

BREADBOX PRODUCTIONS PRESENTS

# LIEMBA

An epic voyage down Lake Tanganyika  
aboard Africa's oldest steamship



WRITTEN AND DIRECTED BY JOHN BILLINGSLEY & ANDREW SUBIN  
NARRATED BY CHIWONISO MARAIRE EDITORS DINA GUTTMAN, WILSON LARGE & CHRISTINA SCHWERIN  
ASSOCIATE PRODUCERS MARTIN STUMPF & LAURA SUBIN

ORIGINAL SOUNDTRACK RECORDED ON LOCATION FEATURING THE MUSIC OF:  
ROGER MZUNGU & THE DIAMOND STARS, SISI TAMBALA, MAPIGO SABA, THE UJJI NEEMA CHOIR, MARGARET DAVID & JUMA SHABAMI

[WWW.LIEMBA.ORG](http://WWW.LIEMBA.ORG) [WWW.FACEBOOK.COM/LIEMBADOC](http://WWW.FACEBOOK.COM/LIEMBADOC) [WWW.TWITTER.COM/LIEMBADOC](http://WWW.TWITTER.COM/LIEMBADOC)

# LIEMBA

A Documentary Film



[www.liemba.org](http://www.liemba.org)

*“If the Liemba could talk, she would tell a long story.”*

Joseph Mbwiliza, Tanzania

## Synopsis

Deep in what was once considered the darkest heart of Africa, on one of the world's largest and most pristine lakes, the MV Liemba doggedly perseveres, ferrying passengers and cargo up and down the remote eastern shore of Lake Tanganyika. For nearly a century, the ship has served as the primary means of travel, and a critical avenue of commerce, for soldiers, traders, missionaries and migrants on Lake Tanganyika - the geographical link between east, central and southern Africa. The MV Liemba has witnessed many sea-changes in Africa's troubled history from the era of European colonialism, through African independence in the 1960s and up to today's emerging global marketplace. This documentary uses the story of the Liemba to bring that history to life while also taking the audience on a present day journey on the oldest operational passenger ship in the world.

Originally christened the Graf von Goetzen, the ship was assembled in Papenburg, Germany in 1913, only to be taken apart piece by piece and shipped in wooden crates to Dar-es-Salaam on the Indian Ocean in what was then German East Africa. From Dar, the pieces of the 1300-ton steamship were transported 800 miles overland to Kigoma, on the shore of Lake Tanganyika, first by train and then on the backs of local porters. This journey took over three months and extolled enormous costs - including great loss of human lives. Once reassembled, the Graf von Goetzen was launched on Lake Tanganyika to serve as a German gunboat during World War One. The ship's wartime exploits inspired the book, and later film, *The African Queen*. When defeat was certain for the Germans in 1916, they scuttled the ship to avoid its capture by the British. After 8 years on the bottom of the lake, the vessel was brought to the surface by the British, renamed the MV Liemba and put into service as a passenger and cargo ferry.

Today, the MV Liemba plays a critical role in the communities of the Lake Tanganyika region. Lakeside villages remain totally cut off from the grid of global development and are without electricity, telephones or paved roads. Villagers use dug-out canoes to race and meet each passing of the antiquated ferry, attempting to sell their produce, chickens or dried fish or to buy goods imported from the markets of southern Africa. The floating open-air markets that erupt around the Liemba when she stops constitute many of the villager's only contact with the 'modern' world. The ship generates some of the few economic opportunities available in the area beyond subsistence farming and fishing. It also serves as the sole means by which many people can access life-sustaining supplies and

services such as medicine and hospitals. This film brings the relationship between the ship and these Tanzanian communities alive through the personal stories of an array of unique characters found on board.

The MV Liemba is many things: a physical relic of European colonialism; a vital lifeline for otherwise isolated communities; the principle means of transport for cargo and people traveling from Francophone Central Africa to Anglophone Southern Africa; a meeting place where Africans from a variety of socio-economic backgrounds come together -- a floating microcosm of Africa. Narrated by Chiwoniso Maraire and featuring an entirely original, locally recorded soundtrack, this documentary brings Liemba's colorful history to life and celebrates her role in this region of Africa. Compelling passenger narratives, breathtaking footage and upbeat music combine to take the audience on an unforgettable trip down Lake Tanganyika.



