

Top star gives up rap 'for God'

By FAITH BALONGO

Popular 21-year-old rap musician Mase has chosen to follow God or as he says, "to serve God in His way." Mase had become so popular that he had been called the future of hip-hop.

Mase released a press statement titled, "Mase takes leap of faith; retires from recording to walk with the Lord". The young musician, who was only quoted as saying that "rapping was not in my heart", has hinted that he might go into charity work with children, return to school where he was pursuing a sociology degree or possibly try his hand at acting.

Bad Boy vice-president/general manager Jeff Burroughs told *Ebony* magazine: "We wholeheartedly support Mase's decision. It's a personal decision that everyone at the label respects to the utmost."

Mase says he has no regrets about his past or doubts about his future despite leaving the secular music scene at the prime of his career. Questions have been raised about how Bad Boy Entertainment will cope with the loss of one of their best artists.

Since he first hit the charts with his gold single *Only You*, Mase grabbed the attention of music fans. In just a few months, he leapt from relative obscurity into a chart-topper, and his song *Lookin' at me* made it to the Billboard charts on the top 10 list.

Born Mason Betha in Jacksonville, Florida, United States, Mase is one of six children — three boys and three girls. He lived in Jacksonville until he was five when his family relocated to Harlem.

As a child, he was a good student who spent much of his spare time playing basketball or in church. But, at 13, he began to get caught up in dangerous ghetto games and was promptly sent to the south by his parents. He returned to New York two years later and his music began to sprout "from nowhere," as he puts it.

Mase met a number of established performers, including Redman and Busta Rhymes. While in Atlanta three years ago, he bumped into Sean 'Puff Daddy' Combs and did a demo rap for him. From then on, he had himself a career rapping about money, women and partying.

Before releasing his first single, Mase had already been featured in more than six chart-topping music videos. During the 1997 MTV awards ceremony, he joined the Bad Boy family in a live performance of *I'll Be missing You*.

He also lent his talent to Puff Daddy's double platinum *Can't Nobody Hold Me Down*, Notorious B.I.G.'s platinum *Mo Monday Mo Problems* and



Mase



R. Kelly



Kamaru

Mariah Carey's *Honey*. Mase's first album, *Harlem World* sold more than 3 million copies. He joins a growing number of artistes who have either abandoned secular music or chosen to sing both.

In 1997, R. Kelly announced that he was done with "flying in sin" and was now going to "fly with Jesus." R. Kelly was earning millions with songs like *You Remind Me of Something* when he made his decision. Just like Mase, Robert Kelly, left at the prime of his career. Many could not believe they would no longer see their typical R. Kelly clad in dark shades, or hear him croon sexually explicit messages or even drop his pants on stage during live concerts. R. Kelly's last three albums before the change had been million sellers around the world, especially the one-titled *12-play*.

In Kenya, we have also had 'defectors'. In 1997, Fredrick Maina who shot to fame with the hit musical comedy, *Giagatika*, "embraced the Lord" and declared the change would be reflected in his life and music.

Popular Kikuyu musician Joseph Kamaru also made the big turnaround a few years ago, and proceeded to play gospel tunes. Many people were left asking how a man who had made a good sum of money singing sexually explicit songs could have had such a drastic change.

Many other entertainers have in the past turned to religion. Al Green was until his turnaround rated as R&B's hottest sex symbol. Green married and started his own church. He has been a gospel singer ever since. Donna Summer also followed suit a few years later, abandoning fame and fortune.



Marking 30 years of co-operation

By AMOS NGAIRA

Nairobi: A special "Millennium Congo-Kenya Show" is scheduled for the Makuti Park Restaurant, South "B," on Thursday. The show, to feature Kenyan and Congolese musicians, opens at 6 pm. Orch Super Mazembe, New Rhumba Japan International and Princess Jolly (pictured) will perform.

Veteran Congolese musician Longwa Didos said this was the culmination of a long-time ambition to organise a show to mark more than 30 years of music cooperation between Kenya and Congo.

Rhumba Japan, the Makuti resident band, will perform tracks from their latest CD, *Punition*, while Princess Jolly will parade her new look Jolly Boys Band.

Operation Jambo Zangelewa dance troupe have invited the Loketo dance group and Kanda Kid to their 10th anniversary celebrations at Connection Village, Embakasi.

A new group, Champions-Top-One, is the latest dancing sensation. Samson Macharia and Joseph Kyalo dance to both Lingala and raggamauffin tunes.

Kakamega: The "Miss Kakamega," beauty contest enters the knockout stage on Saturday at the Savona Isle Resort Club. Daser Promotions say 15 girls will take part. Irene Abade, 22, and Evelyn Andika, 21, excelled in the qualifying rounds. The finals will be held in December.

Choc Generation Du Congo and the visiting Nairobi-based Mass System Band, led by William Onyango 'Tough,' will also perform.

Kinshasa: Veteran musician Nyoka Longo, the leader of the legendary Zaiko Langa Langa — Nkolo Mboka band was recently summoned before the DRC Music Censorship board over the lyrics of his latest chart-buster titled, *Poisson*. Nyoka sings that leadership is not just about riches but a good name. The song was an apparent answer to rival Koffi Olomide's song, *Round Point* (Off the album *Droit De Veto*).

