THE TALKING DRUM

July 2008

No 29

The Talking Drum · Newsletter Issue No. 29 • July 2008
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Editorial

Marie Jorritsma and colleagues from the University of South Africa's Department of Art History, Visual Arts and Musicology are responsible for supplying materials in this issue of *The Talking Drum*. George King gives an overview of UNISA's Department of Art History, Visual Arts and Musicology. Christine Lucia describes ground breaking work which enables students to learn to perform and write music using staff notation, and transcribe music from tonic solfa to staff notation. Sean Adams provides activities for teachers to use hip-hop in their classroom. Cameron Harris focuses on the continued practice of adapting and recasting of pre-existing musical ideas along with the layering of those ideas against new material in both Western and African music. Michael Blake encourages composers to take either existing music or a choice of instruments as a starting point for their composition. Think outside the box, he suggests. Finally, Marie Jorritsman poses the question: "What is 'African music' " and encourages all to reach a broader or greater understanding of this concept. Our special thanks to Marie, coordinator of this issue, and to her colleagues for sharing their work through *TTD*

UNISA's involvement brings to five the number of institutions contributing material to *TTD*. It is stimulating and encouraging to learn of the research being done at UNISA, the University of Cape Town's School of Music, North-West University's School of Music, University of Pretoria's Music Department and the University of KwaZulu-Natal's School of Music. We look forward to including materials from other institutions in future. Grasp the opportunity to encourage your students researching musics of southern Africa to publish in *TTD* along with members of your staff. One responsible staff member will be the coordinator.

TTD promotes intercultural education through music/arts. Insight into the meaning of the broad concept of intercultural appears in *Music Education Research Vol.10, No.1 March 2008*. In this volume is a review of *Intercultural music: creation and interpretation* edited by Sally Macarthur, Bruce Crossman and Ronaldo Morelos from Australia. The introduction begins:

> This is a collection of refereed papers selected from the conference component of the 2006 Aurora New Music Festival held in Sydney. It brings together a diverse range of voices … who speak from various perspectives – as theorists and/or practitioners – about the creative and interpretative process of intercultural music. The idea of 'intercultural' in this volume is broadly conceived.... (165)

Educators searching for clarification and breadth of meaning for the term intercultural will benefit by delving into this relevant book.

Elizabeth Oehrle




Sponsorship of this journal, in memory of Thea Mikula, is gratefully acknowledged.

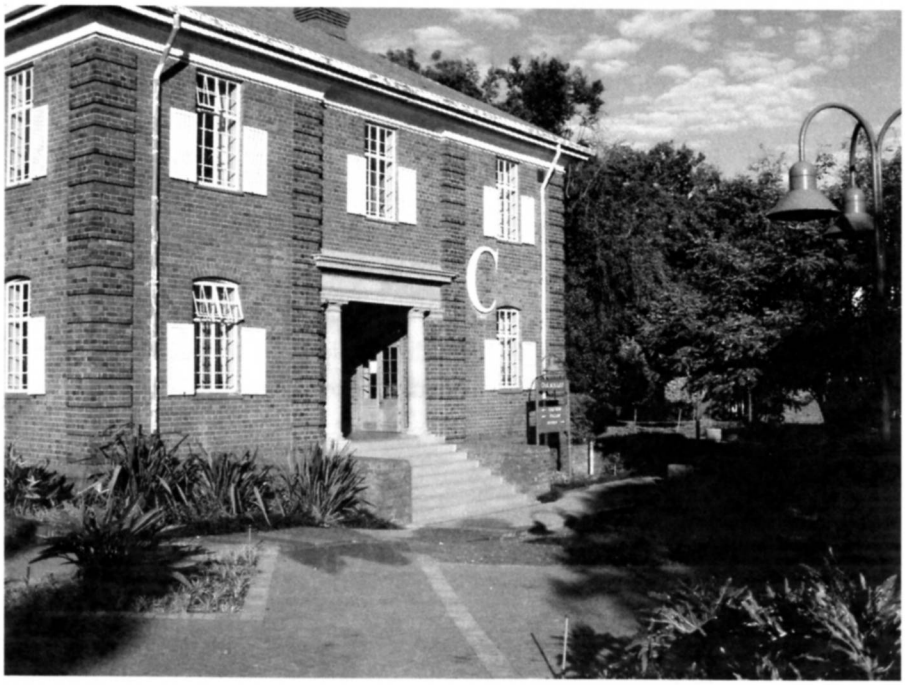
Academic Music Study at Unisa

© George King, Chair, Department of Art History, Visual Arts and Musicology, University of South Africa

Many people get confused about music at Unisa. This is not surprising, as many who work at Unisa are equally confused! The institution has had a music examining system for over a century, and it is this activity that I think most people associate with music at Unisa. Many budding musicians in South Africa have come through Unisa's practical and theory exams. But this enterprise is largely aimed at primary and secondary school children, not university students (although many of those who do the licentiate exams are of course young adults).

Then there is the Unisa Music Foundation which was constituted in 1990 with the primary object of organizing the international music competitions that have become well known throughout South Africa over the past two decades or so. The Music Foundation also arranges regular concerts by local and international professional musicians on the two Unisa campuses in Pretoria, and has extended its influence in recent years in a comprehensive outreach programme, including a highly successful competition for young musicians in Tshwane.

However, this short article is principally about the academic study of music at Unisa. In 1969 what was then called the Department of Music (an academic department) became known as the Department of Musicology, the first such at a South African university. This move, proposed by Bernard van der Linde, who was head of department at that time, was to some extent a response to the distance-teaching nature of the university. The name change did not only apply to the department but also to the degree itself, so that Unisa became the first (and only) university in the country to offer a Bachelor of Musicology degree rather than a Bachelor of Music. The need for students to possess adequate skills in musical performance was adroitly solved by requiring them to gain a licentiate in practical music before being awarded the Bachelor of Musicology degree, thus guaranteeing a recognized standard in musical proficiency. This requirement is still in force today.



The Department of Art History, Visual Arts and Musicology building, Unisa.
Photograph by Marie Jorritsma.

Unisa was awarding music degrees in its capacity as an examining body (when several of today's autonomous universities were still university colleges) long before it became a distance-education institution in the late 1940s. By the mid-1960s, the staff of the Music Department had begun to expand. There was a flurry of appointments in the late 1960s, with further growth in student numbers and staff throughout the 1970s and 80s. However, uncertainty created by the government's policy towards the arts and music in particular meant that the mid- to late nineties saw a decline in student numbers, triggering a corresponding decline in the size of the staff, in turn hastened by several retirements and the unexpected death in May 1998 of Rudolph van den Berg, who had become head of department the previous year.

The year 1998 also saw the beginning of a process of radical and long-overdue transformation of the BMus curriculum, initiated by Douglas Reid and Rudolph van den Berg, and prompted by the university's decision to modularize its courses. This curriculum transformation, introduced in 2000, included the change to a three-year degree instead of a four-year one. Underpinning this decision was the retention of the practical licentiate requirement which added at least another year to the full three-year

academic programme, so students were certainly not being short-changed.

The entire BMus curriculum was thoroughly overhauled, resulting in several innovations. In particular, these embraced a rejuvenated History of Music curriculum that adopted a number of themes that were not predicated on the so-called stylistic periods, as well as a new subject called Music in World Cultures Today. One of the two first-year History of Music modules is based on Nicholas Cook's *Music: A Very Short Introduction.* Choosing this book was a deliberate attempt to sensitize students to some of the more progressive thinking about music from the past couple of decades, including concepts such as plurality, diversity and notions of musicking (Christopher Small's useful term). Modules at second and third levels were devoted individually to a wide variety of topics such as music and patronage, urban musicology, opera, jazz, and music in South Africa (a module that incorporates a range of different kinds of South African music, with a strong emphasis on social and political context).

Music in World Cultures Today attempts to bridge the gap between areas that formerly lay in either the musicology or ethnomusicology fields, and presents modules in subjects like musical literacy, sociology of music, music and religion, musical entrepreneurship, music in post-liberation South Africa and music technology. The first-year modules in this subject are our most popular ones. Now based on a new text book that adopts the approach of a series of 'journeys', these modules allow students to explore a variety of world musics, different kinds of ensemble in diverse traditions (folk, popular and art music) and the basics of the Hornborstel and Sachs classification. Instead of surveying a wide range of instruments with many lists, we then concentrate on a few specific ones and explore their use in different cultures and historical contexts: the flute, violin and trumpet. In this way we hope to introduce students to the connectedness of musical instruments around the world.

A third major subject, Composition Theory, did not initially see much innovation, although we launched modules on serialism, twentieth-century tonal music and performing practice at third-year level. Since last year we have begun to introduce aspects of renewal in the teaching of 'elementary theory', and we now have plans for revising much of this curriculum, including a change of name to Composition Studies rather than Composition Theory (or even 'Harmony and Counterpoint').

Our module on performing practice (An Introduction to Performing Practice) is intended to introduce students to historically-informed performance or HIP as the most up-to-date way of performing within the Western art music tradition – an indispensable feature on the landscape of late twentieth and early twenty-first century music. This module tackles a serious and bewildering deficiency in the South African music education scene head on. Aspects of HIP have increasingly become mainstream in many parts of the world, particularly Britain, parts of Europe, Japan and Australia. It has long become customary in concert and recording reviews, especially in Britain and elsewhere, to comment on the appropriateness of the performance approach. Contrary to what many might think (and I suspect this includes many teachers and professional musicians in South Africa), knowledge of HIP is enabling rather than restrictive. It opens doors rather than shuts them, and allows the performer a wider freedom of choice than s/he would otherwise have. At the same time it forces us to question the mindless acceptance of 'received style' that so disfigures much music teaching. And it is pertinent to all aspects of music-making, from the primary level upwards, within a variety of traditions.

Some further small changes were made to the BMus curriculum in 2004 and again in 2007, mostly due to rationalization, and more are in the pipeline. Thus, curriculum development is a constantly ongoing process. We believe this is necessary in order to address many of the needs of South African music students in the new millennium. The Honours curriculum has also been overhauled, and our Master's and doctoral programmes are once again fully devoted to research, in line with the thrust of the Department of Education and the National Research Foundation.

Who is the typical Unisa music student? Well, we've had many young graduates, like other music departments around the country, but we've also enabled many professional, practising musicians, often with considerable experience, to realize their ambition of gaining a formal musical qualification. Several of these have gone on to occupy prominent positions in the country's university music departments over the past twenty-five or thirty years. And the flexibility of the distance-education system at Unisa means that some young musicians, as well as older students with family commitments, find it more convenient to study in this way. Among orchestral musicians who have graduated with us are several who occupy the principal desk in orchestras, both here and overseas. These include the principal oboe of the Nord-West Deutsche Rundfunkorchester in Hamburg (Germany) and the principal clarinet of the Zurich Opera (Switzerland). Other students do not necessarily take up music as a profession but work in music-related areas. You can also take some undergraduate modules for the BA (with specialisation in Music) degree, which we also offer.

We are particularly proud that the first black South African to receive the BMus degree was a Unisa student, Michael Moerane (1909–81), who graduated as far back as 1941. Moerane's symphonic poem *Fatše Le Heso* (My Country) was premiered by

Moerane's composition *Fatse la heso* (My Country) (11:18) has been recorded on the CD South African Music, Marco Polo 8.223709 (1994).
Source: http://chevalierdesaintgeorges.homestead.com/Moerane.html

the BBC Symphony Orchestra under Clifford Curzon in 1944, and later performed in New York and Paris by the black American conductor Dean Dixon. It was recorded by the National Symphony Orchestra of the SABC in the early 1990s and is currently enjoying something of a revival. Moerane's achievement points to the noteworthy fact that Unisa was always freely open to students of all races, even during the darkest years of the notorious 'quota' system at the historically advantaged universities.

