

Rwanda Journal of Social Sciences, Humanities and Business: ISSN 2708-759X (Print); ISSN 2708-7603 (Online). DOI: <https://dx.doi.org/10.4313/rjsshb.v2i2.3>

“Avoiding the consequences of being famous”: An Interview with the Queen of Rwandan Karaoke, Jane Uwimana

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Abstract

Karaoke is the act of singing to prerecorded music. Put differently, karaoke is an exhibition of some sort of *scripted simulation* (Adams, 1996). The literature on karaoke performance is extensive across the globe. In Africa, however, this literature is non-existent. This is so in spite of the rampancy of the category in Rwanda’s provinces where a karaoke fever brews, a near-absent nightlife notwithstanding.

Having witnessed the popularity of karaoke in the country firsthand, and towards addressing the curious gap in the extant literature, I sought audiences with a selection of leading karaoke performers in contemporary Rwanda. Jane Uwimana is a blogger, a radio presenter and the acclaimed queen of Rwandan karaoke.

This paper presents excerpts from a semi-structured interview with Ms. Uwimana held at her residence in Kigali. The interview session which was recorded using a tape recorder lasted about one hundred minutes. This was subsequently transcribed for purposes of presentation.

Keywords: Karaoke; Jane Uwimana; Rwanda; Africa; Popular music

1. Introduction

Over the past two decades, the literature on the humanities and the social science research coming out of Rwanda has been dominated by a post-genocidal framing of the nation’s contemporary realities. This has of course grown to become somewhat redundant and tiresome considering that many other nations across the world emerged from conflict at one point or the other through their histories.

On this premise, the present study aimed to appreciate Rwanda through an unadulterated lens by simply engaging with a cultural phenomenon in the country as is presently. There is perhaps a sense in which this phenomenon remains hitherto unexplored owing to the blur a ‘post-genocide’ tag places on the researcher *ab initio*. As such, detailed excerpts from an interview with one of Rwanda’s leading karaoke performers form the core of this paper’s presentation.

Karaoke can simply be defined as singing to prerecorded music. The literature on karaoke performance and culture is very distinguished. In Africa, this literature is curiously non-existent. This paper takes an initial step in shortening this gap by presenting excerpts from the aforementioned interview.

Having witnessed the rampancy of the genre across the provinces of Rwanda, the term ‘fever’ appears a most applicable label in captioning the state of karaoke in the country. It is essential to note that whereas there is a rich literature on night-time culture particularly in urban spaces across the globe, it is difficult to frame the Rwandan experience within this body of knowledge because there is hardly nightlife in contemporary Rwanda in the strict sense of it.

The nightlife in Kigali is barely comparable to that of Kampala in neighboring Uganda, for example, which is a city known to never sleep. Indeed, the night-time culture in Rwanda ends at about 2300hr which is the same time karaoke performances are wrapped up in a good number of cities.

Mr. Fred Mwasu is a youth and media leader in Rwanda. He works with one of Rwanda’s leading radio stations, *Kigali Today*. Sat side-by-side with Mr. Mwasu on a trip from Musanze in the northern province of Rwanda to the capital Kigali in Rwanda’s central province, I ask him about karaoke in Rwanda and to react to my elucidated observation.

He confirms to me that “karaoke is without doubt the most popular music genre in Rwanda”. However, he is unable to tell me precisely why this is the case. Nor has anyone from the myriad of karaoke audiences I spoke with from bar to bar across Rwanda’s provinces. As such, I source from others who may know: Rwanda’s ‘Karaoke Queen’ Jane Uwimana and her protégé Frank Cyiza are two well-known karaoke performers in Rwanda. They both agreed to grant me audience following my requests. My questions to Ms. Uwimana and her responses make for an engaging read in the data section below.

2. Materials and Method

In setting out to interview Rwanda's Queen of Karaoke, Jane Uwimana, it was necessary to be armed with the contacts of relevant networks in Rwanda. More than this, actual field tools required by a practicing journalist were also needed. Primarily, a diary detailing the questions I had and the direction I planned the session would go was crucial. A tape recorder was also used to record the entirety of the process with Ms. Uwimana's permission.