**Loading ammunition into guns on the deck of the ship during WWI**

*“The Liemba is just a fantastic experience and it’s something that everyone should really know about...its history and what it does for the people.” – Chris Job, South African Attorney*

## Director's Statement

A trip down Lake Tanganyika aboard the MV Liemba is an unforgettable experience. The massive turquoise lake, dotted only with the small white sails of dhows takes your breath away. The nearly century-old Liemba lists slightly starboard as she travels down the lake, reeking from sacks of sardine-like fish piled high on the decks. Every available space on deck is sprawled with travelers, luggage, chickens, everything- imaginable and unimaginable. Each stop along the way is a spectacle as merchants loudly hawk produce, fish, meats and anything else they think someone might buy.

There is a distinct rhythm to riding the Liemba. The chaotic floating markets that erupt night and day each time the ship coasts to a stop at a village are mellowed by the idle time traveling between them. People from all walks of life come together and share a meal or a story or a laugh. They are anxiously awaiting arrival at a decent hospital, or returning for family in war stricken areas or hoping for luck in the markets of southern Africa. It doesn't take long to realize the vital role this ship plays in the lives of the people along the shores of Lake Tanganyika.

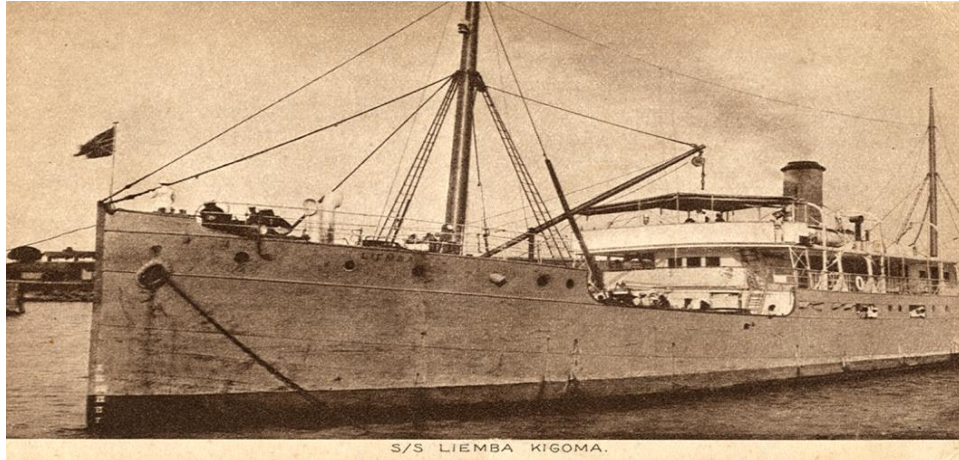
Using the ship as a lens, our documentary explores the history of this region over the past century. The ship becomes a platform, literally and figuratively, from which to discuss the legacy of colonialism as it informs this region of Africa. The film interweaves the fantastic history of the ship with the present day wonder of what her ongoing weekly trips offer communities otherwise still totally disconnected from modernization. Interspersed without are the touching personal stories of the passengers and crew we meet as we travel aboard the Liemba.

The story of the Liemba and the people she services is animated to its fullest by the film's astounding soundtrack. All of the music was recorded on location during production in Tanzania. We brought a "studio in a laptop" and a suitcase full of microphones along with the rest of our gear and were able to record hours of mind blowing original, indigenous music.

The lively soundtrack helps to set an upbeat tone for the documentary that celebrates the ship and the people who travel upon her. We strived to make a documentary that celebrates this region of Africa too often framed in the context of disease, poverty and war in western media. We tried to transport the audience to central, east Africa for 50 minutes to experience the journey.

During our own trips up and down the lake, we became close to the crew and many of the regular travelers. We are very grateful to the entire crew of the Liemba and all the kind folks we met who helped us along the way. We are very thankful to all of our supporters and proud to be able to bring you Liemba. We hope you enjoy the ride.

