

Reuben Kigame’s “*Lipo Tumaini*”: Delivering Hope in One Album

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Reuben Kigame has done it again. An award-winning artist in Gospel Music, he ended the year 2019 with a bang. At a time when people needed pick-me-up moments, he delivered hope in a way that was more tangible than the word itself. With music and lyrics that make you truly feel and see hope, Reuben Kigame’s *Lipo Tumaini* is right for these uncertain times.

In the speech that made Obama famous as a Senator in 2004, he rolled out the importance of hope and brought it to the fore as something real, something audacious, something to be believed in. He said:

I’m talking about something more substantial. It’s the hope of slaves sitting around a fire singing freedom songs; the hope of immigrants setting out for distant shores;...the hope of a millworker’s son who dares to defy the odds; the hope of a skinny kid with a funny name who believes that America has a place for him, too. Hope in the face of difficulty. Hope in the face of uncertainty. The audacity of hope!

This is the kind of hope that is delivered to us in “*Lipo Tumaini*.” A Kiswahili title, this collection of uplifting songs brings with it a conglomeration of things to be celebrated: words of hope strongly grounded in scripture, varied talent in voice and instrumental music characterized with skill, and, most of all, a whopping fifteen¹ different languages from around the African continent and beyond. The joy of being hopeful is projected without any hint of reservation, and the danceable sounds, ululations and uplifting worship fill the air in any of the twelve songs you may want to pick.

I am not a musical expert, and neither am I an analyst of lyrics and sounds. I come to this analysis as one who enjoys good music, and one who has enjoyed Reuben Kigame’s timeless music for over thirty years. This album, in particular, took me by surprise in terms of the different genres it carries, and the number of languages represented. It is

¹ The 15 languages featured in this album are Swahili, English, Dholuo, Luhya, Kalenjin, Hindi, Kikuyu, Shona, Somali, Afrikaans, Portuguese, Akan, Arabic, Youruba, and, last but not least, Kirundi. The medley *Mazuva Ose*, alone, features 12 of these languages.

an odyssey of collaborative talent that showcases not only the expertise of a seasoned musician with a keen eye for the scripture and musical excellence, but also his belief in nurturing and working with other talents in the field to produce a legendary musical work that, in itself, projects the message of hope in the collection.

On a personal note, listening to the music in this album is uplifting and gratifying. Being an applied linguist, I enjoy the varied sounds of different languages, the happiness that is evident in the main artist and other featured artists, and, most of all, the beats that send me singing along and dancing to the tunes from around the world. Without further ado, I would like to present each song with its uniqueness, message and connection to the theme. I would like to echo that the reactions I present here, while personal, may be shared by many who, by the same measure, have enjoyed Kigame's previous music as much as this one.

Lipo Tumaini

Bearing the title of the album, this song is on point. From style, to instrument, to the fun that it brings, *Lipo Tumaini* does justice to its privileged place as the main song in this album. It does not boast of its lifted place for nothing; it truly delivers. In the tune of *Taarab* music and Swahili poetry, it proudly takes its place as the oar that rows the boat of hope in this collection of songs. Pick any verse, and the message of hope is so resounding that it is unmistakable even in one's dreams. For language enthusiasts like me, the beauty of the poetry is what grips you first and carries you to the shores of the Indian Ocean, to enjoy the breeze while counting the "*mizani*" or enjoying the rhyming "*vina*." The beauty of Swahili poetry becomes in itself a message of hope for a language that some fear may be losing its luster in these days of a major shift to English. Here is hope, literally. *Lipo Tumaini*.

The collaboration with Jemimah Thiong'o and Princess Farida was more than brilliant for this song. Indeed, these two musical legends in their own rights, join in unison to elevate this song even higher up besides the style and the message. Listening to these two ladies belt out the poetic renditions in the verses will send you dancing and singing along even without knowing the words. Whether they are singing solo or duets in the verses of this song, the harmonious voices join in unison to remind you that in every

corner of life, like Job of old, you are not alone. Even when friends forsake you or you get broke, someone knows. Just lift your voice in praise, because there is hope. Even when a tree is cut, it will sprout again.

