



GEORGE MUKABI (BITS OF HIS HISTORY)

BY PETER AKWABI (A FRIEND AND COLLEAGUE)

Kisa Location of the former Western Province of Kenya – now better known as Kakamega County – right inside that location someone was born. His name was George Mukabi, a son to Mzee Omukuba and Mama Shikobe.

George Mukabi never attended any formal education that we people who were close to him could talk about. But when he grew up he became such a good guitarist, and composed many songs in Kiswahili language – the lingua franca of East and Central Africa. His lyrics marveled the people of his time, and even up to now those who still love his music think that the man was not only creative but also authentic in nature! His compositions covered a cross-section of topical subjects of his environmental time. If one took trouble to listen to these compositions analytically, one would be left with mixed feelings about what kind of man George Mukabi was!

In one of his compositions, namely Napiga Ashante Kwa Wazazi Wa Leo, the man who did not go to school strongly encourages parents to take their children to school. He even makes a comparison between the behavior of parents of long time ago and the present ones. That those of the past used to wake up their children very early in the morning to order them to take their herds of domestic animals out for grazing, instead of thinking of ways and means of taking their children to school to be educated. That the parents of these days must be congratulated for their habits of encouraging their children to go to school to acquire education for good living!

Another irony is that: While this musician was a very hot tempered person who loved walking with a sharp knife hidden underneath the sleeves of his pull-over, mainly for the purpose of knifing any person who dared to make a noise at the venue of his performance, in one of his songs, namely “Victoria Maisha Mena Usiende Kwa Dansi Na Kisu,” meaning “If you want to lead some peaceful life, do not form a habit of going to dances with a knife on your body.” Come to think of this one! Preaching water while he was busy taking wine?

His performances were full of nasty and bloody surprises but he was a crowd puller. Those dances of his were ever well attended. One, because he was the only man in Kisa Location who could handle a guitar with a certain amount of proficiency that left many people with lots of “wows” on their lips! To cut the long story short: his lyrics addressed the local situations that his fans could easily understand and relate to without a mental cracking.

G. Mukabi had two wives. The younger wife whose name was Mama Osimbo was the one who caused his death. Why and how? The musician had been from Nairobi on a recording business. And when he arrived at his home traditionally, he had to go to rest at his first wife’s house. But owing to much love he had for the second wife, who was much younger and more charming than the first one, he decided to go to keep his guitar at her house. He actually kept it nearest to the entrance by leaning it against the wall. Then he abruptly left to go to have

a rest at his first wife’s house. This was at about 5:30 AM in the morning. At 6:00 AM when the second wife woke up to clean her house, it wasn’t business as usual. She was so moody because she thought that all the money her husband had been paid from his recording would be left with the first wife. With this assumption on her mind, coupled with the usual envy that is common in polygamous marriages, she mishandled G. Mukabi’s guitar (left at her house) while sweeping the floor. It fell down with a thud. The fall was so hard that it broke its string number one, and the sound of that commotion awoke up George Mukabi who quickly ran very fast toward the second wife’s house – to find out what was happening to his beloved guitar! By the way, he loved this particular guitar more than anything else. Why? It had been given to him by a certain Englishman who had spotted him playing a home-made guitar underneath a shade of a tree at the Railway Training School where he used to work as a shamba boy – a man charged with responsibility of weeding flowers on that compound. He had also dual identity (role) of lending a helping hand to the cooks in the kitchen. But that is a different episode to which I will come thereafter.

Back to where we were!

When Osimbo realized that her husband was in prep to come towards her house, she decided to take off for her dear life’s sake. Her parents’ home wasn’t that far from where she had been married. So she ran as fast as her legs could enable her to do. And on arrival at her parents’ home she found her father (Mzee Khainga) basking in the morning sunshine outside his hut. She went past him, straight into the house and underneath her father’s bed.

When Mukabi realized that his guitar was with its string number one missing he followed after her as fast as lightening. It was a matter of sheer luck that he could not catch up with her on the way before she reached her parents’ home! One could keep guessing what Mukabi would have done to her – in the circumstance! However, he could not give up the chase ‘til its final end – a thing that landed him to his final day on this earth.

The musician went straight to Osimbo’s home, entered Mzee Khainga’s homestead, and went past this Mzee, and entered his hut. On looking around, he failed to see his wife. He concluded that she must have hidden in her father’s bedroom. So he entered that bedroom to see if he could find his ‘culprit.’ He found nobody inside there! But when he checked underneath the bed, he found her lying underneath there with her tummy faced downwards. He began to box her vigorously as she cried for her father’s help.

The father, who was too old to wrestle with the man of extraordinary stature, decided not to enter his hut, and, instead, he began to make the kind of noise people make at our home place if invaded with enemies. It was now going on 9:30 AM, and many young people were in the shambas weeding their beans and maize. The kind of voice Mzee Khainga made was self-explanatory – that an

enemy had invaded their Mzee and therefore it was now their full responsibility to do the needful! They had come onto the compound of this Mzee Khainga as quickly as they could to solve the problem. Mzee showed them where the ‘enemy’ was. They found George Mukabi very busy beating and pulling his wife from underneath the father-in-law’s bed. They immediately started cutting him by use of the hoes, pangas [machetes], and swords they had been using on their farms. But because he was a tall and well-built giant, he managed to wrestle with them ‘til he escaped with deep cuts onto his spinal cord, his head, and legs. His home was now yonder there – right across River Yala. He managed to run down the river and crossed through an African bridge while bleeding profusely. But when he began to climb up the steep hill so that he could branch to a path leading to his homestead, he was out of oxygen and fell down.

