

# singing wells

PROJECT



Preserving East Africa's cultural music heritage now and for the future



**Project Review 2010/12**

**and**

**Project Strategy 2012/14**



## What is the Singing Wells project?

The Singing Wells project (SWP) is a collaboration between Abubilla Music in London and Ketebul Music in Kenya, a non profit organisation committed to identifying, preserving and promoting the diverse music traditions of East Africa. The aim of the Singing Wells project is to record and document the unique music and dance of East Africa by travelling to rural villages throughout the region with a dedicated mobile recording 'studio' and a team of experienced music and video engineers and ethnomusicologists. The project includes the production of new material called the *Influences* series - contemporary songs inspired and influenced by traditional tribal music. Songs and videos produced by the Singing Wells project are made available to the widest possible audience through our Music Map of East Africa on the Singing Wells website: [www.singingwells.org](http://www.singingwells.org)

Fundraising for the Singing Wells project is managed by [The Abubilla Music Foundation](#), a UK registered charity (no: 1142173)

## Rationale for the Singing Wells project

East Africa is a region with a diverse cultural heritage. Its borders encompass a multitude of different ethnic groups, each with their own unique traditions and histories, languages and dialects, religions and beliefs, ways of dressing, music and dance. Over time, many of these time-honoured practices have been lost and there is little doubt that the pace of social, political and economic change today is in danger of obscuring the region's traditional cultural heritage. The importance of preserving music traditions cannot be underestimated. It provides a link from the past to the present and into the future and promotes a sense of national pride.

## Ketebul Music & Abubilla Music – a unique collaboration

The Singing Wells project started with a unique collaboration between two music companies – Abubilla Music in London and Ketebul Music in Nairobi - based 4,000 miles apart but linked by shared ambitions.

*"Abubilla Music in London and Ketebul Music in Nairobi came together in 2009 when, following a visit to Kenya, the team at Abubilla became inspired to put our musical talents towards good causes. Our research led us to Tabu Osusa and the work he was undertaking with Ketebul Music to promote talented artists in his own country – something we were also doing in London. Tabu and his team impressed us with their vision for Ketebul Music and what it could achieve; how they wanted to capture and preserve the traditional sounds of East Africa and share them with a wider audience. Everything Ketebul stands for resonated with us and we became determined to help them achieve their ambitious goals."* **James Allen, Founder Abubilla Music**

## Aims and Objectives

- ***To preserve the rich music heritage of East Africa***

To fulfill this aim we have developed a dedicated, professional quality mobile recording facility that allows us to travel to remote areas of East Africa and record the performances of local music groups in their own environment, in front of their own community. The equipment allows us to record these performances with professional quality audio and in HD video. Our focus is on the quality of the recordings and we believe that our material supersedes existing field recordings of East African tribal music. We hope our material will become a rich source of traditional sounds and images for contemporary musicians, music producers, ethnomusicologists and enthusiastic listeners.

- ***To introduce East African tribal music to a new generation of musicians and music fans***

In fulfilling this aim we have developed the ***Influences*** series. These are original music compositions which are a fusion of traditional and contemporary styles. New songs inspired and influenced by traditional cultural music themes, harmonies and instruments. ***Influences*** is led by musicians from the studios of our partners Ketebul Music. These musicians work with us in the field and at the studio in Nairobi to produce unique, new material. We believe our ***Influences*** series will refresh the origins of East African music and make it discoverable to a new generation of music fans. ([Find out more about Influences here](#)).

- ***To offer tangible and lasting benefits to the musicians and village communities we visit***

We have already witnessed amazing musical talent in some very remote areas of East Africa and we hope that, through Singing Wells, many of these artists will become truly 'discovered'. In the meantime our aim is to continue to support these musicians and the wider communities by instigating new music projects and other programmes which will provide benefits long after we have left the field. If we can foster partnerships with other organizations we know Singing Wells can offer long lasting benefit to these rural communities.



## Summary of project activities - September 2010 to March 2012

### September to December 2010

- Launch of [The Abubilla Music Foundation](#) (AMF) to support and manage all fundraising and expenditure for the Singing Wells project
- Development of online presence for project with [Singing Wells website](#)

### January to April 2011

- AMF funding used to develop and purchase mobile recording equipment
- Official launch of Singing Wells with pilot field visit to proof the SWP concept and test equipment (recording [music of the Mijikenda](#) in Kenya's Coastal region)
- Ketebul Music audio & video engineers supported with training in field recordings
- Following pilot phase the project objectives are reviewed and refined
- Development of audio and video distribution strategy

### May to October 2011

- Completion of multimedia output from pilot phase (audio & video)
- Development of online [music map of East Africa](#)
- SWP trip to Lake Turkana Cultural Music Festival
- AMF is granted charitable status with [UK Charity Commission](#)
- Funds used to upgrade SWP audio & video recording capabilities

