


You've selected the International Edition. Would you like to make this your default edition? [Yes](#) | [No](#) Close X

EDITION: INTERNATIONAL U.S. MEXICO ARABIC


Set edition preference

**CNN**   SEARCH

POWERED BY Google

[Home](#) [Video](#) [World](#) [U.S.](#) [Africa](#) [Asia](#) [Europe](#) [Latin America](#) [Middle East](#) [Business](#) [World Sport](#) [Entertainment](#) [Tech](#) [Travel](#) [iReport](#)

---

Part of complete coverage on **Inside Africa** IN ASSOCIATION WITH 

# Rwandan reggae spreads musical message of peace

By **Lisa Desai**, CNN

August 19, 2010 -- Updated 1023 GMT (1823 HKT)



Rwanda's rising musical stars

## STORY HIGHLIGHTS

- Rwanda's Jah Doves are just one of the country's up-and-coming bands
- British music producer Dicken Marshall spotted the band playing in Kigali
- Marshall has set up a record label and two recording studios in Rwanda
- He says traditional musicians, like Sophie Nzayisenga, are become rare

**Kigali, Rwanda (CNN)** -- Rwanda's not a nation typically recognized for its music scene. But if you spend a little time there you'll find a selection of talented musicians ready to emerge.

One of the country's up-and-coming bands, Jah Doves, offer listeners modern-day reggae mixed with traditional Rwandan beats.

The six-man band is especially known for its bold lyrics. Every song has a meaning that conveys a positive message. It's the reason they call themselves Jah Doves. Doves symbolize peace and harmony, both traits the band wants to emulate in their song writing.

"We all like the kind of music which has the good message," bass player Ras Patrick told CNN, "which is not about shooting each other, which is building not destroying."

Jah Doves started off as a group of friends who used music as a way to deal with the trauma of Rwanda's 1994 genocide. They practiced with broken instruments at home or in any free rooms they could access for a few hours. The group often played just for fun, hoping to land gigs at events or parties around the country.



*Gallery: Rwanda's rising musical stars*

In 2008 Jah Doves were spotted by Dicken Marshall, a musician and music producer from the UK who had a special interest in the African music scene. He heard the group practicing in Kigali, and couldn't walk away.

"The first time I saw Jah Doves they were loud -- really, really loud," Marshall told CNN. "But they had a really nice interaction between the different members.

"So the sound was terrible and they weren't particularly in tune but their energy and the singing was fantastic," he said. "I think that's what really hit me, and I just knew, okay, I want to work with these guys."

Jah Doves weren't the only Rwandan artists Marshall noticed with lots of talent and no tools to make it grow. There were no professional studios in Kigali, no trustworthy record labels, and none of the musicians worked under contract.

"There is a lot of talent being exploited in one way or another -- you know, not being paid, many people plagiarizing many people's work," he said. "There is also a real lack of structure in terms of royalty collection. There is none."

Marshall saw an opportunity to protect Rwanda's musicians and do business at the same time. He built two studios and set up the [Rafiki Records](#) label, where musicians are entitled to take home 50 percent of profits they earn -- much higher than most labels offer.

"My ultimate goal for the label is for the artist to be able to have a sustainable career and the label to be able to grow, and the ethic behind the label to be a concept that people can trust and that people can expand on," he said.

This is good news for groups like Jah Doves. They are trying to take their talent to bigger and better places, and these days the group is busy recording their second album. One of the songs on the album is a mellow tune called "Agate."

"Agate in the Rwandan language means piece of wood," explained Patrick. "So this song is a small story about all the musicians who used to play with the old instruments and they found themselves in a new world where there are new keyboards and guitars that are amplified.

"The song we composed says if you want to make music you can make it -- doesn't matter if you're using old things or new instruments."

One of the old-style musicians Jah Doves refer to in this song is Sophie Nzayisenga. She's another up-and-coming singer who works under Marshall's Rafiki Records. And her music offers a traditional twist. Nzayisenga plays an instrument called the inanga. It's a traditional Rwandan guitar -- a long piece of wood with one string wrapped around it 12 times.

"My father played it, my mother was played it and everyone in the family plays inanga," she told CNN. "I learned the inanga when I was very young. I liked it then and still like it today."

Her lyrics are never about love; instead she chooses to use her music to sing about nature and good governance.

Nzayisenga is one of the few musicians left in Rwanda who can play the inanga and she is the only woman who plays professionally.

With a little exposure via the Rafiki Records website and contacts in the music industry, Marshall hopes to bring Rwanda's love for traditional instruments back to life.

"People don't know about the instrumentation that is here and the fact that the art of playing those instruments is dying," Marshall said.

And it might just be working. Nzayisenga has recently been picked up by some of Rwanda's mainstream radio stations. Interviews and live singing sessions with the musician have been broadcast live around the country's airwaves.

Marshall has high hopes for all his musicians. He says the one thing they have in common is music with meaning.

"Now we work with R & B artists, we work with hip-hop artists, Jah Doves, the Sophie's, but it's more about how they work together to create something different, and carrying a message that maybe hasn't come across before."

A message he hopes Rafiki Records will take around the world.