

BIGWALA MUSIC AND DANCE OF THE BASOGA PEOPLE

written by James Isabirye 2012



Background

The Basoga are Bantu speaking people who live in southeastern Uganda. They are neighbors to the Baganda, Bagwere, Basamia, Banyoli and Banyoro people. The Basoga are primarily subsistence agricultural people.

"Bigwala" is a Lusoga language term that refers to a set of five or more monotone gourd trumpets of different sizes. The music of the trumpets and the dance performed to that music are both called "**Bigwala**". Five drums accompany "**Bigwala**" music and they include a big drum "**Engoma enene**", a long drum "**Omugaabe**," short drum "**Endyanga**", a medium size drum "**Mbidimbidi**" and a small drum "**Enduumi**" each of which plays a specific role in the set.

Bigwala heritage is of significant palace / royal importance because of its ritualistic role during burial of kings, coronations and their anniversaries and stands as one of the main symbols of Basoga kingship.

When King Henry Wako Muloki passed away on 1st September 2008, the "Bigwala" players were invited to Nakabango palace and Kaliro burial ground to perform their funeral function.

During the coronation of late king Henry Wako Muloki on 11th February 1995; the Bigwala players performed their ritual roles. It is important to note that Busoga kingdom like all others had been abolished in 1966 by the Ugandan republic government of Obote I and all aspects its existence were jeopardised including the **Bigwala**. The Kingship is the only main uniting identity which represents the Basoga, offers them opportunity to exist in a value system, focuses their initiatives to deal with development issues within the framework of their ethnic society and connects them to their cherished past.

“**Bigwala**” Music and Dance needs urgent safe guarding because there are only five surviving **Bigwala** bearers; elderly men who are living under poor conditions and can pass away any moment. If these old men die before anybody learns how to make and / or play **Bigwala**, this heritage could disappear from the face of the earth completely.



Then Busoga kingdom will have nobody to perform this and other royal functions of the **Bigwala** when initiatives to revive the presence of the kingdom are in high gear with plans to reconstruct the palace at Bugembe already in progress (2011).

The absence of a documented national culture policy to guide the implementation of culture up to 2006, affected implementation of cultural programs that could rescue **Bigwala** during the dark period that followed the abolition of kingdoms in 1966.

The restated Busoga kingdom (1995) is financially handicapped because they cannot collect revenue due to the government policy reforms that restrict kingdoms to cultural functions only. This makes it hard for the kingdom to reach out to the various palace activities including Bigwala performance

It is of urgent necessity that the five surviving holders teach youths how to make and / or play the Bigwala. It is also important for the youths to experience the Bigwala music and dance as a way of educating them about Busoga history, the kingship and its significance as the major source of pride and identity for the Basoga.

If the old men pass away nobody will be around to perform their ritualistic duty in the kingdom which will threaten the very survival of Busoga kingdom, its values and symbols of a people who share common history.



According to Wachsmann (1953), “**Bigwala**” are a kind of primitive trumpets that are made from natural materials.

“Primitive trumpets are the ones made from natural materials. Wood trumpets are found in many parts of the world, and are usually made from a single piece of wood. More unusual are the wood and gourd trumpets”

Generally primitive trumpets are known from the materials they are made of which could be wood, gourds, animal horns, human bones, wooden carvings, bamboo, and spiral wound barks, ivory, clay, metal and others. Some trumpets are made from ivory like the ones played in western Uganda and are similar to those of the Congo Bantu. Some trumpets are made from horns of antelopes and other game, then other are made by combining gourds and horns and others from wood, like the “**Yuge**” trumpets of the Kakwa people,

the “*Limba*” trumpets of the Madi and the “*Mare*” trumpets of the Lugbara peoples from north western Uganda.

When all five Bigwala players have started, drummers come in and singers follow, led by a soloist, who narrates as the chorus responds. Women ululate and sing but do not blow the “*Bigwala*”. As the excitement builds up, some of the members start to dance energetically following the procession of the trumpet players.



It is the combination of trumpet playing, drumming, singing and processional dancing, which constitutes “*Bigwala*” music and dance of the Basoga.

The Basoga have a number of folk music and dance forms some of which include, “*Tamenhaibuga*”(do not break the gourd) music and dance, “*Nalufuka*” (the dance that pours) music and dance, “*Irongo*” (twin ritual) music and dance, “*Mayebe*” (leg rattles) music and dance, “*Bigwala*” (gourd trumpets) music and dance plus others. “*Bigwala*” music is generally rich and exciting and is a representation of the cultural practices of the Basoga peoples’ palace repertoire. “*Bigwala*” music and dance however, is likely to disappear in the very near future – a point of five years or so. I found one group of all elderly men who live in different parts of Namutumba and Iganga districts that used to play Bigwala. They have ceased to converge at Nambote, in Busiki – Namutumba district where they used to rehearse this heritage. After the abolition of kingdoms in 1967, “*Bigwala*” music and dance ceased to be a reserve for the palace chiefs just like other goodies that were in palaces and was performed in the villages. I remember when I was a child (about

seven years in the early 70s) these trumpeters used to perform at certain functions like last funeral rites, house warming but this is no longer the case. This music and dance strengthened the social bonds among the people and was a great source of entertainment. There is a concern from Basoga elders, opinion leaders and music scholars that Busoga is losing much of its heritage including “**Bigwala**”.

“**Bigwala**” music and dance is about to disappear, yet it has not received scholarly attention. Lack of documentation and preservation thus calls for an urgent effort to save it, as a culturally essential representation of the Basoga peoples’ philosophy since many ethnic societies are documenting their cultures. If the elderly “**Bigwala**” players pass away before any safe guarding measures are affected, this art will have disappeared from the face of the earth completely. Many people have never heard “**Bigwala**” music and even some who have ever, do not remember it.

“**Bigwala**” - gourd trumpet music is unique with sounds intertwining in the course of playing them. The melody is shared among the players which represents a collective social approach to music making. The other melodic instruments of Busoga namely; “**Embaire**” (xylophones), “**Enkwanzi**” (Panpipes), “**Endere**” (Flute), “**Endongo**” (Lamellaphone), “**Endingidi**” (Tube fiddle), “**Entongooli**” (Lyre) can play a complete song pattern. The communality witnessed in the way “**Bigwala**” players share a tune mutually to the extent that no one single “**Bigwala**” is more important to the extent of doing without the others is very representative of the people associate.

I was always disturbed by my mother’s statements in referring to me whenever I committed a grave crime and she threatened to beat me up. She would say in Lusoga, “**Muna ndhakukuba**” (my friend, I will beat you up). Even in a situation where things have got bad, the Musoga will say my friend. These bonds are not only portrayed musically in the Bigwala case but in how the many different instruments are played together combining different rhythms and timbres to express collective emotions.

The five side blown, single tone trumpets each has a name relating to its role. The biggest and deepest trumpet is called “**Enhana**”, which plays the lead role and is followed in size and pitch by “**Empala**”, then “**Endhasasi**”, then “**Endesi**” and the smallest and highest in pitch is “**Endumirizi**”. At times, the flute and tube fiddles are added to enrich “**Bigwala**” music. These names do not only carry Basoga philosophy but also their concept of pitch in relation to a certain hierarchy of depth or height of sound. “**Enhana**” makes the loudest sound. It derived from the Lusoga word “**Okwana**” (To yell) so the deepest trumpet makes

the loudest sound as derived from its name. I will come back to meanings of Bigwala names.

“**Bigwala**” music and dance constitute part of the cultural arts of the Basoga as means of social interaction and discussion, communicating and entertaining themselves in a manner they understand.

“**Bigwala**” art is threatening extinction yet it has not received scholarly attention and documentation since I did not find much written materials about Bigwala music and dance.

