# LOCATING HOPE IN PERFORMANCE: LESSONS FROM EDWARD KABUYE

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## Introduction

This article draws upon fieldwork in Nairobi, Kenya, and scholarly literature to consider the efficacy of music in communicating messages and promoting social change. I focus on the work of Nairobi-based Ugandan artist Edward Kabuye. Kabuye's projects reveal his approach to life: his creative thinking, his desire to address the problems facing the communities in which he lives, and his perseverance despite myriad challenges. Through performance, Kabuye seeks to persuade audience members to rethink the circumstances of their lives and to take positive action. By examining two of his performances, I demonstrate how artists such as Kabuye experience a continual interplay between difficult social circumstances and creative displays of hope.

I use the term "artist" deliberately because individuals in Nairobi often perform multiple arts and may not identify themselves with one art form above another.[1] Although much of the article centres on Kabuye, I also provide perspectives from other performers and non-performers with whom I have spoken in Nairobi. Finally, I acknowledge my struggle as a researcher to represent hope in my writings when there sometimes appears to be little.

## Introducing Edward Kabuye

I met Edward Kabuye in 1996 when I first went to Nairobi as an undergraduate student to study drumming and dance. Kabuye became my primary teacher. I worked with him again during doctoral fieldwork in 2004[2] and follow-up research in 2006. We also collaborated on performance workshops outside Africa. Throughout these interactions, he expressed a strong sense of responsibility to serve as an educator as well as an artist within his community. He demonstrated this commitment through numerous performances on issues such as HIV and AIDS, drug and alcohol abuse, and children's rights.

Kabuye (b. 1966), a Muganda (from the Buganda kingdom of Uganda), has made Nairobi his primary base since the mid-1990s. He was formally trained in the Department

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1 Performer Abil Ochango, for example, argues that being an artist means being knowledgeable in all arts. He states, "You have art as an element, just one element and when you divide it, then it's not strong" (interview with artist, Nairobi, 1 September 2004). Ethnomusicologists often discuss the problematic nature of the term "music", noting that in many cultures music is not perceived apart from other arts (see Barz 2006:56–57).

2 Parts of this article derive from my PhD dissertation (Van Buren 2006).

Figure 1. Edward Kabuye. Photo: Cecilia Noss.

of Music, Dance, and Drama at Makerere University in Kampala and performed there with the popular Ugandan group the Afrigo Band before moving to Nairobi. He also travelled from Uganda to Kenya and Tanzania to research music and dance for teaching and performance purposes. In 1994, he moved to Nairobi and established a group called the Talking Drums of Uganda comprised of Ugandan musicians and dancers. That same year, he was appointed honorary Ugandan cultural ambassador for music, dance and education by the Ugandan High Commission in Kenya. In 1995, Kabuye began to incorporate Kenyan artists into performances and renamed his group the Talking Drums of Africa. Both his background and his performance work have attracted the attention of Kenyan newspapers (see, for example, Kimani 1999 and Agengo 2000).

The individual members and total number of artists in the Talking Drums of Africa have varied over time. During its peak in the late 1990s and early 2000s, the Talking Drums featured 18–20 members, including vocalists, instrumentalists, dancers, acrobats and actors, with many members performing multiple roles. They performed a mixture of neo-traditional and "fusion" music and dance (blending African and non-African styles and instruments). The Talking Drums also spent three summers touring, offering workshops, and participating in the Festival Mundial in the Netherlands. On his own, Kabuye has travelled to Germany, South Africa, Thailand and Malaysia to participate in cultural workshops and exchange programmes. At the time of this writing, the Talking Drums group is alive more as a memory and reference point (with members drawing upon past repertoire to use for new projects with other groups) than as a united,

functional group. Allegiances have sometimes followed funding. Kabuye remarks that some members tired of participating in charitable productions, in which he has frequently been involved. Discussions with former group members suggest that tensions also arose amongst members about leadership and management.