### November/December 2011

- SWP field visit to record the [music of the Batwa](#) people of Kisoro, Uganda (part-funded by the [Institute of International Education](#))
- SWP field visit to record the [music of the Luo](#), Nyanza Province, Western Kenya
- Ketebul Music audio & video engineers supported by training in field recordings and the use of ProTools

### March 2012

- SWP field visit to record the [music of the Kalenjin tribes](#)
- Production of Influences material with selected musicians in the Ketebul Music studios, Nairobi
- Production of multimedia output from field and studio recordings including CD/DVD compilations 'The Music of the Batwa' and '[Best of Singing Wells 2011](#).'

#### THE SINGING WELLS PROJECT IN NUMBERS

To date we have completed **4** field recording visits, setting up the mobile studio in **20** different recording locations; discovered and recorded **35** musicians and music groups; invited **16** musicians to record their own music and *Influences* songs at the Ketebul Music studios in Nairobi; amassed over **90** audio tracks and **60** videos for our archive of East African music; documented our field recording visits in **NUMEROUS** reports on the Singing Wells website supported by **1000s** of wonderful photos; launched The Music Map of East Africa where we have so far uploaded **58** audio tracks and **15** videos (more material is in post-production); helped train **4** Ketebul Music engineers in field recording techniques and the use of ProTools; offered scholarship opportunities to **2** Ketebul Music engineers for further training in the UK; released **2** CD/DVD compilations featuring the "Best of" our 2011 recordings.

## **Singing Wells - lessons we have learned**

In our first year of operation we have fine-tuned our goals and operational procedures. There are some key areas where the project has benefited from the lessons we have learned:

### **We have formed a lean and efficient team**

The SWP team in the field comprises these operational roles: audio engineers (x2); video engineers (x3); ethnomusicologist/interviewer for oral histories; researcher/fixer; trainee engineer; photographer; reporter/interviewer for song translations; musicians for *Influences* series. We cover these key operational roles with a core team of between 7 and 10 individuals ([see profiles here](#)). Our experience of four field visits means that we can now set up the studio very quickly (20 minutes) in the remotest of locations. We are also very efficient at back-up, archiving and post-production of the material. Our priority is to share the music with the widest audience possible, as soon as possible.

### **The Influences series has become a key part of our mission**

We have always appreciated the importance of identifying and capturing the unique cultural heritage of East Africa offered by the music and dance of tribal groups. In this respect we see ourselves as ‘fossil collectors’, discovering the origins of music within the region and saving it for future generations to appreciate and learn from. We believe that there is another element to our mission which is of equal importance and that is to use this music to create new, inspirational songs within a modern context. Our *Influences* series is designed to do just this. We are giving the talented musicians we discover the opportunity to work with contemporary musicians in a professional studio so they jointly create something new and unique. Here we are like seed collectors as we discover new talent and nurture it in the right environment to grow into something special.

### **We have developed a repeatable model for field recordings**

Our field recording goal is to cover at least 75% of the traditional music styles of Kenya, Tanzania and Uganda over the next two years. By 2014 we hope to have recorded the music of at least three inspirational groups/individuals representing each of the major genres. Even so, we will have only scratched the surface of the talent that is waiting to be discovered. We recognize the need for sustainability and gladly offer our knowledge and experience to other field recording projects which can continue this valuable work.

### **Discovery and distribution are key to our success**

We have already demonstrated our ability to generate professional-quality audio and visual content, both in the field and in the studio, which we are sharing on our [Music Map of East Africa](#), [YouTube](#) and [SoundCloud](#). One of our priorities from now on is to extend our reach to a wider audience of musicians, music enthusiasts and ethnomusicologists alike. Singing Wells deserves to be discovered by more people and we want our website to become a valued portal to East African traditional and contemporary music.



### **Professionalism and partnerships**

From the outset our priority was to demonstrate complete professionalism in all that we do. We also recognized the need for really great partnerships which would ensure the success of the Singing Wells project. The strong partnership between Ketebul Music and Abubilla Music, and the shared ambitions of both organisations, has been integral to our success so far. As has the backing of our other supporters - NGOs, corporate partners and individual donors to the project. We have heeded their valued advice and concentrated on building the project 'brick by brick', learning from our experience as we go. We have created a lean organisation, tightly focussed on its mission and are proud to have achieved all our first-year goals.

### **Good governance and accountability**

The Abubilla Music Foundation, a UK registered charity, handles all fundraising for the project, guaranteeing 100% financial accountability. Under the control of the charity we can ensure that donations and grants to the Singing Wells project are channelled directly towards the project goals and are in-line with the priorities of our supporters and sponsors. We offer a guarantee to our sponsors that their contributions will be spent within East Africa, supporting both local musicians in rural communities and aspiring music professionals.

