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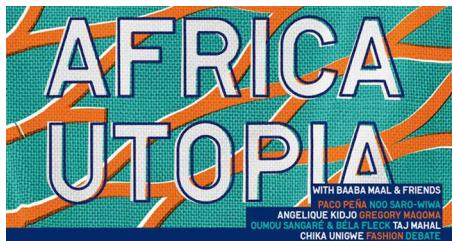
African Utopia Flourishes at the Southbank Centre

Bv [sapellestyle](#). Published on July 23, 2012.



Africa Utopia is a month-long festival running at London's **Southbank Centre** until 28 July 2012 and featuring music from renowned artists such as Baaba Maal and Angelique Kidjo, theatre, film, literature, dance, fashion and debates as part of **Southbank Centre's Festival of the World**.

AN IMPRESSIVE LINE-UP OF THINKERS, MOVERS AND SHAKERS



The South bank has brought together an

impressive range of key individuals from various fields of interest including human rights, the arts, research, social policy and the media being brought together for this event. The events include artistic performances, exhibitions and debates and we think it will appeal to a wide audience with interests in aspects of contemporary African culture that challenge the long-held negative perception of Africa as a lost cause. Where else would you hope to find under one roof, renowned singers and human rights activists, key media players, artists, designers – all on a mission to celebrate, enlighten, inspire and inform about Africa?



The panel for 'Not Just Zebra Print' thrashes out some issues

ECO-AFRICA: WHY GREEN IS THE NEW BLACK

On Friday 21 July we attended '**Eco-Africa: Why Green is the New Black**', a provocative debate on the challenges and benefits facing a continent clocking rapid economic expansion in some cases whilst contending with environmental and sustainability issues. This is a topic close to our hearts, and one which affects the partners of our online fashion boutique, sapelle.com which is committed to promoting African and Afro-inspired labels that practice ethically-sound principles including fair trade, fair pay, sustainable production, organic production and social enterprise. We recognised a lot of the points made by the panel, including the issue of the uphill battle manufacturers, especially those in the textile industry, face against cheap Far East imports.



Writer, Eco-entrepreneur & Founder of Africa Fashion Guide, Jacqueline Shaw

The panel included **Jacqueline Shaw**, eco-entrepreneur, author and founder of the social enterprise Africa Fashion Guide who highlighted even more challenges the African fashion and textiles industry faces, for instance the exportation of raw cotton which is then re-imported as finished goods for African-based

manufacturers, and why value-adding processing can't happen on the continent.

Solomon Mugera, Editor of BBC Africa presented the case study of Rwanda, a country committed to implementing a clear and comprehensive environmental strategy that aims to protect the limited and fragile natural resources of the small landlocked country – an example that many African countries could learn from.

AFRICA ON THE CATWALK

On 21 July we attended '**Africa on the Catwalk**', a visual treat for the packed Royal Festival Hall Ballroom audience. Organised by **Ola Shobowale**, Creative Director of Infinite Beauty Factory, with

styling by Arise Magazine's Sabrina Henry, the show featured current collections from a number of upcoming and more seasoned top labels representing the best of African fashion in the UK.

The show opened with an edgy collection from Central St.

Martin's graduate, **Kezia**

Fredrick featuring a bold colour palette with block colours, batik, black-and-white checks.

Established label **Bestow**

Elan presented their current collection of sexy and sophisticated feminine pieces with signature features that identify and distinguish the innovative label.



An elegant Bestow Elan gown on a model whose legs appeared to go on forever.

Hip fashion label **Chichia London**, paired up with self-styled 'afro-pop' fashion accessories label Ugos Boutique oilcloth bags, presented a fun and colourful Summer collection featuring viser hats and cool garments made from the Tanzanian traditional Khanga cloth.

'Regal' was the word that sprung to mind when we saw the new collection from **Eki Orleans**. With accents in oranges, violets and royal blue, the collection exuded an air of high class and, well, royalty.