Across the river, from where he had come, the crowd was still keeping their wakeful eyes on him. When they realized that he was unable to move, they ran very fast towards him and began to cut him into pieces. They brought an ox-cart, put his body pieces onto it, and took them to Kakamega General Hospital. Those pieces of his body were reassembled at the hospital and kept in the morgue to await for George Mukabi’s next-of-kin to come to collect them for burial.

It must be mentioned here that before he left the city of Nairobi for his home, he had recorded two songs, namely “Tom Itabale” and “Bibi Rael (Festo Amahaya).” It can therefore be said that his last two songs on his mission of making music for us are those two named above. And his first Kiswahili songs were “Buno Nobushiro George” – a song composed in his mother tongue in praise of the dancing style he had invented – the Omutibo Style. The flipside of this 1st record was Omukhana Wautoto meaning Mzee Okutoto’s daughter who was beautiful but poor in character.

It had been stated that his last two songs were released much later after his burial. And therefore the people who were in love with his music in both Eastern and Central Africa began to think that their hero was still alive! Until an unknown guitarist who had been under-studying George Mukabi, known was Peter Akwabi, was taken to Nairobi by a man who used to accompany George Mukabi on vocals. The guitarist was just a mere boy who was still at school – doing his Standard VII class! The boy had composed a “Kifo Cha Mukabi,” meaning The Death of Mukabi. He was helped by this comrade of Mukabi to record the song so that when played over the radio, people would now come to terms with the bare truth that: indeed, George Mukabi was no more.

When the song was released it broke a new ground in that many people in Kenya, Uganda, Tanzania, Rwanda, Burundi, Congo and Cameroon rushed to shops to buy it. This led to the Asians who were in this business of recording to look for Mukabi’s comrade, send him back home in Kisa Location to fetch for the boy to come and record whatever else he had composed. The name of Mukabi’s comrade was Jack Malenya and he used to sing the upper tenor voice with Mukabi taking the lower one. This time around, he now joined the boy [Peter Akwabi himself] to handle the same voice he was used to: upper tenor, while the boy sang the lower one.

To cut the long story short, let me end by writing down here the lyrics of this song that was all about the death of GEORGE MUKABI.

KIFO CHA MUKABI

Josiah Ombogo namotokaa yake
Alitubeba kutoka Ebuahong
Sisi tulikuwa
Na Malenya wetu
Tukimpeleka
Kwa matanga ya George Mukabi

Tulipofika mji wa Emulunya
Tulikaribia kwao George
Bwana Malenya
Alipoona Kabwri
Alilia sana George wangu amekwenda wapi?

Watu Butsotso ni wabaya sana
Walikata George kama mti
George mwamba
Angalikuwa Kisa
Wasingemkata
Kama mti wa kunjenga mjumba

THE DEATH OF MUKABI

Josiah Ombogo had a car
And gave us a lift to Ebuahong
And in the company
Of our beloved Malenya
We took him
To the funeral function of George Mukabi

When we arrived at Emulunya village
Glancing at Mukabi’s grave,
Mister Malenya
Could not control crying
He said: “Where is my George?”

Those from Butsotso location were very bad people
For if George The Rock
Were in his home place Kisa
They would not have managed
To cut him into pieces
Like the logs of trees
That are used for building houses

Peter Akwabi,
God Bless 05.02.2017

GEORGE MUKABI: FURAHA WENYE GITA



JACK MALENYA (LEFT) AND GEORGE MUKABI

Rarely do the memories of old men align. But as I traveled through Kenya interviewing old musicians, one story never changed:

“George Mukabi was the giant of Kenyan guitar.”

Peter Akwabi tells me this in his ground floor apartment in an industrial suburb of Nairobi. It’s 2016, but he describes, for many hours and in great detail, Kenya in the crackling final years before independence, when his mentor George Mukabi reigned.

Throughout the 1950s, in his home village in western Kenya, Mukabi developed an intricate acoustic style called Omutibo. On a single guitar, he simultaneously picked out bass, rhythm, and lead lines. His backup consisted of a Fanta bottle scraped with a spoon and the high harmonies of his faithful partner Jack Malenya.

The studio wizards in Nairobi looked down on the simple country style. “You come with one guitar and spoons as if you’re going to dine in my studio?” the record producer Charles Worrod asked Peter Akwabi. But the records Mukabi cut sold throughout the region. He was one of East and Central Africa’s biggest stars when he was murdered in a family dispute in 1963.

Despite his regional fame, Mukabi’s music was never officially released outside of Kenya, and little is known about the man.

With permission from his surviving family, we are releasing as many of George Mukabi’s songs as we are able to uncover. 10 are included on this album. The rest are available for free download. The total number of his recordings is still unknown.

