

AFRICAN METHODS OF MUSIC EDUCATION: SOME REFLECTIONS¹

by

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Perhaps my attitudes towards the Western 'classical' system of teaching music are too much coloured by my own experiences of it. I was about seven years old when my parents put me to learn the piano – I was then a pupil – a boarder – at a convent school. The first step in the process was for me to attend classes in music theory, and write an examination in the subject. I still remember the look on my teacher's face when I unexpectedly surmounted this obstacle.

The next step was for me to learn piano technique, in particular, scales. I liked the sound of the scales. But I did not succeed in learning them to my teacher's satisfaction. My little finger insisted on sticking up in the wrong way. Fortunately for me, I was also taught to play some simple tunes. I liked the idea of tunes. I tried to compose some myself. This was greeted with astonishment; but it was not in the script, so it was regrettably meaningless.

I battled on with learning the piano until my father put me to another music teacher. She was not at all pleased with me, and in desperation got in a girl – a girl! – to show me how well the girl could play the piece I was assailing. That nearly cured me for good of trying to play the piano. It was nearly twenty years later that I again attempted piano examinations.

In view of these experiences, this is how I sum up the music education system that was applied to me:

- i) The first step is *theory*: book learning and memorising were supposed to help me towards music; but in fact they were barrier number one between me and the music.
- ii) The second step was learning *technique*: this was very definitely barrier number two for me, at seven years of age.
- iii) The third step was – at last – *music*. I could find delight in the sound of the piano and in the little melodies I had to learn; but I was not learning for my own delight. I had to please another person, and – horror of horrors – I had to learn for an *examination*. So delight in the music had to recede into the background – in a way,

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the music itself now became a barrier.

iv) The fourth step was – joy – to receive my *certificate*. When I did manage to succeed in getting a certificate, I could enjoy a sense of achievement; but in doing this I had lost my joy in the music. It was only many years later that my still burning desire to compose music drew me back into the system.

No doubt some people, those of especial talent in performance, or of especial determination, can find themselves and discover music in this system. But it seems to me that for every one that succeeds, there are many more who lose the joy of ‘classical’ music, who in adult life are only too glad to forget what was drummed into them at their early lessons.

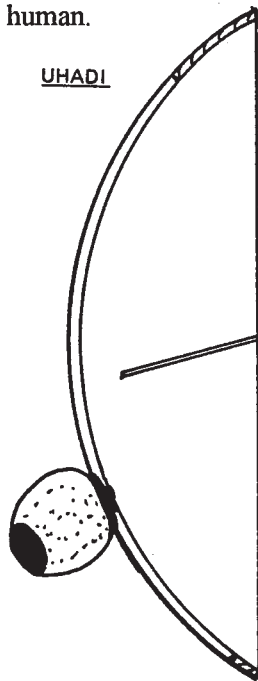
This system comes into full growth with the adulation paid to the maestro. Music is above the level of ordinary mortals, who can only gather to worship when the Great descend briefly to their level by performing in the concert hall. If ever an anthropology of Western classical music comes to be written, it will have to contain chapters on the rituals of attending the Concert, of purchasing the Compact Disc, of the techniques of praising one’s own favourite performer to the detriment of all the others. We are familiar with the technique of ‘winespeak’ – as practised by the cognoscenti (“...a pleasant little vintage, but I think you’ll be amused by its presumption...”). There is also a science of ‘musicspeak’. It features phrases such as “...one of Bach’s earlier works, of course...”, “...from the original 78rpm discs...”, “...unacknowledged masterpiece...”, and so on. This ‘musicspeak’ ought to be analysed as part of our anthropology of Western music; but at least its purpose is clear, just as with ‘winespeak’: to designate (gently, of course) just who the cognoscenti are. And, conversely, who are the plebs. My argument, which needs no reinforcing, is that our Western musical attitudes often create barriers between people and the music we consider to be of the greatest value.

