

Denise L.L. Onen (b.1995) is a South African-born Ugandan/Zambian sonic artist and cultural practitioner known for her work's eclecticism, intensity, and immersive quality. She approaches sound-making as a form of audio alchemy—a transformative process that distils layered life experiences into uncanny and graceful expressions.

Education

2023 - Present | **MMus in Musicology** (by Dissertation) - University of Cape Town, UCT, ZA
“*Graphically scoring and analysing Film Sound Design as a form of Electroacoustic Composition*”

10.2024 - 02.2025 | **Media Art** - Staatliche Hochschule für Gestaltung Karlsruhe, HfG, DE
Intercultural Music and Media Practice Exchange

2014 - 2018 | **BMus in Music Technology** - SACM, University of Cape Town, UCT, ZA

Awards

03.2025 | PACT Zollverein Residency, with Gugulethu Duma and Camille Lacadee | Essen, DE

2024 | *Nominee* - Best Music for Digital Film | Fak’ugesi, Tshimolongo, Wits., ZA

2024 | Myra Chapman Department Scholarship | UCT, ZA

2023 | Oct, Nov. Fellow, DAAD Arts and Media Program | DAAD, DE

2022 | *International Nominee* for *Oram Award* | PRS Foundation, Radiophonic Ins.,UK

Selected Artist Features + Collaborations

2025 | [Whistles Re-Imagined](#) (Electroacoustic Composition) featured at [MANTRA](#) exhibition, MUSLAB, EC

2024/25 | Sound Designer, [Becoming Cyborg Made Me Human](#) (short film) dir. [Louise Westerhout](#)
Premiere: DisDance Cyprus 2024, CY
Berlin Video Hours at GlogauAIR Gallery, DE
Gedok Karlsruhe, DE

2025/22 | [Unclear/ Rooming with Shadows](#) (un/performance art) with [Louise Westerhout](#), Theatre Arts, ZA

2023/24 | [sounding the body as a site](#) (installation), Interaction designer: [Lucy Strauss](#)
Oscillations Exhibition, 27.04 - 19.05, Akademie der Künste, Berlin, DE
Broadcast: [Sound Art from Southern Africa](#) Deutschlandfunk Kultur DLFK
Workshop: Sonic Inquiries and Practice, Centre of Humanities Research, UWC, Cape Town, ZA

2023 | [Sound Designer](#), *The Theatre of Beauty: Imvuselelo* by [Koleka Putuma](#) (Installation),
Premiere: National Arts Festival Makhanda, ZA
‘The Dancing Mushroom’ dir. Haneem Christian - MIND Foundation’s INSIGHT conference, Berlin, DE

2023 | Sound Designer, [The Revolution will not be Televised: It will be live-streamed](#) by Koleka Putuma
Premiere: National Arts Festival Makhanda, ZA
features: World Expression Forum WEXFO, Lillehammer, NO
International Literature Festival BuchBasel, CH

2021 | [Surviving Solitude](#) (Immersive Audio Piece)
Featured Artist, Surviving Solitude – ICA UnInfecting the City Public Arts Festival, ZA
Featured Artist, So Creative Summit (Digital Storytelling Exhibition) – British Council

2021 | [Remnant Wading Space](#), for installation by [Blk Banaana](#)
Featured Sound Artist, Our Bodies are Clocks Made of Water, LAPA Residence, Jhb, ZA

2021 | Backing Vocals and Keyboard/Electronics, for [Pushing Portals](#)
In collaboration with [Dumama](#), [Jannous Aukema](#), and [Kamil Hassan](#).
The Mutha_Ship Landing, ZA and Found Sound Nation