We also set out to learn more about Mukabi’s life from those who knew him. Throughout the fertile Kisa and Kakamega regions of western Kenya, along the River Yala, and in the cities of Kisumu, Eldoret, and Nairobi, I met with Mukabi’s friends, colleagues, and family. Here, in interviews conducted in spring 2016, they tell the story better than I ever could.

Cyrus Moussavi, 2017, Athens

Thanks to Timothy Lusala, Bernad Yego, Hannington Steven Okoth, and Naman Obuyi for their work on this oral history – driving, searching for artists, translating, negotiating, making it happen. All interviews are transcribed in the original English, with the exception of our interview with Dorcas, which was conducted in and translated from Luhya by Timothy Lusala. Any contradiction, inaccuracy, exaggeration, full blown lie, myth or magic herein is a reflection of human memory and experience and celebrated as such.



DORCAS

We meet Dorcas at George Mukabi's abandoned homestead in the village of Emulunya. She says she's 125 years old. When we play Mukabi's music for her, she stands and begins to dance. The family has prepared a feast, and Tim interviews Dorcas in Luhya as she works through a plate of chicken stew, chapatti and rice.

I haven't had my chapatti yet, so I'm not full. I'm an old woman but I can still fight a bone. My teeth are still strong.

You're just a girl still. The girls of today, they're old.

I came here when I was 22 years old.

[The other side of the room, full of family and curious neighbors, erupts genially but insistently]: No, you were 20 years!

How many children do you have?

I have two children. One of them Sylvia, another one Roda.

Others: Only girls!

One of them has eight children.

Others: Dorcas! Can she hear? The kids who are calling you grandmother are how many??

I got children when I was late, so don't ask me.

George Mukabi played the guitar. Did you see him?

George Mukabi started playing guitar when I was already old.

Others: She was very old!

He was born when I was already here. I carried him, I washed him as a child, and I washed his children that you can see here. All these people you see here were born when I was here.

Others: She was already here when we were born, and now we are getting old.

His father really loved George. George resembled Mukubwa, his grandfather, so much.

Others: Oh, Mukubwa. He was a pastor.

George Mukabi, he used to get money through guitar. Anytime he used to go playing guitar, he used to come back with money. He used to give money to his father. Other money came from his cows that used to dig on peoples' shamba [small farms]. He also gave that money to his father. The other brothers and sisters that were following him were still young. He was the breadwinner.



JOHNSTONE OUKO MUKABI

George Mukabi's son from his first wife. Johnstone spent most of his life in Nairobi working as a gardener on British estates and playing his father's songs at bars and clubs when he could get time off. He has the uncanny ability to recreate Mukabi's complex guitar work in full. He's estranged from the family, and now works as a night watchman in a small village near Eldoret.

My father died in 1963, May. My father Mukabi. Was killed when he was with Sengula. He was killed there.

I was six. I was six. But he never showed me how to play guitar. I say that I can try. I can try to play as my father played. Let me try. Nobody showed me.

But he was happy. I [learned to] play one song, that one he was singing when he cried. His mama died when he was small. So he sing, "Mama, nice boy. Wife cannot be as good as Mama." "Bibi Mama Gani Mzuri." That's the first song I learned.

And you taught yourself?

Yeah I tried to play.

No one taught you.

Nobody. Nobody. Maybe God. Maybe God. Because nobody show me play like this. No, nobody tell me.



PETER AKWABI

A neighbor of Mukabi growing up, Peter Akwabi had a successful musical career and several big Omutibo hits of his own. Unlike most musicians of his generation, he also pursued higher education, serving as a professor at Kenyatta University in Nairobi for many years. Recently widowed, he lives near Nairobi and teaches Omutibo guitar.

When Mukabi died, Johnstone used to go to the grave and take that red soil, put it in his mouth, and the mother would come and say “No no no, don’t do that!”

In fact, I don’t know how he came to know to play. You can see how music can be inherited. He just inherited, and out of blue he started playing. And we found the boy was playing exactly! We encouraged him. We told him, “Go and get some records.” Just like Mukabi used to encourage me to go to Nairobi and record. So we encouraged the boy, and he has not lost that touch.

Mukabi died in Emulunya, but his home was in Kisa -- Kisa West. Our family shared the same fence with Mukabi’s. My elder sisters used to pass through a gap during the night to go to listen to Mukabi while he was practicing. Sometimes they could go with me. Not for protection, because I could not even kill a fly. I was a small boy. But they used to go with me so that should my father wake up in the night and find that they were not on the compound, he could not suspect anything bad had took place.

I was eight, nine years. I used to go and stand underneath a table in his cottage. I used to take that strategic place so I could clearly see how that guitar was being handled to produce sound.

He was a huge person, black, tall, with red eyes, and ever in a pullover, a red pullover with long sleeves. And underneath the sleeves he used to hide there a knife. This knife, at one time I saw it being put to use. Someone made noise when he was entertaining. He was just preparing to go to Nairobi to gang with [Jack] Malyena to cut a disc, the last record before he died – “Tom Itabale.”

