupe at the Commonwealth Arts Festival in 1965 and 1966.



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When the country's economy declined, he continued to play at parties and on the radio until he passed. When he died in 1985, many music groups assembled at his home in Berry Street and played his songs all through the night.

Dr. Oloh developed Milo Jazz from Calendar's Goombay music.

Listen to some of his music:

Ebenezer Calendar and his Maringa Band - Jollof Rice

- <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5VgsNsyhTRQ>

Double Decker Buses

- <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NhySUaZypjA>

Ebenezer Calendar - Fire, Fire, Fire

- <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=p3jorkz5J7A>

Ebenezer Calendar and his Maringa Band - Lumley

- <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1NcXqjjXDQM>



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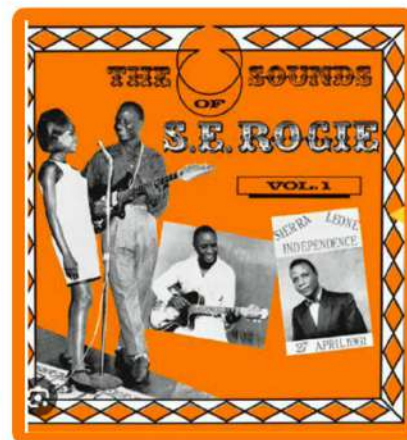


Sooliman E. Rogie popularly known as 'Rogie' was born in 1926 in Fonikoh in Pujehun District. His childhood was tough. He had to cut and sell firewood. Unable to continue his schooling, he moved to Freetown to live with his elder brother and learned how to be a tailor. He was a singer, songwriter and guitarist. His style of music was known as 'Palm Wine' music. He started performing when he was young. He was a tailor by profession. In the 1940s he became a professional musician. He had a distinctive baritone voice, and he could sing in four languages, English, Krio, Mende and Temne.

In 1965 he formed the band called 'The Morningstars' which didn't last long. When he became popular he recorded under his own label 'Rogie and Rogiephone' label. In 1973 he went to the US and stayed in the San Francisco Bay area, performing under the name 'Rogie'. In the 80s he played at elementary and high schools across California with his 'African Folk and Culture Show' which created educational programmes for American children and also entertainment programmes for the elderly. For this, he received many awards from the US Congress and Senate, and also from the cities of Berkley and Oakland in California.

In 1988 he moved to England. In 1991 he formed a band called 'The Palm-Wine Tappers' and they toured the UK. He recorded the album 'Dead Men Don't Smoke Marijuana' but sadly he passed soon after with a heart condition, while performing on stage in Estonia, on 4 July 1994.

His most famous song is 'My Lovely Elisabeth'. This was one of 10 songs selected by listeners of the BBC when they asked, 'What is the best song ever produced by an African musician?' in 2004. Other songs he composed were 'Baby Lef Marah' and 'Man Stupid Being'.



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Listen to some of his songs;

