



Smithsonian Folkways

SINGING FOR LIFE

Songs of Hope, Healing, and HIV/AIDS in Uganda



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1. **Olumbe lubiibi [Death is bad]** *Vilimina Nakiranda and the Bakuseka Majja Group, Kibaale Village (Text and music composed by Vilimina Nakiranda)* 6:46
2. **Guno gwe mulembe gwe tulimu kat [This period of time that we are in]** *NACWOLA Iganga* 1:32
3. **Abange ab'eno? [Is someone there?]** *Meeting Point Kampala* 4:22
4. **Emagombe newaife [The graveyard is our home]** *Mzee Mata Nasani, akadongo (Text and music composed by Mzee Mata Nasani)* 3:59
5. **Silimu yaheeza abantu [AIDS has finished our people]** *Kanihiro Group* 3:29
6. **Bannange twajjirwa [We have been invaded]** *Bright Women Actresses* 6:53
7. **Gampisi [The hyena]** *Negro Angels Bamalayika* 2:56
8. **Silimu okutumala! [AIDS finished us!]** *Bukona Women's Group* 4:03
9. **Fight the epidemic and Abange mikwano gyange muvawa? [Friends, where do you come from?]** *TASGA Drama Group [Tokamalirawo AIDS Support Group Awareness]* 5:21
10. **Olumbe lwamala abantu [Death killed all the people]** *Kibaale Village Embaire Ensemble* 7:49
11. **Abalugana [Those who have not settled]** *Centurio Balikoowa, (Composed by Centurio Balikoowa)* 4:51
12. **Zino endwadde ezitakyaluma kusa-sira [Such painful, merciless diseases]** *MUDINET Drama Group (Composed by Vincent Wandera)* 4:27
13. **Eitu lilimuki? [What is in the luggage?]** *Walya Sulaiman and PADA [People with AIDS Development Association] (Composed by Walya Sulaiman)* 8:21
14. **The struggle against AIDS** *Jumbo Theatre Group* 1:42

Along one of the many pathways I have taken in Uganda I met a visual artist named Francis Wasswa. Wasswa and I noted the potential for expressive culture—art in particular—to respond to HIV/AIDS at the grassroots level in Uganda. But Wasswa felt the visual arts had not yet assumed as significant a role in the struggles of community-based cooperative initiatives against HIV/AIDS as had music, dance, and drama. Several months later Wasswa presented me with several batik paintings. In his words, the largest one tells a story, a narrative of devastation and disease leading to hope and healing through behavioral change in one particular rural Ugandan village. This painting—a pullout feature in this album—stands as a testament to Wasswa’s dedicated work as a visual artist. As I now follow the winding path through the painting’s village scene, I see the everyday interaction between traditional healers and Christian clergy, nurses and medical workers, local business traders and ethnomusicologists—all working together. The journey begins in despair, as villagers moan and wail after consultations with herbalists and traditional healers. Hands are outstretched, and the backs of most are bent over. Further along the path, villagers visit the homes of those dying in the community while others process to the village’s cemeteries for burials. In a clearing, drummers and musicians dance as they accompany a drama about the preparation and consumption of local brew. Off to the side, an HIV/AIDS seminar presented by medical professionals is attended only by women. I see myself—the foreign ethnomusicologist—transformed into a medical doctor in a white lab coat as men undergo voluntary counseling and testing. A white SUV with TASO (The AIDS Support Organization) written on the side speeds along the village paths as we arrive back in the area where we started. It is clear by the end of the metaphoric journey that everyday life in the village has responded well to the series of medical interventions along the way. Frances Wasswa’s painting, AIDS in a Ugandan Village, is a personal story shared by many of faith, hope, and healing through the arts in a country as resourceful as it is compassionate.

—Gregory Barz

INTRODUCTION

As I Now Follow the Winding Paths...

Vilimina Nakiranda’s women’s group gathers in a village clearing to perform for farmers returning from a day in the fields. The women, many with babies strapped to their backs, are dressed in colorful floor-length *gomesi* with extended shoulder flaps—the everyday traditional dress of Ugandan women—and flip-flops. A group of men bring *baakisimba*, *nankasa*, and *engalabi* drums over to the women. Most villagers continue to walk by until the drumming cracks an opening rhythm and the women start to dance as they sing their songs. Music, dance, and drama groups frequently sing about HIV/AIDS in Uganda today; the groups have had an enormous impact in rural and urban communities, and nowhere more important than at the grassroots. Governmental organizations in East Africa are often not able to reach out to the areas where music groups working with little or no funding have been most successful. When doctors ask women *living positively* with HIV why they persist in their efforts to contribute to local medical interventions, why they continue to dance when they have such little energy, the answers remain profound—Ugandan women do not want other women and youths to experience what has in many cases been *forced* on them. Nowadays both men and women will use whatever power they can access to initiate social and political interventions, no matter how small the reward. As a member of the Jumbo Theatre Group in Kampala suggests, music can “save”:

Music to me is food for the soul. From our African perspective, we realize that messages are portrayed better through music. When you approach something

like HIV/AIDS that has such stigma and just walk up and say, "People have come to talk about AIDS," people are shy, and they will not come. But if you say, "I'm going to present a play," then you hear a song that has messages about HIV/AIDS and you're entertained, then by the end of the visit you'll think, "What did they mean?" From there someone will get the message so much faster than just coming up to a blackboard saying, "AIDS is like this!" That's why we sensitize through music, dance, and drama. People get the message very fast. I think another thing is, when we come together and sing, we get some new feelings. For example, some of us have problems. But when we are together singing, we forget our problems. So it saves us, too.

Apofia Naikoba, director of the Iganga branch of NACWOLA (National Community of Women Living with AIDS), observed, "These women have nothing left. Nothing. The words we use in our songs directly address the issue of HIV/AIDS, and people listen to us sing! People now realize the importance of condoms. Some now practice abstinence. Some seek our services for blood testing and counseling before marriage. The music we sing is not just an exercise—it excites people! They come in large numbers to join in the dancing, and if they pick some message from our songs, well, then we are successful."

