Mp3 Samite - Kambu Angels

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African singer-songwriter with kalimba, flute and drums. 10 MP3 Songs WORLD: African, FOLK: Traditional Folk Details: "I believe we must celebrate our differences as well as our commonalities to have and maintain and strong global community." -- Samite "Kambu Angels" was inspired by an Africa that is renewing itself, the people, and particularly the children. They are the spirit at the heart of this newest album. Samite uses the strength of his voice and his playful kalimbas to weave this colorful landscape of theme and melody. It is an album about peace, renewal, forgiveness and grace, and about joy. Here is some writing from Samite about his experiences and about his album "Kambu Angels"... I am a musician and recording artist from Uganda presently making my home in Ithaca, New York. I fled Uganda as a political refugee in 1982 when my brother was brutally killed and my own life was threatened. I spent five years in Kenya, including six months in a refugee camp, before coming to the US. In 1997 I returned to Uganda for the first time since I fled. But I did not go alone! I was accompanied by a video crew who filmed my homecoming as part of a one-hour documentary--"Song of the Refugee"--distributed by the Public Broadcasting Service in January 1998. The program focuses on displaced and resettled people in Liberia, Cote d'Ivoire, Rwanda and Uganda. It was inspired by a desire to present African refugees' hope for the future in spite of the suffering and loss they have endured. Media coverage during the darkest days of crisis in Liberia, Rwanda and Uganda concentrated on violence and destruction, on waves of humanity fleeing in desperation. There was no sense that these were individuals, with families and communities. With this incomplete picture, and little or no coverage of the reconciliation and healing processes now underway, it is small wonder that Africans appear helpless and hopeless to many Americans. By now Americans are accustomed to seeing throngs of refugees filing by with their few possessions on their heads, and surging crowds being beaten back with staffs as food parcels are tossed

from trucks. Major networks present short video clips on the evening news of millions of displaced people in Africa and millions more are on the move within their own country. But is there more to this story? And does the way refugees are depicted influence the way Americans feel about their plight and about our capabilities to help them? And what of their countries, depicted as chaotic, irreversibly corrupted and devastated? Can we see it as anything else? The answer is yes! The documentary moves from a hopeful picture of refugees whose lives must be saved to a hopeful picture of a country that has been rebuilt in large part by refugees who survived, returned home and became self-sufficient once again. Song of the Refugee is an awareness-raising and documentary video project designed to go beyond the news clips and headlines to the unreported story of African refugees. Yes, there are millions, but until you hear the stories of individuals and know their names and see their faces, it is nearly impossible to relate to or empathize with them. My return home took me through camps and settlements of displaced Liberians, Ugandans, and Rwandans. Their stories and songs paint a new picture for the American public, a picture of the awesome triumph of the human spirit over the harshest adversity. My return to Uganda brings the program full circle--to find my home country reunited and at peace. I visited with Liberians who were internally displaced by their seven-year civil war, or who remain refugees in Cote d'Ivoire. In Rwanda, I met with refugees just returning to their villages from "Zaire" (the Congo). In Uganda, I found that many people who were internally displaced have started new lives where they are, but many have returned to their ancestral homelands. Although I witnessed massive destruction and tragic loss of life throughout my journey, I found people getting on with their lives, optimistic that hard times will pass and life will be good again. I found Liberians rebuilding their communities and congregations, and providing educational opportunities for children. Rwandans are building homes for the homeless, schools for the children and for those incapable of building for themselves. Seed money from various NGOs is enabling Ugandans to buy livestock, restart their farms and undertake a variety of income-producing projects. Everywhere I found adults taking seriously their obligation to provide children a safe place to be children--to sing, dance, play with their friends. The original plan was for me, a former refugee, to meet and talk with individuals and families, allowing them the opportunity to express their dreams and plans beyond their present plight. This seemed to work well, but in camp #3 of displaced Liberians, the camp director encouraged me to play my flute. At first I was apprehensive about performing for my fellow Africans amidst their suffering. But to my surprise, I found that my music moved adults and children alike to open