My Lovely Elisabeth by S.E.Rogie

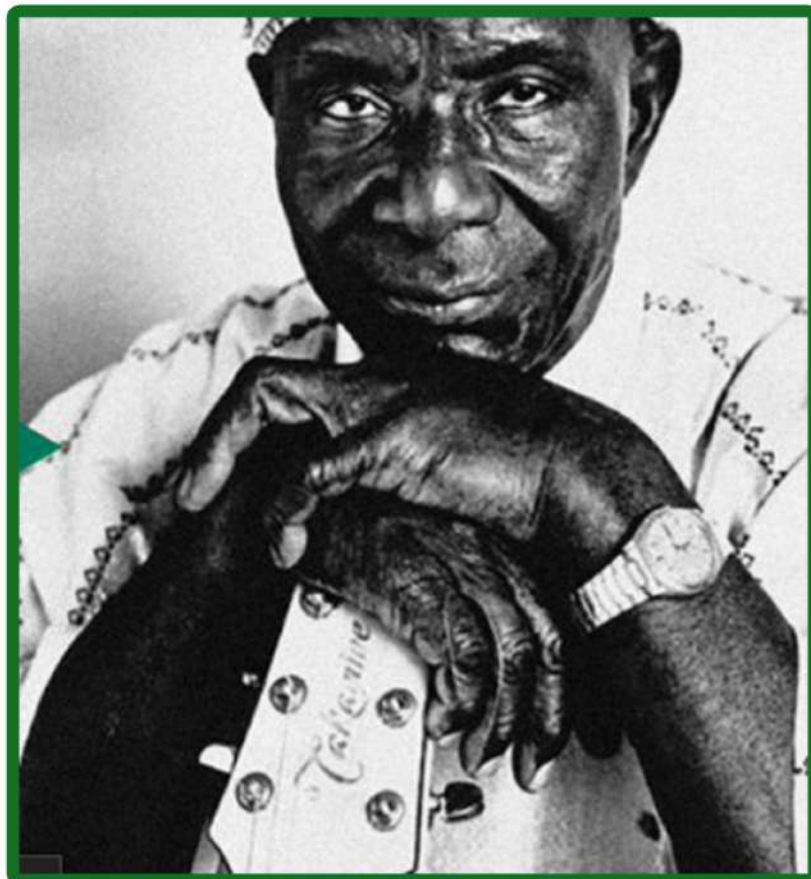
- <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2nx-cJ9TgD4>

Please Go Easy With Me by S.E.Rogie

- <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=o7FXFzpAwPA>

Dieman Noba Smoke Tafee (Dead Men Don't Smoke Marijuana) by S.E.Rogie

- <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7DGA6MudTJo>



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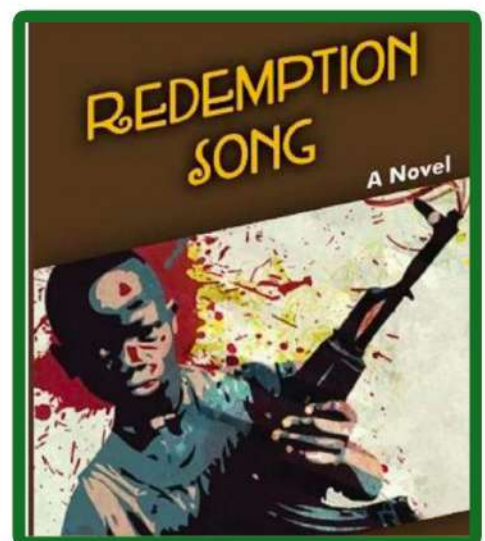
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Lucilda Hunter was born in Freetown in 1943, of the Caulker family. She was a librarian and biographer. She became the librarian at the Sierra Leone Library Board, the Medical Library at Connaught Hospital and in Brazzaville with the World Health Organization. She was made a Fellow of the Chartered Institute of Library and Information Professionals, formerly known as the British Library Association. Her pen name was Yema Lucilda Hunter. Lucilda wrote 6 novels and one non-fiction book. Her first novel was 'Road to Freedom', published in 1982, about how hard the early settlers in Freetown worked to form the Province of Freedom. 'Bittersweet' is the title of her second book, written in 1989. A road accident of a cousin prompted her to write this book.



The civil war in Sierra Leone inspired her to write 'Redemption Song' in 2006. Her main characters are usually Krios, descendants of the Liberated Africans who were settled in the Freetown area in the early 19th century. Through her novels, she has written about the history, life and culture of Sierra Leone in a charming, memorable way. She showed her love for her country and her people in her stories. She passed on August 21, 2022. She was a literary icon. She blazed the trail for female Sierra Leonean writers. She was married to Kobi Hunter and they have two children.