When I was a child (1976) Otuli Kakolokombe, one of the Bigwala players died and all his teammates played for his funeral. That was my first experience with Bigwala and the interesting music for one week. Men and women danced as they drunk “**Malwa**” (local gin made from fired millet balls and yeast). After that experience, the next opportunity I had was in 2005 (thirty years later), at Busembatia during the Senator Cultural festival. I grew up in the village and experienced much “**Ngoma**” (Drums), “**Mbairé**” (xylophones) and other genres of music but not Bigwala. My first opportunity was a chance I got because the Bigwala player who had died was our neighbor but we did not know about it until his funeral.

Listening to Bigwala as an adult I found their tone so compelling and the interlocking tones to be a serious expression of musical ingenuity. The singer was not a good vocalist neither were the drum any better. It was the power of discovering a music genre that belongs to me (traditionally) and yet I had forgotten about it all together. The frail men manifested youthful energy at the power of the Bigwala and everybody felt sorry for themselves. There was a general sense of “where has this been” on the faces of the people.



This initiative is to make available some information about Bigwala to raise awareness and attract further works to the end that it could be saved.

In course of doing this research, I wanted to:

- To find out the origin, historical and other influences on “**Bigwala**” music and dance.
- To establish how the “**Bigwala**” played and the great players in time and space.
- To find out the taboos associated with “**Bigwala**”.
- To find out how “**Bigwala**” trumpets are made, the materials used and their sources.
- To establish the dance motifs, costumes and vocal styles used in “**Bigwala**” music.
- To look into ways of revitalizing “**Bigwala**” music and dance.

The research was carried out in Iganga, Kamuli and Jinja districts of southeastern Uganda where some of the Basoga people who perform Bigwala music and dance live.

Introduction

This is a presentation of the findings, which I encountered in course of finding out about the “**Bigwala**” art in relation to its social context. The over all achievement from this research should thus generate deeper understanding of “**Bigwala**”, which was my fundamental objective in doing this research in the first instance.

The data was obtained using the following instruments: observation, interviews of selected subjects, discussions with focus groups and analysis of photographs, Audio and Audio – visual recording that were made in the course of conducting the research.

The discussions of the “**Bigwala**” art are presented in seven aspects.

Historical background of “Bigwala**” music and dance**

It is a strenuous exercise to try finding the actual origin of Bigwala and of primitive trumpets as a whole, considering the way history is been passed on in traditional Africa; through oral tradition. There are many contrasted perspectives due to influences of the people who pass on knowledge in time, space, lack of a dependable system of counting time and absence of written sources. Time for instance is counted in terms of generations instead of years or other, which makes it so fluid to tell.

Trumpets are very old and widely spread instruments in the world. They are found in almost all parts of the world, and have existed for such a long time. There were paintings of primitive trumpets in tombs of Egypt. There are no existing illustrations of this theory but available information is based on sculpture and contemporary imaginary illustrations.

After attempting to find out the origin of trumpets in Eastern Africa found difficulty, Watchsmann (1953) notes that whether or not these royal trumpet bands date back to the early Arabs or tribal customs is impossible to decide.

He goes on to add that, it must suffice to refer to Vasco Da Gama's notes about his reception by trumpets and Janissary bands when he landed at the shores of the Indian Ocean.

According to Gideon S. Were and Derek A. Wilson (1996), Vasco Da Gama arrived at the Mozambique coast in 1 March 1498. Therefore, by that time trumpets were already in existence in East Africa. Egypt could be a possible origin of trumpets but not Western Europe since by the time the first European came, these primitive trumpets were already at the coast of East Africa as argued above.

Wachsmann (1953) argued that according to one trumpet player he met once, it is Kintu who brought the trumpets to Buganda from the slopes of Mt. Elgon and that from here they spread to neighboring places like Bunyoro, Busoga and Toro. According to Baganda oral tradition, Kintu was the first Muganda and he is believed to have come from the slopes of Mt. Elgon in Eastern Uganda.

Another African musicologist, J. Middleton (1950) in his personal communication notes argued,

“According to the late Kimomera, Mr. M.B. Nsimbi informed the writer, that Mubiru, the head of Mamba clan in the days of the legendary Kintu, is said to have assigned the task of playing trumpet sets to his grand children ...”

The two scholars agree on the fact that trumpets were played during the time of Kintu. This view is important because some people who settled in Busoga came with Kintu yet there is a significant resemblance between the “**Bigwala**” trumpets of Busoga and those of Buganda, which were brought by Kintu, according to Baganda oral tradition and yet some Basoga clans have the name Kintu.

Furthermore, G. Were and D. Wilson (1996) write that the immigrants into the Busoga region came from the Elgon led by Kintu round the 16th century.

Therefore, according to these sources the “**Bigwala**” trumpets could have been brought into Busoga from the mountain Elgon area.

According to James Lugolole who is the leader of the Nambote “**Bigwala**” group, his father Muyaga Lugolole introduced the “**Bigwala**” into Bugweri County in Iganga district. . He could not tell where these Bigwala came from or even the time when they were first played in Busoga. He could only remember that, even his grandfather had been a Bigwala player. His grand father had been one of the trumpet players in the chief of Bugabula’s court. Bugabula was one of the the original chiefdoms of Busoga kingdom that became a county in Kamuli district. His father Muyaga, moved to Bukonte during famine, which he says, could have been either “**Bikapu**” (palms made from palm leaves) or “**Bikutiya**” dirty sisal bags.

There were terrible famines in Busoga, which were given names like “**Bikapu**”. During this famine people had to move around with palm leaves bags to collect any food they found on their way. Another one is “**Mugudya**”; the one that chases. This famine made people to move from place to place in search of food. “**Bikutiya**” – dirty sisal bags, was a famine during which people move around with sisal bags to take any food they came across.

James, like his fellow Bigwala players cannot tell their past in terms of years. They use former chiefs’ regimes, calamities such as famines, epidemics and memorable occurrences to date their past. The researcher had to estimate in relation to happenings of the time or by asking the respondent about how old, they were when something happened. Therefore, pointers show that Bugabula chiefdom is the likely origin of “**Bigwala**” in Busoga.

According to Tomasi Tigahalana from Budyubye village, Bugweri County Iganga district, at the beginning of the 20th century, trumpet players from Gabula’s court once come to Bugweri. The “**Bigwala**” entertainers who came to performed when former president of Uganda (1966 – 71 and 1980 – 85) Apollo Milton Obote (RIP) visited the home of Shaban Nkuutu near Idudi – Bugweri, Iganga district, in 1969. Nkuutu was one of the most prominent national political leaders from Iganga district. Although, Tomasi could not give the origin of the “**Bigwala**”, he says these trumpet players from Kamuli who used to play in Gabula’s court were the first players of trumpets in Busoga.

The ancient Busoga state of Bugabula was founded 1737. Some of the greatest chiefs include Omukama Gabula Nadiope I (1791 – 1817),

Kitamirike I Gabula Namugweri (1845 – 1863) and Yosiya Gabula Nadiope II (1894 – 1913).

Tomasi Tigahalana was a former member of the Heart Beat Troupe of Africa and “Ndhote cultural group”

Arthur Musulube was a National Inspector of Schools in charge of Music in the 1980s. He has traveled all round Busoga teaching music, adjudicating school festivals and performing. He has interacted with many folk musicians and scholars on issues including music research in this region. He is respected for composing the anthem for Busoga kingdom

According to Arthur Musulube, the “**Bigwala**” are related to the “**Makondere**” of the Banyoro. He argued that a number of Banyoro princes were sent by their father, the then king of Bunyoro between the 16th and 18th centuries to set up states in what became Busoga kingdom

According to Gideon Were and Wilson (1993) King Tito Winyi of Bunyoro (1935 – 6) once said, princes Naika Kiyira who ruled Bugabula between 1894 – 1904 was sent by King Isingoma Rukidi Mpuga of Bunyoro to set up a state in Busoga. These princes must have brought with them the trumpets culture from Bunyoro. To date Bunyoro kingdom has a coronation dance called ‘**Empango**’ during which “**Amakondere**” trumpets are played then people perform a processional dance called “**Empango**”.