In 1969 the department launched a newsletter for its students. This was called *Ars Nova*, and by 1971 it had established itself as a fully fledged university journal with musicological articles as well as news items about staff members and students. *Ars Nova* continued to be published without a break for thirty-five years, having finally gained accreditation with the Department of Education with effect from the late 1990s, before it was replaced in 2004 by *Muziki,* a new journal dedicated to musical research on the African continent. In many ways a logical outcome of the pioneering work of *Ars Nova* in publishing articles on South African music, *Muziki* is intended to fill a niche market, establishing a unified African voice for African music research. It is published by Unisa Press in association with Taylor and Francis.

This year we introduced the first module ('Staff Notation through South African Music') in our new Short Learning Programme 'Music for Life' in an 18-week course presented at the Sunnyside Campus. Intended for those who have little or no knowledge of staff notation, this module enables students to learn to perform and write music using staff notation, and transcribe music from tonic solfa to staff notation, through a ground-breaking approach that draws on a wide range of African, jazz and Western music from South African cultures.

Restructuring in 2002 within Unisa's Arts Faculty (now the College of Human Sciences) gave rise to the amalgamation of several smaller units with one another. So it was that in June 2002 the Departments of Musicology and of Art History and Visual Arts formed a new entity called the Department of Art History, Visual Arts and Musicology. This combination of disciplines is unique for South Africa but fairly common in the USA and elsewhere. We are housed in a lovely 90-year-old building on Unisa's Sunnyside Campus, at Oak Square. The potential for the arts, and music in particular, to play an increasing role in the community and the general life of our country is a stimulus for increased and more focused academic attention. Musicology at Unisa will surely continue to play a role in equipping musicians and teachers in facing those challenges.

Learning Music for Life

© Christine Lucia, Visiting Professor, Wits School of Arts

The new Unisa Short Learning Programme *Music for Life: Empowering the Choral Sector* kicked off in February 2008 with a pilot course in basic music reading called "Staff Notation through South African Music". It is one of six music modules the Unisa Department of AHVAM has developed during the course of 2007 under the direction of Head of Department George King and Lecturer in Composition Michael Blake with assistance from Wits Visiting Professor Christine Lucia. AHVAM has similar programmes in fine art & history of art, but this is the first such programme in Music at Unisa. It is something George King has been wanting to do for many years and is inspired by his abiding interest in choralism and his expertise as a choral director and adjudicator.

The new programme targets the choral sector – very big in Gauteng with more choirs here than in any other region of the country. It is not a highly skilled, sector however: wonderful voices, and great repertoire and a keen competitive edge between the choirs exists, but many choristers cannot read music (even in tonic solfa notation) and many conductors compose and conduct without any formal training. Moreover the many choral composers who write in tonic solfa notation cannot arrange their own music for orchestras and instrumental groups, who are increasingly interested in promoting choral music. The choral sector thus remains something of a Cinderella in the music industry, and the Unisa Musicology Department wanted to do something about this.

The six modules are called "Staff Notation through South African Music", taught this year by Christine Lucia (seen in the photograph with a class in April), "Composition from Scratch" (a course for beginners who can read staff notation), "Composing Original Music" (a more advanced course), "Arranging and Orchestrating Music" (for composers who want to 'make their own arrangements' as it were…), "Choral Music Practice" (honing conducting and vocal training skills), and "African Choral Music in South Africa", which is an introduction to the history of choral music including analytical study of individual works by composers such as Bokwe, Caluza, Tyamzashe, Moerane, Mohapeloa.

Each module lasts 18 weeks (covering each half of the year) and students are assessed through a final exam or portfolio. They attend classes in the evenings and occasional Saturday mornings, and classes are held in Oak Square, home of the Department of Art History, Visual Arts and Musicology on the Sunnyside Campus. Three modules will start in July in addition to the staff notation module: the composition from scratch module, orchestration, and the history of choral repertoire.

The fee for each course is R1 500, which includes face-to-face class tuition (these courses are not taught by correspondence), learning materials, assignment and test marking, final exam assessment, and a certificate of completion. SAMRO has offered partial bursaries to those who cannot afford the entire fee. People can register for one course only, or for two or three concurrently. If they don't already read music notation it's best to do this basic course first, and once all the courses are on offer – as Unisa hopes they will by 2009 – students may do any of the other courses.

Registration is already open for the second half of 2008, and will continue until just before classes begin on Wed 23 July. To register, people can contact Pertunia Mbatha on tel 012 429-6582, or fax 012 429-3556, or e-mail ukun7@unisa.ac.za and ask for a registration form. Michael Blake can also answer any enquiries: on blakem@unisa.ac.za or tel 012 429-6782.

Hip-hop in the Cape

© Sean Adams, Department of Art History, Visual Arts and Musicology, University of South Africa

Hip-hop originated amongst the black Americans in the Bronx, New York City in the late 1970s and is characterized by the use of rap over a strong rhythmic background, resulting from the manipulation of pre-recorded sound. Records (LPs) were played on turntables and manipulated to form a background over which the artists rapped. Tricia Rose, an authority on hip-hop, noted that hip-hop culture consists of three modes of expression namely rap music, graffiti writing and break dancing, and that it emerged 'as a source for youth of alternative identity formation and social status' (Ramsey 2003:165). Hip-hop has given a voice to young artists by empowering them to grapple with important social, political and racial issues, and to comment on the realities of their everyday lives.

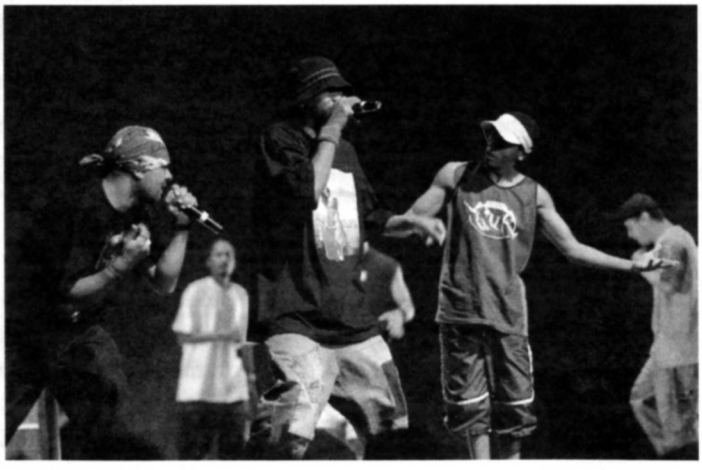
Hip-hop took off in Cape Town during the 1980s amidst rising political tension and after the forced removals and relocations of the 1970s. Many of the band members of two of Cape Town's most prominent hip-hop groups *Prophets of da City* and *Brasse vannie Kaap* ('Brothers of the Cape'), also known by the acronyms *POC* and *BVK* respectively, hail from the Cape Flats, an area of the Cape where many people settled after having been forced from their homes in District Six during the apartheid years. DJ Ready D, who is also a band member of both *Prophets of da City* and *Brasse vannie Kaap*, was born in District Six and grew up on the Cape Flats, thus having first hand experience of the forced removals and the tensions that accompanied them

The people of District Six were predominantly 'coloured' and Malay, and District Six was a happy place where people mixed freely, absorbing and sharing each others' cultures. The Group Areas Act resulted in the inhabitants of District Six being forced to move from their homes before these were demolished by the apartheid government. Their relocation to the Cape Flats, an area far removed from the city centre, resulted in the destruction of the sense of community that existed amongst the people of District Six. Social ills such as unemployment, poverty, alcohol abuse, rape, drugs, gangsterism and murder are rife on the Cape Flats and many of these are similar to those experienced by black Americans in the Bronx.

One of the key aspects of hip-hop is the concept of 'knowledge of self' and having to engage critically with your own reality in order to attain this level of self-awareness. Many of the Cape hip-hop artists used hip-hop as a means of depicting their social, political and racial realities to their audiences. This has been achieved by employing hip-hop as a vehicle for the expressing the tension and frustration of racism and marginalization, and the problems resulting from these.

Prophets of da City

As in the United States, local hip-hop also became a vehicle by which the youth could be politicized and re-educated. Battersby (2003: 115) has argued that hip-hop 'through its lyrics and projects associated with it, offers a vital sense of resistance and a means to express new identities'. The apartheid years bear witness to the immense resistance to the oppressive regime of the National Party government. *Prophets of da City,* which is also a rap group, is one group who used hip-hop to express resistance to racial discrimination, and to create an awareness of black consciousness. They addressed the issue of racial oppression in their song *Roots* and that of the



apartheid struggle in politically charged songs such as *Da Struggle Continues, Neva Again* and *Tales from the Townships*. During the apartheid years, many people were uprooted and treated unjustly, and youths expressed their resistance towards the oppression of the apartheid regime by engaging in often violent protests in the townships. Songs such as the aforementioned ones simultaneously serve as protest songs, as well as a reminder of our turbulent past.

Race and identity dynamics feature prominently in hip-hop in Cape Town. There has in the past been racial tension between the 'coloureds' and the blacks in South Africa and some of this tension still exists today. According to Marks and Trapido (cited in Battersby 2003: 123) the 'coloured' people have been viewed by the white population as not being white enough. Murphy (cited in Battersby 2003: 123) stated that the 'coloured' is often disliked and untrusted by the black population, probably because the majority of 'coloureds' are not in favour of the ANC. As a result of these attitudes, a large proportion of the 'coloured' community feels marginalized by both the whites and the blacks. This has resulted in some loss of a sense of identity. This disunity with regard to identity results from the notion that some members of the 'coloured' community identify with the whites, and do not fully acknowledge their blackness, while some identify with blacks, the latter being a minority. Haupt (2001: 180) argued that the chorus, in *Prophets of da City's* song *Black Thing* from their album *Phunk Phlow* 'conveys a sense of tensions which coloureds feel with regard to conceptualizations of blackness' and the notion that racial identity is fraught with contradictions and anxieties is linked to a lack of 'knowledge of self' which is central to hip-hop.

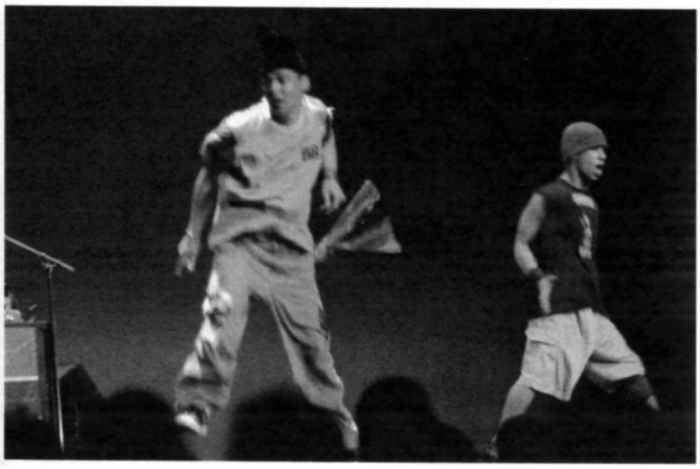
Prophets of da City have not only attempted to break down the barriers of race through their music, but have also changed the racial dynamic of the group. In 1993, two black artists, Junior 'Danisa' Dread and Ishmael, were introduced to the group, which as Haupt (2001: 178) pointed out has prevented audiences from perceiving them as a 'coloured' group. Haupt (2001: 186) has also argued that it is evident from the song *Black Thing* that they identify with black consciousness in reaction to being labelled 'coloured' by the National Party.