The Ugandan men, women, and young people featured on this album—Apofia, Vilimina, Vincent, Walya, Mata, Centurio, and others—*dramatize* the need for better-informed communities, *dance* for continued health education of youths, *drum* to attract the attention and participation of their communities, and *sing* the songs that turn people's heads. In their carefully constructed and medically informed musical performances, Ugandans today are not only *singing for life*, they are also *saving lives!*

UGANDA

A Country As Resourceful As It Is Compassionate...

Uganda, a land locked country in East Africa bordered by Kenya, Tanzania, Rwanda, the Democratic Republic of Congo, and Sudan, is home to numerous rural and urban communities that maintain rich histories and reflect a variety of economic conditions, geographic terrain, and linguistic and musical soundscapes. The eighteen ethnic groups of Bantu, Nilotic, and Central Sudanic origins that today live in this small country represent diverse cultures that are both rooted in history and represent significant change and adaptation to modern times. The regime of infamous dictator Idi Amin (1971–79) followed by the abuses of Milton Obote in the 1980s contributed greatly to the instability of their newly independent nation. Today, although Uganda negotiates ongoing clashes with the Lord's Resistance Army in the north and rebel conflicts in the west, it remains a generally peaceful and politically stable country. From the soil-rich coffee and tea plantations and rice fields in the east to the Rwenzori mountain range in the west and the lush valleys in the central areas of the country, Uganda astounds with its range of geographic beauty.

The cultural landscape of Kampala reflects the country's diversity. Built on seven hills, the capital city is home to a seemingly endless fleet of white "taxis" (passenger buses), and speeding *boda boda* motor scooters that race across the city's paved and gravel roadways at all hours of the day and night. Large white SUVs with the names of foreign health-care-related NGOs painted on their sides contribute to the congested downtown

traffic. Street vendors hawk everything from penny candy to bootleg computer software. Votive candles are sold on sidewalks next to newspapers from throughout East Africa. The amplified sounds of local independent churches comfortably coexist with the call to prayer of the city's numerous mosques. The social clubs and airwaves play as much American and European popular music as local traditional and popular music. Yet many village-based cultural traditions (including music) continue to be practiced in urban contexts—taught in schools and played among families—reflecting participation in urban modernity and the persistence of rural identities.

In Uganda's villages and smaller towns, everyday life continues to present challenges. Families farm the land, growing bananas, cassava, coffee, and other cash crops to make a living. Ten-foot-tall anthills line the paths of many villages, and black bicycles imported from China add to the local soundscapes with their ringing bells. Electricity often does not make it down the network of dirt pathways that connect most rural communities, places where potable drinking water and access to necessary health care are often non-existent. In villages such as Kibaale in the eastern Busoga region, evenings are filled with local music-making and consumption of locally brewed millet beer, and many song texts tell of the hardships of everyday life.

MUSIC IN UGANDA

In a Clearing Drummers and Musicians Dance...

The roots of many contemporary musical traditions can be found in Ugandan traditional culture “deep in the village,” as musician Centurio Balikoowa often says. Several of the recordings featured on this album, such as those by the Kibaale Village Embaire Ensemble, were made in remote areas of the country far from urban centers. Traditional music-making continues to serve important ritual and everyday purposes in Uganda. For example, musical performances are organized for funeral rites, to communicate information through drumming patterns, to accompany labor, to console, and for educational purposes, as demonstrated on this CD. There is also a rich diversity of musical instruments in Uganda, ranging from *ndere* flutes and panpipes to string *endingidi* tube fiddles, *adungu* harps, and *ntongoli* lyres. Many local musical traditions draw on melodies that are pentatonic, a scale comprised of five notes. Increasingly common, however, is a tendency toward the Western diatonic tuning system. In addition, drums of all shapes and sizes, grouped together or played individually, accompany plucked lamellophones (“thumb pianos”) and xylophones. Village ensembles often combine instruments to form unique groups, such as the *embaire* xylophone ensemble featured in Track 10. Instruments complement singing and dancing as well as clapping and ululation—a high-pitched vocal cry manipulated by rapid movement of the tongue which punctuates musical performances throughout East Africa, as demonstrated in Track 8. Soloists Mzee Mata, Centurio Balikoowa, and Vilimina Nakiranda each offer the best of Ugandan musical

