

**Music as Social Action in Southern Africa**  
A Report on Native Music in South Africa, Botswana and Swaziland  
(Kenan Grant, 2005)

Patrick Kabanda  
School Organist and Instructor in Music  
Phillips Academy, Andover, Massachusetts  
United States of America

*Prepared for*

The Kenan Grant Committee, Phillips Academy  
and the General Public  
(Winter 2007)

## Contents

	<b>Acknowledgements</b> .....	i
<b>I.</b>	<b>Introduction</b> .....	1
<b>II.</b>	<b>Arrival</b> .....	2
	Research Travel	
<b>III.</b>	<b>Grahamstown</b> .....	2
	<b>International Library of African Music</b> .....	2
<b>IV.</b>	<b>Gaborone, Botswana</b> .....	3
	<b>Mr. Myizer G. Matlhaku</b> .....	4
<b>V.</b>	<b>Umtata</b> .....	4
	<b>St. John's Choir</b> .....	4
<b>VI.</b>	<b>Cape Town</b> .....	5
	Mr. Dizu Plaatjies.....	5
	The Musical Bow, <i>ugubhu</i> (Zulu)/ <i>uhadi</i> (Xhosa).....	5
	The Mouth Bow, <i>umrhubhe</i> .....	5
	University of Cape Town.....	6
	Professor Sylvia Bruinders.....	6
	Artscape.....	6
	Mr. Lungile Jacobs.....	6
<b>VII.</b>	<b>Durban</b> .....	7
	University of Kwazulu-Natal.....	7
	Mr. Sazi Dlamini.....	7
	Mr. Lindokuhle Mpungose.....	8
<b>VIII.</b>	<b>Swaziland</b> .....	8
	Mantenga Nature Reserve and Swazi Cultural Village.....	8
	Interviews	
<b>IX.</b>	<b>Johannesburg</b> .....	9
	Professor Mzilikazi Khumalo.....	9
	Mr. Richard Cock.....	14
<b>X.</b>	<b>Pretoria</b> .....	
	University of Pretoria.....	17
	Mr. Charles Mugerwa.....	17
<b>XI.</b>	<b>Final Thoughts</b> .....	18
<b>XII.</b>	<b>Appendix</b> .....	
	Map.....	20

## Acknowledgements

Many thanks to the musicians and people I met in southern Africa for their time and willingness to grant me interviews and discussions during this trip. Without them, this project would have not been viable. I am especially grateful to the Phillips Academy Kenan Grant Committee for approving and funding my proposal. At Phillips Academy, I would also like to thank the following people: the Dean of Faculty, Temba Maqubela, and his wife Vuyelwa Maqubela, who provided me with invaluable help to develop the proposal and plan this trip; the former Catholic Chaplain, Friar Francisco Nahoe, for his help in writing the proposal; the Chair of the Music Department, Ms. Elizabeth Aureden, for her advice on the proposal; Instructor in English (Summer Session) and Chapel Office Manager, Ms. Nancy Miller, for proofreading the article related to this project; Writer-in-Residence (English), Mr. William Lychack, for his editorial suggestions regarding portions of this report; the staff at Oliver Wendell Library, for their assistance with research related to this project; the staff at the Computer Center for their help with technical applications; and Theater and Dance Instructor, Mr. Mark Efinger, for assisting me with accommodation at Rhodes University (South Africa). I am thankful to Professor Jessica Davis, former Director of the Arts in Education Program at the Harvard Graduate School of Education, for reading through the final draft of my proposal. At the International Library of African music (Rhodes University), I am grateful to Mr. Elijah Madiba who recommended most of the musicians I met in South Africa. While on the trip, I received equally generous assistance, and I especially would like to thank the following people: Mr. David Slater, Director of Maitson in Botswana, for driving me from Grahamstown (South Africa) to Gaborone (Botswana), and for recommending musicians I met in Botswana; Linda Bukhosini and Bongani Tembe for accommodating me in Durban; Mr. Benny B. Otim for accommodating me in Gaborone; the Maqubela Family for accommodating me in Umtata; Mr. Thamsanqa Zungu for accommodation in Pretoria; Ms. Constance Tiny for guiding me in Gaborone; Mr. William Nyende for guiding me in Swaziland; and my sister, Ms. Hasfah Mirembe, for guiding me in Johannesburg. I am thankful to Mr. Joseph Senyonjo, and Ms. Susu Durst for their suggestions on writing this report. Professor Mzilikazi Khumalo and Mr. Maqubela assisted me with the Zulu names and phrases in this work, and I greatly appreciate their help. I am also grateful to Dr. Thomas A. Underwood, Preceptor in Expository Writing at Harvard, and Ms. Joanna L. Rutter, for criticism, editing, and proofreading of this report.

## Introduction

In April 2004, I had a wonderful opportunity to participate in South Africa's 10<sup>th</sup> Independence Anniversary in London as part of a collaboration with one British and two South African classical vocalists. The South African High Commission in the United Kingdom, which had invited me, not only showcased classical musicians, but also South African-based traditional and popular musicians. I had heard about South Africa's immense talent in voice from my South African schoolmates at Juilliard, who were themselves gifted singers, but it was at the London event that I truly realized the richness and extent of South Africa's treasury of talented singers. Speeches by notables such as Archbishop Desmond Tutu were uplifting, as were the music and the anecdotes about its role in South Africa's struggle for social justice. At one dinner, South Africa's High Commissioner to the United Kingdom, Her Excellency Ms. Lindiwe Mabuza, observed: "Artists are the true ambassadors of South Africa to the world." This was an inspiring statement to hear from a high-ranking diplomat, especially since the arts are taken for granted and struggle for adequate recognition in many societies.

Most Westerners equate African music with West African drumming. Nothing is wrong with that notion, but it constitutes a myopic view of the music of Africa, a continent with a vast range of diversity. The southern region of Africa, for example, has a rich vocal tradition—one that has frequently served as a vehicle for social action as evidenced in the popular movie about the apartheid struggle, *Amandla!*

When I joined the faculty at Phillips Academy in the fall of 2004, the newly appointed Dean of Faculty, Temba Maqubela, and his wife Vuyelwa Maqubela, suggested that I carry out a music research project in their native South Africa. I was eager to take on such a project, especially because the South African talent I had recently heard in London had piqued my interest in South Africa's music. I undertook this project with the help of the Maqubelas, Ms. Elizabeth Aureden, Chair of the Music Department, and Friar Francisco Nahoe, the former Catholic Chaplain. In the proposal subsequently approved by the Kenan Grant Committee at Phillips Academy, I wrote:

*Initially, my research interests will focus on whether, and to what extent, music from other regions of Africa has been incorporated into South African music, and whether or not that kind of musical exchange suggests a pedagogical model for curricular development. Further research would ask whether music united, divided or labeled people in South Africa during the liberation struggle, and whether particular African musical expressions contribute to the emergence of a postcolonial African identity. Lastly, I would explore what we at Phillips Academy can learn from the social role of music in South African culture, especially by integrating aspects of my research into the present curriculum.*

I was to spend a month (July 2005) in Cape Town, Durban, Grahamstown, and Johannesburg interviewing musicians, visiting music centers and collecting music and data. Later, I added Pretoria, Umtata, Gaborone (Botswana), and Mbabane (Swaziland) to my itinerary. My research trip evolved into a true journey of discovery—not only of music but also of the interrelationships among music, social action and political justice.

