



**NHIMBE TRUST PRESS RELEASE | 4 FEBRUARY 2021 | Immediate release**

## **Bluez Café Renovation: Brick Bank Appeal**



97A Lobengula Street, Bulawayo

[+ Other Photos Attached]

Coming out strongly from the starting blocks of 2021, one of Nhimbe Trust's areas of focus in this year is to tackle the renovation of the Bluez Café - the bold vision to create a multidisciplinary arts centre in the heart of Bulawayo, the cultural capital in the south-west of Zimbabwe.

It started in 2017 with consultation with 60 performing artists and cultural practitioners of the city, which exposed a united need for a dedicated venue for music, dance, theatre, arts training and rehearsal spaces, accessible by all. The stated aim became to create the Bluez Café as a vibrant and multi-dimensional cultural space for artists and arts practitioners, a space to create, a space for free expression of cultural identity - a space of tolerance, inclusion, unity, respect, and dialogue through linkages with civil society organisations.

A month later, on Africa Day 2017, artists came together in the bare space at 98A Lobengula Street in a star-studded celebration filled with such hope for the future.

While Nhimbe plunged into the ground-breaking work of identifying specific needs, mobilising resources and establishing partnerships, the Bluez Café space opened up with existing minimal resources and capacity, and from May to December 2017 hosted 7 public events involving 110 artists, 7 meetings attended by 178 participants, 15 workshops and 3 auditions, involving 290 people, and 305 rehearsal/training slots taken up between 15 groups/projects. Events included an album launch by Busi Ncube, poetry platforms, and the hosting of 'Unified Women', a collaboration between young women artists from the UK, Bulawayo and Harare which produced a unique theatre piece in cultural exchange partnership with the Young Vic Theatre of London.

However all activities came to a halt when the leased premises, the old Scout Hall at 98A Lobengula Street, was reclaimed to resume the City's long-shelved plans to build a shopping mall on the site. Sadly, the

burgeoning Bluez Cafe vacated the building at the end of February 2018 as required, and all forward planning was put on hold.

Equipment, furniture and staff relocated to an adjacent building at 97A Lobengula St, a very old and dilapidated townhouse donated to Nhimbe Trust by Youth Contact Centre. Although promising, it would require major renovation, costs of which are way beyond Nhimbe's capacity, and unreachable without considerable financial support.

To date the existing space houses the Nhimbe offices, and has been availed to artists in a very limited way – for meetings, a video shoot by rapper 'Asaph' and rehearsal space for Victory Siyanqoba Theatre, with pop-up Bluez Café support for artists to festivals and artistic productions held in other venues. Nhimbe Trust is grateful to its main partner, Africalia, for the ongoing institutional support.

Holding determinedly to the vision of a dedicated centre for the city's producers of culture, Nhimbe's 2021 focus has started out with a BRICK BANK appeal, to start work on the physical, structural needs of the new premises.

Nhimbe Executive Director Josh Nyapimbi said:

*"As the local economy continues to decline and funding for cultural is also declining globally, with the needs for culture being reduced to a mere survival and humanitarian in nature, Nhimbe has a key role to play in the city. As the technical partner for the City of Bulawayo, it is important that the refurbishment of the Bluez Café is prioritized so that Nhimbe can meaningfully deliver on its mandate.*

*The opportunity that remains for Nhimbe for now is to mobilize individual giving, hence this appeal for the Bluez Café, for donations to a 'Brick Bank'. Whilst the needs are much greater and wider, we are also open to receiving other forms of donations that are critical for the refurbishment of the Bluez Café."*

**Other stakeholders** in Bulawayo's cultural industries expressed support for the refurbishment plan.

**SAIMON MAMBAZO PHIRI**, Bulawayo artist, producer and director, most recently of Bulawayo Arts Festival, Bulawayo Arts Awards and Ibumba Arts Festival among many others over the last two decades, said:

"I just want to take this opportunity to urge all of you to support the Nhimbe Trust Brickbank Appeal, which is aimed at renovating the BZ where a lot of arts find a synergy, where a lot of arts meet, and remember that Bulawayo is the only city in this country, Zimbabwe, which can have a multicultural festival without importing any talent; and if you support Bluez Cafe and the Nhimbe Trust Brickbank Appeal you are supporting the building of the future of Bulawayo arts. Thank you very much."

**JEYS MARABINI**, acclaimed musician and producer recorded a video message in iSindebele, translated to:

"Greetings, my people. Blues Cafe is a place situated in Bulawayo which accommodates all aspects of performing arts that brings joy to our souls. Blues Cafe needs to be renovated, now it has a plea that you and I join hands and help the Cafe get sound equipment and video equipment and also buy building material to ensure the success of the renovations. Your Guy, Jeys Marabini."

