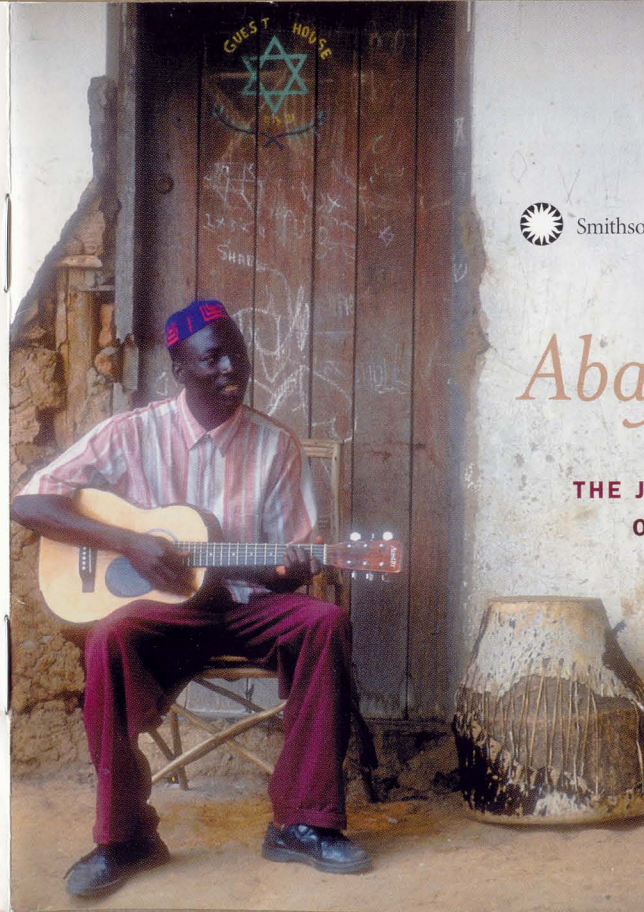




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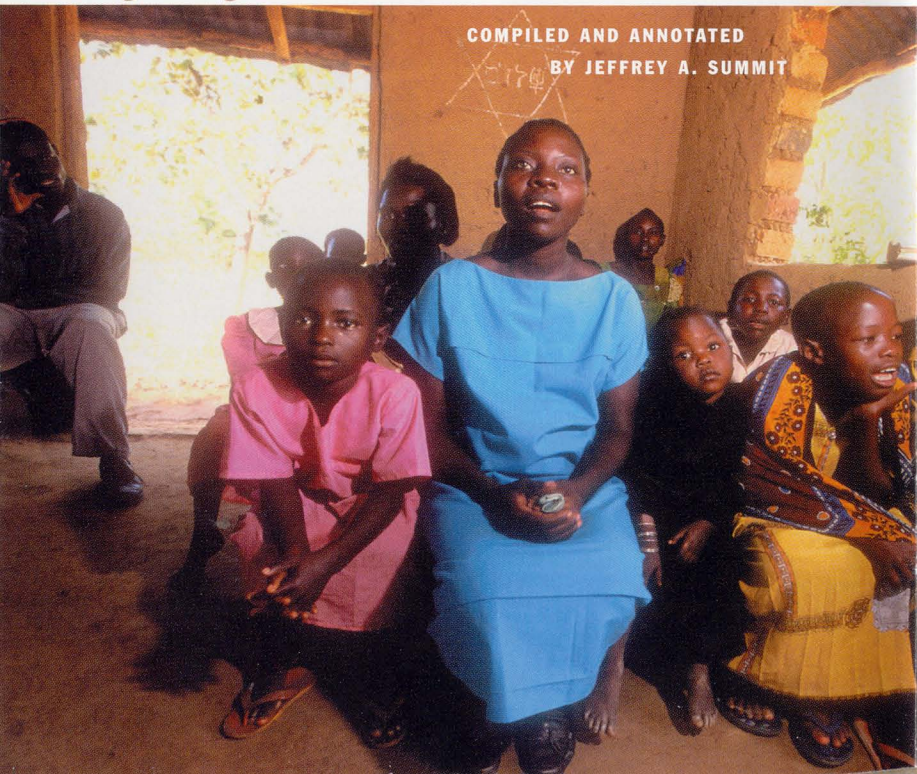
Smithsonian Folkways Recordings

Abayudaya

MUSIC FROM
THE JEWISH PEOPLE
OF UGANDA

Abayudaya MUSIC FROM THE JEWISH PEOPLE OF UGANDA

COMPILED AND ANNOTATED
BY JEFFREY A. SUMMIT



1. PSALM 136 3:24
2. KATONDA OYO NALIMANA (GOD IS ALL-KNOWING) 4:09
3. HIWUMBE AWUMBA (GOD CREATES AND THEN DESTROYS) 2:31
4. MWANA TALITAMBULA (THE CHILD WILL NEVER WALK) 1:18
5. MWANA, NGOLERA (BABY, KEEP QUIET) 0:49
6. TULO, TULO (SLEEP, SLEEP) 0:52
7. I AM A SOLDIER 0:46
8. MI KHAMOKHAH (WHO IS LIKE YOU[, O GOD]?) 0:18
9. KABBILA (THE PATCH OF FOREST) 3:49
10. TWAGALA TORAH (WE LOVE THE TORAH) 1:33
11. WE ARE HAPPY 3:25
12. ADON OLAM (MASTER OF THE WORLD) 1:53
13. LEKHAH, DODI (COME, MY BELOVED) 5:21
14. PSALM 92 4:59
15. PSALM 93 2:44
16. KIDDUSH AND MOTZI (SABBATH BLESSING OVER WINE AND BREAD) 1:11
17. PSALM 121 1:31
18. MAIMUNA 2:13
19. HINEI MA TOV (BEHOLD HOW GOOD [IT IS FOR BROTHERS TO DWELL TOGETHER]) 1:23
20. ALI OMU YEKKA (MY ONLY ONE) 4:45
21. PSALM 150 3:33
22. DEUTERONOMY 32:8, SONG TWO (SELECTION) 0:35
23. DEUTERONOMY 32:39-43, SONG EIGHT 3:35
24. PSALM 130 1:52

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LEFT: Rena bat Esther leads a psalm in the Pallisa synagogue. FRONT COVER: John Mark Nkoola plays one of the community's three shared guitars in front of the student guest house on Nabogoya Hill.

Abayudaya MUSIC FROM THE JEWISH PEOPLE OF UGANDA

Jeffrey A. Summit

The Abayudaya, a community of approximately 600 people living in villages surrounding Mbale in Eastern Uganda, are practicing Jews. Many members scrupulously follow Jewish ritual, observe the laws of the Sabbath, celebrate Jewish holidays, keep kosher, and pray in Hebrew. Other communities of indigenous Africans, such as the Beta Israel of Ethiopia and the Lemba of South Africa and Zimbabwe, claim Jewish lineage. The Abayudaya do not; their ancestors converted to Judaism in 1919. Moved by their belief in the truth of the Torah (the five books of Moses), they developed their Jewish practice and liturgy in the process of separating themselves from Christian missionary activity and British political rule.

