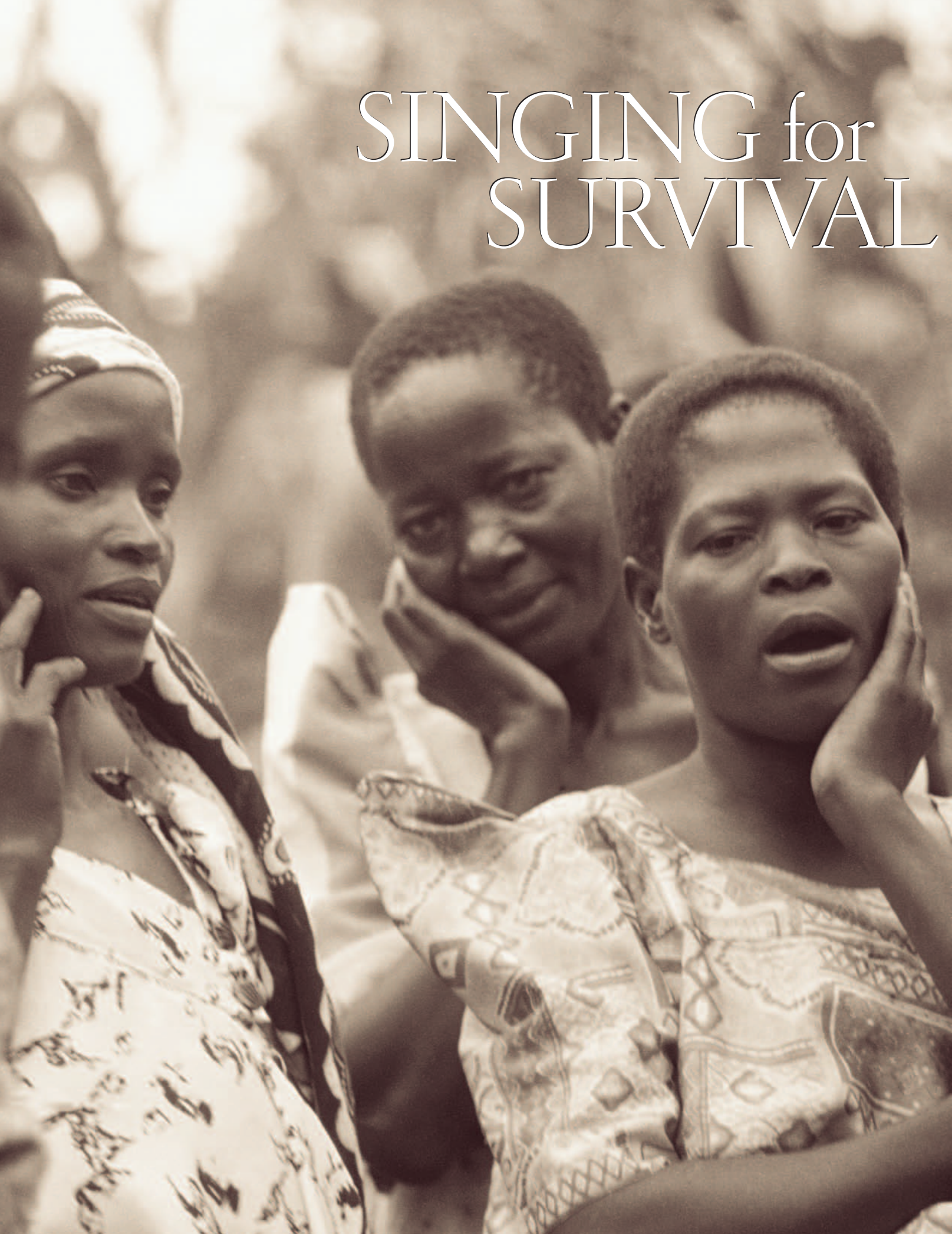


SINGING for SURVIVAL



THE MUSIC of AIDS in UGANDA

“We are traveling in a leaking canoe,” sings Ugandan composer, orphanage director, and AIDS activist Vincent Wandera. *“When the world waves and viruses came, ignorantly we perished ... today children must parent one another.”*



By LISA A. DUBOIS

The virus Wandera sings about is AIDS. According to a report by the United Nations, 38 million people worldwide are infected with HIV, and 67 percent of those, or 25.3 million adults and children, reside in sub-Saharan Africa. Even in the best scenarios among those nations, the infection rate is stabilizing, while in countries like Botswana and South Africa, AIDS continues to spread with alarming momentum.