like flowers to warm sunshine. I saw a new light appear in the eyes of old and young alike. As I sang and played my kalimba (finger piano) or flute, people pulled out drums, tins cans, and anything handy with percussive quality and offered their own songs and dances in return--songs that had been pushed to the sub-conscious since being uprooted from their homes. When this experience repeated itself from camp to camp and country to country, I became convinced that in addition to food, health services, housing, etc. provided by the many agencies concerned with refugees and displaced persons, music should be made available--a wellspring of hope, joy, and nourishment of spirit. Our first filming location was in Liberia in May where we met individuals who had taken on the task of restoring young boy soldiers back into the community--young boys who had been conscripted by various rebel groups to fight and commit atrocities during the long civil war. This difficult work requires great patience and love. I spent time talking with nine year old Dennis who expressed his great desire to become a doctor--to heal and care for people and indirectly heal his own deep psychological wounds. Throughout our travels in Liberia we were prepared to pay heavy bribes to the West African peacekeeping forces (ECOMOG) at checkpoints. We had been warned that they might also confiscate cameras and other valuable equipment. We found the opposite to be true and it was a great source of pride to me, as an African, to witness the cooperation and service of the ECOMOG forces. I had visited the capital, Monrovia, prior to the war, so it was sad to see the destruction of all the buildings, bridges, roads, and homes. In spite of the devastation, we witnessed a strong commitment on the part of the Liberian people to rebuild their city. They were anxious for the upcoming election--hopeful to get on with the restoration of their cities as well as the peace required for the thousands of rural people who had been forced into the city for protection, to return to their farmlands. As one elderly man expressed: "Why would I stay in the city where I must buy rice and peppers when I can return to my farm and grow my own?" Another farmer, Boimah Sando, declared that he would return to his rural home when he knew that schools and clinics were in place so that he could give his children a good future. In more than one displaced camp, we met individuals who were well educated and had sufficient resources to leave the country. Instead they were committed to remaining with their people--to share their knowledge and resources to the struggle that lay ahead. In the refugee camps in Cote d'Ivoire as well as in Liberia, refugees had one important common characteristic--their unselfish sharing of their meager food and accommodations with us. There was not a spirit of gloom as one might assume, but rather a cheerful, hopeful tone that permeated the populations. However, in Cote d'Ivoire we found a

different kind of refugee. They were further behind in their attitudes of forgiving and forgetting the atrocities that forced them to leave their country than those who were in the displaced camps within Liberia. Yet they still had the determination that one day they will return home and rebuild their lives. One six year old little girl named Prize Batuah, sang for us a touching, hopeful song with these words: "When this war is over, we will see our friends back home and we will tell them the stories of how the bombs missed us by inches". From Liberia we flew across the entire continent to Rwanda. My first impression was how beautiful the country was, it did not display as many physical scars of war as we witnessed in Liberia--which was rather chilling knowing the recent genocide that had taken place in the country. We drove deep into the countryside where we visited resettled people working hard to build new villages--including schools and health clinics. People were putting their ethnic differences aside in their attempt to heal and get on their lives. Widows who could not build their own houses were being given new homes. In Ruyenzi, we spent two days at a transit-receiving center where refugees were being returned from Zaire (the Congo)--including hundreds of orphans who arrived on UN cargo planes. This was perhaps the most difficult visit for me, for the returnees had seen so much suffering that they had numb, expressionless faces. The orphan children were identified with number tags around the wrists. There was an eerie silence which one does not expect with so many people assembled in one place. The only sounds were the coughs of the sick and the shouting over the megaphones ordering people to board lorries for transporting them to new villages. The first day I was overwhelmed by the human suffering and could not bring myself to interact with anyone. I had to return the following day after reviewing my purpose in being there and gathering my courage to initiate conversations. I concentrated on the children. I made friends with one young boy who followed me about. He spoke Swahili and told me that he was alone in the camp. "I am on my own. I don't have a father or mother. I don't know where my brothers and sisters are. Even my best friend was killed. But guess what! I have a new friend. Would you like to meet him?" He introduced me to another boy who had experienced the same devastating losses. As we talked they asked me why we were in the camp. I told him that I had also been a refugee and we had come to film a documentary about refugees. "But what do you do in America?" he asked. I told him I was a musician; they asked me for a song. We sat beneath the shade of a big tree where I sang for them. Other children hearing the music joined us and soon they were clapping, singing , and dancing. We traded songs back and forth--with children remembering song after song. The smiles returned to their faces,