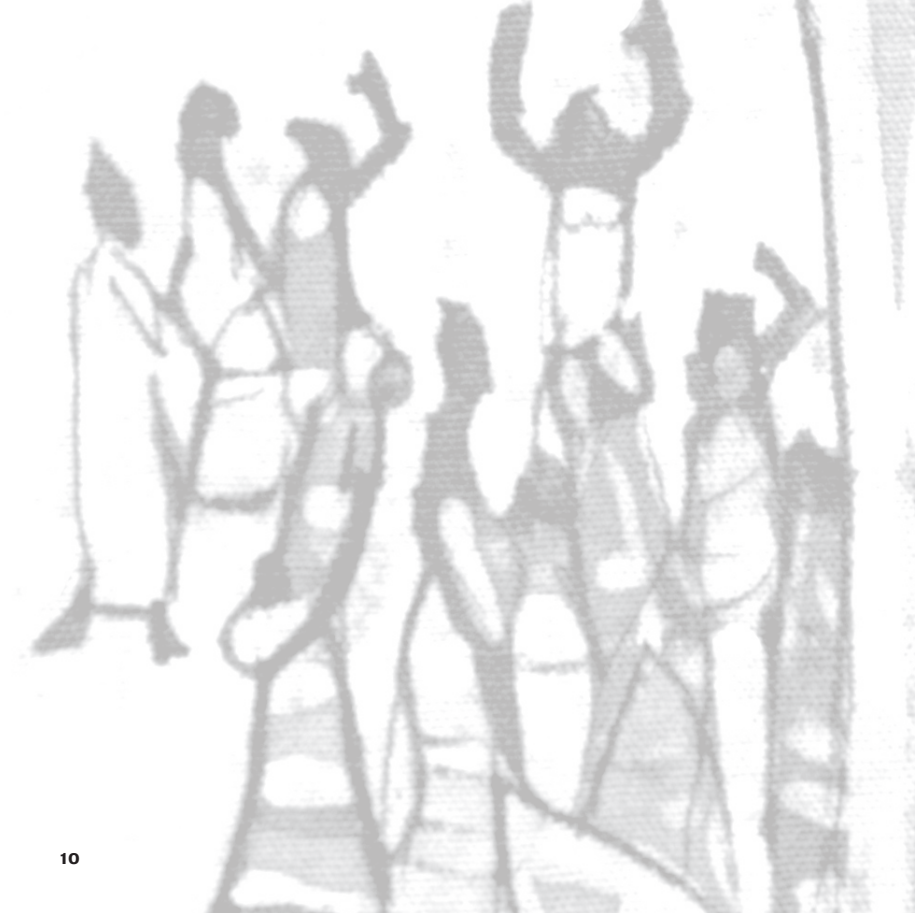
performance traditions. Mzee Mata, a blind singer and *akadongo*-playing storyteller, has kept his community's history alive in the texts of his songs for most of his 70 years. Balikoowa, one of the last to be trained by the Baganda royal court musician Evaristo Muyinda, is known nationwide for his efforts to educate primary school children in elements of traditional Ugandan music. Vilimina Nakiranda opens the CD with her strong singing and *akadongo* playing. Known throughout the eastern Busoga region, Nakiranda fuses traditional music-making with performances that highlight contemporary social issues. Choral traditions featuring local call-and-response singing styles as well as styles dependent on Western harmonies are included. The recording of the famous "Gampisi" song by Negro Angels Bamalayika and the song by the Kanihiro Group, "AIDS has finished our people," are two examples of music used to punctuate local dramatic performances. In each case the songs reinforce the main themes of the plays. Instrumental, choral, vocal solo, and dramatic musical performances continue to thrive and develop in Uganda today. While popular songs and the latest dance music dominate radio airtime and the play lists of social clubs, local forms of music with socially relevant texts still meet the needs of communities throughout Uganda.

LOCAL LANGUAGES AND LOCAL MUSIC TRADITIONS

A Narrative of Devastation and Disease Leading to Hope and Healing...

The songs featured on this album represent a cross-section of local Ugandan languages: Runyankore, spoken among the Ankole people in the west; Lusoga, spoken by the Basoga people to the east; and English. Half of the songs, however, are sung in Luganda, a Bantu language spoken by the Baganda people in Uganda's central Buganda kingdom that also functions as a second language for many in the country. Most songs reflect a history of sung poetic texts, and it is the lyrical nature of the songs on which most audiences focus their attention.

The recordings represent a national musical response by local individuals and groups to combat HIV/AIDS. Efforts by the government and private multinational and multilateral Non-Governmental Organizations have failed to successfully meet the needs of the population in this global health crisis. Local languages often position AIDS within local cultures, specifically by referring to AIDS with labels from specific geographic regions. The best example of this socio-linguistic phenomenon occurs on Track 11, "Abalugana," in which Centurio Balikoowa presents a litany of names associated with AIDS. A complete transcription of the Luganda song text is provided in order to demonstrate the ability of local languages to reference deep meaning surrounding the disease. The songs on *Singing for Life* offer evidence of the contributions of musicians to the ongoing decline in Uganda's HIV infection rate at local, regional, and national levels.



TRACK NOTES

1. **Olumbe lubiibi** [Death is bad]

Vilimina Nakiranda, *akadongo*, and the Bakuseka Majja Group, Kibaale Village

(Led by Vilimina Nakiranda. Recorded in Kibaale Village, Busiki County; text in Lusoga.)

The sounds of cicadas open this track, which was recorded outdoors in Kibaale Village in the eastern Busoga region of Uganda. “Clap and drum, and then I will narrate,” sings Vilimina Nakiranda, leader of her local Bakuseka Majja women’s club. The women of this group work together using music, dance, and drama to address social issues in their community. In this performance a litany of everyday health issues such as cholera, ulcers, and AIDS are situated within local contexts. The accompanying women interject responses such as “death is bad.” As Vilimina Nakiranda sings and accompanies herself on an *akadongo* (thumb piano), she suggests that death is prevalent in Kibaale and does not discriminate—“death takes the educated and the ignorant, death takes the wealthy and the poor.” AIDS has “finished” the local villages, and Vilimina suggests that everyone should live life to the fullest since there is no predicting when the disease will enter one’s own home.

*AIDS has finished our friends, taking the boastful villagers who contracted HIV
They have searched for medicine without success
Others have run to TASO, but they too have been met with defeat
Others have used condoms, but they too have failed
Every intervention has failed*

While a direct translation of the song text might lead us to believe that the village has

lost all hope, Vilimina enumerates the ways in which local villagers have unsuccessfully addressed the AIDS epidemic in order to motivate her community to act even more aggressively. No medicine is available to her community, and as local residents turn to agencies such as TASO (The AIDS Support Organization) in the larger and more distant cities and towns, they have been met “with defeat.” Condoms, Vilimina sings, have also failed. In fact, Vilimina suggests that every medical intervention in the area has failed. “The white men in Kampala have failed. The white men in America have failed.”

2. Guno gwe mulembe gwe tulimu kat [This period of time that we are in]

NACWOLA Iganga

(Led by Apofia Naikoba. Recorded in Iganga at the Iganga Regional Hospital; text in Lusoga.)