The video of this song brings out the Taarab culture that we do not see in the vocals. The poet/singer wears the “jezi” he references in the song, a poetic gown. The supporting musicians dance to this tune with the backdrop of the ocean and sand under their feet, and our souls are transported to a place of hope, one that reassures us yet again that all shall be well if we “fix our eyes to the heavens.” I can’t help but crown *Ustadh* Kigame for doing such a fine job with his Swahili skills here. Prof. Shitemi, we love and miss you for being such a fine teacher. Your legacy lives on in one of your polished students.²

Inuka Kenya

For the love of country, I cannot say enough how this song is simply relevant to me and my life as a Kenyan living far from home. It brings forth the glow of the love I have for my country and the many positive thoughts I have for my beloved nation. Praying for it is the least I can do. Yet having a song that aids me in this process ushers in more solemn moments to remind me of my God-given privilege of being born Kenyan. When I first heard this song, I was welled with emotions of yesteryears, of days spent in the sunshine of this beautiful country, of family, of friends, and of the hope that awaits the great things that are yet to come to this nation.

What greets you when you first listen to this song is its anthem style that sends you scrambling for your heart with your right hand in reverence. Then immediately, you start imagining how God’s strong hand is holding us up so that we stay blessed. His love for Kenya is indeed peculiar, no doubt. It is not because we have a strong army, but there is just something special about Kenya that we Kenyans know well, even when we can’t lay our hands on it. This song captures that special place in God’s heart without

² Prof. Naomi L. Shitemi (RIP), was our Swahili teacher when both Mr. Kigame and I attended Thika High School for the Blind. The finest teacher I know, she was meticulous in her language teaching, and she encouraged us to be creative. She moved on to be a professor of Kiswahili at Moi University for many years and continued to be a mentor to us. She even published with Mr. Kigame. I know she would be the first to give a standing ovation to *Ustadh* Kigame on this resoundingly astounding work of art!

mincing any words. In this song, Kenya is personified. It is given the attributes of a person, just like in the Bible the Lord addresses Israel as His own, “Hear oh Israel...” (Deut 6:4). Kenya is a beacon of light for other nations. This song exhorts the nation to remember the poor and the refugees and treat them right. The widows and the orphans need you, Kenya. Sing this with thanks, and your sacrifice of thanksgiving to the Lord is your work with the needy inside your borders.

This is a call to duty for all Kenyans. The internal organization of the song speaks to this. While the main artist projects his voice with gusto to declare the strength of the hand of God, he invites others to affirm this. What warms my heart most is the sound of the children singing “*Inua wimbo mpya...*,” the entire chorus all by themselves before being joined by the rest of the group. These little ones carry the mantra of hope for a better Kenya tomorrow. Having them sing these words for their country ushers in an era of yet another layer of hope for a beloved country. You have to love this song as a Kenyan, especially if you are in Diaspora like me. It gives me the same feeling I get when I see the Kenyan flag hanging at my workplace every day I go to work; the feeling of being so far from home, yet so near. A sense of gratitude engulfs me for my country, and that is the message of hope I feel for it in this song. *Inuka Kenya*.

Ameiyweishe

Do not fear, for the Lord God is with you! When do we need this message more than now? This song was fashioned for such a time as this. It debuted just before the Corona Virus pandemic outbreak was reported in China in late December 2019. This song should be an anthem at this time when fear is gripping people around the world and immobilizing them. Isaiah 43:2 is a vivid scripture showing us the protection of God in a way that is comforting and real. Can you picture yourself in a river and not being swallowed or washed away? Or in any body of water? Ask Peter, calling out Jesus’ name when he saw that the waters were almost engulfing him. They did not.

My parents came from two opposite sides of Lake Victoria in the Nyanza Province of Kenya. From various cities where we lived when I was a child, we always traveled to Kisumu by train, and then to Homa Bay or Kendu Bay by ship. The ship was okay, and we felt a sense of security in the massive Lake Victoria. Wait until we had to visit my

maternal grandparents in Uyoma! To save time and money, we used a boat. I still try to shake off the memories of a time when the boat started rocking in the tempest that was billowing ferociously. Everyone was praying the best way they knew they could reach their God. Women clutched their rosaries dearly and men took to trying their best to balance the boat and scoop the water that was already entering it. Only ten years old at that time, I did not quite capture the fear that was gripping the adults in the boat. All I knew, though, was that this was positive fear that moved all of them to action; some praying, and some trying to salvage the boat. That day, our arrival to the shore had new meaning as Mama locked me in an embrace that may have well lasted a century in my mind. I realized that I hadn't been scared because I was with Mama. She, on the other hand, had been anxious about me! God says *Ameiyweishe*, he calms the storm. He holds you in His protective hands.