ARISE & SHINE

Later on Saturday, Arise Magazine presented an interactive event welcoming creatives from an array of disciplines to share their work and views with the audience. South African poet **Lebo Mashile** performed live, Nigerian soul singer **Bez** performed tracks from Super Sun and a host of other African talent showcased their stuff, including fashion designer **Tsemaye Binitie**, Missla Libsekal of **Another Africa** and poet and playwright **Inua Ellams**.

NOT JUST ZEBRA PRINT



Laurence Kanza, Helen Jennings and Hannah Pool on the 'Not Just Zebra Print' panel

Curated by journalist and writer **Hannah Pool**, this panel discussion explored the evolution of 'New African Fashion', its impact on the global fashion industry and on the fashion sector in Africa. Panel members included **Jana Sante** of couture label **Gisella Boutique**, **Ola Shobowale**,

Enyinne Owunwanne of Heritage1960, **Laurence Kanza** of La Petite Congolaise, and each described their journey, their vision and proceeded to debate the future of the African fashion

renaissance including whether the adoption of 'tribal' print by top design labels such as Gucci and Burberry had helped or hurt the industry, and the steps home-grown talent could take to make in on the world stage.

STILL MORE TO COME!

The weekend proved to be stimulating enough, and yet there's still more to come!



Photo courtesy of Southbank Centre

VOCAL ENSEMBLE OF AFRICA

Monday 23rd July sees Pianist and vocalist **Juwon Ogungbe** presenting something new from Africa with six singers from five countries and a four-piece band, combining multiple languages, influences and rhythms to create music of astounding power. Passionate harmonies, rich melodies and vocal textures as deep as the ocean and big beat are fused together to create music that defines what African musical culture is today: no musical borders.

ANGELIQUE KIDJO



Photo courtesy of Southbank Centre

On Thursday 26 July **Angelique Kidjo**, the Beninese singer who needs no introduction will be performing in the Queen Elizabeth Hall following the release of 2012's live album Spirit Rising. Expect an evening of rock'n'roll, reggae, R'n'B, funk and more. And be warned: you will be up on your feet and dancing by the end of the night!

JOE DRISCOLL & SEKOU KOUYATE



Photo courtesy of Southbank Centre

pairing of kindred spirits.

Friday 27 July brings a mad genre-defying fusion of afrobeat, hip-hop, folk and reggae, this American-Guinean collaboration is a spiritual and musical

Sekou Kouyate, originally from Conakry, Guinea is known as the 'Jimi Hendrix of the kora', because of his unique style of playing with various effects, in a variety of genres, and with an extreme intensity. He has toured the world over with the band Ba Cissoko, comprised of his cousin and brothers.

Joe Driscoll, the man Cee-Lo Green labelled 'the gangsta with an iron lung' has been touring steadily for years, spreading his unique fusion of folk and hip-hop. A groundbreaking and totally genre-defying live act, he has been in high demand the world over – performing at Glastonbury Festival, Electric Picnic in Ireland, and Lake of Stars in Malawi, Africa.

'He doesn't speak any French, and I speak no English... but through music, we understand' (Sekou Kouyate)

BAABA MAAL & FRIENDS

And the finale of the Africa Utopia festival is a high-energy triple-bill featuring West Africa's biggest



Photo courtesy of Southbank Centre

stars. Led by Senegalese singer/human-rights campaigner Baaba Maal, the concert features the powerful voice, infectious guitar playing and skilful song-writing of **Baaba Maal**.

He's joined by Mali's ngoni virtuoso **Bassekou Kouyaté**, known for his remarkable improvisations on the West African lute. His band Ngoni Ba's 2007 release 'Segu Blue' was listed in The Guardian's *1000 Albums to Hear Before You Die* and won a string of awards that year.



million records) makes a rare London appearance. His music blends traditional African music with jazz, Afro-Cuban, Caribbean, Middle Eastern, and Maghreb to create an infectious, fresh Afro-pop sound.

A real celebration of Africa today through music, dance and storytelling with plenty of surprises and more special guests, this is an unmissable night – guaranteed to have you on your feet.

If you're in London, check out the festival and soak up the atmosphere of Africa Utopia.

For more information click <http://ticketing.southbankcentre.co.uk//find/festivals-series/africa-utopia>

For some New African Fashion inspiration click <http://sapelle.com/>

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