

MUSIC IN KENYA

DEVELOPMENT, MANAGEMENT,
COMPOSITION AND PERFORMANCE

A TRIBUTE TO

DANIEL T. ARAP MOI

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KABARAK UNIVERSITY

The study and practice of musical composition is rapidly gaining popularity as we go through unique musical periods in Kenya. While conductors are shifting their performance interests to authentic Kenyan popular, sacred, secular, patriotic and political songs, performers and musical organizations continue to face a plethora of management related challenges threatening their very survival.

Part one of *Music In Kenya: Development, Management, Composition and Performance* adds value to the existing literature on Kenyan music history by chronicling epoch making contributions of H. E. Daniel Arap Moi to the refocusing of traditional music and to the development and performance of popular, gospel, church and school music. It looks at the historical development of musical institutions such as Presidential Music Commission and Kenya Music Festival Foundation.

This volume further presents valuable information on how to deal with myriad issues related to composition of music, management of musical organizations as well as training and performance of music in Kenya.

Part two of this book is yet another unique documentation of sampled music scores of patriotic, political, sacred and national songs composed by Kenyans. This book has been jointly written by a constellation of music artists and scholars from various universities and institutions in Kenya. It is a one-stop source recommended for music students, teachers, lecturers, researchers and the general public.



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A TRIBUTE TO

DANIEL T. ARAP MOI

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LEAD EDITORS

MELLITUS N. WANYAMA
ROSE A. O. ONGATI
FREDERICK A. NGALA
CALEB C. OKUMU

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CHAPTER 3

THE GROWTH OF GOSPEL MUSIC IN KENYA DURING THE NYAYO ERA

WANYAMA Mellitus N.
Moi University Eldoret

Introduction

The tremendous growth of Gospel music in Kenya during the Nyayo era (1978 – 2002) was partly because of the conducive and encouraging atmosphere, and political good will provided by the then head of state, Daniel Arap Moi. Furthermore, most of the gospel tunes were popularized during the *Nyayo* era through arrangement and adaptation by military brass bands which performed this music during state functions such as national holidays. A good example is the song, *Yesu Wainyanza*, by the late David Zalo which is occasionally performed by the brass bands to date. The use of radio and television transmission of events on such occasions created an opportunity for performance of the music to a much wider audience.

Gospel Music in Kenya during the *Nyayo* Era

Since pre-independence days gospel music has had a steady growth partly as a result of the expansion of Christian denominations in Kenya over time. Gospel music is a key mobilizing element in evangelization and hence it's pivotal role in enhancing the growth and development of various churches in Kenya and elsewhere in the world (Kidula, 1998). It is worth noting that early missionaries in Kenya were pioneer users of religious music in popularizing their faiths and denominations. The most notable ones were Catholics and Friends. One way of doing this was by translating the Western hymnal from English and other European languages into indigenous African languages so as to communicate clearly and directly to their African converts. This approach had its own problems in regard to achieving the intended meaning in some target languages. This was more especially in tonal languages where, a single word could have a number of meanings depending on the rise and/or fall of tones in the word (Omollo Ongati, 2002). With the emergence of African independent churches in Kenya, Christian converts sought for more identity and expression by coating secular folk tunes with texts in various mother tongues embodying Christian messages and principles. The examples of such churches that exist to date include: Israel Nineveh, Legio Maria, Akorino and several Pentecostal churches in Kenya.

With time, many musicians in most churches in Kenya Africanized gospel music by using their mother tongue and Kiswahili in their compositions (Kidula, 1998). Accompanying these songs are dance movements which are largely adapted from specific traditional cultural idioms. Notable gospel musicians who were active in the *Nyayo* era and used this idiom/technique are, among others; the Kasangas (comprising Mr. and Mrs. Kasanga), Mary Atieno, Reuben Kigame, Douglas Jiveti, Sheri Martin, the late Wilson Majale, Naomi Nyongesa, the late Isaiah Symekher and the late Emachichi.

Since early nineteen eighties, the use of electronic equipment such as keyboards and synthesizers has taken a center stage in music performance. During the *Nyayo* era, and through the *harambee*³ spirit, many churches were built. In many cases music was/is used to entertain, mobilize and enhance solidarity among church members, and provide alternative evangelization through the gospel messages embodied in the songs. During public holidays and other official functions, church choirs of different denominations were, and still are, invited to entertain and also propagate Christian principles. It can then be argued that involvement in such functions and the exposure accrued from the same has encouraged many choirs to recruit choir members, choir trainers, and invest in costumes for visual appeal and impact.