My inquiries were geared towards enhancing an understanding of the karaoke fever in Rwanda at the present time, particularly as the existing literature on karaoke globally deviates from any attention on the experience in Rwanda. A grasp of the extant literature was thus a vital material as well. Having witnessed her performances at the Rainbow Hotel, in the Kimironko area of Kigali, Ms. Jane Uwimana was happy to grant audience for an extended interview at her home in Kagugu, an upper middle-class neighborhood in Kigali.

The ability to navigate routes in Kigali was essential. The ensuing semi-structured interview constitutes the main results of the conducted study. Firstly, however, a brief review of the literature on the performance and culture of karaoke is appropriate.

2.1 Karaoke studies thus far

Japan is karaoke's point of origin. Yano (1996) engages in a worthwhile study themed on the floating world of karaoke in Japan. Therein, Yano raises fundamental questions about the appreciation of karaoke performance as a creative exertion. After all, if music-making constitutes "a sound-producing endeavor expressing individual thoughts and feelings with the creativity and spontaneity of the moment" (Yano, 1996: 1), where does one position the plagiarism-dependent rehash of another's creativity? Karaoke, in the end, is antithetical to the creative, expressive process of music making. In this regard, Yano posits that there could in fact be more than one way of defining musical creativity and its perception thereof.

Consequently, Yano's focus in this Japanese based study is on the competing ideologies which shaped karaoke as performance and karaoke as participation. In this respect, Yano's triad of research questions on the Japan study guides this intervention into the karaoke fever in Rwanda: (i) what are the cultural antecedents of karaoke in Rwanda? (ii) How has karaoke's development

influenced musical behavior in Rwanda? And (iii) what kinds of sociocultural implications can be inferred in the Rwandan space?

Drew (1997) attempts an establishment of the karaoke performer, albeit an amateur, in the mainstream. This is as opposed to previous conceptualizations that restricted the karaoke performer to the margins as a cultural endeavor. Indeed, argues Drew, the pursuit of the average karaoke performer presents a more animated and rewarding experience than say a boxed in professional.

Ruismakiet *al.* (2013) engage with the dimension of singers' dialogue with the audience and on singers' getting their message through by focusing their study among Finnish try-out competitors for the 2010 Karaoke World Championship. The study found that karaoke singers are motivated to do karaoke for social contact and that these singers were profoundly appreciative of applause, feedback and success and competitions.

The exploration of Tongson (2015) engages with the disputed origins of the first karaoke machine, shedding light on how the term '*karaoke*' ultimately became a connotation for judgment in star-making reality vocal competition shows. Tongson further shows that there is only but a thin line between amateur recreation via karaoke and the actual celebrity pop prowess. In terms of critical utility, Koh (2001) sheds light on how karaoke shops serve as a vehicle through which Vietnamese citizens engage in social vices to the point of being countercultural to the Vietnamese government's policies. In similar vein, the work of Feng (2002) shows the superiority of karaoke therapy in comparison to mere music therapy in mental patients through a Hong Kong-based study.

Yu and Chan (2003) offer useful educational information cum strategy to karaoke singers through their findings that water consumption and vocal rests at regular intervals result in a capacity to sing for longer in addition to maintaining a consistent voice quality through performances.

Duong (2003) ethnographically surveys how karaoke bars offer the large Vietnamese communities of San Jose, California a sense of belonging and identity within the American space. Drew (2005) is preoccupied with a comparative assessment of karaoke as a traditionally

mimetic art form and an ‘ironic’ variant of karaoke in the USA. Drew is equally concerned with the understanding of karaoke through social class. In this respect, whereas karaoke’s popularity in Eastern cultures (e.g. in Japan) was among the upper-middle class, the reverse was the case in Western cultures (e.g. in the USA) where the working and lower-middle class was karaoke’s primary audience. Drew, therefore, historicizes these developments while signposting how the ironic performance style of karaoke got the upper-middle class engaged in the West by the late 1990s. A similar preoccupation with the ironic consumption of karaoke in Rotterdam, Netherlands is the charter of Peters *et al.* (2018).

