

Interviewee: Steven Kasamba

Interviewer: Rolf Killius

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SUMMARY

Steven Kasamba, a performer and director from Uganda now based in London, discusses his journey promoting African music and dance. He arrived in 1997 and founded Bantu Arts in 2013, focusing on community and corporate projects. Bantu Arts has collaborated with various organizations, including Horniman Museum and London Marathon. Kasamba emphasizes the importance of traditional Ugandan music and dance, which he learned from his boarding school days. He also highlights the cultural exchange between Uganda and the UK, the impact of colonialism, and his vision to integrate African culture into British society through performances and community projects.

Outline

Steven Kasamba's Background and Journey

- Steven Kasamba introduces himself as a performer, director, and entrepreneur based in London, UK, originally from Uganda.
- He discusses his early memories and connection to Uganda, despite living in Britain.
- Steven explains his initial travel to the UK in 1997 as a performer and his return to explore and promote East African music and dance.
- He highlights the excitement and fulfillment he finds in his work, which brings smiles to people's faces.

Career Development and Education

- Steven shares his early experiences in Uganda, where cultural music and dances were not seen as viable careers.
- He realized the potential of earning a living as a performer in the UK, where people appreciate and value East African music and dance.
- Steven pursued further education at Roehampton University, studying dance, drama, theatre, and performing arts to enhance his skills.
- He discusses the cultural differences between Africa and the UK, emphasizing the importance of adapting to Western disciplines.

Variety of Experiences and Skills

- Steven recounts his diverse experiences, including bricklaying, trading fish, and selling mineral water before coming to the UK.
- In the UK, he has worked in various roles such as modelling, cleaning, warehouse work, and hospitality.
- These experiences have equipped him with a broad skill set, enabling him to manage and direct his company effectively.
- Steven emphasizes the importance of learning and adapting to different environments and cultures.

Folk Music and Dance from Uganda

- Steven explains his focus on Ugandan folk music and dances, which are passed down from generation to generation and have no copyright.
- He describes the instruments he plays, including the adungu, a type of harp, and various drums.
- Steven highlights the cultural significance of these dances, which narrate stories of childhood, community behavior, and societal norms.
- He mentions collaborations with artists from different parts of Africa, incorporating their cultural elements into his performances.

Establishment of Bantu Arts

- Steven discusses the establishment of Bantu Arts in 2013, initially focusing on community-based work but later expanding to corporate projects.
- The first project, "Love God in the Pile of Africa," was successfully staged in 2015 during Black History Month.
- Bantu Arts has since collaborated with various organizations, including Honma Museum, London Marathon, Marie Curie, LinkedIn, Spotify, Paramount Films, and Global Fusion Music and Arts.
- Steven emphasizes the professionalism and value of Bantu Arts, which has gained recognition and support from diverse sectors.

Bantu Arts Foundation and Community Support

- Steven introduces Bantu Arts Foundation, an organization based in Uganda aimed at supporting young artists and the community.
- The foundation focuses on mentoring young people, providing clothing, and creating opportunities for them to live positive lives.

- Steven highlights the importance of supporting the next generation in Uganda, both artistically and financially.
- The foundation aims to help young people retain their cultural values while gaining new opportunities.

Diversity of Ugandan Communities and Dances

- Steven explains the diversity of Ugandan communities, with about 55 tribes each having at least two dances.
- He describes various dances from different regions, such as the Buganda Kingdom's baksimba, nankasa, mogolla, and magunju.
- Steven emphasizes the cultural significance of these dances, which tell stories and reflect community values.
- He discusses the challenges of preserving and promoting these dances in a rapidly changing world.

Impact of Colonialism on Uganda

- Steven reflects on the impact of colonialism on Uganda, noting both positive and negative aspects.
- He mentions the introduction of Western medicine, religion, and education, which brought new opportunities but also disrupted traditional practices.
- Steven criticizes the colonial mindset that undervalues local cultures and resources, leading to a loss of identity and self-worth.
- He emphasizes the need to balance external influences with the preservation of Ugandan cultural heritage.

Experiences of Racism and Identity

- Steven shares his experiences of racism in the UK, noting that he has learned to ignore and rise above such challenges.
- He discusses the importance of community and mutual support in overcoming racial barriers.
- Steven emphasizes the value of his African heritage and the importance of maintaining cultural connections despite living in a different country.
- He highlights the dynamic nature of his identity, blending British and Ugandan elements.

Future Aspirations and Challenges

- Steven expresses his desire to promote Ugandan culture through music and dance, both in the UK and Africa.
- He aims to stage productions in the West End and bring African culture to a wider audience.
- Steven plans to support professional African artists in the UK, helping them focus on their talents rather than secondary jobs.
- He envisions a future where African culture is celebrated and valued, both in Africa and the diaspora.