Theory behind the theory

The system of music education described above is based on a theory. Music theory → instrumental technique → performance of music → reward for achievement = certificate: that is the theoretical design of the system. But there is a deeper theory behind it – a philosophical system, a way of thinking. We who have been educated in Western educational systems have grown so much into it that it seems our way of thinking is completely natural. It is the system of *essentialism*, of always trying to get at the essences of things. To do this, we *abstract* the qualities of the thing we wish to think about, often by constructing a *definition* of it. Having then made our definition, we have a look at the subject in the light of the definition –forgetting that it is we ourselves who have made the definition.

So we collect all the abstractions we can about music, and put them together as ‘Theory of Music’. This then becomes the necessary preliminary study of anyone

wishing to become a musician. Then we assemble a theory of technique, by studying the most effective performers. This technical theory is then embodied in technical exercises for performance training – scales, arpeggios, up to Czerny and Hanon. The system works; and not least because, even when all the theories and techniques are put together, there are still indefinable qualities and content in the music, the real music, perhaps, which the talented must be able to express over and above any studied theory or practised technique. The system works, but something has been sacrificed – lost – in the process. I can illustrate what this is by referring to the most important definition in essentialist philosophy – the definition of a human being. A human being is defined as a ‘rational animal’: reducing the idea of humanity to the absolute minimum connotation, stripping away all the non-essential ideas in order to achieve the purest definition, the total abstraction of the notion of what it is to be human.



Another system of thinking

Seeing that the definition of a human being is so important, I decided to try the idea on Nofinishi Dywili one day in between recording her playing and singing with her *uhadi* musical bow. Nofinishi is a totally traditional rural Xhosa/Thembu woman of Ngqoko village near Lady Frere in the Transkei district of the Eastern Cape Province of South Africa. Before I continue on the topic of what is a human being, it is necessary to turn aside briefly to tell a little about Nofinishi.

She is now well over seventy years of age. I met her first at a feast at old Lumko in 1980. She was leading the singing with a group of women performing the *umngqungqo* women's round dance. When I asked them if there was anyone who played the *uhadi* bow, Nofinishi boldly announced: "Ndim lo" – "I'm the one". Since then I have recorded many of her songs. Until that time I do not think she had been in any large town or city except

probably Queenstown. When a few years later we took her for the second time to perform at Rhodes University in Grahamstown, she proudly renamed herself 'Nofinishi waseRhini' – Nofinishi of Grahamstown. Having had, in 1989, the almost miraculous opportunity of performing in Paris, she now probably calls herself by something even more grand than Grahamstown.

One day at old Lumko we had a visit from two very pleasant Xhosa gentlemen, school inspectors attending a conference at a nearby school. In the music department I played them some of my recent recordings of Nofinishi, weaving magic with her

uhadi and her gentle bow-music voice. They were enthralled. When the music stopped, one made the comment: "And to think, she is completely uneducated!" I could not let it go at that. It was rather rude of me to contradict him, but I tried to do it gently. "No," I suggested, "that is not the case. She is one of the most educated people in the village. Of course, she does not read or write". They thought about it a moment, and then agreed. (Even – or should I say especially – the use of writing to represent speech or music is yet another way in which we Westerners make abstraction of reality. And sometimes ineffective abstraction.)

So it was that one day while Nofinishi was resting after playing her bow, I asked her: What is a human being? Xhosa has a better word for such a reality than we have in English. *Umntu* means a person, male or female; it is a more human term than 'human being'. So I asked her: "Umntu intoni na?" – "What sort of a thing is a human being?" She looked at me in some surprise, then stabbed herself with her thumb. "Ndim!" she said – "I am". She pointed at me: "Wena!" – "You!" She pointed at someone else who was present: "Yena!" So that was my answer, if I was not too stupid to understand it. Ask a silly question!

Nofinishi's response illustrates thinking and conceptualising in the *existentialist* mode, the opposite of essentialism. New things are not understood by abstraction, by stripping them of their layers of reality, but simply by confronting the thing itself. If you want to know what is a human being, look at one. Look at yourself. Look at another person. This type of thinking is perhaps best summed up by the well-known Xhosa proverb: *Umntu ngumntu ngabantu* – a person is a person through (or because of, or in the context of) people. It is sharing in a common humanity which makes someone human. So we see that whereas the Western definition isolates the individual person, the Xhosa proverb (and conceptualisation) views the individual as part of a social, human context.