In the early nineteen eighties, one of the most active gospel musicians in the gospel music scene was Mr. Faustin Munishi, a Tanzanian born musician who settled in Kenya for quite some time, especially in the eighties and nineties. He took the advantage of the relatively low creativity in gospel music by then and nurtured a style that can still be remembered by many Kenyans today. His trademark instrument has all along been the accordion. He begun by performing alone but subsequently he was joined by his wife and much later by his two children.

At the apex of his career in mid eighties, many households in Kenya that had a radio cassette player at least played Munishi's music. His topics ranged from commentary on good governance, faithfulness among couples, interpretation and application of some verses from the bible, and ridicule of unbecoming behavior among Christians. It is arguable that Munishi inspired the then aspiring gospel musicians to join him in the less crowded field of gospel music by then. Many of these upcoming musicians must have been encouraged by the fact that gospel music had become a very lucrative business. Among the contemporaries of Munishi was Mary Atieno who performed the following songs, among others: *Halleluiah Amen*, *Shetani Songa Mbali*, and *Adamu na Eva*.

3 A word used in Kenya since independence in reference to collective responsibility towards community development.

In the early nineties a great number of gospel musicians emerged probably because of the anticipated monetary gains from the sale of their recorded music. Among the musicians who encouraged/inspired other people to venture in commercial gospel music were the Kasangas who up to now own a number of music shops in Nairobi city. It should be noted that during the *Nyayo* era, the Kasangas were occasionally invited to perform at state functions. The fact that, in most cases, their performance was aired on Kenyan television networks, could have contributed to popularization of their style of composition and performance. Although the Kasangas were role models to many people in the then world of gospel music in Kenya, they also attracted competition from budding musicians who borrowed a lot from them in terms of composition and performance styles. It is arguable that the Kasangas developed as such because of their recognition by the *Nyayo* era government.

Another vibrant gospel musician, Reuben Kigame, blossomed between 1990 to 1998 when he produced, among others, the song *Murule mu bwoni*; literally meaning 'come out of evil.' His style was/is fairly unique and differs from other gospel music trends in that in most cases he accompanies himself with playing of the Keyboard. The fact that Reuben is blind and yet produces admirable music through which he preaches the gospel and from which he earns a living has inspired scores of young gospel musicians in Kenya. The more the number of musicians increased, the more the competition among musicians themselves intensified, and the more the quality of music improved. The growth of standards can also be partly attributed to the increased use of computer technology with regard to utilization of music software for recording, editing and music production.

The abundance of gospel music in Kenya in the nineties can largely be attributed to prevalent use of CDs, VCDs, DVDs, MP3s and MP4s in music recording and production. Towards the year 2000, gospel musicians began to fill the market with a lot of their recorded music which sold at relatively cheaper prices compared to earlier recordings on cassette audio tapes. This is partly because its production by using computer assisted digital technology was readily available, affordable, fashionable and faster than the previous systems of music production on audio and/or video tapes. However, in most cases the rush to gospel music was construed by many as one way of gospel musicians enriching themselves as opposed to evangelizing the gospel through music.

The presidential music commission which was set up by the then President, Moi in early 80s also played a significant role in encouraging gospel music by inviting and facilitating gospel music performance. During such functions academic papers on the history, composition, development and performance of

gospel music in various contexts in Africa and elsewhere were also presented. One such symposium which brought on board scholars and musicians from East and Central Africa was: The Presidential Music Commission Symposium, on church music, held at Egerton University in 2001.

It is worth noting that more than ever before, the *Nyayo* era saw a remarkable number of female artistes streaming into gospel music composition and performance. Notable among the female artistes is Esther Wahome; the composer of the famous hit – *Kuna Dawa*; meaning ‘there is medicine.’ Medicine here is used in reference to the saving power of Jesus Christ. *Kuna Dawa* is well known and popular not only among church going people but it is also played in other places such as bars and clubs. Its popularity could be attributed to the music’s danceable beat; and hence bridging the gap between the solemn Christian hymns and the vibrant beats of most popular secular music.

The overwhelming acceptance of Wahome’s music, especially *Kuna Dawa* is attributed to the fact that gospel music has with time, since mid nineties, been gradually adopting the prevalent popular gospel music style of composition and performance. The style is conventionally associated with danceable and rhythmic music. The music style also highly employs improvisation in that there is always room for the performer/singer/soloist to continue composing and recomposing the music by adding new texts and somehow changing the melodic character here and there at will; that is, the style highly allows extemporization by the performer. This is partly because of the fact that Gospel music was born in African-American milieus; characteristics of which it espouses to date. It should be noted that these traits are also very common to popular music, traditional music and even jazz idioms.

