# "CREATIVE ETHNOMUSICOLOGY" AND AFRICAN ART MUSIC: A CLOSE MUSICAL READING OF WOOD AND CLAY, KUNDI DREAMS AND UMRHUBHE GEESTE BY ANTHONY CAPLAN

by

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**Abstract:** This article deals with Anthony Caplan's application of African art music through the lens of three works whose instrumentation and compositional processes result in pieces that transcend conventional boundaries. These works emerge as integrated artistic products exceeding the limitations of conventional musical expression. Through close musical readings of Wood and Clay, Kundi Dreams and Umrhubhe Geeste, Caplan's employment of "creative ethnomusicology" (term first used by Akin Euba) becomes evident as his knowledge, experience and familiarity with a wide range of musical styles and cultures coalesce in the creation of original works of musical art. Combining either the udu, Kundi harp or umrhubhe with the oboe Caplan's compositional amalgam merges sonic qualities from African and Western musical domains, including aspects of Eastern musicmaking. Evincing the attributes of African art music—labelled by Euba as African-European art music—Caplan's three works represent a growing body of repertoire from South Africa (a relative latecomer to this style of writing) embodying the essence of African art music.

**Keywords:** African pianism, African art music, creative ethnomusicology, hemiola, polyrhythm, udu, Kundi harp, *umrhubhe*.

# Introduction

Intent on transferring traditional African musical mores onto a Western musical instrument—the piano—Nigerian composer, Akin Euba (b. 1935), initiated a new style: African pianism. For composers interested in "cross-cultural musical synthesis" (Euba, in Omojola 2001: 156) Euba explained:

[T]he piano, being partially a percussive instrument, possesses latent African characteristics. Techniques in the performance of xylophones, thumb pianos, plucked lutes, drum chimes, for which Africans are noted, and the polyrhythmic methods of African instrumental music in general [forms] a good basis for an African pianistic style (*ibid.*: 157).

Listing some of African pianism's ingredients, Euba includes "[T]hematic repetition, direct borrowings of thematic material [...] from African traditional sources, the use of rhythmic and/or tonal motifs which, although not borrowed from specific sources, are based on

traditional idioms and percussive treatment of the piano" (*ibid.*). Making the case that Euba's concept of African pianism "belongs to the category of intercultural music", Bode Omojola continues that as "African [...] and European elements are combined" in Euba's repertoire, it is logical to consider this repertoire as part of African art music (*ibid.*).

African art music is intended for presentation in a Western concert setting with "performance by experts before an audience [...] not encouraged to participate in the performance but [...] required to devote its whole attention to listening while the performance is going on" (Euba 1975: 47). Commenting that this approach "constitutes a radical change in the African approach to music". Euba elaborates that this style constitutes a "balanced synthesis of African and Western styles"; a compositional idiom he referred to as "African-European art music" (*ibid.*: 46). Noting the need for cultural relevance within an African geographical location, Omojola (2001: 156) writes that

Euba [...] realized the impact of Western tradition on his initial musical development and the need to make his works culturally relevant to his African background. But rather than abandon Western music, his interest in projecting African music led to his evolving a bicultural composing style [...] often [reflecting] Euba's knowledge of Western and African (especially Yoruba) styles.

Different in its approach to that of many Western composers who treat African musical elements (usually melody or rhythm) as exotic features within a thoroughly Western structure, Euba and other African art music composers allow for a musical work to unfold within the parameters of African artistry and musicianship. Here, cyclicism is more apparent than Germanic-styled motivic development and thematic growth, diatonicism surpasses chromatically inflected melodic shapes and harmonic structures, and, as Andrew Tracey has pointed out, "Western music [at its core] is not [essentially] polyrhythmic and at root African music is" (Tracey, in Lucia 2007: 131).

Infiltrating the expressive domains of other black African composers, Euba's compositional transformation is observed, for example, in the works of fellow Nigerian, Joshua Uziogwe (1946–2005), Ghanaians Joseph Hanson (J.H.) Kwabena Nketia (b. 1921) and Fred Onovwerosuoke (b.1960), Ugandan Justinian Tamusuza (b. 1951) and from a later generation, South African Bongani Ndodana-Breen (b. 1975). Also influenced by Euba's transformative approach are South African composers Kevin Volans (b. 1949) and Michael Blake (b. 1951) with Volans, Euba and Uziogwe having the profoundest effect on Ndodana-Breen's development as a composer. Describing his reaction to Volans' *African Paraphrases* (1980-1982), Ndodana-Breen writes:

Volans' music and his methodology, based on transcription, quotation and paraphrasing of indigenous music [...] indirectly informed my composing [...] he engaged with indigenous music in a direct and meaningful way [...] without exoticism. He did so in a substantive manner that displayed a deep understanding of the music, how it is practiced and its cultural context [...] he [learnt] to play the *mbira* [...and] it is a revelation to hear a *mbira* transcription played on a harpsichord [tuned] in the traditional Shona manner. Those exposed to both indigenous African music and the Western paradigm, relate to this – no South African composer had done this before (Ndodana-Breen 2013: 5–6).