### **Creating a lasting benefit**

We have witnessed at first hand the effect of the Singing Wells project on local musicians and their communities. One of the great joys of recording in the field it to share the enormous pride of the groups as they perform to us, their friends and families. It is wonderful to see the beneficial effects of music and dance on the whole community and to realise the significance music has in their lives. We want to create lasting benefits for the communities we touch during our brief recording visits. In addition to the performance gratuity the groups receive from Singing Wells, we will ensure that musicians are given any financial reward which may result from the discovery and commercial use of their songs. We also believe that, with the right partners, the Singing Wells project can bring new opportunities and other tangible benefits to whole communities. (Following our visit to Kisoro in Uganda we have established a lasting relationship with UOBDU to help support the marginalized Batwa community there - [click here for more details](#)).



## SINGING WELLS 2012 and beyond

Our strategy for Singing Wells for the next three years is focussed on these key objectives

**Field recordings:** to conduct six further field visits to document traditional music genres in Uganda, Tanzania, Rwanda and Burundi, plus we will cover three cultural music festivals - the Lake Turkana Cultural Festival, Uganda Festival and the Mekatilili Wa Menza Festival in Malindi, Kenya.

**Studio recordings:** to discover 12-15 inspirational musicians/ music groups and bring them to the Ketebul Music studios to record at least two new songs with professional contemporary artists.

**Training scholarships:** to launch the Singing Wells scholarship programme where Ketebul Music audio/video engineers are offered the opportunity to travel to the UK for in-depth training in the use of ProTools and Final Cut Pro, plus advance archiving and documentary film making. We are pleased to announce that two Ketebul Music engineers have already been selected to benefit from this programme - [Steve Kivutia](#) and [Patrick Ondiek](#).

**Distribution of SWP material:** to develop partnerships which will allow us to better distribute our recorded material and find new audiences for Singing Wells, plus produce annual 'Best of Singing Wells' CD/DVD compilations from our field and studio recordings. ([Click here for Best of Singing Wells 2011](#))

**Create valued online portal for East African music:** to develop partnerships which will allow us to turn the Singing Wells website into a valuable resource for music professionals, researchers and enthusiasts, where people can come to share and gain knowledge of the unique wonder of East African music.

**Extend the reach of Singing Wells:** to develop partnerships which will allow us to increase the benefits of Singing Wells to communities long after we have finished recording. We believe there is a huge opportunity to foster new music projects which will support communities in rural villages. Our aims here include co-hosting a Singing Wells live event to celebrate the 50th Anniversary of Kenya's Independence in 2014.

### FIELD RECORDING SCHEDULE 2012/14

#### 2012

- **November:** *field visit to Northern Uganda*

#### 2013

- **April:** *field visit to Tanzania (the Makonde*

- **May:** *Lake Turkana Cultural Festival*

- **August:** *field visit to Tanzania (the Kumbwaya)*

- **December:** *Singing Wells concert for Kenya's 50th Anniversary*

#### 2014

- **March:** *field visit to Burundi (the Warundi)*

- **April:** *Uganda Festival*

- **November:** *field visit to Rwanda*

### OUTPUT FROM RECORDING SESSIONS

- Annual 'Best of Singing Wells' CD/DVD compilations
- Singing Wells Influences CD/DVD Volumes 1&2
- Singing Wells concert DVD
- Audio & video archives of all recorded material
- Tracks & videos on Music Map of East Africa
- Field reports, oral histories and photo galleries

## Conclusion

For those interested in supporting us, we close with a summary of the benefit of the Singing Wells project followed by some ideas of how third parties might support us. And finally, we answer what might be some 'frequently asked questions'.

### Preservation

We are committed to becoming a 'one stop shop' for East African tribal music where you will find the music and dance of a variety of groups representative of all the main music styles of the region. Our growing collection of recordings will serve as a 'well' to be drawn from again and again over the years.

### Celebration and rebirth

We are committed to celebrating the traditional music of East Africa and to encouraging today's musicians to draw on it for inspiration to create exciting new material. Through our *Influences* initiative which promotes the fusion of traditional and contemporary music, we will do our part to refresh, renew and make relevant East Africa's rich music heritage, some of which remains largely undiscovered.

### Training and sustainability

The Singing Wells project allows for the training of aspiring music technicians in East Africa. We have already helped a number of Ketebul Music engineers to develop their skills and learn how to set up and operate a mobile recording studio. Our scholarship programme will further extend these opportunities to suitable candidates. We hope our methodology of field recordings will be followed by others who are dedicated to preserving and sharing the music heritage of East Africa.

