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## Seeds of Song

by Lillian (Haas) Nicolson



With only two days and slim resources, Bible translator Souleymane Traoré (Solo), called us together to compose and record Christian songs in Siamou. I was sceptical about what we could accomplish in such a short period of time, considering our limitations.

Among us were three *griots* (traditional musicians), a Siamou pastor's wife, Ruth, a Catholic elder, two Mennonites (one of whom was a shoe repairman and the other a Bible translator) and me, completely unmusical and non-Siamou. The only unifying factor I could detect in the group was a common language and some interest in music.

But how could we draw a Christian theme for the songs we were invited to create? Siamou biblical translations are limited to creation stories and Adam and Eve. Solo and I were the only ones literate in Siamou and the griots were not Christian.

Solo wasn't deterred. "When the music is in your mother tongue and in your mother music, people can sing with greater joy and understanding," he said. "It makes you do more than just sing. It makes you dance."

Using a selected Bible passage, Mary Hendershott, a visiting ethnomusicologist who led the workshop, guided us through techniques for developing a good refrain. Solo followed with a reading of the creation story and we discussed the aspects of it that spoke to us most profoundly. One of the griots began to pick out a tune on the *balaphon* (wooden xylophone) and sing his interpretation of the story.

Soon Ruth's voice hesitantly rose in a refrain she had composed and the others obediently but tentatively sang along. Then someone mentioned that the tune was in the Jula scale, a musical key from the trade language of the area. The griots transposed it into a Siamou scale and, suddenly, the room erupted with joy. Everyone sprang to their feet, praising God with music and song in their mother tongue, dancing to the balaphon and drums.

We managed to compose and record four rough drafts in this workshop – and plant many different kinds of seeds. The Christians present listened to the stories of creation and Adam and Eve in Siamou for the first time. The griots heard these Bible stories for the first time ever. The joy of working together and composing music in the language we shared sparked remarks of, "Let's do this again!"

We pray that these seeds will take root and grow.

*We invite you to share with your congregation the following story from Witness worker, Lillian (Haas) Nicolson, who with her husband Norm is serving in Burkina Faso in Bible translation and communications ministry. This story should take no more than two minutes to read aloud. You might also wish to include it in your church newsletter.*

*"For no one can lay any foundation other than the one that has been laid; that foundation is Jesus Christ." 1 Cor. 3:11*