Noting Volans' immersion into ethnomusicology—developing a deep-seated acquaintance with African performance practices, tuning systems, and cultural

perspectives—Ndodana-Breen draws attention to the ethnomusicology-composition association pervading exponents of African art music, who placing this knowledge in the creative realm, reveal a stance reminiscent of Hungarian composer, Béla Bartók (1881–1945). Commenting that Euba considers Bartók as a "role model for African composers in general" (Euba, in Agawu 2011: 51) Kofi Agawu outlines Bartók's influence and indirect mentorship of these composers:

[From Bartók] there is exemplary fieldwork in Eastern Europe and North Africa, a large body of folksongs meticulously transcribed, and, best of all, a body of original compositions that range in content from the merest inflection of a folk tune by endowing it with an accompaniment that seems already derived from the tune itself, through learned manipulations of and additions to such tunes in the context of art music, to the most intricate and subtle incorporation of the aura of folk music into the most decidedly anti-folk environment of the string quartet, art music's intellectual genre. No wonder that Akin Euba [...] a disciple of Bartók (Agawu 2011: 51).

Emphasizing the connection between field research and original composition, Agawu explains that this is what led Euba to develop the term "creative ethnomusicology" (*ibid.*). Deriving valuable information from ethnomusicology—"observation, transcription, and analysis of African music and music-making, based on [...] first-hand involvement and participation" (Temperley 2000: 66)—these resource materials provide a platform for inspired, inventive artistic expression. Expounding on this ideal Agawu (2011: 56) states that

there is [...] no easy formula for determining the ultimate shape that indigenous influences take within an individual composer's psyche. Depending upon the intensity and integrity of the exposure, the composer may acquire a groove-oriented metrical attitude, a store of modal melodies, a syllabic approach to word-setting, a network of distinctly shaped and timbrally specific rhythms (including time lines), and modes of simultaneous expression that preserve a heterogeneous sound ideal.

Drawing from the notion of "creative ethnomusicology" Kenyan composer, Timothy Njoora (2010: 43), cites Nketia's modelling of this concept:

Analysing some of the materials I encountered in my research enabled me to develop my composition theory to determine where I could move from tradition to modernity without masking my African voice or losing my African identity ... for although my research interest is traditional African music ... documentation, preservation and promotion as our cultural legacy, my creative interest lies in the application of my field experience and research findings to the development of African art music as a contemporary genre.

Encompassing a range of instrumentations, African art music either showcases Western or African configurations (e.g. solo piano, string quartet) or combines Western instruments with traditional African instruments. Detailing the latter, Wendy Onovwerosuoke (2007: 2), cites as examples Uziogwe's *Ritual Procession for African and European Orchestra* (1978), Nketia's *Dance of the Forest* (1963) scored for violin, cello and percussion (*oawuru*, *axatse* and *atumpan*), and representative works by Euba: *Igi Nla So* (1963) for solo piano and a set of four Yoruba drums, *Four Pieces* written for African orchestra (1966), and an opera, *Chaka* (1970), where the chamber orchestra comprises Western and African instruments.

Writing a brace of works (2009–2010) that include the oboe with either African instruments or another Western instrument, Anthony Caplan (b. 1971) explores the integration of African and Western sonic idioms. This article focuses on three of these works: Wood and Clay, Kundi Dreams and Umrhubhe Geeste, where Caplan creates space for the udu, Kundi harp, and umrhubhe to join forces with the oboe. Through a close musical analysis (source material being scores, recordings, interviews with Caplan and the reflexive commentary from his MMus composition portfolio) this article explores the unique compositional elements that exist in each work's design, allowing for a distinctive sound-world to develop. As Agawu (2011: 51) notes, "[...] by probing the music compositionally [...] it is impossible to overestimate the quality and quantity of the kinds of knowledge [that can be] produced from self-conscious manipulation of traditional music's materials and procedures." Through emphasizing compositional resources found in Africa such as traditional African musical creativity, elements of Middle Eastern music, and Western musical practices, this article aims to present details drawn from numerous cultural strands and consider their assimilation within a unified artistic product. While the score, and its sonic representation (performance), remains central to these analyses, it is treated beyond the ambit of theoretical knowledge expressed through compositional practice. It is regarded as a facilitator revealing individual musical (cultural) identities, the emergence of an integrated artistic identity, an avenue supporting creative intervention, and as a vehicle fostering musical and artistic resourcefulness.

