



## **Pioneering Role of Kabaa Catholic Mission School in Kenyan Music Education**

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### **Abstract**

Every existence has its pioneering pillars that give it the foundation on which it stands. This is no exception to Kenyan Music Education. Kenyan Music Education as we know it today started as part of the first educational institutions started by the Christian missionaries who came to the country either from Europe or America as members of the two main Christian denominations: the Roman Catholic and the Protestants. Kabaa Mission School has the privilege of being one of such first educational institutions, started in 1924 just four years after Kenya became a colony in 1920. Kabaa mission school was started by Father Michael J. Witte, a Dutch Catholic Holy Ghost Father. The school was set up for children of African Roman Catholic Church converts to get their Western education which was seen as the way to bring change to African natives. This was seen by the missionaries as the key to success; not only for learners but also for their country. At the Mission school, like in other mission schools of the time, learners generally passed through a deeply religious programme in which some became altar boys and members of the school and church choirs. Students of Kabaa Mission School came from all over the country. These students were exposed to, not only theory of Western music, but also to different types of Western Musical Instruments. The students were encouraged to join and actively take part in the school band and also learn from one another the musical skills they needed. As a result, Kabaa produced some of the key persons who influenced the development of different types of music in the country. The paper looks into the Pioneering Role of Kabaa Mission School in Kenyan Music education with a view to document and avail information to scholars and other stakeholders.

**Key words:** Kabaa Mission School, Father Michael Witte, Roman Catholic, Kavaa, Music Education, Curriculum, Akamba, Priests

### **Introduction**

This paper is a survey of a school, the Kabaa Mission School, one of the pioneer schools in Africa which gave a group of the ablest and most determined young men in a changing society opportunity to pursue Western education, an education they considered as key to success, not only in academic subjects but more so in Music, not only for themselves but for their country folk. As Hunter (1964) notes, they painfully perfected themselves in the alien habits of thought and culture, often achieving real distinction as educationists, civil servants, musicians and professors; thus, finally forming new societies in the continent. Having achieved this much, they changed and approached Western values with far greater independence outlook by rejecting much that they accepted. What dramatically made the new societies change? It is true that Africa, like other continents, had earlier civilizations, most of which were lost during this period. Such loss did weigh heavily on the new societies; having been inducted into the habits and cultures of the West. The new societies wondered how those ignorant men from the West could enter a society whose real nature and true values they had no idea; yet, they were able to scorn many values of these indigenous societies. Failure to understand the local events which were only intelligible with reference to the surrounding environment meant that such events could not be understood without reference to the societies' socio-cultural history



Plate 1: the Kabaa School main gate



Plate 2: The Improved School's Classrooms

The story of Kabaa Mission School therefore forms part of an outstanding European contribution to the natives' education as they moved inwards from the coast to the central parts of Kenya. It took not only the explorers, but also the missionaries, the traders, the settlers and the government; all with different interwoven interests to change and "civilize" the natives in the continent! The administrators and missionaries painted pictures of horrors and suffering of the old African societies, whereas the anthropologists and sociologists emphasized the close relationship of family and comforting sense of tradition. The misery that was presented by both the administrators and the missionaries and the close texture of family and village relationship given by the anthropologists and sociologists boil down to the fact that the misery expressed was sustained by the culture. It was, therefore, under such assumed horrible situations that existed in Africa that some Christian missionaries like Dutch priest, Fr. Michael Witte of the Holy Ghost Fathers in 1924, decided to set up educational institution to enable the children of the Roman Catholic converts have their education. Such missionaries also had wished to leave behind their legacy.



Plate 3:( i ) The Castle,



Plate (ii) & (iii) Some of the School buildings,



Plate (iv) John K. Katuli behind the school bus,



Plate (v) In the Principal's Office: The Principal, his deputy with John K. Katuli in the middle (Photos by researcher)

Kenya became a colony in 1920, and during this time, there was no western oriented educational institution operating in the country. The first such educational institutions were started by the Christian missionaries who came to the country either from Europe or America as members of two main Christian denominations, namely the Roman Catholics and the Protestants who passionately spoke of evangelism but the religious motives were mixed with motives of commerce and imperial expansion; thus, representing interests of their origin home countries. Kabaa Mission School therefore, has the history of being one of the first educational institutions of its kind. Being started in 1924, it pioneered the Western school curriculum at the wee hours of Kenya's colonial history. It should also be noted that by the time Father Witte started the Institution, it had taken the Colonial Administration only four years to put her house in order if meaningful changes such as putting in place educational structures for the natives were to be realized in the new territory.