The above relationship between Bunyoro and Busoga it is argued by oral tradition is also supported the fact that Basoga chiefs were called “**Omukama**” just like the one of Bunyoro, until July 1906, when the twelve former chiefdoms or states joined themselves into a confederation and became Busoga kingdom.

However, according to Wachsmann (1953), Kintu’s subjects brought trumpets with them from the Mountain Elgon area. This is in agreement with Baganda oral tradition, the first Muganda was Kintu who came from Mountain Elgon with all his subjects. As some of his subjects remained in Busoga, they kept trumpets and continued to play them.

In the Encyclopedia of Musical Instruments of the world (1976), the “**Bigwala**” belong to group of the primitive trumpets.

Extracts of primitive trumpets from Francis Babey “African Music: A peoples’ art” show that there are different types of primitive trumpets. There is a wide variety of materials used to make them. They also differ in shapes and sizes, accompanied by drum of different sizes and shapes too. Some are side blown and others end blown. There is a similarity between the “**Bigwala**” and “**Amakondere**” of the Baganda. The “**Makondere**”, which were brought by Kintu’s followers, are made from gourds as illustrated in the picture below.

Therefore, the people who came with Kintu and settled in Busoga could have brought the “**Bigwala**”. This argument is based on the fact that they resemble in make and material and the part of Busoga (Nambote) where the “**Bigwala**” are currently played is located on the probable Kintu’s route to Buganda.

How the “Bigwala” are played and the great players

The “**Bigwala**” a set of five trumpets; the “**Enyana**” followed by “**Empala**”, then “**Endasasi**”, then “**Endesi**” and the highest is “**Endumirizi**”. The “**Enyana**” always starts the song and then others come in according to the tune of the song.

The player takes a deep breath, tightens his lips and forces air through them into the “**Bigwala** places his mouth round the mouthpiece” – trumpet. (*One trumpet is called “Ekigwala”*)

The player places his mouth round the mouthpiece, keeps expanding and contracting his cheeks; to get a reasonable amount of air, enough for blowing into the trumpet.

According to Sulayi Maganda Kifembe, one of the players in Lugolole group, it is better to keep breathing through the mouth as you blow the trumpet. In doing so, he takes a deep breath and wet the mouthpiece with saliva. According to him, it is very important to pour some water into the trumpet before starting to play – to moist it.

Maganda explains that apart from being able to produce sound on the instrument, one has to listen carefully to the other players in order to come in at the correct point in the song. The right hand is especially used to ensure that the mouth is directly positioned on the mouthpiece while the left hand supports from a distance.

Players make the sound outlet face up and are always close in the procession so that they hear one another’s sound with ease. Even when dancers join the procession, they do not mix up with the players otherwise the players do not hear one another and get

confused. Therefore, although each player produces only one note, he has to sing through and hear the whole song in order to maintain the right point at which to play his Kigwala. They do not perceive their music in terms of the single note they play but rather the song as a whole.

“**Bigwala**” players sometimes get problems when one of them is absent for one or other reason and they wish or are required to play. They cannot play the song if any one of the trumpets is missing. Therefore, every “**Kigwala**” is equally important in the set.

The Great “*Bigwala*” players

According to the James Lugolole and his “**Bigwala**” colleagues, the players whom they consider to have been the greatest include late Lugolole Muyaga from Nambote, Busiki County in Iganga district. Muyaga learnt from his father when he was a boy and he in turn taught his children. One of the children is James Lugolole, the leader of the Nambote Trumpets group:



His home that was at Nambote came to be known as the “*home of Bigwala*” because during his time, all people who wanted to learn how to play trumpets went there. It was at Bukonte that Kyamundhu (one of the five surviving Bigwala players) joined James Lugolole. To date, many people associate the “**Bigwala**” to the name Lugolole.

James Lugolole adds that another player and friend of his father was late Swiki Menya that lived at Nawangisa, Bugweri County in Iganga district. He was a prince and they used to play “**Bigwala**” together to entertain themselves.

According to Akamada Kakaire another surviving Bigwala player, his father Kasadha Myenge Kakaire from Butongole was playing together with Swiki Menya up to a time estimated by the researcher to be in the 1940s. According to Akamada Kakaire, all the players named above belonged to one generation and the same Bigwala group. Nobody hired them to play the Bigwala but only played for pleasure at their homes as they wished.

James Lugolole adds that only the friends of his father could join the dance but other people could only watch at a distance.

The following are some of the living trumpets players who belong to the Lugolole trumpet group from Nambote, Busiki – Iganga district.

By the time of writing this report, there are only five surviving ailing Bigwala players in the entire Busoga Kingdom. Unless an urgent saving initiative is put in place in which youths are taught how to make and play Bigwala, the next decade may not see this heritage.

What is interesting is that when His highness late Henry Wako Muloki, the former Kyabazinga (king) of Busoga passed away in 2008, the Bigwala players were brought to Nakabango palace for two days then to Kaliro in Bulamogi, where the body of the king was laid to rest, to perform the funeral rituals. The kingdom of Busoga may not however be in position to support any Bigwala saving initiative although they are recognized to have a royal ritualistic function to perform. If these old men pass away, the future kings of Busoga will have no Bigwala send off and Busoga history will have a new page written. Below are the only surviving Bigwala players who performed the ritual at late Henry Wako Muloki’s funeral.

Daudi Kyamundhu *about 70 years est.* and lives at Bukonte, Busiki County in Namutumba district.

?

See Fig. 4.1.4 for a Photo.

He is a son of the late Kyamundhu who was playing with Muyaga Lugolole. He learnt how to play from his father who taught him the largest and deepest trumpet called “**Enyana**” – the one that yells or the calf. Daudi says, whenever they play a song, the other trumpets swallow up this trumpet. Therefore, it has to fight for space in the set.

What is interesting is that Daudi plays this trumpet and it sounds loudest of all the trumpets.



James Lugolole *about 74 years est.* and lives at Nabirere, Namalembe Sub County in Bugweri County of Iganga district:

He is a son of Muyaga Lugolole referred to earlier as the founder of the Lugolole “**Bigwala**” group. James learnt to play Bigwala from his father. He says, his father had learnt Bigwala playing from the palace in Bugabula, Kamuli district.



James is the leader of the group and plays the second deepest trumpet, which is called “**Empala**”; the leopard. He could not explain why it is called leopard but insists that is the name of the Kigwala and that is what it has been called since he was young.



Akamada Kakaire Myenge *about 77 years est.* from Butongole, Namalemba sub county, Bugweri County in Iganga district.

Akamada has been playing trumpets since he was about 7 years, never went to a western formal school like his other four contemporaries. He studied Arabic and Islam like all Moslem children of his time. Akamada has been a peasant farmer since he was a boy and at about 20 years, he got married to Zabina Mungere who gave him two children (Kamudu Kakaire and Jamawa). Both children are peasant farmers and married with children.

Akamada says, his friends used to laugh at him when they saw his father spit blood after playing trumpets. None of his children is interested in playing the trumpets.

He plays a significant role as maker of the trumpets for the group and plays the middle trumpet called “**Endasasi**” - . He learnt from his father Kakaire Myenge by imitation.

I met Akamada Kakaire and fellow trumpets players at the Busembatia during the Senator National Cultural festival to find out their past performances in festivals. The trumpet players had never been involved in such festivals before. This festival set a

new trend in “**Bigwala**” playing which is important in terms of folk music development and transmission.