During 2004, Kabuye focused on directing and promoting a group called Arts Alive. Through this group, he and a few colleagues attracted and trained younger and less experienced performers. More recently, Kabuye has collaborated with five other drummers to develop a project called the Drum Café. A multi-series event, the first Drum Café began with a one-week drumming workshop culminating in a final performance at the Alliance Française in September 2006. Additional workshops have since been held, a website has been launched, and plans are in place for a major festival/conference to be held in 2010 centring on the theme of music and peace. Kabuye continues to develop new ideas and proposals for performances, training workshops and community education events. These projects are all linked by a common focus on teaching performance skills and using performance to teach about social issues. The projects have also frequently been fraught with challenges and constraints as described in the following sections on the Talking Drums of Africa and Arts Alive.

Ethnomusicologists have always collaborated with individual musicians during fieldwork, but have only more recently begun to foreground "musical experience on the level of the individual and actively to incorporate this perspective into their written publications" (Shelemay 1998:182). Increased focus on individual musicians (e.g. Rice 1994, Stock 1996, Danielson 1997, and Barz 2004) has in turn led to consideration of the extent to which musicians have agency.[3] Tim Rice (1994:300) has argued that "when individual experience is made the locus of investigation, the notion that music reflects culture largely disappears. In its place we find individuals acting on or through music." In his study of Balinese *gamelan*, Michael Bakan (1999) describes individuals as simultaneously active agents, significant in contributing to and guiding *gamelan* musical traditions, and as products of their past and present environs, limited by the frameworks within which they function.

Kabuye did not work alone on the projects featured in this article; rather, they were communal efforts, developed through the ideas and work of multiple artists. However, as a primary instigator and leader in each project, and as director in particular of the Talking Drums of Africa ensemble, Kabuye's vision – to promote both creativity and social change – has been a major force. My research considers the extent to which Kabuye and his colleagues can truly be effective in promoting social change through performance.

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[3] A concept developed by British sociologist Anthony Giddens, agency refers to the "power of persons to accomplish things, to influence others, and to create changes in roles and rules" (Ottenberg 1996:7). A related concept, personhood (or person), is defined by Simon Ottenberg (1996:6) as an actor-oriented approach which recognizes that individuals do not passively conform to cultural frameworks, but rather "may violate, manipulate, and reinterpret. . . cultural elements and cause them to change."

## The Talking Drums of Africa HIV and AIDS Performance

In 1998, the Talking Drums of Africa was awarded first prize in the dance-drama category of the National Youth World AIDS Day Drama Festival in Nairobi, Kenya.[4] According to Kabuye, the dance-drama category stipulated use of only dramatized dance and music, with no spoken narration. The festival also featured competitions in drama, narration, poetry and choral verses, and was preceded by regional competitions. My discussion of the Talking Drums performance is based on two video-taped performances of the event; work with Kabuye in 1997, 2002, and 2004 on specific pieces and dances included in the performance; and multiple interviews with Kabuye since 1997 about elements of the performance.

Approximately 14 minutes in length, the Talking Drums performance comprises four pieces. Kabuye chose Buganda as the setting for the performance and drew upon the Luganda language and Kiganda proverbs, dance styles (especially *baakisimba*), and clothing in the pieces. However, he also incorporated a diversity of other African musical and cultural elements. Instruments included *bumbumbu*, three-legged drums performed in the coastal regions of Kenya (amongst the Digo, the drums are associated with traditional healing practices; see Akombo 2005); *djembe*, West African goblet-shaped drums; *engalabi*, Kiganda drums from Uganda; an *isiriri*, a Luhya one-stringed fiddle; a whistle; and rattles, ankle bells and wooden blocks.

Emotion in the performance moves from calm to tragedy to hope. In the first piece, "Ssekabembbe", a community setting is established through music and dance. Dancers imitate the movements performed by men and women at work tending fields or households. As the piece unfolds, audience members gain a sense of impending problems in the staged community. Through call-and-response, vocalists tell the story of a man, Ssekabembbe, who is ill and laments his poor health. In vocal solos, a man representing Ssekabembbe comments on the response of the community to his disease; he emphasizes that he is trying to warn others, but that they are not listening. A critical series of dance patterns, each involving pairs of female and male dancers, also tell a story. A first dance sequence represents an ideal courtship between a man and a woman, while a second dance sequence represents an established monogamous relationship. The second sequence is then altered slightly to become a third sequence, in which men and women begin physically and symbolically exchanging partners.