FULL TRANSCRIPT

Steven Kasamba 00:13
Hello. My name is Steven Kasamba. I'm based in London, UK, originally born in Uganda, and I'm a performer, I'm a director, and I'm entrepreneur, and I promote African music, African dance, anything to do with Africa, I'm right up there. Me, I'm connected to Uganda because I was born in Uganda. I'm Ugandan, but, of course, I live in Britain. Now I'm British, but most of my experience, most of the knowledge, most of the thing that I do, relates to Uganda, because that's where I grew up. Because, of course, as well, in terms of our communities, like you know you are, your early memories start from childhood. So the memory that I have when I was little, they were from Uganda. And hence, when I'm in the UK, I might be British, but the Ugandan is still in me.

Rolf Killius 01:14
Why did you come to this country and when?

Steven Kasamba 01:18
Hmmm..So my travel is quite very interesting. I came in in London or in the UK in 1997 as a performer. We came here to perform a few musical projects, acting projects, and we did them in in East London. So we stayed for about probably one month or two. Then I went back to Uganda. Then, of course, coming here, I thought there was a need, as well as a performer, to explore more, to do more for a community that doesn't know too much about African music, or East African music or East African dance. So then I came back in 1997 and as a performer, as an artist, and I've stayed here since and of course, coming the excitement of my knowledge, experience the community, build up the thing that we do, or how our music and dance entails in Uganda, I thought it's better and it's good for other communities to enjoy. So when I came back, of course, I carried on doing as a performer, as an artist. And hence the reason why I'm still here and I enjoy what I do because it brings smiles to people's faces. And, yeah, it's just exciting.

Rolf Killius 02:48
You perform what what kind of, what kind of things you perform.

Steven Kasamba 02:52
Ah, so believe it or not, when I was in Uganda, I started in the boarding school at the time when we were studying, our parents, they could not think, or they could not believe, that what we do, or culture music, folk music, or folk dances is something that you can pursue as a career. So in my boarding school we would go study about maths. We study about chemistry, biography, history, accounts and all that, because that's what our parents thought is the best way, and it's a job that you can do. Not until actually I came here. That's when I realised actually that you can earn a living as a performer who is doing folk music and folk dances, specifically from where you're coming from. So my career as an artist developed a lot more

when I'm in the UK, because I thought and I realised that people actually appreciate what I do, people love what I do, and people are not aware. They're not exposed to East African music and dance. So as as a performer, I developed all these skills while I'm here. As a dancer, I went to Roehampton University, and I did dance drama, theatre and performing studies to enhance more about how I can operate myself as an artist, as an entrepreneur, as a business person. Mainly, I didn't want to study because I wanted to be a professional dancer or a professional musician in that sense. I just wanted to get the knowledge of how I can conduct myself in a western world, how my disciplines would be, because in Africa, I give an example that I can drum throughout the day. When you come to the UK or in the Western world, everything is according to time. So when is with time? So you have to learn on the way, how you can conduct yourself, or how you can change the behaviour from the African way to the community you're in. And we have a saying 'bogende or yambua', which means that when you go somewhere where they eat dog, and the only thing they eat is a dog, you have to eat a dog. So you learn eyes as you go along. So I adapted myself to be able to bring the Africa in me to Britain, but to benefit the British community that I'm in. So as a performer after studies, of course, I developed a few companies. Some didn't work, and some worked. So then I became a director. I became more of a choreographer. I became more just a lot of skills that I gained because I could not employ enough people to do other things. So I end up myself put my foot in the mud. So making sure that I do this, I do that, I do this. So I gained a lot of experience as I was training. And it's the same thing in our in our community in Uganda, some of the things you learn as you grow, as you as as you deal with it. So, so that's how I learnt a lot of things. I'm not really a very brilliant dancer or a very good musician, but when it comes to put a project together, when it comes to bring artists together, when it comes to managing a project, these are the skills that I gained at the university, which, of course, I didn't know when I was back home. And then, of course, back home, I did a course called bricklaying and concrete practice. Believe it or not, I was doing building , but then that one didn't mature. So I did quite a lot of experiment within my life as I was growing up to the age I mean, which I won't mention. So I've gained quite a lot from brick laying to selling like fish, because I used to trade fish from Uganda, take it to Congo. Then I did the mineral water I was selling water in before I came to the UK. And then when I came here, I did quite a project. I did a few, I did. I was enrolled in modelling company called, I can't even remember the name of the modelling company, so I did a bit of modelling. I did a bit of dancing around, you know, in, like, corporate places. And then I did a bit of cleaning. I did a bit of, you know, warehouse work. I did a bit of hospitality. God knows, I've done pretty much a lot. I did so many things that I've done to the point where I am, and all the things that I've done throughout life have has put me into the position where I am to be able to manage, direct and deal with the company that I have right now.

Rolf Killius 03:01
Talking about music and dance. What exactly?