Earlier on, for a long time since the early eighties up to early nineties both the secular and popular music scene was dominated by male artistes. Among the few female gospel music artistes that featured around this time were: Naomi Nyongesa of Kenya prisons band; and Mary Atieno of International Fellowship for Christ (IFC) choir who performed as a lead vocalist and occasional composer in conjunction with the director of the choir, the late Isaiah Symekher (Kidula 1998:120). The fact that by the year 2002, we had Esther Wahome, Helen Akoth, Lydia Mwaura, Salome Mwabindo and several other budding female artistes in the gospel music scene is in itself a testimony that the number of female artists during the *Nyayo* era grew day by day. Today, as evidenced by a rough survey of the ever increasing volumes of recorded music in the market, the number of female Gospel music artists has increased so tremendously that

the author of this chapter opines they could be currently outnumbering their male counterparts.

Due to the current advanced readily available, fashionable and user-friendly audio-visual technology, today many gospel musicians are earning their living out of the sales of their music and videos. One major problem however, is the high rate of piracy in the music industry that continues to rob the musicians of colossal amounts of money. This vice has been perfected by the incredible diversity of computer gimmicks and manipulation. It is time the Kenya government and other stakeholders sought for an effective solution to music piracy in Kenya because if well taken care of, the music industry can be a vibrant economic booster (UNDP, 2008).

Conclusion

During the *Nyayo* era, performance of gospel music was encouraged by the creation of participation space for the stake holders. In many cases funds were raised to purchase uniforms, instruments and even for building or expanding churches. Such functions were, in most cases, presided over by the former president Daniel Arap Moi himself. Advancement in regard to music technology has also seen gospel music grow from strength to strength in terms of the quality of performance and production. Since the early nineties the use of computer software in playing, editing and recording gospel music has been on the increase up to date.

As a way forward, it is arguable that gospel music can expand tremendously if it is given support by the government in terms of publicity, recording and dissemination. In retrospect of the recent 2007 post-election violence, this chapter opines that gospel music, because of its current prevalence, is one of the effective tools of enhancing peace messages among Kenyans. This can be done through recording the gospel music, with peace building messages, and airing it through the various television and radio stations.

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Kabarak University Choir perform during the dedication of Ladies Hostels constructed by H.E. Daniel T. Arap Moi. The uniforms were also donated by him

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H.E. Daniel T. Arap Moi Addresses Kenya Chamber Choir, Moi University Choir, Kabarak University and Chapel Choirs, Dec, 2008



H.E. Daniel T. Moi, Rev. Dr. Robert Lang'at (L), Hon Charles Njonjo (3rd L), Mrs. Njonjo, Mr Henry Kiplagat (5th L) and Mr. Ken Burton During a concert mounted by London Adventist Chorale at Kabarak Chapel, 2006



H.E. Daniel T. Arap Moi Donates a Bible to Mrs. Maureen Ngala, a chorister after Baptism Ordinance

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CHAPTER 5

KENYA MUSIC FESTIVAL: GROWTH AND IMPACT ON MUSIC DEVELOPMENT IN KENYA DURING THE NYAYO ERA

WANYAMA Mellitus N.
Moi University

Introduction

The Kenya Music Festival (KMF) has been in existence for over 70 years. As an organ of the Ministry of Education under the Inspectorate, it organizes an annual music festival, encouraging music making through training for competition from Zonal to National level (Akuno, 2005). According to Odwar (2005) and Wanjala (2000) the festival was founded in 1927⁴ by a few British musicians living in Kenya who thought that life would be empty without making music and attending or participating in a music festival. The KMF was founded as a private association, which "was organized as a society or a club" (Wanjala, 2000:85). The members annually contributed funds for the running of activities of the association. The participants in the festival were charged a fee to be included in the festival. The festival at its early stages was for the British nationals only. With time, it opened its doors to other white communities living within Kenya. In the fifties, it allowed members of the Asian communities, especially the Goans, to take part in the festival by participating in oriental music, which consisted of Indian classical dance, as well as vocal music. The last community that was allowed to participate in the festival was the Kenyan natives. Wanjala (*ibid*) observes that in 1960s, several African instrumentalists were given a chance to perform during the Kenya Music Festival. He notes that they played such instruments as *Nyatiti*, (the Luo lyre) and the *Eshiriri*, the Luhya fiddle.