Watanabe (2005) focuses on the intriguing dimension of the place of karaoke in adult learning in Japan. Offering a basis for the increasing popularity of the study of karaoke at a variety of public and private organizations in Japan, Watanabe posits that older Japanese and housewives are drawn to karaoke learning because of its affordability and simplicity. Fung (2009) makes the point about the popularity of karaoke among young people in Hong Kong since the 1980s before contrasting the state and effects of the genre in that advanced capitalist society with what obtains in the post-reform socialist market economy of mainland China.

More strikingly, Fung (2009) is emphatic about the dearth of empirical research on karaoke and how his study earns groundbreaking status on account of this. Also seminal was the study by Ong (2009) which attempted a comparative analysis of news and karaoke with regards to London-based Filipinos and how these two media helped to construct the identities of performers and audiences.

The work of Kelly (2011) offers a seeming workbook for the emergent karaoke fever in Rwanda in that it evaluates “the introduction, adaptation and popularization of karaoke singing in the UK” (309). Kelly is sure to place Japan’s influence on the globalizing of the karaoke concept owing to Japanese technological influence, yet is insistent that the popularization of the genre in the UK is as a result of the localization of the production, distribution and uses of karaoke hardware and software on the European island.

It is pertinent to reflect on the possibility of such localization of such technological production in Rwanda.

Owing to the near consensus of dismal on the quality of service delivery across Rwanda's hospitality industry, perhaps a quantitative study from which future audience research on karaoke in Rwanda might take guidance is Wu *et al.* (2015) which focused on leisure-service quality and hedonic experiences as derived from the theatre of singing at a karaoke house.

Drawing on theories of dramaturgy and environmental psychology, Wu *et al.* (2015) explore the links of the marketing drivers and the consequences of hedonic experiences in the context of karaoke houses while assessing the effects of the physical environment, the employee service, and the core service on hedonic experience outcomes. The analysis of Plancke (2017) of the revitalization of Kigali's traditional dances towards a new national identity falls short in that it does not isolate the place of karaoke performances in this. It would have been worthwhile to interrogate the import of dance styles by karaoke performers whilst singing. Again, future research has its work cut out across these respects.

Karaoke Nights: An Ethnographic Rhapsody (2001) is a book by Rob Drew about karaoke in bars wherein the author offers that "there are many karaokes, and there are likely to be many more" (Drew, 2001: 11), and that in spite of the best efforts by retailers to market karaoke for home use, karaoke remains most lucrative and accessible in public spaces. Just like Drew's observation that karaoke's dynamism, dispersion and mobility make it impossible to ascertain how many karaoke bars there are in the USA; it is arguably impossible to know for sure how many karaoke bars there are currently in little, landlocked Rwanda.

Taking a cue from Drew's study, therefore, the two interviews engaged here attempt an up-close and personal account of how karaoke is achieved, and what is achieved by it in the Rwandan space. The extensive interview style adopted by Haebich and Morrison's study (2014) offers what is a useful precedent and guide for this exploration of karaoke fever in present-day Rwanda. Equally instructive here is the work of Chau (2006) whose focus is on karaoke's youth culture dynamic in north central China. Equally of relevance are several other studies/volumes from around the globe such as Ma (1994), Mitsui and Hosokawa (1998), Drew (2004), de Kloet and Teurlings (2008), Zhou (2008), Ugrešić (2011), and Clark (2014). The following section presents the results of the present study.

3. Results

This section presents the main findings of the study conducted. In particular, excerpts from the interview with Jane Uwimana, conducted at her home in Kagugu, Kigali make for the core of the results which is subsequently analyzed in the discussion section. My questions are presented in bold fonts and introduced with bullets while Ms. Uwimana's responses are presented in non-bold fonts and without bullets:

➤ **Would you please introduce yourself?**

My name is Jane Uwimana, I am a professional journalist and also a singer. I can sing live music while in a live band but I chose to specialize in karaoke style, so I sing karaoke music.