In the next piece, referred to by Kabuye as "the medical part" of the performance, community members begin to fall ill and seek medical help. Against the backdrop of a call-and-response piece based on the vocables "la la la", with no full text, two types of medical personnel are introduced: a "traditional healer" draped in animal skins and a "modern doctor", dressed in a white coat. One community member is taken to the

[4] Other writings focused on AIDS and arts in Africa include Bourgault (2003) and Barz (2006). A collection of papers on arts and AIDS in Africa, edited by Judah Cohen and Gregory Barz, is forthcoming in 2010.

traditional healer, but later dies. Another is taken to the doctor, given medication, and is able to return to work. At this point, most dancers have abandoned their sexual dance patterns due to concern over their friends' illnesses. Two dancers, however, continue to embrace each other.

"Towone", the third piece, reveals the community mourning the death of one member. As they mourn, sitting in a semi-circle, they again sing. A soloist represents a sick person who describes the things that he will miss when he dies: his children, his house, his friends, his bicycle and car, and his wife. In their choral response, the community members stress that this sick person will not survive his disease. As Kabuye explains, the lyrics to this song say, "You won't survive, you really won't. You're going to die. . . because there are no cures." However, community members are then approached by the doctor, who pulls out a long white sock and demonstrates how to put it onto his arm. The sock symbolizes a condom. The moment the doctor reaches for the hand of a woman in the community, music for "Ayowei" begins.

The final song, "Ayowei", is based on the following folk proverb from Banyoro (Uganda): *Ayowei lero ah lore ndora Ayowei*, translated as "Never do it again". This piece is the climax of the production. In call-and-response form, the soloist refers to "catching" the illness, asks what has happened to his acquaintances, and suggests his own imminent death. The Luganda chorus draws upon the proverb from Banyoro to warn against mixing sexual partners due to the AIDS pandemic. The text and English translation are provided by Kabuye.

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| Solos: | *Kandololire lore ndola* | Let me watch, watch to see |
| | *Mama mama mama mama* | Mother mother mother mother |
| | *Samba samba sambe' ndege* | Play play play the jingles |
| | *Kwata kwata kwatandabe* | Catch catch catch I see |
| | *Kandololire lore ndola* | Let me watch, watch to see |
| | *Mama mama mama nfude* | Mother mother mother I am dead |
| | *Kandololire Obuya aliwa* | Let me watch, where is Obuya |
| | *Mama mama Jumba aliwa* | Mother mother, where is Jumba |
| | *Kandololire Kimbuga aliwa* | Let me watch, where is Kimbuga |
| | *Mama mama Mik(e) 'liwa* | Mother mother, where is Mike |
| | *Kwata kwata Jumba kwata* | Catch catch, Jumba catch |
| | *Kandololire lore ndola* | Let me watch, watch to see |
| Chorus: | *Ayowei leero ah leero ndola ayowei* | Stop today ah, what I see today stop |

Although the lyrics are ominous, "Ayowei" brings a sense of celebration to the Talking Drums performance. While the lyrics remind listeners of the ongoing threat of AIDS, the story and dance bring hope and joy. The drums pulsate with the rhythms of *baakisimba*. In front of the remaining community members, and re-introducing dance

patterns from the first piece, the doctor and one woman offer an energetic demonstration of sex; however, the doctor's hand is covered with a sock. The two are using protection. The doctor then distributes socks to the rest of the community members. Taking partners again, community members all engage in protected sexual dancing.