The Growth of Kenya Music Festival up to 2002 and beyond

Odwar (*ibid*) further observes that in 1968, the KMF, as a private association, found the festival too big to run with the meagre funds raised by the members. In this connection, Wanjala (2000: 85) points out that: "In 1968, the Kenya Music Festival got new sponsors and organizers. The Kenya Music Festival was now jointly [sponsored and organized] by the Ministries of Education, and Culture and Social Services." Later, as Odwar (2005: 30) remarks: "The Kenya music festival became too big an event later for the Ministry of Education

4 Akuno (2005:27) indicates that the Kenya Music Festival was founded in 1926.

also to run, as it took almost a month to stage all items.” Consequently, it was decided that the festival be split into two festivals: one, for learning institutions to be organized by the Ministry of Education and the other for participants who did not fall under the learning institutions to be organized by the Ministry of Culture and Social Services. In this regard, Akuno (2005) confirms that: “In 1990, a festival for non-educational institutions and cultural groups was carved out of this parent organization [KMF], testimony to its popularity.” On further development of Kenya Music Festival, Odwar (2005), observes that in 1990, during the state concert, Moi, the President of Kenya by then, suggested that the KMF should be a parastatal body under the Ministry of Education’s control, but be autonomous in carrying out its affairs. He proposed the body to be known as “Kenya Music Festival Foundation [KMFF].” Odwar notes that on the 31st December 1995, KMFF was gazetted. Its objectives according to the Kenya Music Festival syllabus (2009) are:

- (a) To encourage the study, practice and development of music, elocution and dance.
- (b) To guide pupils, students, teachers and other persons or parties associated with the festival, with helpful criticism by qualified adjudicators.
- (c) To provide a forum for promising performers of music, elocution and dance to expose their works.
- (d) To promote the preservation of Kenya’s cultural heritage.

The KMFF is the body charged with the mandate to manage festivals for educational institutions in the country. Akuno (2005), observes that KMFF categories of competition, called classes, include music and elocution in vernacular, Kiswahili, English, German and French languages and idioms. Akuno (2005:28) further clarifies that:

The folk song and dance classes cover items from Kenya, the rest of Africa, Asia (usually India) and Europe (usually Great Britain). Competitions begin in the month of May (second school term of the year) at Zonal level progressing to Divisional and District levels by the end of June. In July, the provincial competitions take place in eight venues throughout the country, and in early August, some ten days of national competitions held in Nairobi.⁵

⁵ From 2006, the venue for the national music festivals rotates from one provincial venue to the other depending on the availability of the necessary space and facilities in the host province.

Over the years, the number of classes in the festivals has increased from less than 20 at inception to over 180. According to the KMFF syllabus (2009), there is provision for 118 music and dance classes, and 75 classes for elocution. During the *Nyayo* era (1978 – 2002), the Kenya music festivals expanded tremendously. It is arguable that this was partly because music teachers especially those who excelled in the annual Kenya national music festivals, were appreciated and encouraged by the then head of state during state concerts. This trend was the sole initiative of the then Head of State President Daniel T. Arap Moi whose love and support of music was not in doubt. Consequently, many students and teachers were keen to pursue careers in music as music teachers and/or choir trainers. The tremendous growth of the KMF to the current status is partly attributed to this trend.

Kenya Music Festival, Music Education and Free Primary Education

The author of this paper argues that the status of the music curriculum in Kenya as per the 2000 review and the introduction/implementation of free primary education in Kenya in 2003 have affected the Kenya music festivals in various ways. It is worth noting that during the bigger part of the *Nyayo* era, especially between 1985 and 2000; music was both a compulsory and examinable subject in primary schools in Kenya. Coincidentally, it is during this period that the Kenya Music festival witnessed tremendous transformations in terms of organization, sponsorship and management. In essence, music education entails two crucial sections: the practical and the theoretical. Therefore, performances in the KMF supplemented the practical part of music education hence, making it more sensible. It is arguable that participation in KMF was/is a major boost towards motivating students to choose and develop careers in music. No wonder many pupils were so enthusiastic about music that some of them developed music-teaching careers. Several of such teachers are presently serving in both primary and secondary schools in Kenya. Many of the products of this era/system also serve the society as freelance or private music teachers or trainers in educational and non-educational institutions in Kenya today. Popular musicians and entertainers during public and government functions e.g. Juma Odemba and Esmond Majanga of Kayamba Africa and Kayamba Roots respectively developed from Kenya Music Festival.