➤ **How did you start?**

I started over 10 years ago. In 2008, I knew nothing about karaoke but it was introduced by a colleague whom we were working together at Radio 10. He used to hear me singing in the newsroom and then he gave me a new idea because he had lived abroad in France and vacationed severally to France for holidays. He told me that in France there is this style called karaoke but it requires much of knowledge many songs, and he knew that I know many songs.

When he went back he brought me some DVDs to see how it's done and I started immediately because he had a bar. He took me to his bar and I started singing from there, while he paid me some money to survive. I have kept on up to now.

➤ **Who is your role model in karaoke?**

I can't say that I have a role model because karaoke is just knowledge of many songs so I don't neglect any artiste or any song as long as it is an international hit, because I sing for the public so I go for my public's preferences. When I hear an international hit song from a radio station, I learn the song and I check if it has a karaoke style so that I can sing it. I have an overall role model in music but not in karaoke because karaoke is done according to a country's culture.

There are countries where they have what we call karaoke machines. The karaoke machines are more developed in eastern countries so they don't need a singer or a performer. They put a machine in a bar and clients go and put coins and they choose a song to sing using the machine's microphone. I used to have one but because it's a language-specific package, I had to improvise. When you buy English karaoke machines its only English, when you buy a French karaoke machine it's only French and it's not easy to update as you have to wait for the DVDs made for each machine and this takes a long time.

I chose to use a computer because it compiles English, French, Swahili and even some Kinyarwanda and Portuguese. I am able to feed any language into the software which makes it easier to use. So in Rwanda, I did it my way because I didn't see how the French do it or how the English or Chinese do it as it was more developed in Asia. I had to adopt it to the Rwandan context by making a selection of international hits that I know Rwandans love.

I also did it in Congo when I went to Congo. Congo is a different place where they have their preferences. So I first studied the audience and I chose accordingly. My international role model is Celine Dion; she is the one I used to listen to when I was very young because I used to sing in a choir but I wanted also to perform to have a solo career so I started to listen to her when I was in primary school.

➤ **Celine Dion is such a role model, yet you opted for karaoke over popular music, how come?**

I chose karaoke because it's easier for me. I used to sing in a live band and I sang for long like three or four years but I saw that what I was earning was very small compared to what I could earn in karaoke, and in karaoke the good thing is that it is also like a solo career. I perform alone and manage my audience alone, I do my schedules for rehearsal alone, and all these things help me.

They make things easier as I can rehearse while driving on the way to somewhere. If there is a new song that I want to listen to or rehearse, I can do it driving, but when you are in a live band we have to meet as a team and rehearse together.

I could have some challenges in a live band on stage when music players and instruments fail to repeat the song the way we rehearsed; so it could be trouble for me. And the earnings in a live band is only half of what I earn in karaoke because in a live band I have to be there twice, once for rehearsals and once for the performance.

Consequently, I figured it was better to build my karaoke career because I was actually alone and I had no big competitors. I figured it's even better because live bands are many, they get places in bars but I also will get places because I have a unique product. Apart from the other performers in the contemporary scene most of whom I taught, there was one Kenyan who could perform professionally. However, I was not worried about the Kenyan because I could perform in French or in Kinyarwanda and she can't attract the audience the way I do; so I have always been the number one in karaoke. I figured to choose one style and master it and make sure that I will do it professionally.

➤ **Why do you only go to Congo yet you speak other languages, why don't you go to different countries?**

I chose Congo because again it's easier compared to other countries. I also sang in Kampala some years ago but singing in Kampala could require me to leave here and stay abroad like a month and come back later and it was not easy for me. However, now it's easier to go to Congo because I have a family here in Kigali, I go and pass 2 or 3 days and I come back and there is no problem. So to go further like in other countries is possible but it is also according to the demand, it is in Congo that I saw the offer.