Mentioning that in general "ethnomusicologists have shown little interest in such music-on-music exploration", Agawu points out that "this task has been left [mainly] to scholar-composers like Akin Euba and his followers" (*ibid.*). In the South African context the African art music oeuvre of many black composers remains a hugely underrepresented field of scholarship (especially close musical analyses), and apart from studies into the music of Volans, and to a lesser extent Blake, white exponents of African art music have also been largely ignored. Yet, in a country that has emerged with a liberal democratic constitution after a racially, socially and politically fragmented past, it is not misplaced to engage with what Agawu refers to as "a dissolution of [musical] boundaries and an expansion of the soundscapes resulting from the new proximity of previously distant musical territories and creative strategies" (*ibid.*).

### Genesis and production of Oboe in Africa

Wood and Clay, Kundi Dreams and Umrhubhe Geeste appear on the compact disc Oboe in Africa featuring oboist Kobus Malan and Caplan—an experienced African music practitioner—as performer. Apart from the udu, Kundi harp, and umrhubhe Caplan also performs on the Kudu horn, Xigubu drum, shakers, djembe and reed pipes. Other artists appearing on this recording are Andrew Tracey (mbira), guitarists Dirk van Staden and Tessa Ziegler, Magda de Vries (marimba), and alto flutist, Malane Burger-Hofmeyer.

Engaging with this project as performer and composer, Caplan demonstrates his immersion into "creative ethnomusicology" where his knowledge of performing and creating traditional African music—and elements of Eastern-styled music found on the

African continent—informs his compositional choices and creative product. Similarly, Malan's interest in African music, apparent through numerous visits to the International Library of African Music (ILAM), housed at Rhodes University in Grahamstown, South Africa, results in three transformed transcriptions drawn from ILAM's *Music of Africa Series* – originally a LP series published by ILAM's founder, Hugh Tracey, from his field recordings. Malan's transcriptions (adapted in response to the technical aspects of Western instrumentation) are of four pieces recorded by Hugh Tracey in the then-Belgian Congo (1952). Embodying the tenets of "creative ethnomusicology" Malan and Caplan transcend the hegemony of Western art music, taking cognizance of their African geographical location and South Africa's wide variety of cultures. Explaining his need to create African art music, Caplan writes:

Classical Western music has developed a sophisticated system of notation whereby metrical and pitch details are recorded as well as interpretative details. African music did not develop in the same way and this is the reason why a greater flexibility lies within its lexicon. There is simply no record beyond word of mouth of how exactly it should be played. This is why I feel passionately to try and extract the essence of some of these types of musical forms and utilize them in an original way (Caplan 2016: 3).

Defending this style of music Caplan notes that marrying Western and African music in a composition "is not for the approval of die-hard purists [...] but for those interested in forging new ground. I write what I hear in my mind and it just so happens that the sum of my experiences have led me to this" (*ibid.*: 4).

Cognizant of views opposed to using staff notation for transcribing African music (Ndlovu 1991), Caplan defends his use of staff notation explaining that his music "is through composed and written for reading musicians" (Caplan 2016: 3) and that "the need to develop contemporary ways of transcribing African music and dance" must still evolve "as modern transcriptions of traditional music [tend not to] account for some melodic and rhythmic patterns" (*ibid.*). Bolstering his stance, Caplan explains:

I believe that by capturing an idea on paper [staff notation] it may be remembered and reproduced long after I am no more. It's a way of shaping and filling in colour that would otherwise remain forever in its most basic form and allows me to satisfy something that has not yet already been expressed (*ibid*.: 5).

Engaging with performance practices associated with traditional African music, Caplan's *Oboe in Africa* interpretations include improvisatory elements, or in his words, "opportunities to express myself beyond the score" (*ibid.*: 8). However, recognizing that those trained in the Western mould do not necessarily possess improvisatory skills Caplan's statement that "a performer not adept at improvisation could always just follow the score and the performance would be a true reflection of the work" (*ibid.*) is a reminder of Robin Moore's observation that it is a

puzzling fact that improvisatory performance has ceased to interest a majority of conservatory-trained musicians, despite the fact that performers of European art music in previous centuries exhibited considerable interest in improvisation (Moore 1992: 61).