## Arrival

At dusk on July 1, 2005, my luggage delayed by South African Airways, I landed in East London, South Africa, only to encounter my first African winter with no jacket! My inability to converse in local languages further marked me as a stranger. “Where are you from?”<sup>1</sup> asked the white South African *kombi* (taxi) driver from the airport to my destination, the Grahamstown Festival.<sup>2</sup> I never realized that my answer—“I am a Ugandan but went to school in the United States and now work there”—would prove fertile ground for political debate on the road in rural Africa! “Ho...the United States? Why is the United States behaving like a bully? And why did you leave Uganda to go there? For me,” the driver continued, “someone who leaves their homeland to go work or live in other places is abandoning their culture, and if you look at it in a certain way, it is not ethical.” He added, “I love South Africa so much that I cannot imagine leaving my family, friends and the beauty here to go there. Moreover, the United States, like previous superpowers, is showing signs of decline; maybe one day the superpower will be China...South Africa...who knows?”<sup>3</sup> While I did not have answers to all those questions, I did say that although I currently live in the United States, I have Africa on my mind. Does one, I asked, have to be an African living in Africa to care about Africa?

This exchange (and it was only one instance of a topic that came up again and again during my travels) raised for me the question of what constitutes African identity. Does it mean physically living on the continent, or does it mean keeping Africa in one’s mind and memory—in other words, carrying African culture with one wherever one goes? Artists in particular have a special duty and privilege to transcend physical and political borders precisely because their role is to communicate among and bridge cultures. It also struck me that this taxi driver, like a number of other Africans I encountered, presumed that visitors from America were coming to impose their culture on Africa, while my trip actually involved a reversal of the usual power relations: I was there not to bring American influences to Africa but to bring African influences back to America.

## Grahamstown

It was a cold night when I arrived in Grahamstown (July 1), but the streets were bustling with music, dance, food and drink. I checked in to the dorm of Rhodes University where I stayed with a group of visiting Phillips Academy students who were there to present a dramatic version of Chinua Achebe’s novel *Things Fall Apart* at the Grahamstown Festival. My odyssey began when I explored this festival and visited the International Library of African Music (ILAM). Located at Rhodes University, ILAM houses the “largest archive of traditional African music south of the Sahara.”<sup>4</sup> In addition to books, audio and videos, ILAM boasts a rich collection of African instruments—drums, marimbas, *mbiras* (thumb pianos), horns, harps, flutes, musical bows, and so forth. ILAM also offers instruction in African music theory, methods of fieldwork and the making and

---

<sup>1</sup> This conversation has been edited.

<sup>2</sup> A prominent arts celebration in Grahamstown, South Africa that runs annually between the end of June and the beginning of July; officially known as the National Arts Festival.

<sup>3</sup> For an in-depth discussion of the current image of America in Africa, see the recent *New York Times* article by Jeffrey Gettleman, “Across Africa, A Sense that U.S. Power Isn’t So Super,” (*NYT*, December 24, 2006).

<sup>4</sup> International Library of African Music. <http://ilam.ru.ac.za/index.php> (accessed January 12, 2007).

repair of African instruments. ILAM's materials are used worldwide to teach African music. I acquired *Music from the Roadside 1*, a CD of music from across South Africa, and two volumes of marimba music scores. Mr. Elijah Madiba, the librarian who gave the tour, also gave me names of traditional musicians from whom I later gained invaluable information.

### **Gaborone, Botswana**

In Botswana, my original intent was to visit Maitisong,<sup>5</sup> a cultural center in the capital Gaborone. Fortunately, Maitisong's director, Mr. David Slater, was also at the Grahamstown Festival. He offered to drive me to Gaborone, and at dawn on July 6, we embarked on a twelve-hour journey. The roads were in good condition, and the scenery of the savannah was breathtaking: the landscape flat and undulating, the skies clear and blue. In the countryside, we could drive miles without seeing another person or automobile; as the hours passed, one could not help but appreciate the tranquil company of nature, but as we approached Gaborone, the wilderness dissolved into a city. On our arrival in the evening, Mr. Slater dropped me off at the Gaborone Sun, a posh hotel that I learned was the meeting place for the "who's who" of Botswana. At this hotel, I met my host, His Excellency Mr. Benny Otim, a Ugandan who was Chief of Mission for the United Nations High Commission for Refugees in Botswana. I became acquainted with Mr. Otim through his former law school classmate, Mr. Paul Rampell, an American mutual friend and parent of a former student at Phillips Academy. That evening, with Mr. Otim, I met Bishop Trevor Mwamba (the Anglican Bishop of Botswana), Botswana's Speaker of Parliament, and several ambassadors. Though my primary interest was to discuss music in Botswana, the conversation with these dignitaries quickly drifted to AIDS, a pandemic in this country, illustrating the interconnectedness of cultural and social issues in this context. I was told that while Botswana's economy is better than that of many other African countries, AIDS is seriously weakening her growth. "One out of three girls you see out there has AIDS," said one dignitary. Unfortunately, the backbone of many African homesteads, women and young people, are the chief prey of the disease. The government and private agencies recognize this crisis and have earnestly responded with efforts to curb the virus, but the challenge here, as in many other African countries, remains immense. Amidst such crises, music still functions as a vehicle for social harmony—and has even been used to promote awareness of AIDS and AIDS prevention. In some places, native music constitutes an especially strong thread of cohesion, as the postcolonial era has propelled many Africans to become inquisitive about and respectful of their own culture.

In a discussion about music, Bishop Mwamba, whom I had just met, expressed his concern about the shortage of African liturgical music. He told me that he hopes to found a music school that teaches both Western and African music. One afternoon, the Bishop gave me a tour of the cathedral situated in the heart of Gaborone and showed me the site of the proposed music school that, if established, will be a great cultural resource to the city due to its strategic location.

---

<sup>5</sup> "Maitisong" is "a *Setswana* word meaning the place where people gather in the evening to be entertained: traditionally the family hearth where the young gathered to hear the stories from the old: the place where the culture is shared and passed on." Maitisong. *Welcome to Maitisong*, <http://www.info.bw/~maitisong/> (accessed January 12, 2007).

At Maitisong, an already thriving cultural center, I was unable to attend any presentations because the performance season was over. But Mr. Slater, Maitisong's director, referred me to Mr. Myizer G. Matlhaku, a prominent musician in Botswana whom I met on July 8 at his studio in the suburbs of Gaborone. At first, Mr. Matlhaku was skeptical of my intentions in seeking out a meeting with him. After critically questioning me, however, he eventually opened up; he explained that some scholars from the West come to exploit his expertise and never assign him credit. Our talk revolved around the meaning of his band's name *Koitrans* and the theme of their CD, *Techatekanyo*.

*Koitrans*' meaning, according to the band, "stems from a time when we were all one human race...dancing together and living together." Their CD *Techatekanyo* (Equilibrium), "reflects the band's continual struggle towards a balance of ancient and modern; young and old; rich and poor; brown and green; man and woman; nature and technology..." "Our hope," the Kotrians assert, "is that with this album we can inspire people to return to that harmonious balance." To express that harmony, the band, composed of members from Botswana and South Africa, fuses various musical styles and uses traditional and Western instruments such as the double bass, *mbira*, drums and keyboards to accompany their songs, which draw their inspiration from the joys and trials of daily living.

