

singing wells

PROJECT



Preserving East Africa's cultural music heritage now and for the future



Project Report

Recording the Batwa Kisoro District, Uganda

21st-25th November, 2011



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THE SINGING WELLS PROJECT - SUMMARY

The Singing Wells project is a collaboration between Abubilla Music in London and Ketebul Music in Kenya, a not for profit organisation committed to identifying, preserving and promoting the diverse music traditions of East Africa. The aim of the Singing Wells project is to record and document the unique music and dance traditions of East Africa by traveling to rural villages throughout the region with a dedicated mobile recording unit and a team of experienced music and video engineers and ethnomusicologists. The project includes the production of new material called the 'Influences' series - songs from contemporary artists which have been inspired and influenced by traditional tribal music. All output material will be professionally produced and made available to the widest possible audience through all media platforms - TV, radio, CD & DVD, digital and print - and in particular through the dedicated Singing Wells website and digital music map of East Africa. www.singingwells.org

Fundraising for the Singing Wells project is being managed by **The Abubilla Music Foundation**, a UK registered charity (Charity number: 1142173).

THE SINGING WELLS PROJECT – PHASE 4

Summary

A team of sound and video engineers, artists and ethnomusicologists from Ketebul Music in Nairobi, supported by volunteers from Abubilla Music in London, undertook a programme of field recordings of traditional, cultural music groups for the Singing Wells Project. The programme comprised seven full recording days in the field - three with the Batwa people near Kisoro in Uganda and four with the Luo people in Western Kenya. In addition, we invited ten performers from the Batwa community to the Ketebul Music studio in Nairobi for a further two days of recording.

Recording the Batwa: 21st to 25th November 2011

The Batwa, historically a nomadic, forest dwelling community of hunter-gatherers, are widely acknowledged to have been the first human residents of the forest areas which stretch across much of what is now Uganda, Rwanda, Burundi and DRC. In recent history, due conservation projects to protect the mountain gorillas, the Batwa have become a displaced and largely forgotten ethnic group and their traditional culture and way of life is threatened with extinction.

The overall aim of the Singing Wells project is to identify, record, preserve and promote the cultural music heritage of East Africa. In taking the project to Uganda to document and record the traditional music and dance of the Batwa, our objective was to help stem the tide which is threatening to obscure the music traditions of this ethnic group. With professional audio and visual recording equipment, we were able to capture the unique sights and sounds of the Batwa which will be preserved for the future and promoted to a wide audience through all media platforms. Our aim was also to provide a positive and lasting benefit for the whole Batwa community. The immediate benefit was a source of income as each of the music groups received a gratuity payment for their performances. We hope that the lasting benefit will be the preservation, awareness and appreciation of the Batwa people and their cultural music heritage. The SWP will literally put the Batwa back on the map as we add their music and dance to the 'Discover the Music' map on the Singing Wells website. We will make the recordings available to other NGOs and ethnomusicologists and we hope this will, in time, provide new recognition, opportunities and sources of income for the Batwa. In planning and executing our visit to Kisoro, we worked closely with the United Organization for Batwa Development in Uganda (UOBDU) to ensure that the Batwa community received the maximum benefit from the Singing Wells project. We are very grateful to Henry Neza and Alice Nyamihanda from UOBDU for their invaluable contribution to the success of the project.

The Singing Wells Team

- Tabu Osusa - Director, Ketebul Music
- Steve Kivutia - Project Manager (Logistics & Admin), Ketebul Music
- Jesse Bukindu - Sound Engineer, Ketebul Music
- Willy Gachuche - Sound Engineer, Ketebul Music
- Patrick Ondiek - Video Engineer, Ketebul Music
- Nick Abonyo - Intern/trainee engineer, Ketebul Music
- Winyo - Ketebul Music artist/Influences sessions

The project was also supported by volunteers from Abubilla Music

- Andy Patterson - audio engineer
- Jimmy Allen - video engineer (and trustee of The Abubilla Music Foundation)
- Victoria Denison - admin & video support (Administrator of The Abubilla Music Foundation)



Day 1: Travelling from Nairobi to Kisoro

21st November, 2011

The Singing Wells team met at Nairobi airport on the morning of 21st November. Our journey to Kisoro started with a Kenya Airways flight to Kigali, the capital of Rwanda, via Bujumbura in Burundi. By the end of the day we would have been in four different countries, albeit briefly.

