



## Popular Music Education: Insights from Tabuley's 'Muzina'

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### Abstract

Tabu Ley Rocherou was a renowned popular musician and songwriter. Most listeners to his music knew/know him for his secular popular music themes, structures and performance styles. However, his song 'Muzina' is arguably his best rendered Christian worship music in terms of thematic concerns, choice of lyrics, development, structure and performance techniques – albeit conceived along popular and secular dance music styles. In this paper, I endeavour to unearth, enumerate, discuss, elaborate and demonstrate critical song writing nuggets evident in Tabu Ley's 'Muzina' for purposes of informing pathways and filling knowledge gaps in popular music education. The paper is underpinned by popular music composition, performance and analysis theories and common practices that cut across secular and sacred genres. Song lyrics and recorded music form key units of discussion and analysis that drive coherent debatable issues – generally in popular music studies and specifically in song writing practice. Eventually, the paper generates and recommends several best practices for song writing as exemplified in Tabu Ley's 'Muzina'. The insights will, hopefully, be informative to upcoming and experienced song writers, popular musicians (performers and composers) and music educators at all levels. This paper is premised on the fact that listening and deeply analysing popular hit songs like Muzina is a recipe for nurturing and rejuvenating song writing skills.

**Key Words:** Muzina, Tabu Ley, Congo, Lingala, Music, Prayer

### Background Information

#### Linguistic Background of the Song "Muzina" (In the name of...)

According to Baongoli (2009), "Muzina" is a song composed in two languages: Kikongo and Lingala. The title of the song "Muzina" is in Kikongo language while the lyrics of the song is a mixture of Kikongo and Lingala. These two languages are two of the four national languages in DRC. The four national languages in DRC are Lingala, Kikongo, Tshiluba and Congolese Swahili (Kingwana). Although Tabu Ley's mother tongue is not Lingala, he spoke Lingala fluently because he spent most of his life in Kinshasa where Lingala is used as a lingua franca. In addition to Lingala, he was also fluent in French and he could speak some English. Most of his songs were composed in Lingala, French, a blend of Lingala and French, Kikongo, Kiswahili, English etc. In this song (Muzina), he blended Kikongo and Lingala very well. In the beginning of the song, he starts with Kikongo words such as 'muzina' (in the name of...), 'tata' (father), 'mwana' (son), 'mpevesantu' (Holy Ghost), then later he switches to Lingala. Baongoli further observes that in linguistics, this phenomenon is known as code switching or language mixing. He notes that code switching is extremely common in Lingala songs because of the multi-linguistic background of the two Congos.

With regard to the aspect of the code-switching in Muzina, it is worth noting that the two languages - Kikongo and Lingala - are both Bantu languages. They are related and they share so many words. This implies that there are many words used in Kikongo and Lingala that are the same. For example, as Baongoli observes, 'tata', 'mwana', 'santu' are exactly the same in the two languages. Therefore, it is



sometimes difficult to distinguish which word is from Kikongo and which one is from Lingala. Code-switching is used by many song writers in order to achieve the rhyme scheme and for purposes of conveying hidden meanings in a particular song.

### **Life history of Tabu Ley**

Tabu Ley Rochereau, who is also known as ‘Le Seigneur’ (French for the Lord), was one of the most influential African rumba Congolese vocalists, songwriters and band leaders. He was born on 13<sup>th</sup> November, 1940, at Bagata, Kwilu, in Bandundu Province in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC). He was born as a Pascal-Emmanuel Sinamoyi. During Mobutu’s policy of ‘recours a l’authenticite’, Pascal adopted his parents’ names namely Tabu and Ley. He then became Tabu Ley. When he was in school at “Athenee Royale de Kalina”, he nicknamed himself “Le Marechal Rochereau”. Later Rochereau became part of his name.

He started singing in the Church Choir and in choirs of the schools that he attended. In 1954, when he was only 14 years old, he wrote his first song ‘Bessama Muchacha’ which he recorded with Joseph Kabasele (Grand Kalle’s) band, African Jazz. After finishing high school, he joined the band as a full time musician. Tabu Ley sang the Pan-African hit song ‘Independance Cha Cha’ which was composed by Grand Kalle when DRC was declared an independent nation in 1960, propelling him to instant fame. He remained with African Jazz until 1963 when, together with Dr. Nico Kasanda, they formed their own band known as “African Fiesta”.