Scholars have suggested that characteristics of African musical forms may enhance music's ability to communicate and educate. Bebey (1975:2) and Mjomba (2005:6) point to repetition, Alagoa (1968:4) stresses the frequent brevity of lyrical phrases and use of call-and-response forms, and Turino (2000:217) emphasizes use of repetition and music's ability to entertain. The piece "Ayowei" offers an example of how Kabuye uses each of these elements in his performances. The short and repeated chorus reminds audience members again and again not to engage in unprotected sexual relations, while the upbeat drumming, the pace of the music and energetic dancing keep the audience interested and entertained. By listening to so many repetitions of the lyrics, audience members pick up the words and sing along, even if they do not understand the full meaning of the lyrics. Kabuye reports that fans of the Talking Drums do indeed "love and sing 'Ayowei.'" Even those audience members who may not understand the language in which the lyrics are sung can gain a clue to the meaning of the lyrics from the sexual dancing and socks. When singing the song at a later time, they may recall the storyline and message. The repetitiveness of the instrumental accompaniment might also enhance the educational value of the piece. Because it is repetitive, the music does not draw too much attention away from the lyrics. Still, there is enough improvisation and energy in the musical performance due to the fast tempo and the drum rhythms that the piece is catchy and exciting to listen to.

Despite the serious topic of AIDS and the tragic elements present in the Talking Drums dramatic performance, hope is in fact visible not only at the end of the performance but also at moments throughout the production. For example, whatever divisions exist between the sick man Ssekabembbe in the opening song and the community (due to his poor health and their lack of knowledge, and as reflected in the call-and-response form), Kabuye notes, "At the same time – as we believe in Africa that all ten people can't be against you, however bad you are – there will be somebody who feels, who can sympathize with you." This is suggested by having the soloist on stage surrounded by other performers and by the musical harmony created by the voices and instruments and the physical and rhythmic coordination of the dance movements. Hence, Kabuye includes a foreshadowing of unity while portraying suffering. To the call (the warning and the crisis), there is also an answer (a coming together, a moving forward, a type of resolution). In addition, a battle step inserted in the opening dance hints that the community is prepared for a fight and will be able to overcome the crisis.

As national festival winners, the Talking Drums won a trophy and a prize of 5,000 shillings (approximately US $64 today, and worth slightly more in 1998). Kabuye noted that the money did not even cover the cost of rehearsal space to prepare the performance.

One of the women in the group was awarded the prize for best female dancer in the festival and the "modern" doctor received an acting prize. Following the competition, the group was asked to perform once during Madeline Albright's visit to Kenya, but was not invited or sponsored to perform for any other functions, a fact that deeply disappointed Kabuye. Not receiving support for further performances was disappointing from an educational as well as artistic and financial perspective. The story of this AIDS performance confirms one of the challenges performers can face: even groups that win competitions are not necessarily sponsored to take their performances and messages beyond the arena of the competition. They struggle to reach wider audiences, the audiences that might need their messages most.

Despite the lack of external support following the competition, the Talking Drums continued to perform some of the pieces from the production in their own shows. "Ayowei" has been performed most frequently, and has also been adopted by other neo-traditional and "fusion" groups in Nairobi. The Talking Drums of Africa performed "Ayowei" during the Festival Mundial in the Netherlands in 2000. The track appears on a cassette tape entitled *Message for Our People* (2000), produced by Edward Kabuye and the Talking Drums of Africa, as well as on a Festival Mundial compilation compact disc (2000). Some day, Kabuye hopes to concentrate on his HIV and AIDS production again. Should he find the funding, he would lengthen the production to 45 minutes, which he says would allow him to add more details to the story so that the message could become clearer to audience members. He would also like to create a video production that could be marketed in and out of Kenya. His goal is not only to broaden the reach of this particular production, but also to provide performing groups in other locations with a model from which to construct further educational performances about HIV and AIDS.

**Arts Alive and the Ivory**

In 2004, Kabuye collaborated with colleagues in dance and theatre (Abil Ochango, Emmanuel Mumelo and Stella Wanda) to develop a "dance-theatre" production entitled "the Ivory". According to Kabuye, dance-theatre features theatre and dance which are intertwined and linked thematically, as distinguished from dance drama in which the drama and dances are not related thematically, and dramatized dance, when dance is used to dramatize other activities.