The Abayudaya have developed a unique musical repertoire, which has grown from a variety of sources: Malakite music adapted by the community's founder, Semei Kakungulu; liturgical selections learned from their early contacts with occasional Jewish visitors and the expatriate congregation in Nairobi; music of worship and celebration composed by Abayudaya youth in the 1980s; and traditional and contemporary music learned by their recent contact with Jews from North America and Israel. Their music of worship and religious celebration bridges the five Bantu ethnic and language groups that comprise the community—Baganda, Basoga, Bagisu, Bagwere, and Banyole. This shared tradition of Jewish music increasingly causes the Abayudaya to see themselves as one people. Still, a fuller view of the community's music shows an expressive culture rooted in local musical forms and styles. In aspects of daily life that they see as not conflicting with their Jewish identity, the Abayudaya continue to celebrate and sing in the traditions of their local languages and ethnic groups. Yet even this traditional music has undergone transformation. Basoga *ngoma* (drumming songs) are reframed to stress

God's providence for the Abayudaya. Abayudaya who converted to Christianity during the persecutions of Idi Amin compose contemporary folksongs accompanied by *adungu* (a nine-stringed harp), and reintroduce this music into Abayudaya community celebrations. Bagisu circumcision songs are adapted for the political campaign of Joab (J. J.) Keki, the first Jew elected to local political office in Uganda. Abayudaya songs of celebration are written in the style of village guitar music, but their lyrics blend verses from the Bible in Hebrew with verses in Luganda. One can ask what is Jewish about a Basoga drumming song, yet if, as the ethnomusicologist Curt Sachs said, Jewish music is music made *by Jews, for Jews, as Jews*, a closer examination of these songs and their social context deepens our understanding of Abayudaya identity (Bayer 1972:555).

The community was founded by Semei Kakungulu, a powerful Baganda military leader who worked with the British in the early 20th century. In the 1890s, he was recruited to fight against Muslims and Roman Catholics in the battles to control Uganda. Evangelized by the Anglican Church Missionary Society, he allied himself with the British in the hope that he would be recognized as *kabaka* ([Luganda] king) of Uganda's eastern region. In Uganda's colonial history, religious conversion was a strategic aspect of political affiliation and opposition. The attainment of Western literacy, which was often required for conversion by the Anglican Church, led to power and status under British colonial rule. Kakungulu's achievements were many: he founded the town of Mbale, built roads, and planted trees. But he was sorely disappointed when the British did not grant him a royal title, and resigned his post in Busoga in 1913 to return to Mbale. His disaffection with the British and his literal reading of the Bible led him to reject the Anglican Church. He joined the Malakites, dissident Protestants who regarded Saturday as the Sabbath, would eat no pork, and, following the example of the biblical patriarchs, allowed polygamy.

As Kakungulu studied the Luganda translation of the Hebrew Bible, he called for yet stricter adherence than the Malakites. In 1919, he embraced the proposition that male babies should undergo circumcision on their eighth day of life, as commanded in the Bible.

This was a break not only with Christianity, but with the rituals of his Baganda heritage. Malakai, the Malakites' founder, told him that only Jews practiced the ritual of circumcision on the eighth day, to which he reportedly replied, "If this is so, then from this day on, I am a Jew." According to Abayudaya elders, Kakungulu followed the example of the patriarch Abraham and circumcised himself and his sons. Soon afterwards, about 3000 of his male followers were circumcised. They practiced a form of proto-Judaism that focused on biblical ritual observance, incorporating aspects of Judaism with Protestantism. Kakungulu himself adapted the music from Malakite worship and developed the community's Sabbath liturgy, which included preaching, reading selections from the Hebrew Bible in Luganda, and singing selections from the Song of Moses (Deut. 32:1-43).

The Abayudaya's first contact with mainstream Judaism occurred in 1926, when, in Kampala, Kakungulu met a Jewish trader, Yusuf (Joseph). Kakungulu invited him and his business companion, a Jew named Moses, to return with him to Mbale. Yusuf taught the community leaders elementary Hebrew, certain prayers and blessings, and the basics of kosher slaughtering. Under Yusuf's direction, they abandoned key Christian beliefs and practices, such as baptism and liturgical references to Jesus. They began to name their children after people in the Hebrew Bible. They took their Bibles and literally ripped out the New Testament. Yusuf presented them with their first copy of the Hebrew Bible, a volume printed in Hebrew and English.

From the 1930s to the mid-1960s, the community had contact with very few other Jews. In 1937, the community learned that a Jew from Yemen, David Solomon, was working in Mbale. They visited him and impressed upon him that they too were Jews. Solomon provided them with elementary Hebrew books and Jewish calendars, and stayed in regular contact until he left Uganda, in 1963. This period was a time of economic difficulties, struggles for succession in community leadership, and a weakening of the community's structure. During these years, the community paid a price for their adherence to Jewish belief. Since the only schools in the area were run by Christians, who continually tried to convert their students, many Abayudaya men did not attend school. For fear of being

RECORDING THE ABAYUDAYA

As Jews who follow traditional practice, the Abayudaya observe the prohibition against lighting a fire on the Sabbath. This prohibition is extended by traditional Jews to forbid the use of electricity, and thus recording devices. To record their Sabbath music, members of the congregation assembled during the week to sing the music that is normally sung on the Sabbath and festivals. Although I wished to record the music on location in the Moses Synagogue on Nabogoya Hill, this was not possible. The Moses Synagogue is visible from the Bufumbo road that runs between Nabogoya and Mbale. When the recording equipment was set up, we became the most exciting event in the area, and scores of neighborhood children and visitors flocked to the sessions. While it was a great party, controlling the noise level on Nabogoya Hill was impossible. The shouting of children, the rustling of grass mats, the scraping of wooden benches against the cement floor—all obscured the music.

For these recording sessions, I rented a thatched hut on the grounds of the Mount Elgon Hotel, on the outskirts of Mbale. Here we recorded the liturgical music and music of celebration accompanied by keyboard and guitar. As noted, other selections were recorded in the villages in which the Abayudaya live. In the field, we recorded on a Sony DAT D-10 Pro using a Shure VP 88 microphone. On the grounds of the Mount Elgon Hotel, we used two Bruel and Kjaer 4011 cardioid microphones, with two Bruel and Kjaer 4006 omni directionals up high to capture ambient room sound. We ran these mikes through a Mackie 1402 VLZ stereo mixer to an Apogee PSX100 converter to the Sony DAT recorder.

drawn away from their traditions, a whole generation failed to become educated. During this time, local Christians often abused the Abayudaya, calling them monkeys and Christ-killers. Local Muslims and Christians would not hire Abayudaya, and the community had to eke out a living by subsistence farming. Samson Mugombe, a student of Kakungulu's, was then their rabbi. He said that if members of that generation had gone to school, they would have learned English and become doctors and lawyers. Still, he affirmed, "I did not feel any loss at all because I stayed with the Torah."