The women of the Iganga town branch of NACWOLA (National Community of Women Living with HIV/AIDS) who meet regularly at the Iganga District hospital perform a song warning that AIDS does not discriminate. After a regular health education meeting, the group breaks to rehearse a song they will perform for various women’s groups whom they will visit the following week. According to the lyrics of “This period of time that we are in,” AIDS enters the homes of both rich and poor, adults and youth. The various symptoms are listed throughout the performance, including fever, headache, bouts of vomiting, shivering, and coughing. The song’s leader, Apofia Naikoba, confesses, “This disease is difficult to describe.” The song is directed primarily at young girls whom the women of the group advise not to spend time with older men and always to be mindful of the presence of AIDS in the region.

3. Abange ab’eno? [Is someone there?]

Meeting Point Kampala

(Led by Noelina Namukisa. Recorded at Meeting Point in Namuwongo, Kampala; text in Luganda.)

Meeting Point is a medium-sized NGO in the Namuwongo slum area of Kampala run by Noelina Namukisa. “Is someone there?” was recorded in the organization’s front room as more and more Meeting Point clients joined the performance. Noelina Namukisa sat next to me during this song and pointed to an elderly woman who could barely walk when she entered the room, but who had found the energy to dance by the time the song had concluded. “She is dancing her disease,” Noelina Namukisa stated as she slapped my hand in laughter. Meeting Point’s Learning Center, located in the so-called Soweto slums, provides shelter, educational and vocational training, and opportunities to live and grow in a nurturing community. Music, dance, and drama are central to the outreach efforts of this organization.

In “Is someone there?” the singers, all clients and volunteer workers at Meeting Point, describe AIDS as a ruthless killer that has invaded the country, sparing no one in its path. Historical responses to the disease referred to as *Slim* [AIDS] are outlined to suggest ways in which many people have turned to ill-trained traditional healers and ended up dying in poverty.

Chorus—*Slim has many traps through which it captures people—razor blades, needles, and others ways such as transfusions of infected blood or through contact with it in an accident. You can get Slim immediately. That is the grave. Lastly, Slim is transmitted through the “garden” that everybody likes. The owner of the garden has laid traps that you cannot miss. We all know this, but we ignore it. It is in the garden where*

sexual sin among the elites and the non-elites occurs. Sexual perversion is ruling the nations. It is terrible.

4. Emagombe newaife [The graveyard is our home]

Mzee Mata Nasani, *akadongo*

(Led by Mzee Mata Nasani. Recorded in the Kasokoso area of Iganga town; text in Lusoga.)

I watch as Mata progresses down a water-filled path, clutching the arm of a younger musician as they walk toward a family compound where a makeshift recording studio has been set up in a men's drinking hut. Outside the hut, millet is spread out on a series of overlapping tarps to dry in the hot morning sun. Inside, drinking urns are stacked up along the walls next to a pile of 10-foot-long drinking straws used by the men to extract the strong traditional local brew from the urns. Mzee Mata Nasani is a 70-year-old *akadongo* player, blind since birth, who lives in Iganga, a town located in the eastern Busoga region of Uganda. Mzee Mata—whose singing and playing style is recognizable throughout the country—is best known for having composed and recorded a song widely played on the radio that extolled the merits of the nation's newly ratified constitution in 1962. To this day, people recall Mzee Mata and the educational outreach of his political song. The songs Mata recorded in the 1990s may strike one as curious at first—songs of strange fruits enveloping entire communities, strange insects eating farm animals, and even stranger brooms that were sweeping through villages—all early references to HIV/AIDS. According to Mata, music, dance, and drama have long assumed a principal role in local medical outreach efforts pertaining to HIV/AIDS education and prevention in his area of the country:

Music has really helped control and prevent AIDS, not only in this area but also throughout the country. People who listen to us, well, they normally change and adapt their behavior. Those who do not listen do not learn. Music has played a large role in my own community. There are songs that tell people how to protect themselves, and for those who are already sick there are songs about how to live happy and live positively. For those who have not yet got AIDS there are songs about how to be careful as they move around. Music has helped people throughout the region, preventing them from catching the virus. We even use songs to advise people how to use condoms, especially in those areas where things are not so good in terms of information about health care. We tell them that they should use condoms in order to prevent catching AIDS. Some traditional healers give out herbs; just clinics and hospitals give out tablets. But others use music to call the ancestors to come and solve the problems. They often use music in such settings. Very many people at the grassroots have now formed groups that mirror my own group's efforts to educate, and in response to my songs people now go out and compose, also using music to change and prevent people from catching AIDS. Music controls AIDS. We have really struggled for this country, Uganda. Unfortunately, I have a feeling that AIDS has no cure, so those who do not listen to our songs and change their behavior will land in problems. Women and the youth must fight back against AIDS with their music. The youth normally listen to music and should therefore listen to us musicians who advise them to change their behavior. Those who do not listen often land in problems.

In “Emagombe newaife,” Mata sings about graveyards, the new home for many in the wake of AIDS. AIDS, he sings, is running us over like motorcars, like bullets piercing our flesh. In his song, the metaphor of graveyard-as-home morphs into graveyard-as-hell, a place where tolling bells beckon. Mata's narrative instills fear among his listeners: “We will not have clothes in hell. We will be provided with only one blanket. Our shirts will be

torn to pieces. We will be separated from those we love, even our spouses with whom we are buried." When Mata sings, people listen.

5. Silimu yaheeza abantu [AIDS has finished our people]

Kanihiro Group

(Recorded in Kitabi Village, Bushenyi; text in Runyankore)

The remote village of Kitabi is near Ishaka town in western Uganda, set in a mountainous region with farmlands cut into the inclined peaks. Primary school children commuting to school on foot share the one main road with goats and slow-moving motor scooters. Vehicles attempting the incline find the road impassable due to severe potholes. We climb the mountain to spend time with the Kanihiro group, a local women's collective that perform for their own community and for surrounding rural communities when they have funds for transportation. Kanihiro's dramas include important messages about blood testing sites, gender issues, and methods of HIV transmission, and they frequently conclude with a song that sums up the drama's central theme, such as "Silimu yaheeza abantu."