Akuno (2005) explains that as per her observation, items presented in the traditional music category between 1977 and 1999 (which happens to fall in the *Nyayo* era) have manifested changes in that category of music. Akuno observes that changes are remarkable in connection with tempo and authenticity of performance. In folksong and dance categories, faster, entries that are more

rhythmic tended to take first place, with the slower, yet perhaps more graceful pieces appearing dull and less exciting in comparison regardless of the unique cultural modes. It is further noted that the exposure of competitors to music and dance from cultures other than their own has also resulted in adoption of foreign style and practices. In this connection, Akuno remarks that, "traditional music has developed tremendously at the hand of KMFF competitors, often as a reaction to well-meant criticism from adjudicators, and due to the competitive nature of the festival" (2005:30). This comment is a pointer to the crucial role of an adjudicator and hence the necessity of adjudicators being conversant with the nature of the music they judge. This is so because as foregoing evidence shows, the adjudicator can easily lead or mislead the participants in a particular category of music.

Towards the end of the *Nyayo* era in the year 2000, the Ministry of Education undertook a review of education system and came out with a new education policy on assessment of music education. This policy reduced music to a non-compulsory and non-examinable subject in primary schools and an optional subject in secondary schools. Wanyama (2006:1) observes that 'such a move makes it difficult to sustain the love for music. Teachers and students have apparently lost interest in the subject at the primary school level. Consequently, a negligible number of students who join the secondary school have background knowledge and/or interest in the subject. This vicious cycle replicates itself at various tertiary institutions and even at the university level.' Against this background, it is intriguing to point out that in 2003, the government of Kenya introduced free primary education and hence the increase in the number of participants in KMFF as witnessed in 2003 onwards. In this regard, it is the author's conviction that the festival would have served a better purpose if it went along with the implementation of music in the curriculum at least at primary school level. The increase in the number of participants in the festival is mainly because of the rise in pupil enrolment numbers and the government's financial support of the festival.

In the foregoing circumstances, the pertinent questions are, how can the youth be encouraged to pursue music education at secondary and university level if the subject is neglected and considered as inferior? Who holds the authority to re-instate the place of music back to the status in which it was between 1985-2000? Is the benefit of music education only valuable in entertainment? These are significant questions, which seek to harmonize music education and its practice. It should be pointed out that music performance is given prevalence during all official functions including state or political functions attended by policy makers in Kenya. If music is genuinely appreciated as such, why is it not given its worth in the curriculum with a view to enhance its research,

training and continuity? Since the content of the KMFF is an integral practical component of the music curriculum, it would be prudent to reinstate music at all levels for corroborating music theory and practice. This move would go a long way in enhancing the growth and development of music in all institutions of learning.

Apart from the growth in the number of music and dance classes, the *Nyayo* era also saw the enhancement of a relatively new genre of creative work called elocution. Elocution, which entails the art of public speaking, grew to encompass verse speaking in the Kenyan indigenous languages. This dimension is paramount in the achievement of the main objectives of the Kenya Music Festival; that is, to promote Kenya's rich cultural heritage (Kenya Music Festival Syllabus 2008: vi). Furthermore, the inclusion of French and German verse speaking started giving the festival an international outlook. In this regard, students are given the opportunity to explore languages from cultures other than their own. This dimension also opens up future job opportunities in areas like tourism, translation and international relations.

Conclusion

The *Nyayo* era has so far achieved much in terms of growth and development of the KMFF. This is largely because participation in the festivals was considered part of the music curriculum. Reinstatement of music as a subject in the school curriculum would go a long way in making the future of music and music education brighter. Currently, academic success or achievement in Kenya is measured through exams. There is therefore, need not only for the reinstatement of music as an examinable subject, but also to put music practice into focus at all levels. Many talented people are unable to maximize and actualize their talents sufficiently due to inadequate music educational information and guidance. If this is provided, such people will be able to put their knowledge and/or talent in a worthwhile perspective that would benefit them and the society. With the rebirth of the East African Community, the member states should also consider looking into possibilities of having an East African Music Festival. This will be seminal in the invigoration of cultural integration and development within the region. The existing models of KMFF festival can be used as a starting point.

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H.E. President Daniel T. Arap Moi Joins a School choir in singing



H.E. President Daniel T. Arap Moi shares His experience with a student on the Keyboard