Prophets of the City have performed at numerous European festivals and have also been involved in educational tours, such as the *Rapping for Democracy* voter education tour and a drug awareness campaign. Here, the role played in educating primarily the youth runs parallel to that played by hip-hop groups in the United States, who have embarked on similar tours. Their ability to rap in a range of languages has enabled them to appeal to a more diverse audience. Their music contains a blend of hip-hop and rap elements, and has a strong African rhythmic pulse, thereby reiterating their roots and celebrating their African blackness.

Brasse vannie Kaap

Brasse vannie Kaap has performed at numerous festivals such as the Klein Karoo Nasionale Kunstefees, Oppikoppi, and the Pukkelpop Festival in Belgium. Their first album was entitled *BVK*, the second *Yskoud* ('Ice Cold') and the third *Super Power*. They too addressed important social issues in their music. In the first song, *Potjiekos*, from their album, *Yskoud*, cultural elements of the 'coloureds' and the white Afrikaners, who were in conflict during the apartheid years, are integrated and coexist in a syncretic relationship. The song is sung in Afrikaans, not in pure Afrikaans, but in its Cape Flats' dialect and slang. This is a combination of Afrikaans with some English, and is commonly referred to as *gamtaal* on the Cape Flats, where it is widely spoken. The 'coloured' band members of *BVK* combined their strong Cape Flats slang with elements of an Afrikaner music style called *boeremusiek* in this song. The song opens with the concertina, an instrument which features prominently in *boeremusiek*, and the *sakkie-sakkie* rhythm of Afrikaans dance music has also been thrown into the mix (Kwami 2003: 266). In addition to employing the concertina and the *sakkie-sakkie* rhythm in the song, reference is made to it in lyrics as well.

Other references to Afrikaans culture are included when reference is



made to the old Afrikaans television programmes *Spies en Plessie* and *Orkney Snork Nie*, which appealed to many Afrikaans-speaking South Africans, irrespective of race. The fusion of different cultural elements in *Potjiekos*, and the fact that a non-white group has drawn on so many strong elements from Afrikaans culture illustrates music's ability to transcend the boundaries of culture and race, and to draw people together.

Much of *BVK's* music is a description of life on the Cape Flats, where poverty and alcohol abuse often go hand in hand. Reference is made to it in the lines *'gaan uitsteek met 'n bottel en 'n case'* ('with a bottle and a case') and *'som gaan suip'* ('some will drink') of the song *Potjiekos* (BVK, 2004). The effects of alcohol abuse are highlighted much more strongly in the song *Afkool*, from their album *Super Power*. Here, the lyrics provide a detailed description of the behaviour of a drunk person and reference is made to the domestic tension that results from this. Songs such of these are examples of how hip-hop can be used to re-educate the youth about some of the evils of society.

Earlier, I mentioned that knowledge of the self is one of the key elements of hip-hop. Self-awareness and identity come to the fore in the song *BVK*, which is a strong expression of who the group is, in which the notion of identity is reiterated by the lyrics *'BVK is die Brasse vannie Kaap'* ('BVK is the brothers of the Cape') and *'ek is wie ek is'* ('I am who I am') (BVK, 2004). The atmosphere created in this song is one of acceptance of identity, contentment with the self and being oblivious of others' opinions of the self.

Class distinction is clearly at play in *BVK's 'Jy Smaak My'* ('You Fancy Me') in which a girl from the middle class rejects a boy of a lower social standing. She speaks only English, while he is Afrikaans-speaking. In this song the girl clearly expresses her disdain at being associated with him and demonstrates the apparent colour and class snobbery, probably resulting from a fear of losing their social standing, found in some sections of the 'coloured' community. The girl's conception of blackness can also be called into question as her lyrics hint at a closer affinity to the white community.

South Africa's cultural diversity should be celebrated and in order to embrace this diversity, an attitude of tolerance, understanding and respect for other cultures needs to be cultivated. In the multicultural classroom, hip-hop can be utilized to create an awareness of the past and the issues that people dealt with then and are dealing with now and can be used as the starting point for debates on a variety of social issues in an attempt to heal the past and deal with the challenges of the future.

Activities:

- Create your own hip-hop song which addresses any issue currently of importance to the youth of South Africa.
- Prepare a brief presentation on the music of any South African hip-hop group, focusing on the message within their music.
- Take the text of a song by any South African hip-hop group and analyse and discuss the issues addressed in it.

Some hip-hop albums:

Brasse vannie Kaap. 1998. *BVK*. South Africa. Ghetto Ruff.

Prophets of da City. 1996. *Ghetto Code*. South Africa: Ghetto Ruff.

Prophets of da City. 1995. *Phunk Phlow*. South Africa: Ghetto Ruff.

Useful websites:

www.ghettoruff.co.za
www.africanhiphop.com

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Brasse vannie Kaap. 2000. *Super Power*. South Africa. Ghetto Ruff.

Haupt, Adam. 2001. 'Black Thing: Hip-Hop Nationalism, Race and Gender in *Prophets of da City* and *Brasse vannie Kaap*' in Z. Erasmus (ed.). *Coloured by History, Shaped by Place: New Perspectives on Coloured Identities in Cape Town*. Cape Town: Kwela Books.

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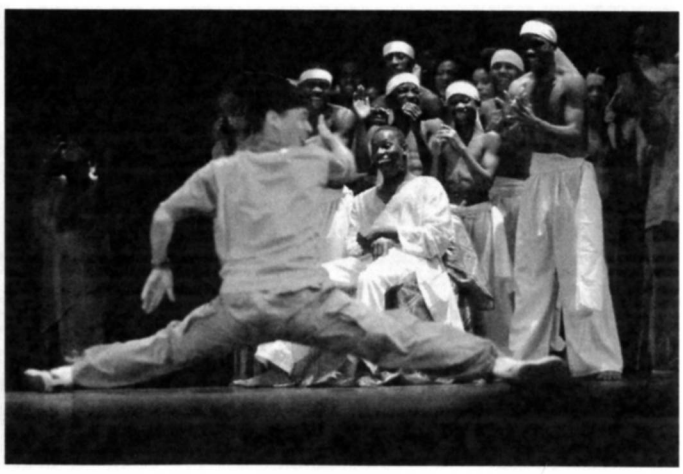


Who is the Composer? Musical Layering in Western and Non-Western Music

© Cameron Harris, Department of Art History, Visual Arts and Musicology, University of South Africa

At the end of a recording session a little magic happens: with only a few minutes of studio time left to go, a musician sings a musical idea that makes all those around sit up and take notice. The mechanics of the music machine swing into motion and everyone gets to work. The result is a song that will enter the musical psyche across cultures and throughout the world.

The above could easily be a description of how the cyclic riff that eventually became the essential material for the song *The Lion Sleeps Tonight* came into the world (Malan 2004 [Online] [O]). The story of the song *Mbube*, its transformation into *The Lion Sleeps Tonight* and the moral/financial injustice done to Solomon Linda, the original creator of *Mbube* has become well known in recent years and it now has a more-or-less happy ending: journalist Rian Malan was investigating the case around the time Disney used *The Lion Sleeps Tonight* in the hit movie *The Lion King*. Malan made Linda's family aware of how much Linda had lost out and lawyers acting for the family were able to threaten Disney's assets in South Africa enough to pressure the American publishing company that had licensed the song to Disney to settle the case. The settlement provided for fair royalty payments to Linda's family and ensured that Linda would be credited as co-author of *The Lion Sleeps Tonight* (Dean 2006 [O]). The ending of the story was only more-or-less happy, though, because all this was too late for Linda himself. He had died a pauper in 1962 despite the fact that *Mbube*-inspired songs had already made a vast amount of money by that time (Malan 2004 [O]).

What is particularly fascinating, though, is that the narrative above is not specifically about the creation of *Mbube* and *The Lion Sleeps Tonight*. It tells the story equally well of the recording of another mega global hit, the musical material of which has a history that would sound very familiar to those who know the story of *Mbube*. We must transport the scene thousands of miles from the studios of Gallo Records in Johannesburg to those of Atlantic Records in New York and then we need only change a few further details: the date is 1962, rather than 1939, the musician with the song was Ben E. King not Solomon Linda and the recording was overseen by the immensely successful songwriting duo of Jerry Leiber and Mike Stoller. The song in question was to become a classic of American soul; it was *Stand by Me* (BBC 2008 [O]).

Despite the fact that both songs were recorded during the last fading moments of a recording session, there are two more important similarities.

www.3rdearmusic.com/forum/mbube2.html

The first is that the construction and resulting texture of the music is similar: both songs as we know them today are based on cyclic bass lines above which a flowing melody line is layered. The texture is somewhat starker in the American song, though, as it does not posses the chordal harmony in the accompaniment that can be heard in *Mbube*. The melodies of the songs are both individual and remarkably effective: the high-pitched sweep of the African song contains an exoticism that the Western ear has never tired of and which is surely a large part of the piece's success, while the power in the matter-of-fact delivery of Ben E. King's slightly strained vocal timbre in *Stand by Me* and the comforting gestures that lead up to a warm cadence with each completion of cycle are also difficult to forget.

It is the bass lines, though, that are the most compelling feature of both songs. They possess such a strong and distinct character that they instantly summon up the whole song in our minds – in addition to a host of extra-musical associations, namely a jungle scene, a Disney feature and a music video of dubious quality in the case of *The Lion Sleeps Tonight* and a strange pair of images in the case of *Stand by Me*, a group of children discovering a body in a wood (the overriding image from the 1986 film of the same name, which drew heavily on the song) and a semi-naked man doing his laundry in an ad for Levi's jeans (dating from the same year). It goes without saying that these images were far from the minds of the original creators of the material

and thus that its context has changed a great deal during the course of its existence. The life that these songs have had and the manner of their transformation into the massive hits that we know today is the primary focus of this article, which also takes the opportunity to highlight similar processes at work in music from different times and places.

In the case of both songs, the style and much of the meaning of the original material was altered considerably by the time the song 'made it big'. When Ben E. King recorded his version of *Stand by Me*, the music had already been produced in a number of different versions and several prominent musicians had credited themselves as the song's author before their composer credit was wiped off the record sleeve by the next round of musical borrowers. It was common practice and perfectly legal in mid-century America to attach composer credits to new versions of traditional tunes that are in the public domain, or 'wild horses' as they were often called (Malan 2004 [O]). This shouldn't have been possible with *Mbube* because the composer could be identified with a little work, but very often this sort of work was not done and musical material was borrowed anyway.

In the case of *Stand by Me*, the relationship between the soul version of the song and the earliest known gospel hymn version is not so direct; it is right at the point where it is difficult to say whether the newer music has simply been inspired by the existing music or has actually been based on its material. The history of *Stand by Me* is a little like a musical poker game where each musician kept putting his musical ideas into an ever larger pot at the centre of the table; it was a game of 'winner takes all' and King was the one who collected the winnings and gleefully slid the pile towards his side of the table. His role in the creation of *Stand by Me* came much later in the process of musical layering than Linda's in *Mbube*. King's version, however, became the basis used for further creations up to this very day.

We can only trace *Stand by Me* back so far, to a gospel hymn of the same name written in 1905 by Charles Albert Tindley. Tindley, who is given much credit for the rise of gospel music in America, wrote the hymn while he was Pastor of Bainbridge Street Methodist Church in Philadelphia (Boyer 2008 [O]). The earliest recordings of the song are by gospel singers who based their versions closely on the hymn. Tindley's gospel music made use of the call and response technique that can be traced back to Africa via the cotton fields of the southern United States (Boyer 2008 [O]). It is therefore impossible to know if *Stand by Me* specifically had any kind of life before the official composition of the hymn. As Rian Malan has said in connection with *Mbube*, "Its epic transcultural saga is also, in a way, the story of popular music, which limped pale-skinned and anaemic into the twentieth century but danced out the other side vastly invigorated by transfusions of ragtime and rap, jazz, blues and soul, all of whose blood lines run back to Africa via slave ships and plantations and ghettos" (Malan 2004 [O]).