Then there is Uganda. Bordering Africa's Lake Victoria, Uganda stands out as the lone sub-Saharan country whose HIV infection rate has been rapidly declining over the last decade, sparing millions of lives.

Why Uganda? Experts have been hotly debating that very question of late. Although it's clear that many factors are playing a part in this unprecedented decline, Gregory Barz, a professor of ethnomusicology at Vanderbilt's Blair School of Music, has discovered one crucial component that for years has been hiding in plain sight — music. Women, men and children, witch doctors and caregivers, urban residents and denizens of isolated bush villages are all singing about AIDS. Supported by indigenous music, dance and drama, they are spreading the word about the dangers of the disease, how to get it, ways to treat it, how to prevent it. Using the art of traditional performance, or *ngoma*, they are educating one another and slowly turning a skeptical eye to long-held mores. Ultimately, many Ugandans are making the kinds of lifestyle changes that are helping to stem the tide of this formidable, deadly virus.

In the rural villages where Barz conducts much of his research, the phenomenon is largely a grassroots movement created by and

focused among women. The unique role of women in solving Uganda's AIDS problem is something Barz discovered quite by accident. Six years ago, new to the Vanderbilt faculty, he embarked on a 10-week research project to create a cultural map of the drumming styles of the populations around Lake Victoria. His idea was to demonstrate the migratory patterns of the "interlacustrine," or "lake culture," people who have settled there for centuries. To help him, he enlisted native interlacustrine men to serve as translators and guides. On the very last day of his sojourn, Barz was recording drummers in a tiny village in eastern Uganda, hours away from electricity and modern accoutrements, when he noticed a woman walking across the banana fields, approaching his recording session. She was carrying a *likembe*, or "thumb piano," slung across her shoulder. Although she sat silently while the village men played, Barz found her presence unsettling, a chronic distraction.

"I had this crushing feeling," he recalls. "I

realized at that moment that for the past 10 weeks I had fallen into every anthropological trap I could fall into. All throughout the lake I realized I'd only talked to men and only been led to hear the music of men. And when I'd asked about women, I was constantly told that women don't make music. I had never followed up on it."

The woman introduced herself as Vilimina Nakiranda and asked the American professor if he would record her songs. When Barz agreed, she began to play three songs on her *likembe*, singing them in her local dialect. Uganda is a country with 52 separate languages, so it is nearly impossible to understand all of them. Just before heading to the airport to fly home, Barz hired a translator to listen to the woman's songs and tell him the gist of what they were about.

In the first song, Vilimina educated women about the proper use of condoms to avoid spreading AIDS. The second song told women where they could go in the region to have their blood tested for HIV. The third song



proclaimed that knowledge is power and that girls should learn about their lovers' HIV status before entering into a sexual relationship. Floored by the lyrical content of these melodies, Barz returned to Nashville and met with the dean of the Blair School, Mark Wait.

"I have a hunch that I'm on to something, and I need to go back to Uganda and start from scratch," Barz told the dean.

Wait replied, "The only answer I can give you after hearing your stories is that not only is this something that should be done, it is something that *has* to be done."

While completing a book about his research on interlacustrine drumming and musical cultures, Barz returned to Uganda and began investigating the culture of AIDS. Uganda is a landlocked, fertile, water-rich nation of 25 million people, governed by President Yoweri Museveni. One-third of the total population, including more than half of the female population, is illiterate. Ninety-six percent of the people live on less than \$2 a day, and the average fertility rate is seven children per

woman. Of the total population, 1.1 million Ugandans are living with AIDS and each year more than 110,000 die from the disease, which is primarily transmitted through heterosexual intercourse. Compare those numbers to the United States, with a population of 294 million, where 890,000 people are living with AIDS, and the primary means of transmission has been homosexual contact and drug injection.