During the late 1940s, through radio and newspapers, the Abayudaya became aware of the emergence of Israel. When Israel was declared a state, in 1948, the community gathered and scanned the horizon, waiting for an airplane to appear and transport them to Zion. They prayed to be delivered from their isolation, but world Jewry knew nothing about them. To date, no member of the community has visited Israel.

In 1962, at David Solomon's request, Arye Oded, secretary at the Israeli Embassy in Kampala, visited the Abayudaya and arranged for Hebrew prayerbooks to be sent to the community from the United States and Israel. Abayudaya leaders began to study Hebrew and to restructure their worship in accord with mainstream Jewish practice. They began to correspond with Jewish organizations in the United States and Israel, requesting aid and recognition. This developing connection to world Jewry ended abruptly in 1971, when Idi Amin came to power as dictator of Uganda. His rule, which lasted until 1979, was a dangerous and difficult time for the Abayudaya. He cut off all contact with Israel, closed synagogues, and forbade the Abayudaya to gather for worship and to study the Bible.

ABAYUDAYA

In Luganda, the root yudaya means "Jew." The plural, bayudaya, means "Jews," and the singular, muyudaya, means "an individual Jew." Abayudaya means "the Jews" or "the Jewish people." As the community has had increased contact with Jews in North America, they have chosen to refer to themselves as the Abayudaya. In consultation with the leadership of the community, we have decided to use the phrase "the Abayudaya," although technically, this repeats the definite article.

The Abayudaya's Hebrew pronunciation is influenced by Luganda, where many words end with a vowel. As a result, when singing in Hebrew, the Abayudaya often add a vowel to the end of a word. Thus, likrat, "to welcome," becomes likrati, and olam, "world," becomes olamu.

Gershom Sizomu, the community's current spiritual leader, was a child during Amin's reign. "My faith was being strangled by the president," Sizomu explains. "It was not easy going to school. We would be taunted by our teachers and forced to work in the school gardens on Saturday, our Sabbath. We were even forbidden to conduct funeral services and had to bear our dead silently to the grave." Disheartened, and with little means of support, many members converted to Christianity. Still, a core of the Abayudaya saw their trials as a test of their faith, and retained their practice in the face of persecution. Committed members worshiped in secret, praying in their homes and in an isolated cave. To circumcise baby boys, their *mohalim* (ritual circumcisers) would take infants into the banana groves, away from the eyes of suspicious neighbors. Sizomu tells of how his father, to observe the Jewish holiday of Sukkot, secretly built a small booth, a *sukkah*, behind their home. He was caught by local security people, and only a bribe of two goats saved him from going to jail. After Amin was deposed and the community returned to Jewish practice, much had been forgotten, synagogues had fallen into disrepair, and the community had dwindled to as few as 300 members. Once there had been thirty-six synagogues; after Amin, only five remained.

RESURGENCE OF THE COMMUNITY IN THE 1980s

In the early 1980s, to revive the community, Joab (J. J.) Keki, with his brothers, Gershom Sizomu and Aaron Kintu Moses, and a group of classmates, formed the Young Jewish Club. These youths studied the Hebrew alphabet and prayerbooks that had arrived from abroad in the 1960s. They developed a new style of Abayudaya music, composing choral settings for psalms in Luganda, both to use in worship and to accompany their youth-group activities. A youth movement that started out to be a revival of Abayudaya traditions became a full-scale attempt by the community's youth to transform their cultural and religious life and its social organization. Their efforts, however, were frustrated by the political turmoil, violence, and famine in Uganda during the second government of Milton Obote (1981–1985).

These young leaders persisted and were more militant than Samson Mugombe and other elders. They were determined to rebuild the Moses Synagogue on Nabogoya Hill, Kakungulu's land on the outskirts of Mbale. In 1988, the Anglican School tried to claim the hill. Abayudaya elders did not protest, but the youths formed a new youth-group, which they called the Kibbutz, modeled after Zionist pioneers they had read about in books. With guitars, drums, prayerbooks, and Bibles, about twenty kibbutzniks moved into one of the simple buildings on the hill. The Anglican Church used its political influence, and local police took four of the leaders to jail, where they were beaten and imprisoned for four days. Isaac Kakungulu, Semei Kakungulu's son, who had converted to Christianity and had become a lawyer in Kampala, helped post bail and secure their release. They returned from prison even more determined to remain on Nabogoya Hill. As Sizomu describes it, "They came back with a local force and threw our belongings outside the staff houses that we had occupied, but we said, 'We will not leave this place. This is our land. If we are to die, bring the guns and shoot all of us and our blood will flow here.'" Finally, matters went to the district administrator, and Isaac Kakungulu wrote an impassioned letter to the local district leaders advising them to leave the Abayudaya alone. These years of intimidation inspired Keki to run for political office—his answer to those who had used political power to intimidate the community.

Only in the late 1980s did the Abayudaya become aware of the expatriate Jewish community in Nairobi, Kenya. When Keki first went to visit this community of Jews, he did not receive a warm welcome. Few of them believed that this Bantu man from Uganda was Jewish. He returned to Mbale so discouraged that he related the details of this unsuccessful visit only to his closest friends, so as not to dishearten the community. Over time, however, Sizomu and Keki developed friendships with certain members of the congregation in Nairobi. The young Abayudaya leaders had a tremendous desire to make contact with other Jews. Sizomu visited Nairobi frequently in the early 1990s to study with one of their older members, who taught him the structure and melodies of traditional Jewish prayer. In the Nairobi synagogue, he met Matthew Meyer, a student from Brown University, who subsequently visited the Abayudaya. Upon his return to the United

States, Meyer raised \$1000 from his Hillel Foundation to finish the synagogue. Anglican officials in Mbale finally gave up all efforts to claim the Abayudaya's land on Nabogoya Hill.

A NEW ERA FOR THE COMMUNITY

A new era began for the Abayudaya in the early 1990s. In 1992, Matthew Meyer established an Abayudaya web page—which led, three years later, to a visit by fifteen members of the American Jewish organization Kulanu, which is dedicated to finding and helping lost remnants of the Jewish people. Kulanu published a recording of selected Abayudaya music, entitled *Shalom Everybody Everywhere!* Since 1995, the Abayudaya have had increasing contact with Jewish travelers and visitors, including many young Israelis who travel in Africa after completing their army service. "When we see Jews from other parts of the world," Sizomu says, "we feel like Joseph in Egypt being visited by his brothers, and we feel very happy." Jewish communities from the United States have sent a Torah, prayerbooks, prayer shawls, and cassette tapes. A Hasidic rabbi has visited twice, staying with the community for six weeks. Hebrew is taught at the Hadassah Nursery School and at the Semei Kakungulu primary and secondary school. Two of the synagogues, in Putti and Namatumba, have retained Kakungulu's style of worship, but at Nabogoya Hill, Namanyonyi, and Nasenyi, the service has moved much closer to mainstream Jewish practice.

