



The Loruvani STORY

Years ago, back when we were working mostly in West Africa, we ran into a friend of ours in the Nairobi Airport earlier than early after we rode the Red Eye from Dakar. Mark was off to the world to look for money for his new hospital in Arusha, Tanzania. We were looking for new audio projects, particularly something with the Maasai. But Maasai, like most tribes, are leery. They've had so much taken from them they don't know what's next. It generally doesn't sit well when a couple of techs show up with boom poles, microphones, and wires.

“...Maasai
bend the
notes...”

Mark suggested we get in touch with Hezron Abel, a Maasai elder whose choir has been winning competitions in Tanzania since forever. They sing Maasai songs, but in Swahili so they can reach a broader audience. Tracking Hezron down was an exercise in itself. We started in his village, followed the trail to Heifer International, and finally found him somewhere upstairs and down the hall in the Lutheran Diocese administration building in Arusha.

Hezron understood right away what we were trying to do: record great Maasai singers singing their haunting songs. Over the next few weeks, we drove all over the slopes of Mt. Meru looking for a choir. Lead after lead was a dead end. We heard of choirs and found they didn't exist. In a wired together shock-less Toyota wagon with Metilli, Hezron's brother-in-law, at the wheel, we raced up and down so-called dirt roads with bushes and banana trees on either side scraping the dust off. As we uncharacteristically crossed ourselves in the back seat, we crashed through backyards and scattered chickens, all the while with Metilli yelling that we didn't need seatbelts because he was in Divinity School.



We sometimes made appointments with choirs that didn't show up. Village elders came in their stead, asking, often more than directly, exactly why we wanted to record their choirs and telling us they wanted to be paid up front. A lot. Hezron and Metilli were patient with us. After several trips into the wilds, they convinced us that maybe we didn't want a bush sound, anyway. Why not listen to Hezron's people, the Loruvani Choir? We did and the rest is as you guessed. It's Maasai magic.

Pat Patton from Flying Medical Service offered the use of his airplane parts storeroom, which had been converted decades ago into an egg-crate lined, workable studio. Grass mats covered the floor and deadened sound. At times, we waited until the wind died and the roof quit creaking. To create, as much as we could, decent audio booths we moved massive propeller crates around to block sound. When we were in town and able to record, the entire choir of twenty plus piled into one Toyota van and came to sing. They're the most professional group with which we've ever worked. None are paid. They're all volunteers and they're tight.

PHOTOS:
Members of the Loruvani choir



Editor's note: A magazine is a medium of words and pictures. This story is about SOUND. While we love the serendipity of the story above, when we listened to the choir we were speechless. Go to the website, have a listen and buy the music— that's our recommendation.



Maasai ordinarily, at the same time they're singing, make wild vocalizations. They pop. They click. They yelp and trill. We'd never heard anything like it. One fellow's groan sounded like a barn falling over. When we replayed our first recordings in the editing suite, we thought we had a defective machine. Too many pops and clicks. In some songs, Maasai bend the notes, for lack of a better term. When we first heard this in editing, we thought our recorder had a variable speed motor. We got all that worked out. As I said, the Loruvani people are professional. With a little explanation about recording, they were off and running again. You'll hear the results.

What will happen now that they're becoming famous? They've been to Germany to perform. They're performing and winning competitions all over their region. They'd like to sing in Carnegie Hall. They're scheduled to go to Sweden and some other Nordic countries. They'll continue with all that. But, at the end of the day, they're still Maasai. They enjoy the things we've forgotten: hanging out with the kids and grandparents, working in the shamba, taking care of the animals, singing for the fun and story of it, and going to church.

They're community people. They've already agreed that any money coming in from the sale of their CD will be used in the village. Like the old pioneer days of barn-raising, this income is for work that will benefit everyone and it's not for private consumption. It's been quite a while since most of us have made a decision like that, hasn't it?

You can buy this music at:
www.ImpossibleMusic.com or go to www.amazon.com and search for Loruvani 📺