After seizing power in 1986, Museveni sent his soldiers to military training camps in Cuba, where they underwent basic physical exams. One-third of his troops tested positive for HIV. Aware that he had a major problem on his hands, the president, with no formal training or medical expertise and with no funding support from the West, launched a vigorous campaign to clear his country of the scourge of AIDS, which is colloquially known as "*silimu*" or "*slim*" because of its wasting effects on patients. He began a program known as "ABC": practice *Abstinence*; *Be faithful* (regionally referred to as "zero grazing," meaning a man shouldn't have multiple sex partners); and use *Condoms*. Soon government agencies posted billboards depicting coffins and skulls and crossbones. They broadcasted AIDS warnings over radio and television, and Museveni mentioned his ABC plan in every public speech he gave, regardless of the intended subject matter. This all-out assault on the disease worked. The infection rate in Uganda has decreased from a high of 30 percent to its current level of 5 percent.

The concept behind ABC is particularly difficult to grasp among many sub-Saharan Africans who grow up in a cultural system that encourages, rather than frowns upon, such ancient practices as girls engaging in sexual activity at an early age and men having multiple sex partners outside of marriage. Still, Museveni has been relentless.

In a 2004 conference on AIDS, Norman Hearst, a professor of epidemiology at the University of California, San Francisco, com-

mented, "Fortunately for Uganda, there weren't a lot of foreign experts telling them how to do things in the late 1980s and early 1990s.

So they did things their own way. That's when Museveni went around with his bullhorn telling people about 'zero grazing' and, in the circles in which I travel (the so-called AIDS experts), everybody

Uganda has shown a 70-percent decline in HIV prevalence since the early 1990s, linked to a 60-percent reduction in casual sex.



thought he was a clown, a buffoon. Everybody made fun of him. Well, it turns out he was exactly right and we were all wrong."

After studying the Ugandan system for AIDS prevention, Dr. Rand Stoneburner wrote in the journal *Science* (April 30, 2004) that, more than access to condoms, the progress made in that country was largely due to efficient communication using traditional social networks. "Despite limited resources, Uganda has shown a 70-percent decline in HIV prevalence since the early 1990s, linked to a 60-percent reduction in casual sex ... distinctly associated with communication about AIDS through social networks," he writes. "The Ugandan success is equivalent to a vaccine of 80-percent effectiveness."

Taking that data one step further, Princeton University's Helen Epstein proposes that the main catalyst lies in step B—a reduction in sexual partners among Ugandan men. Writing in the June 13, 2004, issue of the *New York Times Magazine*, she states, "Newspapers, singing groups, and ordinary people spread the same message. ... Uganda's women's movement, one of the oldest and most dynamic in Africa, galvanized around issues of domestic abuse, rape and HIV. The anger of the activists, and the eloquent sorrow of women throughout the country who nursed the sick and helped neighbors cope, was a harsh reproach to promiscuous men. So was their gossip, a highly efficient method of spreading any public health message."

I can hear wailing and people crying
for help
We're all in danger, Ugandans
Let's pull up our socks—those who
are still alive
To fight the disease that wants to
destroy us
Many diseases have come to torture
and mercilessly kill both the old
and young
Now is the time for those of us who
can see into the future to stand
and fight our hunters
Woe to us, woe to parents who bury
their offspring
Our heads drip with pain
Who will bury us?
Who will help us when we are old,
in the future when our bones are
brittle?
Ah, wasteland, those villages that
used to be inhabited

— Song performed at the Meeting Point,
Kampala, Uganda

According to the latest report from the United Nations, AIDS is increasingly a woman's issue in the developing world, with 13 infected women in sub-Saharan Africa for every 10 infected men. Barz illustrates the problem this way: In many of the remote villages, women are in a powerless position even if they practice safe sex because fishermen will come up from Lake Victoria and either buy young girls or rape them. Therefore, the virus is constantly reinserted into the local population.