Kabaa mission school was started in 1924 by Father Michael J. Witte (born on 31 January 1895 in Holland), one of the French Catholic Holy Ghost fathers who wanted to leave behind a legacy and more so set up an institution in which the children of African Roman Catholic Church converts could get their education. This was part of the powerful influences Europe put in place in order to bring change to African natives. The Spirit of change advocated by European expansionists and directed to the natives involved not only the explorers, but also the European states (governments), the traders, the missionaries, and the settlers; but rather, a combination of all the five in their quest to control the new colonies. The main cry was to civilize the savages, as the African natives were known. And how was this to be done? The only way to bring change to African natives was to give them Western education! This was the only key to success; not only for themselves but also for their countries. It is true that the students painfully perfected themselves in alien habits of thought, often achieving real distinctions similar to those of their colonizing masters. This became the encouraging slogan of the alumni of Kabaa Mission School.



Plate 4: The deplorable school roads condition with the refurbished classroom



Plate 5: The school bus repainted in Matiang'i's school vehicle colours

(Photos by Researcher)

### **Civilizing the Savages, the Missionaries Cry**

A lot has been said in various scholarly treatises concerning the objectives of the European expansionists who justified their activities and intentions as that of “civilizing” the nations in all remote parts of the world (Rodney, 1989). The Expansionists were to bring the natives to civilization by the softest and gentlest methods which were to make them fall into the customs and usage of Western culture and to incorporate them among the Westerners as one people (Hunter, 1962). The said incorporation was of the customs and their usage that were to make the Savages live like Christians whether they were Christianized or not (Defoe, 1728, in Blackwood, 1927). It should be noted that the making of the colonized native Christians was not the main purpose or the practice in the colonized native communities! But the customs and their usage were very important to the expansionists as they enculturated the savages ‘to live like Christians whether they turned Christians or not’. Defoe (1728, in Hunter, 1962, p. 5) explains that ‘living like a Christian’ meant;

clothing with Decency, not shameless and naked; feeding with Humanity and not in a Manner brutal; dwelling in Towns and Cities, with economy and Civil Government, and not like Savages.

Although some scholars consider the European activities in Africa as purely commercial coupled with imperial expansion (Hunter, *ibid.*), others observe that evangelism was quite a strong factor as illustrated by a number European missionary graves found all over the continent (*ibid.*). On the same note, the religious motives were mixed with what they usually refer to as the moral urge to spread “good government or liberty” (Hunter, 1962, p. 6). The justification of the expansionists’ activities concerning the rights of man notes that of all rights of man,

the right of the ignorant man to be guided by the wiser, to be gently or forcibly, held in the true course by him, is the indisputable.... If Freedom has any meaning, it means enjoyment of this right, wherein all rights are enjoyed



Hunter (1962, p. 6) goes on to quote a missionary in the then Belgian Congo (DRC) who went on to tell his congregation that,

I told them plainly that God had permitted the State authorities to take over possession of their country because they could not rule themselves. They were always fighting and killing one another... This they were unable to deny (Cameroon, 1877).

The observation above highlights the double edged nature of the civilizing mission. It would be better to observe the mixed outlook of the missionaries as they approached the *Nzamayaatumia*, Council of Elders of *Mwala - Masaku* being approached by the Roman Catholic Holy Ghost Father White leading the team and informing the *Nzamayaatumia* of the Good News the Missionary and his entourage had for the elders and the populace of *Masaku* as a whole. The missionary and his team requested *Nzamayaatumia* of *Mwala - Masaku* for a piece of land to put up their mission station. This was in 1924; four years after Kenya became a British colony in 1920. During this time, the Akamba territory had been divided into two districts namely *Machakos* and *Kitui*. In fact, the territories were *Masaku's* and *Kitui* but since the colonialists found it difficult to pronounce the name *Masaku*, they changed the name and called it *Machakos*. The name *Masaku* originated from one of renowned elders of the territory named *Masaku's*, meaning, the territory of the outstanding elder, *Masaku*. Part of the popular history of Akamba also relates the late *Paul Ngei* (*one of the renowned Kamba politicians*) to be the grandson of *Masaku* (personal interview Katuli, 2018).