He used to play and allow people to give comments as to if it was a good song or not before he could go to Nairobi to record. Some people started talking when he was playing this song. And he just put down the guitar, took out the knife, and knifed that person. He started bleeding profusely, and Mukabi went back to his guitar and continued playing. When people jumped and said, “Ah! Mukabi had knifed someone!” He

said, “Ah! Come back, come back and listen to music. It was just a small cut, a small cut. I didn’t knife him. It was a small cut.”

And he would just continue playing. And because of the love of his music, because the song was very catchy, people could forget about the person who had been knifed and just continue dancing.



JOHN NZENZE

A tall, thin wily old man, Nzenze was one of the stylish AGS Boys alongside John Mwale, Edward Nandwa, John Luongo, Tom Miti, Joseph Abbas, and Reuben Shimbiro. The house band for AGS (African Gramophone Stores) in Nairobi, they wore matching suits, rocked electric guitars, and traveled the world playing the Kenyan Twist. In his old age, Nzenze returned to his home village in Bunyore. A recent motorcycle crash put him off guitar. His claim to own the rights to AGS’ catalog (and by extension Mukabi’s music) is disputed.

Nairobi was a very small town. From Hilton Hotel to Railway Station was a forest. Just a forest when I was born. Even when I was playing music in the clubs. This development came just about 30 to 40 years. That is all.

I knew Mukabi well. We were recording in the same company [AGS]. Mukabi was a very good musician. He came to Nairobi with his own style of guitar, of one guitar. He was the only person who was playing the Omutibo. And it is his style performance.

When he recorded “Sengula Nakupenda,” this song broke out in East and Central Africa. Everybody wanted to buy the song.

But one thing -- Mukabi was very rude. Don’t try to correct him. Correct him once you will get it! Ha! And he was a strong person. So Mukabi was a very rude musician in the company, but every song he recorded was just a hit, just a hit, just a hit.

DORCAS

How did this person start playing guitar?

Murembe, he started playing Murembe [a traditional one string, bowed instrument also known as orutu in nearby Luoland].

George had his own cows. He was matata [hard, aggressive]. Sometimes you’ll think he’s coming back but he won’t come until the next day or two days.



PETER AKWABI

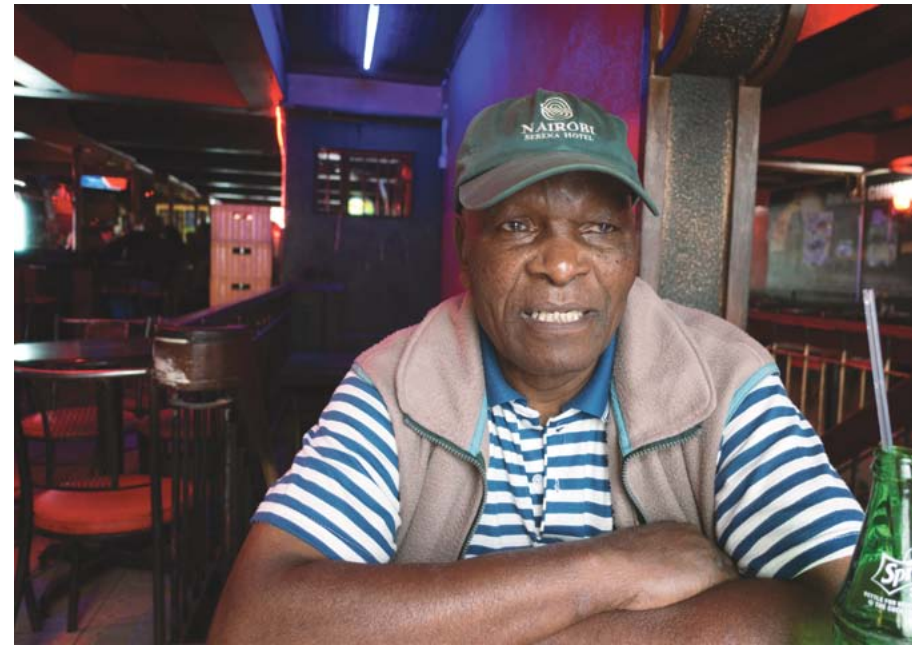
George Mukabi got excitement of playing guitar from someone known as George Sibanda (from Zimbabwe). Before Mukabi, George Sibanda was very, very popular in Kenya here. But when Mukabi came up with his style, he broke a new ground altogether. Now people forgot all about George Sibanda. People forgot about the Congolese music that had already started invading East Africa. And Mukabi became popular throughout East Africa and even Central Africa. Even the Congolese people used to like that style, because it sounded so unique to them. Because they were used to a band of three guitars – solo guitar, rhythm guitar, and then bass. But they hadn't seen a man playing a single acoustic guitar combining all those three things together in one thing.

How did he create this Omutibo style?

Through sheer creativity, I'm sure. Through sheer creativity. And also, you see, there is an old adage that "poverty provokes creativity." He did not go to school, and he had to survive. So when he found that his music could be loved by many people, he got interested and developed this style, and he could only develop it from within. Grazing from the sukuti drums and the nyatiti lyre of our area. And he also used to love dances. So it was not very hard for him to imitate George Sibanda, but then bring the style back home to what was nearest to him – the sukuti and the nyatiti.