"I work in village after village where every single woman will tell me she is HIV-positive," says Barz. "If an entire village is infected, I ask them why bother singing? Why bother dancing? Their response always is, 'Well, this is all we have to give our daughters. We have to encourage the men to stop the cycle. We can't give up or otherwise the cycle is never broken.'"

In areas of abject poverty, where dense vegetation makes the roads impassable, where there is no electricity, where no one has ever heard a broadcast by Museveni, where many people have never seen a medical doctor or nurse, and where most of the villagers can't read or write, local women must be resourceful for their stories to be heard. So, ironically, they engage in titillating, sexual songs and dances to get men's attention and warn them about AIDS.

Barz says, "If they're going to get men to listen to them, they've communicated to me that one of the most successful ways is to couch, to place these messages within a cultural context that men will find attractive. Men will come and hear the drumming. They will come and watch the dancing. If the message can get through that way, then these women are not only clever; they're saving lives."

Draped in bright, off-the-shoulder dresses, the women dance barefooted, swaying their hips and shimmying their shoulders, calling and responding, joining in complex harmonies, working up to a frenzy of steamy, deliberate sucker punches about the killer virus.

For decades the HIV menace has been misunderstood as it strengthened and uncoiled across the continent, destroying entire populations. In the past a combination of baseless rumors, draconian healing practices, and cries by popular musicians to ignore HIV

We ladies, we used to sit behind the houses
 The real truth is that we used to cry from behind there
 We used to put on only half a *gomesi* (traditional Ugandan women's dress)
 We used to drink water in gourds that were already drunk from
 But these days we eat using forks because we are now civilized
 We now drink water in cups and also sit on chairs very well
 We even cross one leg and we are happy
 I have come to advise you to stop complaining
 Marriage issues are not easy things to discuss openly
 The first thing you fight about is washing the trousers
 Well, stop fighting because things are different nowadays
 There are those youths and others who keep fooling around with their bodies
 They don't listen to their friends
 You, children, you better change your behavior
 What I am telling you is very important and may help your family
 What makes me sad is that the youth do not listen to advice
 When you tell them not to get married to older women they don't listen
 When you tell them that AIDS is killing everybody
 Even I, ladies, am going to die with you
 I am just advising you because AIDS came to kill everybody
 I want you to abstain from sex and keep yourself safe
 AIDS came to kill us
 I am advising the youth to keep themselves safe and stop shaming us
 These young boys are so difficult to understand
 We don't want you to shame us
 We women learned *endongo* (bowl lyre) some time ago, and now we even play
engalabe (long drum)
 We put on the leg rattles

— "Omukazi Omoteguu," as sung by Vilimina Nakiranda

warnings fueled misinformation about the disease and led to its spread. That has now turned around. Localized graphic descriptions and slang terms for AIDS still abound in regional music, but those terms are now clarifying the message. In Uganda it's known as "banana weevil," since a banana weevil eats its fruit from the inside out; "broom" or "sweeper," meaning the virus can sweep through and decimate an entire village; and "jackfruit," a metaphor for the noxious-smelling, sticky fruit of the tropics. "This virus, it has a hunting mechanism,"

cautions one traditional song, after it lists all the people in the community whom AIDS has claimed, young and old, beautiful and ugly.



Since there is only one doctor for every 20,000 Ugandan citizens, traditional healers — often referred to as witch doctors in Uganda — have begun to play a more prominent role in the education of the public. A group effort known as THETA — Traditional Healers Together Against AIDS — has been convening witch doctors and Western medical doctors to discuss the roots of the disease, treatments, and



issues relating to palliative care and secondary infections. Because villagers are so desperate for information and knowledge, Barz always brings a Ugandan physician with him to answer their questions as he conducts his research.