## Umtata

Near Umtata lies the village of Qunu, where Nelson Mandela, one of the world's leading freedom fighters, was born. I was delighted to learn that "Nelson Mandela finds music very uplifting, and takes a keen interest not only in European classical music but also in African choral music and the many talents in South African music."<sup>6</sup> When I flew from Botswana to East London, South Africa (July 10), I reconnected with Mr. Maqubela who drove me to Umtata to hear the St. John's Parish Choir, an example of South Africa's vocal talent in his hometown. After the two-hour drive, during which I was moved by seeing Mandela's home, we were welcomed upon our arrival by Mr. Maqubela's family, with whom I stayed. For Mr. Maqubela and his family, St. John's is a place of powerful emotional resonance, standing adjacent to the high school where he was arrested as a teenager for participating in the struggle against apartheid.

St. John's Choir, a volunteer group of men and women, sing in a free-spirited and inviting manner. In a performance on the evening of July 11, they sang freedom songs and hymns in local languages. I was asked to provide accompaniment on a small electronic organ using Tonic Sol-fa,<sup>7</sup> which I was able to do thanks to my solfege training in Uganda. Ms. Nobubele Quvile, treasurer of the choir, said, "We use music [i.e., singing] to carry the message...fight inequalities, preach and educate kids. In freedom songs, using the same music, words can be changed to suit the occasion. For example, on Nelson Mandela's

---

<sup>6</sup> African National Congress. *Profile of Nelson Rolihlahla Mandela*, <http://www.anc.org.za/people/mandela.html> (accessed January 12, 2007).

<sup>7</sup> Tonic Sol-fa is a system of music notation using syllables, which in the major scale are: doh, ray, me, fah, soh, lah, te [ti], returning to doh, an octave higher. In the so-called "moveable doh" version of Tonic Sol-fa (solfege), the system most commonly used in southern Africa, "doh" depends on the key in which the piece of music is set, whereas in the "fixed doh" system "doh" is always C. Brian Blood, *Music Theory Online: Staff, Clefs & Pitch Notation*, <http://www.dolmetsch.com/musictheory1.htm> (accessed February 11, 2007).

birthday, the lyrics of, let's say, a harvest song, may be changed to 'There is no one like Nelson Mandela!' " Because of the missionary influence in South Africa, it is not easy to find native songs in many churches. When I asked for traditional music, I heard old Western hymn-tunes, which, after many years of seasoning, have now been Africanized!

## Cape Town

After visiting with the St. John's Parish Choir, Mr. Maqubela returned me to East London where I boarded a Greyhound bus for the six-hour trip to Cape Town. The trip provided another opportunity to appreciate the landscape, its brown and green vegetation covering flat land, valleys and mountainous terrain. One of the most beautiful cities in the world, Cape Town, also known as South Africa's "Mother City," is blessed with attractions such as the famous Table Mountain, lavish gardens of native plants and numerous white and golden sandy beaches. I rested at a hostel in Sea Point, a cosmopolitan suburb adjacent to the Atlantic Ocean. On the morning of July 14, I went to the next suburb, Langa, to meet Mr. Dizu Plaatjies, founder of *Amampondo*, a cherished native music group, and also director of the Dizu Kudu Horn Ensemble, which specializes in African music performance, history and education.

Mr. Plaatjies's exposure to peoples of the Cape has shaped his syncretic music style. He has arranged and transcribed many African songs and has fused elements of hip-hop with tongue clicks; his distinctive neo-traditional sound is evident on his albums. Mr. Plaatjies, who also makes native instruments, is regularly visited by artists from all over the world. No sooner had I arrived, for instance, than visitors from Indonesia showed up.

Mr. Plaatjies began our meeting by demonstrating what might be the principal South African native instrument, a musical bow, *ugubhu* (Zulu) or *uhadi* (Xhosa). This instrument is made from a small tree branch, which after careful treatment (through burning and drying) is bent to form a bow-shape. A resonator made from a gourd-fruit is then attached to the bow near the lower end. The string tied across the bow was originally made of twisted ox hair, but, as time went by, plastic threads and steel wire also began to be used. (The timbre of the sound would change according to the type of string used.) A light grass stick is used to pluck the string to produce the sound; while being played, the instrument is held in the player's left hand, with the resonator placed over the left side of the player's chest. Though men now play the *uhadi*, it was originally played by women.

Next, Mr. Plaatjies demonstrated the *umrhubhe* (mouth bow). The *umrhubhe*, an instrument he said was important to the history of the Xhosa people, is similar to the *uhadi* (musical bow) but smaller and has no resonator. Mr. Plaatjies is writing a book about the *umrhubhe* and has developed a personal playing style: he plucks instead of bowing the string and has also devised a peg for tuning when he plays with other pitch instruments such as the guitar. To produce the sound (harmonics), the branch part of the instrument is placed in the mouth; the player inhales while bowing or plucking the string, a process that makes this instrument extremely difficult to play. After Mr. Plaatjies described the instruments, I purchased a *uhadi* (musical bow) and shakers from him to bring back to Phillips Academy.



Mr. Plaatjies's aunt, Ms. Madosini, is an impeccable traditional musician from whom he says he learned most of his music. Since they are neighbors, we made a quick visit to her home. As soon as we entered her house, she picked up a mouth bow, tuned it, and played for us. She followed the mouth bow with melodious *uhadi* (musical bow) tunes. Mr. Plaatjies explained that in his culture, a guest has to be given something, and in this case music was her gift to her visitors.

As we left Ms. Madosini's home, Mr. Plaatjies expressed concern about the minimal promotion of native music. He said that native musicians normally sell their music (recordings) at home where it is not easy to tap into the market: "In the shops, it is difficult to find our music. ... You find pop, rock, jazz, and so on...but not our music." The use of the term "traditional song" by Western scholars also concerns Mr. Plaatjies: "Every song has a composer; there is a person who started a song and others followed. ... We need to give credit to the composer." In his view, "something should be called traditional when it is about a century old and we absolutely cannot find the composer." His comments raise interesting questions concerning our use of the term "traditional" and the accompanying issues of intellectual property rights, copyright, and the commodification of art, a common concept in the developed world which is also now penetrating African consciousness about artistic production.

In addition to teaching locally, Mr. Plaatjies conducts workshops abroad that have given him an international platform: "Some musicians do not like to share," he says, "but fusing and playing with other international musicians is a sign of sharing." Foreigners with an appreciation for their own folk traditions are often interested in what he does, and he noted that his popularity is greater abroad. "Now at home," he says, "few people show interest in native music. One thing I remember about apartheid was that it united blacks. Now everybody is all about money. This is killing the culture; the tradition is slowly dying out. The problem is due to the fact that many people believe that things coming from the West are the best. As Africans, if we allow this to happen," he concluded, "we are going nowhere."

From Langa, Mr. Plaatjies drove me to the University of Cape Town where I met with Ms. Sylvia Bruinders, Professor of African Music. Professor Bruinders, who studied in the United States, noted that many African music books are published outside of Africa. She recommended several books to me, including Veit Erlmann's *African Stars: Studies in Black South African Performance*.<sup>8</sup> Many African cultures preserve cultural practices (such as music making) by memory, but wars and pandemics such as AIDS interrupt this traditional mode of preservation. Without books, it is difficult to pass on this knowledge to foreigners. It would certainly seem that African universities, with their advantage of proximity, ought to invest heavily in research and publications on African arts and culture.

My final stop in Cape Town (July 16<sup>th</sup>) was at Artscape, a first-rate performing arts center. There, I met with Mr. Lungile Jacobs, director of Voices of Cape Town, an international touring vocal ensemble. A member of the Province Choral Music Association, Mr. Jacobs is a prolific composer; he gave me a copy of his recent mass.

---

<sup>8</sup> Veit Erlmann, *African Stars: Studies in Black South African Performance* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1991).