The historical background of this style, from my studies, Mukabi picked it from a drum. A Luhya drum known as Sukuti. Sukuti drum, if you look at its rhythmic pattern, it's more or less the way the acoustic guitar plays. Also Kisa location borders Luoland. The Luos have got a lyre, an 8-stringed African musical instrument known as nyatiti. Now, when you look at that instrument and you hear how it sounds when an expert plays it, it sounds more or less like a person playing Omutibo on an acoustic guitar. So I seem to think that this style was mainly picked from the two instruments. The chordophone and the membranophone instruments.

His first record was in Luhya [Omukhana Wa Okutoto]. And it is the only record that he sang in Luhya. But it did not sell much. People did not like it very much. And then he switched. When he coupled with Jack Malenya, he started playing in Kiswahili. And now he became a darling of everyone. And he could not go back to Luhya again.



DAVID AMUNGA

An old legend of the Kenyan recording industry. One of the few African performers to make the transition from musician to producer. He ran several labels, including Mwangaza and Kassanga Star, but currently struggles to make ends meet in Nairobi.

I would say that song of his "Mtoto Si Nguo," it was in pure Luhya. It's me who translated it into Swahili. Because the [record] company had ruled out tribal languages. And I was the only one who could be able to speak [Swahili] those days. So most of the translation, it's me. But I can tell you if Mukabi would have sang that song in Luhya, it would have been sweeter. He lost a lot of material! The feeling, it was so good.

JOHNSTONE OUKO MUKABI

The Muindis [Indian record company owners] were kali [strong]. They love Mukabi because when he come to record, he is done quickly. Done, finish. There are some musicians who make some 6 hours practice. And when Mukabi comes Muindi tells them "Go, let Mukabi record." So they didn't like Mukabi for that. But Muindi love Mukabi for doing it quickly. When Mukabi come with a guitar, the people were in trouble. Mukabi finish one hour. Play, play, no repeat, done.

PETER AKWABI

Jack Malenya* was working with the [Kenya] Railways also, but as a stores-clerk.

So it was after duty that they would meet to do practice, in their estates, the place called Makongeni Estate, Nairobi. I can remember the house -- R6, door 59. That's where they used to meet to practice. It was only during December holiday they could be allowed to go home [to Kisa] and see their people and so forth and so on. And so when they came, it used to be a very big occasion. All the people are very anxious to see them.

* Jack Malenya was tragically killed in April, 2016. He was working as a night watchman (a common job for elderly men who do not have the means to retire) when he was beaten and robbed of his Kenya Railway pension payout. He was planning to return home to Kisa to retire within days. A few weeks after the funeral I arrived in Kenya and met with Malenya's nephew at Kenya Railway Station, who fondly told us that Malenya, a football obsessive, was known as "Man U" to friends and family. Even in his old age, he still sang.



JOHNSTONE OUKO MUKABI:

He was working in Kenya Railway with Malenya together. So he come home to Kakamega, make a song, go to record in Nairobi. After that he gets money, he comes back. He did not continue with the railway. Because you know, guitar is money.

The time he was alive he used to do music, to dance, play guitar. But he don't want anybody to make noise. Nobody make noise! That was the trouble. When you make noise, he take the guitar, and then beat you. He want those small children to come and stay. Sit. Be quiet. If any big person do a mistake, he throw him away.

You know he had a bicycle. He come home singing, singing. When I find him singing I hide. I go to the grass and hide somewhere. He say, "Come here! Johnstone, come come!" What I was doing is hiding so he can never beat me. When I hear the sound, I try to hide.

DORCAS:

His mother was the best dancer to his music. They called her Marash [perfume].

Others: Oh she really used to dance!

PETER AKWABI:

Mukabi dances used to start during the day, in the afternoon. We used to start with a football match. Those people who were working in Nairobi versus those people who were at home [in the village]. The two teams could really wrestle each other throughout the day. And then Mukabi could now take over. So you could imagine the crowd that had come to watch the football match, now gathering, moving closer, to listen to an acoustic guitar with just two people singing. George Mukabi, Jack Malenya, with a Fanta bottle.

At one time I used to accompany them with a Tusker bottle knocking, knocking with a spoon. A table spoon. So you could find just three people doing that, and people dancing to that.

They used to perform not inside the house, but at an open arena, where everybody could come. You can imagine, they didn't have any amplification on their acoustic guitars. But still people were able to consume that music! Everyone was just dancing. Some people I'm sure could not hear what the acoustic guitar was sounding like, but they could just dance by imitating the rhythmic patterns of their neighbors. You just look how the person next to you is moving, and then you just move like that. Ha!

During those occasions I can't remember ever sleeping at all. We could play throughout the night up to morning, and then early in the morning we are treated to strong tea with green bananas and then off we go.

The places [we performed] used to be very, very far. Walking. Busia is on the border of Kenya and Uganda, and you could walk all the way from Kisa. Mukabi could come on a bicycle, carrying Jack Malenya. The rest of us, the rest of the supporting crew, could just go walking.