In the song, Koffi ridicules musicians who operate as if they were driving around a roundabout (or driving in the same place), an apparent reference to Nyoka, who for many years has been based in Kinshasa, unlike the widely-travelled Koffi.

In 1992, both Koffi and Nyoka were briefly held in custody for promoting the controversial *Etutana yango na yango* dance.

Eldoret: Orch Imbago band of Charles Musera will be at Eldoret Country Club playing a blend of oldies, mainly *rhumba* and *benga*.

Young musicians lament lack of air play

SHOWBIZ THIS WEEK

By NJOKI KARUOYA

Reggae rappers Riz Eye and Poqqine, otherwise known as Melchezidek Crew, are having a hard time getting their five-track CD on the air. They were recently told by Kenya Broadcasting Corporation presenters that their music "is too political".

They disagree. "Our music addresses social issues. They may have listened to only one song and judged the entire album," said Poqqine.

Maxi Priest will perform this afternoon at the Carnivore Restaurant, Nairobi, at the Tusker Export Millennium Beats of the Season. Organised by Tafrija, this annual show has been divided into three sessions — divas, rap mania and bands. The divas will include Mercy Myra, In Tu and Malkia Rukia. Rap Mania is being organised by K-South Flava. The bands include Zana Ziki, Pressmen, Musaimo and Jah'key Malle. This is Maxi's second tour this year.

Mombasa is churning out many rappers and singers. The group, Majizee, is already a household name, as are Malkia Rukia and Poxi Presha. Now, there is Lololova, who has released a self-titled album about love and romance.

Remember the group Immature? Well, the three young heart throbs, Batman, Romeo and LDB, are now performing under the name IMx. Their newest album is in the top ten charts. But as happened to Tevin Campbell, fans are still trying to figure out whether they like the new sounds. But it is apparent that they have come of age.

Next to Sean 'Puff Daddy' Combs, Master P is the biggest name in hip hop music. Master P, who has been spreading rumours of his impending retirement from singing, is now involved in a movie. However, instead of acting, he is still singing.

Dolly Parton will never say die. And just as the hip hop scene continues to reign, she has just released her latest album, *The Grass is Blue*.

The soundtrack of the movie, *Austin Powers: The Spy Who Shagged Me*, features, among others, Marvin Gaye, the Monkees and Madonna. Set in the 60s, the hilarious comedy tells the story of a criminal and his pursuer who freeze themselves and are revived in the 90s, only to find the world is no longer as they knew it. The music bridges the gap between the three decades.



Melchezidek Crew

It's time for 'Falling into place'

By ANTHONY NJAGI

An original play, *Falling into Place*, which will be staged next month, is being rehearsed at the Kenya National Theatre, Nairobi.

Written by JPR Ochieng Odera and directed by Joseph Maina Barbushe, the play will be staged at the Kenya National Theatre before going to other theatre houses. All proceeds will go to children's homes and the Mayor's Christmas Tree Fund.

Falling into place is a hilarious satire about politics and politicking which takes place in a fictional African country. A man called Malian is elected the internal affairs minister of the country, propelling him into the dizzying world of power. But there is a catch. The previously unknown man has a clean past and noble intentions, but certain issues that begin to crop up in his days at the top are puzzling.

The cast includes Conrad Makeni, Caroline Midimo, Packson Ngugi, Catherine Kariuki and Irene Maingi.

Meanwhile, nominations continue for the annual Mbalamwezi Theatre awards. The group awards outstanding actors, actresses, playwrights, directors, and other personalities involved in theatre. According to Peter Mudamba, the co-ordinator of the awards, this year's event will be held at the French Cultural Centre, Nairobi, later in the year.

Elsewhere, the Carnivore Restaurant will be the venue of a poetry extravaganza to be held on November 27. The event will feature poetry on various themes from all over Kenya. A number of well-known theatre personalities, including Edwin Nyutho of the University of Nairobi will take to the stage in the event, which will be held to celebrate the poetic talent in Kenya.

At the same time, Masai School, Ngong, will be host various entertainment pieces to celebrate their silver jubilee. Traditional dances, poetry and plays will feature in the November 6 event, according to the school's Principal, Mr D.L. Gitome.

Meanwhile, a visiting group from the United Kingdom, Theatrum Botanicum, will present a play, *The Three Sisters* at Maseno University. The group has among its cast, Kenyan actors such as Erastus Owour, Sammy Mwangi and Kennedy Waudo.

The troupe staged the play yesterday at Eldoret Municipal Hall and will be showing it at the Nakuru Players Theatre today before proceeding to KNT, Kenyatta University and Bomas of Kenya later in the week.

Finally, Wahome Mutahi's *Jomo Kenyatta — the Man*, is being rehearsed at the Kenya National Theatre.



Aphophia Mwendu, Eduardo Waigwa and Betty Achieng in *Jomo Kenyatta-the man*, a new play by Wahome Mutahi being rehearsed at the Kenya National Theatre. (Picture by ANTHONY NJAGI)