At Kigali airport we were picked up by Arun and John who would be our drivers for the next five days. The drive to the Ugandan border took about three and a half hours, sometimes in heavy rain, but it was a fascinating journey through wonderful scenery. The border crossing was a little slow but uneventful and we arrived at the Traveller's Rest Hotel in Kisoro at 7pm.

Day 2: Recording the Birara Dancers, Kisoro District

22nd November, 2011

Our first stop was the office of UOBDU where we met Henry Neza, Community Development Co-ordinator and Alice Nyamihanda, Tourism Officer (and her beautiful daughter of just five months, Precious). Henry and Alice facilitated our visits to the Batwa community and acted as translators for us. Their help was invaluable to the success of the project. They were also source of information about the Batwa and so, from them, we learned a great deal more about their community, history and current situation and, of course, their music.

The journey by road to the Birara Community took about one and a half hours - a distance of about 35km. Just outside Kisoro we picked up an elderly lady from the Birara community who was walking the long, mainly uphill route back to the village. This was one of our first lessons about the Batwa - many of the communities live a long way from town and have to make this arduous journey to buy provisions two or three times a week.

The Birara Community live on land at the top of a steep hill. We parked on the track at the bottom of the hill and carried all the recording equipment up a narrow path to the top. It was hard work - and we needed the help of one of our Batwa host to carry the generator - but the view, and the warm welcome from the whole community when we got to the top made the climb well worth it.



The Birara Dancers greet the Singing Wells team

The Birara Dancers Performance for Singing Wells

The Birara Dancers are led by Francis Sembagare. There are three principal female vocalists in the group, Jolly Naiti, Paskazia Nyirakarombo and Vastina Ayinkamiye.

The group performed seven songs for the Singing Wells project, each with its own unique meaning and dance.

- ***'Bashitsi bahire we syewe mwese murakaza'*** - a welcome song.
- ***'Iyenzagwa ndagwagwana'*** - a song about having the determination to achieve something important even if you are weak or sick. You will be able to make it.
- ***'Mukadata muto ya yampaye akabindi'*** - a song about the jealousy between a woman and her step-daughter. She sends the girl to fetch water from the well knowing there is a tiger in the forest which may harm her.
- ***'Shiramugasabo'*** - a song from parents asking friends and guests to put something in the basket for their hungry children.
- ***'Ikondera'*** - a celebration song accompanied by horns. The whole community celebrates by joining the dance.
- ***'Umusambi'*** - a song about the crane - the national bird of Uganda. The Batwa mother sings and in slow motion imitates the movements of the bird. She wears bells on her ankles to make a sound like the crane. The song is often performed at festivals or weddings.
- ***'Inanga yabatwa'*** - a story-telling song. The leader gathers the community together and through the song tells stories of the Batwa traditions - the hunt in the forest and the celebrations and meal following the hunt. In this way the children learn about what it is to be Batwa and so will never forget the traditions and way of life of the ancestors.



Francis and the Birara Dancers tell stories of the Batwa through songs and dance



Influences session with the Birara Dancers

We invited Francis Sembagare and the three lead vocalists back to Kisoro so that we could record more of their songs with the Ketebul Music artist Winyo. These recordings were for the Singing Wells project's set of 'Influences' songs. One of the aims of the Singing Wells project is to make traditional East Africa music relevant to today's artists and audiences. We want to celebrate and promote the music heritage of East Africa in a contemporary context. We are doing this with 'Influences'.

The Traveller's Rest Hotel kindly allowed us to set up the studio under the verandah and it was there that we recorded our first 'Influences' session - a fusion of Batwa music from the Birara singers and contemporary music from Winyo, including '*Imparake Yagahinga*', a song in celebration of the National Park which used to be the forest home of the Batwa.



Birara singers recording at Traveller's Rest Hotel

The Birara Singers stayed in Kisoro for the next two days and the female vocalists recorded more songs with Winyo. Francis also recorded two traditional Batwa songs:

- "*Inanga Nyamunini*" - The Biggest Guitar'. A song often performed at a celebration event in praise of all the beautiful things in the forest - honey, medicinal herbs, small game - all the things the Batwa used to be able to enjoy when they lived in the forest.
- "*Umwami*" - In praise of God who gave the Batwa their homeland - the forest.