Two years later, Tabu Ley and Dr. Nico Kasanda split over artistic differences. Tabu Ley went to form “African Fiesta National” which was also known as “African Fiesta Flash”. The group became one of the most successful bands in African history, recording African classics like ‘Mokili Mobimba’ (The Entire World) and surpassing record sales of one million copies by 1970. It is while at African Fiesta National that Tabu Ley launched his “Rochettes”. These were lady dancers who accompanied the band and danced in the second part of the song known as “seben”. In December 1970, Tabu Ley travelled to Paris to perform music in Olympia, the famous French Music hall in which all Congolese Artists dreamt of performing their music therein. This was organized by the Frenchman known as Bruno Coquatrix. When he came back from Paris, he renamed his band as “Orchestre Afrisa International”. Tabu Ley’s Afrisa, and Franco’s TP Ok Jazz, were for a long time in 1970s and 1980s Africa’s greatest bands.

Dr. Nico, on the other hand, went along with his “African Fiesta Sukisa” faction, and continued to perform with the other members of the group. In the early 1981, Tabu Ley discovered a young talented singer and dancer, M’mbilia Bel, who helped popularize the band further. M’mbilia Bel became a part of Afrisa and later she got married to Tabu Ley and gave birth to one daughter called ‘Melodie Tabu’ who is also a singer. Before Mbilia Bel, Tabu Ley was married to Georgette Mowana (popularly known as Tete) and they had five children. In 1987, Tabu Ley introduced another female vocalist known as Faya Tess (real name was Kishila Nggoyi). Mbilia Bel left Afrisa in the late 80’s to start a solo career. After Mbilia Bel’s departure, Afrisa’s influence along with that of their rivals TP OK Jazz continued to wane as fans started preferring the younger generation of musicians. In the early 1990’s, Tabu Ley briefly settled in Southern California in the US from where he released the hit gospel song “Muzina” in 1994. There, he began to tailor his music towards an international audience by including some English in his songs. In the gospel song, Muzina, Tabu Ley exhorts everyone to pray to God and thank God for his blessings. It is worth noting that during this period, Tabu Ley had fled from Zaire because the then Zairean president Mobutu Sese Seko had threatened him after Tabu Ley had criticised him. Fearing for his life, Tabu Ley left Zaire and settled in California where he released a number of albums including Muzina. This episode is a pointer to the fact that the immediate environment and the situation one finds



himself/herself may influence greatly the content and style of a songwriter as evidenced in Tabu Ley's situation.

Tabu Ley also became a political leader after Mobutu's regime. When the late president Mobutu was deposed in 1997, Tabu Ley returned to Kinshasa and took up a position as a member of parliament during the regime of Laurent Kabila. In 2005, he was appointed Deputy-governor in the capital of Kinshasa. He also served as provincial minister of culture, arts and tourism. In 2008, when he came back from Cuba where he got the award of "Musicien africain du cinquantenaire" (African Musician of the past fifty years), his health started deteriorating. It is said that he had a stroke and he was admitted in Kinshasa and was later transferred in Europe. His health became a matter of concern and speculation especially with the media. In 2010, Tabu Ley was 70 years old and had clocked 50 years in his musical career. Baongoli observes that this is an accomplishment because not so many stars have been able to achieve such an accomplishment. Tabu Ley was in and out of the hospital in Europe since 2008 and later died on 30<sup>th</sup> November, 2013 at Brussels, Belgium and was honoured with a state burial ceremony. It is worth noting that since making his professional debut in 1954, Tabu Ley wrote more than 2,000 songs. He won many musical awards and remains one of the greatest musicians that DRC has ever produced. On the whole, it is estimated that he crafted over 3,000 songs.