No amount of information will lead to true social change, however, unless Uganda's children grow up prepared to combat the disease. Part of Barz's mission has been to record the songs of schoolchildren in Uganda's capital city, Kampala, as well as in the countryside. On a recent trip to Kampala, a group of primary-school children put on a musical performance for the American visitors. Barefooted, but dressed in their school uniforms, dozens of young boys and girls tuned their instruments—panpipes, *akogo* thumb pianos, *engalabe* long drums, *baakisimba* drums, *madinda* xylophones, and *adungu* hand harps.

As the session began, the voices of several girls united in fluid, intricate harmonies as they sang a catchy, popular tune, "Angelina." The lyrics warn Angelina to be careful how she holds her neck.

Barz says, "It is a cautionary tale, but it is also perceptive—educating young girls how not to be perceived as overtly sexual. Women tilt their heads in ways that can be misconstrued as provocative in many East African cultures. Angelina is warned not to hold her head in such a way as to be misunderstood—and, yes, raped."

A few years ago he traveled to the town of Ishaka in the Bushenyi region in order to document how far into Uganda's interior the emphasis on AIDS in the curriculum had reached. While recording a group of primary-school children, ranging in age from 6 to 16, Barz was interrupted by a group of preschool-

age students led by their teachers, coming across the schoolyard. When he stopped recording to let them pass through, the teachers asked what he was doing. Upon hearing his answer, the nursery schoolers burst into song, trilling happy tunes, because they wanted to be recorded, too.

"The songs bowled me over," Barz says, "because I'd never heard kids this young singing songs about condoms, singing songs about blood testing. When I was able to translate their songs, they were intensely scientific in their treatment of the HIV virus. I remember looking at these young kids—2, 3, 4 years old—and thinking that they were the same age as my child, who doesn't know what a condom is, doesn't know what the sex act is. But many of the teachers told me afterwards that in order for this information to stick, it has to be ingrained at a very early

age, and what better way than to learn by rote through music?"

African children come to know AIDS under the most painful of circumstances. In June 2004, Barz and Blair School Music Librarian Dennis Clark went to the Golomolo fishing village to visit a children's orphanage. Clad in a Vanderbilt University sweatshirt, director Vincent Wandera greeted them, along with 80 children who live there, all of whom are HIV-positive. Wandera established the facility in order to remove HIV-infected orphans from unsafe urban environments. The orphanage is a compound of thatched-roofed mud huts and small, open-air, brick buildings with tin roofs, dirt floors, and scant sanitation. Says Clark, "The children eat one meal a day of *posho* soup, which is a local cornmeal porridge. In the villages it's common for this kind of poverty to be rampant. It's very much a hand-to-mouth existence without any real safety net."

For over a year, Ugandans have believed that the safety net was finally arriving when, in early 2003, President Bush announced that the United States would deliver \$15 billion in medicine and aid to combat HIV in Africa. He held up Uganda as a shining example of one country's aggressive effort against the disease. In June 2004 the people of Uganda were still waiting for the promised anti-retroviral drugs to materialize and were growing increasingly bitter.

Frustrated, Wandera asked Barz point blank where he could find these drugs for the children under his care, a question the American professor could not answer. "America's promise to Africa is clearly understood," Barz explains. "I fear that our promise will not reach enough people in time. Even though the cost of these drugs has gone down, any cost is beyond many people."

Even if cargo loads of antiretrovirals were to arrive suddenly in Uganda, the obstacles

to their delivery, storage and follow-up is staggering given the lack of clinics, doctors and tests needed, as well as associated costs. Yet, Ugandans argue, since they have figured out how to beat the odds in reducing the infection rate, they will overcome the barriers to drug delivery as well.

Trained as an anthropologist and musicologist, Barz suddenly finds himself on unfamiliar ground — in the thick of a highly charged, political, life-and-death international debate. When he was in graduate school, a famed professor told him that an ethnomusicologist should carry out his research as a "harmless drudge," objectively observing his subjects, leaving no footprints, doing no harm, refraining from meddling. However, despite original intentions, Barz is now immersed in the movement. Invited to a national musical event while he was in Kampala, Barz sat in the audience as the director of the Ugandan AIDS Commission personally thanked the Ameri-



can professor “for teaching us that music, dance and drama are the most effective tools for fighting AIDS in our country.”