Performed by members of the troupe Arts Alive, a mostly amateur group, "the Ivory" focused on the life of the "bushman" (Kabuye's term) versus today's urban resident. Kabuye's goal was not to argue that one lifestyle was superior to the other; rather, he wished to challenge audience members to reflect upon and decide individually which life they believed was better, or perhaps what aspects of these lives were valuable or harmful. Nevertheless, he was interested in demonstrating the positive aspects of life in the past and commenting upon the loss of traditions. He chose the name "the Ivory" "to represent the treasures which I had thought we had lost as Africans, our values which we had to

keep for generations to come" (personal communication, 20 February 2006). During one interview (Nairobi, 12 September 2004), Kabuye argued that few people are interested in history. He also suggested that not many people remember that music has long served educational purposes in Africa. "The Ivory" would address both of these issues by using music, dance and narrative to teach audience members about historical practices and values and about how these practices might differ from and enhance life practices today. Kabuye's interest in discussing the positive and negative aspects of tradition and modernity suggests that he and others may ponder the link between these ways of life, and thus that both traditional and modern elements do figure in their worldviews.[5]

As a dancer in Arts Alive, I was keenly aware of the way in which the production of "the Ivory" was fraught with difficulties. Locating and affording rehearsal and performance space, getting performers to attend rehearsals and resolving artistic differences in the group all proved challenging. When rehearsal space became particularly difficult to arrange, some rehearsals were held at the arboretum in Nairobi, where space was free. Artistic challenges resulted from two main factors: (1) the skill levels of performers differed widely, from amateur artists with no previous performance experience to former members of the Talking Drums of Africa; and (2) Kabuye's wish for this to be a joint production to which all members contributed ideas, despite the fact that differences in ideas about how the storyline should develop, and about how the elements of music, dance and narration should relate, meant slow progress and a constantly shifting production.

Held on 13 September 2004, at the Italian Institute, Kabuye called the first performance of "the Ivory" a "commercial" and a "test" for later productions. It was free to viewers but limited to close family members and members of the media, who Kabuye hoped would advertize future performances. Holding a "test" performance allowed me to join the group in one show as well as to film the performance before returning to the USA, while it provided the rest of the group the opportunity to hold a practice run and advertize for future shows. I paid for the performance space, which enabled the show to be offered for free.

Forty-four minutes in length, the performance comprises a series of dances framed on both ends with songs and woven together with narration. The production begins with the singing of the Kenyan national anthem. This gesture also foreshadows the story, which focuses on migration of the ancestors from Egypt to East Africa. Introduced by drumming, a *mzee* (elder) enters the stage walking amidst a group of dancers who act as his grandchildren. Talking loudly to the youngsters, he announces that he is worried about the deadly disease that is sweeping across the land and the problems that have occurred "in the name of civilization". He foresees doom, and frets that soon his grandchildren

[5] I am hesitant to create a polarity between traditional and non-traditional, or rural and urban life in Africa, for (as demonstrated by "the Ivory" performance) rural and urban spaces, and traditional and non-traditional perspectives and practices, continually interact, feed and shape each other. As Kwame Anthony Appiah has said, "Africa is various" (1992:ix).

and their communities will no longer exist. When his grandchildren appear confused and ask what they are doing that is so problematic, he tells them that they should be ashamed of themselves. He then launches into a tale of the past, describing when their ancestors were still living in the land of Misri (the Swahili term for Egypt). During that time, he says, there was an abundance of food and people knew their cultures and customs. He explains that people came from around the world to see this land. He tells of daily life in the past: of women fetching water, men hunting, and evening gatherings and times for singing by the community. He then tells a sadder part of the tale of Misri. He recounts how so many people came to Misri to see the irrigation systems and look for knowledge that eventually the original inhabitants were forced to leave the land. However, as they moved out, the *mzee* remarks, they continued their daily activities. He breaks his narrative at various points to sing. In one instance, he sings a Luo anthem exclaiming victory, performed in this case in celebration of successful hunts. This song also reflects a general sense of resoluteness. Although forced to leave their land, the people in the story are not defeated.