### **What Kavaa means to the Akamba!**

According to the Akamba tradition (personal interview, Katuli, 2018), there is no outright leader of the community. All communal activities are carried out by a council of elders. This means that the decision on the request that Father White and his team made concerning the piece of land to build the mission station had to come from the *Nzama ya atumia*. After consultation, the *Nzama ya atumia*, decision was *vu nivo ve kavaa*, “even this is better” as they pointed to the area they had allocated the Missionaries to build their station. The missionaries then called the place *Kabaa* instead of *Kavaa*. Why did the *Nzama ya atumia* refer to the place they gave father White and his team *Kavaa*. What was better about it? And for whom was it better? Inside information acknowledge that it was better for the Community to give that piece of land to the missionaries since there was no loss for the community as the land was barren and agriculturally unproductive.

### **Location of Kabaa Mission School**

Unlike other Catholic Mission schools built on their own farmland of thousands of acres (Goldsworthy, 1988), *Kabaa* stood on a piece of land given to the Mission by the *Nzama ya atumia* as requested by Father Witte. The Mission school's programmes in the country were structured in levels. The lowest, that is the elementary, consisted of prayers and catechism. The primary level consisted of reading and writing. Although learning to read and write took place at the *Kabaa* primary school like other mission primary schools, there were no books or slates on which to write; instead, pupils wrote on sand on the ground. During this early stage of development of *Kabaa* Mission School, there were no buildings for classrooms; instead, pupils learnt their lessons under a tree.

### **Mission Boarding Schools**

There were differences between day and boarding schools. The students started their formal education at the High School level where they learnt English, Geography, History, Maths, Record of Activities, Swahili, Agriculture, Rural Carpentry, Nature Study and Hygiene, and Bricklaying. Apart from the above subjects, students generally passed through a deeply religious programme in which some became



altar boys and members of the school and church choirs. Because of the liberal academic nature of the environment at Kabaa, students preferred singing and debating to the playing of the many Western Classical Musical instruments they were encouraged to play in addition to their formal studies. The students were encouraged to join and actively take part in the school band.



Plate 6: John K. Katuli having a feel of some of the Western instruments of Kabaa school band (Photos by Researcher)

The relationship between the students and priests (who were their teachers) was cordial as they were encouraged to be in contact with the priests. This was not only in classroom and church, but also during holidays. The needy students, the ones who had fee problems, were encouraged to work in school kitchen and in the priests' houses to raise the required school fees.

### Where Students of Kabaa were From

Students of Kabaa Mission School came from all over the country, Kenya; Some of the parents were workers at big sisal and coffee estates and farms owned by European/American settlers. Some of these European/American settlers were those who were rewarded for having gallantly fought at the 1<sup>st</sup> World War (1914 to 1918). It should be noted that the founding of Mission Schools was not an accidental venture as “in 1923, McMillan and Lord Delamere founded and financed *the European and African Trades Organization* whose object was to train African artisans to take Indians' places and thereby discourage further Indian immigration” (Goldsworthy, 1982, p. 5).

It was therefore not accidental to find students joining most of these Mission Schools to be the sons of parents whom were converts to the Christian denominations found in the European settlers' estates/farms. For Kabaa Mission School, most of the feeder junior schools came from sisal estates around Kilima Mbogo also known as *the mount of buffalos* in Juja farm, the Sisal Estate at Ol Donyo Sabuk and from Frere town in Mombasa in the Coast Region. It should be noted that there were elementary Catholic Mission schools such as that of Kilima Mbogo and Waa Roman Catholic Mission School in the Coast Province which recommended and sent their graduates for higher level classes at Kabaa. This means that the alumni of Kabaa were sons of converts most of whom were employees of European settler farms. The lessons at the elementary mission schools were chiefly prayers and catechism. Reading and writing began at a slightly higher level, a level that later became known as primary school.



Plate 7: The Kabaa High school bell      Plate 8: Eroded School road  
(Photos by Researcher)

### The Primary School Level Curriculum

The end of the primary school level was standard IV where learners sat for a *Common Entrance Examinations* (CEE). The CEE was regional and each region (Province) of Kenya had her own separate examination-papers. For example, there was specific CEE for Central Province known as CEE (Central), one for Nyanza Province known as CEE (Nyanza), etc. The end Exams for this level were used to select students who would join the next level of Education in the Country, the Intermediate school level. It should be noted that during this time there were very few Intermediate Schools in Kenya. In such mission schools, students went through a curriculum that prepared them for the Kenya African Preliminary Examinations (KAPE) that was done in Standard Eight (VIII); also known as Form Two then. At this level, students learnt English, history, Kiswahili, Geography, Nature Study & Hygiene, Agriculture, Rural Carpentry and Record of Activities. One such Catholic Mission schools – Primary, headed by Irish priests which prepared candidates for Higher Education was St. Mary’s Mission School at Yala, the then Central Nyanza.