While some members expressed interest in moving to Israel, and many wish to visit, most have no desire to leave Uganda. As one man stated, "There are Jews everywhere. Why shouldn't there be Jews in Uganda?" Sizomu, however, believes that many younger members would like to move to Israel: "We realize Israel is not the Garden of Eden. We have heard of the problems, the wars, the insecurity, but many of us wish to be part of that insecurity."

The Abayudaya's relationship with their neighbors has greatly improved, and is strengthened by the benefits they have brought to the local community. Through contact with the Abayudaya, the Heifer Project International has offered more heifers to

the surrounding community. The Semei Kakungulu School serves many Christian and Muslim students, and the teaching staff is composed of Jews, Muslims, and Christians, who get along well with one another. The anti-Semitic slurs of the past are no longer heard, and when Keki ran for chairman of Namanyonyi subcounty, he was elected with the support of many Christians and Muslims.

The Abayudaya have always known that even while living as committed Jews for four generations, their status as Jews has been tenuous. They knew that to be recognized formally as Jews, they would have to undergo conversion according to *halakhah* (Jewish law). This process includes an assessment of their Jewish knowledge and commitment by a *beit din* (rabbinic court) and a ritual act of immersion in water. Circumcised men must go through symbolic circumcision, in which a drop of blood is taken from the residual of their foreskin. In February 2002, at the community's request, a *beit din* composed of three Conservative rabbis and one Reform rabbi traveled to Uganda and conducted halachic conversions for more than 350 members of the community. The *beit din* plans to return to continue this process for members who have not yet undergone formal conversion.

MUSIC OF THE ABAYUDAYA

The community's earliest musical and liturgical traditions were developed by Semei Kakungulu in the early 1920s. Following Malakite worship, he divided the Song of Moses into eight separate songs, which were chanted on Sabbaths and festivals. Community members composed a few hymns after Kakungulu's death, but the Song of Moses formed the basis for Abayudaya worship until the early 1980s. Kakungulu's music did not provide the energy and focus that the young leaders saw as necessary to revive their community. Sizomu said, "The Song of Moses was not enough. Youth are interested in modern things, and it was a time when we were discouraged by the Amin regime. We wanted music that would attract the youth back to the community." During the period of the Young Jewish Club, the younger members created a new form of liturgical music, composing melodies for the psalms in Luganda. Encouraged to memorize

these new compositions, the youth became devoted to the community as they learned this music by heart.

The Abayudaya cite various musical sources and influences for these liturgical compositions. On Kenya radio, they heard Zulu music, music of the Independent Churches in Kenya, the Salvation Army, and Israel Church. They were especially drawn to what they describe as Bantu folk music, which they heard on the radio in the 1980s, because it was not overtly Christian. Though the Abayudaya see it as very important to differentiate their traditions from Christian practice, the style of the psalms composed during this period is clearly influenced by Protestant hymn-singing in Uganda.

Many members of the Young Jewish Club—men and women, leaders and followers—composed music for about fifteen psalms. To make worship accessible and draw other youth into their activities, they sang primarily in Luganda, though they were studying Hebrew. The call-and-response structure encouraged participation. They worshipped with the American Conservative Movement's Silverman Hebrew-English prayerbook, but even when these psalms appeared in the traditional order of the service, they sang them in Luganda, rather than Hebrew. Other psalms were not sung in the context of Sabbath or holiday worship, but became liturgical selections for various lifecycle events: circumcisions, bar and bat mitzvahs, weddings, and funerals. Still other psalms provided strength and encouragement for sick members. Certain psalms were sung to accompany community events, such as making bricks to build the new synagogue. All of these psalms had originally been sung in Luganda, but they are now increasingly sung in Hebrew.

Technological changes and contact with visitors have also shaped Abayudaya popular music. In the late 1970s and the 1980s, members owned a few drums, guitars, and local instruments, such as nine-stringed harps (*adungu*). In the 1990s, visitors brought an electric keyboard and synthesizer, putting the community on par with the wealthier local churches, which could afford electric instruments, and enabling Abayudaya youth to compose in popular music styles. Though the Abayudaya do not yet have electricity in

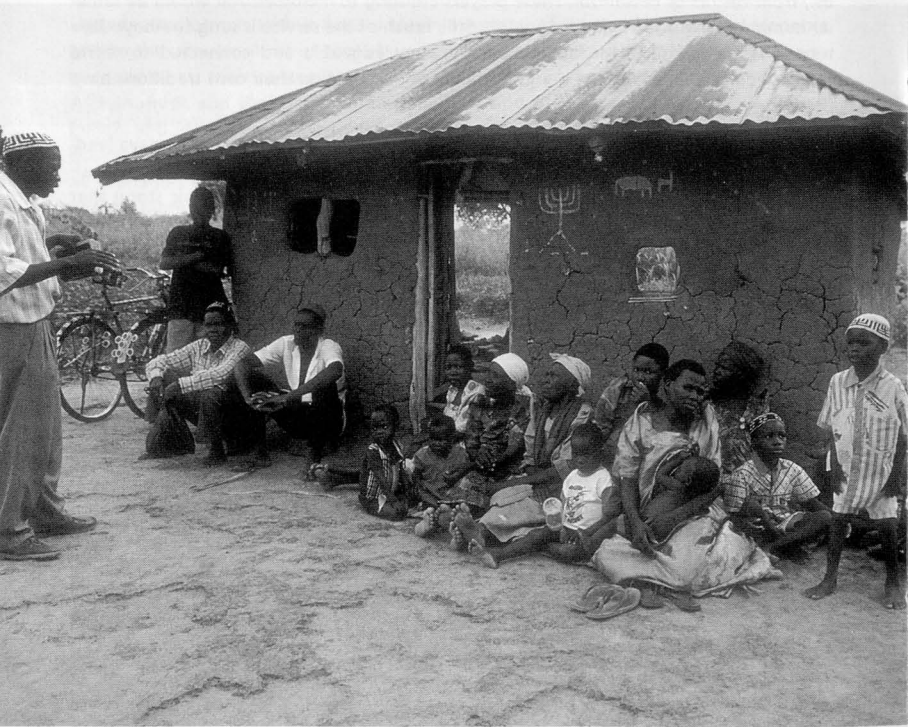
their homes, inexpensive batteries are available at the local trading post. In contemporary instrumental music used for celebration, the Abayudaya have been influenced by Ugandan performers such as Ronald Mayinja and the Afrigo Band with Rachel Magoola, and by the popular music of Zimbabwe, Kenya, Tanzania, South Africa, and the Congo. In many cases, their contemporary music of celebration synthesizes styles of popular African music and their Jewish tradition. They sing of the importance of their Jewish beliefs and identity, and the texts of these songs often draw from Jewish liturgy and psalms. The students at Semei Kakungulu High School write about themes common to all teenagers—the trials of love, their personal hopes and aspirations—but they also address more challenging topics, such as the difficulty of poverty, the pain of death in a society devastated by HIV/AIDS, and the importance of teaching and maintaining Jewish values, such as Torah, education, and marriage.