Akamada Kakaire is growing coffee and rice for cash that enable him not to depend on unpredictable income from “**Bigwala**” playing because people rarely hire them to perform at any ceremony.



Sulayi Maganda Kifembe *about 71 years est. and lives at* Namalembe Nalwegoloire village near Namalembe Sub County headquarters, Bugweri County in Iganga district.

He plays the second highest trumpet called “**Endesi**”; the one that starts or brings. This is a confusing name for this particular trumpet because the “**Enyana**” starts all songs according to Kifembe. He has played this trumpet for the last 55 years and is proud of this contribution to life.



Sulaiti Dingu *about 72 years est.* and lives at Butyabule, Bugweri County in Iganga district. He plays the highest pitched trumpet - “*Endumurizi*”; the one that shouts. This is easy to sound but hard to play because the player keeps coming in continuously while the others fit in once or twice in a pattern depending on the song. Sulaiti said that some times the trumpets exchange roles and one song might require another trumpet to come in many times and the Endumirizi comes in once or twice as the case may be.

?

MVI_0317. TT. 27 seconds.

In the movies MVI_0317, the trumpet players take about 20 seconds before they combine to bring out the intended song. The players do not walk to the rhythm of their song and this could be the reason why they get difficulties putting their song together.

All the Bigwala suggest that a good player is one who can play any of the trumpets in the set. They said each of them could play any of the trumpets in the set though it took them time to learn how to do this. They decided to demonstrate and James Lugolole started to play “*Enyana*” instead of “*Empala*” and Kyamundhu the “*Empala*” instead of “*Enyana*”. The other players kept to their stated trumpets and the song was still perfect.

They learnt from their fathers by imitation except Dungu, whom the researcher did not get opportunity to interview. They are concerned that youths fear to play the trumpets.

The taboos associated to “Bigwala” playing

The “**Bigwala**” are simple reflections of the Basoga culture. Although there are not many known taboos associated with the making of “**Bigwala**”, there are some taboos concerning how the basket is treated. When the trumpet players are hired, they bring the basket in which they keep spare gourds so that in case one piece breaks, they can pick other pieces, replace and continue in action.

This basket is regarded in a special way in the “**Bigwala**” circles and not just a container. They carry it to symbolize their preparedness to perform the best. In return, the one hiring them must slaughter a sheep and two hens for the group. The sheep is believed to be a gift to the basket. One of the hens is a ceremonial one to encourage the “**Bigwala**” players handed over as soon as the group arrives. They slaughter it immediately and eat on arrival. The second hen, which may be given in kind, is what the trumpet players’ regard as their meal. If a real hen is given however, it may be slaughtered any time and be served with food.

The group does not seem to treat the basket with its importance. I found an old and dilapidated basket with some gourd pieces, rubber bands and old pieces of cloth. They usually carry a knife in the basket although I did not see one in the basket.

(see Fig. 4.6)

Culturally, children are not supposed to touch the trumpets and the Lugolole group keeps their trumpet set with Akamada Kakaire who has only two children and could control them. The children can break the gourds very easily and vandalize even the assembled pieces. They are therefore discouraged from touching the trumpets, which is why Bigwala is reserved for those who are interested and are invited to play by the owners. This could be one of the reasons why no youth can be found that play the Bigwala.

Social Importance of “Bigwala” music and dance

According to Klaus Wachsmann (1953), trumpets are characteristic of the court ceremonial of the rulers and more important chiefs in Bantu Uganda and beyond the

borders in Tanganyika. They were played in consorts belonging to the courts and are kept up by the rulers in Buganda, Bunyoro, Tooro and Ankole, where they hold official titles. In Bugwere, the Bansenza a babito clan keeps a set of trumpets. It forms part of the Binaceri, the regalia of the Babito in Bugwere. Then he goes on to say that Busoga is the exception since there, a set is at the disposal of any one who can afford it. He also adds that in Buganda, men are no longer found who would be willing to perform on the trumpet sets.

In his chapter entitled “Primitive Musical instruments” that is found in Baines’ book entitled, “Musical Instruments through the Ages”, Watchsmann (1950) notes that primitive trumpets sets are part of the royal regalia.

“... these are considered part of the sultan’s regalia which are kept at his residence at warr. Five sets altogether were found to be kept at Warr in a gunny bag, the only “Kanga” in Alur.... the “Kanga” are played only on rare occasions. According to the retainers of the sultan, they were brought out when a member of the sultan’s family died or for accession ceremony.”

As argued above, there were restrictions on the trumpets among some ethnic societies. In Buganda, only members of the lungfish -“**Mamba**” clan played them due to their importance but in Busoga anybody could own the “**Bigwala**” trumpets. There were no restrictions to do with ownership and therefore playing these trumpets.

Apollo Kagwa describes the trumpets in the following extract as,

“... Stalks of tall vegetable marrows”. Their social significance and the beauty of sound produced by a set surpass their value as objects of art. Their privileges are important. During the coronation ceremony of Kabaka Mutesa II, the set of amakondere were the only instruments which had the honor of playing alternately with the royal battery of drums at the traditional site at Buddo”

I wanted to investigate whether the “**Bigwala**” are related to any royal or ritual functions like the others trumpets referred to in Buganda and Bunyoro.

According to James Lugolole, ‘**Bigwala**’ music and dance were entertainment arts in the court of Bugabula chief until when the kingdom was abolished. After that, they

settled at Nambote and often played them during social events like beer parties, funerals, house warming, marriage and others.

Trumpets players are obliged to perform during funerals of their members in case one of them dies. Akamada Kakaire said, they played trumpets music for about a week during the funeral of Lugolole founder of their group and father of the leader. They wanted to show respect for him and to encourage themselves and their leader, James plus his mourners. Therefore, trumpet music is serves a functional during funerals. Funeral music and dance is done in some other Ugandan societies like the Bagisu women who perform “*Libandu*” dance to encourage the widow.

When a man dies, the widows gather and perform this dance to encourage the new widow and mourn the deceased. When people are so sad, such music encourages them.

Akamada Kakaire said the most exciting funeral was in 1978 (researcher’s estimation). They played trumpets at Otuli Kakolo’s funeral at Nabitende village - Namalembe Sub County, Bugweri County – Iganga district for weeks, eating and the none Moslems enjoyed “*Mwenge*” a local gin.

“*Bigwala*” music was played in Omukama Gabula’s court as part of his entertainment. During the coronation of late Isebantu Kyabazinga of Busoga Henry Wako Muloki, on 11th February 1995, the Lugolole trumpet players were invited to lead the procession of the King’s party and perform the coronation ceremony. Trumpets are commonly used for royal processions in Bunyoro and Toro kingdoms.

?

A sheep or goat is slaughtered for the basket whenever the Bigwala group is hired.

Therefore, the royal function of trumpets in Uganda is also illustrated by the jacket of a CD that was recorded by Hugh Tracey in 1950

During the Senator Cultural Festival that was organized by Nile Beat Artists in 2006, the trumpets players participated in the competition. It was the first time for the group to participate in such a thing. The people who joined the procession stood aside and observed. The functional role of the dance is changing like is happening to other folk arts; they are becoming theatrical performances; performers and audience demarcations defined.

PART II

?