Collaborating with a range of South African composers—Mokale Koapeng (b. 1963), Jeanne Zaidel-Rudolph (b. 1948), Isak Roux (b. 1959), and of course Caplan—

Malan pursued his intention of compiling a compact disc that includes the oboe with various aspects of African musical expression.

Explaining that "musical instruments are powerful signifiers that assist in the recognition of musical types [...] and of the geocultural origins of music", Euba (2001: 121) also notes that "[M]usical instruments are not the only signifiers that enable us to recognize musical types; the latter are usually understood through a multiplicity of signifiers working together and complementing one another." Choosing to combine the oboe with African instruments, Caplan signifies cultural blending; signification that, in his hands, is located in the score (text) suggesting sonic perception and understanding of African/Middle Eastern/Western sound-worlds. Hence, signification that forms a new aural experience and blended compositional style.

# Development of style

As a teenager growing up in Johannesburg suburbia, Caplan fulfilled his urge "to satisfy something I could not describe other than in music" (Caplan 2016: 4) through composing songs as well as some piano and guitar pieces. Concomitant with exposure to various styles his compositions included aspects of jazz, Bossa Nova, Reggae, and "whatever popular hits of the day caught my attention" (*ibid.*). Moving at age thirteen from piano studies to studying the guitar, Caplan's exposure to music was encouraged at home with both parents playing a variety of instruments, and a mother who saw the benefit of early childhood music education (Kunju 2013: 64–65).

As an undergraduate student at Rhodes University his range of influences expanded beyond the Western canon, such as playing the congas, percussion and drum kit in Andrew Tracey's Steel Band.¹ Attending, at this time, traditional amaXhosa ceremonies "that lasted through the night with non-stop music making where one song could last ten minutes or more" (Caplan 2016: 4–5) Caplan learnt traditional African songs, developed his capacity for speaking African languages, and imbibed the general atmosphere. Commenting that these events completely changed his perception of music, he began experiencing music as "an integral part of life [...] the platform on which humanity stood, to help connect one another at social gatherings, ceremonies, weddings and the like" (*ibid.*: 7). Mentioning Caplan's early experiences with African music, Hleze Kunju continues:

[...] the domestic servants who worked for [Caplan's parents] over the years always used to hum or sing to themselves and always looked like they enjoyed it [... Caplan] used to go and [visit] them in their quarters, their radio was always on so [he] listened to the music of their choice, African music (Caplan, in Kunju 2013: 64).

Considering the direction Caplan's future compositional development would take his subsequent reflection about engaging with numerous, varied musical strands is illuminating. "[...] I found all these different kinds of music exciting and of equal value. I did not feel the need to fixate on any one of them" (Caplan 2016: 5). Merging many

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>1</sup> The Andrew Tracey Steel Band (1969–2007) which appeared at the National Arts Festival, Grahamstown, for twenty consecutive years, was the first steel band to exist in South Africa.

influences into a single work, *Symphony Makuvatsine* (2004), Caplan's instrumentation includes "Western orchestra, African instruments, steel drums [Andrew Tracey Steelband], and choir [Masakheke Choir]" (Kunju 2013: 65). Written for ILAMs fiftieth anniversary celebrations in 2004, this work draws from the Classical four movement framework, which along with the work's instrumentation points to an imaginative engagement with African art music. Reviewing its premiere performance, Deborah Seddon, comments on the fusion of various traditions, going on to state that "[S] ymphonies of this kind tend to be conceptual, operating as ideas rather than existing as music, but Caplan's fine touch, and his intuitive knowledge of the instruments, allowed for a wonderful new piece of work [...]" (Seddon 2004).

Caplan's knowledge of traditional African music, gleaned through participation, observation, and learning from practitioners such as Tracey, led him to incorporate a range of culturally diverse influences. Drawing from an evolving tradition, Caplan's compositional stance and development of ideas is similar to that experienced by Uziogwe:

Most of my [Uziogwe] works have been influenced by my analytical studies of the ethnography of musical performances in African societies. These works involve the utilisation of traditional African elements and techniques, as well as a positive assimilation of qualitative and useful foreign musical ideas and creative methodologies (Uziogwe in Dixon [1992: 938], in Sadoh 2004: 638).