These days on Nabogoya Hill, one can hear contemporary Israeli and Hasidic music played on a cassette player powered by a truck battery. Visitors teach songs and occasionally lead services. Though the Abayudaya enjoy listening to many styles of Jewish music, they continue to value their own compositions and selectively incorporate other melodies into their worship, based on aesthetic and stylistic preferences.

In the fall of 2001, Gershom Sizomu was a visiting student at the Hebrew Union College–Jewish Institute of Religion in New York, where he studied rabbinic texts and took a class in Ashkenazi cantorial traditions. Upon his return, he spoke about the changes he wished to make in the community's worship, stressing that he wanted women to play a larger role in leading prayer. Because women have such a profound influence on the community's children, he felt it was important that they be educated, engaged Jewish leaders. He began teaching a group of community leaders the *nusach* ([Hebrew] traditional Ashkenazi chant) for certain prayers such as the Kaddish ([Aramaic] Sanctification). The Abayudaya have always been enthusiastically receptive to mainstream Jewish practice. Even before Sizomu and Keki traveled outside East Africa, the community had learned certain central prayers, such as the *Shema* ([Hebrew]

Hear, [O Israel]), *Ve'ahavta* ([Hebrew] And you shall love), and *A/enu* ([Hebrew] It is upon us), from visitors or in Nairobi. These prayers are sung to melodies that would be familiar in many North American synagogues. Still, much of the service is sung to Abayudaya tunes. As the people become increasingly knowledgeable and connected to world Jewry, their discussions about the importance of maintaining their own traditions have become more spirited.

Early in 2002, a few weeks before the community's official conversion, Abayudaya leaders gathered after the Sabbath and discussed the importance of maintaining their musical traditions. A community leader, Israel Siriri, shared a midrash (rabbinic story) that asks, "Why, on Shabbat evening, when parents bless their children, are sons specifically blessed in the name of Ephraim and Menashe?" The answer the midrash gives is that, when all Joseph's brothers were dwelling in Egypt, it was Ephraim and Menashe who steadfastly maintained and preserved their Jewish traditions. So too, Siriri explained, the Abayudaya proudly maintained their traditions during the persecutions of Idi Amin and through their subsequent struggles to reestablish their community: "We should continue to sing and teach our own melodies and traditions that have strengthened us over the years." So too, Keki expressed his admiration for North American Jewish melodies, but said that doesn't mean that the Abayudaya should forget their own traditions. Increasingly, the Abayudaya are recognizing the potential of their musical contribution to world Jewry. Uri Katula continued the conversation. He turned to me and emphasized, "We need to sing our own traditional music. If not, there would be no need for you to come and see the Abayudaya. What would be the purpose? Would you be coming to learn? No. Because we would be doing what you do. And I doubt whether God likes that. Why did God place some Jews in Uganda and some in America? I think the purpose was to make it a colorful world." Sizomu concluded, "We are one people, but like Jacob's coat, we are a coat of many colors."



ABOVE: Uri Katula teaches the weekly Torah portion in front of the Putti synagogue.

CATALOGUE OF SONGS

These notes are based on oral histories conducted with the Abayudaya from 2000 to 2003. Unless otherwise noted, these selections were recorded in January 2002 on Nabogoya Hill and in Mbale. The sessions for these recordings were informal. Following is a list of singers and musicians who participated in these selections, unless otherwise noted. Singers: J. J. Keki, Music Director, Abayudaya Congregation; Seth ben Jonadav; Richard Kasakya; Uri Katula; Enosh Keki Mainah; Eria Majanga; Aaron Kintu Moses; Jacob Mwosuko; Tziporah Naisi; Rachel Namudosi; Norah Nantabo; Aaron Naome; John Mark Nkoola; Moses Sebagabo; Gershon Sizomu; Moses Walyombe; Samson Wamani. Musicians: Richard Kasakya (guitar), John Mark Nkoola (keyboard), Geshom Sizomu (guitar).

Full song lyrics and translations are available on this CD's webpage: www.folkways.si.edu/abayudaya.

1. PSALM 136

"Give thanks to Adonai, for [the Lord] is good." This psalm recounts acts of God's love and deliverance, referring to the Exodus from Egypt and the parting of the Red Sea. The refrain of this hymn is "God's mercy endures forever." The biblical text has been slightly altered to fit the rhythm of the composition. Keki describes this psalm as a song of happiness sung after the redemption of the Israelites. The community connects this psalm to the downfall of Idi Amin. Keki explained how he composed this psalm: "Amin was chased away before Passover in 1979. It looked like we moved from slavery to freedom." Now the Abayudaya sing this psalm in its traditional place as one of the introductory psalms in the morning Sabbath and festival service.

Within these psalms, the community substitutes certain Hebrew words for the Luganda. The Hebrew Adonai (Lord) is substituted for the Luganda word for Lord, Mukama, which is how Ugandan Christians refer to Jesus. While the Abayudaya stress that they adapted this call-and-response style from traditional Ugandan music, the rendition of this psalm fits into a category called *mapambio* in Swahili and used in youth choirs and

evangelical churches throughout East Africa. The Abayudaya follow the Jewish prohibition against playing musical instruments during Sabbath worship—a symbolic act of mourning for the destruction of the Temple in Jerusalem. Although this psalm is sung a cappella during worship, at weddings, festival celebrations, or parties, many psalms are accompanied by electric keyboard, guitars, and occasionally traditional instruments, such as drums and nine-stringed harps (*adungu*). Here, to present a comparison of both versions, we fade out of the a cappella version and into the accompanied rendition. The accompanied version ends with a composed section that departs from the biblical text. New text and melody composed by J. J. Keki. Led by J. J. Keki. Text in Luganda.

2. KATONDA OYO NALIMANA (GOD IS ALL-KNOWING)

A traditional song of the Basoga people, with lyrics improvised by Basiki Walugo, an Abayudaya elder in Namatumba, the community farthest away from the center of Abayudaya life on Nabogoya Hill. After he finished this song, Walugo commented, "People who have never known the Abayudaya, it is time for them to understand. It is God who loved the land of Israel, and God is still loving us. God is still requesting that we should obey His word."