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Other works include:

'Mother and Daughter: memoirs and poems', 1983

'Joy Came in the Morning', 2013

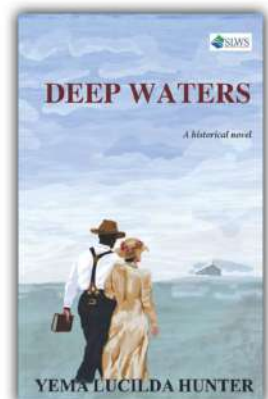
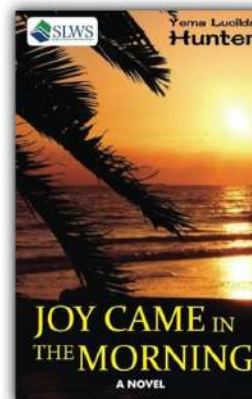
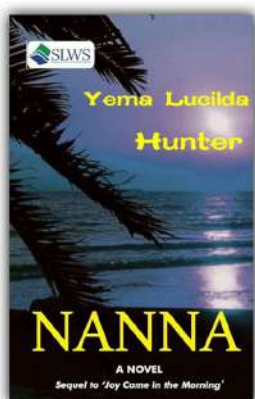
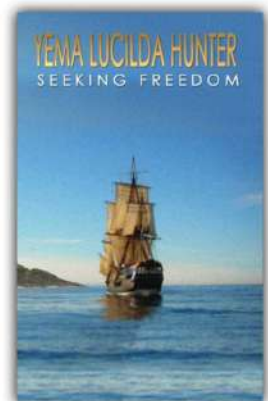
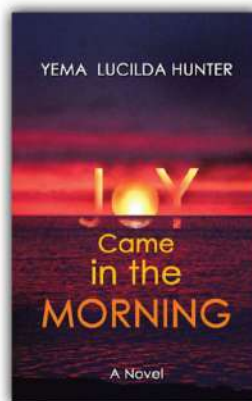
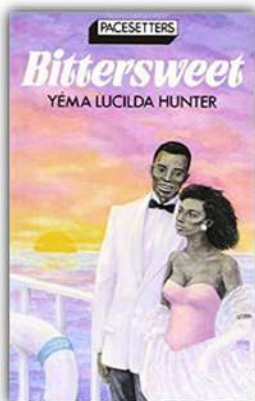
'Nanna', 2014

'Her Name was Aina: a historical novel', 2018

'Deep Waters', 2022.

'An African Treasure: In Search of Gladys Casely-Hayford (1904-1950), 2008, biography

'Builders: the Annie Walsh story (1849-2009)', 2009



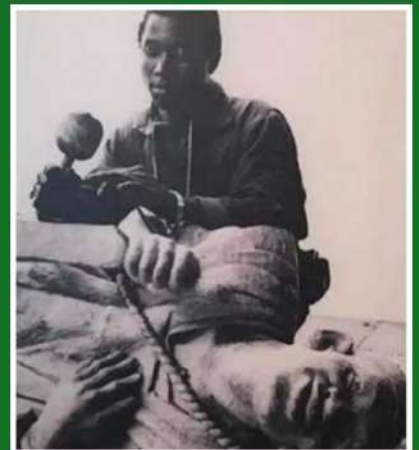
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Samuel Marco was known as 'Marco', the wood carver and sculptor. (25/12/1958 - 29/4/2018)
He was born in Moyamba, and grew up there. His father encouraged him to develop his passion for wood carving. He would only need to look at a piece of wood and could visualize what he wanted to create out of it. This was called 'the Marco touch'. According to an interview he had with Dr. Julius Spencer for the BBC in the early 1990s, he started sculpting 'accidentally' and was inspired to be a sculptor after wanting to carve a wooden spoon for his Arts & Crafts examination in school, but it developed into a beautiful human figure. Marco never received any formal training in sculpting, but was naturally talented.



He is famous for his life-sized and life-like wood carvings. He would use African mahogany to carve his magnificent statues. Marco presented a sculpture of the royal emblem to Prince Charles (now King Charles) at the Freetown Golf Club when he visited Sierra Leone in 2006.

In 1993 Marco visited England and carved the figure of a freed slave making a pilgrimage to see William Wilberforce out of one piece of oak. He used only a chisel. The figure carried a gift of ivory horn on his back. This carving was given to the Wilberforce House as a gift, and is displayed in the Wilberforce House Museum in Hull. Other works include a carved wooden hunter carrying a dead animal over his left shoulder and carrying a hunting spear in his right hand. He also carved Bob Marley with his guitar and a microphone. One of his carvings shows President Siaka Stevens holding the map of Sierra Leone as an angel descended on him, predicting that he would become a leader.