Paskazia, Vastina, baby Robson, Francis & Jolly

Day 3: Recording the Mperwa Dancers, Kisoro District **23rd November, 2011**

We travelled a short distance out of Kisoro to visit the Mperwa community - a much smaller community than the Birara, with just a few families.

The setting for the recording was against a spectacular backdrop - the lush valley and terraced hills of local farms and the Virunga volcanos in the distance. However, we were equally struck by the impoverishment of this small community. As we arrived, a small group of women were gathered on a muddy terrace, washing their babies in a small plastic bowl. We set up the equipment amongst the tiny grass huts, the outdoor 'kitchen' and the dug out latrine - it was our first intimate view of daily life for the Batwa and a sobering one.

Gradually more members of the community began to arrive on the 'stage' and we were ready to start. The recording session was an extraordinary one, full of energetic dancing and wonderful, joyous singing. By the end of the session everyone was joining in with the performance and we were being watched by a growing audience of local people who had gathered on the hillside. We could see how hard life is for the Batwa, living on small pieces of borrowed land on the fringes of society but the performance of the Mperwa Dancers did not portray this - it was full of pride and happiness. Once again, we witnessed how important the songs and dances are to the whole Batwa community, from the youngest infant to the oldest members of the family.



The 'stage' for the Singing Wells recordings is set amongst the tiny huts of the Mperwa village



The Mperwa Dancers Performance for Singing Wells

- ***'Imparake Yagahinga'*** - a song about the National Park. The Batwa have lived and looked after the park since time immemorial. They looked after the gorillas and did not harm them. Now the government only cares about looking after the gorillas.
- ***'Inyange Dore Twahageze'*** - a song in praise of beautiful people who are compared to the beautiful white Inyange bird.
- ***'Muremere'*** - A song to the Batwa to tell them to resist eviction from the forest and not to give up.
- ***'Waratsinze Sikota'*** - a song in praise of God. It talks about the traditional houses the Batwa made in the forest out of grass. Now their houses have tin roofs.
- ***'Aye'*** - a sad song sung by the Batwa to console themselves about their eviction from the forest.
- ***'Ihorerewe'*** - If you disturb me don't worry, it's OK.
- ***'Araje Araje Araberewe'*** - the song says, 'he/she is coming to us and he/she is looking beautiful'.
- ***'Ayiye Wararaye'*** - a song about the courage of the Batwa people and the characteristics which make the Batwa who they are.
- ***'Ikondera'*** - a song about happiness often sung at celebrations.
- ***'Kumunyinyawaremera'*** - a song about gathering berries in the forest.

And the 'Influences' song with Winyo and Jessie:

- ***'Bashitsi Bahire'*** - a welcome song.



Ketebul artist Winyo performs with the group for 'Influences'



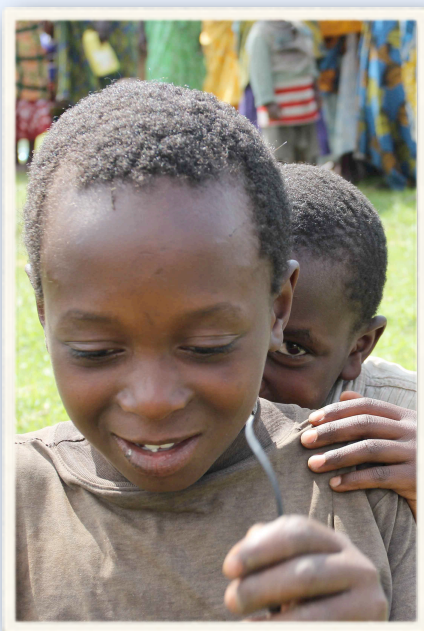
Day 3: Recording Kanyabukunga Twifatanye, Kisoro District **23rd November, 2011**

After leaving the Mperwa community we drove a short distance to our next recording location to meet the Kanyabukunga Batwa community. They call their music group 'Twifatanye' meaning 'togetherness'. The village is adjacent to a former UN refugee camp, previously used to support refugees from Rwanda following the 1994 genocide. Thankfully the site is now wonderfully empty of refugees and it served as a expansive backdrop to the performance of the Togetherness Group.