Plate 9: St. Mary’s Yala

### Music Programmes (both formal and informal)

Apart from the formal studies that students took at the school, some students preferred singing and debate. In such mission boarding schools, students went through a deeply religious adolescence whereby some of them became altar boys and members of church choirs. The students became close to



priests, not only in classrooms but also in church. At the Holy Ghost College, students were encouraged to learn the playing of Western musical instruments such as flute and participate in the school choir.

At the College, the students were encouraged to sing their communities' folk songs in addition to being taught Western music theory and playing of instruments of the orchestra. In short, the students were not only taken through the Western music theory but also encouraged to perform available Western musical instruments which were considered to be the Instruments of Civilization. The students were trained and encouraged to play the church organ in order to accompany church choirs during Church service. At times, students were encouraged and enrolled to sit for Exams of Western Music Theory grades either those of the Trinity College of Music– London, or the Associated Board of the Royal Schools of Music (ABRSM). Apart from the theory grades, students were encouraged and enrolled to sit for in both Trinity and ABRSM. There was a higher level, the Diploma level in Western Music Performance (voice or instruments), the Licentiate. The highest grade in theory of Western Music is eight grade for both the Trinity and ABRSM. From the foregoing, it is clear that the Mission Schools pioneered or laid a strong foundation in the learning of Western Music and hardly paid attention to the learning of traditional music of the Kenyan communities. This is evidenced by the type and number instruments that were available for students' use in the schools and kind of music curriculum that was sanctioned in the schools. But later, some of the students having achieved that much changed and went in search of their traditional music.

### **Guitar Music in Kenya**

It is not known exactly when guitar arrived in Kenya, but it must have been played in Kenya, especially, by the native Africans who were settled in Frere town well before the Second World War (Nyakiti, 1988). The existence of *Beni* (established in the principles of brass) and *dansi* (played on guitar and accordion) among the residents of Frere town (established in 1875) as observed by Okumu (1998), attest to the existence of the instrument in the Kenyan coast before 1900s. By this time, the Swahili communities in the Coast had a number of dances in which they competed. Therefore, when guitar was introduced in Frere town, they took it and adapted it to the existing dance genres. *Dansi* was more of a Christian nature, therefore was a dance for those who had seen the light. Since it was acceptable to Europeans the freed slaves who were settled in Frere town and those influenced by the missionaries readily took to it.

### **Earliest Experiences and Influences of Popular Guitar**

According to Okumu (ibid. p. 24), “the very earliest experiences and influences of popular guitar music in Kenya can be traced to the military marching bands. This therefore goes back to the period before and after the first World War”. In 1880s and 1890s, the earliest forms of popular music *beni* coined from the English word “band” with traces from Kiswahili dance genres was introduced by Africans who had been educated and trained in India and brought to Frere town to take up leadership and play other roles. Such educated natives were able to play the piano accordion and guitar. Okumu (ibid.) observes that *beni* was founded on the principles of military brass band and the music played on accordion and guitar. The spread of the two dances (*beni* and *dansi*) coexisted at the time with the Swahili communities preferring *beni* because of its similarities to *chapa*, *urunge*, *ngoma* and *tari la ndia* which existed before. The other genre, the *dansi* was acceptable to the missionaries who encouraged the native converts to participate in the dance. This was because Africans who were considered “to have seen the light” were not allowed to take part in the native dances. Kavyu (1978, in Okumu, 1998, p.24) links the beginning of guitar music in Kenya to three social conditions, namely,



the settlement of freed slaves, church and school music and finally to the decline of *beni* dance; which started to decline in the 1940s due to economic constraints whereby only a few members were allowed to take part in the dance and be members of the dance associations. Coupled with the above, transporting large numbers of performers to venues and the cost of purchasing instruments and costumes became increasingly impossible to be footed by patrons.

The earliest performances of guitar by the natives were not recorded until 1928 by *Siti binti Saad* from Zanzibar who had to travel to Bombay to record her Kiswahili song in “*Taarab*” style on “His Masters Voice” (Harrey, 1991, in Okumu, 1998, p. 26). For Kenya, the first recording facility *the East African Sound Studios* was established in 1947 by two Britons namely Dr. Guy Johnson and Eric Blackhart. The same goes for the Broadcasting Industry. This could have been due to the less contact of the artists with the instruments.