Steven Kasamba 03:45
Yes, so the music I really know more about is about is from Uganda, whereby most of Ugandan music is passed on from generation to generation is folk music, and it has no

copyright. So I'm into folk music. I mean to folk dances, or traditional music and dance another thing that I practice more because, one, they bring communities together. That's number one. Number two, you don't have to go to study, sit down in a class and learn how to do them. So bring us together. And of course, yes, it's easy, but it's not easy in a sense. So all these, all these music I do, or the dances that I do, is mainly from Uganda. And of course, I've worked with companies from different parts of Africa, like South Africa, West Africa, and of course, we learn we might come from a different parts of Africa, but a lot of things are similar, because my music and stories, our music and dances tell story. They narrate our childhood. They narrate. They narrate how we grow up, they narrate how we should behave in the community. So all the things are similar. So mainly, most, most of the thing that I do is folk music and folk dances from Uganda.

Rolf Killius 09:30
Can you explain a bit about what kind of dances you do, what kind of music, what kind of instruments?

Steven Kasamba 09:37
Yeah. So the instrument, mainly I play is called adungu. I'm not really, really so great at it, but I love it and but I'm blessed to know what I know as an entertainer. So I play adungu, which is in the family of the harps, and this usually we call it the African guitar. Then i play a tube Fido, which we call Endingidi. Adungu, as I said is a harp. Endingidi, a harp and then I play drums, Engoma with this terminology that we have in East Africa, which means type of drum. So with the Engoma,, there are different types of Engoma. We have the small drums we call Namun joloba. We have the bass, which is the Emponi. Then we have the main drum, which you called Nankasa. And then we have the long drum, which you call, which we call Engalabi. So it's a mixture of all of that. Then on top of that, of course I sing, somehow I sing. And, of course, playing, drumming and all these for us, it all works as one unity, as a and the dance as well. So I get more excited in when I'm doing that. So those are mainly the music, the instrument that I play in Endingidi, Adungu, Engalabi, Engoma, mainly those, and then the dance I used to do, quite a variety of dances, not in the central because, as you see, some of the knowledge we have in Uganda, like one, one, one region let's say the Buganda Kingdom has about five dances, for example. So out of those five dances I could do, probably one dance, I would say. But when you go to different parts of Uganda, they have like, each tribe has more than one or two dances in that sense. So some of the dances I do them like I do the Amagunju in the central region. I've done the Chitta guriro from the western part. I've done the Raka, raka from the northern part of Uganda. Oh, these are Ugandans. And then, of course, we have, we have, we've had some artists from Senegal, and they taught us quite a few dance, I think they dance called cuckoo cuckoo dance, and it's from Senegal, with the rhythms as well. So not only doing the Ugandan part, but have managed to borrow and learn a few other things from other parts of Africa, which, of course, translates to Uganda, and we develop within that what they do and what we do. Sometimes we create something of our own, or sometimes we we explore other cultures in that sense, or we just do a bit of a mixture to make the entertainment enjoy full.

Rolf Killius 12:49
I have seen you with Bantu Arts. Yes, is this your brain child? Or

Steven Kasamba 12:54
So Bantu Arts is my baby. I started Bantu arts. I started it in 2013 originally, I didn't think it was going to be the way it is now. I wanted Bantu Arts to be more as kind of like a company that focuses predominantly on productions that we take on stage. And I wanted it to be. I had a vision of two companies. One of them was to do more of community based work and Bantu Arts to do more of corporate work in that sense. So the first one didn't work, so I went with the latter. So then if the other one didn't work, so I moulded Bantu Arts to do both professional community and as a production company. So then in 2013 we started slowly, slowly. We did one of our first project in Dugdale theatre, one of the first ever Uganda musical production, full of music, full of dances in Enfield. And that was called Love God in the pile of Africa. Uh, it was widely, widely received. We did it actually in October, 2015 and mainly the project was between, uh, I think, the month of Black History month in October. And, of course, I thought that would be a very good platform for us to start, you know, doing that because of the Black History Month. But then I realised, why do we have just one month for Black History Month? So I thought, okay, I can push Bantu Arts as every day we are celebrating we as Africans who live in the diaspora, and we brought so much to both our communities, not only in Uganda, but even where we live now. So we're celebrating our theme, mainly to celebrate African music, African dance throughout the year, both in the communities . We do school projects like African drumming workshops. We do African dance workshops. We do projects for community like Horniman Museum . We did a few projects in the last two, three years. We've done quite a few projects with Horniman Museum, which is based in South East London. We've done a few projects with London Marathon and then a charity called Marie Curie, so we've been supporting them throughout the years. We've done a few projects with quite a lot, quite a lot of companies. We've done LinkedIn, we've done, I think Spotify, we've done Paramount films in Camden, and some of them, we've been doing them through black history month in October. Some of them, we've been ongoing. We've worked with companies like global fusion music and arts as Bantu Arts, because some of the people, they come to us because they think we have value, and we are very professional, and they know that what we do, we know and we understand what we do. So hence, the reason why we, as Bantu arts, we have this connection with not only corporate companies, but charity organisations, community organisations, and of course, you can watch us on a lot of our websites, which is Bantuarts.co.uk, on all social media platforms. Just type in Bantu arts. So you will see quite a lot of things that we do on Twitter, Instagram, Facebook, LinkedIn, and you just follow us and see where and what Bantu Arts has. Then, of course, when we started Bantu arts, I didn't know that I wanted to be more in, go back to Africa and support more with them. Then throughout the years, I realised that there's no place like home, and there was a need to support this young generation in terms of their art, in terms of their mental health, in terms of their well being, financially and the rest of it. So we created Bantu Arts Foundation, which is an organisation, a company, based in Uganda and and the aim for that is to support these, these young generation, or these young kids on how to basically, to mentor them, not only as good citizens, but as financially help them with