*You hear people over there yelling, others are mourning
AIDS has finished our people, let us please protect ourselves
It came from areas far away that we do not know
Due to our little knowledge of the disease it spread like a bush fire when it
reached Uganda
The dreaded disease has killed our children
Those of us who were parents are now childless
It kills both men and women, leaving behind orphans as young as those
still breastfeeding*

Our people are dying

*People have become infected due to promiscuity and prostitutes
Not knowing who is infected, drinking alcohol, spending nights in discos
These are ways people have become infected, oh, AIDS is a bad disease
Often times the person who could have helped you has just died
You hear a death announcement over the radio that they are taking a dead body home
You spend the night in sorrow, mourning, and you bury the person the next day
If you are not at the burial, then you go somewhere to pay condolences to
bereaved families
If you are not able to pay your condolences, then you are visiting a sick person
elsewhere
Let us all protect ourselves against HIV/AIDS and take heed of prevention messages
These messages are passed along to us over the radio and screened on TV
Oh, AIDS is finishing our people, so let us protect ourselves*

6. Bannange twajjirwa [We have been invaded]

Bright Women Actresses

(Recorded in Bwaise, Kampala; text in Luganda)

It is hard to escape the hustle and bustle of the urban Kampala sprawl, even as far out as the Bwaise suburb. Sewage flows down trenches lining the slums of the area, where family compounds are surrounded by large, locked steel doors. At the home of a member of Bright Women Actresses, up to twenty women typically meet to better their lives through increased involvement in health-care outreach efforts within their impoverished community. An important feature in musical performances in the fight against HIV/AIDS

is the ability to trigger memory. Many CBOs (community-based organizations) that use music to communicate their messages rely on the ability of music lyrics to “stick” long after they’ve been sung. As one of the members of Bright Women Actresses in Bwaise suggests below, the memory of a song’s performance can recall the message of that particular song. And for many women who sing, this is what they hope for:

Music has done so much, you know. People can appear indifferent, yet they will have learned something. This happens many places we’ve been to with this women’s group. In an audience it is hard for people to go away with no lesson learned. At least one person will learn. Many listen to what we sing, and when he gets tempted to love a young girl, he remembers the songs.

In “Bannange Twajjirwa” Bright Women Actresses open by dispelling the myth that those who are HIV+ brought the virus on themselves—“They are not guilty of anything, but merely the victims of the contagion, the mass murderer.” According to the solo singer, the one in a relationship who goes to work cannot trust the one who stays at home, while the one who stays home merely waits for the disease. Sadly, the song suggests, the disease begins in the womb, and it continues to “ambush” families until all are buried. According to the chorus, “Slim” causes poverty for many families, and poverty exacerbates the progress of the disease in the body. The women conclude by reminding us that their songs come with strong “medicine.” The first intervention is abstinence (“Listen, youths, never give away your life to those who encourage you to have sex”). Another is to go for an HIV test (“If you are both healthy, then do not waste time”). A third is the encouragement to be faithful to each other (“Never do anything alone that you would not do if your partner were present”). A fourth is the need for protection in the form of condoms (“Use them, use condoms like shoes”). The final form the group encourages is prayer (“The last thing is to try very hard to pray, for your Creator is your doctor”).

7. Gampisi [The hyena]

Negro Angels Bamalayika

(Recorded in Kampala; text in Luganda)

In a dusty meeting room overcrowded with hand-soldered metal chairs at the Kampala YMCA, the members of Negro Angels Bamalayika meet to rehearse for an upcoming dramatic performance. The room’s blackboards have long since fallen to pieces, and little is left of the institutional robin’s egg blue paint on the walls. Roles are shuffled among members according to who will be absent or late that evening. At the end of the rehearsal one of the directors of the drama troupe asks if we would like them to perform the famous “Gampisi” song. *Gampisi*—which means hyena—became a metaphor for AIDS when it was first used as the title of a highly successful play produced by Negro Angels in the 1990s. The *gampisi* lays traps that ensnare its prey through sex, unsterilized needles, and unscreened blood. The singers are fearful that they will not make it through the 1990s because they are too busy tightening their belts, constructing coffins, digging graves, and reading wills. *Gampisi* has “disorganized” everyone, especially people who used to love one another.

8. Silimu okutumala! [AIDS finished us!]

Bukona Women’s Group

(Led by Loy Namaganda. Recorded in Bupala Village, Bukona sub-county; text in Lusoga.)

We travel in the back of a pickup truck through rural eastern Busoga along with Rev. Jackson Muteeba, the director of IDAAC (Integrated Development and AIDS Concern), an AIDS clinic in nearby Iganga town. After arriving in Bupala Village, we cut down banana branches to create an awning that will protect us all from the noon sun. As the women

of the village gather to share with us the history of their performance group, children surround us. Rev. Jackson whispers in my ear, "These women will only be successful if the children continue to listen to their songs." The Bukona Women's Group suggests that all the women listening to "Silimu Okutumala" should put on the banana leaves that women in this area of Uganda typically wrap around their waists when they are in mourning. "Let's go to IDAAC," sing the women. *Silimu* (or "Slim") has "finished the village." The lead singer suggests that women should take their mothers with them when they go to IDAAC for HIV counseling and blood testing so that they all can raise their children for longer periods of time. The presence in the village of the visiting Rev. Jackson is acknowledged, followed in the song by a geographic mapping of the spread of the HIV virus from Kampala to Jinja, through the Mukono District, and into Iganga town. AIDS is now present in the villages of the women in the Bukona Women's Group who sing about the physical manifestation of AIDS in a graphic and direct way: "It starts with feeling cold, then there is headache, then pains in the muscles and bones of the legs, then abdominal discomfort, then diarrhea, then vomiting." Some women go for help to the local witch doctor, sings the group's leader. Those who seek out such help end up selling their land and their possessions in order to pay for treatment. The members of the ensemble, however, pledge their support if their fellow sisters go to IDAAC for treatment and help. "We used to have stigma," the song concludes. Now, however, even if women experience the physical discomfort of diarrhea, they are encouraged to "tell your friends."