Flora Bwuzu and Cathy Komen have featured in this song not only as native speakers of Kalenjin, but as happy, joyful and melodious additions to this song. It has been a privilege to see the video of this song bringing with it a message that is full of happiness, because without fear, hope is ushered in. The video is an excellent accompaniment to this song, available through Kigame Media TV on YouTube. I felt the mandatory call to dance this song as I watched Flora dance with joy and purpose on her wheelchair. What excuse would I give not to heartily join her? The whole team, fronted by Kigame and Komen, brings the flavors of this Kalenjin song through the vivacious harmony of their voices and the sheer colors of their African themed outfits. The rocky landscape and green backgrounds bring with them the beauty of hope as the song reaches our ears. The "Kalenjin" elder sings with his "*rungu*" to encourage his "village" not to fear. This is a true blend reminding us that the Lord upholds, provides and protects. We should not fear, for he is our hope!

Neema yako

The Grace of God is another of His many attributes that I take pride in. It is free, enough and protective. No wonder it is sufficient! This composition by a guest singer, Irene Odhiambo, is so reassuring. To know that this grace takes us through hard times and through valleys is truly uplifting, literally, in the sense that this is a song that will send

you lifting your hands up in praise and closing your eyes in earnest praise of a great God. One or both hands then swing in their position high up from left to right, or right to left, in praise of a grace so sufficient that it does not discriminate. Odhiambo's voice brings this message smoothly and without a struggle. Crisp but strong, her voice is clothed with a subtle humility in the background. It reminds us to worship the Lord in sincerity, and to know that his greatness is accompanied with a mercy so mellow that we can, and should, receive without hesitation. This is a song that rings again and again in your mind after you hear it for the first time.

Looking outside my window to see the brightness with clear, steady clouds, I can see the hills and the clouds touch in the horizon. I imagine the length of this journey of being locked up behind bricks and walls in the name of a virus that I cannot see with my eyes. I wait for calls of what else I was supposed to do today that has been cancelled, and a spring break that has been imposed two weeks early to cope with the situation at hand. I can't listen enough to the harmonizing tunes of Sifa Voices reminding me how the Lord has covered us with his wings and saved us from the trap of everything in and outside of these walls. Just how did they know? Accolades to you Odhiambo for bringing the word of God to us and its reality to our feeble lives. "*Japo safari iwe ndefu*" –Indeed, no journey can be longer than the uncertainty that now dictates our lives. Hope is there at the end of the tunnel, because we have already seen the goodness of the Lord, and we marvel. Yes, we stand to marvel even more when this is all said and done. When these clouds pass and the sun reveals its shine in our lives again, it will be worth it to know that we looked upon the Lord, and He saved us. *Mtazamie tu...* just look up to him...him alone.

Mazuva Ose

My affinity for this song is beyond its core message of the everlasting faithfulness of the Lord. I wrote earlier in this piece that I am an applied linguist, and therefore, language use and practice are at the heart of what I do every day as a teacher of multiple languages, translator and interpreter. There is no doubt, therefore, in light of this, that I like and enjoy this medley immensely. This is a song in twelve different languages, and all verses mean the same thing. This kind of repetition may render itself redundant in

other circumstances and get boring. Not in this song. What a wonderful medley this is! My heart went in full admiration for the artist and Sifa Voices members for having to learn all these languages and singing them with such precision. The power in this song is also in the spoken communication the soloist has with us throughout, introducing us to each language and where it is spoken in the continent. It adds to the pleasure of listening to it.

Kigame has fashioned this song to be an emblem for Africa, a sign of the continent's richness and greatness in the eyes of God. The continent is not only rich in a multiplicity of languages and cultures, but God has a plan for her that is as unique as her people, landscape, minerals, vast land and her people's love for life and belief in God. This gift of Africa from one of her own people is sang with so much passion, and it has taken a lot of energy to research and learn the different languages. The musical style is full of background life that keeps the song alive and the listeners enjoying and traveling through the continent. These fun stopovers to different parts of Africa that finally end in Zimbabwe again are the oil that lubricates our ears as we keep listening.