Sound Design

- 2025 | [Let Them Be Seen](#) (Feature Film) dir. [Nolitha Mkulisi](#), DE/ZA
World Premiere: International Film Festival Rotterdam 2026, NL
- 2025 | [ABNORMAL_01 glitch](#) (Short Film) dir. Natascha Nassir-Shahinian, DE
Exhibition Premiere: Gesellschaft für Aktuelle Kunst, DE
International Film Premiere: Ishango Encounters, Goma, CD
- 2025 | [The Fugue of Tjebolang](#) (Epic Play) dir. [Rehane Abrahams](#), ZA
- 2024 | [Eyes to See](#) (Documentary) dir. Haneem Christian, ZA
Premiere: BFI Film Flare; African Rising Int. Film Festival
- 2023 | [Lemkus for Nike Footscape](#) (Advertisement) dir. [Haneem Christian](#) ZA
- 2023 | [Still Connecting](#) (Multimedia Film) - Edinburgh Fringe Film Festival dir. [Faye Kabali-Kagwa](#), ZA
- 2023 | [Nèpp Nèppel](#) (Multimedia) dir. [Elijah Ndoumbe](#) US
- 2022 | [All my Ex-Lovers are Dead](#) (Stage Play, [sound design as soundtrack](#)) dir. Dara Beth ZA
- 2022 | [I AM](#) – Sportscene RSA (Advertisement) dir. Haneem Christian ZA
- 2021 | [Deliver Me](#) – (Documentary) Paper Crane Collective dir. [Jannous Aukema](#) ZA
Awards: Best Southern African Short Documentary - African Human Rights Festival
Features: CIFF, Encounters Documentary Festival
- 2021 | [Prayers for Sweet Water](#) – British Film Institute, CT (Documentary) ZA/UK
Awards: Sundance Jury Prize Nominee, DIFF Best Short Documentary,
New Fest: Emerging Black LGBTQ+ Filmmaker

Composition

- 2025/26 | Original Score, Future Tense (Feature Film) dir. [Jenna Bass](#), prod. [Bench Films](#), ZA
- 2025 | Thula Nunu Zola ulale (Choral Work SATB) - Commissioned by Dr. John Woodland, Vox Cape Town ZA
- 2024 | [Spore Berlin](#) (Documentary) Studio Johannes Förster, AFF architects, the Schöpflin Foundation DE
- 2024 | Democracy (String Quartet + Tape) - Commissioned by the [Signum Quartet](#)
with the support of the Ernst von Siemens Music Foundation, DE
Premiere: Pierre Boulez Saal, Berlin
2026 - [String Quartet Bienalle Amsterdam](#), NL
- 2023 | [Original Score, About Happy Hippos and Sad Peacocks](#) (Essay Documentary) DE
dir. [Johannes Förster](#) & [Elkin Calderón Guevara](#)
World Premiere - Visions du Réel, Nyon, Switzerland, CH
Seoul Animal Film Festival, South Korea: **Special Mention**, OKO International Ethnographic Film
Festival, Kyiv, Ukraine - **Award: Festival Team Special Prize for Cinematic Innovation & Craft**
Festival Villa del Cine, Villa de Leyva, Colombia - **Award: Premio Fossil Best Short Documentary**
- 2023 | [Usque ad Sidera Tellus](#) (Choral Work SATB) - Commissioned by Dr. John Woodland, Vox Cape Town ZA
- 2023 | Delela (Stage Play) - dir. Tiisetso Mashifane wa Noni ZA
- 2022 | [Siyamphimbili](#) – (Choral Work), Commissioned by Dr. P Shangkuan, Calvin University US
- 2022 | [Composer, I AM](#) – Sportscene RSA (Advertisement) dir. Haneem Christian ZA
- 2021 | [Original Score, Prayers for Sweet Water](#) (Documentary) – British Film Institute ZA/UK