Perhaps the Western method of thinking is the only way in which the human brain can understand technological realities – the nature or harnessing of electricity, the invention and use of computers. But when applied to thinking about human affairs, and human arts, this thinking is not enough. It must be complemented by existential thinking; it must be humanised. To illustrate, here are some musical examples.

Xhosa methods of music education.

One day in 1981 I was recording two elderly women at Mackay's Nek mission, near old Lumko. One, Nosinothi Dumiso, was playing the *uhadi* bow and singing the leader's parts of the songs as she played the bow. With her Nomawuntini Qadushe was keeping the time by clapping and stamping her foot, and singing the followers' parts of the songs. I obtained from them a recording of a wonderful survival of the "Hymn of the Prophet Ntsikana" (died 1821), a version of his song dating (by internal

evidence in the text) to at least the War of Mlanjeni. In April 1851 more than 200 Xhosa and Thembu died in a battle of this war, not far from Mackay's Nek. When they were resting from their singing I asked Nosinothi, how had she learned to play the bow? Her reply was perfectly logical, but it took me by surprise. She had never learned to play the bow, she said. But here she was playing the bow with a good deal of skill. Obviously I had asked the wrong question. I waited, and then tried again. That was better. She explained to me that she had begun to go blind – malnutrition causes much blindness in the rural areas of our country. She had interpreted this blindness as a call from the ancestors to *thwasa* – to change her state in life, to become a medium for the ancestors. The way she chose to do this was by taking up the *uhadi* bow. She was certainly a successful medium for me – by her bow playing she enabled me to feel I had made contact both with Ntsikana, the first Xhosa Christian, and with those long-dead warriors of Mlanjeni's war.

Nevertheless, that was not exactly what I wanted to know. So I asked her how was it that, when the call came from the ancestors, she had known how to play the bow? She then explained to me how, when young, she had observed how other people made and played bows, and had made an *uhadi* for herself, and learned the songs. I say learned the songs, but in fact in her conceptualisation of the process 'learning' is the wrong word to use. 'Learning' implies perhaps the imparting and absorption of abstract concepts, and that was not the way she had become a musician. Learning was what took place in the school at the mission, or the government school in the village. That was not how Xhosa songs were passed on.

For a Xhosa child, the process of becoming a Xhosa musician begins perhaps as early as the time when, in its mother's womb, the unborn feels the rhythmic movements of her body as she moves with the song, feels the sounds of the song in her body. Certainly this process moves forward strongly when the child is carried, snug in its blanket, on the back of the mother or another woman or girl, as the carrier moves with the dance or claps as she sings. I have seen a Xhosa mother teaching her baby, not yet old enough to walk by himself, little songs. As soon as he began to imitate her, she would no longer sing with him, but put in an answering part. It was education and a most loving form of play at the same time. Singing becomes play very soon. In the villages one sees groups of children singing together for play. When the adults or older children sing and dance, the tinies enthusiastically watch and imitate them. Infants can already feel and perform complex additive and cross-rhythm patterns. It took me three years to get into the simplest cross-rhythm pattern, which perhaps every child of five in Ngqoko can perform without giving it a thought.

This music-learning process takes place in the opposite order to that followed in my childhood music lessons. The *incentive* comes first: not a certificate, but the burning desire to be able to share fully in the life of the village. Almost every aspect of life is bound up with songs suitable to the occasions of life, the rites and

ceremonies of traditional life: sleep and play in babyhood, the boys' and girls' *umtshotsho* dances as the child grows, later the young men's (and girls' of their peer-group) *intlombe* dance parties, the songs and dances of initiation rituals, the ancestor songs called 'beer songs' (because, just as in Germany, whenever there is beer one should expect anyone of good sense to be present, which includes the ancestors). These rites and ceremonies *are* life, and to share fully in them is the greatest spur to music learning.

In order to share in the rites and ceremonies, it is necessary to learn the *songs*. (Music is an abstract concept: although '*umculo*' from *-cula*, sing, has in modern times been pressed into service for 'music', in traditional Xhosa there is no word for 'music', but a number of words for songs and the way people participate in them: singing with clapping, dancing with singing, leading or following the song, and so on.) And in order to learn the songs, it is necessary to learn all the elements and techniques of those songs: the texts, the melodies, harmonies, rhythms. The learning must take place in the same way that Nosinothi learned to make and play the bow: by observation, concentrated attention, the development of musical memory; by *practising* until the ability to *feel* every variation of the rhythm becomes something almost in the blood and bones of the learner; by *listening* until the ability to *hear* is developed to an extraordinary extent.