Selected lyrics of the song are: Chorus: "God is all-knowing." Leader: "God, the loved one, we appreciate what You do. Thank You, God. On behalf of Judaism, please dance, clap your hands, and sound drums." Katonda, another name for God in Luganda, means "Creator." Traditional Basoga music accompanied by drumming is sung on festive occasions, such as public holidays, weddings, and graduations. Such songs are also sung to welcome important visitors, such as local politicians. In each case, the singer will improvise words to fit the occasion. Walugo is accompanied by three musicians: one plays a long, goblet-shaped, snakeskin-headed drum (*engalabi* in Luganda, *engalabe* in Lusoga), the second plays a short, laced drum (*ngoma*, in both languages), and the third plays a modern version of a traditional gourd shaker, made out of a bean-filled crushed

tin can (*nsasi* in Lusoga). It is difficult to come to a clear understanding of instrument names in eastern Uganda. The problem is complicated by the diversity of the terminology used by various language and ethnic groups, and the different ways that people think about instruments and their role in performance. Led by Basiki Walugo. Text in Lusoga. Recorded in Namatumba.

3. HIWUMBE AWUMBA (GOD CREATES AND THEN DESTROYS)

This composition, by Michael Mawoni, tells of the fragility of life. The text is: "God creates and then destroys. I don't know when I will die. Death is powerful. While you walk, it follows you. I don't know where I will be buried. Even if you board an airplane, death also boards. Even if you get into a car, it also gets in. Even if you are riding on a bicycle, as you ride, it also rides with you."

During Idi Amin's rule, in the 1970s, many members of the Abayudaya converted to Christianity. Mawoni's family converted at that time, but he lives near his Jewish cousins in Nasenyi, in the Pallisa District, and remains close to them. In many of his contemporary compositions, he sings about the power of God and the faith of the Abayudaya. Reflecting upon the pressured conversions during Amin's reign, Gershom Sizomu laments, "We have lost tribes of Israel. We have lost people who need to be found."

There has been a renewed interest in the *adungu* in Uganda. The *adungu* originated in the West Nile, in the land of the Alur, but Mawoni's style of playing is more contemporary, using a seven-tone scale, rather than the older, traditional five- or six-tone scales. The newer *adungu* tuning is now common throughout Uganda. Ethnomusicologist James Makubuya observes that this style sounds more like music from the Lango or Acholi in Northern Uganda. Mawoni's solo style is similar to *kadongo kamu*, a style of solo performance by itinerant rural musicians accompanied with steel-string guitar and popularized in the 1990s (Cooke 2001:42). Composed and sung by Michael Mawoni, accompanying himself on a small *adungu*. Text in Lunyole. Recorded in Nasenyi.

4. MWANA TALITAMBULA (THE CHILD WILL NEVER WALK)

This and the following two lullabies, sung by Abayudaya women, are drawn from local traditions. Here, a mother encourages a baby to take its first, unsteady steps. "The child will never walk. [If he won't walk,] buy a cloth, tie the child on the back [like a little baby]." Sung by Phyllis Nafuna. Text in Lusoga.

5. MWANA, NGOLERA (BABY, KEEP QUIET)

In this lullaby, a babysitter sings: "Baby, keep quiet. I am taking you to your mother. You will nurse." The lyrics *gisalagi giyanagi* are vocables. Sung by Tziporah Naisi, the first Abayudaya woman to be admitted to a university; she is married to Gershom Sizomu. Text in Lunyole.

6. TULO, TULO (SLEEP, SLEEP)

In this popular Baganda lullaby, a babysitter sings, "Sleep, sleep, take the child. If you don't, then you are a witch! I want to go dancing, change my life. You only live once." Sung by Phyllis Nafuna. Text in Luganda.

7. I AM A SOLDIER

Headmaster Aaron Kintu Moses recounted how this Pentecostal church song was made Jewish by the addition of the final Hebrew verse, a translation of the first line, "I am a soldier in the army of the Lord." There are many Pentecostal churches in Uganda, and this song was familiar to the children and their teachers from their contact with local Christian nursery and Sunday schools. It is common in Uganda to sing such songs in several languages as an aid to teaching language, and the Hadassah Nursery School often uses this approach to teach basic Hebrew vocabulary. Sung by Abayudaya children who attend the community's Hadassah Nursery School. Text in English and Hebrew. Recorded in Nangolo.

8. MI KHAMOKHAH (WHO IS LIKE YOU[O GOD]?)

Children in the Hadassah Nursery School learn these small segments of prayers to improve their Hebrew comprehension and become introduced to the traditional Hebrew liturgy. Melody composed by Aaron Kintu Moses. Text in Hebrew. Recorded in Nangolo.

9. KABBILA (THE PATCH OF FOREST)

This traditional Baganda folksong tells of hunters pursuing an animal in a patch of forest, but the children's Hebrew teacher and youth leader, Moses Sebagabo, gave it a metaphorical meaning: the children should not be afraid to pursue and achieve their goals. Arranged by Moses Sebagabo. Sung in three sections by Abayudaya schoolchildren who attend public school in Namanyonyi. Text in Luganda. Recorded in Namanyonyi.

10. TWAGALA TORAH (WE LOVE THE TORAH)

This is an example of the music written by children's teachers to teach Hebrew and selections from the prayerbook, and to inculcate Jewish values, such as the importance of Jewish education and observance. The text includes: "We love the Torah, the tree of life, riches and honor, thy treasure. Thy Torah, my Lord, has to spread, to judge all people. (In Hebrew:) *Blessed [is He] who has given the Torah to His people Israel in His holiness.*" Melody and Luganda text composed by Moses Sebagabo. Sung by Abayudaya schoolchildren who attend public school in Namanyonyi. Text in Luganda, English, and Hebrew. Recorded in Namanyonyi.

11. WE ARE HAPPY

A contemporary Abayudaya composition, accompanied here by electric keyboard, guitar, and occasionally drums and *adungu*. The text mixes verses in English with verses from Hebrew psalms, such as *Shiru, shiru hallelujah* (Sing, sing hallelujah), and recounts the story of the Jewish holiday of Purim: "In the days of Mordachai and Esther in Shushan, when the wicked Haman rose up against us, to slay and make perish. But oh, our Lord,

Adonai, saved us from Haman. Instead he was hanged." It is sung on Purim and other festive occasions, such as weddings, birthdays, and bar and bat mitzvahs. The lead singer commonly improvises verses marking the occasion. Though this song is composed in the style of village guitar music, it is more influenced by traditional call-and-response, rather than soloist and chorus, which would be more common in local churches or traveling theater music. Sizomu explained that the community's recent acquisition of keyboards and guitars put them on same level as local missionary groups. A neighboring Roman Catholic parish tried unsuccessfully to attract one of the community's talented young woman singers by offering her a prominent place in its band and money for her education if she would convert. Sizomu said, "Now we can say, 'Look, we have that here. You don't have to leave.'" Melody and text composed by Gershom Sizomu. Gershom Sizomu (guitar and vocal solo), John Mark Nkoola (keyboard). Text in English and Hebrew.