So, is it worth trying to track songs like these to their earliest origins at all? Western art music can be said to be the exception rather than the rule in its attitude that music should be written by one single composer who takes exclusive credit for the work. It is far more usual for music to be a communal activity where musicians work together to form an end product. And if musicians work with one another to do this, it is only a short leap for them to consider working with those with whom they do not have a direct link: to borrow and work with their material and make it at least partially their own. The trouble in this comes, of course, when there is serious money at stake. Copyright law was designed to work based on the Western notion of a single composer and it does not cope well when the situation becomes more complicated. Ben E. King's attitude to the original music of *Stand by Me* can be detected in the following quotation from an interview on BBC radio, "I took *Stand by Me* from an old gospel song that was recorded by Sam Cooke and the Soul Stirrers called *Lord I'm Standing By*, or something" (BBC 2008 [O]). You can tell that King is not really worried about what the title of the earlier version was, or where it actually came from. He was not interested in going any deeper in researching the origins of the material. He liked what he had heard and wanted to make something of it.

This is similar to the attitude of seventeen-year-old Sam Kingston, who used material from *Stand by Me* as the basis of his 2007 song *Beautiful Girls*. Kingston was already recording an album when he heard King's version of *Stand by Me* on the radio. His young age meant that he heard the song completely out of the blue rather than in the context of its earlier success. He just heard that famous bass line and was taken with it. He wholeheartedly and without any sense of irony borrowed the bass line unaltered and even preserved the characteristic off-beat tambourine. He then thought up a new melody that occasionally follows the contour of King's and occasionally takes its own path. The result was a teen-hip-hop song that appealed to a new generation who had little or no connection to King's soul antecedent: the song had been transformed once again to suit a new musical culture, time and place.

This open attitude to musical material is also partly what makes possible the transformation of the textual meaning as well as the style of the song as it is reborn time and time again. Until Kingston's recording, Ben E. King's *Stand by Me* was the most secular version of a song that had remained strongly religious up until that time. Marcus Gray tells us that Tindley's hymn was inspired by Psalm 23: "Yea, though I walk through the

valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil for thou art with me" (Gray 2007 [O]). Obviously these words are echoed in the more straightforward and secular phrase 'Stand by me'. The first transformation of this hymn was into a commercial gospel song, and a number of gospel artists recorded it in the 1940s–50s. The song reached the peak of its religious identity with the last of these, when Sam Cook added extra biblical imagery in his version entitled *Stand by Me, Father.* This is the recording that Ben E. King knew and from which he stripped off all the overt piety to create his more secular version, which nonetheless retained much of the original sentiment that can be traced back to Tindley's hymn tune. Little of this sentiment can be detected in Sam Kingston's version, *Beautiful Girls,* the title of which provides the sole topic for the song. The link between Kingston and the past is not at all textual but through musical elements which are inseparable from the sentiment of the original song. If we were to draw a graph of religious meaning in the song with Cook's version at the peak, Kingston's version would be at the bottom of a sharp dip.

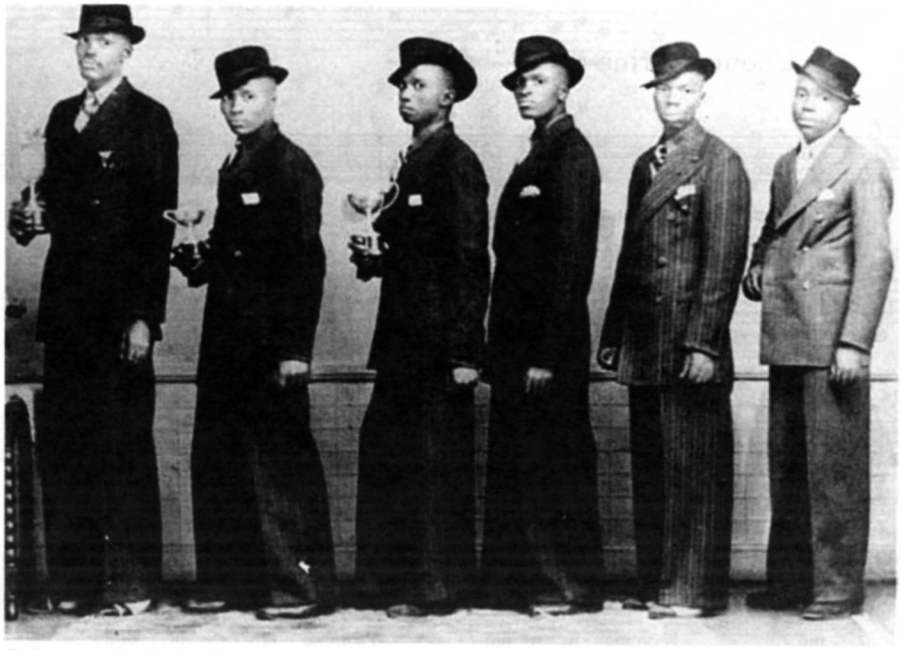
The material that Kingston used from *Stand by Me* was one of the last musical layers to be added to the song, namely that famous bass line. Hit song writing duo Jerry Leiber and Mike Stoller (who were behind such hits as Elvis Presley's *Hound Dog* and *Jailhouse Rock*) collaborated with King on the recording of *Stand by Me* and it is believed that it was Stoller who came up with the bass line (Gray 2007 [O]).

The secularisation of *Stand by Me* over the period of a little over a century from 1905 to 2007 and the layering of musical material by different musicians that we see in both *Stand by Me* and *The Lion Sleeps Tonight* have interesting parallels with two compositional techniques used in European liturgical music during the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries. The earlier technique is that of composing a mass around a pre-existing *cantus firmus*. The later, associated technique was that of parody, which became part of the musical mainstream during the sixteenth century. The main difference between the two is that a single melodic line is borrowed in the composition of a *cantus firmus* mass whereas the whole texture of a piece of pre-existing music was often borrowed to form the basis of sections (particularly the beginnings and ends) of parody masses. The *cantus firmus* is most often found in the tenor, with freshly-composed bass and upper voices wrapped around it.

These techniques are also closely related to that of textual change known as *contrafactum*. In a *contrafactum*, new words are given to a pre-existing tune that normally change the meaning and function of the tune greatly (it was most often a secular song that was adopted for settings of liturgical music—generally settings of the mass). Quite often it is difficult to separate out these techniques when studying music from the late fifteenth century, at the point where the rise of polyphonic composition made parody technique appealing but when composers still continued to make much of the *cantus firmus*.

The case is similar with *Stand by Me* during its transformation over the years: when Sam Cooke added extra biblical associations to Tindley's hymn he was in effect creating a new *contrafactum* and Ben E. King created his own, new *contrafactum* when he changed the words for his version of the song. One last flurry of *contrafactum* activity occurred when Kingston dramatically changed the meaning of the song one more time and was followed closely by a pure *contrafactum* from his teen rival, JoJo Levesque, who altered Kingston's lyrics so that the song is sung from the viewpoint of a girl. Levesque only altered the lyrics of Kingston's song; her scathing commentary of Kingston's version is very in keeping with the topical commentary that is also found in the texts of much medieval music.

When Stoller added the famous bass line for King's version, he was adding a musical layer in a way similar to that of a composer of a *cantus firmus* mass, who would also have added lines to a pre-existing melody. Also, the spirit of parody technique can be felt in nearly all of the transformations of *Stand by Me* in that the composers of parody mass settings



Solomon Linda & The Evening Birds 1941
Left to Right: Solomon Linda (Soprano), Gilbert Madondo (Alto), Boy Sibiya (Tenor), Samuel Mlangeni (Bass) and Owen Skakane (Bass). Photo: The International Library of African Music (Rhodes University) and Veit Erlmann. Source: www.3rdearmusic.com/forum/mbube2.html

sought to create an integrated whole, a new piece that did not set the old material apart from what had been newly composed. It may well be that the methods of 20th- and 21st-century pop musicians (who very often work collaboratively) are more like those of the late Medieval/Early Renaissance composers such as Dufay and Josquin than contemporary art music composers, even though it is the art music composers who are more likely to wish to connect themselves clearly to the past.

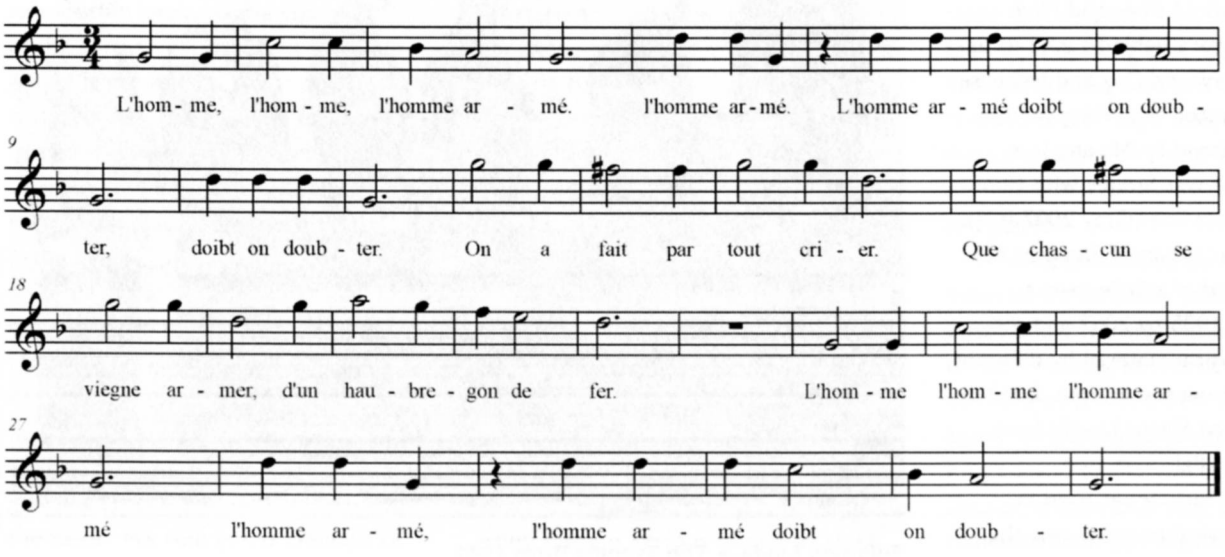
Around the turn of the twentieth century, Western art music composers have had a lot more of the weight of history on their shoulders. They have often borrowed music but their quotations are almost always used within "inverted commas" (that is to say, they are set separate in some way from the rest of the composition). The composers always find a way to say "this is not mine, but I am using it". In some cases composers have wanted to make a conscious link with the music of the past to validate their own musical style, to link themselves to part of a continuous tradition that those critical of their approach would say has been irreparably broken. (Webern's orchestration of Bach's *Musical Offering* is an example of this.) Composers in other styles and traditions, however, are closer to the sentiment "This wasn't mine, but it is now!"

There is an interesting reversal that can be seen if we compare the *cantus firmus* and parody masses of the sixteenth century with the way the meaning of *Stand by Me* has changed over time. These masses are sacred works that generally draw upon secular songs. In contrast, the hymn *Stand by Me* eventually became a secular song as new material was added to the original.

The composers of *cantus firmus* and parody masses used a variety of secular tunes as the material for their religious music but many of them became obsessed with one in particular: the mysteriously named tune *L'homme armé,* or 'The armed man'. Nobody knows who the armed man was or why in particular he felt the need to take up arms. We also cannot say for sure who wrote the tune, although it has been suggested that it may have been the composer Jacob Obrecht (Fallows 2008 [O]).