When I began to study Xhosa music I soon realised that the people I saw and heard performing were hearing and feeling the music in ways I could only guess at. When an *uhadi* player began a song, everyone would join in singing before even one cycle of the bow part had been completed. No song title had been announced. Later I learned that they could all identify the bow melody almost instantaneously, even though I could hear only vague overtone patterns at most. And almost every song has its own characteristic rhythm. This may seem an overstatement, but I had to learn this the hard way. For my dissertation I transcribed sixty-two Xhosa/Thembu songs, a task which took me six months. Some of the songs are huge, with dozens of polyphonic parts with different texts, which can all be sung at the same time. It was also a major task to 'crack' the rhythm of each song. No song ever uses just one rhythm pattern. For some, different additive rhythm patterns move at the same time: eight beats divided differently, for example: $8 = 3 + 3 + 2 = 3 + 2 + 3 = 2 + 2 + 2 + 2$, all going at the same time. But by far most of the songs use cross-rhythms based on patterns of three-against-two in some way. One delightfully complex song is the very old "*Umzi ka-Mzwandile*", in which bow and singers use a twelve-beat pattern disguised as ten beats, against which is clapped and danced a perfect four or eight beat pattern (see overleaf). Often the singers could identify a song almost immediately simply by the rhythm.

At any rate it was clear that these musicians – not specialists, but the ordinary people of the village – had developed the most advanced musical abilities. I was

UMZI KAMZWANDILE -- Rhythm Patterns

The Principal Bow Melody -- basic rhythm (= sung leader line when not used as a canon)

1 nge - kho kwa - phe - zo - lo. // E - be - lel' e -

The Principal Bow Melody -- derived rhythm (usual sung leader line, when not used as canon)

2 nge - kho kwa - phe - zo - lo. // E - be - lel' e -

Basic clapping pattern -- fast step

3

slow clap pattern -- Nofinishi Dywili

4

slow clap

5

cries: Ho shi | Ho shi |

medium fast clap

6

vocal percussion: uh hu-----uh uh hu-----uh

medium fast clap

7

cries: (yi-)ba-mbe hotsh' | (yi-)ba-mbe hotsh' |

Clapping Patterns

8

A dance pattern

9

A dance pattern

10

Old man's umbhayizelo singing ("swung" or to the clapping rhythm)

11 (gruff voice)

Old man's singing (also "swung" onto the clapping rhythm)

12 He he ye ye ma!

supposed to be a highly qualified musician; I had taught in a university; but I had a lot to learn.

The first step in my music education was the last for Ngqoko village musicians: the ability to *express concepts* about the music. I had to begin with theory. These people had their own way of *talking about* music which revealed how they thought about it. As mentioned above, they did not trouble to invent or use words for abstract concepts like ‘music’ or ‘melody’ or ‘rhythm’. These concepts were implicit in the words for songs, for the text-lines of songs, for the many different styles or dancing. There was no word meaning only ‘to sing’. Words for singing always imply some other way of participating in the song: to lead or follow the song by singing, to sing with clapping, to dance with singing, and so on. Even the role of the musical bows was expressed in terms which showed that the bows were thought of as singers participating in the song, personalised by terminology. Thus when Nofinishi sings with the bow, the *uhadi* leads the song, and she follows with her voice. When two *imirhubhe* mouth bows play together, one leads, the other follows, just as if they were two singers.

So the Ngqoko method of music education is based on the progression incentive → songs → techniques → terminology. This is the reverse of the Western system, and it has different results. It makes people musicians for life. It makes music a people’s art. At least it did until Western methods of education were forced on the Xhosas.