### **The Recording Wireless and Broadcasting Services**

The first wireless broadcasting was established on August, 1928, following the agreement between the Colonial Government and the British East African Broadcasting Company Limited. The broadcast was in English and this continued until the beginning of the 2<sup>nd</sup> World War. In 1939, more programmes in Asian and local languages were added. The colonial department of information added programmes in Kiswahili and other local languages like Agikuyu, Kikamba, Nandi, Dholuo, Kipsigis and Arabic which was not considered Asiatic.

It should be noted that the establishment of recording and broadcasting services went a long way in shaping popular music in Kenya. The catalogues from the recording studios in 1952 show records of Christian hymns sung by local choirs, traditional music, marches from the bands of the Kings African Rifles (KAR), dance music with the Coast Social Orchestra and Taarab (Okumu, 1998). Most of the records were in the *dansi* style performed on accordion, guitar, banjo or violin which played the “waltz”, foxtrot and *rumba*.

### **The 2<sup>nd</sup> World War (1939 to 1945)**

The period serves as a demarcating musical period in Kenya. Okumu observes that it was the returning war veterans who had seen battle in far places as Burma who came back to Kenya and further popularized guitar music. Members of the original Rhino band who became members of the entertainment unit of the KAR brought back with them instruments such as Western violins, guitars and piano accordions. The War returnees also brought back money which enabled them to buy gramophones and 78rpm records which were popular. This was the period when the former students of Kabaa Mission School such as Fundi Konde, Ally Sykes, Paul Mwachupa and others were prominently featured on released records although he was not one of the war returnees.

### **Copy-right or Playing by Imitation**

The recorded guitar music helped the upcoming guitarists to learn to play what was referred to as copy-right or by imitation (Oguda Resa, personal interview, 1987). Bands formed during this period learnt to play records bought from shops; which were mainly from Europe as they were associated with the high class and civilized members of society. Members of such bands would be seen to be fashionable if they played copy-right of the Latin American records. As already been mentioned earlier in the paper, “most of musicians of this period used the records as lessons in guitar playing thus became apprenticed on the new foreign instruments”(Okumu, 1998, p. 28). By and by styles and trends were incorporated from the popular existing records thus enabling Kenyan upcoming artists copy from Jean Mwenda Bosco and Losta Belo styles. Most popular records were GV and other American hits in the styles of *cha cha cha*,

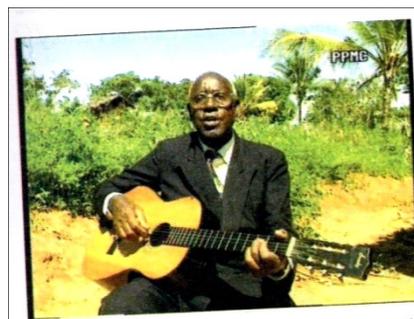
samba, bolero, mambo and most of all the rumba(Okumu, *ibid.*). Apart from learning to play from the foreign records some local guitarists took the same songs and music from the records and just changed the words to form their compositions (Mkok Ignatius, personal interview, 1986).



Plate 10: Bill Alexander and the band. First guy to introduce electric guitar to Congolese music.

### Paul Mwachupa Mazera

Paul Mwachupa Mazera was born in Ganjoni–Mombasa on 21<sup>st</sup> June, 1918, the last born in a family of seven children of his father Thomas Mazera who was a Duruma, from one of the nine clans of the Midzi Chenda from Kwale District. Mwachupa’s father, Thomas Mazera was one of the earliest African Methodist Church pastors, a position held by a group of Africans who had been educated and trained to take up leadership roles in the community. The name Mazera was his father’s which was later given to the railway station, the village and their house. According to Okumu (*ibid.* p. 62), Mwachupa learnt how to play guitar and accordion from the two sons of a freed slave originally from Malawi, who settled in Frere town called Rebman and Simba Rao. Other influences in music on him includes that of a European Methodist Church missionary at Mazeras who taught him to sing Hymns by rote. He bought his first guitar in an Indian shop in Mombasa. The band he performed in first was a two-man band with Henry Timothy Mwanayae on guitar and Mwachupa either performed on guitar or accordion. His first record was cut in 1950.



Photograph 1: Paul Mwachupa (Courtesy of the Permanent Presidential Music Commission - P.P.M.C.)