which showed me the invincibility of the human spirit. There was a fire still burning inside. It was now time to go to Uganda--my long awaited homecoming! The smell of the flowers and forest in Rwanda brought back memories of the Uganda I remembered from my childhood, rather than the Uganda I had fled. These smells helped erase the anxieties and fears that had kept me away from my country for so long. I was now eager to return. As we landed at the Entebbe airport I looked down at the villages and the red soil; tears rushed to my eyes and I attempted to hide them from the camera crew. I didn't let my friends and family (except for my younger brother and best friend) know that I was arriving for we were scheduled to leave early the following morning for Soroti in the eastern part of the county to visit formerly displaced people who had now resettled. I knew that my family would have prepared big welcoming parties for me and would not understand why I had to leave. On my way to Soroti, a four hour drive, east of Kampala, my anxieties and fears returned. I found out that some people in that area had been killed by land mines recently and I also remembered that during the bad times in my country, the ethnic group we were going to visit, had many of its people used as spies by Milton Obote. Again to my surprise, I discovered that although we spoke different languages, we had much in common. I learned that they had also gone through bad times, lost members of their families and were trying to find ways to forgive. In Soroti they were using music and drama to help heal the pains of war. As in the other visits, these people did not have much material wealth, but they did not hesitate to share the little food they had. When we finished filming in Soroti, we headed back to Kampala. We had just one more day to shoot before the camera crew return to the US. This time my family knew I returning to Kampala. They arranged a big dinner and reception where many of my old friends and extended family members were invited. Before the dinner, however, my father invited me to the cathedral for a memorial service for my older brother who was killed by Obote's soldiers in 1982. The memorial service was an emotional experience; many of my relatives, who had not seen me in fifteen years, saw me for the first time in the catherdral. Normally they would have screamed and danced for my return, but in deference to my slain brother they were quiet. During the service, I played a flute solo in memory of my brother, Richard, which my father thought was very special. It was even more special for me since it was the first time my father heard me perform. The filming was completed that day following the dinner and reception. The dinning table so heavily laden with food created a disturbing remembrance of the refugees and the little food they had. That night I said goodbye to the camera crew and I spent the following two weeks getting re-acquainted with my large extended

family before returning to New York. The Uganda I returned to was not the same place I had fled--where people moved about in fear. I found the Uganda that I knew as a child--peaceful, moving forward. I saw new buildings going up, children getting a good education, people moving about in a spirit of unity and reconcilation. Yes, Uganda has come full circle and even I have come full circle--I was complete again. In January, PBS will distribute nationwide the documentary Song of the Refugee--the culmination of those first meetings with the director and producer, Glen Ivers. When we first met we both expressed our pain and anger at the terrible news coming out of Africa. We both remembered a much saner Africa, an Africa where people cared--about kids, community, home, and country. But this was not what we were seeing on the television broadcasts. We saw knife-wielding villagers and hate-driven madmen. What, we wondered, can we do to make a difference in the way the outside world views Africa? The answer was clear. Go back to Africa, the Africa that we know, the Africa that is not only fashioned in our minds but in our souls. Not the Africa I fled as a refugee, but the one I knew before, the Africa of my childhood that I knew existed once again. So we returned to Africa on a journey of immersion and awareness. We wanted to bring to the world the "real" Africa, the Africa, not in addition to, but in spite of, the horrific happenings. What we experienced was many times more than we had bargained for. In Rwanda, Uganda, Liberia, and Cote d'Ivoire, we witnessed time and time again the legacy of caring that human suffering could not erase. Refugees and displaced people helping one another, sharing the little food they had, volunteering, teaching their children under trees, doctors and other professionals choosing to stay and help out. These are the stories not being told--the stories of hopes and dreams that have not been destroyed, only delayed.