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ABBI, the 2004 Kisima award winner for the Best Male Artiste and the Most Promising Artiste, has performed at various international music festivals, but he has still maintained his humble ways he was a shoeshine boy and a car wash 'expert.' He talked to KIMANI WAWANJIRU.

What have you been up to lately?

I have been journeying through experiments with new sounds. Call it an adventure break that allowed me growth.

I have also for the last two years been happy to spend a lot of time in my studio enjoying production of myself and other artists.

You have pointed out that your latest project is a reggae album. How can you describe it? What inspired the album?

All I can say is that it's a lovely sound and after my whole musical experience, I discovered reggae is a wonderful rhythm for telling stories.

At the same time I observed that a large part of Africa listens to reggae, yet we have very few African artists in the genre locally and internationally. I also know the pre-perceptions that a lot of people may have when it comes to reggae, yet this is simply Abbi-reggae and that's enough.

Why did you change from what you have previously done?

My doing reggae now is more of an expansion in expression than a departure from afro-music, because I still love and do enjoy afro-groove. Then again isn't reggae African essentially?

How would you say this project has been in your musical journey?

I have for a long time been known to do Afro-beat and it has been what I played, then one morning, the wind blows the reggae tunes my way.

At first, I was tempted to do it only as personal moment kind of thing. Then more and more people actually kept urging me and telling me that it was still truly Abbi as Abbi is.

As I pursued it further, there were these incessant coincidences that brought too many people softly twisting my hand. And as they say it, "when the mystery is too strong, don't resist it." So, here I am even working with reggae artists, musicians and producers locally and internationally.

I say that destiny yanked me from the familiar into the unknown, and my fear became my only courage to try, and guess what, it is so much fun to dare be more.

Did you always want to be a musician?

I won't say I always knew I'd be a musician and if anything it was seriously discouraged as a career. Yet beyond the dreams of piloting, doctoring, and all the wonderful other career possibilities, I am deeply fulfilled being who I have chosen to be today. I love connecting with people, and a nice melody shall always do that.

You know the perception that was always associated with being an artist. Did you suffer from these perceptions?

I know this all too well. I have seen it, felt it and lived it. Nonetheless, there's only the truth that you are truly who you are and can become even more by being

ONE ON ONE WITH ABBI

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aware and attentive to your soul-passion. That's where your arsenal of creativity lies and thrives.

Where do you draw inspiration for your work?

I am inspired by all that is here, there and everywhere in life. It is people, and events, experiences and memories, yet also deep seated inexplicable urges play a major role in my expression and composition as an artist.

What is your opinion of the music industry in the Kenyan and African scene in general?

Africa is Africa, and that is ok, since Africa is speeding like the wind into its fantastic future with an open mind. I am happy with where the industry is and am even more hopeful that given the direc-

tion as a people and developing society, we will soon entrench the proper framework for the music industry to be accorded security, respect and support into evolution.

As an artist is the expression of a people, we can see through the music industry the vibrant teething challenges that beset our self-understanding and resolve as Africans. Yet, this is all an opportunity to find the will to forge into a greater future together.

I also know that when Africa shall pause for a moment and listen to the songs of her sons and daughters, it shall remember and find all that's needed to become more than everything that plagues her existence at this moment. I believe that Africa is close to herself through her peoples' expression traditionally and also the contemporary new youthfulness. It can be better, and it shall get better, for after rock bottom the only other way is up, for Kenya and Africa.

You were also involved with Suzanne Owiyo's Kisumu 100 that was sensational. How did you get involved?

I actually only played on the video but wasn't Suzanne Owiyo's co-singer on the audio record. I got a call one morning and was told to be in town within half an hour and two hours later I was made very famous and popular as many people simply addressed me in Dholuo as I walked the streets.

What are some of the other extraordinary things that have happened to you and also added invaluable experience to your life as a musician?

I shall say that becoming an artist

was one of the most extra-ordinary things that happened to me. It has enabled me to experience and exchanged with persons, places, things, moments and seen me through so many events.

Now through my art I have fought my battles winning and losing some (and I know many losses) but am happy to find the tool through which I know myself better and dialogue with life wholesomely. Life is now become the greatest ever expanding adventure.

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TALENTED: Abbi on stage