Destructive methods

At five years of age most children in villages such as Ngqoko are competent traditional musicians. In many cases the musical education received in the schools helps to alter this. After the experience of singing ‘quality’ music in school or church, the musician may come to believe that high-class music must be performed standing still – no dancing or clapping or body movement. And all music must be harmonised using the Western diatonic system. In addition, the principle may be impressed on the musician that the *real* composer is the one who writes down his music – and by using the regrettable sol-fa system at that, which can only with great difficulty be used for transcribing any but the most simple music: diatonic music with little use of chromatic tones, and with the simplest rhythm (even as Western music understands rhythm). It was in the light of these standards that the two very nice school inspectors had described Nofinishi as “uneducated”.

The evidence of the survival of Ntsikana’s hymn as a traditional song is proof of the durability of the oral tradition system for music. Ntsikana died before the death of Beethoven. One of the lines of the song “*Umzi kaMzwandile*” says: “*Ndemka nehlungulwana*” – “I have gone with the child of the scavenger crow”. This line occurs in a version recorded by Hugh Tracey among the Gcaleka Xhosa in the 1950s, as well as in the versions found around Ngqoko today. It refers to the custom of not

burying the dead – for more than fifty years after the plague of 1770 the Xhosa did not bury their dead, but left them in the bush for the crows and scavengers. This proved the antiquity of this song as well. The first time it was transcribed was in the 1980s, by this author.

The early missionaries among the Xhosa seem to have been so determined to dissociate the idea of body movement from ‘high quality’ music that they invented a new Xhosa system of terminology. They took a word which, according to Kropf’s dictionary (first published in 1899) meant originally to sing “little songs”. The word is *uku-cula*. What these little songs were nobody today seems to know, but perhaps they were sung standing still – the type of singing the missionaries wanted to encourage. So today to *-cula* means to sing standing still. Then from this word a vocabulary is built: *umculi*: a singer; *iculo*: a song or hymn; *umculo*: music. So a beginning was made on providing the Xhosa language with an abstract musical terminology. Other words were taken and their meaning changed. *Umqambi* in Ngqoko still retains its original meaning: a person who makes up song texts. The school and dictionary meaning of the word is as a composer of music, a concept that people in Ngqoko do not seem to be concerned with. They told me there was nobody composing music in Ngqoko – and this despite the fact that new songs appear constantly. (Kropf gives this word as *ingqambi*.) Another word is *ingqongqo*, a dried bullock skin beaten by women to accompany certain dance songs, and still used in Ngqoko at boys’ initiation dances. This word has come to mean ‘rhythmic beat’ in school usage. And so on.

Perhaps it is necessary to provide words for new concepts, as happens all the time in all living languages. But without perhaps deliberately realising it, by doing this we may be acting in a destructive as well as subversive manner. It was not just new words or word usages that were provided to the Xhosa language of music; this was an attempt to change the way people think. And it was done to the detriment of their love of their own traditional culture. I have no doubt that a parallel destructive process took place centuries ago in European music. When people began to write down music, they found (don’t we all!) that the rhythms were the most difficult element of music to transcribe. And so while even today European folk music is still rich in rhythm, consider the gradual winding-down of rhythm in ‘classical’ music as we go from the light, quick rhythms of Vivaldi, through the driving rhythms of Bach, the still lively rhythms and driving movement of Mozart and Beethoven, to the almost rhythmless music of the late Romantic period. There was nothing left to inspire composers rhythmically, until at last some like Bartok turned to European folk rhythms, others like Stravinsky found inspiration in jazz, and still others discovered the rhythms of India and the East. So writing down music is a marvellous art; but because it was not followed through totally, so I contend, much of the old rhythms of European music was lost. The sol-fa system of notation has proved an even more

inadequate medium, and it was Europe's gift to some of the most rhythmically talented people in the world.

On the other hand, perhaps the damage can be retrieved by using African methods of music education.

Attempts at using African music teaching.

It was sometime in 1982 or 1983, I think, that one of the nuns at old Lumko wanted to learn to play the *uhadi*. So we got in Nofinishi, paid her what seemed to be a fair wage per hour, to teach Sister to play the bow. Nofinishi came down to the mission and to the music department at Lumko Institute, found Sister ready and waiting, all smiles as she clutched her new instrument. Nofinishi greeted her, then plonked herself down (as she always did when being recorded there) on a large pouffe on the floor, took up her bow, and launched into the song "*Inxembula*". This is Nofinishi's personal song. She was paying Sister a real honour by offering to teach it to her. *Inxembula* – the Ugly One – is the female ancestor figure Nomadambe. The ugly one is coming in, sang Nofinishi; she is my friend Nomadambe, she is a whore.