Emulating the sonic realm of traditional African music, Caplan's use of melodic contours, scales, harmony, and body percussion, are apparent in his first commissioned work, an opera, *The Moon Prince – Inkosana Yenyanga* (1997); it is also the first time that he uses the *uhadi* in one of his compositions. Again, African art music is apparent: a formal Western design (arias, choruses, duets and other ensemble settings) with African musicianship at its expressive core. Supporting the notion that *The Moon Prince – Inkosana Yenyanga* is a tool toward promoting multiculturalism, Lwando Ntenda writes:

A new genre in South Africa was established whereby the Western way of telling stories, which was through a dramatic work combining text and music usually in a theatrical setting (opera) was adapted by the blacks and used as means of telling their own stories. Thus opera music was decolonized and Africanised [with] stories that they were familiar with, and stories that spoke about their history [...] The Western frames were kept in this new genre and remain unchanged [...] one can say that there was an integration which brought Western and African ideas (dramatic and musical) together [...] (Ntenda 2017).

Classifying this opera as a form of "intercultural and cross-cultural communication" (Kunju 2013: 81) Kunju points toward using

African and Western instruments, English and isiXhosa languages inter-acting and crossing over into each other's territory [...] arias composed in the Western style [while] most choruses [follow the style of] isiXhosa traditional music [...] sometimes [there is] a jazz feel as well as a rap feel to the music [...] These are all mixed together and the performers have to switch from one to another. This is done to reach as many cultures as possible.

Outlining the interplay between African and Western instrumentation, and isiXhosa and English languages, Kunju's brief analysis of the opera's opening bars shows Caplan's free flowing mixture across African and Western domains:

[...] the whole opera is introduced by the uhadi bow. The uhadi bow plays for eight bars

and is joined by the cello on [sic] bar nine. The violin joins in bar thirteen; flute and clarinet join in bar seventeen. The uhadi bow switches to the igubu (an African drum) in bar twenty [...] in bar five the King's Advisor sings, "Yizani! Yizani ngapha!" In bar twenty-one the villagers switch to English and sing, "We have come to hear our King, our King ... Sifubasinenyanga ..." (ibid.).

Incorporating elements of improvisation within the opera, and drawing from African and jazz traditions of extemporization, Caplan explains:

I allow the orchestra to improvise although there are notes [scored notation] in there ... I say, go for it, you guys can now come out and play and I think as far as hearing something live and happening right now instead of just notes, that is what I think is so interesting and dynamic about this work. That's what I try to instil in the cast and in the orchestra, let's give it something a little bit different every time guys and we'll have a show ... (*ibid.*: 90).

Likening these improvisatory moments to African musical tradition, Kunju mentions creating music on-the-spot in front of an audience as is the case with isiXhosa oral poetry such as a "praise singer [that] sings praises spontaneously" (*ibid.*). At times the audience is invited to participate in the improvisation. For instance, during the "celebration of the reunion of the King and future king, audience members are invited to get on the stage and celebrate with the rest of the villagers by dancing to a familiar isiXhosa chorus "Liphumile ilinga" (the sun has risen) referring to the discovery of the future king" (*ibid.*: 96).

Deviating from Euba's explication of African art music as a performance in Western concert-style, Caplan encourages audience-performer participation, displaying the genre's new, ongoing development, and the need to constantly break barriers leading to deeper understanding among groups in a multicultural society; through actively participating in artistic expression develop understanding of various cultures.

This merging of Western and African music idioms led to Caplan composing for the Mzantsi Traditional Orchestra, based in Johannesburg; an ensemble that "takes some of Africa's almost extinct instruments and combines them with western instruments [...] done by combining western instruments like the guitar, cello, saxophone, pennywhistle and drums, with reed pipes, kudu horns, marimbas, mbiras, and string instruments called *umakweyanas* and *uhadis*" (2008).

Using his expertise of merging Western and African (and aspects of Middle Eastern) musics—as a composer and performer—Caplan assists Malan in propagating African art music. These aspects—performance practices and salient compositional features—will be discussed in the analyses that follow.

