

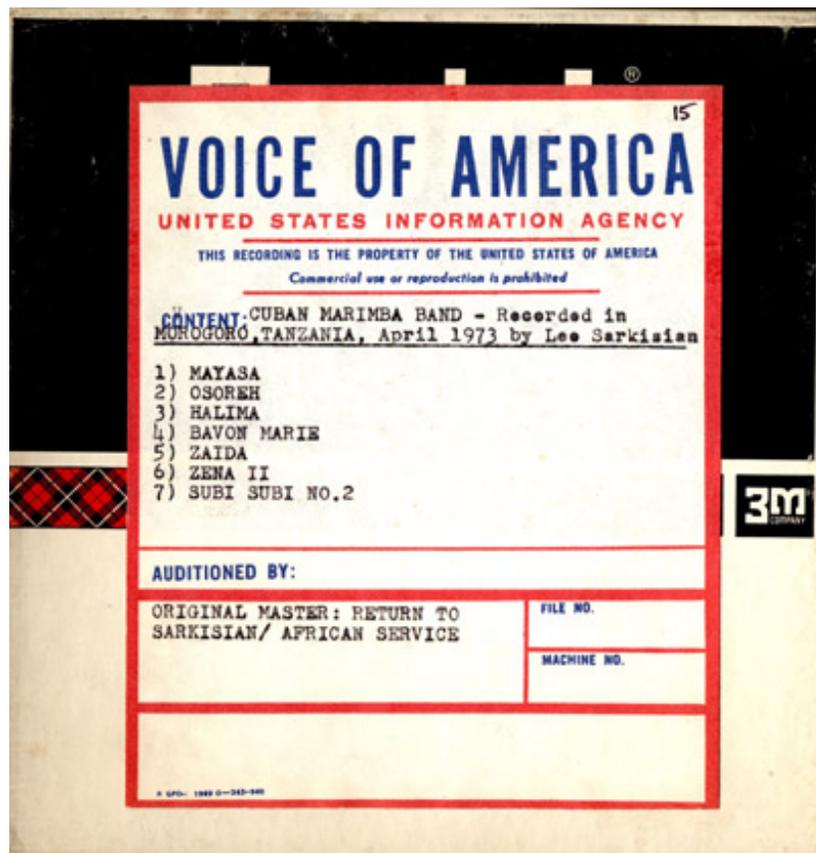
Unreleased recording of the Cuban Marimba Band

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In early 1973 the Public Affairs Officer at the United States Information Agency office in Tanzania received a request from David Wakati of Radio Tanzania. Mr. Wakati had previously worked at the Voice of America in Washington D.C. and later became the director of broadcasting at Radio Tanzania, from 1979 to 1991. Radio Tanzania needed help organizing its tape library and Mr. Wakati was hoping that the Voice of America could help. So in April of 1973 USIA (which at the time governed the VOA) dispatched Leo to Tanzania to help Radio Tanzania organize its tape library, and to record Tanzanian music for VOA programs.

Leo remembers walking into the 'tape room' at Radio Tanzania and finding stacks of open-reels piled on the floor. After days of working with Radio Tanzania staff members the piles of tapes on the floor were transformed into a catalogued collection, with a Radio Tanzania staff member designated as the tape librarian. This done, Leo hit the road with two colleagues from Radio Tanzania; a technician and a journalist/broadcaster (whose names he unfortunately doesn't remember). From Dar they traveled West to Lake Victoria, stopping along the way in Morogoro, Dodoma, Tabora, and Mwanza. Leo made several recordings during this trip (copies of all the recordings were deposited in the Radio Tanzania tape library). One of the most interesting reels features the Cuban Marimba Band.



Leo remembers the recording session taking place in mid-morning. The group was set up on the stage of an open-air nightclub. There was no rehearsal and no second-takes. Leo set up his equipment and the band cranked their way through seven tracks. The recording was captured by at least 6 microphones (we don't have an exact number) running through a 12 input Sony Mixer into a two-track binaural Nagra tape machine. Leo mixed the channels live to tape as he recorded.

The famous leader of the Cuban Marimba Band Salum Abdallah died in a car accident in November 1965 and, according to Werner Graebner, the singer Juma Kikaza then became the bandleader. We don't have any documentation accompanying this reel other than what you see above. So we don't know who participated in this recording. Any and all help in identifying the line-up would be very appreciated!! The guitar player has adopted several of Mbaraka Mwinshehe's guitarisms... check out his chicken-scratching during the breakdowns.

Halima is a love song that features some gloriously out-of-tune horns and some very nice guitar playing. Halima is driving the singer crazy... "Halima, my love I'm calling you. My love is overflowing. My love, I'm suffering. I can't sleep. I'm hurting".

↳ [Cuban Marimba Band "Halima"](#)

Next up is a tribute to the late great Siongo Bavon aka Bavon Marie Marie from the Democratic Republic of

the Congo. One of the bandleaders of the popular Orchestre Négro Succès, Bavon Marie Marie was also the younger brother of Le Grand Maitre Franco Luambo Makiadi. He died in a car crash in the early morning of August 5, 1970.

↳ [Cuban Marimba Band "Bavon Marie"](#)

We continue with Zaida, another love song. As the singer says to kick things off "I takua ngumu" which can be roughly translated as "it will be difficult"... and this is a tough tune! I love the echoplex on the guitar.

↳ [Cuban Marimba Band "Zaida"](#)

The band seemed to pick up steam as they worked their way through their repertoire. I think the last two tracks on the reel are the best. This one features some wonderful guitar playing.

↳ [Cuban Marimba Band "Zena II"](#)

The last track on the reel is my favorite. The horns are punchier, the guitars have more bite and the rhythm section is throwing it down. This song is somewhat of a riddle that I am hoping those of you understand Swahili can help solve. The more or less literal translation of the words is 'Oh Subiana... you've come to suck again. You still want to suck? Then you have to go to Karatu, you can go and suck there too. Eh Subi, eh Subi. I'm sucking, I'm sucking. I am warning you not to play with Subi Subi. You can't manage Subi it sucks your blood.' So... who or what is Subi? Could 'Subi Subi' refer to a politician who is 'sucking the life' out of the people?

↳ [Cuban Marimba Band "Subi Subi No. 2"](#)

I hope you enjoyed the music!