either clothing, help them with creating more opportunities for them in life, so that they can live a positive life in that sense. So we've got Bantu Arts UK and Bantu Arts Foundation, Uganda.

Rolf Killius 17:49
Going back to Uganda, what I experienced, there were so many different communities and so many different also music sites relating to different communities. How do you can you talk about the different communities in Uganda?

Steven Kasamba 18:05
So it depends, Uganda as a country, I think, is the size of Britain, if it's not bigger than Britain, Uganda has different we have about, I think, 55 tribes. I think, to my knowledge, I think it's, I think it's a is definitely more than 50 tribes. And every tribe, to my knowledge, has at least, at least two dances, at least two dances. For example, in the region in the Buganda Kingdom where I'm from, we used to have, we have a dance called baximba. Then there was a dance called nankasa. There's about a dance called mogolla. There's a dance called amagunju. And then I think there is another dance. But now, throughout years, what artists have done, organisers have done, they've joined some of the dances together, so you have baksimba, nankassa, mogolla, and they've created that as one dance, but long time ago, all these dances were separate, right? And each dance has its own message, has its own meaning. Oh, and there is mbaga dance as well. That makes it five dances. So it's baximba, nankassa, mogolla, magunju and embaga dance. Embaga dance is it's a wedding dance, and when they do the dance, the dance tells the story about how a woman should behave when they get into the marriage. In that sense. That's why it's called embaga dance. It's mainly done on the wedding. So mbaga means wedding. Magunju is a dance that is mainly performed in front of the king or the royal dance, then you have baximba - baximba tells a story about men went and planted the banana fibre. Right? With banana tree, no banana fibre. Sorry. A banana tree, which, of course, the banana tree had. We have different types of bananas. We have bananas that we cook to eat as a as a meal. We have bananas that we get juice out of them, just juice. We have bananas that you get juice and you put sorghum on them and you make beer, right? So now that's where the dance baximba comes from. Baximba means they planted it. Baximba, so they created a dance coming from that genre of going plant the tree, right, get the banana out, squeeze it, get the juice put the sorghum on top of it, let it ferment, all right, to create the beer. And when, when they drank it, they start creating the dance that goes with a Bucha. The Bucha, which means those who planted it made it so sweet, all right, and that's where the dance comes from. So that is the central region of of of Uganda. Actually we only have, we have north, we have east, we have West, we don't and we have central, we don't have south. So South will be around Lake Victoria. It would have been, but it's mainly we call it Central, right? So in the north we have the Chole people, and they do dances like Larakaraka. Then you go into the East, you have tribes like the basoga people. When you go to the west, you have the Banyan Kore and the batoro. They do different dances, like the runege entogoro. They do staguriro. And many, many more. Right in bosoga, they do dance like Tamina ibuga. They do other dances, lots of them, but with different tribes in Uganda, they have their own little thing, like in Busoga, they have two dances. One is called Tamina I

Bucha, and the other one is called narufka, right? So they all have a meaning within the community. They come from same thing with all, all the tribes and types, all the all the regions and tribes that portray their dances. So it has a meaning in that sense. Well, to be quite honest, the I had this idea of, in fact, in everything that I do, I like to I want to represent. I want, yeah, I want to represent what I sell or what I bring to the people. So then I realised the name I had before was not representing me, it was not representing the vision I had. It was not representing where I'm from. So I thought, what is the best name that can describe or that can tell a story about where I'm from? And the idea came to me, and I say, why don't I say, Bantu Arts right? So Bantu means that a group, it's a tribe of Bantu speaking people. And the history to my knowledge about Bantu is we started from sub Sahara. They travelled the Bantu people started from the western part of Africa. They travelled from the West, they came to south of Africa, and then they felt like, no, no, we don't want to settle here. They travelled to East Africa, and then they settled in East Africa. But it's a journey of Bantu. So the term Bantu, the terminology of Bantu, is a group of people, if it's one person, is called omuntu, either loads of people. They are called Bantu. And then you can add on abantu, if it's a community, abantu. So then I thought, Okay, I think Bantu will represent me, represent my vision, and will represent where I'm coming from. Hence the reason why we are called Bantu Arts. yeah, yeah, talking about the different communities, but they are also I was, for instance, in Jinja, and people informed me about the previous Indian community, of course, expelled by Idi Amin in the 70s. So what is your take on there are still Indian people living in Uganda. What is your take on this community? For Asians,