# Wood and Clay

Scored for the oboe and *udu*, *Wood and Clay* reveals an impulsive-like dialogue, what Caplan (2016: 9) refers to as "a cat-and-mouse – styled game" between the oboe and *udu*. Aiming to write a piece where "the oboe and *udu* [...] enter into a cross cultural dialogue", Caplan realized a score where "[R]hythmically the oboe needs to be able to accomplish various patterns that the *udu* would play naturally and the *udu* must at times try to pitch in order to meet the oboe" (*ibid*.). Seeking musical commonalities

the key,  $E\flat$  minor, is based around the udu Caplan had at his disposal and the pitches it could produce (ibid.). These pitches closely relate to  $B\flat$ ,  $D\flat$ ,  $E\flat$ , and  $E(\natural)$ . While this arrangement works for the Caplan-Malan performance duo, future performances with other artists will require an udu with similar pitch capabilities.

Placed within an African-Middle Eastern fabric, this short work (61 bars) is an effective medium for African art music with much of the melodic material derived from Middle Eastern (Arabic) styled scales, and rhythmical features showing the influence of African musical traits. Weaving these sound worlds into a single entity the oboe's initial contours are based on the Aeolian mode starting on  $E^{\flat}$  with additional semitone movement,  $E^{\natural}$  and  $A^{\natural}$ , introduced through an ascending grace note. This lends a Middle Eastern flavour to the winding melodic line. With the oboe showcasing traditional Western compositional procedures such as ascending sequential patterning (bb. 5–7, 21–24, 43–47, and 58–60) and close position broken chords (bb. 9 and 11) mixed with Middle Eastern styled scale patterns, the complete musical experience underscores the merging of Western-African musical mores, where "African" incorporates Eastern and black African forms of expression.

Alternating regular and irregular note groupings Caplan showcases elements of African music-making<sup>2</sup>, an aspect Christopher James (1992: 24) explains as "groups of four, five, six and seven notes [being] used in duple or triple patterns". The use of syncopated rhythmical patterning, made pertinent through silence separating syncopated utterances, also refers to African rhythmical practice, e.g. b. 2. Revealing his application of "creative ethnomusicology" Caplan synthesizes this rhythmical knowledge into a single instrumental part (oboe). Coupled with the *udu's* ostinatostyled patterning—two alternating pitches divided into two bar patterns—are rhythmical details that integrate with the oboe's syncopated elements; for instance, an artfully constructed 3/2 polyrhythm first appears at b. 3<sup>4</sup> (see Figure 1).

From b. 29 the oboe plays a passage based on the Phrygian dominant scale (Bb Cb D Eb F Gb Ab [Bb]). Explaining the use of this scale Caplan (2016: 9) writes that "the oboe plays a melody of Middle Eastern influence with the use of a minor second step distinct of the Arabic and Gypsy musical traditions." Close inspection reveals that this scale is structurally identical to the Hijaz-Nahawand maqam (Arabic- Egyptian scale) with Caplan's use being a transposed version (lower major third) of the Hijaz on D (D Eb F# G) and the Nahawand on G (G A Bb C [D]), hence the Hijaz-Nahawand maqam (D Eb F# G A Bb C [D]). Common to Arabic, Jewish and East European musics this scale frequently forms the basis for music accompanying Hebrew prayers (*Ahava Rabbah*); also underscoring melodic and harmonic aspects of much Klezmer music where it is known as the Freygish or "Jewish" scale. Simply referred to as the "Gypsy" scale within an East European context, or as the Spanish gypsy scale in a flamenco Spanish milieu,

Reference to the African continent is with the awareness that there are major differences between traditional music regions on the continent. These references refer to the dominant music features of sub-Saharan Africa.

All music examples appear with the composer's permission.



Figure 1. Caplan: Wood and Clay, bb. 1-8. Composer's score, with permission.

its use is also located in traditional Iranian music (*Dastgāh e Homāyoun*). With his Jewish heritage and comprehensive knowledge of world music, Caplan is well placed to incorporate such influences within his oeuvre.

Following a period of metrical instability of seven bars from b. 34–40 (2/4, 4/4, 5/4, 4/4) a slightly extended section in simple triple time (b. 41 through 50) creates an element of metrical steadiness, though this is shrouded with rhythmical complexities disguising the triple meter (see Figure 2). Dividing the semiquaver pulse into groups of seven and five pulses, initially with synchronized accentuation played by the oboe and udu (bb. 41–42) the oboe continues with these rhythmical subdivisions while the udu's scored accentuation from b. 43 onwards sonically replicates compound quadruple (12/16). Aurally resembling an additive time signature the seven-five division of twelve equal semiquaver pulses sounds more like 7 + 5/16 than a syncopated passage in 3/4 time with misplaced accents. With the semiquaver as common denominator the simultaneous use of 12/16 and 7 + 5/16 creates a polyrhythmic effect during the ensuing five bars (bb. 43–47). Continuing to group the udu's accentuation in units of three semiquavers Caplan sets the scene for cross-accentuation between the oboe and udu parts with b. 48 replicating the sonic image of simple triple (oboe) and compound quadruple (udu).