➤ **Do you write songs at all?**

I know how to write. I even used to have a big book of songs and the audio recordings of the songs I recorded are still available. However, I can't do it as a profession because I already have many things and I have chosen my way of doing things. I've been to the studios, I have produced songs and I have two songs of mine, one was made in 2005 while the other was in 2008.

But it was not in a professional way, it was just for fun because I am aware of the nature of work and volume of effort people put in to produce a song. On the flip side, the incomes the songs generate are not really equal. I see that it's a very long way to gain.

Being a singer-songwriter requires again many things in many aspects of life to be able to be successful. So I chose not to be an artiste but to be a singer because it's easier for my life and better for me. I earn more this way and I don't need to write and produce songs. I earn more in karaoke than in journalism, it's a noble profession which I love. I'm not inspired to be a superstar; I just love a simple life. As a karaoke performer rather than a recording musician, I also avoid the consequences of being famous.

➤ **When and where did you perform for the very first time?**

The guy who introduced me to karaoke is called Virgules RUGEMA, he is a radio star. He was a journalist at Radio 10 back when I started and joined the team in 2007. We worked together so after one year, he found out that I had that one talent of singing. Since he had a bar in Gikondo, he provided me the auspices to express myself. The bar was called Pasadena by that time but it is now called Miami. That's where I performed for the first time and now I am still performing there. Virgules has moved to France but the present owners call me for warming up the place.

➤ **Would you like to share the feeling the first time you were on stage?**

It's hard to tell because I have been on stage since I was very young, I can't even remember, I've been there for choirs because I started to sing in choirs and later on for life funds. So, I can't really remember the first time I went on stage alone but there is a short experience that I had when I started to sing karaoke at Virgules' place, because I knew I was alone and people were looking at me, and it was my first time in a bar alone.

I was a bit of nervous because I knew that people were expecting much and I was afraid that I will not give enough. But as soon as I sang the first song, they gave me a round of applause, they were very happy, they looked very satisfied, so I really felt that it was my place, I never felt nervous again, I knew that I could master them, I could give them what they needed and I could satisfy them.

➤ **What are the challenges you face in this work?**

The challenges are not too many. Mainly though, because most of the performances take place at bars which are very dangerous places, there is an issue with alcohol and

alcoholism. For example, many of the people I taught to sing karaoke are no longer performing because they grew addicted to alcohol. In the job, we are exposed to drinking and to drunk people who sometimes use violence and abusive language on performers.

It's really hard to know how best to behave to control abusive audiences but I realize that I am there primarily to please them. I am there to sing for them and to make them happy even when it sometimes deteriorates into audiences abusing me. There is a misplaced stigma in the society associated with working in bars. When people see someone working in a bar, particularly a female, they automatically assume that such a girl must be a prostitute. So I have to behave well like twice as much as normal people to prove to them that I am not there for prostitution that I am there for singing.

I have to be politer when I am there to prove that I am educated; so it's not easy with all the effort. In the bars I worked on my name so now they know me even if they can be drunk because they have seen me there for long and they know that I am not that kind of lady. They respect me. I had to work extra hard to earn my respect in bars from drunkards and now they can really enjoy but without being abusive to me.

➤ **What do you do when someone abuses you?**

On the very few occasions when this happened to me, they had to put the person out. The bars where I sing are very organized places with employed bouncers, security guards and the managers. So when I see that someone is really becoming violent to me I tell it to manager or that person who can help me but normally when I talk to them even though they are drunkards, there is a kind of expression that I use that they can understand. I can be an entertainer but when things get serious and I am talking to them, I talk in a serious way or harsh manner that they cannot go on, they see that I am serious and they can't approach me.

➤ **Since 2008 you have been doing this, is there any change that karaoke has brought into your life?**

The first change is emotional change, maybe it's because I have grown up through all the years. It is over 10 years, still it helps me to feel stable, to release my stress. I work

through all the day, when I work through the daytime I meet many stressful events but in the evening at the time I step on the stage, at the time I get a microphone I feel very nice. You know, the benefit of music effect on the body? I am the first one to feel that. First of all, it is sports, it is exercise because I sing for no less than three hours in the evening and when I sing I move around, I stand for all those three hours. Sometimes I even dance so it's good for my body, it's a nice exercise it's like you go the gym but it's different because you have fun so I always feel good when I perform.