Mr. Jacobs, who has enjoyed lucrative choral tours, is also a business teacher who takes his choir to his business classes to demonstrate ideas. In the class, for instance, he asks the choir to perform with, let's say, a tenor, singing louder than the rest. When the audience points out that one member was louder, he says that the performance was unsuccessful due to lack of teamwork. He equates the choir director with the CEO of a company: "If the director does not give clear instructions and guidance what happens?" "Explicit communication skills," he concluded, "are integral to good leadership..." He finds that his students tend to remember such musical examples more easily than material given to them from business textbooks.

Mr. Jacobs's choral interests include African, jazz, gospel/spirituals and classical music. In a rehearsal I attended, his choir sang various traditional songs. I was asked to accompany some songs (notated in Tonic Sol-fa) on the piano and also to teach a Luganda song. I chose a lullaby, *Tulo tulo kwata omwana, botwomukwaate, ng'olimulogo*, literally meaning, "Sleep, sleep catch the baby, if you do not you will be a witch!" Like many African choirs, this choir could instinctively harmonize by ear, so I only had to teach the melody.

## **Durban**

After my learning and teaching experience at Artscape, on July 17, I headed off to Durban. Though the Greyhound bus ride was long—a little over twenty-two hours—it was a constant visual feast of ineffably lush and diverse natural beauty. The reddish sunrises and sunsets were truly celestial moments. Durban, a major urban center adjacent to the Indian Ocean, has beautiful subtropical greenery. Upon my arrival, Mr. Bongani Tembe, Chief Executive and Artistic Director of the KwaZulu-Natal Philharmonic, one of South Africa's major orchestras, received me. (Mr. Tembe and his wife Linda, whom I have known for a while, studied voice at Juilliard.)

My work in Durban began on July 19 when I had a meeting with Mr. Sazi Dlamini, a Ph.D. candidate in music at the University of KwaZulu-Natal. In addition to making instruments such as bows and flutes, he composes township jazz tunes and children's songs. "The real thing is on the streets," he said as he opened the door of his old VW Beetle for me to jump in for a ride to the market: "You will hear influences from all over...I hope that will help you understand what is happening locally with our music more than me telling you what I think." We visited a crowded street market where every music vendor had a loud boom box. While this is intended to lure customers, it can be a challenge to discern individual tunes. Nonetheless, I recognized some *Lingala* (Congolese music), reggae, blues, pop...suggesting the eclectic mix of musical styles that have penetrated South Africa.

From the market, we went to the University of KwaZulu-Natal where Mr. Dlamini demonstrated the *uhadi* (musical bow) and the flute. Mr. Dlamini's story of the *uhadi* differs from that of Mr. Plaatjies. He explained that this instrument used to be played by young girls: "They played when going to fetch water with pots balanced on their heads. The repertoire was wide because almost every girl who played composed a song according to her life experience. Some older women would persist in playing but

generally when a woman got married, she stopped playing.” After the *uhadi*, he improvised tunes on the flute, an instrument he said is normally played when herding cattle.

Next, at a music shop called Fields of Rhythm, I met with Mr. Lindokuhle Mpungose, lecturer and coordinator of African music modules at the University of KwaZulu-Natal. He said that to boost creativity, enthusiasm, and a sense of pride, several traditional music teachers encourage students to make their own instruments. Describing a Zulu drum, Mr. Mpungose said that it was mostly used to accompany dancing but now it is also present in churches, and is used in healing rituals. Mr. Mpungose, who embellishes drums with artistic carvings, noted that sometimes it is not easy to tell the origins of an instrument as they spread everywhere via trade. “When tourists buy an instrument here they often assume it is South African, but sometimes,” he said, “that is not the case.” On the one hand, this is attributable to the naïve tendency among some to think of the African continent as culturally uniform. But there is also the question of how particular musical instruments and styles are identified with particular places and ethnic groups. While there is ever-increasing cultural fluidity through trade and migration, there is still a strong sense of connection between peoples and their music in some, especially rural, areas. Mr. Mpungose highlights the tension between the traditionalist position, which values purity and stability, and the inevitable syncretism that results from increasing globalization. Even as he encourages a deeper awareness of instrument origins, he himself is contributing to their modification through his embellishment of traditional drums.

## Swaziland

According to the Swazi government website, “The history of the Great Kings of the Kingdom [Swaziland] is best told in [the] form of stories, songs, and praises.”<sup>9</sup> Swaziland, a tiny landlocked country bordered by South Africa and Mozambique, is one of the few surviving African monarchies today. The Swazis are especially proud of their cultural heritage, and I was keen to visit this Kingdom. The tragedy is that AIDS is here too, at a record high rate. In fewer than six hours from Durban (South Africa) I was in Swaziland, where I met my Ugandan friends William Nyende and Steven Kaleebu, both of whom teach piano there. The following day, William and Steven took me to the celebrated Mantenga Nature Reserve and Swazi Cultural Village. This popular tourist spot, nestled on the outskirts of the capital, Mbabane, offers daily tours and cultural performances for visitors.

We arrived in time for a dance in which women and men performed in colorful costumes; with shakers on their legs and sticks in their hands, they sang songs in a call-and-response style. Their dance is athletically demanding and dancers must be physically fit to perform. Asked about the meaning of this dance, one of the village elders, Mr. Paul G. Malindzisa, remarked that it was just for “casual entertainment.” If they put such zeal into an ordinary performance, however, one wonders what happens when they are performing for their King! At Mantenga, the display of artifacts, together with chicken, monkeys, cattle and goats loitering around the reed-fenced huts, transports the visitor back to ancient Swazi life.

---

<sup>9</sup> Swaziland Government. *Kings of Swaziland*, <http://www.gov.sz/> (accessed January 11, 2007).

## **Johannesburg**

### **Interview with Professor Mzilikazi Khumalo**

Johannesburg, one of Africa's largest cities, is home to various prominent artists. When I arrived there from Swaziland, my sister, Ms. Hasifa Mirembe, helped me navigate through the city where I met two distinguished South African musicians: Professor James Stephen Mzilikazi Khumalo,<sup>10</sup> and Mr. Richard Cock. Parts of this gigantic city are reminiscent of New York City. As one of the top financial districts in Africa, Johannesburg is home to myriad skyscrapers, and streets bustling with commerce of all sorts.

Among the various impressive buildings in this city is the Southern African Music Rights Organization (SAMRO) building. There, on July 27, I met with Professor Mzilikazi Khumalo, a notable South African composer who is Vice Chairman of both the Board of Trustees of the SAMRO Endowment for the National Arts and the SAMRO Board of Directors. In the following interview,<sup>11</sup> Professor Khumalo, one of the people who has shaped South Africa's choral music landscape, discussed his background in music, and topics such as his involvement with the Nation Building Initiative through choral festivals, the promotion of native music, and his composition *UShaka*.

**PK:** *How did you get involved in music?*

**MK:** I was lucky to be born of parents who were musical and were members of the Salvation Army, where music is very important. My mother had a very beautiful voice and loved indigenous music. My father, on the other hand, was mostly interested in Western music. The Salvation Army Brass Band accompanied hymn singing and was an important aspect of the church musically. Because band members played using staff notation, I learnt how to read staff notation from there at the age of 7 or 8.

One of the places where I grew up, Hlabisa, in the middle of Zulu land, had abundant fertile soil, valleys, mountains, rivers, and cattle; together with all that was the music. Music at the weddings was especially captivating; the bride and the groom each had their own choirs. I used to ask for permission from my parents to join a wedding choir near home. The competition between the two choirs was stiff but friendly. There was no adjudication, but, in the end, one choir would win. Every time a person did something impressive, for example, danced well or sang well, or if the conductor, called the *umbhidi*, did well, somebody from the audience would offer...maybe a flower...maybe a sweet...maybe a handkerchief...This is how people judged which choir had won.

