



Lutheran Bible
Translators

FAR TREKKIN'

News from Rob and Eshinee Veith

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THINGS GO RIGHT AND THINGS GO WRONG

By Rob

August 2022, I undertook my first overseas hands-on ministry trip since November 2019. After covid-related travel restrictions for nearly two years, it felt great to get back into the field to do my thing. I had a bunch of air miles about to expire in my account, so I even upgraded to business class for the return.

There would be two parts, two different countries, two very different projects.

For the first part of the trip, I met up with my colleague Stephanie Biggs in Bukoba in the northwestern part of Tanzania. We connected through Inspiro and have worked together on several East Africa projects in the past.

For this project, Stephanie had partnered with a group of pastors representing all of the denominations present in the Karagwe region of Tanzania to build a “walking recording studio” to encourage the documentation and distribution of locally created Christian music. She and I chose and acquired a great box of recording gear with which to train a dozen prospective producer/engineers recruited by the pastoral leadership. All of the equipment was shipped to me in the States, where I spent weeks learning how to use everything myself. Stephanie and I divided the day’s teaching, with her focused on recording philosophy things (such as how to choose the right microphone for a project) while I taught hands-on stuff related directly to the gear.

Several of the students really

got it. I delighted in seeing them discuss microphone placement to improve the mix on a single-microphone recording, passing the headphones around and talking about how they wanted the recording to sound. When doing punch-in edits, multiple students made a list of edit markers so they could see if they came to the same conclusion. By the end of the week, some took ideas I’d shown them and adapted them to their local context. For example, they figured out how to download backing tracks from the Internet and transfer them to the recorder for overdubbing. One night, they practiced recording until long after I went to bed, making some of the best recordings of the week.

Most evenings, Stephanie and I would be prepping for the next day’s sessions, trying to figure out what hadn’t clicked thus far and identifying gaps in what we’d prepared. On one night, we met with a local pastor whose language did not yet have a Bible



translation. I was able to connect him with LBT leadership to start a conversation about translation in his language community.

The days were long and the accommodations were rustic, but things went more or less according to plan.

The second part of the trip, which took us to Jinja, Uganda, turned out very differently. So many things went wrong.

I first met Peter Ekulam Kins

Above: A student has his first hands-on experience with a portable audio recorder.

Below: the students practice overdubbing a percussion track.





at a conference in Kenya in 2018. He wrote worship songs using local rhythms and melodic styles arranged for use by a contemporary worship band. That is, they sounded both like Ugandan church music and Ugandan cultural music. He asked me to come to Uganda to produce five to seven songs as a proof of

concept that he could share with his students and community. It was a good idea and the songs were amazing. Peter gathered a band of friends from around the country. We had four days to record tracks of all of the songs.

I don't have space in this article to tell you all of the challenges we faced in this recording. Even before I arrived, the recording studio which had been booked for us fell through. Instead, we recorded in a gymnasium-style church with a metal roof that sounded like a standing ovation when it rained. And, oh, it rained. A drummer was delayed. Backing singers had

last minute schedule conflicts. We had to work around events at the church. We had rain storms. We had power failures. Through it all, we had literally hundreds of people across the world praying for the success of this project.

I ended the penultimate day behind schedule, but with hope that we could make things up. By that point, we had recorded everything except vocals. Peter recorded placeholder vocals for all of the songs. We overdubbed real vocals for three of the tracks with two of the three vocalists that day. The hope was that we could do final vocals for the other four tracks on the last day and maybe the third vocalist could add some parts to the other tracks.

And that's when my computer died. It opened to an icon of a folder with a question mark. Troubleshooting sites told me this meant system corruption. Various fixes were proposed. I worked most of the night trying to apply them. When troubleshooting failed, I prayed for a miracle.

The prayer team was contacted. *Hundreds of people* prayed with me for a miracle.

No miracle came.

Without my computer, the only way to continue would be to overdub vocal parts onto the MP3 rough mixes I'd sent out a few days before. The vocalists recorded one song over the MP3 file the next day. Even with these vocals, I wouldn't be able to finish the project without the recordings trapped on the computer.

The last day, as I was packing up my recording gear and wondering just how pointless this

trip had been, Peter came and sat down in the room with me. He told me how the band he had recruited for this project had never played together before. They were people he knew, some of them for decades. He had done projects with them individually before. It had been a part of his dream to get them together, for them to encourage each other. "If only for this experience, that is enough," he told me. "I am content." I said I wished I could be content too, but I wasn't. It is my joy to be in the room with beautiful powerful music like this is created for the glory of God. That joy is fulfilled when these creations are shared with the world.

On the trip home, I tried to be content, tried to see God's hand in this project concluding with a crash. Then, during a layover, I tried once again to start up the computer. It had been "in the grave" five days, but I thought I might be able to download a system patch on the airport lounge's fast internet.

And the computer started.

At this moment, in my office in Bellingham, I'm listening to final candidate mixes of five of the songs. Some of the songs have only placeholder vocals, but they're great vocals, because Peter sang so well. Two of the songs needed more parts, so we're leaving them for a future project. But the bulk of the project is there and it's lovely.

I'm calling this a miracle. And now I too am content.

I look forward to sharing the final project with you wherever and when Peter decides it's ready to be shared with the world.

Above: Peter Ekulam Kins shares one of his compositions.

Below: Partial band selfie. Left to right: Ranja (bass and saxophone), Peter (guitar and vocals), Derek (drums), and Isaak (keyboards).



ABOUT US

Rob serves as LBT's Scripture Engagement Coordinator and a specialist in EthnoArts and Vernacular Media.

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