The final word of encouragement, "Let Africa arise again..." and the call to its corners "from Capetown to Cairo, from Timboroa to Timbuktu," ring with the confidence of the singer/preacher at the end of this powerful medley. For the sake of the beginning rhyme, or alliteration, our dear small town of Timboroa in Baringo County, got its recognition in the medley! My listening included a keen ear on the care and practice it took to pronounce everything right. The time taken and multiple people contacted for translation and interpretation, plus pronunciation coaching, cannot be understated. This is a testament to the commitment of an artist who also is a scholar of, and has a heart for, African Christianity. When this song goes back to its origin in Zimbabwe, it will be decorated beyond recognition, and I know the Shona will be thrilled for their contribution to an African musical odyssey. My contribution to further lengthen the medley by adding Kikamba is, "*Mavinda onthe, wi mwiikiiku mwiai.*" The Lord is steadfastly faithful, so be full of hope, brethren. Every day, every hour.

Binti Sayuni

Sit back and enjoy the unique, enchanting, and danceable instruments in this song before the first word is even uttered. Did I just say sit back? I take that back. Dance first, because you will need to sit and rest after unleashing all the dancing styles while enjoying this song whose beauty and grace matches the message in it. I don't know a better way of declaring hope, than showing us this picture of Zion being a perfect bride in the eyes of her God. Taken verbatim from Isaiah 62, it is time to claim the promises of God. It is time to say, "Lord, give us what you promised. You promised to give us a new name and create us anew. You promised to see the positive side of us and never let anyone take our wealth, or health, or strength, or life. Here we are. Declare your promise again. Reassure us in these hard times. We believe in your promise."

Bringing us this message in such a metaphorical way, like the verses represented, are father and daughter. This duo will make you leap with excitement in a contagious way. Indeed, Shekinah is her father's daughter! Her high soprano supplements his voice as we know it in many ways. This duo is a duo that will tantalize us for a long time with their voices that blend well, ringing beyond the clouds to praise the one who blessed them with the talent. Neither of them will be silent "till her vindication shines out like the dawn, her salvation like a blazing torch" (Is. 62:1b). The splendor of the tune, beats, and sound of this song is reminiscent of the grandeur of the daughter of Zion described here. What a better choice than father and daughter, his own "*Binti*," to sing this. It was a wise move that did not disappoint.

The jubilation in this song is one you will not get enough of. While they sing, the duo takes an exciting tour, hoping they don't leave you behind. From the instruments that beckon you to ready your feet and dance, to the background "whooh" and "heeh," we have no choice but to step into their space and support their elation. For it is a song of hope for Zion, and it is a song of hope for us to take the promise. After all, from now on, what is ours shall remain ours. We shall not be called "Deserted." The Lord our God is with us. Dance to this tune, and rejoice, for your shine is being polished to be the "crown of splendor in the Lord's hand." Imagine that for a moment. Hope!

Natarajia

Wait! Are you hearing shakers and other unusual instrumentals? Yes, that is the beginning of the song *natarajia*. What you are hearing is the sound of the things to come. The song is about expecting a new heaven and a new earth. On the contrary, it is in a language we do not expect—Hindi. Wow, what are the odds that you would expect a Hindi song in this collection? Well, you had a taste of the *Mazuva Ose* medley in twelve languages. *Natarajia* has only two—Hindi and Kiswahili. While hearing Hindi is a treat, the real treat is this song’s translation into Kiswahili for it to reach more Kenyans. Otherwise it would be like any other song in another tongue to be enjoyed for its sound and tune but not the meaning. We cannot forget, though, that Hindi is one of the languages spoken in Kenya. On 21st July 2017, it was recognized as the 44th tribe in Kenya.

This song is unique in many ways. Being a language that does not typically appear in Kenyan Gospel music albums, we can’t help but recognize the special rhythm and style. The sound of the language is a metaphor of the new heaven and the new earth, something we are expecting but have not seen. That is the hope in this song; that things as we see and experience them now will come to pass. The anxiety we have right now, the pain, the tears...all these shall come to pass. We shall be with God forever, and He with us.