As a small boy at school, I sang in all school choirs and got picked for tenor solos. I developed an understanding of Tonic Sol-fa because many choirs here used to—and still do—use that system. I acquired a good background, and the high school teacher used to

---

<sup>10</sup> Professor Emeritus at the University of Witwatersrand.

<sup>11</sup> All the interviews presented here have been edited. The original versions are documented on video footage.

ask me to direct the choir in his absence. Soon I organized a little group of mostly male voices that performed jazz in high school and in college. After college, I started teaching and also formed a teacher's choir. After a while, I lost interest in jazz and got into native music, formed the Black Orpheus Singers (8 male voices) and introduced them to native music. But the problem is that when missionaries came to South Africa, in order to win over blacks to Christianity, they thought that they had to remove blacks from a number of things; one of them was singing traditional music. They actually called the traditional music "pagan music"...and you know what pagan is! Our people began to look down on their own music. So when I started this choir, I wanted us to work out a scheme to promote native music. The smart idea here is that the members I recruited to form the Orpheus Singers were leading musicians in the area: conductors ...musicians running their own schools. In order to succeed we thought that we ought to embrace Western folk music as well. So when a concert was staged, the first half was Western folk music and the second half African folk music, and you know...that was a good scheme! Many people came to our concerts. Even more important was the fact that members of the Orpheus Singers got so attracted to traditional music that they started performing it with their own choirs. That added to the promotion of our music. Around that time black consciousness was developing in the country. Black people came to realize that they had to love and respect their own heritage. With all these things happening, people started to sing more traditional music in schools and community choirs. I was happy with that!

**PK:** *Did music play any role in bringing people together as the nation struggled to dismantle apartheid?*

**MK:** Just about the time I got started in promoting native music, Aggrey Klaaste, former editor of the *Sowetan*, an important paper in the country, was also starting the Nation Building Initiative. One of the most important aspects of this project was the Nation Building Massed Choir Festival, of which Richard Cock and myself were appointed to be music directors. Mr. Klaaste found a company to fund the project, and the first festival was held in 1989 with 20 choirs—we have kept it around that number with choirs from across the country.

The first festival was exciting to the people. They were pleased to hear their traditional songs in a concert. Thousands singing a folk song is so beautiful. I will never forget listening to some of the rare folk songs that were sung with a thousand voices. At that time, it became quite clear that somehow we've got to introduce black soloists—in 1989 there were hardly any black soloists—and have more of the traditional music arranged. Arranging makes this music accessible to other people and most importantly, it preserves the music. It is difficult to preserve songs that are only known by memory.

One of the typical traditional songs that I arranged and we sang at the concert was *Sangena*, a type of song you sing as you enter the stage...as you introduce yourself to the audience. *Sangena* means "we are entering." If you look at the music you see that *Sangena* is written in dual notation;<sup>12</sup> on top is the staff; at the bottom is Tonic Sol-fa. We did this because in Nation Building we really meant nation building! We meant the building together of all the groups that make up the South African nation. South Africa is

---

<sup>12</sup> A system of music notation in which both Tonic Sol-fa and staff notation appear in the same score (mostly used in choral music).

not made up of only blacks. It is made up of blacks, whites, coloreds and Indians... everybody. Now you see what I'm talking about. This was the first time, as far as I know, that a folk song like *Sangena* was arranged—in other words put down on paper for various good choirs to sing. People who couldn't learn by ear were able to read the music, and each member was given a copy to keep. A number of folk songs have now been arranged and this constitutes a great development in our music.

To introduce black soloists, we worked on developing solo parts for traditional songs. We decided that it doesn't help us if we have black soloists singing Western music only. They must sing their own music too. So in the songs, especially the ones I arranged, I made sure that there was a place for some solo work, so that a black soloist could get work to do. But also what was crucial, in 1990, was our decision to begin training and auditioning soloists. When people heard that we were going to train them to sing, they came to our program. What happened is unbelievable today. We have hundreds of good soloists; most of them came through this program, and now what do they do? ...They sing opera, and if you walk around town in the evening you will find all sorts of places where blacks sing opera. Personally...as a human being, as a black person, I have been happy with the Nation Building project. It has done good work for the music in this country! On the 10<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the project, in 1999, we recorded 18 of what we considered the best African songs we performed. Good Western songs are recorded; it is the black songs that were not recorded.

**PK:** *How has African instrumental music done in this country?*

**MK:** The problem is that the traditional instruments of this country are small. Most of them are meant to accompany one person; usually the same person who sings plays the instrument. So when we started singing serious traditional choral music, we debated. What are we going to do? What is going to become our accompaniment? Most of us have decided—and I'm one of those leading this particular sphere—that we are not going to be able to develop our music to the highest level if we don't accept the Western orchestra. So what we have done is to incorporate the Western orchestra. We have said that the Western orchestra must learn to play African Music!

**PK:** *What would you say about your compositions?*

**MK:** I have written only two major works. Just two. *Princess Magogo*, the first black opera in our country, and the epic cantata, *UShaka KaSenzangakhona*, a work about our great King Shaka, nation builder of the Zulus. Luckily, I got Dr. Chris James to orchestrate it for me. An American, Robert Maxym, who conducted the first performance, realized that *Ushaka* needed a little improvement. We worked on those improvements and scored the music in dual notation to enable all sorts of people to sing this music.

**PK:** *What was the inspiration...you said UShaka is about King Shaka. What was the source of the text?*

**MK:** As I remarked earlier, King Shaka was the builder of the Zulu nation. When Shaka became King, he ended up the leader of a strong army, but he had had an unfortunate life

as a boy. His father and mother were not married, and so he was not quite accepted in the Zulu tribe. He moved away with his mother and ended up at the Mthetwa tribe where he became a strong soldier. At Mthetwa, they realized that he was a brave boy, because...he, for instance, killed a lion on his own, and he killed a mad man who had murdered many people! He did many wondrous things! When he went back to the Zulu land after his father died, he formed a strong army that conquered other tribes, one after another. When a tribe was defeated it became part of the Zulu tribe. That's how he quickly built the Zulu nation. This is what moved me so much!

There are many false publications about Shaka. Even on TV there is a program about Shaka Zulu that really doesn't tell the truth about the King. I looked around for someone to write the lyrics of this cantata, and by God's grace I found him. I found Professor Themba Msimang, an author. The first book of his I saw was about the war between the British and the Zulus, and it is powerful. I was struck with the way he wrote. So struck! The next book I saw, *Buzani kuMkabayi*, is also a powerful book! I said: 'I'm going to hunt for this guy; I'm going to look for him.' A Zulu historian, professor Msimang, understands that there are many false things written about the King. He agreed to write the lyrics for me. After completing the text, I asked him to read the script for me onto a tape, which he kindly did. I loved languages in school, and in particular, English and Zulu. The great problem with languages is that sometimes we are not sure of the correct pronunciation of certain words, particularly the names of people. We know how to pronounce common words in our language, but *Ushaka* includes many names of the great Zulu kings and warriors. I knew it was going to be difficult for me to write those names without knowing the proper pronunciation. Because Zulu is a tonal language, if the person's name is "ta taa ta" and you write it as "tatata," it's just wrong.