Ref. MVI_0266

This Video recording of Bigwala performers was done by Dave Pier at Busembatia July 10th 2006. Dave Pier was a doctoral research scholar from the City University of New York whose topic was about the Senator Cultural Extravaganza. The extravaganza was a National competition that was organized by Nile Beat Artists in which the National champion won UGX 6 Million (Approx. US\$ 3300). Each group was required to present a solo or ensemble, a creative item song or dance, a traditional folk song and a traditional dance. There were groups like Tweekembe cultural group that polished items and others. At this county level event three groups were selected to qualify to the district level that was held at Jinja town – Bugembe stadium on July 30th 2006, Tweekembe cultural group emerged the winners, and then Lugolole Bigwala group and the third was Mununuze Mayebe group. Mayebe Music and Dance is also on the edge and this will form part of the next presentation. The old men and the Mayebe group valued their trip to Jinja town for the competition more than the money they had won as the second group at the county level; traveling is exciting to many people in this region of the country but how many get opportunity to leave their homes and go to places that are more than ten kilometers away? (Jinja is the regional capital for Busoga, formerly industrial town of Uganda, where the source of the River Nile and the Owen falls dams where hydro electric power is generated are located) Along the way, they would have opportunity to see the biggest sugar plantation in the country at Kakira and of course show their talent to the richer Jinja town people in case they can give them some money or even hire them in future. Exposure of the Bigwala group to a Jinja audience and other such groups to audiences their districts was a realization of another of our objectives for this tough festival project.

On stage at Jinja, many people were amazed at the sound of these seemingly simple gourds; the rich tone leveling that of the brass instruments.

The presence of Bigwala and Mayebe groups on the same performance stage was another achievement for us as festival organizers. We had been to all corners of the business world trying to find funding for a cultural activity in which the Ugandan people could discover who they are culturally through music and dance performances. The over all objective of the festival was to un-earth the dieing performance traditions, encourage performing groups to reawaken and transmit them for the community to appreciate them in their ethnic context.

We sought funding since 1996, after our encouraging experience with the “Omuvangano” which was the first to attract village groups of different ethnic backgrounds on one platform stage. We had seen a possibility of Ugandans acknowledging their differences, appreciating one another and forging tracing areas that unite them culturally.

Funds can be difficult to come by but Senator Beer, a brand of Uganda breweries offered to finance the festival nine years later in 2005. It was not an exciting option for us but there was no other offer; we tried to find new opportunities but since 2005 we have not found an interested party to finance folk music and dance development whether government or non government. The festival has led to many discoveries as we anticipated and this subject will be handled in another work on my profitable experiences with this traditional music and dance festival in a Ugandan context.

In video recording, we see the Bigwala ensemble on stage with a solo singer who moves up and down the stage as the trumpeters move round the five drum players. The singing is of spontaneously improvised texts, melody lines tailored around the basic Bigwala tune while at times, the singer comes in off beat, for lack of practice.

The audience was standing near the raised platform and women ululated from the audience in excited response to the Bigwala music. This is the most fulfilling approval any performer would look up for and get energy to continue. Climbing the stage had been a challenging task for the old Bigwala players but as soon as they crowd approved, they literally started running while playing the trumpets. They are supposed to lead the dancers in the procession round the drum players but in this case they did not have any dancers so they tried to dance and ended up running joyfully. Members of the crowd threw some money on the stage which MC collected and gave to them at the end of the performance.

The audience behavior in reaction to the performance was characterized by great excitement; one could see that the crowd was happy with the “**Bigwala**” music and even started to dance any motifs that were available to them. The raised platform limited the participation of the crowd in the procession, which is the most fulfilling experience for the people but it was visible that if the players were not on a raised platform, the entire crowd would have joined the procession.

If the Bigwala are played regularly for the people, this heritage is highly enjoyable to the Basoga and can be so fulfilling. One member in the audience at Busembatia exclaimed, “**Eh! banno babatoire wa?** (Eh! Where did they get these from?) This gentleman and many others had never seen “**Bigwala**” music and dance.

According to group leader James Lugolole, most youths are not exposed to “**Bigwala**” music; they have never heard it being performed neither have they been encouraged to play them. This explains the youth’s attitude towards “**Bigwala**”. When I asked the young man who was singing why he had joined the group and whether he could play the trumpets he said, “I cannot play the trumpets but I love trumpets music so much. It is unique and exciting”

The uniqueness of Bigwala music I note lies in interlocking nature in which the five trumpets join one another to complete the song and the energy generated by the heavy drumming which is highly rhythmical. Drums play different patterns that converge around a central beat which is implied by the long drum bass. Some songs are slow and meditative while others are faster, intended for dance and merry.

One would almost think there is no special repertoire for Bigwala because they play any Lusoga (language of the Basoga people) songs because they have all the notes of the scale used for their songs / music.

The young man (singer) said when they perform, people get so excited and happy which is the most fulfilling experience for him. Again this an interesting perspective of music making which characterizes most folk musicians; they do not look at their work as a money generating engagement but rather as a channel through which they can be appreciated by the community. One wonders how such people can ever get out poverty when they are always dishing out their skills/ property for free in the name of gratifying the community. This has a historical connotation because music is not viewed as serious economic engagement thus even the practitioners have believed this to date.

Like the other members of the group, he is illiterate but happy to make a contribution to peoples’ lives. He tried to encourage other youth to join the Bigwala group but the old men do not allow them to play with their instruments saying since the gourds break easily, those destructive young men could spoil their cherished trumpets. This is another aspect of the problem around Bigwala not being common in Busoga. The materials from which Bigwala are made are scarce and not easy to get unlike in the past when the gourds were in plenty. As noted earlier, Akamada Kakaire finds it hard to get gourds because he has to hire people to go to Bugwere or Bulamogi (about 50 miles) to get the materials. If the gourds are made available and the old men have the assurance of getting many trumpet sets then Bigwala holders will be in position to teach the youths.

The Bigwala musicians were all simple village peasants who depend on the hoe for their daily potato and beans meal. As they become weary by the day, their chances of living

swiftly dwindle. They rarely get chance to see or even hear from each other yet they live averagely 5 kilometers away from one another. They cannot leave their homes as it would require them to borrow bicycles and get riders to take them except for Daudi Kyamundhu who was still strong enough to ride on his own.

I visited Akamada Kakaire (February 2011) and asked whether all his friends were still alive and whether they could play the trumpets. They were still alive but getting weaker and though he was really sick, he assured me that if an opportunity arose, they could play. I could see the determination and zeal for Bigwala playing that he manifested over powering his ill health.

He told me that the boys he was teaching had started schooling and were no longer coming for the lessons. His closest neighbor Sulayi Kifembe could not walk without the aid of a stick. Then I made arrangement and returned one week later (March 2011) to visit all of them.

We visited Sulayi Kifembe first and he gave Akamada Kakaire a warm but weak embrace then we talked about teaching the youth how to play Bigwala. He said some young men from Butyabule had tried to play but needed more lessons. The problem he noted was the listening skill that was still lacking in some of them. They could realize acceptable sound on the trumpets but still needed help on how to fit the song together.

Sulayi Maganda had his three sons who were not interested in playing the Bigwala so, on seeing we had come driving a car, he boasted “*Muboine emotoka bwedhiinonya, mbakoba okwega ebigwala nga muloba*” (you see, vehicles coming for me, I tell you to learn Bigwala and you refuse)

Like the Youngman in the group, Sulayi does not get much money but is happy to see people happy whenever they get an opportunity to play. I will come back to the other Bigwala players.

How “Bigwala” are made

‘*Bigwala*’ are made from “*Enhendo*” (gourds) - One gourd is called “*Olwendo*”

This type of gourds develops a long neck that gets curved at one end. The “*Enhendo*” are got from creeping plants that are similar to the pumpkin or watermelon plant. The “*Enhendo*” grow to a length of about 30 centimeters.

According to Akamada Kakaire, who is the person charged with making new trumpets for the group, gourds can be got from Bugwere (east of Busoga) or Bulamoji in the district of Kaliro. He said it was becoming difficult to get the gourds because he had to travel those

long journeys to get them. By the time of writing this article (March 2011), he had found some seeds and was planning to plant them at his home.

Making the “**Bigwala**” starts with collecting mature “**Enhendo**”, keep them on “**Ekibani**” (Firewood reserve set up directly above the fireplace) for about a month to dry because it is the mild warmth which is ideal for drying **Enhendo**. The gourds change from yellowish / green to brown with soot on them.