Thunderstruck by such a tribute, Barz insists, “I’ve never come out and said, ‘This is what you should be doing!’ I’ve always just been in there asking questions, trying to identify what is working for them.”

However, while others have abandoned their noble research endeavors, Barz has returned to Uganda year after year, journeying into the far reaches of the country to hear their stories and record their songs. Simply, his act of probing into their pain, asking questions and seeking explanations has been a lifeline to those he meets. He has discovered that people suffering from HIV are more in need of an outsider’s compassion and acceptance than erudite instructions tossed at them from a Westerner’s perspective. He has shown them through his academic pursuits that he’s not going away.

“I can’t just go in, take information, and say, ‘Good-bye and good luck!’ and run back to Nashville,” Barz says. “I feel the moral imperative to create a dialogue with the communities within which I’m privileged to work. This would be one thing if I were asking them to change the national anthem or manipulating people to change political parties. But we’re talking about people’s lives here. Maybe I can’t do this type of work without affecting change, without inadvertently getting people to think about issues that I’m also thinking about. Maybe the best thing I can do is to advocate. Maybe the best thing Vanderbilt can do is to allow me to get messy and try things out.”

Most recently, for example, he has begun



a yearlong pilot project, under the direction of Ugandan traditional musician Centurio Balikoowa, in which equipment purchased by Vanderbilt has been left in Uganda for local musicians to use. These performers will then send their recordings back to the University for the Blair School’s new Music Archive of Africa and the Americas. Realizing that

Barz considers their music valuable enough to invest in and their ties to Vanderbilt important enough to strengthen, Ugandans consider him a friend and an advocate for their needs.

International AIDS experts are now asking if the initiative that has been so successful in Uganda will work in other African nations. Barz suggests rethinking the dominant geo-medical paradigm. “There’s no such thing as African AIDS,” he says. Each country on the continent has its own cultural identity—a unique amalgam of history, politics, education, productivity and climate. Experts have learned that it’s impossible to swat the virus with well meaning, overly calculated solutions. Every community has an indigent response to its own HIV crisis.

In other words, the *ngoma* music about AIDS that is now pervasive in Uganda did not originate as part of a program. It was never designed or planned or brainstormed into existence. Instead, the music rose from the soil where so many victims are buried, it grew in the hearts of the HIV-positive women as they cared for their deceased sisters’ HIV-positive children, and it sprang from the distant rhythms that reverberated through the rain, beckoning the villagers to carry on.▼

Lisa A. DuBois has been a freelance writer since 1985, and over the course of her career has penned stories for newspapers, magazines, radio and video. She has worked as a regular contributor to the now-defunct Nashville Banner daily newspaper, the weekly Nashville Scene and, most recently, the daily Tennessean, among other publications. A native of Greenville, S.C., Lisa resides in Nashville with her husband, Ray, who is on the faculty at Vanderbilt Medical Center.

It all started as a rumor
The disease continued spreading
The rumors continued spreading
It all started as a rumor
The virus continued spreading as well
AIDS has become a serious problem!
Let us tell you the story of a person who refused to listen
Those who could spread the messages did so about AIDS
It is transmitted by unsafe blood transfusions, unsterilized instruments,
and unprotected sexual intercourse
One person, however, refused to hear
He went to a shop, bought a dress for his girlfriend
Bought the most recent lotions—“Mufti” and “Revlon”
He bought these things at extravagantly high prices
When all he was buying was AIDS!
The man became infected with HIV
He lost all his charisma and strong will,
He started selling his property looking for a cure!
AIDS cannot be cured in villages, neither can medical doctors cure it!
The only cure is death and the hoe
Young boys and girls, we hope you’ve heard our message
Men and women, you can make the right choices or not
Adulterous and promiscuous people, you have nowhere to go
AIDS is finishing you
Ask God to forgive you

—“Bakabitandika Nk’onigambo” (“It All Started as a Rumor”),
as sung by children at the Kashenyi Nursery School

Strokes of Love and Kindness

During his sophomore year, John Dick approached Blair School of Music Professor Gregory Barz about majoring in ethnomusicology, becoming the first student at Vanderbilt University to do so. Barz agreed to serve as his adviser under the condition that Dick complete a field research project and write a senior thesis on his findings. At the time, little did either of them know that this academic requirement would take Dick into the slums of Kampala, the capital city of Uganda, where the young man would spend two months studying the music, dance and drama of street children there. Nor did Dick foresee that some of the children he befriended would affect him so deeply that he would shed tears when it came time to leave.

