

## TAMENHAIBUGA MUSIC AND DANCE OF THE BASOGA PEOPLE FROM EASTERN UGANDA



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### Background

The Basoga people live on a land 38,000 sq miles surrounded by river Mpologoma to the East, Lake Victoria to the South, River Nile in the west and Lake Kyoga to the North. They constitute about 10.6 percent of Uganda's 24.6 million. This is a big percentage considering the country has over 56 different cultural traditions.

(Map)

The Basoga came from two directions at different times. Those living in the south it said, came from the Masaba region (Mt. Elgon) and moved westwards and settled in different places of current Busoga ( Land area occupied by the Basoga) territory.

Those in the north, come from Bunyoro according to the oral tradition.

**(Oral tradition - story of Omukama and his sons)**

**Gideon Were and Wilson 1996 in their “East Africa through 1000 years” state that though it is not easy to date African history as time was counted in terms of generations, by the 19<sup>th</sup> Century..... Busoga was settled by 15 sub- dynasties some of which were of the babiito – Bunyoro origin. Due to passage of time these originally different peoples settled to form one Basoga society with clear identifying values they cherish.**

**Tamenhaibuga** literally means “do not break the gourd”. Gourds are fruits much like pumpkins but are not edible. They are used for storage of grains, fetching in water, carrying in milk or beer and other things. They are looked at as symbols of royalty and unity in the Basoga society.

**This paper is partly to explains why Tamenhaibuga is called a royal dance yet at the same time an entertainment art. It is this connection to the gourd a symbol of royalty, yet it is rooted in the**

**Basoga chiefs palaces as we will shortly see. These two points should qualify Tamenhaibuga to be a royal art and symbol of unity.**

This presentation is intended to discuss a **traditional** art of the Basoga which I am continuing to investigate.

In African societies music and dance are not easily separated because music generally leads to dance performance and dance performance invites music making. So, I will at times refer to these arts as dance while intending to mean both the music and dance as one art.

### MUSIC AND DANCES OF THE BASOGA

The Basoga people had many forms of musical arts expressed in song and dance but over the years some of them have become extinct. The survival of **Tamenhaibuga** dance therefore calls for investigation. The following are some of the original musical arts of the Basoga:

1. **Kisibo music and dance** – This was Long drum music and dance exclusively for men.
2. **Embaire** - 15 slab xylophones that was played by two to four people who sung at the same time. The 15-slab **mbaire** sets are currently part of the orchestral accompaniment of **Tamenhaibuga** dance. ( Lubogo 1962).
3. **Bigwala** - Trumpets music and dance. Currently only the Nambote village ensemble from Busiki county are still surviving. All members of the troupe except one are above 65 years. Therefore the future of this art is seriously dependant on the longevity of these old men and the National Council of Folklorists of Uganda efforts to train young men.
4. **Enkwanzi**– Panpipes sets which is now part of the instrumental orchestra of the **Tamenhaibuga** dance. ( Lubogo 1962).
5. **Mgoma** – Drum based music and dance includes **Tamenhaibuga**, **Nalufuka**; the dance that pours people for its speed, **Mibala** – Clan drums.
6. **Kimasa** – Bow harp ( apparently the only royal musical instrument in Busiki chiefdom court) music. I have not come across reports of other royal musical instruments in Busoga. Those are just a few examples. But, what makes **Tamenhaibuga** special?

**TAMENHAIBUGA-ACCOMPANIMENT**



**1. On the stage:**

Ngoma (drum), Mbaire (xylophone), Ndongo (lamellaphone), Ndere (flute), Ngalabe (long drum), Nsaasi (shaker) and song

**2. Outside:**

Ngoma (drum), Mbaire (xylophone), Nkwanzi (panpipe), Ndongo (lamellaphone), Ndere (flute), Ngalabe (long drum), Nsaasi (shaker) and song



## ORIGIN OF TAMENHAIBUGA MUSIC AND DANCE

Oral tradition is still a dependable source of history in Uganda especially since there are not many written records available. Historical information has been passed on from generation to another over the years. Early music history in Uganda is mainly known by those folks who perform it or have interest in it for one reason or another. Zewulesi Jane Kantono (98) born in Busiki but lives at Nakamini, Namalemba told me that she is of the Baise igaga royal clan. She had a story from her mother, that two brothers apparently her ancestors were chiefs in Busiki. This story had been passed on from her grand father who is believed to have seen the two chiefs.

