

ABOUT THE PROGRAM

This concert opens with the Middlebury African Music and Dance Ensemble performing 6 pieces that showcase the stylistic and instrumental diversity of traditional East African musical cultures. In the second half of the concert, the Middlebury Afropop Band performs original compositions and arrangements of classic and contemporary popular songs from all over Africa. The band uses pop and rock instrumentation, embracing styles that blend traditional African with Western and/or Afro-diasporic musical idioms. Both groups highlight the dynamic, communal, and interactive nature of African societies.

Middlebury African Music and Dance Ensemble

1. Agawulugumae Nnyanja (Those [Waves] that Roar in the Lake) Arr. Damascus Kafumbe

“Agawulugama e Nnyanja” is sung in the Bantu language of Luganda, spoken by the Baganda people of south-central Uganda. We sing, “Agawulugama e nnyanja; galiba mayengo,” which means “those [waves] that rumble in the lake; could be waves.” Long ago in the Kingdom of Buganda, the king had a private lake where his subjects proved their loyalty by operating his boats on rough waters. Navigating the waves was a privilege for the courageous few who chose to take part. This piece honors the risk the king’s subjects took to prove their love for him.

Six sets of *madinda* (12-slab xylophone) are accompanied by vocals and 2 drums named *mbuutu* and *mpuunyi*. The melody is started by the *banazi* (initiators), and completed by the *baawuzi* (dividers), who play on the offbeats. This technique allows both musicians to complement each other.

The piece has three sections. The first section begins with a riff and is followed by the *banazi* playing until the *baawuzi* join them; the second part involves the *banazi* playing their part while everyone sings along; the third section is a repeat of the first. The importance of layering, interlocking, and conversational structuring in African music are demonstrated throughout the piece.

2. Enguuli ("Crude Beer")

Arr. Damascus Kafumbe

In Luganda, "Enguuli" translates to "Crude Beer." The piece follows a narrative about young men who drank concentrated alcohol known as *nguuli*, typically used for medicinal purposes. One young man, Ssewajja, abused this substance and then got caned as a punishment. This song reminds the audience of the dangers of abuse and controlled substances.

The performer will be playing the *ndongo*, and the other will be playing the *ndingidi*. The *ndongo* is an 8-stringed bow-lyre made of wood, monitor lizard skin, cow hide, goat hide, banana leaf fiber, and nylon string. The *ngingidi* is a tube-fiddle made of wood, goat hide, papyrus fiber, and nylon string. Both instruments are tuned to a 5-note scale, have beards that signify their maturity, and generate their sound through the vibration of their strings. Listen for the repetition, call-and-response format, and interspersed variations, all of which are musical Africanisms.

3. Gganga Alula

(“Gganga Had a Narrow Escape”)
Arr. Damascus Kafumbe

Transporting us back to the late 19th century in the Kingdom of Buganda, this composition tells the story of King Mwanga II, his daughter Nassolo, and the king’s beloved harpist Gganga. In a forbidden dance between royalty and the commoner, Gganga and Nassolo had an affair. Unfortunately for Gganga, they were caught in the act. This type of violation would normally result in execution, but King Mwanga II, swayed by a rare compassion for his harpist, instead ordered his attendants to cut off the body part that committed the crime – Gganga’s penis. When you hear us sing “ngalo bikkugu,” that phrase translates to “partial” or “useless fingers,” a nickname for Gganga. Additionally, we sing, “yabba ennyama” or “he stole meat,” in reference to the metaphorical meat or flesh of the king’s daughter. Beyond the lyrical intricacies in this song lies a profound lesson about morality, justice, and authority.

As we play and sing, listen to the ways that our instruments and voices interlock. Two performers will play the *madinda*, a 12-key xylophone steeped in the court music practice of Buganda and known for its melodic storytelling abilities. The other two performers will be on the *mbuutu* and *mpuunyi* drums. Drums are generally regarded as the heartbeat of African musical performances, conduits of history, messengers of emotion, and the most critical anchors of ensemble music. We will layer in the *drums* and the *madinda* parts, followed by a section of interlocking vocals with the *madinda*, and finally, ending with just vocals. Pay attention to the ways that we work together to create a sonic experience that captures the captivating narrative of “Gganga Alula.”

4. Agoliam Ka ("The Beloved One")

Arr. Damascus Kafumbe

Sung in Ateso, a Nilo-Saharan language spoken by the Teso people of Eastern Uganda, this song is about love. A woman is concerned that when her husband returns from work, his body will be cold from the ride home at night. The song was composed during a time when groups of Ugandan men went to work far from home, transported by trucks. But these were trucks with exposed beds where the men simply sat with no enclosed heating. We first repeat the line "ayanga alori, agoliam ka" or "a truck has taken my lover, the tall beloved one" four times. We then sing the final line of the song, "isawan iyarei lu akuar(e) olilimor akuanakere, ci ci ci ci" or "at 8:00 p.m. the body gets cold, very cold, very cold" before repeating the entire song's lyrics. Overall, the song reminds us that we are always at the mercy of work, and more importantly, that there is warmth in love and togetherness. That is, two bodies are warmer than one.