"*Inxembula*" is a song about whores. Prostitution as a problem in Ngqoko dates back to the beginnings of the migratory labour system imposed on the Xhosa by, first, the colonial regime, and later the various Whites-only regimes. So it is an important song socially and anthropologically. Needless to say, Sister's eyes were out on stalks. To give her her due, she did try to follow the song. But she never learned to sing "*Inxembula*", and she gave up trying to play the bow. I should mention that Sister was a Sotho, but born and brought up in the Xhosa area and very fluent in Xhosa. But she was school educated, and was left stranded when Nofinishi launched forth into her songs.

My experiences with Nofinishi and Nosinothi began to make me realise that I was missing something in the field of music education. In the church music of the Catholic Church I was responsible for the large-scale project of introducing and spreading the use of African music for worship. This included the introduction of 'marimba' xylophones for use in worship, the aim being to make the worship more suited to African congregations through the use of rhythmic music, and where possible the use of music based on bow-scale melody and harmony. Marimbas were introduced at two workshops held at old Lumko, one in 1977/8 and the second in 1979. The first workshop used marimbas from Zimbabwe (where this modern type of marimba had been developed at the Kwanongoma College of African Music in Bulawayo), the second used marimbas made in Umtata at the workshop of Brother Kurt Huwiler, and tuned in such a way that they could play bow scales, pentatonic scales, and also the Western diatonic scale. These workshops were attended mostly by people from distant parts; but some of the local youngsters became fascinated with the instruments and made it known that they were keen to learn. So in early 1980 I

began to teach a group of boys of Ngqoko village – 12 to 14 year-olds – to play the new marimba mass. It took me eight months, and I made plenty of mistakes. More than once the leader of the group, Thembani Write (pure Xhosa despite the surname) took me aside to tell me that I was going about it all wrong. Despite me, they succeeded in learning the mass, and developed skill in playing the new instruments.

At just about this time I was approached by the priest from the nearby mission at Mackay's Nek, to come and teach the boys there to play their new set of marimbas. By then I had come to the conclusion that there was a much better method than the one I had used. I had used the same method which long ago had been used on me: These are the chords.... hold the sticks like this, etc. etc. Not a satisfactory method, with people who were used to learning songs as a whole, taking in the whole song as a *Gestalt*, a total experience, not something abstracted into its essential elements. So I persuaded the priest to take, not me, but our little group of marimba players. Let his boys have the experience of learning from a performing group as a group. He took the Ngqoko boys, and they spent a week-end at Mackay's Nek. At the end of the week-end six new players there were playing the marimbas. A few weeks later he took the Ngqoko boys for a second (and last) week-end's teaching. When, again a few weeks later, the next mission at Qoqodala got a set of marimbas, it was the Mackay's Nek group that went to teach them. Since then this process has been repeated many times, and church marimba playing has spread through Catholic churches all over southern Africa. It was a group from Ga-Rankuwa, for example, who introduced the marimbas into Botswana in 1989.

This process of musical *Gestalt* learning works very well with people who in their very way of life learn to become totally musically observant, and who have developed listening skills to a fine art. What about us Europeans? Would it be possible with Europeans? From 1989 I spent several years in Germany, and survived largely by giving music workshops and lectures in Germany and other European countries, and also on two occasions in the United States. At these workshops people are often very keen to learn African songs; so I decided to try out some experiential teaching on them. Some of the new African church songs have become great favourites in churches in Europe, finding their way there through church organisations, World Council of Churches music programmes, and even through the work of Lumko. One such song is the "Resurrection Hymn" by the Zimbabwean composer, Abraham Dumisani Maraire. This hymn is also a great favourite among Xhosa Catholics, who sing it not only in their own language, but often also using a typical Xhosa two-against-three clap (see next page).