So I can say that it's my everyday remedy to stress. And the second thing is financial because it has been my job for all this while so I can say that my life has changed. You see that I live in a beautiful house, I pay school fees for my daughter, I take care of her because I am a single mother and when I started singing I was also still studying and the money I earned helped me to pay my school fees until I finished school. Karaoke helped me to be here because this is my house and I also have a car.

I can say that my level of life has changed since I began and it continues to help me because I am still counting on karaoke to achieve more.

➤ **What type of songs do you like to sing more often?**

I have no type of songs I like but I can say that there is a type of songs I tried to do that doesn't work. I tried hip pop songs and I couldn't pull it off. So I can do all the singing, but when it comes to rap, I tried but I can't. Again I can't say that there is this type of songs I like, I go according to my public. I see their preferences, I go for international songs, so there is no type that I like.

➤ **Which is your all-time favorite song?**

There is a song by the Eagles called Hotel California. It has been an international hit since I started in 2008 up to now. Whenever I play it I see that people love it so much and it's an easy song for me to sing in karaoke or in live bands. Personally, there is no song that I love the most; it depends on the times and the mood. I can wake up feeling like there is a song which is coming to my mind and next day it has changes.

➤ **How do you make a selection of songs for the day or a playlist?**

I have so many songs, I have a book for them. For instance, in the bars you find menus. Similarly, I have a menu for songs because there are some songs that people ask for and I have to look on the internet, but many of them I have in this book with more than three-hundred songs. Most of the time, I choose from that book. All I do is to choose the first two songs. I don't like to make the playlist for an entire concert because it depends on the mood. I can make a playlist thinking it would be a cool evening and people will be politely seated and listening.

However, sometimes it turns out to be a cold rainy night whereby people want to get up and dance. So I have to put on songs that will help them to dance so I make the playlist according to the audience. I don't use a DJ to play my songs, I play them myself because after one song things can change. If I put a song and the audience doesn't really like that song, I can know that now I have to change for another type of song until I find the type of songs fitting for the audience.

➤ **Are there any memorable moments in your line of work that you would like to share?**

The bad thing that has happened is not about the audience but with the bar owners. Some time ago, I used to have contracts. I thought it was a good thing that I could go there and perform say once a week and get paid monthly. After one month, however, I was not paid even though I could see that the bar had been earning money through the effort of my performances.

Although I had made plans for the money, I chose to be professional about the sad experience. That was when I decided to not have any contract with anyone. I show up, I perform and I leave with my money such that if I lose it, it will be for one day rather than for a month.

The good thing that happened to me and keeps on happening is that I love to sing for people. People come to bars for different reasons but some of them come for getting healed, to release their stress, to feel good, so I really feel good when there is someone who came in a bar stressed, looking really sad but by the time they are leaving, they

really congratulate me because their moods have been transformed and they are very happy. We eventually become friends because they say I touched their hearts and say that I healed them. I feel really good when I touch people's lives this way. Hearing such testimonies mean everything to me, even more than earning money because it makes me feel that I am important in some peoples' lives.

➤ **Have you had performances which did not turn out as planned?**

I don't remember but it is something that can happen because karaoke is music for intellectuals as it requires the mind most of the times particularly when it's not in Kinyarwanda which is our native language. Karaoke requires reading because when we sing, we read the lyrics and there are certain bars I go to perform where they expect danceable music but see my smooth music as mere noise when I sing. That leaves a sour taste although I am now able to gauge audiences quicker and switch song choices accordingly. So I wouldn't say there has been a stand-out horrible experience.

➤ **What advice can you give to people who say karaoke is a bad career choice or who construe karaoke as a choice for bad boys and bad girls?**

First of karaoke a career, it's a profession like others. Some people may think it is bad because it transpired mainly in bars. But such people don't understand the concept of bars. For me I can tell them that it's a good career which requires determination and to a lot of professionalism. While precaution must be taken against the likely hazards as with other professions, particularly with young ladies, karaoke has a good earning potential. If anyone feels like they have determination and they have what it takes to make it, why not? They can do it.