Plate 11: Paul Mwachupa on his acoustic guitar  
Photo by C.C. Okumu

Research findings references show that guitar playing in Kenya started as early as mid-1920s at Frere Town in Mombasa (Ignatius, 1986, personal Interview). This also coincided with the appearance of dance clubs in Mombasa. Guitar playing by students in schools started as early as 1929 and those



taking the lead were students from Kabaa Mission School, some of whom had joined the School from the Coast; mainly, the alumni of Waa Roman Catholic Mission School such as Fundi Konde. As already been noted, Paul Mwachupa was not an alumnus of any of the Catholic Mission Schools but the earliest African Methodist Mission. The two, Fundi Konde and Paul Mwachupa had been playing the instrument before Kabaa Catholic Mission School was started and therefore, when Fundi Konde, an alumnus of the school took the art of guitar playing to the school; by extension, his friend's contributions are also acknowledged. It should be noted that they had learnt the art of guitar playing at home in Frere town. This, by inference, explains the entry of guitar into the sub Saharan Africa along the eastern coast of Kenya at Fort Jesus Mombasa (Oguda, personal interview, 1986). The Instruments were therefore brought to Kenya through Fort Jesus by the Portuguese explorers who used the Fort to secure their stay enroute from and to the land of spices. Historically, Fort Jesus not only served as a resting and refuelling station to the Portuguese explorers, it also enabled the introduction of Western musical instruments not only to Kenya but also the rest of sub Saharan Africa. It is therefore not misleading to observe that guitar and other Western classical musical instruments could have been first performed in Kenya before they penetrated into other African countries. The priests at the mission stations also took it upon themselves to give or station.

Fundi Konde was the best-known early guitarist, alongside Paul Mwachupa, Fadhili Williams and Lukas Tututu. A short history of Konde observes that during his prime time, Konde teamed up with the late Paul Mwachupa, Fadhili William and Daudi Kabaka among others. Konde was a Giriama from Kilifi district, born on 24<sup>th</sup> August, 1924 at a place called *Mwaba ya nyundo* near Kaloleni. He was named Kenga Mbogo son of Konde, and the name Fundi was later given to him by one of the early Catholic missionaries in the area. His early musical shaping came from the local Waa Roman Catholic Mission school which he had joined in mid-thirties against his parents' wishes. Unlike some of his former school colleagues, his parents were not converts of the new Church. Like most students who joined Catholic Mission Schools he was keen on learning the flute. His music career widened when he joined the colonial army band in 1944. He criss-crossed the country entertaining soldiers in the barracks to keep their morale high during the final years of the Second World War. He had been also trained as a soldier, and he usually travelled on these trips with a gun dangling on one shoulder and a guitar on the other. They were later instructed to join the allied forces fighting in India, Ceylon (now Sri Lanka) and other parts of South East Asia where he continued to polish both his voice and marksmanship.

When the war ended in May 1945, the entertainers rushed to Calcutta where they made their debut recording - of such songs as *Majengo Siendi Tena*, *Jipakieni Meli* and *Seimongo*. Another major highlight of Konde's career was during the advent of the African Broadcasting Service in the early fifties, when the station's leading producer Peter Colmore included Konde in his regular line up of music and comedy entertainers. Among the musicians were people like Edward Masengo, Jean Bosco, George Mukabi, John Mwale and Paul Mwachupa. When Kenga Mbogo died, *Kabaka* observed that it was a big blow to the music fraternity adding that the late was highly regarded among rumba music greats.

According to Nyakiti (1988, p.173), the Luo who attended a mission primary school run by Irish priests at Kabaa in the Kamba District (1982, p. 6), as from 1931, learnt ordinary theory of Western music and were exposed to different types of Western Instruments, to which most of them took to quite quickly. Students such as Messrs Ignatius Mkok and Andrew Oyugi (from 1931 to 1936) learnt guitar styles from the Waswahili students such as Mr. Mwachupa, Fundi Konde and Lukas Tututu (Nyakiti, 1988).



The Portuguese seemed to have been the first Europeans to introduce the Spanish guitar in Kenya (Mkok, 1983). Luo guitarists like Alloys Obunga, Aboge, Matete Junior and Mkok imported the Swahili influence into their compositions, as the Waswahili took to the guitar much earlier than the other Kenyans, that is, by the Middle of 1920s when the dance clubs had already appeared in Mombasa, Kenya music legends /photos/a. In 1942, Mkok became the composer in Kisumu Boys' Social Club which consisted mainly of Civil Servants. This was because they had the money to buy musical instruments- mandolin, banjo and guitars. These pioneer Luo guitarists refined their guitars to the Hawaiian style of guitar playing. The difference, according to Mkok (personal interview, 1983) was in the tuning.