- John Billingsley & Andrew Subin



1950's Postcard of the Liemba

## **Directors' Biographies**

### **Andrew Subin, Director/Producer**

Andrew Subin has been creating documentary films since 2001. Some of his previous films include "Tai Chi Morning", a documentary short that examines how Chinese immigrants use the daily practice of Tai Chi as a way to maintain a sense of cultural identity, and "Who Needs 'Em?", a humorous look at the question of why people decide to have children. Andrew has traveled extensively throughout Africa. He first rode the Liemba in 1991 while working on a study of invertebrate evolution in Lake Tanganyika. After that first voyage, the idea to make a documentary about the ship was born. In addition to producing Liemba, Andrew is currently in pre-production on two new projects: "Second Base Buddha" a feature length documentary about a little league baseball team's quest for the elusive state championship; and "The Sentence" a mockumentary series about a fledgling public defender. Andrew lives and works in Bellingham, Washington.

### **John Billingsley, Director/Producer**

John has two decades experience in a media production as a recording engineer, composer and producer. He has engineering and production credits on a wide range of musical projects, from Philip Glass to Phish, and television credits on programs aired nationally in the US on networks including MTV, VH1 and PBS. John has composed the score for several independent productions; most recently the feature documentary Fold, Crumble Crush: The Art of El Anatsui, which premiered at the Toronto Reel Artists Film Festival in 2010. John has traveled extensively throughout Africa and Asia, seeking out and recording indigenous music all along the way. John first rode the Liemba in 2001. John founded Breadbox Productions with Andrew in 2003 and currently resides in Vermont.

## **Production Details**

Date of Completion: 2010

Total Running Time: 58 minutes

Production Location: Tanzania

Language: English

Also Swahili, French, Amharic with English subtitles

Production Format: MiniDV

Exhibition Format: DigiBeta

### **Festival Screenings:**

2010 Hot Springs Documentary Festival (World Premiere)

2010 Vermont International Film Festival

2010 NW Projections Film Festival

2011 Green Mountain Film Festival (Opening Night)

2011 Park City Film Music Festival

2011 Colombia Gorge International Film Festival

2011 Africa World Documentary Film Festival

2011 Zanzibar International Film Festival

2011 DocMiami International Film Festival

### **Awards:**

2010 James Goldstone Award (VT International Film Festival)

2011 Gold Medal for Excellence in Music for a Documentary Film (Park City Film Music Festival)

## **Contact Information**

John Billingsley

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Facebook: Liemba

Twitter: LiembaDoc

Blog: <http://liembadocumentary.blogspot.com/>

## Full Credits

### Interviewees:

Whycliffe Songwa  
Jackson Kuhiyo  
Kapepwa Tambila  
Edwin Kasupa  
Dr. Paul Msemwa  
Joseph Mbwiliza  
Roger Mzungu  
Papy Bayande

### Liemba crew:

Joseph Nyasuka (engineer)  
Alexander Yambo (engineer)  
Joseph Mukambo (chef)  
Gadi Saria (waiter)  
Charles Luvunzu (waiter)  
Alex Katama (chief mate)  
Andrew Vitu Samlali (quartermaster)  
Beatus Mgahmba (captain)

### Passengers:

Joseph Kaide  
Freddy Muyulolo  
Stephe J. Mwanauta  
Umandi Rajabo  
Muhammed Rashi Sultana  
John Simfultese  
Manfred Mnguli  
Chris Job  
Chris Kapenda  
Thor Thorsson  
Joseph Chisambo  
Mushiya Mama Poto  
Joseph Dibue  
Medard  
Ali Mzee Gunguti  
Joseph Manyolo  
Byavolwa Kabumba  
Alexandra Halkose  
Maria Augustino  
Amitya Mahonde  
Eden Chifunda  
Peter Sihazwe  
Tesfaye Melaka Sossaye  
Nsuwimana Sylvain

**Music recorded in Tanzania by John Billingsley & Martin Stumpf**

**Produced & Mixed by John Billingsley**

**Musicians Featured:**

Roger Muzungu & The Diamond Stars

Sissi Tambila

Mapigo Saba

The Ujiji Neema Chior

Margaret David

Juma Shabami

Kalya Primary School

**Historic Photographs provided by:**

National Museum of Tanzania

British National Archives

Kevin Peters

Meyers Shipbuilding Co

**Academic Advisors:** John Crock; Robert Gordon

**Newsreel provided by:** Pathe

**Translation:** Ben Clarke; Chemi Kadete

**Photos Retouched by:** Ali Mcleod

**Digital Photo moves by:** Jesse Denes

**Website design:** Charley Wheelock, Kapow Designs

**Interpreter:** Aziz

**Driver:** Amisi



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