Accolades to the members of Sifa Voices featured here who have given this song all it needed to be what it is. The supportive role of the whole group and the harmonious melody is inviting to the ears, whether in Hindi or Kiswahili. One of my favorite parts though, is the spoken portion that brings the real flavor of the language, raw and unperturbed, before the translation into Swahili. It is a taste of deep Hindi accent as it is spoken, stamping the reality that everyone practiced their Hindi lines with dedication. The solo parts by the composer embeds the song in the genre it belongs to. Together, the singing of the soloist and that of the group coalesce into this melodious sound that further characterizes the distinctiveness of this peculiar genre.

Timni

I am home now. I heard Dholuo before I was born, and it is my “*mdomo changu*.” In that regard, while this is an album with a great collection, I cannot help but single out

this song as one that struck a special place in my heart. It is purely because this language is a large part of my identity. Dholuo is the only language my mother spoke, until she taught herself enough Swahili later in her life to help her navigate the world of her small business in order to raise us. Still, she taught herself how to read and write in order to read the Dholuo Bible. I thank her for her precision in teaching, guiding, admonishing, and appreciating me in this language. She did not even know how to say, “but do we say,” but I say it for her. For that reason, I deeply appreciate the fact that this song is among the other well done, praiseworthy songs in this album. I dedicate this part of the analysis to my mother for her commitment to teaching me and making sure I maintained my Dholuo despite living in many parts of Kenya and acquiring other languages.

Timni is a song that praises the good deeds of the Lord. It is appropriate for any tough circumstance in order to show God’s steadfastness and love for us. This song, extracted from Psalm 89, has rich language that, in and of itself, is edifying to the soul. Starting from the title, *Timni* is a word with dual meaning depending on a slight variation of intonation. It could mean “your action” or “this action.” Either way, the actions of the Lord are good, to the point that the heavens are aware, and the angels praise his wonders. “The heavens praise your wonders, Lord” (Psalm 89: 5a). The beautiful chorus has a rhetorical question, “Who is like you, Lord God Almighty?” (Psalm 89:8a). None is like our Lord who wins for us all the battles. The psalmist is in awe of God’s goodness, that he is unable to narrate. What is our story? Don’t we feel like the Psalmist? I do. I see this goodness in many ways, including just being alive and able to write this; seeing the wonderful creation; remaining positive in times of pestilence—the list is endless. That is the message of hope in this song: that the Lord will take us through it all, because he is all good and his mercies are immense!

Kigame and Ngesa do justice to this song by the sheer joy, energy, and purpose that they bring to it. They are reveling in this Luo Benga tune, and it spills over to us, the listeners. The singing as well as the spoken word are encouraging and exhilarating. The dialogue among these two, inclusive of even addressing each other by name, keeps you engaged and alert throughout the song. It is also supportive of the overall message of the song. Ngesa is a gospel sensation in her own right, and an authority in Luo Gospel

music. Her CD entitled “*Okumbana*” is also produced by Kigame at his Living Water Studios. If you understand Dholuo, Ngesa’s music is a must-listen! Needless to say, she is just right for *Timni*. Her mastery of the language and lyrics, and her obvious command of her own voice, help bring a picture-perfect completion to Kigame’s Luo Benga composition. Ours is to enjoy, sing along, learn, and of course, dance!

Vumilia

This song has one of the hardest messages, probably for any believer. It’s difficult to imagine that “...in all things God works for the good of those who love him” (Romans 8:28). Sometimes the things we go through are so tough that we do not want to think the Lord has a hand in it. This is a message that Nancy Karua brings to us with so much humility. Telling us to “hang on, persevere, be strong,” Karua’s calming voice is reassuring and tailored for this song. In turn, we are persuaded to believe in these words of wisdom based in scripture, even though it is hard to think that dawn is coming when it is so dark outside. The message is, dawn will eventually come anyway, so please take heart and wait on. Night is passing...daybreak is coming your way, and all will be well.

The best thing about our situations is that the Lord is larger than them. I want to believe that even though we do not know the event that prompted Karua to write this song, it is reaching all of us at a time when we want and need it. I do not know if I ever thought of not going to church and instead zoom in to hear my pastor on YouTube livestreaming. It was not the same. There was no worship as we know it, but only the message portion. And that portion, too, was full of directions about how to stay safe, and mainly stay home. For the next three weeks, no church. No church as we know it! How more can I say I am grateful for being reminded to “*vumilia*.” These may not be the same circumstances for everyone, but the message comes straight home. That is the hope in this song; that the Lord has a good plan for us in any situation, even though we may not see it.