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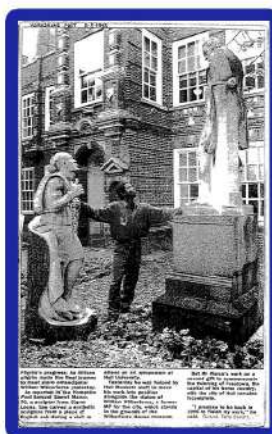


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SIERRA LEONE'S ARTS LEGENDS

Marco was an artist-in-residence at Fourth Bay College, University of Sierra Leone. He was given the award of Order of the Rokel in 2011 by President Ernest Bai Koroma at the 50th Independence anniversary. He passed on the 29th April, 2018. His work is continued by his son Mark and his brother Andrew.

In recent times, seven of his carvings were donated to the Sierra Leone National Museum by Alhaji Hussein Jawad of the Family Kingdom. The Ag. Curator of the museum said, 'Marco built institutions in Makeni, Freetown, Moyamba and Lungi. Because of his talent and knowledge, he passed all that to students who can now boast of wood carving'



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REMEMBERING OUR LEGENDS

SIERRA LEONE'S ARTS LEGENDS

Alhaji Hassan Bangurah's parents were the late Pa Sorie and Yabome Bangurah. He was born in Freetown on Jan 18 1933. He had 6 siblings. His father was a trader and his mother a housewife. He attended the Tabernacle Primary School and St. Edward's Secondary School. He was employed as an accounts clerk in the United African Company (UAC). He had a great love of sports. He was captain of the Sierra Leone National Soccer team and the Cricket Teams in 1959. He was so good that he got the nickname 'Skipper Bangurah'.



His love for art led him to study at the Goldsmith College of Art of the University of London. When he returned from England, he worked at the Sierra Leone Broadcasting Service (SLBS), where he developed many programmes and designed formats needed by the country. He also worked as a design artist for the Mano River Union. He traveled all over the world promoting Sierra Leone and African scenery. He was particularly known for his artworks showing the Cotton Tree, the City Hotel (one of Sierra Leone's oldest hotels), African dancers, drummers, figure heads, and typical Krio houses. He also drew scenes from mountain tops. Alhaji Hassan Bangurah was given several awards for his work from the Government of Sierra Leone: the Order of the Republic, Order of the Rokel, Bai Bureh Star, Nyagu Medal, Matturi Medal, Milton Margai Medal, Wallace Johnson Medal, Presidential Medal, Mosquito Medal, Sanusi Mustapha award, Sierra Leone Grammar School (US branch), Temne Union, SLNC and the Nama Kono awards.

In his last years, he went to the US to be with his family. There he was a teacher and mentor to all who came in contact with him. He was a devout Muslim, and in his fun-loving way, he encouraged young people to practice the Islamic faith. He was made Imam of the Ebele cultural group and the Nigerian mosque. He passed in 2005. Alhaji Hassan Bangurah was married to his wife Haja Khadija Jariatu Bangurah and they had seven children and several grandchildren.



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REMEMBERING OUR LEGENDS

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Works by Alhaji Hassan Bangurah:
Mural for the Bank of Sierra Leone , 1971
Poster for the African Development Bank , 1969,
Poster for Guinea Djiliba, 1970
Right-hand traffic calendar, 1971
Presidential Mace, 1975



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REMEMBERING OUR LEGENDS

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Gerald Pine, later known as Geraldo Pino, was born in Freetown on 10 Feb 1939. His father was a lawyer based in Nigeria, and his mother and sister died when he was young. From an early age, Gerald was known for his guitar skills. He was also a radio and electronic technician. Gerald was tall, and a captivating stage performer. He co-founded the Heartbeats in 1961, a band consisting originally of Geraldo Pino on vocals and guitar, Francis Fuster on drums and conga, Alimamy Hassan Deen on vocals, George Keister on bass and Arnold Nylander on lead guitar.