The group had assembled at the top of a small hill and, as we got out of the vans and headed towards the 'stage', they began a rousing welcome song.

The group performed a further seven songs, led by vocalist Gadensia Kampire. Other members of the Batwa community gathered to watch the performance, some of whom were reluctant to be photographed at first.

A few of the boys gained confidence and started to pose for as many photos as they could and laughed hysterically when we showed them the images on the screen.



The Togetherness Group Performance for Singing Wells

- **'Ongera Ungabire'** - in this song we, as guests, are asked to go to our country and find money that can be used to buy good land for the Batwa to settle on.
- **'Imparake Yagahinga'** - a song about the National Park. The Batwa have lived and looked after the park since time immemorial. They looked after the gorillas and did not harm them. Now the government only cares about looking after the gorillas.
- **'Uganda Yacu Irakaramba'** - a song in praise of Uganda, their country where they were born and raised.
- **'Waratsinze Sikota'** - a song in praise of God. It talks about the traditional houses the Batwa made in the forest out of grass. Now their houses have tin roofs.
- **'Imparake Yagahinga'** (reprise)
- **'Nyirangeri Wararaye'** - a song about the courage of the Batwa people and the characteristics which make the Batwa who they are.
- **'Abaganyi Beza'** - a song to us, their visitors, telling us we are beautiful.
- **'Ongera Ungabire'** (reprise of the welcome song)

Fiona Nyiraguhirwa

This is Fiona, a very special young girl from the Kanyabukunga Batwa community. Fiona has been able to attend junior school through the sponsorship of the United Organization for Batwa Development in Uganda (UOBDU), an NGO based in Kisoro. She is a wonderful role model for the Batwa community and is proving that, with the right opportunity, Batwa children can achieve the same educational goals as any other child in the district. Everyone is hoping that Fiona will be able to continue being sponsored through her senior school years.



Day 3: Recording the Micyingo (Kisoro Hill) Community

23rd November, 2011

After leaving the Togetherness group we we headed back to the Traveller's Rest Hotel in the town of Kisoro where we had an appointment with the next music group. Due to the kindness of the hotel staff we were able to set our mobile studio up, once again, under the verandah in the garden.

The group was from the Micyingo (or Kisoro Hill) Batwa community and we were treated to a spirited and most energetic performance of song and dance. Some of the hotel guests, returning from their gorilla safari, were delighted to witness the performance too. We explained about the plight of the Batwa and the objectives of the Singing Wells project, pleased to be able to spread the message to a new and interested audience.

After a few songs from the main group, including our now favorite song 'Imparake Yibirungo', we were introduced to two young stars of the group - the guitarist and bass player.

The instruments were home-made - the guitar carved from wood to form a basic but effective instrument. The bass was even more amazing - a clay pot, concealed in a plastic bag which the performer blew into in the style of a 'beat-boxer'. The deep bass sound he produced was incredible. And the percussion was an old tin can (tomato soup!) filled with dry beans. Priceless.



Moses Nzikumua-Kamuntu on guitar and Mbirikimu Mbarushimana on 'bass'

The Micyingo Batwa Community Performance for Singing Wells

- ***'Itorero Ryimana'*** - a song about the Church of God (since eviction from the forest, the Batwa now worship a Christian God).
- ***'Ikondera'*** - a song of happiness which is often sung at celebrations.
- ***'Imparake Yibirungo'*** - the song in praise of the National Park which was once the Batwa home.
- ***'Nyirangeri Wararaye'*** - a song about the courage of the Batwa people.
- ***'Ongera Ungabire'*** - a song which asks us to go to our country and bring back money which can be used to buy new land for the Batwa to settle on.
- ***'Mubirunga Harazamuka'*** - a song to say that it is good that visitors come to see the mountain gorillas as they pay money to the government which is used to help develop Uganda. They hope the government will use some of the money to support the Batwa.
- ***'Dore Ndikugenda Murukuto Rwiwetu'*** - "as I was walking home a stranger asked me my name. I said my name is Kamuntu."
- ***'Bageni Mwebare Kwija'*** - a welcome song to visitors asking God to bless them.
- ***'Muhaguruke Dukorere Hamwe Dushime President Museveni'*** - a song to the President of Uganda asking him to 'wake up' and work with the Batwa people to develop Uganda together.
- ***'Ayiwe Turagije Asigaye Nugutaho'*** - "we have finished our work and now we will go home."