The introductory instrumentals in this song have an effect of assurance in themselves. The chorus by the Sifa Voices members that follows is well organized and calming in a way that matches the message of the song. Karua comes in with a unique voice and confidence that shows she believes in these very words. There is a poetic repetition to

the song that brings the message right to our hearts: there is a time for everything, so wait it out, things will be alright. Here is hope, again, of things to come, and someone, bigger than us, is in control. This poetic part is also my favorite in the song as Kigame joins in to assist Karua to deliver the message safely home. Purpose fulfilled.

U Mwema

Here comes Julie Kigame with a composition that is true to an overarching theme in her songs. Mrs. Kigame has a way of showing you the goodness of the Lord with a voice that was created for just that purpose. This makes me wonder where she has been ever since she brought to us her amazing debut CD entitled “*Nitakuabudu*.” While the songs in her CD set her apart as a gospel singer in her own right, my favorite is the song, “*Wimbo wa Musa*.” Moses’ conversation with the Lord, and Mrs. Kigame’s rendition of it, takes you to the place where it all happened. Beseeching the Lord not to be angry with His own people, Mrs. Kigame’s voice is a convincing tool to make the Lord answer the question, “*Mbona hasira kama hii?*” She represents Moses, and all of us very well in this song. Please listen to it when you have a chance. Now here she is again telling us that the Lord is all good.

Mrs. Kigame does a great job with direct address. The richness of this song lies in the fact that while composing, she looked at the goodness of the Lord in all three persons. She was able to directly address the Lord as we see in the title, “*U Mwema*.” In the chorus, she has given Sifa Voices the opportunity to do the same, tell the Lord, “You are good.” She uses third person to make this general and appealing to everyone, “He saves the righteous out of all his troubles.” Then she uses second person, “(You all) taste and see that the Lord is good” (Psalm 34:8a). Then she implores others to “Tell those who are fearful, ‘take heart, do not fear, the Lord God is coming to deliver you.’” The triad utilization of the three persons is what makes this song a song for everyone. It is accessible to you, whether talking directly to God, telling someone to expect the Lord’s goodness, or having a third person know that the Lord will always hear their cry.

It is the delivery of this song with the fullness and distinct nature of Mrs. Kigame’s voice that makes it special for this collection. It anchors and proves itself as a worship song that carries and upholds the other messages in the album. Reason being that if the Lord

is this good, he will do all the things that He has promised in all the other songs before and after this song. Worship Him in earnest, for He will fulfill his promise. The hope in this promise is echoed splendidly at the end of the song with the prolonging of the words “*Wewe u Mwema*,” showing the strength and polish in the voice that has conveyed this powerful message to us.

Abula

Disclaimer: Please do not listen to this song while driving. The temptation to dance is very high, and I don’t need to go into the details of what it takes to dance a true, real Luhya song. It takes everything! *Abula* is a song you cannot easily get enough of. I reiterate here, just like with “*Natarajia*,” that its translation into two languages commonly spoken in Kenya is a welcome addition to this delightful song. Already the Luhya language wins in keeping you engaged if you would like to sing along or learn the words. Being a Bantu language, it has its own noun class agreement that renders it to an obvious alliteration that is poetic and musical. So, a line like “*bandu bosi bamanye*” lays itself out well and sounds really fine with a great composer. How about “*tsimoni tsyanje tsili..*” This “*ts*” sound and its first cousin “*kh*” make Luhya what it is. They are a big part of what endears me to this language. We are glad to repeat the chorus twice in order to enjoy the sounds in “*Abula wokhunza bukhania nawe.*”

Abula is a song of resolve! The stresses in the words are a welcome tool in giving this song the sound of strong resolve that it is all about. The singer songwriter chose his words and tune to go well with the theme of the song. It is a declaration that states strongly that no matter what the circumstances are, “I will follow you Jesus.” It is in first person also, directly addressing the Lord. The list of serious things that may befall a believer and encourage them to falter are listed. Not hunger, not death, not poverty, not lack of friends, none of these things warrant separation from the Lord. Think of all the things that the Lord can do, and how much he can bless. It is worth fixing your eyes on him, no matter what.

