

ALBUM REVIEW | Compilation has 15 tracks from across the country

Producer remixes Kenya's sounds

German musician moved across the country to collect country's diverse musical sounds

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The sound of music, any music, will always alert the ear. Often, the rest of the body may follow the ear's response. The feet may start tapping the floor and soon the head, the waist and the whole body may demand a jig.

Music soothes a troubled soul, like at funerals or when in love. Music is a catalyst to gaiety. It has been a source of revolutions and often defines human spirituality. Sometimes, it is through music that one may know the 'creative soul' of a community.

It is this wish to know what the definitive music of Kenya is that bothered Sven Kacirek, a German jazz drummer and music producer, when he visited Kenya in 2008.

He wished to know: what does music from Kenya actually sound like, and where is it played? Definitely not in the hundreds of clubs and bars in Kenya's towns and cities. His immediate experience in Nairobi revealed the "usual MTV loop or R&B and gangsta rap ... and no trace of traditional music."

In a country where bastard forms such as 'genge' or 'kapuka' rule the FM station airwaves and blast the ears of passengers in public transport, one may be forgiven for thinking that Kenyans don't have an authentically local sound.

Yes, music is very adaptive. Any one form of music will generally be receptive to new sounds and instruments as musicians and producers try to

innovate. That is how jazz has survived all along.

So, Sven set out to travel through Kenya to discover for himself how the music of Western Kenyan sounds compared to that of the Eastern or Coastal region. What he found out make up the album on the CD *Sven Kacirek: The Kenya Sessions*.

This compilation has 15 tracks selected from across the country. The musical journey starts with a nyatiti composition *Arsenal Aluny Village* from Rang'ala village in Nyanza province to *Takaye Preaching* in Takaye village, Malindi.

Other tracks include: *Old Man Small Studio*, *Walk to Rang'ala*, *Dear Anastacia*, *Kayamba Tuc Tuc*, *Too Good to be True*, *On the Coast*, *Lamu Sunsail*, *Maria*, *Paperflowers*, *Headphones & Headress*, *Vuvuzela in White*, and *Trickled Away*.

Some are completely new

sounds, collages of what can be called 'musical possibilities'; others are familiar songs, tweaked but retaining the familiar chords, tones and words that many Kenyans who know the original versions would identify.

Essentially this collection is a classic illustration of what innovation and technology can do in changing and remaking any musical sound. Sven re-engineers much of the music to give it a fairly new flavour. For instance, he records the three elements that make up a nyatiti composition: the tapping of the foot, the singing and the sound of the jingle.

He then mixes the nyatiti riff with a sound from the piano and then accelerates the singer's singing. What emerges appears to be a sub-genre of nyatiti. Yet on listening closely one appreciates how careful and creative the producer is in re-crafting the old

sound into what appears as new music. This formula is generally used throughout the compilation, with Sven playing around with the sounds in the background of musical performances, latching on what some producers may think is extraneous and interfering sound to cross-fertilise his recordings.

The Kenya Sessions is a result of collaboration between Sven and the Goethe-Institut in Nairobi and continues a recent practice by producers such as Tabu Osusa (who was also involved in its recording) who have adopted old Kenyan music and subjected it to the vagaries of technology.

This is surely, the way of the future. What emerges retains a Kenyan 'creative soul' but has a captivating freshness to it.

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The cover of Sven Kacirek's upcoming album 'The Kenya Sessions' shows a street scene in Kenya. The album covers music from all over the country.