Throughout the history of musical borrowing this tune stands head and shoulders above any other in the number of times it has been used. David Fallows tells us that it was the basis of over forty mass cycles between the mid-fifteenth century and the end of the seventeenth century. Many of these were by the most prominent composers of their times such as Dufay, Josquin and Palestrina and composers have continued to occasionally set the tune up until the present day. Whatever the original reasons for the early *L'homme armé* settings, at some point it must have simply become musical tradition to use the music from the song; a little like the basic chord progressions from jazz standards that are used as the basis for new jazz compositions. This parallel could also be stretched to include the famous drum breaks that were first extracted from recordings dating from the 1950s–1970s during the 'break dancing' craze of the late 70s and early 80s (originally by scratching on a turntable and not long after by musicians using samplers). These recorded drum breaks are still used in many different types of popular music today.

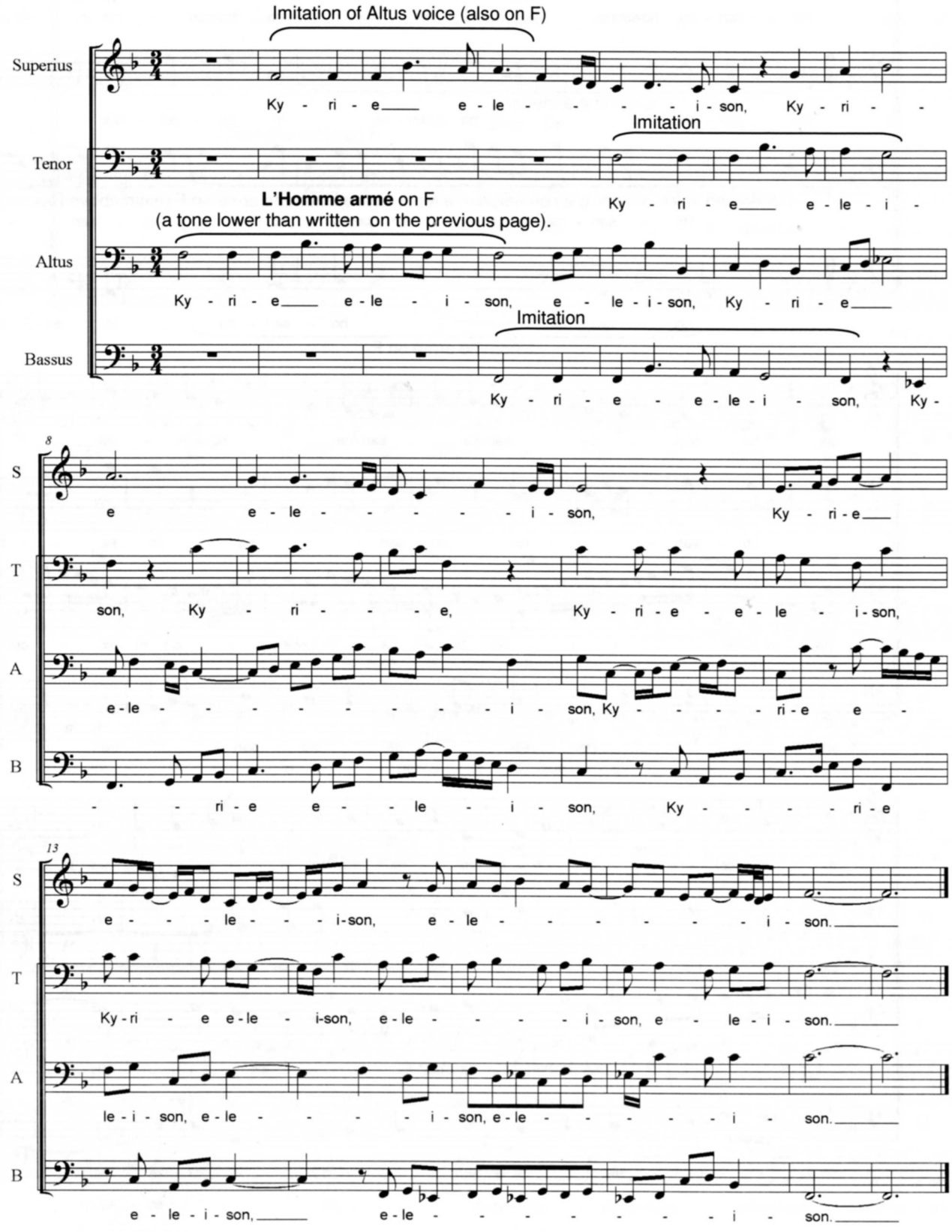
L'homme armé on G



Three excerpts from Josquin des Prés: *Missa L'Homme Armé*

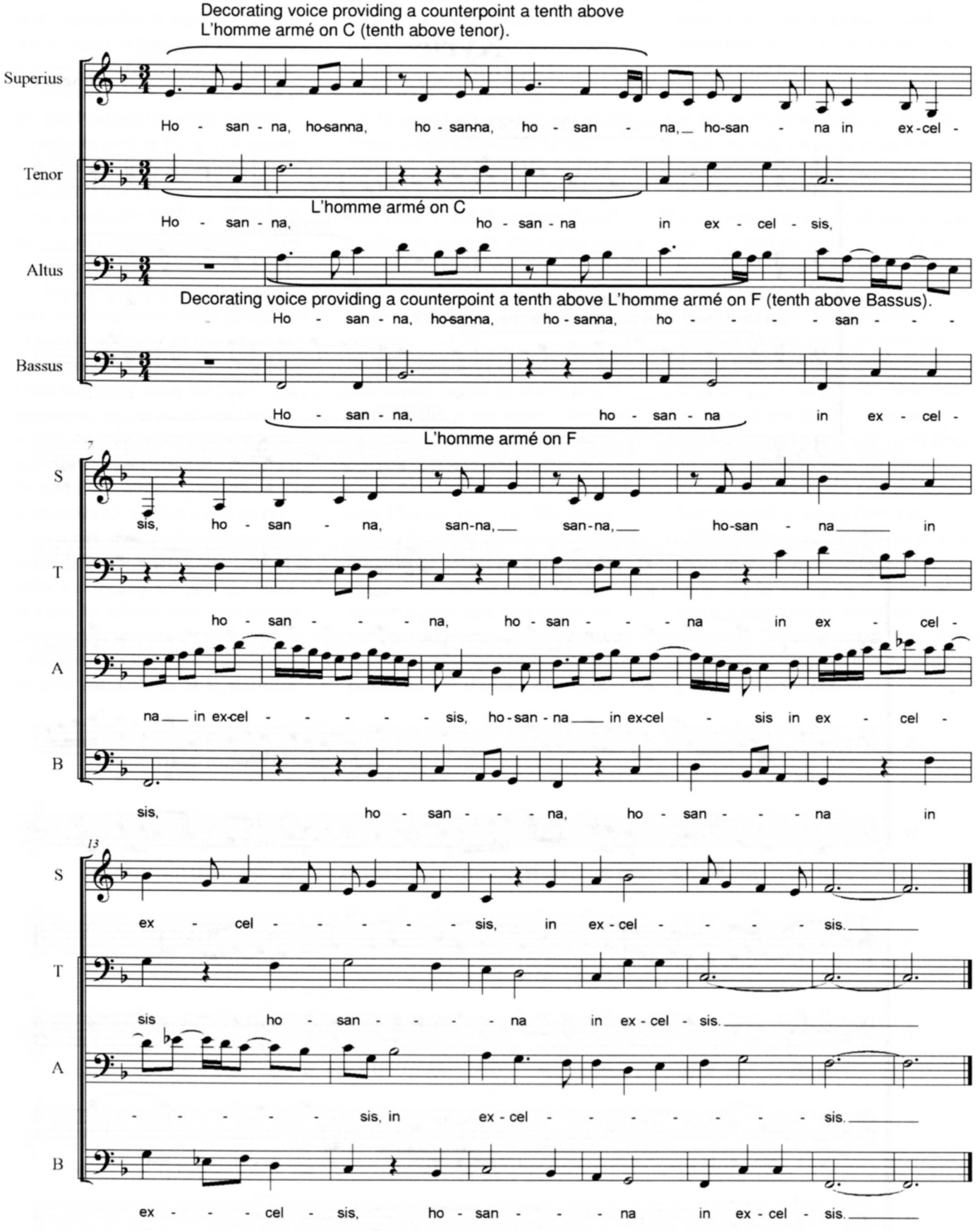
Kyrie

Josquin



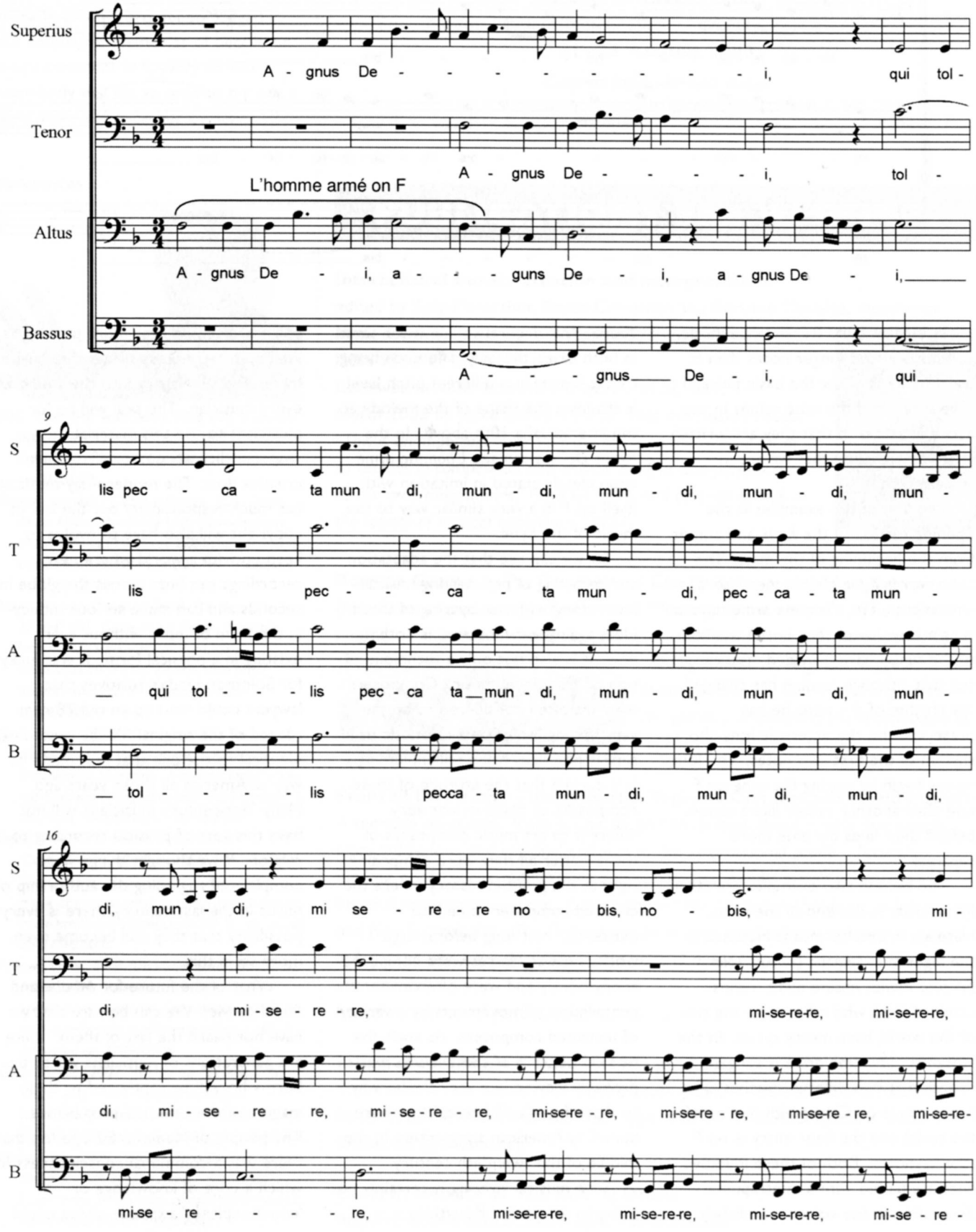
Hosanna

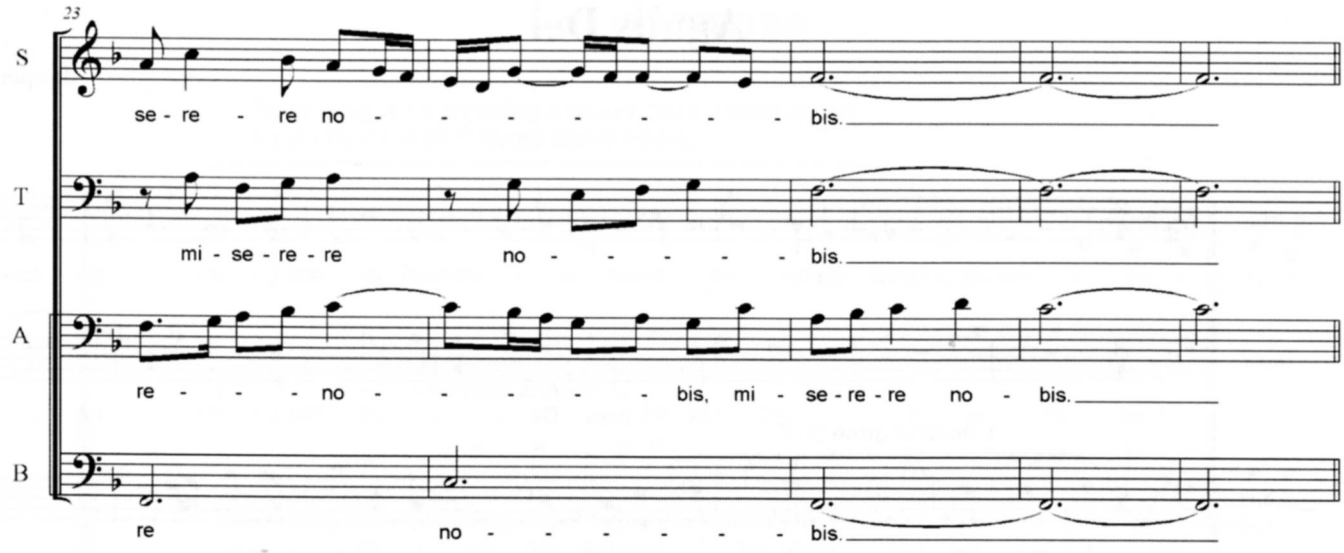
Josquin



Agnus Dei

Josquin





In Medieval and Renaissance music, composers used longer notes than is usual today to show the basic pulse. I have shortened the note values in the above example so that they are written in a time signature that we are more familiar with.

The first of the examples is the opening section of the *Kyrie* and comes from the beginning of the mass. The Latin words *Kyrie eleison* mean Lord, have mercy. The *L'homme armé* tune is sung a tone lower than in the example of the tune I have provided. You can see that although Josquin has changed the rhythm of the tune, he has preserved the characteristic long-short rhythm of the first two notes. The four voices begin by singing the tune on F, one after another, rather like a canon, before their lines become more separate.

The second two examples are taken from towards the end of the mass. *Hosanna in excelsis* means Hosanna in the highest and *Agnus Dei, qui tolis peccata mundi, misere nobis* means Lamb of God, who takes away the sins of the world, have mercy on us. In the Hosanna, *L'homme armé* is sung in imitation at two different pitches. The first entry is on C (the fifth degree of the scale) and the later entry is on F (the keynote). Both of these imitative lines are paired with a contrapuntal decoration in the voice immediately above. This decorative line is the same in both cases, the only difference being that it is sung at a different pitch level. It shadows the shape of the melody at the interval of a 10th above. In the *Agnus Dei* we can see *L'homme armé* again clearly stated in imitation with itself on F in a very similar way to the music of the *Kyrie*.

So, we can see that the adaptation and recasting of pre-existing musical ideas along with the layering of those ideas against new material is nothing new. It is also not only a technique of pop or traditional music. Composers who are often considered to be the very foundation of classical music used similar practices half a millennium ago. It is certain that the attitude of these composers to material was very different to art music composers of today—after all they were composing right at the point in history where the credited composer came into existence. Not long before, large works such as Masses were composed anonymously and were often a compilation of movements by a variety of unnamed composers. As such, the musical material of these works was probably viewed in a very similar way to that of the 'wild horses' that were tamed by American songwriters in the middle of the twentieth century.

Such musical layering is certainly not going to disappear. If anything it is going to become ever more present as improved technology brings the musical material of all history into the studio of every musician. The skill will be for musicians to use this material responsibility while not stifling their creative flow. The modern-day musician has much responsibility but the law of copyright will also have to evolve to keep up with a world where new recordings can buzz across the globe in seconds and can make serious money in the form of mp3s without ever existing in a physical form. It was lucky for Solomon Linda's relatives that lawyers could hold up an old 78 rpm record of the original *Mbube* recording, identical to the one that first made its way to America all those years ago. Many 21st-century musicians will not have this sort of physical recording to rely on. If we thought things were complicated regarding the authorship of music in the last century, there is every possibility that they will become even more so in this.

What of the future for *Mbube* and *Stand by Me*? We can be sure that we have not heard the last of them: there are generations of musicians yet to be born who will be captivated by their magic and their musical possibilities. The people of Medieval Europe felt that there was a communal consciousness in which a core of knowledge or 'commonplaces' existed—these could

be refrains of text, quotations, snatches of music, almost anything. In the present day, the mass media is the creator of most of our modern 'commonplaces'. What is certain is that these two songs are deeply lodged in the communal memories of people on every continent and, every so often, somebody will get an urge to try out a little magic of his or her own.

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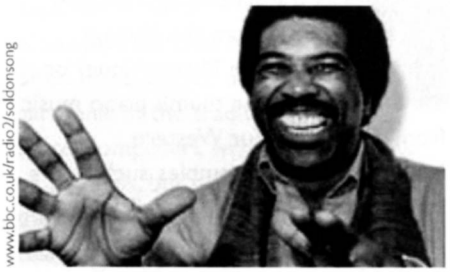