Steven Kasamba 24:31
Asian community.., okay, for me, I think we had for me, with my experience, I feel like the Indians prefer to come to East Africa because we have so many things in similar we have a lot of similarities between Indian culture and or Africa in general. But I would say East Africa, because that's where I'm from, and I've seen a lot of Indian in East Africa. And of course, they were good at trading. They came through the Indian Ocean to Mombasa, or Tanzania, and they came to Tanzania, they came to Kenya, and they came to Uganda, because that's all part of the East Africa on the coast of the Indian Ocean. So to me, when they came, they came with stuff. They brought things like they had their language, they had food, they had some of the spices and some of the things up to now, they're still there, right? But at the same time, we've created something of our own from what they brought, for example, the chapatis. So we have a different types of chapati from India. But originally the chapati is not Ugandan. It was Indian. And then we have thing like samosas and thing like that. So for them to come, they brought something very positive. They brought something different to what we have and so on. But they came specifically to make business, to make money and bring something, not really to colonialize us, or in any way. So when they came, when they brought the food, they brought the language. And then, as you to me with the knowledge I have with Swahili, Swahili is a mixture of quite a lot of languages. I think it's a mixture of Swahili. It's, I mean, it's a mixture of Indian it's a mixture of Persian, it's a mixture of the local language in Tanzania to create the language called Swahili. And when you go to certain places in Tanzania, they speak proper, original Swahili. And when you come to Dar es Salaam, you come to Kenya, the Swahili is a little bit different, right? So then when they

came with the experience, the exposure, we managed to work together. They didn't come with weapons, they didn't come with anything like that, other than business or their mind, their business people. So they created shops to create opportunities for work, employment and so on, and the dances on their couch and the rest of it. So the similarity is, they love colours. We love colours. They are dances using gestures. We use a lot of gestures, and so that. And with a smile and the rest of it, I feel like they came to East Africa because we are more we are more open, we are more friendly, we are more kind of appealing, and that sense. So they we, I feel like we have so many Indians that came to East Africa. So at the time they were expelled, I was little. I didn't know what was the reason and the rest of it. But of course, we learned the history and that they were done ABCD. But to me, it's I wasn't there, so I could not comment on that. But we as a community, we need each other. I would not feel we learn from each other. And when Indians are there, I think for us is good, because where, if they can bring opportunities for the the country, that's well and good. If we can share things in common, that's very good if we if To be honest, it doesn't matter like I'm in England right now, right? I was, I was not born here, but I've been blessed to be here. I've been given opportunities and so on, and I've added a lot of value to where I am right now. So why would I be different? Why would I object when somebody wants to go and live in Uganda or settle in Uganda for their own reason? I don't think it's right for me to object that. But in general, I think if people are coming to your country and they bring value to that country, could be economically, socially and the rest of it, as long as people are benefiting from that. So why not so to me, Indians, I think they've done, they've done they've done so well they did. They brought so many things that we relate to right now and and, yeah, I just, I just love people. I love people.

Speaker 1 29:03
How is the real? How was, how is the relationship between different black communities and Indian communities, who also became in Ugandans, of course?

Rolf Killius 29:13
Surprisingly, we have Indians that have never actually stepped in in India at all, and they have no connections at all in India. So they are part of us. So right now, the Indians who were, who were expelled, and they he, when the President, we have Yoweri kaguta mseveni wanted, I think he the one who came to exile. He told them to come back because, of course, they add so much value to Uganda. Some of them were connected. So a lot of them came back when the President came back in power. So that brought quite a good value for our community and the the other aspects as well for the Indians when they came back is they, of course, the development of their businesses, you know, until the schools were open. And, of course, they injected a lot of money. So when they went back, I mean, it's, it's, it was just a beautiful thing to me that they had already connection to Uganda. They had already established themselves to Uganda. And, of course, some of their families asked because they didn't know where. Some of them didn't know where to go. So that's why they came here. And they, I think they there was a connection between Uganda and and Great Britain. And there's the reason why, when they were expelled, it they straight away they came here, so some of them went back, and they've got so many businesses now. They own so many

properties and so on. Of course, some of you know local communities have benefited. It a lot in them, but I think it's all about having a balance of supporting the locals and those who are coming to invest in the country, and to see how you can balance them, rather than fostering one and leave the other. So it needs just to balance, in that sense, with my experience.