Our performance also features a couple of instrumental variations. The singing is accompanied by 1 *adungu* bow-harp and 5 *akogo* thumb-pianos. The *adungu* is a 10-string chordophone made of wood and cowhide. The *akogos* are idiophones played by plucking the metal tongues above the sounding board.

5. Upendo ("Love")

Comp. Damascus Kafumbe

Based on 1 Corinthians 13: 4-8, "Upendo" reminds us that true love is "patient" and "kind." "It does not envy, it does not boast, it is not proud. It does not dishonor others, it is not self-seeking, it is not easily angered, it keeps no record of wrongs. [It] does not delight in evil but rejoices with the truth. It always protects, always trusts, always hopes, always perseveres. [It] never fails." In the Bantu language of Swahili, "Upendo" can be translated as "love." Our ensemble community and family has been built on a foundation of love. Together, we have played, sung, danced, laughed, and shared in a love for who we are as an eclectic musical group. We have experienced an interlocking of not only our instruments and voices, but also our hearts. We want to spread that love to you all through the song "Upendo." We sing, "Upendo, upendo; upendo unashinda vyote. Kupendana, kupendana; kupendana, kunashinda vyote." "Love, love; love overcomes all things. Loving one another, loving one another; loving one another overcomes all things." As we sing, we implore you to think about how loving one another brings our world together.

Stylistically, "Upendo" showcases the virtues mentioned earlier through a synthesis of different instruments, performance techniques, styles, and idioms. The piece is broken into different sections that allow for various musical Africanisms to shine through: multiple layers, recurring patterns, musical conversations, improvised riffs, a variety of sound qualities, and varied musical scales.

6. Ugandan Dance Medley

Chor. Damascus Kafumbe

In African cultural traditions, there is a profound relationship between movement and sound. Thus, it is crucial to dance when performing music. Dancing often occurs in groups, and distinct gender roles govern performances. One of the primary goals of dancing in African societies is to build community. Dances also index specific activities, providing insights into the rhythms of everyday life. Dances are also accompanied by drums, which are generally regarded as the heartbeat of African musical performances. There are stories behind every dance which signify significant cultural practices, including rites of passage in life—birth, coming of age, marriage, and death. Individual dances are regional and specific to ethnic groups, reflecting the unique background of those who perform them. Tonight, we will perform a series of dances from different ethnic groups of and regions in Uganda. At the end of our performance, we will invite audience members to join us in dancing.

Our first dance, *bakiksimba*, comes from the Baganda people of present-day south-western Uganda. The dance was initially performed while cultivating and planting a special banana plant, *kitooke*. Embodying and expressing the process of the Baganda's agricultural practices, *baakisimba* is a dance of sustenance and life. Our second dance, *imbalu* is performed by the Bugisu people of eastern Uganda as part of a circumcision, coming of age ritual. The newly circumcised men dance through their pain to express manhood and bravery to their communities. It is an expressive rite of passage that signifies the transition from adolescence to adulthood. Our third dance, *ntogoro*, is from to the Batooro people of western Uganda. *Ntogoro* is a courtship dance where young men and women display their suitability as future spouses through their movements. It is a display of affection and commitment. Next, the *larakaraka* dance of the Acholi of northwestern Uganda is also a courtship dance, but it primarily demonstrates the intellect and creativity of young women or future wives through movement. A type of gourd called *agwata*—which is a key cultural tool and symbol among the Acholi—serves as a musical instrument that gives *larakaraka* its unique sound and character. Lastly, we will perform the *kizino* dance of the Bikiga people in southwestern Uganda. The dance is traditionally a means of keeping warm in the coldest part of Uganda, as well as a means of celebrating the harvest season. Performers drink a special beer called *muramba* made from sorghum for energy as they dance through the night. Whoever makes the deepest hole during their dancing earns the honor of hosting the event the following year.

Middlebury

Afropop Band

The Afropop Band will play 11 songs in tonight's performance, each piece featuring its own distinct style and history. Incorporating a range of traditional and contemporary African, Western, and Afro-diasporic styles, the band will visit countless time periods and geographical locations by way of music. Genres such as highlife, jazz, reggae, Afrobeat, Afrobeats, soul, and more will be included in a blend of sonic culture, featuring many popular artists such as Bob Marley, Fela Kuti, Ebo Taylor, and Sade. While many songs come from classic African records, others are ensemble director's original compositions.

Afropop Band Setlist:

1. “Love and Death” - originally performed by Ebo Taylor
2. “Mu Africa” (“In Africa”)
3. “Smooth Operator” - originally performed by Sade
4. “Waiting in Vain” - originally performed by Bob Marley
5. “Johnny B. Goode” - originally performed by Peter Tosh
6. “Alone” - originally performed by Burna Boy
7. “Water No Get Enemy” - originally performed by Fela Kuti
8. “Zombie” - originally performed by Fela Kuti
9. “Afrique Victime” - originally performed by Mdou Moctar
10. “Yesu Ni Wangu” (“Jesus is Mine”)
11. “Jump” - originally performed by Rupee