I use two methods of teaching European course participants to perform such 2-vs-3 rhythm. One is the theory-first, technique-second, song-third method. I write the music (can one 'write music?') on the board, explain how it works, then teach them little rhythm exercises until they get into it. Then we learn the song. But the second

Uvukile u-Yesu emangcwabeni, a-le-lu-ya, a-le-lu-ya.
 NguloYesu o-wa-fel' emnqamlezweni, a-le-lu-ya, a-le-lu-ya.

SOP: A-le-lu-ya, a-le-lu-ya, a-le-lu-ya, a-le-lu-ya.

Alely-ya, a-le-lu-ya, a-le-lu-ya, a-le-lu-ya. //

MARACAS & DRUMS
 CLAP/DANCE X X X X ETCETERA

Resurrection Hymn, by Abraham Dumisani Maraire, from Shona. Xhosa text:

- Chorus* Aleluya, aleluya, aleluya, aleluya (x 2)
- Verses*
1. Uvukile uYesu emangcwabeni, aleluya, aleluya
 Ngulo Yesu owafel' emnqamlezweni, aleluya, aleluya
 2. Masivume amaculo kwiNkosi yethu, aleluya, aleluya
 Eyaziva iintlungu ngenxa yosindiso, aleluya, aleluya
 3. Yola zulu, vuya mhlaba, uYes' uvukile, aleluya, aleluya
 Yes' ovukileyo zusisikelele, aleluya, aleluya
 4. Sikubonga, sikuncoma nabangwele bonke, aleluya, aleluya
 Sikuthanda, sikukhonza ngamaxesha onke, aleluya, aleluya

method usually works much better. I present the song, not as a technical exercise, but as some sort of social experience. For example, I tell them that I would like to use an African greeting with them; that we should all sing a song together, and then go around greeting each other while we sing. I show them the three-step 'African' handshake, and then I sing the chorus of Maraire's song for them – the Xhosa version of

this chorus, which is a bit different from the original. I explain that this is an easy song because all they have to say is “Hallelujah”, not *Igqirha lendlela ngugqongqothwane*, for example. I sing the melody, and soon they get into it. Then I ask them to clap with me while they sing, and I clap the 2-vs-3 pattern. Usually there are some surprised looks, but I keep going strongly, and time after time it orks. Sometimes we rest a bit, and that gives them a chance to think about what we are doing, and then they find the cross-rhythm difficult to get into again; but more often than not, it works and continues to work. Then I get them dancing while we sing and clap, and then while still singing we begin the greeting, going around shaking hands.

Interestingly enough, the groups which find this method very difficult are the ones that perform the most difficult “classical” music; for example, the choir with which I sang in Munich. In the last few of our concerts we performed Mozart’s mass in C minor, Beethoven’s Mass in C, Bach’s Magnificat, and etc., with orchestra, of course. I offered a little workshop for some interested people of this choir. Of all the groups I have tried to teach Maraire’s “Hallelujah”, they struggled most. It would have been kinder to teach them from the written score.

With European course participants, naturally, once we have sung the “Hallelujah” with its cross-rhythm, I explain to them what they have succeeded in doing. I usually don’t tell them it took me three years to learn it myself. So the desire for theory is satisfied, but after the practical experience. I must also acknowledge that, for me, perhaps the only way I could get into the practice was by first working out the theory for myself: analysing what was going on until I understood it. Perhaps it was also necessary that the first marimba group should be taught painstakingly, going from theory through technique to performance of songs. But once the ground was broken, then the more direct and successful method could be used.

Conclusions

Obviously there is room for much more work in this field, not only research on African teaching methods, but also more experimentation must take place in using such methods, both with African and non-African learners. Reference must also be made to the Japanese methods of teaching instruments, including the violin, to children, by direct learning, avoiding the prior enforcement of theory and music literacy. Perhaps in the near future I will have the opportunity of teaching some people in Europe to play musical bows. Nofinishi’s songs would be just as relevant there as in Ngqoko, I am sure.

But where there is the greatest need for a revision of teaching methods (and teaching material!) is in the music education programs in the African schools and colleges and universities, in South Africa and many other African countries too, where educational methods have grown out of missionising via colonisation. Otherwise at some not too distant date we will have succeeded in wiping out

traditional African music without putting anything of comparable value in its place.

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