I know some people who started doing casual karaoke thinking that because they have the voice that they can do it but it's a thing that requires more than just voice. It requires a lot of determination, it requires a maturity of the mind and then avoiding drinking as I already mentioned. As the saying goes that one should not drink and drive, it's the same way that you don't drink and work in karaoke. It is unwise to stay unemployed if you have the talent and you have the voice and you know you can do it, what you have to do

is be determined. So working hard means that you don't go the bars thinking that you went out just for fun, you went to work. So you work to earn.

➤ **You are a pioneer of karaoke in Rwanda. What plans have you towards further developing the genre in the country?**

Karaoke is something that keeps on changing but it depends on the artist and music industry in general. So I can't say that there is something special that can change in karaoke because it goes with the songs and the music stays the same, just like in live bands. We interpret, we don't go there first and make our own songs, we wait for the artists to make the songs and then we interpret those songs, we repeat those songs internationally. So the best thing that I will do is to provide the infrastructure.

Comfortable places like the karaoke palace, sort of a nice building for the performances so that people can get the experience of proper karaoke every evening where they could find the karaoke machines or the performers. If they want to make exercises they can do. But it's only in terms of providing material because changing the industry is not something that we can say that is really possible because it goes according to the music which is provided.

➤ **Compared to when you started out, where would you say Rwandan karaoke is right now, and how does this compare with the experience of performers in other countries?**

Let me start by saying that I've never compared myself to anyone. As I said earlier, I did it my way because I knew it's a new thing and there is no one I can call a role model. I just knew what I had to do, I had a definition of karaoke and I had information on how it's done in other countries, so I started it my way. I practically had to teach the audience. Many people didn't know about it, I had to make many radio and TV interviews to spread the news in the media, to let people get informed about what is happening and what karaoke is so as to try to attract more audiences. Now, I see that many people are informed, they know about karaoke and because there are many people whom I taught, there are many young girls and many young boys that I taught how to sing and now they are doing their own concert, they also keep on teaching the audience how karaoke is

done. So people are changing their minds and karaoke is taking another level because now many bar owners know that in order to have many happy clients, they have to have at least a karaoke performer at least one evening or more to keep their clientele. So I can say that karaoke is at a good level in Rwanda as audiences now approach bars without karaoke to say that “we love this place but we need karaoke in this place”.

This way, the bar owners have no choice but to call us, but to call the karaoke performers to go there and perform. So it's really at a nice level compared to when I started. When I started, it's only Virgules who could give me that job because he knew what it was and he knew that he could attract many clients and it happened.

Consequently, other people who saw me performing there called me and said we need you to perform in our places too. So it's keeping on because I performed in many places, you see now I can go abroad and earn dollars as against just Rwandan francs. It's at a really vibrant level, I know that if I teach a young boy or a young lady to sing, I can even tell her or him to go to a certain place and knock on the doors and they open for them. I can have that hope that they will find job because we have many bars in the country and they will never be satisfied, so we will never be too many for the bars.

➤ **As a karaoke performer, what are some things you can't live without?**

I've learnt that there are no things that you can't live without. Only the breath, like this breath we breathe, it's the only thing that you can't live without. As long as the heart beats, there is nothing you can't live without because all things come and go in our lives. Perhaps the things that I like most in my life would be more appropriate, but again I can live even if I don't have. The first thing, okay let me not call it a thing, it's just my life, I love my life and I know that I have to take care of myself. I'm ageing, I'm no longer in youth, I have a certain age but I love to take care of myself, to keep on looking young. The second thing is: I love my daughter, I have a daughter, can I call it a thing? My daughter is the greatest blessing that I had in my life so I really love her.

The third thing is my voice because most of the earnings depend on my voice, so I do all my best to take care of my voice because it gives me a livelihood. The fourth thing is friends and the family. I don't have much of them but I really love them, the ones I have.