They rehearsed at Gerald's house in Charlotte Street. Later Balogun Johnson-Williams aka Dr. Dynamite became the lead guitarist. At the beginning they played songs popular in those days, from the music of Cliff Richards, Elvis Presley, Tommy Steele, James Brown, and also the Latin American rhythms of the Meringue, Cha Cha Cha, Mambo and Rumba. Congolese music from the Rico Jazz group was also popular. The Heartbeats were very popular at the Freetown nightclubs such as Flamingo, Palm Beach and Tiwana. Gerald Pine soon changed his name to Geraldo Pino, after the fashion of Congolese musicians Franco and Dr. Nico. When television was introduced in 1962, they had their own show. In 1963, they cut their first records.

They had their own record label, Pino Records in 1963. Dr. Christian Horton says the band was 'the most significant group of the period. The group made an impact on others because of the rich quality of its music and its swinging style of playing'. In January 1964 they travelled to Monrovia. They also played for six months in Liberia at the Ducor Intercontinental Hotel.



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That year Dr. Dynamite left the group. Gerald replaced him with Tom Brown, a fantastic guitar player. In 1966 they were in Cote d'Ivoire. From there they went to Kumasi in Ghana, and stayed there a year with Collingwood Williams.

Pino became a successful manager, promoter and businessman. He had a captivating stage presence, and was clever. He owned a flashy car, fashionable clothes, and powerful amplifiers and speakers and electronic instruments with 6 microphones that impressed his audience. His band toured Ghana and Nigeria between 1965 and 1967.

Geraldo left Sierra Leone with his group in early 1970s to tour Ghana and never returned. In Ghana they played at Kumasi and then in Accra at the Apollo Theatre, a club which Gerald Pino opened. The Apollo Theatre was booming then. Another rhythm guitarist, Emile Walsh, joined him. After Ghana he went to Nigeria. There he met Chief Tony Benson and Fela Ransome Kuti. Fela Ransome Kuti admired him greatly. In 1969 Pino settled in Nigeria, and never left. He bought a TV station and the airport hotel in the city of Port Harcourt where he had a nightclub. At his hotel, he played with promising Cameroonian musicians, and Fela Kuti. "He had all Nigeria in his pocket," Fela said in 1982. "Made me fall right on my ass, man." Geraldo lived in Aba, Imo State, playing in nightclubs. Francis Fuster was deputy leader but he left the group in 1972 and formed his own band called 'Baranta', taking some of the players with him.

In 2007 he played in London with his former Heartbeats drummer, Francis Fuster, even though his health was failing him. He passed away at the University of Port Harcourt Teaching Hospital on 10th November 2008. "He had a good humour, treated his musicians well and had a great respect for any other professional musician," recalls Tee Mac Iseli, Nigerian musician. He is now recognized as the 'godfather of afrobeat', a hero of African popular music, not properly acknowledged by his country and his people. The Guardian of Jan 14 2009 said of him, 'He had a major influence on west Africa's soul, funk and Afrobeat scene in the 1960s and 70s, and made a huge impression on the young Fela Kuti, yet his music had been largely unheard for the past 30 years'.

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REMEMBERING OUR LEGENDS

SIERRA LEONE'S ARTS LEGENDS

Listen to some of his music:

Geraldo Pino - Let Them Talk

- <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kKL-abkLWFY>

Geraldo Pino and his Heartbeats - Maria Lef for Waka

- <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DsMc2yY6vk8>

Geraldo Pino - Heavy Heavy Heavy

- https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FencH4bXZQg&list=OLAK5uy_nzaLAKfxnZG76-VLKG01JD1vSxQ5JBQWs

Geraldo Pino - Afro Soco Soul Live

- https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fIWHkZVsr7I&list=OLAK5uy_nzaLAKfxnZG76-VLKG01JD1vSxQ5JBQWs&index=12

Geraldo Pino - Africans Must Unite

- https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IQleLhtExnU&list=OLAK5uy_nzaLAKfxnZG76-VLKG01JD1vSxQ5JBQWs&index=3

Geraldo Pino - Interview with Francis Fuster

- <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ukuNqm67joo>

Geraldo Pino - remembered by Francis Fuster

- <https://youtu.be/ukuNqm67joo?si=RKOH8w8Z7IMfGUA>

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