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Intercultural music: creation and interpretation, edited by Sally Macarthur, Bruce Crossman and Ronaldo Morelos, Australian Music Centre, University of Western Sydney, 2006, 134 pp., ISBN 9780909168605.

Reviewed in *Music Education Research, Vol 10, No 1, March 2008* by Joyce Boyce-Tillman. Her conclusion reads: *"This is an important book that should be on the reading list of all courses in composition and musical analysis and performance as research programmes. Here we see a real attempt to look at the totality of musical experience."* (167)

Born to Groove by Pat Campbell and Charlie Keil is published on the web (http://borntogroove.org). Keil writes: *"Please go to our website right now. Start reading … any chapter that grabs your attention. Then, please start participating by offering comments, criticisms, suggestions and lesson plans in the forums, defining terms in the glossary or compiling the encyclopedia of 'applied groovology' in the wiki."*

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Choosing instruments *is* composition[1]: alternative ways to make original pieces

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Composers in Europe surprisingly don't have it easy: they are weighed down by centuries of Western musical tradition which they feel obliged to acknowledge, assimilate and "reimagine" in new compositions. Here at the opposite end of the world we are aware of this tradition, but can treat it as one of many musical possibilities available to the composer. The development of a unique South African style of composition, to which all composers can make a contribution, has been inhibited or slowed down by our unwillingness to let go of so many of the chains of Western art music that have restricted our local vision for a long time.

A. History: The American Experimental Tradition and South Africa

Look what happened a century ago in what was then another young, aspiring musical culture: the United States of America. Charles E Ives (1874–1954) became known as the 'father of American music' as a result of the visionary works he composed. In pieces like *The Unanswered Question* (1908), *Tones Roads* (1911–15) and the *Concord Sonata* (1911–12) he completely "reimagined" harmony, rhythm, tonality, orchestration – those parameters which make up the very fabric of music – in new ways. He took what was fruitful from the musical tradition of Europe, and with pioneering spirit in the New World that was America then, he established what has become known as the American Experimental Tradition. Others followed in his footsteps: Henry Cowell (1897–1965), John Cage (1912–1992), Morton Feldman (1926–1987), Lou Harrison (1917–2003), Terry Riley (b.1935), Steve Reich (b.1936) and others.

South Africa has not yet had a 'Charles Ives', a bold adventurer, a visionary. Some of our composers have chosen to use so-called 'African elements' in their compositions. This means that they have, for example, used a hexatonic (6-note) scale or a descending melodic line, particular intervals such as a fourth or rhythmic devices such as polyrhythm, or a structure such as cyclic form within their piece, to give it an African 'flavour'. In most cases it remains a flavour, present on the surface but not thoroughly integrated into the music. Some South African composers who have approached composition in this way include Stefans Grové (b.1922), Jeanne Zaidel-Rudolph (b.1948) and Hans Huyssen (b.1964). While they have used some African elements in their music, they haven't really let go of too much of the European tradition, i.e. phrasing, form, harmony, rhythmic structure and so on. Huyssen for example has introduced some African kudu horns into the orchestra, but of course they are tuned differently and mainly add what we might call 'local colour'. In the past this approach was often labelled 'exoticism', and typified the colonial era worldwide.

On the other hand composers like Kevin Volans (b.1949), Michael Blake (b.1951) and Bongani Ndodana (b.1975) have looked to the American Experimental Tradition to inform their work as South African composers. One of the aims in bringing together elements of European and African music during the apartheid era was to try to reconcile differences between different peoples, through music. Volans for example has transcribed or arranged traditional music from the Nyanga (panpipe music from Mozambique) or the Shona (*mbira* or thumb piano music from Zimbabwe) for Western instruments and ensembles such as the string quartet. Henry Cowell, who coined the term 'world music' for a course he was teaching in New York in the 1960s, used to say "I want to live in the whole world of music".[2] Perhaps that is a good way in for us as South African composers in the 21st century.

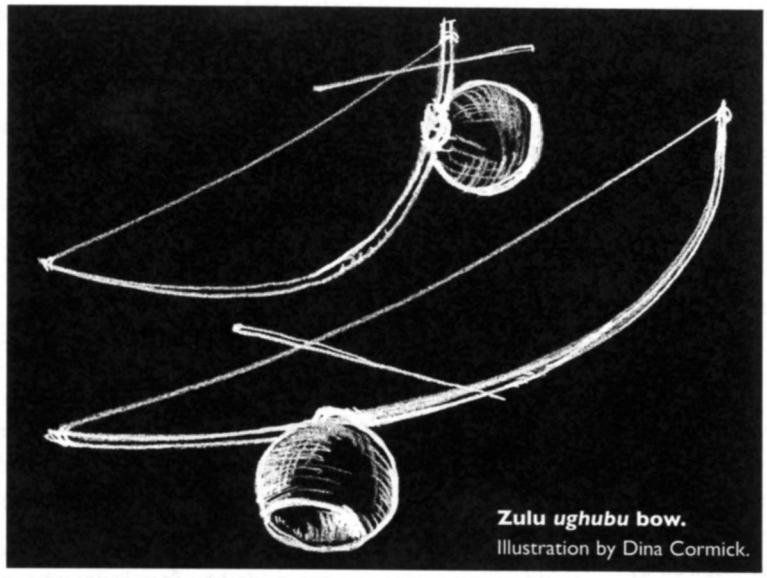
B. Form vs. Material

American composer Morton Feldman said: "As a teacher of composition the most important thing I can convey to the young composer is an awareness of what exactly is material. There is a crucial discrepancy between having 'ideas' and a sense of what the material is in one's own music [...] With Stravinsky his material suggests the composition, while with Schoenberg his material *is* the composition." [3]

We could divide contemporary composers roughly into two groups: the conceptualists and the materialists. What are these? Whereas conceptualists start with the idea, and are primarily concerned with the way the music is put together, materialists – the more intuitive composers – concentrate on the nature of material itself and try to let the material determine the piece. So Schoenberg would fall into the first category, Stravinsky into the second.