Steven Kasamba 29:37
You already mentioned colonial past.

Rolf Killius 31:19
Yes, would you like to comment on that.

Steven Kasamba 31:22

Steven Kasamba 31:26
Colonial? Hmm.. Colonial was to me, I feel like everything that comes in your life, there is good and bad out of things. For example, we as Ugandans or as Africans. We didn't have things like paracetamol, we didn't have things like aspirin, we didn't have things like injections. We did all these medication we didn't have them. We were we used to take things like things that squeeze from the grass and the trees and these local hubs in that sense. So we believed in healing method. We believe in spiritual methods with we believed in community builder, community strengthening and things like that. That's how we raise and we are brought up. We we did not have fabric that we have, you know. So all these was brought in by foreigners, was brought in by the Colonials, was brought in religion, for example, as well. We had no like Protestants, Christianity and things like that. It wasn't there. We believed in the witchcraft, and we believe in spiritual healing. We believe in all these traditional way of living. And then, of course, the Colonials, they brought Catholicism, they brought Protestantism. And of course, we have the Arabs that brought Arabic or Islamic Islam. And then, of course, now we have Pentecostal, which is part of Christianity, which they call them, they call themselves born again. They're not Catholics, they're not protesters. They're called Born again. And then, plus other other religions. So to answer your question is, to me, everything has its goods and bads. But of course, if the bads exceeds the goods, then that's where the problem is. But if you balance it out in that sense, so the good things, where we got a little bit of exposed in a few things in the rest of the world, what the rest of the world has to offer, what they have, as I said in my saying that Colaba could do, Mia, which you go and see, and you bring back that knowledge and share it with with the rest of the world. So when they came to Africa, they brought a lot of things, and we learned, oh, there is such a thing in another country, because you only, you only surrounded with your own circle. So those are the things. Those are the benefits. What we learned on what others countries, what other countries have to offer, and so on and so forth. The bad thing was to take to make you feel like what you have is less value than what they're bringing to you. For example, languages in school as we speak now, we speak English. Our local languages are not we don't have a local In fact, in Uganda, we don't have, like a main main language that we say, this is our local main language, as you have here in England. In England, you have English as the main

language, then you, of course, if, when you go to Wales, there's Welsh and there's Scottish and the rest of it, Kenyans, they've, they put themselves to say they have tribes as well. They have the Kikuyu, they have the luos, and they have all that. But they say, No, we need to have Swahili as our main language. In Tanzania, they have Swahili as their main language. And of course, in Tanzania, because that's the origin of Swahili, they only have Swahili. I would say, with my experience. In Kenya, they have different languages. Whereas in Uganda we have the russoga, we have Nyan core, we have luganda, we have rutoro, we have luchiga, we have so many languages, but we've failed to pick a language that can unite us all ugandans. The only language which is more predominant or more dominant right now is Uganda. But even that is not officially is the only reason why it's dominant is because the capital city in Kampala is in Buganda kingdom, and everybody wants to come to Kampala to trade. And the language that is used is Luganda. Even the President is not Luganda, but he speaks Luganda. A lot of people that come from different regions in Uganda, they tend to speak Luganda. But the I don't know whether it's the institute, I don't know that is part of colonialism and but we don't have an official language that Uganda has, and I think we need to have that. That's very important. So back to the question about colonial, colonialism - there are things that are still trading right now, because the colonialist mind is still there. We forget to value our countries. We forget to value the things that we have as a country. For example, the food Uganda has got the best food in the world. We've got the best soil in the world. But people don't value that because they still have this mentality of, I need to board a plane and go to Dubai and do cleaning. I need to go to UK and do care work. I need to go to America to do ABCD. And we forget the values and the the the beauties that we have in Uganda, yes, for us as well, I'm knowing the I'm not, I'm the I'm the other person as well that he could put into that bracket, because I came in this country as a performer. But for me, my vision was to promote African music. Was to promote Uganda music, and that's what I'm still doing. So we still have that mentality of colonialism in our countries, because the dressing, the language, the our desires and all that. So all that is is done. And bear in mind as well, all these maps that we see in our countries or in Uganda, we are done. We are divided. I mean, this office was in the UK, and somebody made a call and they say, Okay, from this point to this point, make that Buganda kingdom. From this point to this point, make that this country. And whereas Africa was one country, right, or Uganda would have been one country, one whatever. And then that's how all the things started developing, and that's all still part of colonialism, and that's why I'm saying colonial, colonialism is still part of us, right? It's still in there, and it needs to be extracted out so that we can love our country. We can develop our country. Yes, it doesn't matter it and it's good to have other people come in your country. It's good to borrow other cultures. It's good to to get investors from other country. But at the same time, you need to have values of yourself, values of your country, and develop those and then you can add on top of what others have to offer.