In the Spanish guitar, the chords were tuned in such a way that a lot of fingering was required whereas the Hawaiian tuning the chords never required complicated handling, which thus became an asset to the parties. In the 1940s, the colonial government did a lot of good by encouraging the recording companies to record the work of outstanding Kenyan musicians. This became the peak of Luo musical development. It became the peak of Kenya's music that started in the mid-1920s, immediately after World War I.

It is also true that the art of guitar playing in Kenya started in Frere Town - Mombasa (in the Coast Province or Region) via Kabaa Mission School in Kamba District to Kima and Kisumu in the then Kavirondo (*later known as Nyanza Province*), in the Western region of Kenya (Ignatius, personal interview, 1983). On its development journey, the art of guitar playing bypassed both the Rift Valley and Central regions of Kenya. It should be noted that the regions that are now known as Nyanza and Western and the larger Kericho counties of the Rift Valley region were in Kavirondo or Nyanza Province.

In 1936 (Ignatius, 1983, *ibid.*), the Luo guitarists who were alumni of Kabaa Mission School like Dickson Abuso the son of Wanga, Andrew Oyugi and Ignatius Mkok were already established soloists propagating the art in the then Nyanza Province and Kenya as a whole. In the 1940s others like Tobias Oyugi of Gem, who started his guitar playing in Tanganyika (the present Republic Tanzania Mainland); Joseph Owiti of Gem; Aguya the son of Daudi of Seme; John Lang'o of Seme; Dalmas Mbudi of Seme; Otina Mariwa of Seme; Ojwang' of Kambare of Gem; Wagome the son of Karege of Asembo; Ong'udi Atwang'o of Kano Kolwa; Alois Obunga of Kisumu; the teachers of Kima (now Bunyore Girls High School) namely Joseph Aboge of Kisumu Korando and James Were of Nyakach, Joseph Bonga of Karachwonyo, Jacob Olal and others followed as solo guitarists.

Some of these solo guitarists later formed bands. For example, Dickson Abuso Kawanga founded the Lake Victoria band in 1940. The Kindu Band was formed under Joseph Yoyi and Oyungu in 1949; the Victoria Band was formed under John Odula; the Kolwa Band was formed under John Ayugi; the Kajulu Band was formed under Asiyo Alango; the Pap Onditi Band was formed under Ojwando Opiyo; the Sondu Band was formed under James Were; the Kamakowa Band was formed under Willis Olola and Omondi; the Manyatta Band was formed under Walter Anyul and Otiende among others.

As the band guitar lost its popularity with the consumers in the mid-1950s, solo guitars picked up pace and became the consumers' favourite under the patronage of guitarists like Olima Pius, a guitarist (*with visual impairment*) from Kanam Karachwonyo; Lang'o of Seme; Oswera of Gem; Ochuka of Kano; Adero Onani; Jos Kokeyo and Ben Blasto Bulawayo from the Luo territory and George Mukabi from Kisa in North Nyanza. Towards the end of the decade and the early 1960s, Luo solo guitarists witnessed the introduction of a two-guitar band. The number of guitars was further increased from two to three guitars. This was also the time of the introduction of electric guitar playing. With the



introduction of electric guitar bands, most of the former solo guitarists who had been performing on acoustic guitars gave up playing, but others continued and formed bands. Among the solo guitarists who continued are Adero Onani, Ochuka of Angoro, Ben Bulawayo and John Otula. Among the new guitarists who came into the field during the introduction of electric band guitars are Owiti Origo, George Ramogi, Gabriel Omolo and Owino of Sirati (*Tanzania, but based in Kisumu Nyanza*).