### A good partner

Singing Wells is a non-profit initiative with goals wholly centred on East African music. Our relationship with The Abubilla Music Foundation, a UK registered charity, means that we are 100% transparent with good governance and accountability. We know what we are good at and recognize where we need support and advice and will be a dedicated and willing partner to any organisation with similar goals and passions.





## **How to support the Singing Wells project**

We have long term goals for the Singing Wells project and invite contact from NGOs, businesses and individuals who are interested in supporting us. We mentioned building the project 'brick by brick'. Here we have highlighted some of the very specific areas where we would benefit from financial and/or practical support - some 'bricks' which you may be able to provide to help us build Singing Wells.

We will provide detailed budgets for all these suggestions and have included 'best estimates' here.

### **Sponsor a Singing Wells field visit**

- November 2012: Northern Uganda (area TBC): £3,000 per recording day
- March 2013: Tanzania & the Makonde: £3,000 per recording day
- May 2013: Lake Turkana Music Cultural Festival: £2,000 per recording day
- August 2013: Tanzania & the Kumbwaya: £3,000 per recording day

### **Sponsor Singing Wells recording sessions**

- To support Influences recording sessions and post production for musicians from Kenya, Tanzania, Rwanda, Uganda or Burundi: £1,000 per recording day

### **Sponsor production, marketing and distribution of annual Singing Wells CD/DVD compilation**

- Best of Singing Wells: Field Recordings: £6,000
- Best of Singing Wells: Influences: £6,000

### **Sponsor Singing Wells scholarship training programme**

- For one audio engineer: £3,000
- For one video engineer: £3,000

### **Sponsor Singing Wells concert for Kenya's 50th Anniversary**

- Co-host event: £20,000
- Recording of the concert: £5,000
- Production, marketing & distribution of concert DVD: £6,000

### **Sponsor development of Singing Wells online profile**

- Development of Singing Wells website through to 2014: £5,000
- Create extended online community for Singing Wells in East Africa/worldwide
- Develop Singing Wells network for ethnomusicologist

### **Sponsor village communities visited by Singing Wells**

- Develop new music programmes for local communities
- Other programmes to support traditional music groups and the wider community

### **Sponsor Singing Wells gifts or other resources for local communities**

- We like to give small gifts to the communities we visit as an additional 'thank you'. We welcome any sponsorship of these gifts and are happy to provide suggestions of what is appropriate or possible for us to distribute.

## Singing Wells: some FAQs

### ***What is Singing Wells?***

- It's a project jointly operated by Ketebul Music, a non profit music studio in Kenya and Abubilla Music, a UK record label, and supported by The Abubilla Music Foundation, a UK registered charity. Our goal is to preserve the music traditions of East Africa and make this music relevant to the next generation of musicians and fans.

### ***How do you recruit the Singing Wells team?***

- Our team is made up of audio and video engineers from both Ketebul Music and Abubilla Music. Influences artists are professional musicians who collaborate with us on field and studio recordings. We rely on local liaison personnel who have direct contact with the communities we visit and an expert knowledge of local music styles. Ketebul Music also makes the studio available to Singing Wells pro bono.

### ***How do you discover the music groups?***

- To find talented and inspirational musicians and groups we rely on local fixers and musicians who spend a great deal of time researching before our visit. They make sure that everyone locally knows what Singing Wells is about and why we are there.

### ***Where does the money to support Singing Wells come from?***

- We invite financial contributions from private donors and corporate sponsors and seek grants from NGOs. Donations and grants are administered by The Abubilla Music Foundation. Donors may support specific parts of the project - a particular field visit perhaps. For example, in 2011 we received a grant from the [Institute of International Education](#) to record the music of the Batwa in Uganda.

### ***If I support you where will the money go? How do I know it will be well spent?***

- Donations to Singing Wells can be made through The Abubilla Music Foundation, a UK registered charity. Your donation will be restricted for use in East Africa to support the project goals. You can specify how you would like it to be spent. For example, you could sponsor a whole field recording visit or just a single recording day. Or you could sponsor one of our annual CD/DVD collections. Either way, we guarantee that your money will be spent on the ground in Africa. (Note: representatives of Abubilla Music who work on the project are either volunteers or are personally funded. No third party donor money is used to support their expenses).

### ***Who owns the Singing Wells recordings?***

- The ownership of the original songs remains with the performers who receive a performance gratuity from Singing Wells. They give consent for us to publish the material on the Singing Wells website and other digital media which is free to access. Any money received from the sale of Singing Wells CD/ DVD collections or the commercial use of Singing Wells material will be donated back to the project via The Abubilla Music Foundation. New **Influences** material is jointly owned by Ketebul Music and Abubilla Music. Profits arising from the sale of **Influences** material will be used to support the artists and music projects and aspiring musicians in East Africa.

### ***Is there a catch?***

- There's no catch - we're just ridiculously committed to supporting East African music.