

Zimbabwe Mbira Music on an International Stage: Chartwell Dutiro's Life in Music, Edited by Chartwell Dutiro and Keith Howard, SOAS Musicology Series, Ashgate: London. 2007, 98 pages, with CD: "Taanerimwe", Chartwell Dutiro with Spirit Talk Mbira Live at Gateway (Gateway, SOAS Cat.No. SOASIS – 03), Hardbound: ISBN-13: 978-0-7546-5799-6.

The international mbira diaspora has rooted in the USA. This book shows that the UK also has its band of enthusiastic converts to the cause of mbira. In the best A. M. Jones tradition (*Studies in African Music*) it focuses on one African musician who has made a career for himself, first with Thomas Mapfumo's band, then independently in the UK. Nine authors in eight chapters cover in relevant detail and uneven depth: biography, history, politics, spirituality, creativity, music structure, notation, and lyrics, edited by Dutiro himself with Keith Howard, head of the music department at SOAS. They combine to present a reasonably complete and fair picture of the man, his music, the part they both play in the UK today, and the response they evoke in some young English, German and American musicians and ethnomusicologists.

All the contributors share the earnestness and concern to be politically correct that is to be found in African studies outside Africa. Maybe we in Africa have a little more fun! I have the impression that most of the writers depend more on indirect sources for evidence from Zimbabwe than on their own experience, which gives parts of the book something of the tone of a student assignment. The two chapters on musical structure and notation are the least developed. Some thoughts...

The *hosho* rattle beat typical of the Zezuru mbira is never mentioned, but is reduced to two beats (example below).



One result of this is that the writer misses the chance of explaining the duplet dance rhythm in Notation 4 (p. 45) as deriving directly from the *hosho* pattern:



Although he adds, at the end of his chapter, "I now know that, however much I think I know about mbira music, there are still things to encounter that change the way to view it" (p. 47). This is a problem that rings a bell with me and probably everyone who studies mbira. I think he could have gone much deeper into the rhythmic structure.

Two-note Shona harmony is amplified by the writer into full three-note Western major and minor triads, for example the progression of "Nhemamusasa" is given as D F#mi Bmi, D G Bmi, Emi G Bmi, D F#mi A. I suspect this means that the writer

1. genuinely hears and interprets a two-note chord as a triad;
2. plays it as such on Western instruments; and
3. considers the issue of original mbira tuning preferences unimportant.

To take point 3 first, Dutiro has played in a group with Western instruments for such a long time that perhaps by now he is tuning his mbira practically Western. He is not alone in this – I have watched mbira tuning in Zimbabwe, especially on the mbira *dza vadzimu*, inexorably westernizing as players are bombarded with little else but Western music in the media. As one example, the writer discusses how different a certain mbira sounds if one of the notes is tuned G natural or G#; he does not consider the possibility that it is neither, and that it is his ear that forces it one way or the other.

Regarding point 1, I think it is true to say that two notes in harmony, when tuned Western (or to the harmonic series, i.e. their frequencies are in simple arithmetical relationships with each other such as fifths, fourths and thirds) seem to demand, in a Western ear, a third note to complete a triad; and on the other hand that two notes tuned to other typical African intervals (for example those in the heptatonic, near equi-spaced tunings much found in the Zambezi region which are not based on the harmonics of a string) do not necessarily do so to *anybody's* ear. They don't to the traditional player who is unexposed to the blanket noise of the media. I grant that the notion of a triad is not entirely absent in the Zambezi region, but the consonant sound of the third, fundamental in Western harmony, is consistently avoided in favor of the fourths and fifths. In fact, a commonplace is to find a third is a step to the next chord in the progression.

Regarding point 2, whereas Western musicians often hear and accompany their versions of mbira music, and also of finger-style guitar music, in block triads, Shona guitar and keyboard players hardly ever do, but construct single-note mbira-esque melodic patterns using large intervals which better preserve the individuality of each song.

Chapter 6 discusses notation, presenting several alternative methods that have been proposed. Here there is a sharp dichotomy. Some are tablatures, i.e. they show you what *key* to pluck when; and some are sound pictures, i.e. they tell you what *sound* to make when. They all more-or-less work, but the crucial point between the two approaches is that the second one *does both*. It shows you what key to pluck (by referring to the respective chart, whether Pott's or mine) and also the sound it gives. For this reason, the second is incomparably superior. With sufficient experience one can read the music and hear it, appreciate it, understand it, analyze it, in one's head, exactly as does anyone in the wider world of music. It also cultivates a feel for the relationship between the two hands, it clarifies octaves and other intervals, it helps with variations, and it makes the chordal progressions visible. The two systems can look similar on the page, but only one does it all at once. What more need be said?

Another disadvantage of tablature is that not all mbiras have the same layout or number of keys. This approach suffers because any difference in the layout from one mbira to another needs a change in the numbering. The writer of this chapter argues nevertheless for the "LR" tablature system, drawn from Berliner's book "The Soul of

Mbira”, and the next chapter (Chapter 7) presents transcriptions in this system of the basic mbira parts of all ten songs on the CD. This alone is a useful source for learners, along with the six transcriptions in the previous two chapters that can be painstakingly pieced together from the various notation styles.

I should point out that the pictorial notation ascribed to me on p. 54 is not from my booklet “How to play the mbira (dza vadzimu)” but is a rationalization of an animation in one of my mbira films, “The technique of the mbira dza vadzimu”, which was not intended to be a notation system at all.

The book does a good job of covering important aspects of Dutiro’s mbira world in England. Perhaps it is the world’s good luck that conditions in Zimbabwe have driven so many great musicians out, along with the millions of economic refugees who are all waiting for sanity to return in their homeland.

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The Flamboyant Rooster and other Tshivenda Song Stories, Edited by Jaco Kruger and Ina le Roux, Illustrated by Deon Coetzer, School of Music, North-West University, Potchefstroom: South Africa. 149 pages, ISBN: Will supply.

Salungano! Salungano – Here comes a story!

Jaco Kruger and Ina le Roux present a beautifully illustrated collection of Tshivenda song stories (*Ngano*) in a compilation of twenty-seven translated oral narratives from Venda living in the mountainous Soutpansberg region of South Africa. The *Ngano* are not only entertaining tales which conjure up images of grandmothers and children gathered around evening fires, but are also ancient artistic maps of the human condition that provide a privileged view of human relationships in an African society. Often using animals as metaphoric characters, these stories are reminiscent of *The Just So Stories* by Rudyard Kipling and are a delightful vehicle for imparting important social themes and moral lessons.

Having attended an *Ngano* storytelling performance facilitated by Jaco Kruger at a conference at North-West University in 2006, I witnessed the warmth and lyricism of the song-stories and was concerned about how the translation into an English, written form would affect the overall feel. I should not have worried however, as these issues are comprehensively and sensitively dealt with by Kruger and le Roux. *The Flamboyant Rooster* includes translation and presentation descriptions (p. 18) as well as a performance and pronunciation guide (p. 19) which direct the reader in order to facilitate authentic storytelling in both a classroom setting and at home.

As a mouth-piece of the Pan African Society for Musical Arts Education (PASMAE), this book is aimed at providing suitable teaching material in the Arts and Culture learning area but is presented in a style which makes it accessible to all enthusiasts of folk tales.