The blond-haired, blue-eyed senior from Chicago returned to Nashville in August, still feeling like he'd been airdropped from a distant planet. "How has this experience changed me?" he asks, reflectively. "I'm still trying to find the words to explain it."

Dick, who is double-majoring in geology, wanted the chance to work with youths while completing his independent studies project. Barz has focused his own research primarily on rural Ugandan women, and he realized Dick could contribute to the canon of information about African music by analyzing and recording the popular culture of indigent inner-city boys and girls, who are most susceptible to lifestyles that lead to the spread of AIDS. Barz arranged for Dick to work with three non-government social-service organizations that sponsor HIV-awareness and prevention performances.

Of these organizations, Dick spent most of his time with KAYDA, an acronym for Katwe Youth Development Association. Katwe is an overcrowded, impoverished section of Kampala surrounded by dirt footpaths and a maze of buildings haphazardly crammed together. Founded in 1995 by two men, "Uncle Abdu" and "Uncle Faisal" (both of whom are still under 30 years old), KAYDA pro-

vides shelter to local street children. Many of these youth have come from other areas of the country to look for work or to escape servitude, or because they've been orphaned by AIDS or abandoned by their parents. The directors soon understood that shelter was only a small part of these children's needs. These youngsters were just as desperate for food, education, vocational training, medical attention, and relocation services to help them reunite with family members. The directors initially reached out to them through sports—particularly soccer. More recently, they've helped the children form a music, dance and drama troupe. Dick estimates that about 36 children live on the premises, although the organization actually serves around 115 kids at any given time.

One of the goals of KAYDA is to give these children skills for independent survival. Initially very short of funds, everyone slept on pallets on the floor until they learned carpentry and built themselves beds. Once starving, the children are now taught to raise chickens. On Dick's first day in Kampala, he, Barz, and Blair School Librarian Dennis Clark were visiting KAYDA and inspecting the chicken coop when a 6-year-old girl ran over to them and grabbed Dick's hand. Her name was Jowe, and she and her sister Aidah live with their mother next door to KAYDA.

"From that day on, Jowe was my little sidekick," Dick says, explaining that Jowe speaks no English, so their communication was largely nonverbal. "Whenever I was at KAYDA, she was always by my side and always asking to draw in my notebook. My field notebook is covered with all these little doodles from Jowe."

Fourteen-year-old Aidah also formed a close bond with the Vanderbilt student. A KAYDA participant, she helped him translate lyrics and conversations from Luganda into English and taught him some words in her native tongue. One afternoon Dick happened to be the only adult in the building, which made him, unofficially, in charge. Several of the teenagers were outside on the stoop, playing the

**Oh AIDS, you killer
You killed my Daddy
So is my Mommy
Oh AIDS, I hate you
I'll never forget you
till I die
I'll never forget you
till I die.**

*—Song as sung by children
at the GOSSACE Orphan
School, Golomolo Village*





John Dick, a senior from Chicago majoring in ethnomusicology, spent two months this summer in the slums of Kampala, the capital city of Uganda, studying the music, dance and drama of street children there.

radio and listening to the equivalent of the “Top 40” songs of East Africa. “Do you know how to dance?” they asked him.

“No, you’ll have to teach me,” the American responded.

The girls pulled him outside and began teaching him their modern dance moves, known as “strokes,” which quickly attracted the attention of passers-by. Dick says, “Sixty or 70 people stopped dead in their tracks because they saw this *muzungu* (white guy) dancing in the middle of Katwe. Then Aidah taught me how to do one or two traditional dance moves, and that attracted a lot more—at least 100 people came out to watch me dancing on the stoop.”