### Summary of the song "Muzina"

This song is composed in a secular popular music style song but loaded with a religious message. The song is a prayer performed by Tabu Ley in a bid to protect himself against his perceived enemies. The title of the song "Muzina" means "in the name of" in Kikongo language. Kiswahili speakers, can identify the word "jina" (name) in "Muzina". Kikongo language has some words that are similar to other Bantu languages. The word "Muzina" is taken from a common phrase used by Christians, especially Catholics, at the beginning and end of every prayer. It is from the phrase "in the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Ghost..." In the Catholic Church, this phrase is performed using the sign of the cross with the right hand, and a believer will say "In the name of the Father, and the Son and the Holy Ghost, Amen". By repeating the phrase over and over, in the chorus section, Baongoli (2009), opines that the song is given power and also empathetically connects with the listeners.

In this song, Tabu Ley uses the phrase 'muzina' as a part of his prayer, just like any Christian, more so from the catholic denomination would do. His prayer is a lamentation to God about people, perceived to be his enemies, who want him dead. He tells his enemies that he believes in God and for that matter they cannot harm him because God is his protector. He starts the song with a prayer phrase "In the name of the Father, and the Son, and the Holy Ghost". Then he goes on to remind sinners that they have rejected God and they have neglected him in good times, but God's name is powerful and God's grace will forgive them. In some parts of the song, he lashing out at his opponents who don't wish him well. He tells them that although they have continued to insult him, to gossip about him, to plot bad thing against him, to give him death threats, he is innocent and he depends on God for protection. He goes on to pray to God for protection because, as he points out in the song, his only medicine in such situations, since childhood has been prayers to God. He says he has never visited witch doctors for protection because since his childhood he was an altar boy (in reference to Catholic church service) and he always believes in prayers. He advises his enemies to fear God and to read the bible (Tangaka Bible). In the remaining part of the song, he calls upon everybody to praise God, to sing for God (toyembela Nzambe nkolo na biso). In a nutshell, Tabu Ley, through this song prays for his life because of perceived enemies who he thinks are out to harm him. In order to make his prayer/song simple and relate with the high and the low in society, Tabu Ley decides to use the Muzina common



phrase, known by many Christians all over the world. No wonder the song has remained a force to reckon with for a couple of decades.

### **Thematic gospel content concerns**

The main thematic concern that the song addresses is basically gospel message anchored on the fact that God as an able protector of his faithful who pray and consult his counsel from the Bible. This is exemplified through the use of phrases such as: Tangaka Bible – read the Bible; Yembayemba - Sing, sing (for the lord God); Lilobaya Nzambe – You should know the word of God etc.

### **Choice of lyrics**

A cursory overview of the lyrics reveal that over 90% of the words and terms used squarely situate the song in the Christian gospel and/or worship category. Some vocabulary used in the song “Muzina” and their meanings are as listed below:

1. **Basumuki:** sinners (singular: mosumuki)
2. **Bisengo:** happiness
3. **Bomengo:** wealth
4. **Bomwana:** childhood
5. **Ekoti:** hat
6. **Kolimbisa:** to forgive
7. **LilobayaNzambe:** the word of God
8. **Liputa:** loin cloth, wrappers for Congolese women
9. **Litambala:** headscarf
10. **Losambo:** prayer
11. **Mouchoir(French):** handkerchief
12. **Mpevesantu**(from Kikongo): Holy Ghost, Holy Spirit
13. **Mpeve** (from Kikongo) holy
14. **Ngai:** me
15. **Muzina:** (from Kikongo) in the name of
16. **Nkembo:** grace, power
17. **Nkisi:** talisman, charm
18. **Nkolo:** The Lord (i.e. God)
19. **Nkolonabiso:** Our Lord – the only God
20. **Nkombo:** name
21. **Ntembe:** doubt
22. **Nzambe:** God
23. **Nzoto:** body
24. **Santu:** spirit, ghost
25. **Tata:** the father