Mixing and Mastering ZA

- 2025 | Mix & Mastering, [Let Them Be Seen](#) (Feature Film) dir. [Nolitha Mkulisi](#), DE/ZA
- 2025 | Mix & Mastering, [Nicholas Sithole & Robb Report Africa](#) (Short) dir. Haneem Christian
- 2025 | Mix & Mastering, [Mostro Puma](#) (Advertisement) dir. 400 seats
- 2024 | Mix & Mastering, Eyes to See (Documentary) dir. Haneem Christian
- 2023 | Mix & Mastering, [Salon Kewpie - The Legacy Project](#) (Short Documentary) – dir. Haneem Christian, GALA
Archive, District Six Museum
- 2022 | Mix Engineer, I AM – Sportscene RSA (Advertisement)
- 2022 | Mix Engineer, [The SenseMaker Project](#) (Documentary) ACIDI, Western Cape Water Caucus, UCT
- 2022 | Mix Engineer, [City Occupied](#) (Documentary: Housing Crisis) - Lionfish Productions
- 2022 | Mix Engineer, [Decentralising Music Making in South Africa](#) (Documentary) - Stiff Pap/Umuzi 2022

2021 | Mix & Mastering, Deliver Me – Paper Crane Collective (Documentary), 2021
2021 | Mix & Mastering, Prayers for Sweet Water – British Film Institute CT (Documentary), 2021

Work Experience

2024 | **Sound Mentor**, Free Film School, Cape Town, ZA
2023 | **Sound Mentor & Engineer**, *Brave Futures* Film Initiative OTV, Cape Town, ZA
2021-2022 | **Sound Engineer, Audio Restoration**, *The EAR Academy*, Cape Town + Online

Talks, Workshops & Symposiums

2025 | **Seminar Facilitator**, ‘*Sounds of our Lives*’, Free Film School, Cape Town, ZA
2025 | **Panellist**, *Bowed Electrons* – Electroacoustic Music Festival & Symposium, ZA
2024 | **Attendee**, *Doc’s Kingdom: Ways of Listening*, International Seminar on Documentary Film, Odemira, PT
2024 | **Seminar host**, ‘on Sonic Practices and Possibilities’, via Kirsten Reese’s open seminars, Universität der Künste Berlin (UdK) Sound, Berlin, DE
2024 | **Workshop Facilitator**, ‘on Composing with Found Sounds’, Nuts and Bolts Workshop x Black Communion, [Workshops on Music Technology series](#), Berlin, DE
2024 | **Seminar/ Talk Facilitator**, ‘*Introduction to Sound Design*’, Free Film School, Bertha House, ZA
2023 | **Presenter**, [Oscillations Workshop: Sonic Inquiries & Practices](#), Centre of Humanities Research, University of the Western Cape (UWC), Cape Town, ZA
2023 | **Presenter**, ‘*Documentary Sound & Sound Design*’, Free Film School, Bertha House, ZA
2023 | **Attendee**, SASRIM - South African Society for Research in Music Centre of Humanities Research, CHR, UWC, Cape Town, ZA
2023/22 | **Contributing Artist & Presenter**, *Bowed Electrons* – Electroacoustic Music Festival & Symposium, South African College of Music – University of Cape Town, Cape Town, ZA

- 2023 | Presentation: “*Sounding Art: Composing with Found Sounds*”
- 2022 | Presentation: “*Sonic Semiotics: Designing Sounds with Meaning*”

2022 | **Online Panellist**, *Panel 1: “Bodies in Virtual Spaces”* – Network of Embodied Research in Africa Rhodes University Drama Department, Makhanda, ZA
2019 | **Mentor & Participant**, *Dreaming Girls Music Conference*, Rossetonville, Johannesburg, ZA

Publications

2022 | Onen, L.L., Denise, “*Siyaphambili – We Are Moving Forward*”, *Hinshaw Music*
Available at: <https://www.halleonard.com/product/1140075/siyaphambili-we-are-moving-forward>
2019 | Onen, Denise, “*Successfully Failing at Life*” in *Anthology: Den Store Slam!, Boka – littMELK*,
Available at: <https://www.goodreads.com/book/show/43402632-den-store-slam-boka>