At times Mukabi could carry his guitar on his back, but other times he could leave it to me to walk up to the place. I could arrive at the place very late in the evening.

There was nothing like electricity during that time. They used to light some fire. There used to be lanterns, lights all over.

The names of the dances were picked from the kind of instruments that were used. So you could find that sukuti drums, whenever they held dances, people would say, "We are going to dance Sukuti." The dances used not to discriminate. You could find old people dancing along together with young people. But late in the evening old people could give way to young people now to dance and do some courtship and so forth and so on.

Now Mukabi used not to be paid anything to go to those occasions. He used to make his money by people, those individuals who appreciated a given song, could actually move near him and put some money in his guitar, through the hole of the soundbox. Now you can imagine in the morning when he gave me the guitar to carry, it was so heavy, it was full of coins, and a few notes, of course. So I could go and sit somewhere with Jack Malenya to remove all those coins and notes, and then we could put in a bag of some kind and give to him.

It was a big, a big achievement to me. I could tell people "Do you know the owner of this guitar? It belongs to George Mukabi." I could threaten my peer group with that kind of talking. I used to be very proud and very satisfied, just with that alone. And the fact that I was in their company, and that they would allow me to play a song or so when they were tired, that alone satisfied me so much.

DORCAS:

See I've told you, Mukabi was very strong. See he was really beating his wife, and then he followed her to her parents' place. He was matata. He was really somebody very hot tempered

Which wife was that? The first, second or third?

Others: Second wife!

What was the name of that lady? The second wife.

Dorcas: Who? Osimbo.

Others: Jennifer Osimbo!

Is Osimbo still there?

Others: She died.

Dorcas: Their family came from a clan called Valakai, Vakashira. The stepfather was arrested when Mukabi died. And when he was released from jail, he died after a few days. Even his daughter died. All the people of that family died. Now, the clan of Valakai was cursed. Anybody who touched George Mukabi, that house would go down. People pass through tough lives.

PETER AKWABI:

The wife, Osimbo, ran mad. But I think she was just provoked beyond human withstanding. She went mad and she started picking some magazines at the marketplace around Kisumu, singing Mukabi's songs. She did that for many years. I think she should be dead by now.

But quite a number of people now emerged from Kisa. One after another, one after another. William Osale*, a fantastic Omutibo guitarist, Herbert Misango**, just from the same same area, a fantastic guitarist, and then Henry Misango, a fantastic guitarist. And then Humphrey Eshitool, very, very good guitarist from Omutibo***.

I recorded my first record in 1963, August 28th at 4:30pm. They released it immediately. And when it was released, it was the one that gave out the spelling of Mukabi's death. That is "Kifo Cha Mukabi" [Death of Mukabi]. People...they bought it emotionally. Not that it was great music. According to me it wasn't even my greatest music, but people were emotional. Just because of Mukabi. They got so emotional that they kept buying it and buying it.

JOHN NZENZE:

It was very sad to us. Because he was just healthy. He was good, we like him because he brought our company up. Every record of our company was just hit, hit, hit. Even me, I tried my best, I had about nine hits. So the company gave me a small car. Moritz. A gift. A small Moritz 1100. So I was the first musician now driving. Ha!

★ Osale, one of the stars of Omutibo, turns out to be Mukabi's younger brother. According to Johnstone, they didn't get along so well, and Osale (which means "The Vomitor") only picked up guitar after Mukabi's death.

★★ No relation between the two Misangos. Herbert Misango worked for many years at Nairobi's famous Melodica Music Store.

★★★ Of the next generation of Omutibo players, Akwabi says: I don't think there was that tedious competition amongst Omutibo players. If anything we used to help one another. For instance, if Humphrey Eshitool were to come to Nairobi to record, he would actually invite me all the way from my place to walk on foot right up to his place. I would stay a whole day, after listening to all the numbers he'll come to Nairobi to record and having advised and contributed a lot or given him an opinion. And then he would escort me and we would walk back home. It used to be very, very common, that kind of practice.



JOHNSTONE OUKO MUKABI:

I saw when they put him in the coffin. They come with his music, they play for me. When he die we played the gramophone, yeah? To hear his sound. But he never wake up.

When my father die they take the suit, the bicycle, the albums. They do not make sure I do well. It was not good for me.

Then I run away. Yeah, beating then I run away. So never fight with them. Nowadays, they cannot take my things. But that time I still small. Mzee [the old man] die when I still small.

So Johnstone try to follow. Can I play like father? I also try. I hear Mzee, when he play, very nice, I hear his voice. I know my father is gone, so I hear his sound. I say oh! My father is still here. But not really. Father died. But I hear the sound. That is why I like to always play music. Maybe when I die, he will hear. Johnstone gone, but a good musician. So I will be happy.