Akamada says that the sun causes them to dry artificially and the gourds dried in the sun, do not produce the desired rich tone yet they crack when the maker starts to cut them into pieces. Mild warmth from the smoke in the kitchen dries the gourds under controlled conditions. The “**Ziiko**” (fireplace) provides the warmth that dries the gourds. Above the fireplace, “**Ekibani**” is normally put. “**Ekibani**” is a kind of firewood heap which is piled above the fireplace, suspended with ropes where firewood to be used during the rain season is kept. Wood is collected and put directly above the fireplace to dry properly from the warmth of the smoke and fire below. The “**Enhendo**” are put together with the wood in the “**Ekibani**” so that they can dry slowly from the warmth like the firewood.

The next thing is to cut them into “**Ebidome**” pieces according to their shape, so that at the next stage they can fit one into the other until a complete trumpet is made. Simple knives are used for cutting the gourd and this leads to a major problem that could causes some youths to fear Bigwala playing. The Bigwala artisan uses glue to connect the “**Ebidome**” into the desired length of the trumpet. As would be expected, the length of the trumpet determines the pitch. Therefore, the more the “**Ebidome**” - pieces of gourd used to make a trumpet, the lower the pitch. The glue is a kind sticky material got from wastes of “**Bisimizi**” a certain type of black ants that make holes in dry wood and live there in colonies or the milky sap got from a tree called “**Lukone**”.

According to Akamada, either the sap from “**Lukone**” or the waste of the “**Bisimizi**” is sticky enough to keep the “**Ebidome**” together and does not allow air to escape. When the “**Ebidome**” are glued together, a rubber band is used to fasten so that they are firmly knit together and well finished. At times, pieces of old cloth are used instead of a rubber band. At times, the wax dries and trumpets develop cracks in transit as they go to perform. In such cases, they use cloth to block the air leakage.

Therefore, Bigwala are generally made of gourds, glue, rubber bands and pieces of cloth in some cases as observed above.

Gourd trumpets appear to be simple to make but go through a number of processes. The maker has to grow and care for the creeping plant from which “**Enhendo**” are got. When

the gourds are mature, they turn from green to yellowish green. It was not possible to find these gourd plants in the trumpet players' villages that I visited. The maker selects one of the small pieces and bores a hole in the sides to make a mouthpiece using a knife. This becomes the first piece, and then he fixes a slightly bigger piece, making its small end fit into the wider end of the first piece.

I noticed from their trumpets I looked at that the mouthpieces are not well finished and that is why they cut the lips of the players, then they bleed a thing that scares the youths. If the mouthpiece is improved, the youth will take greater interest in the Bigwala. This is especially important because recent initiatives to encourage youths to learn how to play the Bigwala have not yielded much. If the Bigwala maker polished the mouthpiece so that it does not hurt the lips of the player, youth could take interest in this heritage.

The small end is stopped so that all the air takes one direction. The mouthpiece is put near the smallest end of the trumpet.

The Bigwala maker starts by making the lowest trumpet, which is called "**Enhana**". Then he uses this one as a guide for tuning the subsequent trumpets in order of pitch starting with "**Empala**", "**Endasasi**", "**Endesi**" and finally "**Endumirizi**". The maker does not use any other instrument to decide the key of the trumpets.

'I just keep trying out until my most satisfying level is achieved. In case, it becomes deeper than I want, I remove one of the pieces of gourd and replace it with a shorter one. If the pitch is still high, I add another piece until it is low enough'.

He is quick to make them, to the extent that even when he wants to change the pitch level, he only replaces the pieces to make the trumpet either longer or shorter as the case may be. The wide pieces of the gourds are put further away from the mouthpiece of the trumpet. Trumpets are tuned to the pentatonic scale and the notes that were used can be estimated to be F, G, A, C and D.

Gourds are used for some other functions, which include drinking in water, carrying in beer, preserving cereals and others. The gourd is a royal symbol in Busoga and the reason why it was thought to be so is another interesting matter to find out. One of the twelve stated that formed Busoga Kingdom was Busiki founded by Omukama Mumesula in 1683. Oral tradition has it that one of the chiefs of Busiki fought with a junior brother who was drinking beer in a gourd and almost broke the gourd.

Ref. (Isabirye James n.d. *Tamenhaibuga Music and Dance of the Basoga People from eastern Uganda* – <http://www.kuveni.de/uganda/tamenhaibuga.pdf>)

The “Bigwala” music styles, dance motifs and costumes

According to Daudi Kyamundhu, the trumpets players start the song, the first trumpet being “**Enhana**” which the lowest in pitch others join followed by the drummers. The “**Omutandisi w’olwemba**” (soloist) starts and the “**Abanukuzi**” (chorus) singers come in. They sing topical (of Basoga people) songs, which may be original or already known common songs. They select their repertoire depending on the kind of event but most songs have short repetitive texts.

“Bigwala” music repertoire

It is the original Bigwala songs which were played for the palace that I was interested in when I thought about this aspect. Unfortunately none of the surviving Bigwala players could remember any of those original palace songs. However, during the coronation and burial ceremonies, they played repertoires which were approved by the committees in charge. When I asked them to tell me about those song, they could not remember even when they were together trying to do so collectively.

When I asked them for their favorite songs, they came up with “Mwene wamwenda” which is also available in the British Library on line. It is a song cautioning couples not to regret when in marriage and think of divorce because the person they married was their choice. On the marriage or introduction day, such a song would be performed for the couple to tell them to realize that the institution of marriage is life long and whatever negative experiences they might encounter, to remember the love that drew them that marriage. This is a representation of the Basoga thinking regarding marriage and divorce.

One of the songs, which interested the researcher, is entitled “**Muwe wobona asaba**” (Give him / her, when he or she requests). Below is the text.

	Lusoga	English
Soloist :	<i>Muwe</i>	Give him / her
Chorus :	<i>Wobona asaba</i>	When you see him / her request
Soloist :	<i>Muwe</i>	Give him / her
Chorus :	<i>Kyayenda</i>	What he / she wants
Soloist :	<i>Omugwala</i>	The trumpet player
Chorus :	<i>Wobona asaba</i>	When you him/ her request
Soloist :	<i>Muwe</i>	Give him / her
Chorus :	<i>Kyayenda</i>	What he / she wants

The song is in triple time with soloist and the chorus combining to make a complete phrase. The trumpets share pitches that correspond to syllables of the words where each trumpet contributes only one sound and as they join, the music is completed.

“Muwe wobon’ asaba” (Give him / her when he or she requests)

In the song above, the highest “*Endumirizi*” is the first and the lowest – “*Enhana*” comes in on the last beat. This is interesting because the trumpet players allege that the “*Enhana*” is always the starter. That is definitely not the case with this song. Instead, it appears the “*Enhana*” is the last because the song starts with a call by the soloist then an answer by the chorus. The note of the “*Enhana*” is the last on the chorus side. It is therefore important to note that during the tuning, the “*Enhana*” is the first to be made, but it is not always the starter in the songs as the players alleged.

In a complete statement, the “*Endesi*” and “*Empala*” come two times each. The other trumpets come once. This is why the player has to sing through the whole song in order to fit in their note at the right point. Another interesting point here is the fact that the purported overload on the “*Ndasasi*” is not there. The trumpet players alleged that the “*Ndasasi*” comes in most often, which is why it is called so. Therefore, though these names have a foundation in the playing, some songs do not comply with the conventions of trumpet playing.

The researcher was interested in another entitled “**Lwaki Tiberowoza**” – Why don’t people ponder their ways.

?

Audio file R09_0029.

The song reveals the balance between the trumpets, drums and the voice, which joins along the way.