As the story proceeds, two narrators alternate in describing the new lands which the migrants encountered. Some of the ancestors went to Sudan, while others settled in Ethiopia and other parts of East Africa. They found mountains, highlands, places for grazing animals and fishing and hunting. In the evenings, community members gathered together. The narrators` story is punctuated by songs and dances. One, "Ebongo male jole", is a battle piece from the Karamajong of Uganda. Characteristic of the performance as a whole, both the lyrics and the dance movements demonstrate the resilience of the people. The dance steps are based on fighting movements. The lyrics, performed in call-and-response, are: (text and English translation by Kabuye)

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| Solo: | *Ebongo male jole* | Wake up all men |
| Chorus: | *Eee* | Eee |
| Solo: | *Ebongo male jole* | Wake up all men |
| Chorus: | *Jole alowi eee – e* | Let us defend, |
| | *Ajole jole abongole* | Defend our land and people |
| | *jole abongomale* | |

A second Karamajong piece, "Analeyo", is celebratory; the lyrics call members of the community to celebrate, for they will have food and their children will grow strong. Another piece, "Nyanza", based on a Kiganda melody but with Luyia lyrics, tells the story of people who live by a lake. This is accompanied by an all-male fisherman`s dance which includes movements mimicking canoeing and gathering fish in nets. Another, a love scene in a forest, unfolds to the lyrics of "Ndaya", a piece by the Congolese singer Mpongo Love. The production concludes with a final celebratory dance and the singing of the South African anthem "Nkosi Sikeleli", whose lyrics call for unity and blessing upon Africa.

Throughout the performance, sounds and images of unity and resilience stemming from different parts of Africa emerge from circumstances of difficulty and change (the forced historical migration). As they recount the story, the narrators engage audience members by asking them questions about what they would have done in similar situations. Thus audience members are provided with examples of how their ancestors persevered, and urged to reflect on what lessons they might learn.

Despite Kabuye`s hope for expanding "the Ivory" so that it not only addresses the themes of the performance more effectively but also involves more participation and critical thinking on the part of audience members, he has been unable to sustain the production. A second performance was held at the Italian Institute on 17 September 2004, but plans for additional performances fell through. Today, Kabuye and his colleagues have moved on to other projects, including work on new productions that they hope will succeed where other attempts have failed. To Kabuye, there is always possibility in performance: the possibility of expanding, deepening, making more creative and thoughtful. The possibility he sees in performance he also sees in life. If he cannot sustain a particular production, he simply looks for opportunities for new productions. If he sees problems in society, he reflects on solutions and builds them into performance.

**Perspectives on Performance for Change**

In interviews and informal discussions, I have asked Kabuye, his colleagues and others in Nairobi for their views on using arts for communication and social change (see also Van Buren 2006 and 2007). Many of Kabuye`s colleagues share his belief that the performing arts, including music, can be useful for communicating messages. Stella Wanda, a dancer and musician who has performed both with the Talking Drums of Africa and Arts Alive, asserts that performing arts offer a more engaging means of reaching audiences than communicating through speech or writing. "I think, doing it, expressing it lively, as in acting or dancing," she says, "is the easiest way, because it`s done, you`re seeing it. It`s not. . . written or spoken" (interview, Nairobi, 14 September 2004). Abil Ochango, one of the leaders of Arts Alive, also argues that conveying a message through the arts is more effective than communicating it "dry" (interview, Nairobi, 10 August 2004). Emmanuel Mumelo, a leader for the Arts Alive production and a researcher, in three reports assessing theatre for development efforts in Kenya (2001a, 2001b, and n.d.), argues that long-term evaluations of these projects reveal that they were effective, though more so in some areas than in others. Mumelo added (personal communication) that the effect was proven by the fact that audiences began weeping during the performances.

While Kabuye and his colleagues share a belief in the efficacy of arts for communicating messages, they have differing perspectives on which performing arts are most valuable. Focusing on music, Kabuye argues that melody "is the one which captures first the audience, puts them into that mood. . . and [sets] pace for each kind of scenario." Rhythm "is there to keep you going – enjoy more what you are seeing and

feel not bored" (interview, Nairobi, 29 August 2004). Kabuye chooses specific rhythms to invoke particular ethnic groups or contexts. "Most of the tribes have one rhythm," he remarks. "That means whatever they used to do, they used to use this rhythm." In the Talking Drums AIDS performance, for example, he used the *baakisimba* rhythm to invoke the setting, knowing that audience members would recognize the rhythm and understand that the story took place in Buganda (interview, Nairobi, 29 August 2004).