Dance, music and drama, in fact, are integral to Ugandan life. One day Dick ventured to a primary school on the outskirts of Kampala to see a KAYDA production that addressed the problem of stigmatization and discrimination against AIDS victims. Around 250 schoolchildren packed into a small rectangular building while the KAYDA children performed a play about a street urchin who reveals that she came to Katwe because she’d been taken by a man to become his domestic servant. The man raped her and infected her with HIV. The play was followed by a puppet show with a similar theme about discrimination and stigma.

“At first I thought the purpose of the puppet show was to make it more appealing to younger kids, but it actually helps to de-personalize the [information],” Dick says. “The stories they use for the themes of the puppet shows and plays are often based on what the children have personally experienced.”

Traditional dances are ingrained in Ugandans from childhood, and each village or region performs “strokes” unique to that area. In parts of Eastern Uganda, many teenaged boys undergo a rite-of-passage ceremony, known as *imbalu*, involving a public circumcision. Because the ceremony is well known, performance groups have modernized the dance moves to inform the people about AIDS. Dick saw one troupe modeling *imbalu* by picking up sticks, symbolizing knives, and dance-acting the circumcision rite for one boy. Against tradition, however, the troupe used a new set of sticks on the next boy, which served as a warning about the danger of spreading the HIV virus by sharing unclean, unsterilized knives during *imbalu*.

Actually, Dick was privileged to attend the real, as well as the enacted, *imbalu* ceremony. As a welcomed outsider, the American student was selected by the local elders to stand next to the young honoree celebrating his passage into manhood. Dick says, “I saw the circumcision ceremony up close. It was a very graphic encounter with someone else’s culture.”

Part of Dick’s studies required that he assist with setting up the recording equipment left by Barz and Clark to document traditional musical culture. Dick traveled with Centurio Balikoowa, a respected traditional musician and composer who is directing the Ugandan end of the Vanderbilt initiative, to a remote Eastern Uganda village several hours from Kampala. They first took a long taxi ride, caught a second taxi, and finally were transported along dirt paths with their heavy recording equipment by *boda boda*, a bicycle with a jump-seat for passengers.

Once at the village they recorded men performing music on the *embaire* xylophone, a large percussive instrument played over a pit in the ground. At the end of the session, a

man emerged from the group and presented Dick with a goat. “It is very rare that someone from the United States would visit Kampala, much less that you would make the effort to travel from Kampala all the way out here,” the man announced. “So we’d like to offer you this goat.”

The student stood dumbstruck until Balikoowa elbowed him and hissed, “You have to say *something!*”

Collecting his wits, Dick replied, “Thank you for this gift. I’ll accept it, and I’ll take a picture of it—but the goat should stay here.” Everyone seemed pleased with his graciousness.

After eight weeks it was time for Dick to return to Nashville and begin his senior year. He worried about those he was leaving behind. In order to attend school, Ugandan children must pay for books, uniforms, eating utensils and school fees—which adds up to about \$180 American dollars a year, a price far beyond the financial capacity of many families. Before he left, Dick arranged to sponsor both Jowe and Aidah, guaranteeing that they can attend school and have all their supplies for a full school year. The children found out about his sponsorship only after he had departed Katwe.

“I felt that [sponsoring them] was the least I could do,” Dick shrugs. “I think Jowe will be very excited about that. And it gives me a way to stay in touch with them.”

Although Dick journeyed to Uganda to find adventure, to follow a research interest, and to pursue his academic career, ultimately, he says, those were not the most meaningful aspects of his experience. “I remember crying on the plane as I was leaving,” he says. “I thought, ‘When will I ever see these people again? How old will Jowe be when I get a chance to return to Katwe?’ It was the personal, the humanitarian part that meant the most. These people were so open to my being there, and open to sharing with me what they do and who they are. It was very touching to be a part of their community for that period of time—and to know that it meant something similar to them.”

If you are interested in finding out more, you can visit KAYDA’s Web site at www.kayda.4t.com. —LISA A. DUBOIS