The “*Endesi*”, *Empala*” and “*Enhana*” dominate the song while the “*Ndumirizi*” and “*Ndasasi*” are more or less swallowed up. The solo singer is mixed up as he comes in before all the trumpet players get their parts properly. He sings repetitive short, improvised texts punctuated with yodeling.

The drums keep a rather fast steady tempo and enrich the texture of the music.

.

The song starts with 30 seconds of “*Enhana*” and “*Empala*” playing without pointing to a clear melodic direction. The other trumpets take a while to join then the solo singer comes in yodeling and keeps on singing repetitive texts that do not point towards a particular

story. This style of singing is typical of Basoga philosophers like Nathan Nyende Matta,, the blind lamellaphone player from Busakala, Iganga district. He selects rich and philosophical texts that require thought before one can understand the story fully well. Matta once said as a musician, he necessarily sung about unpleasant topic for some people. He had to wrap them in a manner that kept him safe from the wrath of the person affected by the some. At times he sings about love and does not want the children to know what he is dealing with. One such song is “**Wandyaku Voto**” (you have eaten Voto without giving me) It is a love song that many children sing and enjoy unhindered and without realizing what it is all about. Musicians who exercise their mind before they compose a song are no longer easy to find and the value of texts in expressing ability to composition / communicate a message has seriously declined.

Drums come in and it sounds like a competition of instruments and the voice, which was aided by the public address equipment. The dominant drums are the long drum - “**Omugaabe**” and the small drum – “**Enduumi**”.

The lowest trumpet – “**Enhana**” comes in on the strong beat of the simple quadruple time song. The players treat their parts fluidly without observing particular note values. The drums and singer stop, then the Enyana” and “**Empala**” are left to conclude properly.

The song gives a clear test of the “**Bigwala**” music. The recording was done at the Busembatia senator competition. There are ululations by the women in the background and the trumpets and drums seem to be in a kind of competition.

The people often wait by the side for the trumpet players to put their music together then they start singing and dancing round the drummers as in the picture below.

“Bigwala” dance motif

‘**Bigwala**’ dance is processional like the other Ugandan trumpets dances such as “**Empango**” of the Banyoro and “**Agwara**” of the Lugbara people.

The “**Bigwala**” processions are mainly round the drummers and as the number of people increases the circle grow bigger. The Basoga women tend to respond to music before the men and add to the excitement with their ululations as they raise hands high in the air.

As already noted the drummers sit in the middle and play the dance rhythms. The Lugolole Bigwala players have never trained a group of dancers to perform with them. They believe that their audience will always join the presentation and dance as they play the instruments. This is a deliberate invitation to the entire community into the presentation and as one would expect the motifs are fluid; every body dances whatever pleases them. The trumpet

players lead the rest of the performers and eventually as the excitement builds up, they start to dance more energetically to the music.

When I insisted on seeing the old men demonstrate how they used to dance, they said the main dance motifs include shaking the waists alternating with light jumping to the established speed of the procession. In one of the videos I realized that James Lugolole in one of the recordings tried to jump lightly, running and swinging to the beat. They add comic gestures to amuse and entertain their viewers.

The notes of the trumpets are three time but some times the players syncopate the rhythm without altering the established tempo. They also move forth and back spontaneously and as they have mastered their songs so well. Other people who join the dancing at times find problems when the players start to show off their skills. The trumpet players from Nambote are old men but there is a certain magic, which manifests when they start to play their things; every one of them gains energy and they become more energetic than everybody else.

PART III

Costumes used in “Bigwala” dance

The men wore trousers, shirts and coats, hats, kanzus, shoes and sandals – a whole assortment of clothes and colors. The art of costume designing is not a priority but Bigwala still excite their districts.

Trumpet players did not have designed costumes according to James Lugolole. Every person dressed as they wished, with men wearing their preferred clothes.

When the researcher looked at their performance, they dressed in a mixture of clothes that are not uniform.

The men wear their trousers, shirts, Kanzus, coats, sandals and shoes. The women wear Busuti (Gomesi) and a range of women’s shoes. Some of them dance bare footed which is common among dancers not only for the case of Bigwala but even other dances in Busoga and other parts of the country.

‘**Bigwala**’ a social event rather than a theatrical activity in which people join the performance dressed as they came. In the photograph above, the dressing of the dancers, reflect all colors. Some of the trumpet players are Moslems and indeed, they wear their hats. “**Bigwala**” art is for all people and does not limit anybody in the traditional context.

The Senator National Cultural Festival 2006 in which Bigwala group participated affected the way some groups were presenting themselves. They designed costumes in order to

impress the adjudicators and get the highest marks. All groups wore their best as the adjudicators commented on dressing but even then, the “**Bigwala**” group did not change anything. I am tempted to think that they did not even understand the concept of designed costumes let alone think about the marks they were going to get. To them, the applause from the audience was the issue not the judges. This is really in line with the traditional mechanics of adjudicating performances that I witnessed as a child.

In 1974, two great drum groups were invited to perform at a wedding ceremony by then a big official in the late Amin Dada government. The Ngoma groups led by Kam Kasata and another led by Yasoni Ndhote. These were the biggest Ngoma groups in Busoga at the time and it was not easy to hire both of them because they were the most expensive and had bookings most of the time.

They were performing “**Tamenhaibuga**”, “**Nalufuka**” and “**Irongo**” music and dance known for texturally rich instrumental and vocal accompaniment. These groups brought dancers in a certain hierarchy from the least up to the best dancer coming on the arena one by one. As the dark was approaching (could have been 7.15p.m) each troupe prepared their best and last dancer. Each troupe brought the leader and that was my first and last time to see Kasata and Ndhote dancing at one event. After the best dancers, each troupe took their direction while playing music and the crowd got divided with each person following the troupe which they preferred of the two. The people were not just an audience in this case; they had come as judges without being hired. Obviously they did not follow any instructions or regulations to take their decision which even be based on prior thought or sheer love for the group but the “**Bigwala**” group was used to such system of social appreciation not the formalized setting with imported values such as designed costumes, formations, uniformity and others which they were now subjected to in the festival.

When asked about the use of costumes, the leader of the group noted that it is not possible to dress all people who come to an event uniformly or even tell them what to wear. The idea of dress code for example is not any where near the simple folks of Busoga; an average man will wear a shirt, a trouser and jacket as they may wish for burial, at the wedding, in church, visiting a friend and back home the whole day without changing. Many simple men like these “**Bigwala**” players cannot afford and do not have the concept of designing wear.

The “**Bigwala**” leader was emphasizing the fact that this is a social art, which attracts many people and saw no point in designing costumes. This art however, is a potential commercially viable art of the Basoga in contemporary times that requires improvement in

this area. Other dances of the Basoga have well designed and elaborate costumes and this is one of the reasons why such dances are very popular.

Ways of revitalizing “Bigwala” music and dance

I tried to find out whether there were Bigwala groups elsewhere apart from the one I met during the Senator Festival and none was found. By now I have hinted on some of the factors responsible for this scenario; the old men cannot give their instruments to destructive youths in the name of teaching them how to play yet the gourds are not easy to get. The poorly finished mouth piece that hurts the players scare the youths and the holders did not organize themselves into a fully fledged commercial troupe. They did not mind whether they were hired or not and showed that they would not even force their way into any of the palace functions in case nobody remembered to include them in the programs. These Bigwala players live far away from the palaces and can only be collected for functions and returned to their home. In the past, such highly treasured persons lived in the palace and were supposed to perform regularly for the kings’ or chiefs’ guests. They did not need to look around for anybody to hire them rooted in the old palace system.