Winyo performs with the Micyingo group

Day 4: Recording the Gatera & Kabahenda Batwa Communities, Kisoro District 24th November, 2011

The recording studio at the hotel was proving to be a great success and on our final day in Kisoro we invited two new groups to the Traveller's Rest to perform under the verandah - the Gatera Community and the Kabahenda Community. We did not know how many people would be able to make the journey to the hotel (we had sent two small vans to help transport them) so were surprised but delighted when over 40 people walked into the garden!

The first group to perform were from the Gatera Community where Alice, our facilitator and translator from UOBDU, comes from. They performed 11 songs in front of a large audience - at least 23 members of the Kabahenda Community, the Singing Wells team, hotel staff and a growing number of 'Gorilla Safari' tourists.

The Kabahenda performed next with a set of 7 songs accompanied by amazing drumming and some of the most energetic dancing we had seen. And the rain started to come down and didn't stop until the early hours of the following morning, causing a power failure which lasted at least as long. Luckily we had enough battery power to continue recording, completing the Singing Wells project with the Batwa in almost complete darkness!



The Kabahenda perform as darkness falls

The Gatera Batwa Community Performance for Singing Wells

- **'Ayibambe'** - a song telling of the Batwa eviction from the forest.
- **'Kumunyinya Waremera'** - a song about collecting berries in the forest.
- **'Imparake Yibirungo'** - a song in praise of the National Park where the Batwa lived.
- **'Waratsinze Sikota'** - a song in praise of God. It talks about the traditional houses the Batwa made in the forest out of grass. Now their houses have tin roofs.
- **'Murebe Akarigito Kimanzi'** - a dance to show how strong the dancer is.
- **'Ayabagenyi Nibeza'** - a welcome song to visitors telling them that they are beautiful.
- **'Zairewe'** - a song the Batwa in Uganda have learned from their kins people from the DRC. It is in praise of the former country of Zaire (now DRC).
- **'Nowerino'** - a song sung by the Batwa at Christmas time.
- **'Ndendawuramuwe'** - a song about marriage saying that the bride needs the support of her brother-in-law.
- **'Ayabagenyi Nibeza' (reprise)**
- **'Aye Yewe'** - a sad song where the Batwa remember the eviction from their homelands.

The Kabahenda Batwa Community Performance for Singing Wells

- **'Aye'** - another sad song about being evicted from your own land.
- **'Waratsinze Sikota'** - a song in praise of God. It talks about the traditional houses the Batwa made in the forest out of grass. Now their houses have tin roofs.
- **'Aye' (reprise)**
- **'Inzara Igiye Kutwicya'** - a song to say to our dear friends that we are dying of hunger.
- **'Uganda Jambere'** - Uganda will go forward.
- **'Kigorogoro'** - a song/dance performed at celebrations to show happiness.
- **'Ngwino Muviregi Yacu Kabahenda'** - we would love you to come and see our village 'Kabahenda'



Alice Nyamihanda

Alice spent all three days with us, helping with interviews and translations and recording the meanings of the songs. We were delighted to be able to record the music of her own community, Gatera. Her education started in 1993 at Gitovu Primary school but after Year 3 she had to leave as her parents were unable to pay the fees. The Adventist Development Relief Agency (ADRA), an NGO supporting the Batwa, decided to sponsor a group of Batwa children to study at Mabuyemeru School. Alice was chosen as one of those children. ADRA then continued to sponsor her through her first year at secondary school. Another NGO, the Bwindi and Mgahinga Impenetrable Forest Conservation Trust, then supported Alice to the end of Senior 4. During her A Level studies she was supported initially by UOBDU and then ADRA once again. Finally, Alice attended Bugema University near Kampala where she gained her diploma in Development Studies and became the first (and to date only) university graduate from the Batwa community. She has been working for UOBDU as their Tourism Officer since January 2011, is married and in June she had a beautiful little girl, Precious who accompanied us on every day of the Singing Wells project in Kisoro.