### **Developmental and structural features**

Tabu Ley employed monophonic textures in solos, declamations/narrations. He also uses polyphony in terms of the use of seconds, thirds, unisons at an octave, instrumental accompaniments and pure instrumental sections. The song structure is made up of: The intro/prelude/exposition, development section with various subsections (a busy section that entails tempo variations, completion of textual messages and themes, varied repetitions solo-response/question-answer); and coda/postlude/ seben – a busier than the prelude and development section. In the last section band leader/the lead singer, in this case Tabu Ley, encourages a band-audience interaction during the performance by calling upon the audience to be involved in the dance and perform actions like: removing hats from their heads, waving



handkerchiefs, standing, dancing and singing along with the band. In a nutshell, the overall song structure is based on seven major subsections namely: A, B, C, A2, D, E and E2. For purposes of analysis, all phrases in the song (including repeats) are numbered from 1 to 63. Section A entails phrases 1 to 5. It basically serves as an introduction/exposition/prelude. It is characterised by a short solo chant in a half-singing-half-talking style, more or less like the Gregorian chant style, followed by a comparatively long choral response in the same style. The tempo adopted in this section is slow and solemn hence setting a prayerful mood. Phrases 6 and 7 are repeats of phrase 1 and 2 with a very slight inflexion at the beginning. The repeat serves to ground the main theme of the song that can as well be termed as a musically performed prayer.

Section B (phrases 8 – 15) is ushered in by a bridge that rhythmically and melodically mimics motifs in this section. It is a contrast to section A in that it is rendered in a livelier mood and fast tempo. This section displays intensive instrumentation in comparison with section A, thereby demonstrating an upward musical developmental trend in terms of texture and intensity. It is dominated by a solo vocal question phrases that are answered by almost the same melodic instrumental phrase with an alteration of one note or two. Section B is wound up by a bridge that smoothly sets in section C. Just like the bridge between section A and B, the bridge between section B and C employs a motif that melodically and rhythmically mimics the melodic and rhythmic structures in section C. Section C is characterised by a question and response between the instrumental part and voices in harmonies rendered in parallel seconds and thirds. Phrases 16 – 19 are exactly repeated rhythmically and melodically in phrases 20 – 23, possibly for purposes of emphasising the gospel message therein.

The fourth section is A2 (phrases 32 – 39). Phrases 32 and 33; 35 and 36 and 38 and 39 are an exact repeat of phrase 1 and 2 phrase in section A save for the faster tempo – the same tempo adopted for the entire song. In this section, structurally, phrase 32 and 33 form a chorus followed by a verse (phrase 34). Likewise, phrase 35 and 36 form a chorus followed by a verse (phrase 37). Finally, section A2 winds up with phrase 38 and 39 as the chorus. Unlike clearly elaborate bridges between section A and B, and C and A2, the transition between A2 and D is marked with a very insignificant bridge that almost sounds like an instant switch to the section D. This could also be a technique by employed by the songwriter to avoid predictable structural monotony.

Section D which is the climactic section of the song is definitely the longest section and it carries much of the gospel content that is punctuated with the soloist's exhortation for the congregants or the audience to sing the answering phrase 'yemba yemba' which means 'sing along, sing along.' The transition from section D and section E is so much like that between sections A2 and D with no clear bridge, arguably as earlier suggested, for purposes of avoiding predictable structural monotony. Section E has a coda (phrases 60 – 62) and a codetta, E2 (phrase 63). The coda is signalled with the phrase 60 (yelele, yelele) which may not mean anything apart from expression of joy. Similarly, the ending of the codetta (phrase 63) with a ululation is quite significant as a perfect final punctuation of celebratory praise singing, more so, in the African context. Additionally, the coda is rendered with a voice-over that is laced on a lively instrumental section. The voice over gives several instructions to the audience such as: 'Let things go berserk, put your hands up'; 'Take out your handkerchief, headscarf, wrapping cloth, hat, sing for God.' Finally, the song cools off with a codetta where everyone sings: Eh Yahweh, Eh Yahweh, i.e. Eh God, Eh God, as vocal answer to a short instrumental question - supposedly in praise and wonderment of God's greatness and mighty power.

### **Performance techniques and style**

Tabu Ley's performance and presentational technique is based on storytelling where he talks about self-real life story – since childhood to the day he sang the song. Possibly, this particular approach paints a



realistic and convincing story. It is also noteworthy that the chant-like singing at the very beginning of the song provokes a sense of attention and at the same time evokes a spiritual moment and stance. It automatically calls for the audience's attention and signifies the gospel/worship genre of the song.