9. Fight the epidemic and Abange mikwano gyange muvawa?

[Friends, where do you come from?]

TASGA Drama Group (Tokamalirawo AIDS Support Group Awareness)

(Recorded in Kawempe, Kampala suburb; text in English)

Traditional healers in Uganda utilize various forms of music, dance, and drama in their health education outreach. One group that depends heavily on its ancillary performing troupe is TASGA (Tokamalirawo AIDS Support Group Awareness), directed by Mutebi Musa. A charismatic man, Mzee Musa is passionate about marshaling as many resources as he can for the promotion of the health and well-being of his community on the outskirts of Kampala. As a recognized leader in the traditional healing community, Musa maintains, supports, and trains a music and drama group of AIDS widows and orphans that accompanies him in his outreach efforts. The members of the TASGA performing troupe frequently offer critical information for audiences concerning various medical issues confronting a given community, often elaborating on the issues already presented by the healer. According to Musa, medical and spiritual care are both integral to his healing practice:

I began this work in 1967 when I was young. My grandy showed me the bush and herbal medicine for treating ailments among men, women, and children. That is when I started my work, and I loved it so much. I have developed over time those medicines formerly found in clay. Music and dance have played a significant role in the fight against AIDS, so much. When we go to teach, music and dance act as a trap for mobilizing people. For example, if they were to begin now, even those walking along outside would branch off. Wherever we teach, people have asked us, when we are coming back? And we also use music in treating AIDS victims. You see, when these AIDS victims are singing, even

one who came very weak would be able to respond. You see, for us, our treatment is in two ways: physical care and spiritual care. When one sings, eventually she gets relieved. Sometimes she is forced to dance and forgets about the pain.

“Traditional doctors” such as Mutebi Musa contribute significantly to the overall health and spiritual well-being of many Ugandan AIDS patients. In “Fight the Epidemic,” the TASGA ensemble responds to the fears expressed by Negro Angels Bamalayika on this CD by suggesting that there is reason to rejoice due to the mobilization efforts that have led to harmony and togetherness in the new millennium among “traditional healers, medical doctors, and religious leaders.” The primary goal of TASGA’s second song is to communicate the difference between HIV and tuberculosis.

*Let us start with the signs and symptoms of both as a reminder
“Looking alike does not mean you are both related”
TB is an English term for bacteria that infect the lungs through inhalation
The primary difference lies in the signs that are almost similar
Let us give them to you and you will see
One thing is that you can vaccinate against TB but not AIDS
Signs, signs, open your ears
Oh, loss of strength, skin rash, loss of weight, chronic fever, and headaches
Abdominal discomfort, prominent superficial veins that look ugly, all are the signs
Let us also mention the types of TB
Abdominal TB, pulmonary TB, meningitis, and TB of the brain
TB even causes psychoses, but the most important thing is that it can be
vaccinated against
The advice that TASGA is giving you when you start any treatment is to not relax*

*Destroy the friendship with TB by avoiding smoking and alcoholic drinks
How can you avoid this pulmonary tuberculosis?
Oh, it is possible if your children are immunized and do not spit saliva everywhere
Early treatment for those infected is important, as is completing the dose
Most important is sensitization and counseling*

10. Olumbe Iwamala abantu [Death killed all the people]

Kibaale Village Embaire Ensemble

(Recorded in Kibaale Village, Busiki District; text in Lusoga)

When we arrive in the remote village of Kibaale in the eastern Busiki region, a group of men are finishing digging the seven-foot-long, three-foot-deep trench that will support the construction of the massive, local *embaire* xylophone. The banana trees are being felled in the nearby banana fields to be placed along either side of the completed trough. From a neighboring family’s compound, a set of large wooden keys separated by bicycle spokes are retrieved and placed on top of the banana trees. “Olumbe Iwamala abantu,” performed by the Kibaale men’s *embaire* group, features a solo male singer who outlines the ways in which local villagers first became aware of AIDS through local councils and various media. The singer suggests that AIDS does not discriminate based on race, physical strength or stature, social status, or religious affiliation. Only at the end of the song is AIDS referenced directly with the Western term; the older, localized term, *Silimu*, is used first before it is contrasted with the more Western medical term *Ayidisi*, i.e., AIDS, a localized pronunciation (and spelling) adopted by many. This particular performance documents not only the geographic spread of the disease but also the transmission of local knowledge of HIV:

*When I listened to the radio I first got the news
Kasussa [the electoral commission] announced it
As did the New Vision [English-language newspaper], they also wrote about it
When you bring the Bukedde [Luganda-language newspaper], you will find that they
also wrote about it, namely that in the Mukono District they got a disease
Even this side of Seeta town they got the disease
This death that came from Mukono
Father, it has entered our area
It has also entered Bbombo
Listen, when it reached there, all who were there were killed*

The song references “Sheika,” a famous sheik and leader of the local Muslim community who lived in Namakoko, a nearby village. This sheik had the largest and most beautiful house in the entire Iganga District before dying of AIDS in 1998. The reference to the soil not being satisfied suggests that even the death of a powerful man will not fulfill the needs of the earth. Also mentioned is “Muzeyita,” the name of a boy who first sang for me when I recorded in this village in 1999, as an indirect way for the group to inform me of the boy’s death.

11. Abalugana [Those who have not settled]

Centurio Balikoowa, ntongooli and Kiirya Moses, ntongooli

(Recorded in Kampala; text in Lusoga.)

In this recording Centurio Balikoowa plays the *ntongooli* bowl lyre to accompany his original composition on the theme of *Silimu*, AIDS. One of Uganda’s finest traditional musicians, Balikoowa has trained several generations of young musicians in local

Ugandan music traditions. He has traveled extensively in Uganda to collect, record, and document traditional songs and dances, and this recording is his own contribution to the effort to use music to educate others about AIDS. His song suggests that it will only be through behavioral change and ongoing education that the youth of Uganda will avoid the problems thrust on previous generations.