This is not the case for other music genres arts of the Basoga like “**Ngoma**” music, “**Mbairé**” music and other contemporary styles. Since they earn from performances, they try to let people know about their work though informally and when they have opportunity to perform they do their best to attract future patrons. “**Bigwala**” music and dance are no doubt attractive and entertaining to the Basoga and can as well amaze foreign visitors like the students of Vanderbilt University of United States who visited them in 2006 and got royal welcome that presented them opportunity to be entertained by the “**Bigwala**” group. These students were amazed by the quality of sound compared to the rustic shapes and pieces of cloth hanging on the poorly finished trumpets.

Regarding the problem that “**Bigwala**” hurt the players’ mouths and they bleed after playing, the mouthpieces could be smoothened using sandpaper. This could reduce the hazards that scare new players.

They also noted that gourds are no longer abundant but they need to plant more and this make them available.

Richard Mugabe a young boy of about 11 years (2011) had learnt how to make the children’s trumpets from stalks of pawpaw leaves. He demonstrates how he makes them using a razor blade.

They could play their dummy trumpets moving in processions the whole day and after a few trials, they requested to join a cultural music group to play their trumpets together with the other instruments.

One could see that the children were enjoying their trumpets and if they had real trumpets they could be a good beginning for the saving of Bigwala from disappearing.

?

Movie MVI _ 1066

The children are visibly excited to play the trumpets though their other friends laugh at them, they continue with their instruments. The children lack the skill of tuning and one of them is choked by saliva and runs away. Richard says they love their trumpets and are willing to play their instruments with other musicians.

It is important for the trumpet players to teach such enthusiastic children since they are already interested. If gourds can not be found, it might be proper to think about alternative construction materials for the “**Bigwala**”. The other thing would be to encourage such children to perform with other musicians in their environment to develop their musicality and add their ideas to the music making of the time and place. The children have found a place in Tweekembe cultural group in which they are taught how to play other musical instruments as well. The mix of trumpets with other instruments would raise palace traditional questions but in this way, “**Bigwala**” art could possibly survive. It is important to preserve the music genre than to forget about it all together.

The identity of the Basoga could be seen through their “**Kuyiiga**” (hunting), “**Obuwumbi**” (pottery), “**Ekigwo**” (wrestling), “**Embooli n’envuluga**” (Potatoes and Ground nut paste – the staple food) and others. The challenge about all the above is that they are practiced and can be found in other ethnic societies. Music and Dance have got influences but “**Bigwala**” is still intact; not affected by the passage of time in space. Through the “**Bigwala**”, the Basoga can appreciate themselves as identifiable by their values, beliefs and practices in the wider Bantu context. The shaping of the trumpets is a symbol of rustic Basoga philosophy and represents their expertise in the making, tuning and music making.

It became clear to me that Bigwala represents the bigger scenario of the African traditional folk music and related idioms struggling to save a place however small it might be in the global village, competitive framework of cultural transmission.

REFERENCES

- Hugh, Tracey. 1952. *The Sounds of Africa*. News Letter of the University of Pennsylvania
- Nzita, Richard and Mbaga Niwampa. 1995. *Peoples and Cultures of Uganda*. Kampala: Fountain Publishers
- Robert, D.W. 1955. *Ettaka nebika mu Busoga*. Nairobi: Eagle Press
- Roscoe, John. 1924. *Bagisu and other tribes of Uganda Protectorate*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press
- Tumuhairwe, Spelto. 2004. *Primary Schools Atlas from Uganda*. Nairobi: Macmillan
- Wachsmann, and Trowell. 1953. *Tribal Crafts of Uganda*. Oxford: Oxford University Press
- Were, S. Gideon. 1993. *East Africa through 1000 Years*. Hong Kong: Evans Brothers Limited
- Barz, Gregory. 2004. *Music in East Africa*. New York: Oxford University Press
- Lubogo, Y.K. 1962. *A History of Busoga*. Nairobi: East African Literature Bureau
- Middleton, J. 1950. *Personal Communication Notes*
- UNICEF. 1976. *Music Instruments of the World*. New York: Diagram Visual Information Limited
- Cahoon, Ben. 2000. Other Traditional States of Uganda
[.http://www.worldstatesmen.org/uganda_native.html](http://www.worldstatesmen.org/uganda_native.html)

[illegible]

35

The Committee

1. Takes note that Uganda has nominated **Bigwala, gourd trumpet music and dance of the Busoga Kingdom in Uganda** for inscription on the List of Intangible Cultural Heritage in Need of Urgent Safeguarding:

Bigwala music and dance is a cultural practice of the Basoga people of Uganda, performed during royal celebrations such as coronations and funerals and, in recent decades, on social occasions. Bigwala describes a set of five or more monotone gourd trumpets blown in hocket to produce a melody, accompanied by a specific dance. A typical performance begins with one trumpet; other trumpets then join in followed by drummers, singers and dancers in that order. The singers and dancers move in a circular formation around the five drummers, swaying their waists gently and raising their hands with excitement in time with the music and rhythms. Women spectators ululate as the performance nears its climax. Bigwala plays a significant role in contributing to unity among the Basoga people. The lyrics of the songs narrate the history of the Basoga, focusing in particular on their king, thus symbolically reconfirming their identity and links with their past. Bigwala also addresses issues such as leadership, marriage problems and acceptable social norms and practices. At present, however, there are only four remaining older master bearers with skills in Bigwala making, playing and dancing, and their recent transmission attempts have been frustrated by financial obstacles. As a result, Bigwala is performed infrequently, which poses a real threat to its survival.

2. Decides that, from the information provided in nomination file 00749, **Bigwala, gourd trumpet music and dance of the Busoga Kingdom in Uganda** satisfies the criteria for inscription on the List of Intangible Cultural Heritage in Need of Urgent Safeguarding, as follows:

- U.1: Bigwala music and dance, an essential component of royal ceremonies and other important community rituals, gives Basoga people a sense of shared identity and historical continuity, reinforcing social cohesion and allowing today's people to communicate with their departed ancestors;
- U.2: Bigwala currently faces severe threats to its viability, including a limited number of elderly bearers, the weakness of traditional modes of transmission, the absence among the youth of knowledge of the tradition or interest in practicing it and the economic insecurity of the bearers as well as of future possible performers;
- U.3: Past safeguarding efforts include raising awareness at the community, local and national levels of the need to safeguard the element, notably by its inclusion in university research programmes; in addition, a feasible safeguarding plan for the viability of Bigwala is proposed to include education, documentation, video and audio recording, dissemination, and organizing festivals and workshops on making and playing musical instruments, with the involvement of communities, including the four remaining elderly performers, the four local cultural groups and the State;
- U.4: The nomination process benefited from the participation of Basoga communities, the local administration and particularly the Bigwala

practitioners; free, prior and informed consent to the nomination was provided by practitioners and local cultural groups;

U.5: With the participation of the concerned community, gourd trumpet music and dance was included in 2010 in the Basoga Community Inventory of Intangible Heritage, carried out under the authority of the Ministry of Gender, Labour and Social Development;

3. Inscribes **Bigwala, gourd trumpet music and dance of the Busoga Kingdom in Uganda** on the List of Intangible Cultural Heritage in Need of Urgent Safeguarding;
4. Takes note of the importance of Bigwala music and dance within the royal ceremonies of the Busoga Kingdom and encourages the State Party to cooperate closely with the royal authorities in safeguarding the element;
5. Invites the State Party to consider implementing the proposed safeguarding plan in 2013 instead of 2014 as provided within the nomination file, giving particular attention to strengthening the capacities for the transmission of Bigwala from elder practitioners to younger generations;
6. Encourages the State Party during the implementation of the proposed safeguarding measures to seek to establish a strict link between the planned activities, the responsible actors and the budget allotted;
7. Further encourages the State Party to inventory similar or related music and dance traditions elsewhere in Uganda, the knowledge of which may help in safeguarding the Bigwala within the Basoga community.