Like Kabuye, Ochango believes that messages can be communicated directly through sound, without use of text. He explains that a performer can use instrumentation and the pace of music to create a mood, such as of sadness. He argues that "music is the smoothest way of passing a message" (interview, Nairobi, 10 August 2004). In contrast, Stella Wanda argues that dancing is easier to use than music for communication purposes and that music cannot clearly communicate a message unless it has lyrics which can be understood by audience members (interview, Nairobi, 14 September 2004). If music is used, she argues, "Let's sing the music that at least everyone in Kenya, or everyone out there, will understand." These comments may seem surprising, as both the Talking Drums and Arts Alive productions in which she was involved have included languages which not all Nairobi audiences might have understood. When asked about this, Wanda notes that in these cases, the songs were short and dances helped to clarify the storyline, so it was not as critical that the music and lyrics be understood by everyone.[6]

Unfortunately I was unable to view live performances of the Talking Drums AIDS production, as these performances occurred before my fieldwork in Nairobi. However, from video recordings of two performances, it is apparent that many audience members responded enthusiastically, clapping and whistling throughout the show and especially in response to the appearance of socks in "Ayowei". Of course, not all viewers may have appreciated or gained from the production equally. For instance, some viewers may have questioned the use of sexual dancing to promote AIDS awareness. Similarly, some viewers may have been entertained by the use of socks in "Ayowei" without reflecting on the educational message of the performance or changing their behavior accordingly. As for "the Ivory", I was present after the first performance, when audience members were invited to comment on the production. Audience members both praised and critiqued the performance, but they focused on the execution of song and dance pieces rather than on whether messages were communicated clearly (for example, they criticized the singing of "Nkosi Sikeleli", which they said is performed much more enthusiastically by South Africans).

Gathecha Kamau, country coordinator for the Youth Employment Summit Campaign Kenya, suggests that music and other arts are particularly valuable for addressing sensitive issues such as reproductive health or AIDS, as audience members

[6] It is worth noting that while Wanda was a frequent vocal leader, especially in the Arts Alive production, she did not choose the songs for the show. It is also worth remembering that Kabuye hoped eventually to compose original music for the Arts Alive production, so the languages used might have changed.

respond more readily to performers than to medical practitioners and as topics can be invoked symbolically in performance (interview with Gathecha Kamau, Nairobi, 4 May 2004). This view is supported by scholars. For example, Bourgault (2003:204) and Barz (2006:216) emphasize the connection between entertainment and education. Barz notes that having music "cleverly disguised as entertainment" is "critical in the attraction of the largest possible audience" (2006:216). Nketia (1974) and Byerly (1998) point to the sanctions seemingly offered by music and not by speech. As Byerly (1998:31) notes, music offers "sites within which the unsayable [can] be said, and where contentious issues [can] be explored without hazardous consequences."

Yet despite the potential for music and other arts to communicate messages and promote social change, many challenges remain for performers. These go beyond practical issues such as securing financial support for programmes and developing engaging performances that clearly communicate messages. In August 2004, I asked Kabuye to compare addressing HIV and AIDS through the arts with addressing other topics such as immunizations, children's rights, and male and female circumcision. In my interview with Kabuye, I listed a number of "hot" topics (topics frequently in the news and commented upon in performances in Nairobi) and then inquired whether one topic was particularly difficult to tackle through the arts. He immediately exclaimed, "Yeah! AIDS has become very hard." I asked whether AIDS was not as hard to address through music in the past as it is today. He responded: "No! We thought it was easy in the beginning. We shall sing! We shall drum! We shall talk about it! We shall do [whatever] and decrease the numbers, or forget about it at all! It's gone completely. But it becomes difficult" (interview, Nairobi, 28 August 2004). No matter how skillful a performance, no matter how well audience members grasp the messages of the performance, other factors (sexual desire, gender, poverty, etc.) may determine whether or not increased knowledge leads to changed behavior. Furthermore, any changes that do occur are difficult to trace. For example, how does one know if increased use of condoms within a community comes from performances such as the one by the Talking Drums of Africa, or from increased governmental or commercial advertizing, or from distribution of condoms by health care professionals?[7] Ultimately, performers can only hope that their performances will lead to change.