<i>Abalugana bebaleta Silimu</i>	<i>Those not settled [with partners] brought Silimu [AIDS]</i>
<i>Amazima Silimu</i>	<i>I tell the truth about Silimu</i>
<i>Ogenzewa Ssebo</i>	<i>Where have you gone, sir?</i>
<i>Ogenzewa Nyabo</i>	<i>Where have you gone, madam?</i>
<i>Obolunda</i>	<i>My relatives</i>
<i>Abemikwano</i>	<i>And friends</i>
<i>Obwenzi mubuleke</i>	<i>Stop womanizing</i>
<i>Omusayi mukebbeze olabe</i>	<i>Go for a blood test to determine your status</i>
<i>Endwadde yakabi</i>	<i>It is a dangerous disease</i>
<i>Twekume</i>	<i>Let us be faithful</i>
<i>Silimu</i>	<i>Silimu</i>
<i>Mukenenya</i>	<i>Mukenenya [the one that makes you slim]</i>
<i>Kavera</i>	<i>Kavera [polythene bag]</i>
<i>Kasowole</i>	<i>Kasowole [the one that makes you taller]</i>
<i>Obbadde otya Ssebo</i>	<i>What is wrong, sir, that you cannot see what is going on?</i>
<i>Obbadd tya Nyabo</i>	<i>What is wrong, madam, that you cannot see what is going on?</i>
<i>Baganda bange</i>	<i>My relatives</i>
<i>Abanabange</i>	<i>My children</i>

<i>Ffe tunadawa</i>	<i>Where will we go when you are dead?</i>
<i>Nzembasibula</i>	<i>I am saying</i>
<i>Nti bye Mweraba</i>	<i>Goodbye</i>
<i>Endwade yakabi</i>	<i>It is a dangerous disease</i>
<i>Silimu wakabi</i>	<i>Silimu is very dangerous</i>

12. Zino endwadde ezitakyaluma kusasira [Such painful, merciless diseases]

MUDINET Drama Group

(Recorded in Mukono; text in Luganda)

Off to the side of the main market area of Mukono town is a small, one-room office marked “MUDINET” (Mukono District Network of People Living with HIV/AIDS). Several people wait outside, forming a casual queue. As if on cue, we approach the dark office as the group inside begins to clap and sing. “I wonder what types of diseases people had a long time ago?” asks the solo singer. MUDINET is one of the primary NGOs offering services in Uganda’s Mukono District. According to their own mission statement, MUDINET depends on its songs to reach out to its large constituency as the agency “involves itself directly in the fight against HIV/AIDS by offering services such as home visiting, offering both pre- and post- test counseling, educating the community on HIV/AIDS through music dance and drama, organizing HIV/AIDS seminars, giving public testimonies” (UNASO News 2002, 8). In “Zino endwadde ezitakyaluma kusasira” the drama group affiliated with MUDINET attempts to historicize AIDS in Mukono. AIDS is compared to illnesses such as flu that people were able to easily overcome and even laugh off. AIDS, however, curbs ordinary activities, confusing people’s bodies. There were herbs for older ailments, medicines for fevers. Now, even a fever associated with AIDS can kill.

*Music plays in the stomach like an amadinda [xylophone]
You can hear the beating drums playing loudly
Then you end up running to the toilet due to the diarrhea that follows
It drains you until you are completely empty
And you return again like you have not yet started*

13. Eitu lilimuki? [What is in the luggage?]

Walya Sulaiman and PADA

(Recorded in CMS Trading Center, near Iganga; text in Lusoga)

At the Trading Centre along the main road approaching Iganga, Walya Sulaiman, director of PADA (People with AIDS Development Association), leads a group of local Muslims who perform songs and dramas throughout the rural area, often as the only medical outreach effort in the communities they visit. Sulaiman discovered he was HIV+ on the death of his spouse. After losing his job because of the stigma of being labeled HIV+, Sulaiman dedicated all of his energy to the creation of PADA to address the endless needs of his community. For Sulaiman drama is inherent in musical performance, so that within the act of singing the historical tradition of conveying information is reinforced. “My goal today is to tell you about my luggage, my goal today is to narrate my sad experiences.” After he enumerates several of the physical manifestations of the virus’s progress in this song, however, Walya Sulaiman cautions that “this luggage is too heavy.” Like so many others in Uganda, Sulaiman sings his songs for anyone who will listen. He believes that in order for true social change regarding sexual behavior to occur, his community needs to be nurtured in a culture of information, one in which they have the necessary tools to fight the disease.

*Silimu [AIDS] is wrong, it is a wrong disease
When it wants to make you sick, it sends opportunistic infections
You feel a headache, and as that resolves the ears start to pain
When the pain in the ears resolves, backache sets in
As the backache resolves, abdominal upset sets in
As the abdominal upset resolves, profuse diarrhea occurs*

14. The struggle against AIDS

Jumbo Theatre Group

(Recorded in Kampala; text in English)

The sounds of urban Kampala embellish the recording of the Jumbo Theatre Group. Young people formed this group in response to the increase in HIV they found in their primary and secondary schools in the nation's capital. As one member told me, "We had to do *something!* People were dying all around us." The goals of the Jumbo Theatre Group are similar to those of many small-scale groups working throughout Uganda to sensitize youth in particular about HIV/AIDS. Several members of Jumbo realized after taking a HIV test themselves how hard it was for others to go and test. They noticed that people were more inclined to go for testing after being exposed to musical interventions. Members of Jumbo began composing songs, reciting poems, and presenting plays that could help people in the same way that group members had already been helped. Group solidarity is the central theme of "The struggle against AIDS":

*The struggle against AIDS should be a collective one
Should be all-embracing, a duty to me and you
Capable we are all, hands we do have
For together we can, divided we cannot*

According to one member, music is a persuasive art, and as such it is one of the strongest interventions available today against the spread of HIV.