One could interpret this to have been around the second half of the 18<sup>th</sup> or first half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. She said, there was a chief in Busiki (her ancestral county) called Yolamu who put his half brother Isiko to be in charge of a smaller administrative unit- 'Omutala'. **The royal brother chiefs are blood relatives of Jane Kantono and the name Isiko is truly of the Baise igaga clan to date.**

It was found out that the well from which people were getting water had got bushy and scarring to the people who came to fetch water.

Yolamu then instructed all the chiefs under him including his half brother Isiko to mobilize people to go and clean up the well. On that day, Isiko had to prepare 'mwenge bigere' – a local gin that is made out of juice from a certain type of bananas called Ndizi and Kisubi. Isiko had asked his men to come and prepare his mwenge, as the bananas were ready. Any extra day would mean bananas rote. He had to make a choice either to stay home and brew 'mwenge bigere' or mobilize people to go for community work together with the other chiefs. He decided to stay home and brew Mwenge.

After waiting for long Yolamu got angry with his elder brother as his position was being compromised. He decided to find out why his brother was not coming. He found him brewing Mwenge bigere at home and enjoying himself drinking some that was in the gourd - Eibuga which he had and was not bothered. They picked a quarrel and eventually a fight broke out.

Yolamu got the gourd from his brother and threatened to break it. Elders came in quickly and begged him not to break the gourd as it would cause problems for all people.

After they had separated these fighting chiefs, they knew that each of them was going home to mobilize men for further war so they acted quickly and prepared 'Omuvangano' which then became a feast that is prepared for people who had conflict and are re united by the elders in a feast.

The Yolamu / Isiko feast was marked with topical speeches from elders, music and dance making and eating. Cows and goats were slaughtered and drummers were brought. After some time of playing their repertoire, the dancers dramatised the fight.

They brought the gourd, one of them as Yolamu and the other as Isiko and played drum rhythms from the words, "Yolamu otamenhaibuga" – Yolamu do not break the gourd, the words which the elders used to beg Yolamu not to break the gourd on the day of the fight. This was a surprise to the people who got excited and enjoyed the fun, shameful to the chiefs as it was. The skills of the musicians and the power of music possessed the people. They asked for a repeat performance. In the process a great art was being created. This dance continued from then to be the source of entertainment for these chiefs.

That was the entertainment in the palace. As a dance that was performed in the court it is a royal dance yet it is connected to the gourd a royal symbol. If the chiefs did not have the gourd, maybe the dance would not be. The fight threatened the whole society touching it symbol.

## THE SPREAD OF TAMENHA IBUGA MUSIC AND DANCE.

Kingdoms at times had challenges when the kings were seen to be ageing. Since they married quite a number of wives, each of them would want their son to be heir to the throne.

Wives would kill all sons of these kings born by co wives unless some people usually their paternal aunts hid them. This was very common and in some instances Baganda princes were hidden in Busoga or Bunyoro.

**There is a story connected to the Basoga saying of old,**

**" Okubuuza tikwoona: Oyo agiginaire againo ni Kabaka?" . This saying is translated thus, To inquire is not bad: One whose teeth are badly exposed is the King of the Baganda?**

**Old blind Ndongo player, Nathan Matta told me the origin of this saying associating it with a Baganda king who had grown up in Busoga.**

He said a King who was called Kyabaggu of Buganda grew up at a place called Kyebando at Bunya in Busoga. He did not know that he was a Muganda prince until his father had died and the Baganda came

looking for him to be their king after the death of his father. It is said that he ruled Buganda from Busoga for some time until one day during a function a woman from Busoga commented badly about his teeth and this annoyed him so much that he decided to go home than stay in Busoga where he was abused.

On returning to Buganda he took with him Basoga musicians who used to dance **Nalufuka** and **Tamenhaibuga** dances. This was the beginning of the Baganda trying to dance **Kisoga** (of Basoga) dances and when they failed to do it correctly since it was too fast for them, they called it **Muwogola**; the dance which breaks. The king decided to allocate these Basoga Musicians whom he could not part with, land in Buganda and it was named Kyebando, after the place in Busoga where he grew up.

During the years shortly after Uganda's independence (in 1962), the Uganda government formed National Cultural troupe of musicians and dancers - the **Heart Beat Troupe of Africa** and it operated under the ministry of Culture. The reason for its foundation was to promote Ugandan culture through music and dance and related arts as symbols of National unity and identity. It was composed of selected highly talented Ugandans from the different cultural communities of the young nation. They learnt performance of the traditional musics and dances from one another. Their job was to represent the country in many cultural events by performing the traditional dances and songs.