Rolf Killius 38:33
Yeah, coming back to you, you're here now in the UK. You came quite late, in late 1997 Yes, 1997 How do you feel yourself? How you feel accepted, how you feel is your identity nowadays, you also got British citizenship, isn't it? .

Speaker 1 38:57
Yes, so me, as I said, I use the word blessed, because everything, or every journey of my life is a blessing, because I might cry for this, but there are people who are crying to get what I have right. So I'm blessed right now. I'm British and but I still love my country, and everything I do represents where I'm from, because that's my roots, you know. So my identity right now, I'm Britain and Britain, I'm British, so that, yes, I carry that everywhere I go, but at the same time, I wear other shoes as a Ugandan, right? Because even in my passport, it's got born in Uganda, in a place where I was born, and the name I have is still African, so I've not changed my name to be Steven Simms, or whatever Western name that could be. And. I'm I'm still African, so my identity is still there, and so that hasn't changed anything. And I'm very blessed and and lucky that I'm still doing what I'm doing. So Britain has offered me quite a very good platform, a very good way of life, different life of myself, but at the same time, it allows me to share my experience and my knowledge to the community in Britain, and it allows me, not only in Britain, but to the rest of the world. When we do live productions, they go on YouTube, and people can see what we do and what we have to offer to the rest of the world. So all these other things are part of development, a part of my way of what Britain has offered me. And so that's, that's where I'm I'm lining. But at the same time, I'm still me, I'm still African. I'm still connected with a lot of African families. I speak my language. I understand my language very well and and, of course, these are things that to me. I can pass them on as well. So it's the same thing. I feel like nothing has changed in my life. I feel like I'm still living in Africa. I feel like I have so much connections. I'm surrounded with a lot of white speaking people. And believe it or not, I feel like my English has developed a lot as well. Yes, even doing this interview, some of the words might feel a bit African, or, I must say things differently in the way people perceive it in the way, but because I have two languages playing in my mind. And even when we speak a language, even here, sometimes you speak English and add in your local language, you know. So all those, all those identities and personalities are still with me. I feel like nothing has changed. Of course, the world is changing a lot with the economy, financial stability and of course, the art industry as well is very dynamic. So one minute we are busy, next minute we're not busy. There's no job. People have no money, but at the same time you have so much to offer, and so on and so forth. So for me, I'm I'm developing as as an artist, I'm developing with the company that I have, because we have some companies or some NGOs or charity that we're planning to work with, like Kayp Africa. It's a charity that is based in Uganda, and as Bantu arts, we have created a performing group that requires a lot of input in terms of creativity financially. And of course, these the kids that we support. They're all young. They need education, but that education, we pushing it through music and dance culture, music and dance, so that they can, they can tag along with that, and we don't want them to lose their values. We don't want them to lose their identity as Africans or as Ugandans. We want them to retain that. But along the process, they can learn other things throughout the journey, empower them, strengthen them, and keep them more positive. So I'm still here in Britain and but at the same time, I'm connected to the rest of the world in what we do, mainly music and dance.

Rolf Killius 43:48
Have you experienced racism?

Steven Kasamba 43:52
We have, I have, indeed. But for me, it's not something that I put my mind to it, and I tend I lived in places where, actually I was the first black person to be in the in that in that place, like a place like Walton on Thames, I used to live there for quite a long time. Kingston, there were very, very few black people, very, very few black people. And even though, in my community, we are community based people, I mean community, you know, we build around communities. When you go to a place where everybody is for themselves, you have to learn on how you cannot adjust. And these are the things that have learned throughout years. Because when you come in England, you open the door, get in your house, lock yourself in, and that's it. Right. In Africa, you leave your door open, and the reason why you leave your door open is to welcome people in your house. Say more. It's more. Sign of welcome. So in the places that I've lived in, people used to be you could see like somebody is looking at you in a very funny face. Some, some somebody doesn't want to help you, someone, you feel all these kind of thing. But to me, I try to black out all that kind of thing. And I just mind my own business, because I know that people who are racist or people who segregate others, I feel like they are not exposed, right? And I just feel sorry for them, not that it's a I don't condemn them. I just feel like they haven't travelled. They have not seen what the rest of the world has to offer. They have not opened their mind to welcome other people and see what value, what benefits I can give you. I'll give you an example. Like you and me. I'm black, you're white, but you've seen me throughout my journey. You've seen some of the things that I've done, and you've opened door to say, Okay, we need to have a chat, right? So if you had blocked me out in that sense, then your connections, what you know, what I know, how we going to merge it together. So yes, I've experienced a lot of racism. I block it out, and I just feel sorry for them. Just pray that they can just get out of their own bubble, just go outside the world, just see what others have to offer and the rest of it. But in Britain, I think we have a systematic racism, which has been around, yes, they sugarcote it and the rest of it. But I think it's still there. It's there in a way, how you get stopped. It's the way how you get the job. It's in the way on how you educate yourself. So for me, what I do actually strengthen me and give me that positivity, because you cannot take away what I have. You cannot take away my language, you cannot take away the skills and the knowledge that I have. So those are the thing that I hang on a cling on to them. Because no matter what, you can't take those away from me, right? And, yeah, so it's there, but I ignore it. Yeah

Rolf Killius 47:25
Has anybody make made a comment to you that you are foreign, you don't belong to this place.