What is 'material' and what is 'form'?

Well during the 'common practice period' (18th – early 20th century), 'material' was always thought of as the theme or themes (made up of melody and rhythm) and the attendant harmonies that would become the basis for any composition. This material had the potential for growth or development over long expanses of time. Nowadays material is often not thematic or harmonic in the traditional sense: composers write melodic lines or patterns, but don't develop them; they use chords but these are not related as they were in the common practice period (i.e. I-IV-V for example).



Zulu *ughubu* bow.
Illustration by Dina Cormick.

'Form' is seen as the structure of a composition, traditionally classified as binary or ternary. The most common forms that we know (Sonata, Rondo) were developed in very original ways by composers like Mozart, Beethoven and Schubert. These forms have now been used and reused so often that there is only a slim chance of writing something interesting *and* original with them.

Many contemporary composers (i.e. living composers) like to think that good compositional material has its own life, and shouldn't have to be 'squeezed into' one of the old predetermined forms (remember the adage "old bottles, new wine"). So rather than starting with a formal structure, they start by inventing material with no particular structure in mind. They may have an idea of how long the piece is going to be, what instrumentation will be used and so on. The form of the composition invariably emerges as the material runs its course.

Studying our own indigenous music in South Africa has already shown us how to compose with different kinds of scales (5- and 6-note), phrase structure (additive rhythm), rhythmic devices (polyrhythm), formal schemes (cyclic structure) and texture (interlocking). We can learn many more techniques by studying local musics like the Nyanga and Venda panpipe dance, Xhosa *uhadi* and Zulu *ughubu* bow song, and Shona *mbira* and Chopi *timbila* music.

These are quite specific techniques for South African composers to cultivate in their work; right now let's look at more general techniques,

C. Starting points for the composer

There are so many different ways to start a new composition. This makes the start of the journey so exciting; the range of choices also makes it tough. Knowing the outcome in advance would make it a pretty dull journey, which is why almost the most important thing about your work is trying to surprise yourself at every turn!

In this section we will briefly consider some of the main points of departure for a new composition:

- Existing music
- Text
- Visual image
- The medium itself.

The use of *existing music* in a composition dates back centuries, and probably the most commonly used example would be an existing theme for the elaboration of a set of variations (Haydn, Mozart, Beethoven, Schubert, Schumann, Brahms) or an existing opera aria for a fantasy (Liszt). But in composition this century, our intention in using pre-existing material is either to transform it into something else completely, or to use it as quotation. So Stravinsky's transformation of the material of Chopin's *Ballade in F major Op 38* into the first movement of his *Serenade in A* (1925) skilfully concealed its source in a variety of ways. On the other hand, Ives, Luciano Berio (1925–2003) and Alfred Schnittke (1934–1998) used 'quotation' or 'collage' techniques extensively, Schnittke adopting the term 'polystylism' to describe his work.

A text or visual image has also served to get composers going for as long as one can remember. Aside from actually setting a text with voices(s), composers have also used words to shape or inflect an instrumental composition. South African composer Peter Klatzow's (b.1945) piano cycle *From the Poets* (1992) does just that, inspired by the work of D J Opperman and three others poets. He draws on the "structure and imagery… to create their musical counterparts".[4] Another approach to using text can be seen in the second movement of Luciano Berio's (1925–2003) huge orchestral work *Sinfonia* (1968). Here Berio pays tribute to assassinated American black consciousness leader King with the text 'O Martin Luther King', breaking the words up and using just the vowels and consonants.

Claude Debussy (1862–1918) will of course be remembered as the great 'impressionist' composer and his lavish orchestral canvasses such as *Trois Nocturnes* (1899) and *La Mer* (1903–05) as some of the most 'visual'

orchestral scores of the 20th century. Peter Klatzow has followed in his footsteps nearly a century later with his French-inspired *Three Paintings of Irma Stern* (2005). Louis Andriessen (b.1939), Morton Feldman and Kevin Volans have all taken painters and painting as points of departure in their compositions, but never in a descriptive way. The techniques, colours, textures and surface of painting are themselves reflected in the music.

The sound of the *medium* itself, whether individual instruments or voices (or orchestra or choir), has frequently given composers their initial impetus. Luciano Berio was inspired by the voice of the remarkable American soprano Cathy Berberian, who he also married, creating a number of works for her to perform. These include *Sequenza III* (1965), *Folk Songs* (1964) and *Recital I (for Cathy)* (1972), and because of Berberian's acting abilities these works also have a strong theatrical quality. By the same token György Ligeti (1923–2006) was so bowled over by the sound of violist Tabea Zimmermann's C-string that he explored this quality extensively in his six-movement *Sonata for Solo Viola* (1994).

While limitation is not necessarily a starting-point in itself, it can be an excellent catalyst for creativity: take American composer John Cage's beautiful song *The Wonderful Widow of 18 Springs* (1942) for voice and closed piano. Setting a short text by James Joyce, Cage calls for a folk-like (i.e. untrained) quality in the voice and for the piano to be played on the wooden case as a percussion instrument. The pitch material of the melody consists of only three(!) different notes (A, B and E, which are never transposed), and even without harmonic support from the piano, the three notes are sufficient to suggest or imply cadence and tonality. On the other hand, he creates a very fluid texture by using nothing shorter than a quaver in the voice part, and nothing longer than a dotted quaver in the percussive piano part along with quintuplets and septuplets.

In the next section you will find out how you can make your own compositions using existing music as your starting-point, or choosing instruments as your starting-point.

Stravinsky by Pablo Picasso

D. Fresh ways of looking at material

Here are some suggestions for new approaches to your compositional material.

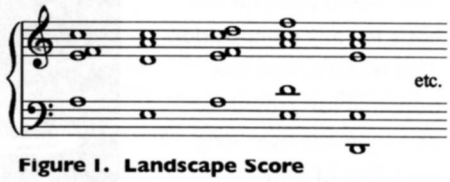


Figure 1. Landscape Score

1. Ransacking the masters

In this composition we are guided by Stravinsky who once said that "a good composer does not initiate, he steals," [5] implying that all existing music was there for the taking. The skilful composer's secret is making the material her or his own. As you will see, taking familiar materials and placing them in new environments can generate new compositions. We don't always have to sit at our desks with a blank sheet of paper waiting for inspiration 'from above'.

a. Take some of your favourite scores (or scores that are new to you). At the piano play through them from the first page, selecting 20, 30, 50, 100 chords as you go along. They should be taken in isolation and chosen for their particular sound, without any thought for what precedes or follows them. The most important consideration at this point is that their sound appeals to you. Cage talked about "giving up control so that sounds can be sounds". [6]

b. Copy them out on manuscript paper as semibreve chords on two staves.

c. Using only your ear as the determining factor, you can now start to experiment with connecting them in new ways. You may like the way some of them follow each other just as you wrote them down, but you will also want to try moving them around the page until you have a sequence that is really striking without connecting in conventional ways.

d. Some chords may be repeated, either immediately or at intervals; chord A may be followed by chord B at first, and later followed by chord C. The relationships can change more often to make longer pieces.

e. Allow each chord the opportunity to sustain for as long as it takes to die away or simply for as long as you want it to, and in so doing enjoy the sound properties of the chord, rather than getting anxious about where it might be going to.

f. When you have a 'landscape' score of chords written in semibreves (your score should start to look like Figure 1), you may want to arrange the composition for string quartet or wind instruments so that your peers can play it. You may need to conduct it so that all the attacks are played together (homophony) but you could also have them play it without a conductor and without synchronising the attacks (heterophony). If you do arrange it for other instruments, you must remember to check that the ranges of the instruments fit the musical lines. Any decent orchestration manual will have this information.

2. Choosing instruments is composition

For this composition you will need to make a number of lists: lists of instruments and combinations, lists of things the instruments can do, lists of pieces which feature those instruments or combinations and particular passages that you find striking, lists of possible textures, and so on.

a. Think about the kinds of instrumental combinations that have struck you and stayed with you in your recent listening and make a list. For example: string quartet; trombone and percussion duo; flute, viola and harp trio; 20 electric guitars; etc.

b. From memory make a list of the kind of sounds, special effects, and so on that those instruments or combinations can produce. Then consult an orchestration manual for further suggestions. For example: string quartet – harmonics, different kinds of *pizzicato*, *col legno* (with the wood of the bow), *con sordino* (with mute), *glissandi*, multiple stopping, etc.

c. Make a list of the pieces where you heard the instruments used in those particular ways and note the passages where they occurred. If you can find the scores and note the bar numbers, then all the better; otherwise, mark the spot by using the digital clock on your CD player/computer. For example: string quartet – extended passage of harmonics (Borodin: Quartet No 1: Trio); different kinds of *pizzicato* (Bartók: Quartet No 5: Adagio molto); *sul ponticello* (Bartók: Quartet No 5: Finale); *col legno* (Bartók: Quartet No 5: Finale); *con sordino* (Berg: Lyric Suite: *Allegro misterioso* – whole movement); *glissandi* (Alfred Schnittke: Quartet No 3: Andante); multiple stopping (Alfred Schnittke: Quartet No 3: Agitato); etc.

d. Make a list of all the possible textures you could create from everything you have listed in a, b and c. For example: viola melody *con sordino* and *pizzicato* accompaniment; *glissandi* across the range of all four instruments; a single melody played heterophonically by all instruments in harmonics; eight-part chords with each instrument double-stopped; etc. There is almost no limit to what you can imagine.

e. You should now have a wealth of sounds at your disposal, far more than you could ever use. Start selecting those that will go into your piece. I used the string quartet as an example, but maybe you only want to use wind instruments or specifically only double reeds (oboe, *cor anglais*, bassoon). Maybe you only want to use the instruments in unusual ways – what is known as 'extended techniques' – and never in conventional ways. Maybe you want to use only low sounds or only high sounds on those instruments, or maybe you want to use instruments in their less characteristic registers (low flute, high bassoon).

f. You are now more than halfway to finishing your new composition. But I haven't written a note yet, I hear you say. In answer to the question "How do I get my notes?" Feldman said "I can't hear a note unless I know its instrument. I can't hear a note to write it down unless I know immediately its register. I can't write a note unless I know its suggested shape in time.[7] Well you've chosen the instruments, you've found the sounds you like, the textures, the instrumental combinations, the registers. Now all you have to do is choose the notes.

g. You could present your composition as a graphic score (diagrams and pictures to represent sounds and textures), with the possibility of writing out a realisation in staff notation later on, or you could take the latter route straight away. Either is good!

E. Conclusion

You may find all this a bit radical. Whatever happened to the rules, I hear you say. Well having learnt so many rules in the past, you now have permission to break those rules. And what's more, you can even make your own. Take what you like, take what you need from say 'common practice harmony' – the chords, but not the functions – and make your own rules for connecting those chords and thus structuring your composition. What could be more creative?