They visited many countries some of which include: Egypt in 1965, England and Canada in 1967, United States, Jamaica, Soviet Union, West Germany, Holland, Japan, Malawi and Kenya. Government funded them to go round representing the cultural traditions of the country.

They used to put **Tamenhaibuga** dance among the last three items on the programme to create a climax. It has very exciting accompaniment and vigorous waist wriggling body movement with dramatic gestures to project the gourd that was carried in the arm pit.

#### **PERFORMANCE OF TAMENHAIBUGA DANCE:**

The accompaniment has been undergoing transformations. At first there were four drums, ' **Engoma enene**' – the big drum, ' **enduumi**' – medium drum, '**Ka mbidimbidi**' – the tiny drum which is named after its **mbidimbidi** sound when it is played with two sticks, '**engalabe**' – the long drum. Each of these is played differently to fulfil a role in the music.

The big drum, as leader of the set, makes the statements of the elders '**Yolamu otamenha ibuga Iya mugandawo yolamu otamenha ibuga**' meaning, "Yolamu do not break your brother's gourd". The drum presents a caution to Yolamu not to break the gourd; a symbol of royalty; it speaks loudly and clearly.

The big drum also changes the styles for the dancers and some of the styles have names like "**Omulenzi okusagaza empele**" – "the boy is shaking his shorts", "**Omulembe gw'obote**" – the regime of Obote, "**Kalya ndhagi**" - "one who ate egg plant" and others style. The big drum can speak words to people.

That variety makes the dance very attractive unlike some others dance where the motifs and styles do not change.

The Basoga have rich music combining all classes of instruments and song with mostly compound rhythms.

Songs are often topical, thematic and rich with text. The soloist narrates a story while the chorus hum or yodel or answer with a short repetitive chorus part. Basoga musicians are so creative that they sometimes compose songs spontaneously, as they perform. Singers perform to their satisfaction first before the dancer comes on the stage normally with the audience all round who at times join in the dance as excitement builds up – the participatory nature of African performance art.

Troupes bring one dancer at a time in the order of skill and the most skilled dancer comes at the end. The audience then goes away saying which troupe has the best dancers acting as judges.

The dancers needs to be attractive; flexible and can exploit the body to excite the audience. They require a reasonable amount of physical energy and the men always stand out for this reason but the women are more flexible. Troupes compete among themselves especially when they are hired to entertain at one function. It is therefore common practice for wealthy music lovers to identify rivalling music groups and hire them to enrich their function. Some troupes have started to bring in all the dancers at once and add formations to the performance as an influence of foreign art.

#### **Costumes:**

One great **Tamenhaibuga** dancer Nkutiire Joyce ( RIP) said: "You put banana leaves, in two pieces of cloth then wrap them round the waist in order to project the flexibility of the dancer's waist". That has been the way to dress and is the general practice to date.

## Interpretation of the dance for audience

Ndhote entertaining at state function – practice of single dancer at a time



## Interpretation of the dance for the audience

Nilebeat artists from Jinja illustrate the dance origin



## THE GREAT MUSICIANS.

Some of the great musicians of this art include: Kasata, Siraji Kirimungo, Kawunhe and Kufa. According to old man Matta the **Ndongo** player from Busakala -Bugweri, Yasoni Ndhote from Bugweri was the greatest **Tamenhaibuga** dancer.

In one of his songs – **Ali mungoma**, Ndhote mocked Kasata that “ **Kasata bamutolaku omukazi nga ali mungoma**’ meaning “Kasata’s wife was taken by another man when he was away dancing Mgoma music”.

**Tamenhaibuga** musicians were highly regarded for example in the 1970s, Ndhote entertained at one occasion where the President Amin Dada had come to preside. He danced and excited the president, who then appointed him to be a county chief for Bugweri County. Even Kasata was one time chief of Bugweri County.

I attended the East African Folklore Festival in Mbarara - district, Western Uganda in September 2004 and Mbaco troupe mainly composed of Banyankore performed **Tamenhaibuga** music and dance.

**It is the use of music in conflict resolution like this which I would like to investigate further. The available writings are about nature of performances. None of the materials I came across offer an answer to this question.**

It is still apparent that **Tamenhaibuga** music and dance arts continue undergo transformations but I suppose they will still occupy a special position in the Ugandan traditional music and dance arena.

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