

In Kabasseleh's footsteps

OHAGA PAUL

Reggie Kabasseleh on piracy and 'sianda' artists.

The loss of DO Misiati, the Benga maestro early last month was undoubtedly a big blow to Kenyan music. In 1998, another all time singer, composer, and producer Ochieng's Kabasseleh passed away.

Ochieng's death was reason to believe that his songs would also go under.

But his son Reggie Kabasseleh put on his big shoes and has been marching on ever since.

In fact, Reggie seems to have made a major strides to retain his father's legacy. He is taking Ochieng's music to a whole new higher level.

In a recent interview, Reggie tells me soon his new albums will be begging for more space in the music shelves.

Tall, dark and hugely built, Reggie strikes the pose of a serious businessman as he walks into the Kisumu studio. He is smartly dressed in a black trouser, an African designer shirt and black shoes.

The noise around him as he welcomes me is disruptive, but he turns it down and we chat. His real name is Nathan Ragerar Kabasseleh. He was named after an uncle to his mother. Reggie is the short form of Ragerar. Musically speaking, he is Reggie Abuta Kabasseleh.

Names like Abuta, Masanga, and Kidi are his trademark names. He comes from such a large, extended family he says he does not know the number of all his siblings.

Reggie has two mothers, Joan and Judy Kabasseleh. They are sisters. His grandfather, Joshua Ogola Kadwoya, who is mentioned in many of late Kabasseleh's songs, had thirteen wives and countless children. He was born in 1978 in Ombia location, Rarieda division of Bombo district.

Reggie is a devoted Christian, yet his father was a staunch Muslim. The younger Kabasseleh got into music in the early 90s, when he performed alongside his father.

He says for seven years, he trained on how to play guitar and other instruments. After performances, his father would allow him and his elder brother Joel Babu to practice in other bands like Super Mazembe (associated with the late Jaungu Dulos) and JP Jakorando's band.

They also had a chance to play alongside L'Ochestre Kisasa Five, and even performed with Moreno Mbatamba and the Congolese Choc Generations band which then based in Kisumu.

After honing their skills in these bands, he and his brother went back to take control of his father's band, where Babu became boss.

He has also performed with Ken Watanya (of 'Adhiambo Sianda' fame), Jasolo Akush Omin Oswaga (now with Aluoch Jamaranda of 'Malo Malo Kings'), Lomboto Banya, the late Bitota and Omundi Tony (Akinyi Judy Akinyi) among others.

The band's name was later changed from Lana Kidi to

Reggie, son of re known musician -the late Ochieng Kabasseleh is passionate about music just like his father.



TP Lana Kidi Ngoma Kubwa, where the two helped their father release a number of hit songs. His father helped them with the recordings and acted as a technical advisor.

He has several nicknames. Reggie is also called Halujas Nyapanje Ogola, Kidi, Olywogo Kwach, Masanga, Mbuta, and Ochieng. He has been in the music industry for twelve years and has so far produced three albums, a VCD and is on his way to producing his fourth album.

His latest VCD is called Waga Jaka Mbare. The three albums, which he produced with the help of his uncle, are doing well. He says his first album Rapudo Kambuta, which had five tracks, did well, while the second one, The Second Liberation of Rainbow, did poorly. The third, Los Mari Kata Tin is reportedly doing well.

"The fourth collection will be my best," he says. He attributes his success to his uncle Amisi Buddy, whom he considers his mentor and guardian. "Amisi nurtured me into what I am now. I played alongside him in the L'Ochestre Buddy Sake Band for at least four years. In fact, I produced many of my songs while I was with him.

But he had to quit because he wanted to pave way for other upcoming young artistes to get the necessary support that Amisi gave us."

His new outfit, L'Ochestre Kidi Masanga, has ten members. There is Malachi Raring'o Othindo, who does solo and is also the personal Assistant to the band.

There is also long term singer Crispin Odhiambo, Sylvester Jaungu (drums), Katina Kazungu (rhythm), Sheriff Otany (bass). Sheriff is also a long time friend and technical advisor to the band.

Others members are Omundi Jakakuth, Ochieng Otare,

Oluoch wud Min Oluoch, and Owiyo wud Jokindu.

Reggie adores music because it pays. "Music is my source of income," he says proudly. "I do it like any other work. I don't consider it a talent, but a job, just like any other. Music has also made me responsible."

The artiste is married to Hilda Akinyi and has four children. He describes his wife as 'the loveliest woman on earth.' In jest, he tells me, "Make sure you report that. She is the best woman who ever lived."

He says he will go on to compose more songs on national unity. He is however, critical of a section of the current crop of musicians, whom he says are 'overly obsessed with singing about the size of women's behinds.'

"How I love the songs done by the old artistes! They were so educative and could soothe your spirits. But the current musicians only sing about love and sianda (women's bums). Music is good. We can make it better if we kill piracy and encourage creativity.

Piracy is killing us. The government has neglected us, yet music is a source of income and employment to many people. He rummages through his suitcase and pulls out a copy of a CD with pirated songs.

"You see, I found this in Nakuru. Someone hawker was selling it to me. Just imagine! I got hold of him! I am going to sue for piracy.

Reggie has recently shifted base to the sugar town of Muloroni and acquired new producer named Kadamba Productions.

"Make sure you report correctly, or I will take you to court, like the pirates. Mark you, I have a very tough lawyer," he says as I leave.