During the 1940s and 1950s, the main recording company was South African based, with a branch in Nairobi, in the premises of Ramogi Photographers located in Luthuli Avenue. The recordings were made under the following trademarks and labels:

- i) Records produced from Congo had *Gallotone C.O.* as their trade mark. The composers who recorded under this trademark were Mwenda Jean Bosco, Losta Abeló and Edward Masengo. The languages they used were broken Kiswahili, Lingala and French. Some of the Luo composers like Bulawayo recorded their work under the trademark *Gallotone O.K.* which was at times referred to as *Gallotone A.C.* Malawian guitarists like George Sibanda recorded their work under *Gallotone C.A.*
- ii) Records produced from East Africa were recorded having *His Master's Voice* as their trademark. The composers who recorded under this trademark were Anton Mito (on his *onanda*, the Luo accordion band music), Otwoma wuon Ogolo (on his *thum*, the Luo lyre music), and Nyangira Obong'o (on his *onanda*, the Luo accordion band music). The language used was mainly that of the *dholuo*.
- iii) Other recording companies were mainly Indian, for example, the East African Music Store whose trademark was *Jambo*. The composers who recorded their works under this trademark were Pius Olima, Amunga among others. The languages the composers used were a mixture of traditional languages.
- iv) Italian music, which was also common in the Kenyan market was recorded under the JV – Trademark. Guitar playing as seen in the 1980s is a hybrid of both local and foreign influences. The influences could further be divided into the following five groups, namely: The Waswahili, the Congolese, the Kwela, the European and the Latin America influences. The first Luo guitarists, the former students of Kabaa High (Mission) School, were highly influenced by the Waswahili guitar players like Fundi Konde, Paul Mwachupa and Fadhili William who had been their school mates at Kabaa. Apart from the guitar playing, the alumni were great musicians. They participated in playing the Church Organs. Those who were teachers taught their students Western music theory and trained choirs which were second to none in music festivals most of them organized. Some of them became music inspectors and supervised the learning of music in schools and also the music education in the country. The music household names such as the late Peter Kipkosia, the former Inspector of music Nairobi City and the late Ignatius Mkok, the teacher, music educator, the guitarist, the Church Organist and Civil Servant whose name has already been mentioned earlier in the paper.

## Conclusion

The survey concerned itself with the pioneering role of a school, one whose leading role contributed a lot to the education of the Kenyan youth who without unwavering concern of individual priests like Father Michael Witte made the students achieve. The study has come to acknowledge the role played



by the school to be second to none. Those priests involved in the process acknowledged the talents and capabilities of these youth. The missions gave the students the education they needed. The students were nurtured and encouraged, thus actualizing their potentials. The alumni never failed their teachers. Kenya must be very proud of the Kabaa alumni. The Kabaa Roman Catholic Mission School, one of the pioneer schools in Africa did give a group of the ablest and most determined young men in a changing society the most opportunity to pursue Western education, an education which they considered key to success. This was not limited only to academic pursuit. The education given at Kabaa was holistic. The alumni painfully perfecting themselves in the alien habits of thought and culture and often achieved real distinction; thus, finally forming new societies in the continent. But, after having achieved this much, they changed and approached Western values with far greater independence of thought and rejected much that they achieved.

Kabaa High School is situated in Mbiuni, Machakos County. It was started by a Dutch priest Fr Michael Witte of the Holy Ghost Fathers in 1924 as a boys' school. The boys' school started with only 35 pupils, but was converted into a teachers' training college, then into a primary boarding school, and later into an intermediate school in 1939. The school remained an intermediate school until 1954 and later became a secondary school, but reconverted again to intermediate school and students were moved to what is today Mang'u High School. Kabaa officially started as a secondary school in 1960 and became an academic giant for 20 years, before its downfall started when the government took it from the Catholic Church.

The school was initially kept in an ideal learning condition, maintained and governed by the Roman Catholic priests; who were appointed to head and maintain the school's educational and moral standards. The handing over of the school's administration to the government resulted into unfortunate appointment of substandard school heads to administer the school which resulted into the deplorable state of the school. The School which was once a centre of excellence and an academic giant till the government took it from the Catholic Church has unfortunate stories to display. During an interview (*YouTube*), the School Chaplain, Father Paul Kinyumu observed that the deplorable state of the school began after the Church had handed it over to the Government. This unfortunate state of affair he attributed to the tag of war that ensued between the Government and the Church.

Notable alumni include former President Mwai Kibaki, Archbishop Ndingi Mwana a'Nzeki, the late Maurice Cardinal Otunga and Tom Mboya in the public domain. Otherwise, the great names of classical and popular musicians of Kenya claim their roots to the school. Among the notable ones are Peter Kipkosia, the late Ignatius Mkok, and the late Fundi Konde, to name but just a few. One is then left to wonder what path in music education Kenya would have taken had it not been for Kabaa Roman Catholic Mission School alumni!

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