Learning more about the Batwa

We were privileged to have Henry Neza and Alice Nyamihanda from UOBDU accompany the Singing Wells team for our recordings of the Batwa people. They arranged all the sessions in advance of our arrival, ensuring that everything went very smoothly and that we achieved as much as we could during our short visit. They helped enormously with language translations and explained the meanings behind the Batwa songs. The success of the project in Kisoro was largely due to their hard work, commitment and expertise.

In this conversation, Henry provides an insight into life for the Batwa:

Was there any violence when the government evicted the Batwa from the forest?

Yes. When you try to remove people from their homes there will be conflict and so they used some violence, and guns. Some people lost their lives.

What happened next?

The Batwa had nowhere to go. No land to settle on. The government had just not considered that. Some NGOs and other supporters came to help. They bought and rented land for the Batwa to live on, but it is not good land so it is difficult for them to live there. It is often a long way from the town and the market. Sometimes the landlord does not allow them to stay and they have to move on.

How do they live in these remote areas?

They have struggled to adapt to life outside the forest. They had all the food they needed there. They would hunt small game and they had many plants which they used for medicine. Now some of the Batwa keep dogs which they use to hunt small animals but the locals often kill the dogs as they think they will harm their livestock. Many of the children are malnourished.

Is there any conflict between the local community and the Batwa?

Yes there is a lot of prejudice against the Batwa from the local people. They do not respect them properly and often treat them as third class citizens. Local farmers exploit the Batwa for cheap labour, using them as porters to carry things for example. And the men often exploit the girls sexually. If there is a pregnancy the girl may be excluded from both communities. She might move to the town but she has nothing. It might end in prostitution for her.

What does the future hold for the Batwa?

At UOBDU we are working with other NGOs to establish proper land rights for the Batwa. We want to buy good land for them so that they can farm for themselves and take their produce to the market. We hope that the government will give them access to the forest again. They would like to be able to use the plants for their herbal medicines and to visit the burial sites of their ancestors.

www.uobdu.wordpress.com



Henry is interviewed and Patrick records on video

Conclusion

The Singing Wells project in Kisoro was a great success. Over three days in Kisoro, we recorded the songs and dance of six Batwa communities and in doing so learned a great deal about their history and their lifestyle in Uganda today. The following week, we invited ten of the Batwa performers to the Ketebul Music studios in Nairobi to record more songs, and in particular, collaborate with contemporary music artists to generate new material for *'Influences'* - a series of new songs influenced and inspired by traditional themes.

Using professional audio and video equipment we have recorded over 50 Batwa song and dance performances, recorded the oral histories of this unique community and have hundreds of beautiful photographs. And we have taken a step further in our objective of safeguarding the cultural music heritage of East Africa. With this material we will be able to tell the story of the Batwa to a wide audience - via our project website and digital music map (www.singingwells.org), CDs & DVDs, photo books, printed material for distribution in the Kisoro district and other media.

Our aim is to provide a lasting benefit for the Batwa community in Uganda and we are doing this through our continuing relationship with UOBDU. We were delighted to receive this message from Henry Neza.

Dear Victoria,

The Batwa of Kisoro as a result of your visit felt an international belonging and recognition. Through the generation of money by the Abubilla Music team to the Batwa who performed their cultural dance, the Batwa managed to acquire things like goats, clothes, seeds, utensils, beddings and tarpaulins/tents to cover their leaking houses. Eating good food among Batwa families was also another priority and change. After the visit of Singing Wells to Kisoro there was an opportunity for some Batwa who had exposure to the outside life when they visited Nairobi and were able to interact with the Ford Foundation. During this trip the Batwa benefitted from some materials such as clothes, shoes and money which improved on their social status by dressing like dominant tribes here. This gave them confidence and changed their behaviour. Today the non-Batwa believe and agree that Batwa can look smart if they are given the chance to compete with others in many different fields. All the best,

Henry.



Batwa singers perform in Ketebul Studios, Nairobi

We would like to thank everyone who supported the Singing Wells project in Uganda - our friends at UOBDU, Ketebul Music, the Ford Foundation, the Institute of International Education for providing their valuable grant and, of course, the Batwa communities of Kisoro District for their inspirational music and dance performances.

Victoria

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