A1. SENGULA NAKUPENDA

Sengula, I love you I had lots of love for you, baby	Sengula ninakupenda Nilikuwa nakupenda mama
Refrain: You! Sengula Oh! My dear Sengula I had lots of love for you	Refrain: Sengula wee! Oh! Sengula wangu Nilikuwa nakupenda
It were better if we loved each other dearly Only that way will our family earn respect	Ni vizuri tupendane Na nyumba yetu iwe na heshima
(Refrain)	(Refrain)
I seem to be getting tired with your behavior And I better send you back to your parents	Nimechoka na mambo yako Na nikutume nakwenu sasa
(Refrain)	(Refrain)

A2. FESTO AMAHAYA

You! Lady Rael! Do you remember what you did? Lady Rael Do you recall what you did How you told Festo “Let’s go to Kisumu” So that you may be his wife!	Eee! Bibi Rael! Kumbuka kitu ulifanya Bibi Rael Kumbuka kitu ulifanya Kumwambia Festo “Hebu tuende Kisumu Nokawe mimi ni bibi”
But when you reached Kisumu You stole all Festo’s belongings You reached Kisumu You stole all Festo’s belongings And left him with nothing	Mlipofika Kisumu Ukaiba vitu vya nyumba Milifika Kisumu Ukaiba vitu vya nyumba Ukamwacha Festo pekee
You women of these days It were better we employed Sharp housekeepers To keep an eye on you To wait at home To wait at home Because of shoplifting!	Kumbe bibi wa siku hizi Tuandike watoto Bibi wa siku hizi Tuandike watoto Wawalinde kunyumba Wawalinde kunyumba Mpaka miezi lalu ukuishe
<i>Theft on theft!</i> <i>Theft is bad</i>	<i>Shauri ya wizi</i> <i>Wizi ni mbaya</i>

A3. DAUDI NYANZA

Daudi Nyanza is our own home born He read books until he ended up in America	Daudi Nyanza ni mtoto wetu Alisoma mpaka America
But when he came back to our country He finally died	Aliporudi nchi ya kwetu Mwisho yake yeye alikufa
My people if you don’t like progressive men It is better if we were all rich and equal	Watu wa kwetu kama hamtaki watu Watu wote wawe watajiri
Chemsumu Muli is crying a lot In the name of this Daudi Nyanza	Chemsumu Muli nalia sana Kwa jina lake uyu Daudi Nyanza
<i>Oh, my brother</i>	<i>Oh, ndugu wangu</i>

A4. BIBI MZURI NYUMBANI

As we stand here to sing We must realize one thing If one has a wife at his house It is very important indeed	Kuimba tunaimba Lakini kweli tukumbuke Ukiwa na bibi Kunyumba yako, ni vizuri
A wife at your house Is likely to give birth to a child Who will bring respect to your family And you’re likely to see many of Your cousins coming to you	Ukiwa na bibi Kunyumba yako ni vizuri Na bibi naye kweli Na ndiye tena atazaa mtoto Taleta heshima nyingi kwako Taoha wantugu wengi kwako
If you have a child at your house It is very important in that It is the child who’ll bring respect to you All your cousins will drift towards you	Ukiwa na mtoto Kunyumba yako ni vizuri Na mtoto ndiye kweli Taleta heshima nyingi sanaa Taona wandugu wengi kwako

A5. BIBI MAMA GANI MZURI?

The trouble I encountered last year Reminds me of my mother Reminds me of my mother, Shikobe	Iletaabu nilipata mwaka uliopita Ilinikumbusha jina la mama yangu Ilinikumbusha jina la mama Shikobe
At times I see some people praising their wives Saying that they’re better than their mothers	Naona watu wengi wanasifu bibi zao Eti wanasema: anashinda mama yake
Ayoooooooooooooooooooo	Ayoooooooooooooooooooo
At times I see some people praising their wives Saying that they’re better than their mothers But let them remember that a mother Is the best of them all! For she carried you in her womb Til nine months Had ended And she gave birth to you She gave birth to you And then she stood the cost of your education And when you finished That is how you managed to get a wife! And so remember A mother of anyone is the best of them all!	Naona watu wengi wanasifu bibi zao Eti wanasema: anashinda mama yake Lakini kumbuka Kweli ndiye mama yako Alikubeba kwa tumbo Mpaka miezi tisa Zilipokwisha Ndipo alikuzaa Alikuzaa Tena akakusomesha Ulipomaliza Ndipo ukaoa bibi Kwa hivyo kumbuka Mama ndiye mzuri
<i>Oh, Shikobe!</i>	<i>Oh, Shikobe!</i>

Let’s take the example of Joshua Kochwa Up to now he still laments his mother Esther That she died when he was at a tender age He underwent many difficulties And even when he got married When he thought the wife Would come to solve all his problems But she did not! So we should keep in our mind: A mother of anyone is the best of them all! And so remember our mothers are the foundation And today we are crying [complaining] About our mother-in-laws	Joshua kochwa analia mama Esther Alimwacha Akiwa angali mdogo Alikuwa na bibi Alipata taabu sana Tena bibi Hakumaliza taabu Kwa hivyo kumbuka Mama ndiye mzuri! Kwa hivyo kumbuka mama ndiye msingi, Leo tunalia yule mama mkwe
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A6. KUOA UTAOA