**PK:** *How long did it take you to write Ushaka?*

**MK:** It took me about six months. I wrote the biggest chorus *Izibongo ZikaShaka (The Traditional Praises of King Shaka)* prior to writing other sections. ...I read the story of the assassination of Shaka, and you know... when he died he cursed those who were killing him, saying, "You think that you will rule when I'm dead...[but] the swallows"—referring to the whites—"are going to rule this country." [I] myself with a number of friends felt that we must apologize to the King for what happened...for his assassination, and then, we must try to persuade him to revoke his curse because it is a curse that we will never undo ourselves. So the last movement, *Siyashweleza Nodumehlezi (We Beg Your Pardon, Your Majesty)*, is an apology to the King. The entire piece took six months to complete.

**PK:** *How do you feel about the state of music education in South Africa?*

**MK:** I'm unhappy with the way the education system is handling music. Most of our public schools do not have music teachers. That makes me unhappy. A number of private schools teach music, but I really think that the correct thing to do is to give every child the opportunity to take music. When a child is so inclined, and has the ability, that child will pick up the music. Music is powerful as a national instrument. We choral musicians here often say to the world: "Our music is as good as—if not better than— music from other countries." That's the statement we make. Last year was wonderful for me because my

only two major works, *Ushaka* and *Princess Magogo*, were performed abroad under government funding. I was grateful that we took *Ushaka* on a tour of Europe as part of the celebration of the 10th Anniversary of our freedom. We sang in a few cities that included Rome, Vienna, Budapest, Madrid, Geneva, Zurich, Brussels and Athens. *Princess Magogo*, was performed in America (Chicago) also as part of the anniversary. This music got high praise from Europeans and Americans. There is such power in our music but what is worrying is that it is not properly developed. If we don't put music in schools...isn't that appalling?

**PK:** *How has music from other places penetrated South Africa?*

**MK:** As I said, initially one of the problems we had at the beginning was that missionaries discouraged people from singing their traditional music. So, at first, our people were just doing Western music. Even when our composers wrote, they wrote in a hymnal style... a Western style with words being the only thing African. Their music was just like hymns that came from Europe with words in native languages. Quite a number of us realized that our own music was not developed. The first thing we did—and are still doing—is to arrange our music. But when arranging you find that somehow you can't afford to ignore good ideas that are not present in your own music. Because otherwise how is the music going to develop? So we started using a number of scales that were not present in African music. We started using a number of African harmonies together and with forms which are not typical in our music. The music itself has to grow. Development means that you look around and say: What is good in that? ... You take it and include it in your music. What's good there? ... You take it and include it in your music. This way, the music has got a native flavor with a sprinkling of many other things. I think that's how things grow. In a place like this where we have Africans, Asians, Whites ... you pick from everywhere anything that will help you to grow.

**PK:** *How is music contributing to economic or community development in South Africa?*

**MK:** Popular music (pop, jazz, *umbhaqanga*<sup>13</sup>) is doing particularly well. Even *isicathamiya*,<sup>14</sup> the type of traditional music sung by Ladysmith Black Mambazo, is making lots of money; they sing beautifully and their music is accepted all over the world. The music that has taken longer to be accepted is choral music...serious choral

---

<sup>13</sup> *Umbhaqanga* or *mbaqanga* – “From the Zulu word for African maize bread... Sometimes called ‘township jive.’ A [type of] dance music [with roots in Zulu traditional music, *mbaqanga*] evolved in South African townships and became broadly popular in the '60s and '70s. Vocal groups such as the Manhattan Brothers, the Skylarks, and Malathini & the Mahotella Queens popularized their vocal version of the *mbaqanga* sound. Usually includes guitars and bass, often brass, atop cascading rhythms. *Mbaqanga* remains a dominant force in the music of South Africa today, incorporated into both jazz forms and popular music.” All About Jazz. *South African Jazz: Glossary*, <http://www.allaboutjazz.com/php/article.php?id=1954>

(accessed February 11, 2007).

<sup>14</sup> “*Isicathamiya* (Is-cot-a-me-ya)...was born in the mines of South Africa. Black workers were taken by rail to work far away from their homes and their families. Poorly housed and paid worse, they would entertain themselves, after a six-day week, by singing songs into the wee hours every Sunday morning. ...”

Ladysmith Black Mambazo. *Ladysmith Bio*, <http://www.mambazo.com/biography.html>

(accessed January 19, 2007).



music. It is sometimes called *umculo wamakhwaya*...music of the choirs. That has taken long to be established, but it is also coming along. For instance, what did we take on tour to Europe? The choir. In fact, it was a big chorus of 80. When we went to America, we took a chorus of 34. I mean, people are beginning to make a bit of money out of choral music. Some of the good choirs—and we do have a few good choirs—work with groups that have evening shows all over the place. So I think the economic strength of music is promising.

*PK: Is there anything you would like to add in particular for the American audience?*

*MK:* I would like to share a small thing with Americans. I had the pleasure of working with them when my opera *Princess Magogo* was sung in Chicago at the opening of the Ravinia Festival, one of the most important American festivals. My colleagues and I were happy that people accepted this opera.

Professor Benjamin Locke, the choral director at Kenyon College, a small college in Ohio, is familiar with black music. When he came to South Africa, he was referred to me. I happened to have some of the music he wanted, and when he returned to Kenyon College, he taught that music to his students. I received a call from him inviting me for a three-week stay at Kenyon College as a visiting artist, and I could bring an assistant. I chose a young man, a great tenor soloist, who is versed in traditional music.

When we arrived at Kenyon College in April 2005, we were amazed: Professor Locke's chamber choir had already learned a number of South African songs in Zulu, Xhosa and Tsonga. It was unbelievable! All they wanted me to do was to polish the songs before they put on a concert. I did that, and of course the beautiful part was that the tenor I brought sang a few traditional songs with powerful tenor solos. The Americans were so pleased. I said: 'I'm glad that our music is being accepted so beautifully all over the world.' I have visited many parts of the world, and have been to America many times. I have been particularly happy about the wider acceptance of our music. When I retired as professor of African languages and linguistics, I dedicated myself completely to music. I thanked God. I said: 'He has actually given me a second life,' and it is this second life that I'm sharing with you.

\* \* \*

A genial person, Professor Khumalo gave me three invaluable musical items from productions in which he was involved: 1) a booklet about *Princess Magogo* and a CD of songs about her, 2) a music score of the 1997 Massed Choir Festival, and 3) a CD entitled *Nation Building: Celebrating 10 Years in Music*.

### **Interview with Mr. Richard Cock**

Following my meeting with Professor Khumalo, I met with Mr. Richard Cock, a prominent South African musician of European descent. Formerly an organist, Mr. Cock's various musical activities now include conducting the Johannesburg Festival Orchestra; on his office walls hang photos of his concerts (attended by some 3000 people)

and of music celebrities such as Yvonne Chaka Chaka<sup>15</sup> with whom he has collaborated. What follows is an interview in which Mr. Cock discussed working with Professor Khumalo on the Nation Building Initiative via a choral festival, and other topics such as music education in township schools, music and AIDS awareness, and the future of music in South Africa:

**PK:** *You have worked with Professor Khumalo on the Nation Building Initiative—how did you find that experience?*

**RC:** As you heard from Professor Khumalo, the idea of the festival came from Aggrey Klaaste, former editor of the *Sowetan* newspaper. This was in 1989 when South Africa was in a troubled state. The country was burning. Aggrey Klaaste said we must get together to help unite the nation, bring people together, develop bonds among people and rebuild structures, which had been destroyed by apartheid. I spoke to Professor Khumalo and together, after meeting with Aggrey Klaaste, we decided to put this festival together in order to help realize his dream.