The last but not the least prayer. I love to pray. I'm not much of a church goer but I love to pray because I know that there is an Almighty God who watches over us.

➤ **Do you have principles that you live by, if so, what are they?**

Certainly. My life is a gift; my health is a gift. So, in whatever I do, I avoid something that can harm my life, especially drugs. I don't drink because I know it's not good for my life. The second thing is that I know that being happy in life, having happiness, is the most important because you can never get enough of the wealth you need in life.

Therefore, being happy is a choice, I will not wait for having hundreds of millions of francs to be happy, I have to take every opportunity to be happy and to smile. And then I know that I live for myself and I also live for others, so whenever I feel like I really can help, I do it, it makes me feel happy. I know that it's a good thing in life, I'm not expecting those whom I help to help me back but I know that as long as I do the good things for others the way I can even in my conscience, even the nature, things that happen to me will always be good. So, I always choose to live a positive life because I know that it's a good thing.

➤ **What is your message to your fans and music lovers?**

Firstly, in over a decade of my experience I've learned that music in general is a very good thing, it has many benefits, and it's really a nice thing. If you have to go out, if you have to go to a bar, if you have an appointment there, if you go there to have fun, or if you feel that it's stress you want to go there to release, please go to karaoke. If you love music, go to a place where karaoke is happening. I'm telling you because of my experience, I saw many people who told me that it had many positive effects on their lives, on their health. So it's better, because all the places where karaoke happens are free, the entrance is for free. They don't have to buy tickets to enter the way they buy tickets to enter in concerts.

The prices of the food, of the beer, of the drinks, it's almost the same in bars where they have karaoke and in bars where they don't have. So they better go for the places where they have karaoke because it's double benefits. They get to derive the benefits of music on their health and they will also enjoy being in a bar.

- **Finally, how have you fared as a karaoke performer since the outbreak of the pandemic and the attendant lockdowns?**

I sing live on Facebook and Instagram. I also keep myself busy learning how to play the guitar and I teach my daughter how to play the piano. I continue to draw incomes from my other engagements as a blogger and radio presenter. I present the *Sexual Reproductive Health Show* which is a youth-focused program every Sunday from 18h00 to 20h00 on Kiss FM 102.3. Also, my blog is accessible @ www.gutehowcomment.com.

- **Great stuff. Thank you very much for your time.**

You are welcome.

4. Discussion

The foregoing data by way of an interview with the Queen of Rwandan karaoke, Jane Uwimana, has addressed issues that hold relevance for each of the social sciences, humanities and business/economics triad of the *Rwandan Journal of Social Sciences, Humanities and Business*. More particularly, Ms. Uwimana has given light to the sustenance component of karaoke performance as a profession in its own right in contemporary Rwanda. She has in fact offered encouragement to individuals with singing talents to develop these and take the bold step of monetizing their talents. Further, the extant literature on karaoke was engaged in order to better inform the slant of the interview viz-a-viz the implications of previous studies on forthcoming studies in Rwanda and East Africa.

5. Conclusion and recommendations

This paper has highlighted the unexplored status of karaoke in Rwanda in spite of a dominance of the form as the most popular music genre across the country's provinces. Through the interrogation of literature, an interview with a leading performer of karaoke in Rwanda as well as interactions with a number of key persons in the country's media sector, an introduction to studies on Rwandan karaoke has materialized. However, it is incontrovertible that subsequent research on the subjects of the diversity, motives and applications of karaoke audiences across Rwanda is needed to reach stronger conclusions.

Comparative studies within the East African sub-region, the continent and indeed against well-known karaoke cultures in Asia and beyond would also facilitate a proper establishment of Rwandan karaoke in the category's literature. From the little findings here, the fever that is karaoke across the country's provinces are given a foregrounding by Jane Uwimana's submissions on the economic advantages of karaoke for its performers. Subsequently, karaoke audiences are expected to provide deeper insights into the mainstream popular music form in the country.

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Notes

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