Kigame unleashes his spirit of courage in this song with a resounding power that is tangible. As he sings each syllable, you feel the purpose and commitment, no matter what comes his way, to follow Jesus. Again, I feel that the Luhya word “*khukhulonda*”

with its stresses aids him to achieve this, delivering the message to our auditory nerves...both to transport the message to us and to guide us in the balance process while we dance to this music. Exuberance defines this song, and from the beginning the ululations invite you in to be an active participant in the present ebullience. One of my favorite parts is where the artist is absorbed deep into the song and chants “*abula, ii..ii..ii...*” The end of the song has the spoken word, akin to that of a motivational preacher, confirming what has been rendered through music with a final resolve. A lot goes on in this song you need to listen to it to corroborate my analysis.

Mungu Mlimani

There is no better song to end this album, both thematically and musically, than this one. I say this on several grounds. First, this is a translated song from English to Kiswahili. Translation is a strong theme in this album, and several songs are sung in multiple languages. Secondly, this song is about the ups and downs of life, and how we respond to them as people of faith. When we are up the mountain, things are fine, and we are at peace. Down in the valley, things change, and you may feel discouraged. The message herein lies in the fact that there is hope. Why? Because the God of the mountain is also the God of the valley. In good times and in bad times, we can confidently rely on the Lord’s mercies.

This song features Florence Ambayo, a lady so passionate about preserving hymns. She sings with passion, and her voice seems to have been fashioned for this exact purpose. Soothing and real, she carries the sound of this favorite song straight to the ears and into the soul. She is determined to carry forth the glory and meaning of hymns to the next generation and beyond. It is really a noble duty, and to have her in this song is emblematic of not only a beautiful collaboration but also the important place of traditional songs like “*Mungu Mlimani*” that need to live on. Ambayo’s and Kigame’s voices blend in idiosyncratic harmony that the original composer of this song would endorse with pride. The instrumentals compliment the quality of the vocals to produce music that will be around for a very long time.

Right now, the world feels like a valley. There is a strong feeling among many that this valley might collapse, and everyone is likely to be engulfed in it. Everyone needs

assurance that they can come out of this valley, unscathed, and continue with life as they know it. This song is for all of us. It is a treat that this timeless song, in the style of the hymns of old, is now available in Kiswahili, courtesy of Kigame's translation prowess. This song has a right to carry the mantra it does at the end of this album, summarizing the wonderful message of hope that has been reiterated, sang, danced, and magnificently echoed in this collection.

In conclusion

I believe that putting together an album like this takes energy, heart, skill, and talent, among other things. Organizing a group like Sifa Voices and training them in this project, without a doubt, took unprecedented time and energy. This is without mentioning the resources that go into a massive project like this one. Having this group deliver time and again, and especially in this album, is something a music enthusiast like me remains grateful for. I give all my laurels to each one of you at Sifa Voices for sharing your time and fine voices to bring to us this gift of music in this age and time when we need positive encouragement while still being entertained.

At the dawn of December 1st, 2019, when this album was launched, who knew that the message of hope in this album would be so relevant in March 2020? Who knew that we would be clinging unto hope to provide answers for the hazy and foggy days that now face us without any certainty in sight? Who knew? Yet this is a steady message of hope, one that entrenches us in the word of God and gives us a trusted mainstay. Hope is presented here with exultation. It is not an abstract but a concrete reality, ours for the taking. It has been celebrated with jubilation and pomp.

From the beginning, I did not intend this to be a critique of this work of art. As I said before, I wanted to share my own perception of this music and give it an analysis that departs a little from my usual writing. I have an inclination toward academic and/or creative non-fiction. However, I wrote this with music enthusiasts in mind, and especially as a celebration of a collaborative work that needs to be illuminated in our society. It is my hope that there are others who share my sentiments and see the point of this analysis.

I join with Kigame and his group, Sifa Voices, to honor hope as a necessary ingredient in our lives. It edifies, it strengthens, and it lifts our souls to a higher ground in times of adversity. Bravo Kigame! Bravo Sifa Voices! Bravo all featured guests that made this album come into being for all of us!

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