

The Singing Wells Project: Music of the Kalenjin



Artist: Ben Kisinja

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Location: Kapsokwony, Kenya

Tribe: Kalenjin, Saboat

Translated by: Rev Chemaswet Peter

Song 1: 'Manyiror'

This song takes place in 1894. Manyiror was a man from the village who went to work for the settlers in Borom. He was given guns by the white man and came home to his village. At home he found famine with children crying. He decided he would gather some men with their guns and go to Uganda to get some cows. The elders of the village told him not to go but Manyiror ignored this because he felt more powerful because of the guns.

The elders warned: "If you see a white dog, come home. If you see a black gazelle, come home. If you see an old man sitting in the sun, don't kill him." When Manyiror went to Uganda he saw all of these signs but did not come home. The Ugandans thought he was coming to fight and sent up a war cry, calling all the young men to come fight. Manyiror thought he could beat them and tried to fight but there were too many young men. Manyiror and his men were killed.

The moral of this story is that one should listen to the advice of your elders.

Song 2: 'Sigerer'

Ben Kisinja, also known as Kisetete, was born in 1947. This story took place in 1973. Kisetete's grandfather had taken two bulls, Bliss and Sigerer, from Uganda after a raid. These bulls became so huge that others wanted to steal them. One day, his grandfather went away and some enemies came to steal the bulls. His grandfather had a fierce dog called Jongjo. He fought the robbers even though they tried to bribe him with meat. When his grandfather came home, the dog was barking and the bulls were gone.

Cows belong to the whole community so all the young men came together to search for the bulls. Jongjo, the dog, followed the scent of the bulls for 75 Km. A young girl carrying bananas saw the young men and thought they were bringing war because they were carrying spears. She was very afraid but the men explained they were just looking for their stolen bulls. Eventually Jongjo came to a butcher. The young men, including Kisetete, followed Jongjo into the butcher's. Sigerer had already been killed but Bliss was still alive.

Jongjo started barking because he was hungry. Kisetete gave money for the villagers to buy him meat. Instead they just bought buns and kept the rest of the money. The police came and arrested the men who had stolen the bulls. The meat from Sigerer was given to the people where the robbers were from. Bliss was taken back to the village and his grandfather was so happy they had brought the bull home that he had Bliss slaughtered and gave the meat to all the young men who had been on the trip to retrieve the bulls.

Song 3: 'Kotuyo Sabot'

This is a historical song about the arrival of the white men in Saboat land in 1892. They came to Bugoma where the chief was Kimengich Arap Brarur. Saboat helped the British settlers because they were starving. In 1920, the Saboat were forced to move from their land and give it to the settlers, this was called Kony Funga Twende (translated: Take Up Your Belongings and Go). From 1930 to 1948 saw the biggest exodus of the Saboat. After Kenyan independence in 1963, the Saboat came and took their land back.

Song 4: 'Nuu'

This is a song about Noah and the Ark from the Bible. It is not a gospel song though.

Song 5: 'Saliamo Chebet'

This was sung by Kisetete's wife, Jane Ross. It's a song about her grandmother who was a Keiyo. She was a Christian and a prophet told her she should move to Mount Elgon where she would be married. Her grandmother came to Kamunera near Mount Elgon and married Jane's grandfather, Sichei. Her grandmother used herbs which she would rub in her hands and hold up to elephants to make them fall asleep. She had this power as an herbalist. Her grandfather used these herbs to make elephants fall asleep so he could clear the elephants by killing them. Jane is also a Christian prophet and pray for people who are mad, making them well again.