The first year we had 20 choirs, and it's remained more or less 20 choirs. The concert is a mixture of Western and African music. In recent years, we have had more African music composed with orchestra, and we have also—this has been Professor Khumalo's work—developed a number of black soloists. Many of these soloists like to do opera so we have worked on operatic arias and opera music for the choirs. The festival is a popular event today on the social and the musical calendars. Aggrey Klaaste's dream has been realized: bringing people together and showing what can be done when you have a festival rather than a competition. There were many competitions, but I have never liked them because you always have one winner and lots of losers. In a festival everyone is winner! That's what I prefer.

Aggrey Klaaste had a lot of opposition to start with from members of his staff who felt that we shouldn't be celebrating when the nation was in such trouble, and that we shouldn't be wasting our resources and our time on something like that. They felt in a way that this was a slightly frivolous effort. But he was courageous. His vision was nation building, and in fact the choral festival was only one part of it. Community Reverence, Black Business Forum: all these things came out of the Nation Building project and a lot of it was Aggrey Klaaste's ideas... he drove it. Unfortunately, he died last year, ...but he certainly lived long enough to see the fruits of his labors.

**PK:** *Professor Khumalo talked about music and education; what would you have to say about this?*

**RC:** Musical education certainly in the township schools...well, what were formerly black schools, is not very good. The department is trying to do something about that, but it is going to be a long process. One of the difficulties is that Tonic Sol-fa, used in most choral situations, can't be easily transferred to instrumental learning. But instrumental

---

<sup>15</sup> "Throughout her illustrious career, Yvonne has met people like [former] President Nelson Mandela, the Queen of England and US talk show host Oprah Winfrey...Yvonne's legacy as 'Princess of Africa' is a testament to her connection to everyday people as well as royalty. ...[Her] popularity and level of accomplishment has already insured her legacy as one of the greatest [music] stars to illuminate the African continent." Princess of Africa. *Biography*, <http://www.princessofafrica.co.za/> (accessed January 12, 2007).

teaching is gradually growing; now there are many projects where instruments are taught. I'm involved in a couple of those, and I think that is developing quite fast. But generally music teaching in schools is still lagging way behind.

**PK:** *Given that AIDS is such a big problem, do you see a major role for music in promoting AIDS awareness?*

**RC:** There are strong messages about AIDS awareness sent through the music. There is a campaign of moral regeneration, which uses choral music. So the answer is yes: music is being used to a certain extent. It may not be enough, but it is certainly being used; the recent 46664<sup>16</sup> concerts of Nelson Mandela are about AIDS awareness.

**PK:** *In what ways are music leaders such as yourself improving or developing African music?*

**RC:** When the Massed Choir Festival began, there was very little African choral music notated. Most of it had been passed on by word of mouth, or by terrible third or fourth generation photocopies. Now, after fifteen years, we've got a collection of books and if you want—we have got a catalog—I will show you a resource of choral music. Each year—for example, this year we had ten pieces in a program—there are new pieces printed. We have developed a system of dual notation: Tonic Sol-fa and staff notation together. If you noticed in the earlier books Tonic Sol-fa and staff notation were separate. Dual notation has been one of the great developments from the Massed Choir Festival. Also, we have commissioned prominent composers. This has given them work and made them write more logically.... Now there is a real purpose for writing and composers are learning to orchestrate. These are some of the good things that have come out of the Massed Choir Festival.

**PK:** *As regards African instruments, what would you say about South African instruments?*

**RC:** I'm not much involved in African instrument orchestras, but there are several people who are involved. I don't know whether you've spoken to George Mxadana; he is forming an African instrument orchestra. We had an African instrument orchestra visit here from Ghana. They were a big hit. I think as a result of that George would like to put together an African orchestra here. South African music amongst the black population has mainly been choral music. Instrumental music has only started recently. There are lots of steel drum and *djembe* drum ensembles. That is all recent.

**PK:** *What is the future of music in this country?*

**RC:** I think the future of the music here is good. There are lots of initiatives coming up. There are lots of instrumentalists coming up, and we are seeing it already in the professional orchestras. There is small core of black players now, but it is going to grow

---

<sup>16</sup> “46664 is Nelson Mandela’s campaign to help raise Global awareness of AIDS/HIV. 46664...aims to highlight the emergency of AIDS/HIV through unique live events and music related initiatives. ... 46664 was...[Mandela’s] prison number when he was held in captivity for eighteen years on Robben Island in Cape Town.” Nelson Mandela Foundation. 46664, <http://46664.tiscali.com/> (accessed January 12, 2007).

rapidly in the next few years. The vision of an all black orchestra is actually not far away. We can probably put one together now—a black orchestra of young people in South Africa. That’s a very good sign!

***PK:** What do you think American students or Americans can learn from the music experiences in South Africa?*

**RC:** I don’t know what Americans can learn from us. I think the problems of music are the same all over the world. One of the problems we face here in classical music is that a lot of young black musicians want to go to jazz. They don’t want to go to classical music or do both. I don’t mind people playing jazz at all. That’s good. But we also need to have players in our classical orchestras, as teachers and so on. Everyone thinks that being in music is quite glamorous because of jazz orchestras, but actually, most of it is just jolly hard work!

### **Pretoria**

My tour concluded in Pretoria, South Africa’s capital, where I met with Mr. Charles Mugerwa, a Ugandan student in African music at the University of Pretoria, and Mr. Thamsanqa Zungu, a Juilliard voice alumnus who hosted me. Mr. Zungu now teaches voice at Tshwane University of Technology and at the University of Pretoria. At Tshwane on July 28, Mr. Zungu and I attended an impressive choir rehearsal and visited the library, where I ran into students incorporating technology into their artistic work. Next, we visited the University of Pretoria, where Mr. Mugerwa, a teaching assistant in African music, discussed some aspects of the school’s African Music Program and their methods of teaching:

***PK** Could you briefly describe the program in African Music at this university?*

**CM:** When we talk of African music here, we mean vocal, instrumental, poetry, and folklore.... As regards instruments, our collection comes from all over Africa. The marimba, for instance, is popular in South Africa, but it originated in Zimbabwe. Due to its popularity, the instrument has been modified, and now it is also produced in a factory. Drumming is not a common practice here, but we are trying to integrate and push for that as a way of improving music education because the drum is important: it equips learners with a sense of rhythm. Most of our drums come from West Africa, and I have a project where we visit different townships to teach drumming using West African drums. Some schools we work with have started to integrate drumming into their musical practice. When you visit there now, you find that they play drums and marimbas together with singing and dancing. Also, they have integrated drums with some of the Western instruments like the recorder and the piano. We also have steel drums on which Western scales can be played; we usually play them together with the marimbas and drums to make the music rich and interesting.

***PK:** Could you talk about your methods of teaching?*

**CM:** The new curriculum of South Africa encourages the integration of African music in schools, but we are still far from reaching productive goals. For a long time, music here

has been purely Western. When you talk of music, it means learning the piano, cello—purely Western. Also, we realize that music has been left for rich families because it is expensive; the poor can't afford it. But we have said: "Look, if we let the trend continue this way, we will miss out on good musicians—I mean kids who would love to become musicians but cannot afford lessons." One of the ideas we've developed is to encourage students to make their own instruments like drums. That way, they don't have to spend money on buying an instrument.

