

**PRESERVATION OF TRADITIONAL MUSIC IDIOMS IN POPULAR  
BAND MUSIC: THE CASE OF THE *KIRINGONGO*.**

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**Technical University of Kenya**

**Faculty of Social Sciences and Technology**

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**(December 2020)**

### DECLARATION

I declare that this thesis is my original work and has not been presented for the award of a degree in any other university.

SIGN  DATE 15.12.2020

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We declare that this thesis has been submitted with our consent as university supervisors for the award of the degree of Master of Music in African Music Studies.

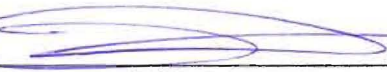
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## DEDICATION

This thesis is dedicated to my loving parents,

CHRISTINE KHIYALI BULINDA AND DISMUS BULINDA MILIMU

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### OPERATIONAL DEFINITION OF TERMS

- Kiringongo:** A term used for an artefact (music instrument) and associated music genre whose rhythmic structures also dictate body movements.
- Music Idioms:** These are the distinct rhythmic, melodic and tonal characteristics of, in this case, the *kiringongo*.
- Preservation:** A process that ensures continuing existence through the application of resources.
- Popular music:** A hybridized genre incorporating traditional elements and western bands' instruments and styles.
- Soundscape:** The new performance context of the music of the *kiringongo*. This includes musical components.
- Traditional:** Music and performance practices of and belonging to a particular group of people. 'Indigenous' is sometimes used instead of 'traditional'.
- Voice:** The whole concept of cultural information, value, symbol and sound associated with and of the *kiringongo*.
- Xylophone:** A musical instrument that is made up of a set of slabs tuned to different pitches. The slabs are placed on resonating chambers of varying kinds. This term will be used interchangeably with 'marimba'.

## ABSTRACT

The study focused on the preservation of traditional music idioms of the *kiringongo* within the Kenyan popular music context. The *kiringongo* is a xylophone that is commonly found among the Chonyi sub-group of the Mijikenda. The Chonyi sub-group is found in Kilifi County of Coastal Kenya (Spear, 1978). This study sought to examine and articulate the traditional music idioms of the *kiringongo*; to analyse those idioms present in popular band music and to establish ways in which the *kiringongo*'s music idioms are preserved within popular band music, hence determining the voice of the *kiringongo* in popular band music.

The research was guided by two theories identified as the theory of change (Merriam, 1980) and the theory of continuity (Nettl, 2005). The theory of change states that music sound feeds back upon the concepts held about music, which in turn alters or reinforces the behaviour and eventually changes or strengthens music practice (Merriam, *ibid.*). The theory of continuity posits that radical change in a system of music whose new form can definitively still be traced in some way to the old is more easily illustrated as there is both a constant population and at least some stable element of the music to establish the continuity (Nettl, *ibid.*).

The research was carried out in Kilifi and Nairobi Counties with the population being players of the *kiringongo*, popular bands and recorded music. Purposive and stratified sampling techniques were used to yield respondents. Data was collected using interview, observation and music analysis schedules. Qualitative data was analysed through descriptive methods that involved the transcription of musical data and text from interviews. This study is significant because it creates a structure for transforming traditional music while upholding the essence of the genres, yet preserving the music in present-day terms (Omolo-Ongati, 2006). The study informs policy by contributing to the Government of Kenya's commitment to preserving music through meaningful measures aimed at ensuring the viability of the intangible cultural heritage as well as the revitalization of various aspects of such heritage (Republic of Kenya - Ministry of Sports, Culture and the Arts, 2015).

The findings of this study revealed succinct rhythmic and melodic features of the music of the *kiringongo* and the music that is associated with the instrument, within the indigenous context. The findings further revealed that those characteristics manifest in popular band music that includes the *kiringongo* or is linked with the xylophone. There is continuity of performance of music of the xylophone in the bands' context and thus, preservation of music idioms of the *kiringongo* effectively ensuring that the voice of the *kiringongo* is audible.