12. ADON OLAM (MASTER OF THE WORLD)

"Eternal Master, who reigned before anything was created." The text of this popular hymn has been included in Jewish daily, Sabbath, and holiday liturgy since the fifteenth century. Sizomu described his first visits to the closest synagogue outside Uganda, the expatriate congregation of European Jews in Nairobi, Kenya. He explained, "When I went to Nairobi, I found 'Adon olam' sung at the conclusion of services, but we were there just briefly, and I couldn't learn their tune. Since I was a musician, I came back here and composed my own melody." Melody composed by Gershom Sizomu. Text in Hebrew.

13. LEKHAI, DODI (COME, MY BELOVED)

There is no hymn more emblematic of mainstream Jewish practice on Friday evening than "Lekhah, dodi." Its text was composed by Shelomo Alkabetz in the land of Israel and introduced as a liturgical innovation by Jewish mystics in the 16th century. The text personifies the Sabbath as a bride, to be welcomed each week with joy. The refrain is "O come, my beloved, let us greet the bride. Let us welcome the Sabbath!" It is now

sung on Friday evenings in Jewish communities throughout the world. For the Abayudaya, singing it in Hebrew is a demonstration of growing Hebrew fluency and a purposeful move toward mainstream Jewish practice. In this version, Keki sings the last verse solo. The community was using several different prayerbooks, which had variant versions for the last verse, and Keki is illustrating the version he prefers and follows. Melody composed by J. J. Keki. Text in Hebrew.

14. PSALM 92

A Song for the Sabbath Day. The composer, Jonadav Keki, was a singer in Semei Kakungulu's time. This psalm, and the next selection, Psalm 93, are the signature melodies for Friday evening worship in all Abayudaya congregations. Gershom Sizomu explained, "This was composed by my dad in the 1960s. It goes far back, but the people of his generation did not like it because it didn't sound like Kakungulu. They resisted the song. So when we started our innovations, we sort of fitted it in ours. And actually we didn't have a song for Shabbat, and in the Bible it is written that this psalm was the psalm for Shabbat! So there was every reason for us to adopt this song. And [our father] was very happy actually, to see that we had put much force in his composition. So the song is in memory of him."

This style of choral singing is well known in Uganda and influenced by Protestant worship. Melody composed by Jonadav Keki. Text in Luganda.

15. PSALM 93

"Adonai reigns." The text of Psalm 93 stresses God's majesty and power. It is sung by the Abayudaya on Friday nights and when taking the Torah from the Ark on Sabbath and festival mornings. Melody composed by Jacob Mwosuko, who has served as chairman of the community's executive council. Text in Luganda.

16. KIDDUSH AND MOTZI
(SABBATH BLESSING OVER WINE AND BREAD)

"Blessed are You, Adonai our God, Ruler of the universe, Creator of the fruit of the vine." Sizomu explained that he had heard the traditional Ashkenazi melody for these prayers sung at the synagogue in Nairobi, and by North American visitors to the Abayudaya. This version is his own rendition. Sung by Gershom Sizomu with community response. Text in Hebrew.

17. PSALM 121

"I will lift up my eyes towards the hills. Where does my help come from? It comes from Adonai, who made heaven and earth." This psalm is seen as a prayer of consolation, and is often sung by the Abayudaya to strengthen and comfort an ill person. It is not used in formal worship. Like most Abayudaya psalms, the music was composed during the period of the Young Jewish Club, in the early 1980s. The crickets, heard loudly in the background, were a prominent part of the sonic landscape as evening fell. Melody composed by Miriam Keki. Performed by members of the Nasenyi community, led by Rena bat Esther. Text in Luganda. Recorded in Nasenyi.

18. MAIMUNA

This campaign song, a modification of a Bagisu circumcision song, was sung in support of J. J. Keki's campaign to be elected chairman of Namanyonyi subcounty. Although Abayudaya do not participate in Bagisu circumcision rituals, they know these songs through close contact with the Bagisu. Maimuna is a woman's name; the song is addressed to her. The text is: "Maimuna, the animal is in the trap. Maimuna, where are we going? You are required to go to school before you obtain leadership positions." The final line is then sung with the alternated response, "J. J." and "Keki." In the context of Bagisu circumcision rituals, the animal in the trap refers to the young men who will be circumcised. Here, the trapped animal is Keki's political rival. The song emphasizes that

Keki had finished high school, but his opponent was uneducated. This style of music, with occasion-specific lyrics, would also be sung at other Bagisu rituals and celebrations, such as the birth of twins, graduations, and when someone achieves economic success. Traditionally, these songs would be accompanied by drums and bells.

J. J. Keki served as the chairman of the Abayudaya Executive Council and as the community's music director. In 2000, he ran unsuccessfully for the office of Namanyonyi subcounty chairman. He and his brother Gershom were the first Abayudaya leaders to travel outside East Africa. They lectured in the United States in the fall of 2001. On September 11, Keki was walking up to the World Trade Center in New York as the first plane hit the tower. Upon returning to Uganda, he was interviewed by two major newspapers as the Ugandan on the scene of the World Trade Center disaster. This fame, together with the hope that his travels and contacts abroad would generate funds for the area, helped him mount a second, successful bid for office. Sung by a chorus of Abayudaya and Bagisu women in Nangolo. Text in Lugisu. Recorded in Nangolo.

19. HINEI MA TOV (BEHOLD HOW GOOD
[IT IS FOR BROTHERS TO DWELL TOGETHER])

The text of this song is from Psalm 133. The melody is a group composition from the time of the Young Jewish Club, in the early 1980s. This song is sung on happy occasions, such as the dedication of a house, circumcisions, and after the birth of a child, festival services, and meals. Text in Luganda and Hebrew.

20. ALI OMU YEKKA (MY ONLY ONE)

J. J. Keki explained that what sounds like a standard love song is actually a metaphor for his love of the Torah, his only one. He sings, "I have a beloved one, the only one. I do not have any other. My beloved, my doctor, my wealth, the only one I choose." Although the Abayudaya now have strong, peaceful relationships with local Christians and Muslims, it is common for these groups to proselytize. In this song, Keki stresses that

other religions have no appeal for him and should not try to come after him. Text and melody composed by J. J. Keki. Led by J. J. Keki. Text in Luganda.

21. PSALM 150

"Hallelujah! Praise God in His sanctuary. Praise Him in the firmament of His power. Praise God with the sound of the shofar, with the harp and lyre. With the timbrel and dance, with stringed instruments and the pipe and with cymbals. Let everything that has breath praise God. Hallelujah!" Here, the last verse of the psalm is sung in Hebrew. This version of Psalm 150 with instrumental accompaniment is sung on joyous occasions and celebrations. An a cappella version is sung as an addition to Hallel, a collection of psalms added to worship on festivals and the monthly celebration of the new moon. Melody composed by J. J. Keki. Text in Luganda and Hebrew.