Marrying is ok One may get married But after marrying Trouble may follow Almost immediately	Kuoa utaoa, tuoe bibi Akifika kunyumba Anaanza matata Akifika kunyumba Anaanza matusi
A long time ago, wives were good She'd quickly pick a waterpot To run to a local spring To bring water for your bathing She'd take finger millet To go to grind	Zamani sana, ukioa bibi Akifika kunyumba Na mtungi wa maji Akuletee maji, uende uoge Aeendekwa wimbi Anaenda kusaga
A long time ago, wives were good If you sent her for something, She'd go running	Zamani sana, bibi wazuri Ukimtuma kitu, anakwenda mbio
Daudi Okwaro, a very good driver He picked me from my home And brought me back safely Kenyan taxi, Daudi Okwaro He took me to my home village To see my father He took me to my home village To see my mother	Daudi Okwaro, dereva mzuri Alinitoa kwetu, akanirudisa kwetu Kenya taxi Daudi Okwaro Akanirudisa kwetu Nione baba Akanirudisa kwetu Nione mama

B1. FURAHA WENYE GITA

Today let's recall Like the day We went to Ebukhoba	Siku ya leo tukumbuke Kama siku moja Si tulienda kule Ebukhoba
We had three girls And we had gone to pay Josiah Ombogo a visit	Tulikuwa na wasichana tatu Tulikwenda kule kumwona Josiah Ombogo
He did one bad thing to us He snatched all our girls And hid them in one of his houses	Kitu moja alitukosea Kachukuwa wote Akaficha ndani ya nyumba yake
If you want to look for happiness Go and make friends with any guitarist	Ukitaka raha kwako Kwenda bembeleza yule mpigaji wa gita
Mukabi: <i>Liar!</i> Malenya: <i>It's true!</i>	Mukabi: <i>Nuwongo!</i> Malenya: <i>Ni kweli!</i>

Let's moan upon the death of Makutsa We should mourn the death of Makutsa Omucharachara	Tumlie Makutsa wafa Tena tuhalia Makutsa wetu Omucharachara
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B2. RAHA INOPOTEZA

Enjoyment in Nairobi, enjoyment in Nairobi Has misled me, has misled me	Raha Nairobi, raha Nairobi Imenipoteza, imenipoteza
There are many years, there are many years That I haven't gone home, that I haven't gone home	Miaka mingi iyo, miaka mingi iyo Sijafika kwetu, sijafika kwetu
My father and mother, my father and mother, Are waiting for me, are waiting for me	Baba na mama, baba na mama, Wananingojea, wananingojea
I don't know, I don't know, If I am bewitched, if I am bewitched	Mimi sijui, mimi sijui, Kama nimerogwa, kama nimerogwa
<i>Oh George Mukabi!</i>	<i>Oh George Mukabi!</i>

B3. JARED ONYANGO

Today is your happy day, Jared Onyango	Ni furaha kwako Jared Onyango leo
We are singing to you, we are singing to you, We are singing to the great boss of the railway	Tunaimba wewe, tunaimba wewe, Tunaimba wewe mkubwa wa reli
We are requesting everyone from our place	Tunaomba watu wote wa kwetu
When you get at our place, when you get at our place, When you get at our place, you be great again	Ukifika kwetu, ukifika kwetu, Ukifika kwetu uwe mkubwa tena
Who doesn't know that Jared Onyango is a great man?	Ni nani asiyejua Jared Onyango ni mkubwa?
All Wakhayo, all Wakhayo, All Wakhayo love Onyango again	Wakhayo wote, wakhayo wote, Wakhayo wote wanapenda Onyango tena
<i>Even Patrick Odunga loves Onyango very much</i>	<i>Hata Patrick Odunga anapenda Onyango sana</i>

B4. TOM ITABALE

We Kenyans are in trouble To help us out of this mess We should pray to our God Let him save us	Kumbe sisi wanakenya Tuko kwa mateso Tumwombe Mola Mpaka naye atuoko
Kisumu, Mamboleo	Kisumu, Mamboleo,
Neneheneeee!	Neneheneeee!
This man called Tom Itabale Came from Uganda To attend Firikita's funeral at Kiringiri	Huyu Tom Itabale Alitoka Uganda Kufika Kiringiri kwa matanga ya Firikita
Three young men came too From a certain town in Uganda To attend Firikita's funeral at Kiringiri	Vijana watatu walitoka Muji wa Uganda Kufika Kiringiri kwa matanga ya Firikita
But when they returned to their work in Uganda They were all sacked Because they came to attend Firikita's funeral	Waliporudi Uganda Wote walitozwa Makazini mwao kwa matanga ya Firikita

B6. MTOTO SI NGUO

It isn't a piece of cloth! A child isn't like A piece of cloth that you'd Just borrow from anyone	Si nguo Utaomba mtu Mtoto si nguo Utaomba mtu baba
If you don't have one That's when you'll realize And cry	Kikosa wakoe Utaliamama
Me, George, the Rock I keep crying I do not have one! That's why I'm crying!	George Mwamba sina wangu Nakosa wangu Nihalia sana mama
Odongo Nzofu, Nzofu died And all of Kashira clan Keeps crying because of him	Odongo Nzofu, Nzofu wafwa Kashira wote Wanalia sana mama



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