A POSTSCRIPT: HIV/AIDS IN UGANDA

At the Grassroots...

At the time of this writing, 38 million people are infected with the HIV virus worldwide. Of this number, over two-thirds, nearly 67 percent—or roughly 25.3 million children and adults—live in sub-Saharan Africa. The countrywide response of Uganda continues to stand out since its initial, alarming infection rates were first documented. Uganda is the single sub-Saharan African country that has demonstrated a remarkable, constant decline in overall infection rates. Many factors have contributed to this decline, and a critical one, as *Singing for Life* tries to show, is music. Men, women, and children, traditional healers, witch doctors, and herbalists, as well as urban and rural residents alike all *sing* their response to AIDS, and they have done so for quite some time. Singing and dancing have been among the earliest interventions directed at HIV in the country. In both songs and dramas, Ugandans educate, care for, and console one another through music, and they have done so for decades.

RESOURCES

Suggested Reading on HIV/AIDS in Africa

Barz, G. 2006. *Singing for Life: HIV/AIDS and Music in Uganda*. New York: Routledge.

_____. 2004. *Music in East Africa: Experiencing Music, Expressing Culture*. New York: Oxford University Press.

Bond, G. C., and J. Vincent. 1997. "AIDS in Uganda: The First Decade." In *AIDS in Africa and the Caribbean*. G. C. Bond et al., eds. Boulder: Westview Press, 85-97.

Campbell, C. 2003. *Letting Them Die: Why HIV/AIDS Prevention Programmes Fail*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press.

Frank, M. 1995. *AIDS Education through Theatre*. Bayreuth: Bayreuth African Studies.

Guest, E. 2003. *Children of AIDS: Africa's Orphan Crisis*. London and Pietermaritzburg: Pluto Press and University of Natal Press.

Selected Recordings of Ugandan Music

Abayudaya: Music from the Jewish People of Uganda. Jeffrey A. Summit, compiler. 2003. Washington, D.C.: Smithsonian Folkways Recordings SFW CD 40504.

Music from Uganda. Stockholm: Caprice CAP 21495.

Ouganda: ensembles villageois du Busoga. 1997. Lausanne: VDE CD-925.

Ouganda: musique des Baganda. Sylvia Nannyonga-Tamusuza, compiler. 2002. Paris: Ocora C 560161.

For further reading and listening please see the *Singing for Life* website at www.singingforlife.com.

Proceeds from *Singing for Life*

All royalties from the sale of this CD go to support the social service networks run by two agencies in Uganda that facilitated many of these recordings. Meeting Point is one of the most visible non-governmental agencies in Kampala and is run almost single-handedly by Noelina Namukisa. Meeting Point works in the Namuwongo slums of the capital city to provide shelter and education for orphans, provide home health care for HIV+ women and their families, and introduce much-needed vocational training opportunities for youth. IDAAC (Integrated Development and AIDS Concern), located in Iganga in the eastern Busoga region of Uganda, supports a large village network of AIDS educational and health-care-related outreach efforts. Meeting Point and IDAAC represent the best of care, healing, and educational outreach in Uganda.

About the Author

Gregory Barz is associate professor of ethnomusicology and anthropology at Vanderbilt University, where he teaches courses in African music, American popular musics, world music, and music and global health. He is co-editor of *Shadows in the Field: New Perspectives for Fieldwork in Ethnomusicology* (Oxford) and *Mashindano! Competitive Music Performance in East Africa* (Mkuki na Nyota). He is author of *Singing for Life: HIV/AIDS and Music in Uganda* (Routledge), *Music in East Africa: Experiencing Music, Expressing Culture* (Oxford), and *Performing Religion: Negotiating Past and Present in Kwaya Music of Tanzania* (Rodopi). He conducts ongoing collaborative field research with medical doctors and health-care professionals in Uganda and South Africa, most recently as a Senior Research Fellow in the AIDS Research Program of the Fulbright Fellowship Program.

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SINGING FOR LIFE

Songs of Hope, Healing, and HIV/AIDS in Uganda

Ugandans have triumphantly tapped the power of their traditional music to battle the AIDS pandemic. Performed with dramatizations and dance in settings all through rural Uganda, this unique blend of music and public health has helped make Uganda's record of success against HIV/AIDS one of the best in Africa. In turn, the traditional music of Uganda is revitalized and made contemporary. *Singing for Life* affirms the profound strength of a people's music in promoting hope and positive change. 66 minutes, extensive notes, 36-page booklet.

- 1. Olumbe lubiibi [Death is bad]**
Vilimina Nakiranda and the Bakuseka Majja Group
- 2. Guno gwe mulembe gwe tulimu kat [This period of time that we are in]** *NACWOLA Iganga*
- 3. Abange ab'eno? [Is someone there?]** *Meeting Point Kampala*
- 4. Emagombe newaife [The graveyard is our home]** *Mzee Mata Nasani*
- 5. Silimu yaheeza abantu [AIDS has finished our people]**
Kanihiro Group
- 6. Bannange twajjirwa [We have been invaded]** *Bright Women Actresses*
- 7. Gampisi [The hyena]** *Negro Angels Bamalayika*
- 8. Silimu okutumala! [AIDS finished us!]** *Bukona Women's Group*
- 9. Fight the epidemic and Abange mikwano gyange muvawa? [Friends, where do you come from?]** *TASGA Drama Group*
- 10. Olumbe lwamala abantu [Death killed all the people]** *Kibaale Village Embaire Ensemble*
- 11. Abalugana [Those who have not settled]** *Centurio Balikoowa*
- 12. Zino endwadde ezitakyaluma kusasira [Such painful, merciless diseases]** *MUDINET Drama Group*
- 13. Eitu lilimuki? [What is in the luggage?]** *Walya Sulaiman and PADA*
- 14. The struggle against AIDS**
Jumbo Theatre Group



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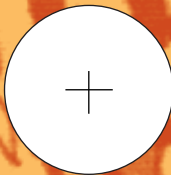
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