Figure 2. Caplan: Wood and Clay, bb. 40-48.

Ultimately, the sense for African art music is forged through the instrumental combination and thematic relationship that results in a unique sonic blend fusing traditional African musical features with elements drawn from Middle Eastern and Western domains. Also, the extemporaneous-like relationship between the instruments rivets the listener's attention, highlighting Caplan's compelling, unpredictable writing.

#### Kundi Dreams

A varied transformation of an earlier work, *Kundi Dreams* is a development of *Nyatiti Magic* (2006) scored for *nyatiti* harp and percussion instruments.<sup>4</sup> In its initial manifestation the harp is dominant, but the revision (*Kundi Dreams*) shows the oboe carrying melodic details with the harp performing a supportive harmonic and rhythmic role (*ibid*.: 10–11). Highlighting the harp's sonic capabilities Caplan explores the lower and upper limits of its range, and the timbre associated with these extremities (see Figure 3). Traversing a two octave range (Bb3 to Bb5) and including typical harp-like features—glissandi, arpeggio-styled passages, inner melodies within gently rocking

Explaining that the *nyatiti/kundi* harp has an East African origin and that similarly styled harps can be located in various countries with a great variety of names, Caplan relates that he "[found] two of them in a [Johannesburg] city market and [has] enjoyed discovering its simple and yet beautiful nature ever since" (Caplan 2016: 10).

ostinato, and descending block chord-type figuration—the harp adds to the oboe's plaintive, uncomplicated melodic line. Clearly set in Bb major, Caplan scores the music with a key signature of three flats. Commenting on this decision he explains that

[...] I settled on the Xhosa hexatonic scale as it was my original desire to have a more South African sound to the work. Instead of scoring in Bb major which is clearly the tonal centre for this work, or in Ab which is the open string on the umrhubhe, I avoided all [chromatic] accidentals and wrote it in Eb [...] the Xhosa hexatonic scale makes use of two major chords a tone apart (*ibid*.: 11).

Arising from musical bows, such as the *uhadi* or *umakhweyane*, are African hexatonic scales. Dave Dargie (2007: 60-61) explains:

[W]hen it is played the bow string vibrates as a whole and also in partial vibrations [...] The vibration of the full length of the string produces the fundamental tone (for example F), the partial vibrations produce overtones. Half the string gives the first octave (F'), 1/3 gives the fifth (C'), 1/4 gives the double octave (F"), 1/5 gives the major third (A"), 1/6 gives a fifth an octave higher (C""). These tones build up the major triad F-A-C [...] With many bows the full chord can be heard when the string is vibrated [...] If the player needs to use a melody tone other than F, A or C, then another fundamental tone must be employed. The player may hold or touch the string to shorten its full vibrating length. This will provide a second fundamental tone higher than the first. If the second fundamental tone is G, then the overtones of the G major chord will become available as melody tones [...] The player can then use a two-chord pattern a whole tone apart (F major-G major), and the available melody overtones form a hexatonic scale F-G-A-B-C-D.

Built on the Xhosa hexatonic scale (Ab Bb C D Eb F) two major triads Ab C Eb and Bb D F are formed in *Kundi Dreams*. With the upper triad prevailing through most of the work, the macro-tonality is centred on Bb giving rise, especially melodically (oboe), to an incomplete, hexatonic-styled Mixolydian mode on Bb (Bb C D Eb F [G] Ab Bb). This leads to an element of tonal ambiguity that creates interest and an element of harmonic variety. From the outset Bb major appears as the tonal centre where the twelve-note underlying ostinato pattern (b.  $1^{11}$  through b.  $2^{10}$ ) reinforced with an eight-note ostinato pattern (b. 5) outlines alternating tonic and dominant harmony with the note, F, creating a dominant pedal point. Delineating the Mixolydian mode (bb. 5–7) the oboe adds to the tonal enunciation. Creatively applying his knowledge ("creative ethnomusicology") Caplan generates a work with an African-inspired sonic backdrop, especially the interlocking polyrhythmic structure of the underlying ostinati. Two independent strands create the 3/2 polyrhythm with the harpist creating the complex amalgam.