**DESIRE MOYO**, Director of Victory Siyanqoba Theatre - a community theatre group formed in 2008, specialising in social commentary and protest theatre in pursuit of human rights and freedoms in Zimbabwe - said:

“People of this wonderful world. *Umasingazenzeli, akula ozasenzela* (If we can’t do it ourselves, no one will!) This is Bulawayo’s very own great idea whose time has finally come. Nhimbe’s 2021 focus is on the brickbank project, a call for you and me to donate to the vision of a centre, a venue, a cultural space, as the city’s own space for cultural producers. Kindly donate to Nhimbe’s brickbank project. It is our baby. *Yindlovu yethu sonke* (It’s our elephant together!). Donate today.”

In 2020 Desire Moyo and Victory Siyanqoba were Bulawayo Arts Awards nominees.

**LADY TSHAWE**, actress, poet and producer, said:

“I’m an artist. I *enjoy* having a place that I can go to, to rehearse, to go and unlock my creative brain, and Bluez Cafe has afforded me that opportunity – to create and also just be in a space with other creatives, other like-minded people. So today I’m appealing to those people who have not only followed my career, but follow the careers of many artists in the City of Bulawayo - to donate something, whether its cash or kind, to the Bluez Cafe Brick Bank. We are really appealing to the public so that we can be able to create more work, more music, more plays, more poetry for you, in a space that has been renovated and has the artists in mind. So please do support this initiative and donate whatever you can to the Bluez Café Brick Bank. Thank you.”

**NKULULEKO NKALA**, artist, said:

“I’m a Creative here in the City of Kings and Queens, koBulawayo. I am here to make a quick appeal on behalf and for Bluez Café. They have a very interesting project coming up where they want to turn Bluez Café into an amazing arts venue, a venue where people can come have their coffee, mingle and milk their creative juices. It’s a Nhimbe Trust arts project; Nhimbe have been known to support arts initiatives since time immemorial. So all you need to do is just donate to the Brick Bank, it doesn’t matter how small or how big, the bottom line is if we all put our hands into it, one way or the other we will have a venue here in Bulawayo of repute, a venue with flexible hours, a venue that will complement whatever is already there in the City of Kings and Queens. Thank you.”

**NICHOLAS MOYO**, Director of the National Arts Council of Zimbabwe, said:

“As NACZ we are quite elated with the Nhimbe Trust project of Renovate Bluez Cafe. This fits very well into pillar No 5 which is cultural infrastructure, from the CCI strategy that was launched by the Minister of Youth, Sport, Arts & Recreation late in 2020. We recognise the work that Nhimbe Trust is doing as a private player fits very well in the bigger picture of resuscitating cultural spaces throughout the country, be they be owned by government, local government, town councils, municipalities or owned by private players. These are going to contribute a lot into the CCI Value Chain in terms of creating spaces for people to produce. We know that the more the cultural spaces the more they contribution to wider participation and appreciation of the arts, and also it can increase the consumption of the same, as audiences will have a place that they can associate with, a place where they can come and enjoy and consume the various forms of art.

Also spaces that have been renovated that have been standing well, they also build an image, they contribute to the image of the sector, they contribute to the building of the image of the artists that participate in those spaces. We congratulate and wish Nhimbe Trust, in the buy-a-brick project to renovate Bluez Café, a happy project. I thank you.”

**LES WATSON (UK)** – long-time partner of Youth Contact Centre and Nhimbe Trustee, said:

“I’ve been involved with the Youth Contact Centre in Bulawayo for many years now, and I’m delighted to say that the Bluez Cafe and Nhimbe Trust have taken over the premises that were formerly the Youth Contact



Centre. But the building is in a dilapidated state, and I just want to ask people to support the buy-a-brick campaign as much as they can, because this has been an important facility for you people in Bulawayo for many years now, 30-40 years, and if we can get this campaign underway then the Bluez Cafe will continue to support you for many years to come. So do what you can, one brick is better than none, ten bricks is better than one. Whatever you can, please support. Thank you very much.”

**Nhimbe invites and urges all stakeholders and supporters of this crucial development to donate to the Bluez Cafe Brick Bank.**

**The cost of a single brick is pinned at USD 0.35.**

**Donations can be made directly to Nhimbe Trust [admin@nhimbe.org](mailto:admin@nhimbe.org).**

*ENDS*

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*Nhimbe Trust*

[info@nhimbe.org](mailto:info@nhimbe.org)

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