**Representing Hope**

Representation has long been an issue of concern in ethnomusicology and related fields. George Marcus and Michael Fischer (1986) documented the "crisis of representation" in the social sciences in the 1980s (cf Marcus and Cushman 1982 and Marcus and Clifford 1985), and Timothy Cooley (1997:3–4) and Ruth Hellier-Tinoco

[7] Communications scholars, who have been active in entertainment-education programmeming, have developed some tactics to deal with this problem. For example, telephone hotline numbers may be announced on radio programmes that address social issues. Following the radio programmes, researchers can monitor numbers and content of calls to the hotlines. For more information on communications approaches, see Singhal and Rogers (1999).

(2003:24), among others, have evoked it.[8] "Author-ity", as Paul Stoller (1994:355) tells us and as our personal experiences confirm, is problematic.

For scholars who are engaged in research or applied work with issues of social change, decisions regarding representation may be especially complex.[9] In some senses, we all experience, engage with, and even stimulate change in the cultures in which we study (Titon 1992:316). In the words of Bess Lomax Hawes, "That's right, we're meddlers" (as quoted in Titon 1992:316). Some of us, however, work with people who, like Kabuye, are themselves deliberate meddlers. As a graduate student, I became fascinated by the ways in which artists in Africa and around the world are responding creatively through the arts to social problems (poverty, disease, human rights issues, etc.) that are impacting on their communities.[10] When I embarked on doctoral research in Nairobi, I was eager to learn more about the efforts of such artists, and to let their missions and perspectives guide my study. Since then, however, I have become increasingly uncertain what narratives to tell in my research.

For Kabuye, life seems to involve a tension between artistic creativity and possibility, and difficult daily and social circumstances and unfulfilled desires. Determining how to represent this tension is challenging. Like many of the artists with whom I work, I share a belief that the arts can (as trite as it may sound) make the world a better place. I admit a desire to show that these artists' performances can make a difference. I would like to represent what I see: tremendous creativity, activity, independence and optimism. Yet what I also see are the challenges involved in such projects. Five years since my fieldwork, neither of the programmes described in this article has been continued and two of the performers involved have died, one from AIDS. This struggle between hope and difficult reality extends beyond Nairobi, of course, to other parts of Africa and the world.

Discussions with Kabuye and other artists in Nairobi suggest that they want both sides of the story told: the difficult, but also the hopeful.[11] This is in fact what Kabuye has achieved in his performances: to honestly depict the circumstances on the ground but also to demonstrate hope, and to balance these elements in such a way that the positive

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8 Discussions of representation in relation to African music scholarship and music-making include, respectively, Kidula (2006) and Agawu (1992, 1995, and 2003).

9 Applied (or "public sector", "active", or "practice") ethnomusicology has roots in similar movements in anthropology and folklore (see Burt Feintuch 1988). While ethnomusicologists still identify particular work as applied many scholars also emphasize the fact that academic and applied work often go hand in hand (Seeger 2008:286; Davis 1992:364–365; and related to folklore, Kirshenblatt-Gimblett 1988).

10 Other music scholars who have examined the relationship between artists and social contexts, looking at how one might impact the other, include Seeger (1979), Rice (1994), Sugarman (1997), and Danielson (1997), among others.

11 During research in Nairobi, I have interviewed, worked with and/or performed with a variety of amateur and professional performers as well as non-performers based at the Kenya Cultural Centre and National Theatre, in community projects (e.g. the Kawangware Street Youth Project) and non-formal schools in low income areas such as Kawangware and Kangemi, and in other media and performance circuits.

aspects of the story are not outweighed by the negative. The arts may not provide a full solution to the problems faced by communities in Nairobi. However, Kabuye demonstrates that performance does provide a vehicle to communicate and educate, and thus offers a valuable step in the right direction.

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