## **Final Thoughts**

Though it was impossible to learn everything I wanted to learn about the music of southern Africa in a short visit, I grasped a few things about the region's musical practices and their impact on the political and social ambiance of southern Africa; I also brought back some valuable materials.<sup>17</sup>

The seamless integration of singing into daily life in southern Africa is something to learn from. In much of American society, singing (and playing instruments) has been largely delegated to professionals. For instance, with some exceptions, the church, where a vast number of Americans regularly congregate, is an example of the segregation of music in American culture. American churches with tremendous resources often hire professional choirs. In others the choir will be made up of only select congregants who are deemed "talented" enough to qualify. Cries such as, "I have a bad voice and cannot join the choir," prevail. Americans feel that they need to be trained musicians to sing whereas in cultures like that of southern Africa, singing is taken for granted as part of daily life. The African proverb, "If you can talk you can sing; if you can walk you can dance," expresses this total integration of music into everyone's life.

A few years ago, while attending a politics and ethics lecture at the Carnegie Council in New York City, I casually pointed out to a member of the American Political Science Association, Professor Cecil W. Boodey, that music was a great way to unite people. Professor Boodey retorted: "Yes, but we cannot underestimate the fact that it also divides people." His comment was not news to me. Musical styles, tastes and interpretations can divide people. For example, hip-hop is regarded as offensive or distasteful to certain segments of society; earlier, rock and roll or jazz were regarded by some as "sinful" or as exerting a bad influence over young people. Music can divide people by class or ethnicity or generation. But generally speaking, music has, in my view, more power to unite than to divide. South Africa's Massed Choir Festival, which brings together people of all races, was created to help unite a nation ripped apart by apartheid; it is among the many fine examples of how music can unite people.

One of my tasks on this trip was to discover a pedagogical model for curriculum development. As societies become increasingly multicultural, understanding and learning from different cultures is inevitable. Yet it still remains difficult to break cultural barriers. Obviously, creating a course in one culture using a dissimilar cultural paradigm presents

---

<sup>17</sup> I hope the materials I brought back, CDs, choral and marimba music scores, and instruments such as the mouth bow, musical bow, thumb piano, shakers, and xylophones will be useful resources to Phillips Academy's Music Department and to outside scholars. Some choral pieces I brought have already been performed at Phillips Academy, and hopefully more of that music will be performed.

challenges. But in his book, *Out of Our Minds: Learning to be Creative*, Sir Ken Robinson urges the following: “Creativity often comes about by making unusual connections, seeing analogies, identifying relationships between ideas and processes that were previously not related. This is precisely why some of the most effective creative teams are interdisciplinary.”<sup>18</sup> While the relationships among various disciplines may not be obvious, with creativity at work, unforeseen connections can emerge. What can, for example, an American student in physics or the social sciences learn from a South African *uhadi* (musical bow) maker? New ideas can emerge from cultural dissonances as much as if not more than from cultural harmonies. Musical practices in South Africa, such as singing, orchestrating African music for Western instruments, and encouraging students to make their own instruments, are all activities that are not only musical in nature but also vitally touch on fields such as social justice, economics, human development and history. In terms of pedagogy, an interdisciplinary approach may help engender courses that would incorporate the music of southern Africa into apparently unrelated subjects such as science, religion, global studies, history, and economics. The topic of intellectual property, to take one example, could serve as a nexus upon which the disparate disciplines of law, economics, history and global studies might converge with art in developing economies.

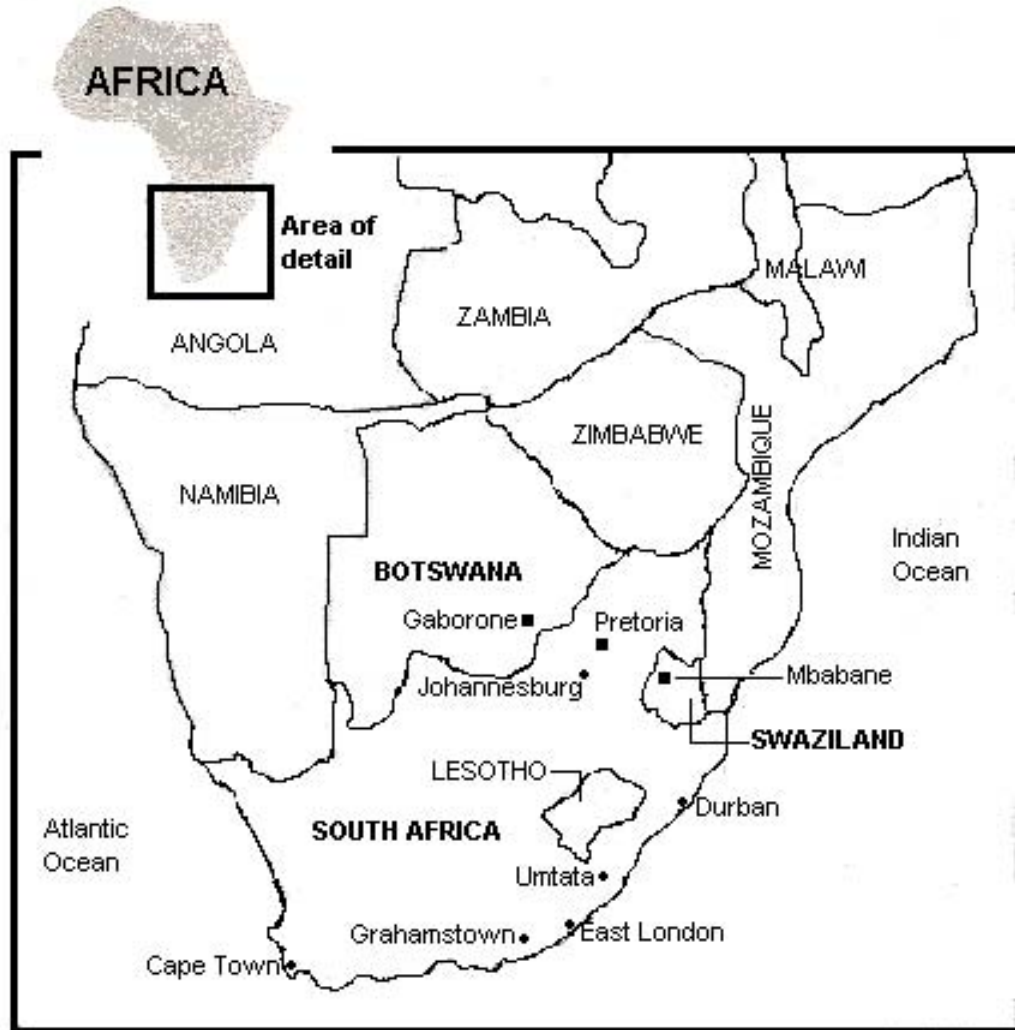
Moreover, African music and other non-Western arts provide one example of how introducing a completely unfamiliar set of ideas into an existing paradigm can lead to the discovery of novel interdisciplinary relationships, producing new insights much as a chemical catalyst may produce new compounds. Admittedly, there are already many instances of interdisciplinary approaches in academia, such as courses in music and language or music and math. However, incorporating a different culture in such a context, using the music of Africa for example, would provide an opportunity to emancipate ourselves even further from existing conceptual constraints. On my trip to southern Africa, I witnessed first hand the principle observed by Sir Ken Robinson: “Creativity often comes about by making unusual connections. ...”

---

<sup>18</sup> Ken Robinson, *Out of Our Minds: Learning to be Creative* (West Sussex: Capstone Publishing Limited, 2001), 188.

## Appendix

### Map of Southern Africa



Source: Adapted from *Wall Street Journal*, December 20, 2006