### **Textual/Lyric presentation, translation and interpretation**

- **Muzinaaaaaaa, Muzina di tata, e di mwana, e di mpevesantu**  
(In the name of the Father, and the Son and the Holy Spirit)
- **Muzina di tata nzambe ohoh, muzina.**(In the name of God the Father, in the name of....)
- **Babotama, bazala, bakufa, balamuka, bsekwa ah**(People are born, they exist, they die, they wake up, they resurrect from the dead ah)
- **Basumukibaboya Nzambebatala ye mpambantangoyabisengo oh oh**(Sinners have rejected God; they neglect him in good times)
- **Kasinkomboya Nzambee zaliyamakasibobotoya Yahweyankembo, bakolimbisabango**(But the name of God is powerful and the grace and power of God will forgive them)
- **Muzinaaaaa**(In the name of....)
- **Muzina di tata, e di mwana, e di mpevesantu**(In the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit)
- **Muzinadi tata nzambe ooh, yamuzina**(In the name of God the Father, for the name of....)
- **Baluka moto nangai, balukangailiwa**(They have tried to finish me, they have threatened me with death)
- **Bamekolabasuka, bamema se mongambo eh**(They have tried but they have failed, they have only got problems)
- **Lisoloooyangai, ekomamosala**(This my story of my life, has become a profession)
- **Na katiyalisanga, nabandakonanganga**(In the homes of witch doctors)
- **Kofingafingangai, kotongotongangai**(Insulting me, gossiping about me)
- **Kokanakanangai, epesangaibomoyi**(Plotting against me has given me life)
- **Naboma moto te, nateka moto te**(I did not kill anybody, I have not betrayed anybody)
- **Nasimbankisite, mpotenazwabomengo**(I have not visited a witchdoctor to get a charm in order to become rich)
- **Nzotonangainzotooyoelelela kaka nzambe**(This body of mine, this body will only lament to God)
- **Nkisinangaibandabomwana, losambona Yahweh**(My medicine since childhood is only prayer to God)
- **Bansooyobayebangainabomwananangai**(Everybody who knew me from my childhood)
- **Ntangoyangobabengangaimwanayabasango oh**(Those days they used to call me the son of priests)
- **Nzoto nangai nzoto oyo elelela kaka nzambe** (This body of mine, this body will only lament to God)
- **Nkisinangaibandabomwana, losambona Yahweh** (My medicine since childhood is only prayer to God)
- **Bansooyobayebangainabomwananangai** (Everybody who knew me from my childhood)
- **Ntangoyangobabengangaimwanayabasango oh** (Those days they used to call me the son of priests)
- **Yebaka ah yebaka, lilobaya Nzambe**(You should know, you should know, the word of God)
- **Yebabisengoyanse**(You should know the pleasure of this world)