Endnotes

1. The phrase came up – and stuck – during conversations with English composer Christopher Fox when we were planning a series of educational workshops in London in the early 1990s (my italics).
2. Nicholls, David. 1990. *American Experimental Music*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press: 134.
3. Feldman, Morton, ed. W. Zimmermann. 1985. *Morton Feldman Essays*. Cologne: Beginner Press: 118.
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What is 'African music'?

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Living in South Africa, many of us come into contact with something called 'African music' every day. But, what precisely is 'African music'? If Western art music composed by Beethoven is performed on African soil, is that African music? If South African artists perform hip hop, a type of musical culture originally from North America, is this African music? Obviously, this term incorporates a multitude of meanings and while we will never be able to define it completely, let's investigate some common misunderstandings about the concept of 'African music' and how we can avoid these stereotyped views in our everyday experiences and encounters with music. In her book, *South African Music: A Century of Traditions in Transformation,* Carol Muller outlines three common misconceptions about Africa and African music. This book is aimed at American students, but it is still helpful to begin this article with a look at stereotyped views which need to be rethought if we are to reach a greater understanding of what African music is.

Some misconceptions about African music

Misconception number 1:
'Africa is a country' (Muller 2004: xvii)

Africa is a vast continent with an extraordinary amount of peoples, languages, dialects and regions. Of course, it is certainly not one country, but instead many different states that were sometimes arbitrarily divided by colonial rulers rather than according to population groups and language similarities. Just as we can't reduce Africa to a single country, we also can't reduce African music to a single style or genre. Even though we can determine some very broad stylistic characteristics of African music (such as call and response patterns, cyclical forms, repetition, complex rhythms, integration of performance art forms such as drama, dance and poetry, etc.) there will always be exceptions to this rule and we need to approach each and every music example with a fresh outlook and an open mind.

Misconception number 2:
'Africa is a place and people without history' (Muller 2004: xviii)

This misconception itself has a long history. When explorers and colonisers 'discovered' Africa, they assumed that it was a completely new place with no history because it was not Europe (with its long history) and it was also not inhabited by Europeans. In fact, evidence exists that Africa was one of the first places to support human habitation and we have archaeological evidence to prove it.

Of course, in South Africa we have a long history, just as other countries in Africa have their own narratives of their pasts. In music especially, it is important to remain aware of the past in order to understand music as a complex societal phenomenon.

Misconception number 3:
'Africa is [only] a continent of drummers and complex drumming ensembles' (Muller 2004: xix)

If you are from South Africa or have heard any South African music, then you already know that this statement is untrue. In fact, southern African music (and South African music in particular) tends to be characterised by a predominance of singing with very little drumming. Traditionally, the musical bow has been a far more common instrument in this region. David Rycroft uses the following analogy to help us understand the problem of characterising all African music as drumming. He states, 'why set yourself up as an expert on European cookery when all you have tried is Dutch?' (Rycroft 1981: 209)

The stereotype that African music is only characterised by drumming and complex rhythms has serious consequences, as the Ghanaian researcher and professor at Harvard University, Kofi Agawu, has pointed out. He says that if we continue to think that African music is only rhythmic and not melodic, we risk two things (2003: 55–60).

First, this implies that African music has no melody.

Second, and related to this, because Western classical music emphasises melody and harmony over rhythm, this sets up an opposition between Western (beautiful, superior) melody and African (raw, primal) rhythm. One can see how destructive these types of thoughts are because they effectively remove African music from being taken seriously and studied seriously—it becomes an exotic type of music, something that is seen as different and by extension, inferior to European music.

So, the seemingly harmless misconception that African music is only comprised of drumming actually has quite detrimental consequences for the way we think about African music. We need to avoid adopting this approach and instead understand that there are many different types of African musics and although rhythm is often an important element, one can find staggeringly beautiful melodies and harmonies as well—all you need to do is listen for them.

I have an additional misconception to mention here before we move onto the next section:

Misconception number 4:
The only African music worth studying is 'pure' African music from traditional African society before the time of colonialism

We have a couple of misconceptions to tackle within this statement. First, does 'pure' African music, and for that matter 'traditional African society' exist? And, did they ever exist? While there are certainly traditional ways of living and making music which allow us to identify Zulu, Xhosa or Sotho music, for example, one must also remember that no human community exists completely isolated from other groups. Interactions like bartering, trading, wars, marriage to people from other districts and so on, always ensure that encounters between different peoples will take place. This in turn means that musical traditions will be shaped, influenced and even changed by these encounters. To name two examples of this process, the South African genre of *maskanda* is a combination of Zulu musical and vocal structures accompanied by the Western guitar; and *makwaya* is African choral music sung in four-part harmony that is typical of Western Christian hymns. It would be incredibly prejudiced for us to insist that these genres are unimportant merely because they contain elements of various musical traditions and therefore cannot be regarded as 'pure' African music.

So, by insisting (as some early researchers did) that the only African music worthy of study was the 'pure' 'untainted' music of 'traditional African society', I (together with many contemporary academics) suggest that we see music as a *living tradition*, one that is constantly changing and adapting to suit present circumstances. This allows us to explore the wealth of musical types on this continent without prejudice and above all, to appreciate their wonderful sounds and talented musicians.

To conclude this section, I leave you with two quotes which effectively summarize the necessity of avoiding this last misconception. 'African music was

Two *mbiras* from southern Africa which form part of the Harold and Eda Steafel musical instrument collection at Unisa.
Photograph by Marie Jorritsma.

and remains a music of encounters; in this lies its attractive power' (Manu Dibango, quoted in Muller 2004: xvii)

'Our ...tradition is a very modern tradition' (Nigerian *jùjú* bandleader, quoted in Waterman 1990: 2)

Exercises:

1. What did you understand by the term 'African music' before you read this section? Write down your definition in your notebook.
2. Has your understanding of the term changed in any way since reading this excerpt? Write your ideas down in a paragraph.
3. Which of these misconceptions (if any) have you been exposed to before and how did you react at the time? How would you react now, after having read this section of the article?

Musical examples from Zimbabwe and Mali

Now, let us take a closer look at two types of music from Africa and see how they manifest themselves as a living tradition that is constantly changing. First, many of you might be familiar with the instrument known as the *mbira* from Zimbabwe. Its full name is *mbira dza vadzima* and it is classified as a lamellophone, a type of instrument where the sound is produced by plucking flat metal strips attached to a wooden base. Performers often attach small bits of metal, such as bottle tops to the instrument so that these vibrate when the metal strips are played and thus add an attractive buzzing timbre to the overall sound. The *mbira* is often placed in a calabash for amplification. Usually, a *mbira* performance consists of two musical parts known as the *kushaura* (the lead part) and the *kutsinhira* (the following part). The *kushaura* part is usually played on the higher notes of the instrument with the *kutsinhira* part on the lower notes. While the *mbira* player concentrates on this, another performer usually shakes a rattle, known as a *hosho*, in time with the *kutsinhira* part. This results in an interlocking of rhythms. A singer may also be present and sometimes a second *mbira* player performs variations on the main melodic material of the piece and can also introduce further interlocking rhythmic patterns.

The most familiar context for a *mbira* performance is the spirit possession ceremony of the Shona people, known as the *bira*. At this important ceremony, the spirits of the ancestors are invited (through *mbira* playing and dancing) to visit the community by means of a spirit medium. Once the ancestral spirit has entered the body of the medium he or she can advise the community, point out incidents of wrongdoing and suggest how the community can protect itself. Thus, the *mbira* is vital to this ceremony and it is also used to provide entertainment for other social and community occasions.

With these important ancestral and community links, it might be difficult to imagine the *mbira* in any other performance context, but this did not discourage Thomas Mapfumo from introducing some aspects of the *mbira* tradition into his Western-style popular music band. Mapfumo began his career by singing cover songs of popular American and English hits with a few traditional Shona songs. But, as the liberation struggle in the 1960s and

1970s became stronger and stronger, his audiences became more interested in hearing versions of local, Zimbabwean music. Soon, he started introducing various changes. First, in the 1970s, he recorded versions of *mbira* songs with his band, consisting of drums, guitar and electric bass, and then he began introducing the sounds of the *mbira* performance into this band as well. For example, the keyboard would play the *kutsinhira* part, the electric guitar and bass guitar the *kushaura* part and the high-hat cymbal of the drum kit would perform the *hosho* percussion part. Finally, by the early 1990s, he had added *mbira* players as well as *hosho* players to the band which made the overall sound very recognizable to people who were familiar with the *mbira* songs and sound. Thomas Mapfumo called this style of music *chimurenga*, which means "struggle" and he has become a famous musician, both on this continent and overseas. Thus we can see how the classic *mbira* tradition is constantly changing due to its encounters with musicians who use it to suit the political and social circumstances in which they live at a particular time.

Our second type of music originates from West Africa, in particular from the Mande people of Mali. The Malian empire was established in the thirteenth century by Sunjarta Keita and ever since then, the history and oral traditions of the Mande people have been preserved and retold by generations of poet-musicians, known as *jalolu* (singular *jali*). *Jalolu* belong to a specialist class of people called *nyamalo* which is different to families of slave descent and freeborn families who are non-specialists. In other words, a person's occupation is determined by the type of family into which he/she is born.

Jalolu are trained using a system of apprenticeship. Young women are trained in singing and young boys are sent to relatives where they learn how to play one of the musical instruments associated with this tradition and also a huge amount of historical and ancestral information which they include in their performances. Once trained, performers work for a patron, usually kings in earlier times, but now they often perform at wedding ceremonies and other important occasions.

The key aspects of a *jali*'s performance consist of speech, instrumental playing and song. The speech element is highly valued and consists of wise sayings and advice along with narratives from Malian history. This is accompanied by instrumental performance, often on an indigenous instrument known as a *kora*. The *kora* is classified as a bridge harp because it has a high bridge on which the strings are attached and the strings themselves are positioned like those on a harp and not flat against the fingerboard like one sees on a violin, for example. The player makes the sound by plucking the strings and these are amplified by a calabash resonator which is built as part of the instrument. While text is spoken or sung, the jali will play a repeating accompanimental phrase known as a *kumbengo* and then play more complicated, difficult passages known as *birimintingo* in the periods where there is no text.

A well-known Malian musician who has gained international recognition is Salif Keita. He is a direct descendant of Sunjarta Keita, the founder of the Malian empire and as such, should not have become a musician because he did not belong to a historical family of musicians. Born in 1949, Salif Keita endured much isolation during his childhood because of his albinism, seen as a sign of bad luck in his culture. Despite this and the fact that his social background dictated that he should not have become a musician, he persevered and moved to the city of Bamako where he performed regularly at a local nightclub. After a brief period of playing in a hotel band, he joined the group known as *Les Ambassadeurs* which toured beyond Mali and gained a reputation outside of his home country. In the 1970s, Keita and *Les Ambassadeurs* left Mali because of increasing political instability and settled in Abidjan, the capital of the Ivory Coast. There they changed the name of their band to *Les Ambassadeurs Internationales*. By 1984, Keita had settled in Paris and since then he has become very popular on the world music scene and often tours internationally. Keita's music combines traditional elements from the *jali* culture (praise singing and *kora* playing) along with other West African, Latin American, European and Islamic influences and I recommend that you visit your nearest music shop in order to listen to some of his work.

Conclusion

If we refer back to the misconceptions about African music that I mentioned at the beginning of this article, we can see that the unique traits demonstrated by Zimbabwean *mbira* music and Malian *jali* performance show how important it is to study each and every type of music from Africa on its own terms. Each style has something different to reveal to us about the culture and society of the people and country from which it originates. This is why it is so important to explore African music with an open mind so that we can talk about the many types of music made on this continent in an informed and respectful manner.

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