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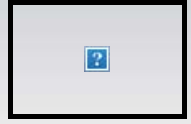
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REVIEWS & PROFILES

# Mwai Kibaki: Music lover turned statesman



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Kibaki dancing with his wife, Lucy. The president's love for dance is from May 1968 at Makerere.

By Abdu Kiyaga ([email the author](#))

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### IN SUMMARY

While a student at Makerere, and later as an Economics lecturer at the same university, Mr Mwai Kibaki was a man who loved the dance floor. The bright student who graduated on top of his class has gone ahead to achieve a lot in his lifetime and for his country.

In a special graduation ceremony three days ago, Makerere University awarded an Honorary Doctorate of Laws (Honoris Causa) to one of its prominent alumni, Kenyan President Mwai Kibaki for his outstanding contribution towards the public service sector.

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An admirer of army service, the youthful Kibaki had spent his early childhood in fields of Gatuyaini grazing his father's sheep and cattle as well as babysitting his little nephews and nieces for his older sister

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until his brother-in-law Paul Muruthi insisted he should go to school.

His love for the army which was influenced by veterans of First and Second World Wars in his native village was, however, frustrated by a chief colonial secretary, Walter Coutts who barred the recruitment of the Kikuyu, Embu and Meru communities into the army and he instead joined Makerere University to continue with his studies.

The youngest son of Kikuyu peasants, Kibaki Githinji and Teresia Wanjiku (both now deceased), studied Economics, History and Political Science, and graduated on top of his class in 1955 with a First Class Honors Degree (BA) in Economics, recording one of the first, first class degrees at the 89-year-old institution.

Unlike today when the intake is always over 40,000, with residential halls occupied by two to four people in a room and the majority of the student body pay own tuition fees, it was another case when Kibaki entered the university that still had enough facilities for a few students, and at the time when being at an institution like Makerere would sway respect to the students.

Professor Richard Bwogi Kanyerezi who joined the university at the time Mr Kibaki was a lecturer recalls that the university then had only four residential halls; Mitchel before it shifted from Makerere College School, Mary Stuart hall when it still occupied the current Makerere Guest House, University Hall and North Cote, where Dr Kibaki was a resident.

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“At that time, an intake of 120 students was considered to be the highest for students in East and Central Africa. It was all a different setup. Everyone had breakfast, a three course lunch and dinner meal and everyone was entitled to sleep. What you had to do was really to study. Nothing else,” Prof Kanyerezi, a medic on top of his career, stressed.

At his time, Mr Kibaki’s contemporaries, Dr Paul Mugambi remembers the future Kenyan head of state as a bright and active star not only in class but also in debates that looked at liberating the Africans from the wrath of colonialism.

“He was always a bright and engaging young man who always liked debates,” Dr Mugambi says of the now 80-year-old statesman.

He, however, adds that the budding economist in his days very much liked to go for dances that were organised at the university.

“He liked going to dances a lot and he was just as good,” Dr Mugambi reminisces.

He would also go to political conferences organized by the university and according to Dr Mugambi, he was influenced by the then Kenyan leader, Jomo Kenyatta.

“I was shocked he went into politics but I later came to realise that Kenyatta enticed him away because there were few learned people and mostly those who were learned were considered to be replacements of the Whites who at the time were at the verge of leaving Africans to take care of their countries,” Dr Mugambi says.

### Life at Makerere in Kibaki’s time

Prof. Kanyerezi remembers nothing but the respect that was put in the dances.

“You could not go to a dance without a suit and a tie,” Prof Kanyerezi says in relation to the way youths put on jeans and T-shirts and “weird” clothing when going to clubs and other happening places.

The professor says the nature of clothing was mainly because they always did the dance with high ranking officials in government and the country as well.

“How would one appear shabby when [Governor] Cohen, the university principal and sometimes the king were on the same dance floor,” he says on the dances that were always organised in the institution’s main hall

Outside the university, the students would visit New Life Bar in Katwe, White Nile, Bagatel, Kamulu, and Tabaris, among others but only self-reputed personnel would go to such dance halls.