- **Tangaka, ah tangaka, tangaka Bible**(You should read, you should read, you should read the Bible)
- **Yebabomengoyanse**(You should know the wealth of this world)
- **Yebaka ah yebaka, lilobaya Nzambe**, (You should know, you should know, the word of God)
- **Yebabisengoyanse** (You should know the pleasure of this world)
- **Tangaka, ah tangaka, tangaka Bible** (You should read, you should read, you should read the Bible)
- **Yebabomengoyanse** (You should know the wealth of this world)
- **Muzinaaaa Muzina di tata, e di mwana, e di mpevesantu**
- **Muzina di tata nzambeoooo, yamuzina**
- **Basolibankulu, bopesabisokisankulu**(Praise the name of the Lord, give us the opportunity to praise the Lord)
- **Muzina di tata, e di mwana, e di mpevesantu**
- **Muzina di tata nzambeoooo, yamuzina**
- **Basantumpebanzulu, botombolankomboyankoloma!**(The saints and the angels, praise the name of the Lord)
- **Muzinaaaa Muzina di tata, e di mwana, e di mpevesantu**
- **Muzina di tata nzambeoooo, yamuzina**
- **Yembayemba ah**, (Sing sing ah) **Yembayemba ah** (Sing, sing ah)
- **Boyakanibansompotoyemba** (Please, come everybody, so that we sing) **Yembayemba ah** (Sing, sing ah)
- **Toyembela Nzambenkolonabiso** (Let's sing for God our Lord) **Yembayemba ah** (Sing, sing ah)
- **Tosanganabansompoboyani** (Let's unite together so that you can come) **Yembayemba ah** (Sing, sing ah)
- **Toyembela Nzambenkoloabenisabiso** (Let's sing for God our Lord so that he can bless us) **Yembayemba ah** (Sing, sing ah)
- **Muzina di tata e di mwana** (In the name of the Father and the son) **Yembayemba ah** (Sing, sing ah) In the name of the Father, the Son
- **Na nkombona Yesutokoyemba** (In the name of Jesus we are singing) **Yembayemba ah** (Sing, sing ah)
- **Na nkombona Nzambetokosambela** (In the name of God we are praying) **Yembayemba ah** (Sing, sing ah) **Muzina e di tata, e di mwana**
- **Afrika mobimbayakanitoyemba** (The whole of Africa please come together so that we sing) **Yembayemba ah** (Sing, sing ah)
- **Toyembela Nzambeabenisamboka** (Let's sing so that God can bless the country) **Yembayemba ah** (Sing, sing ah)
- **Nkombona Nzambee zalilikolo** (The name of God is above everything) **Yembayemba ah** (Sing, sing ah)
- **Elokomokoeleki Nzambee zalite oh** (There is nothing that surpasses God) **Yembayemba ah** (Sing, sing ah)
- **Baningaya Zaire boyokanitosambela** (Friends of Zaire, please come together so that we can pray) **Yembayemba ah**
- **Na nkomboya Nzambe asalisabiso** (In the name of God, he will help us) **Yembayemba ah** (Sing, sing ah)
- **Na nkombona Nzambetokosambela** (In the name of God we are praying) **Yembayemba ah** (Sing, sing ah)



- **Oh Muzina di tata e di mwana**(In the name of the Father, and the Son)**Yembayemba ah**(Sing, sing ah)
- **BotombolamabokomponaNzambe eh**(Put your hands up for God)**Yembayemba ah**(Sing, sing ah)
- **Tobondela ye namotemamoko**(Let's worship him with all our hearts)**Yembayemba ah**(Sing, sing ah)
- **NkomboyaNzambeezalimonene**(The name of God is great)**Yembayemba ah**(Sing, sing ah)
- **Nanoi akokikotiyantembenaNzambe**(Who can doubt God)**Yembayemba ah**(Sing, sing ah)
- **Yebele, yebele**
- **Ebeba eh ehbotombolamaboko**(Let things go berserk, put your hands up)
- **Bimisamouchoir, litambala, liputa, ekoti, yembelaNzambeAleluya**(Take out your handkerchief, headscarf, wrapping cloth, hat, sing for God, Aleluya)
- **Eeh, Yahweh,Eeh, Yahweh,EehYahweh** (Eh God, Eh God, Eh God)

### Conclusion

From the foregoing discourse, it is evident that the song, Muzina, is rich in gospel and Biblical message content as evidenced by the terms and vocabulary employed. The choice of words, song structure, treatment of repetitions, economy of words, variations, contrasts, instrumentation, appropriate use/application of the hook by use of 'yembayemba' in section D, appropriate application of different bridges, stressing the use of key content words, such as *muzina* and *yemba*, definitely attest to the fact that the song was crafted by an experienced hands-on songwriter. Therefore, arguably, is an indisputable resourceful reference gem for upcoming and experienced songwriters and music composers. As earlier postulated, music educators, more so, those interested in song writing and compositional studies will stand to gain greatly if they refer to it and analyse it further.

### Way forward

In my opinion, song writing pedagogy and practice can be effective if best practices are adopted. In this regard, outstanding songs by experienced song writers can be used as templates for crafting new ones. In the same breath, consulting and interviewing experienced song writers about their style of packaging and delivering their songs in different circumstances can serve as insightful lessons in song writing business, theory and practice.

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