Steven Kasamba 47:36
Luckily, I've not experienced it. No, I have not. I've had it in. I've had it people say, Oh, you guys come here, take our jobs and the rest of it. They've never said it to me directly, because I've been self employed for quite a long time. So I'm not taking anything, anything from anybody. I'm doing my thing. Actually, I would feel offended if you come and tell me that you want to take away my art or my music and the rest of it, but it's something that is in me,

so I'm not taking anybody's job. All I'm doing is adding on, actually helping you and empowering you and giving you something more positive in your life. You might think you might not like it, you might think it's not beneficial to you. But you know, until you experience things like mental health, well being, depression and thing like that, everybody needs music. Everybody needs a bit of excitement and thing like that. So for me, those are the things that I have, another thing that I can share. If you have a problem with that, then I don't come to you. And some of the things people look for us to give them the services that we need to. Some of them, we approach customers. Some of them, they don't like what we do. They don't find it value, valuable to them, which is okay, because we humans, we have different opinions, and you can't please everybody. So as me, I need to have that mentality of we him as we're different. Hence, the reason why we have rules and regulation, we have the Bible, we have all these things that mould us within the community. Can you imagine if we had no Koran, there was no Bible, there was no constitution, there was no ABCD, how would people behave among each other or in front of each other. So to me, some of the things, they happen because they happen. You have no choice about them.

Rolf Killius 49:29
What is your personal wishes? Or, let's say, challenges, wishes for the future? It could be perso... only personal or outlook of a society, something what you want to say.

Steven Kasamba 49:44
One, I think we did when, when I mentioned about the project we did at the music production we did at Enfield Love got in the pile of Africa' in 2024 I was the first person from UK to stage a, I would say, a 55 Cast Production in Uganda at the Uganda National Theatre, UNCC. It's called, actually the National Theatre. So we did a project called 'Adungu Tale' musical. It was massive. It was great. We faced challenges, a lot of challenges from the local artists, because I came with a white person, and because I was new in, new in in that environment, and bring a project to to Africa or to Uganda. And of course, because I brought the white person, they thought he we had money, because I come from the UK, they thought I have money. And there's a lot of you know, challenges that went along in that sense, and people ripped us off. And you know so many, many things, you know, and it made the project very, very difficult to produce. However, we managed to do nine shows in 2024 we finished the entire production. So it was done. Of course, I'm still living with those challenges right now, which I'll resolve them very soon. So my, my, my focus is to promote where I'm from through music and dance. I want to extract. I want to do culture action programmes. I want to take Britain to Uganda, right? I want to bring Uganda to Britain. I want to get other countries. You know, these culture exchange programmes. I think that I want to do, I want to bring the production to West End, right? Because I know that we have so much, we have so much we can present, that we can bring to to Britain and people to enjoy a West End show from Africa. So to me, the things that I'm clinging on, bring projects from Africa, bring it to Uganda, and of course, most of the challenges that we have everybody is financial strains. I feel like there's a lot I can do in terms of stage presentation, in some in terms of production. And one of the challenges,

financial constraints, because one and self employed, and then I've got this vision, and then I feel like, no. Feel like, actually, I know that there are lot of professional artists in the UK, lots and lots of lots of professional African artists, but a lot of them are doing job they're not supposed to be doing because they have to support their family and so on and so forth, different reasons. And if I can have them and be performing arts professionally, we have actors, we have dancers, we have musicians, but they're doing so many things that does not really that don't relate to what their their skills and their knowledge, and they have so much they can give their community to me, that's something I would love to bring out, employ artists professionally, just like as you see, you know, people doing things in West End, and you have the committed to do that. To me, that's something I would love to see. I want to bring productions to UK. I want to take production to Africa. And I just want us to really, to be, to represent, to represent, and just learn more as well. I just want to learn more and develop myself as an artist, develop myself as a producer in a lot of things that I want to do that mainly for me. My passion is community. I love community. Most of the thing, I think that's the reason why I happen to us, is to do things that give a smile to people, do things that bring families together and so on. People learn about what other cultures have to offer in that sense. So to me, those are most of the important things. And as an artist, I would still love to carry on doing that until I go into the ground, as everybody have to go there. Yeah.