22. DEUTERONOMY 32:8, SONG TWO (SELECTION)

Tracks 22 and 23 represent the Abayudaya's oldest musical traditions, adapted by Semei Kakungulu from Malakite melodies. Deuteronomy 32:1–43 is divided into eight separate songs. Today, Abayudaya youth see these pieces as old-fashioned and know that these selections are not used in mainstream Jewish worship. Gershom Sizomu characterized Kakungulu's music as low and humble, explaining that there was a lack of enthusiasm in this style of singing. He explained that these songs could not fulfill the Abayudaya's present need for broad-based community participation and to promote cohesion because their melodies were meandering: "People come in spontaneously, without definite rhythm." He stressed that the tonal slides and irregular rhythms made these songs difficult to sing in a group. Though this music is taught to Abayudaya youth, these selections are now considered to be sad songs that can't be used in praise of God and are relegated to solemn times, such as funerals, the High Holidays Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur, and Tisha B'Av, which commemorates the destruction of the first and second

Temples. Keki explained that people sing them to pour out their spirit, and they are also sung in a house of mourning, where the body is laid out before burial. Melody adapted by Semei Kakungulu, after the style of the Malakites. Sung by Samson Mugombe. Text in Luganda. Recorded in Namanyonyi (2000).

23. DEUTERONOMY 32:39–43, SONG EIGHT

The eighth song is sung here by younger Abayudaya leaders, who have regularized the rhythm and added more harmonies. Melody adapted by Semei Kakungulu, after the style of the Malakites. Sung by Gershom Sizomu, J. J. Keki, Aaron Kintu Moses, and their mother, Devorah. Text in Luganda. Recorded in Nongolo.

24. PSALM 130

"Out of the depths I cry to You, Adonai." This psalm is sung for consolation at funerals and when accompanying the dead to the grave. The phrase "out of the depths" is associated with the grave. It is sung repeatedly during a burial while earth is shoveled and the grave is filled up. This psalm is also sung on fast days. Community members described it as a cry before God. They see it as a source of strength, and sing it when visiting the sick. Melody composed by Yael Keki, a member of the community who now lives in Nairobi. Text in Luganda.

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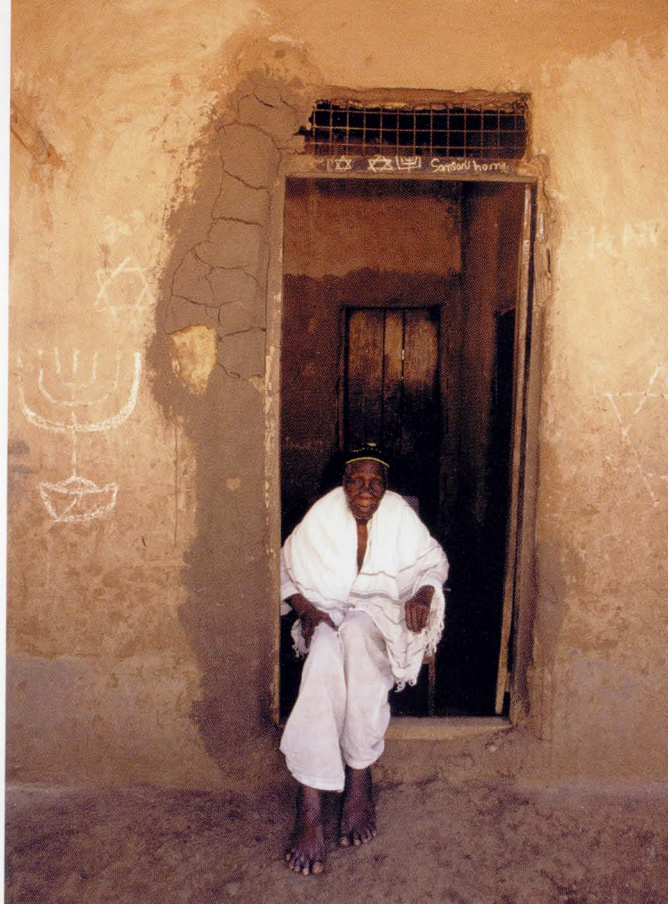
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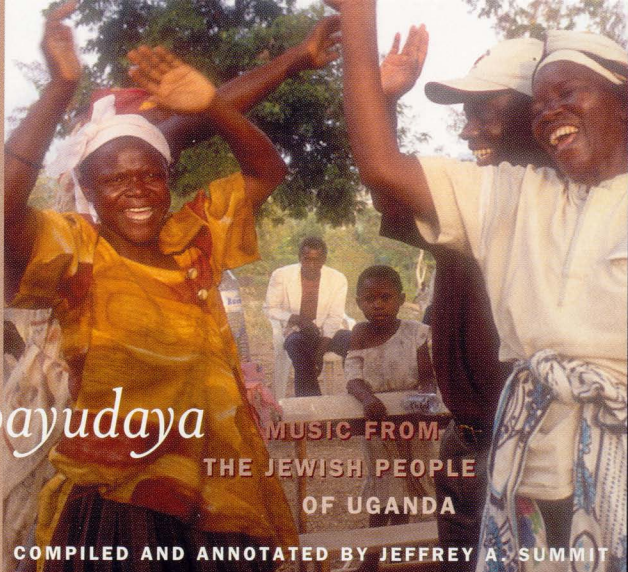
THIS PAGE: Samson Mugombe sits in the doorway of his home in Namanyonyi.
BACK OF BOOKLET: Tinsmith Hezekiah Bumba holds an example of his craft, a seven-branched menorah.

REARCARD: Women on Nabogoya Hill welcome Gershon Sizomu back from his first trip to the United States.





- 1 PSALM 136 3:24
- 2 KATONDA OYO NALIMANA
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- 3 HIWUMBE AWUMBA
(God creates and then destroys) 2:31
- 4 MWANA TALITAMBULA
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- 5 MWANA, NGOLERA
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- 6 TULO, TULO (Sleep, sleep) 0:52
- 7 I AM A SOLDIER 0:46
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- 9 KABBILA (The patch of forest) 3:49
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- 11 WE ARE HAPPY 3:25
- 12 ADON OLAM
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- 14 PSALM 92 4:59
- 15 PSALM 93 2:44
- 16 KIDDUSH AND MOTZI (Sabbath
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- 17 PSALM 121 1:31
- 18 MAIMUNA 2:13
- 19 HINEI MA TOV (Behold how good
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- 20 ALI OMU YEKKA (My only one) 4:45
- 21 PSALM 150 3:33
- 22 DEUTERONOMY 32:8
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Abayudaya

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