Tonally interesting, from b.  $13^{11}$  through b. 28 the music hints at exploring a C minor bias, particularly the Eb - D - Eb - C motion occurring on the principal beat of each bar in the twelve-note ostinato figure. Overlaying the twelve-note ostinato is an eight-note ostinato where Ab is prominent (minor sixth in C Mixolydian). Embedded in this polyrhythmic and polyphonic tapestry is a diminished quality triad formed on the supertonic of C minor (e.g. b.  $14^{4-6}$ ). Here, the diminished fifth interval is treated freely without resolution of the tritone notes, as found in the Western canon. When considered in conjunction with the oboe part the music shows prevalence for C Mixolydian, especially obvious through the inclusion of a sustained dominant, G—first



Figure 3. Caplan: Kundi Dreams, bb. 1-9.

located as a melodic note at b. 21<sup>12</sup>—which becomes more significant through melodic embellishment (quadruplet) at b. 24. Karlton Hester (2010: 42) writes that in African music "three- or four-part [textural] density is not an uncommon [...] feature." Three-part texture is mostly found throughout this work—polyrhythmic two-part ostinato and single-line oboe part—but at b. 24<sup>10-12</sup> three-stranded 4/3/2 polyrhythm is apparent; a feature that adds to Caplan's embodiment of African music-making (see Figure 4).

Alternating Ab and Bb major triads that interchange root position and first inversion (bb. 37–40), repeated with varied extension from bb. 57–72, Caplan creates tonal ambiguity centred on the Ab hexatonic/Lydian-Bb Mixolydian axis. Pointing toward Bb tonality is the prevalence of this key's tonic triad (bb. 37<sup>1-6</sup>, 37, 38<sup>7-9</sup>, 40) though Ab gains currency through use of its tonic triad at bb. 37<sup>7-9</sup>, 38<sup>1-6</sup> and 38<sup>10-12</sup>. This use of homophonic parallelism featuring major quality triads, a common feature in African traditional music, is reinforced by Agawu who citing Gerhard Kubik states:



Figure 4. Caplan: Kundi Dreams, bb. 21-26.

"major triads are the basis of consonant chordal chains in the multipart organization of music in several regions of Africa" (Kubik, in Agawu 2016: 293).

Replacing the consistently applied sense of compound quadruple made apparent through evenly spaced quaver pulses, bars 37–40 involve hemiola resemblances and syncopation; rhythmical features expressed later in the work from b. 57 (see Figure 5). Similar to hemiola these four bars (37–40) are notated in compound duple (6/4) not the prevailing compound quadruple (12/8)—the bar's halfway mark is shared by each time signature, but not the subdivisions—with bar 38 highlighting the dotted minim subdivision of compound duple. Underscoring the compound duple subdivision the second half of b. 37 introduces syncopations which are also located at b. 39 through 40. Hence, these four bars are drawn from traditional African music's harmonic and rhythmic features.

Two bars of octave doubling (bb. 52–54) where melodic lines move in parallel motion represent yet another feature related to traditional African musicking (see Figure 6). Nearly sixty years ago, missionary and musicologist, Arthur Morris Jones (1959 (1): 217),<sup>5</sup> wrote that "generally speaking all over the [African] continent south

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>5</sup> Having read vast portions from Jones's two volumes, Studies in African Music, I concur with the



Figure 5. Caplan: Kundi Dreams, bb. 37-40.



Figure 6. Caplan: Kundi Dreams, bb. 51-54.

myriad of commentators who find these texts to be written from the vantage point of colonialism's sense of superiority. Though I also take heed of Agawu's statement that "one can still learn from Jones's transcriptions" (Question-and-answer session following a Seminar entitled, "Contesting Difference", presented by the Conservatorium of Music at Stellenbosch University, on 16 March 2017). Hence, this reference to Jones's text.

of the Sahara, African harmony is in organum and is sung in either parallel fourths, parallel fifths, parallel octaves or parallel thirds." Developing this further, Kubik (1969: 31) writes:

[...] the Baganda do not use chordal harmony, all their music being in unison and octaves. The harmonic experience here is essentially melodic, a kind of *consecutive harmony* which has its roots in the preference for certain (consonant) intervals to follow one another in melodic succession.

This notion of consecutive harmony appears to lie at the root of Caplan's writing as he moves the music to a climactic point with the oboe playing a high pitched, sustained note while the harp plays a series of descending double note figures followed by an idiomatically scored glissando.

Closing with an extended representation of the Bb Mixolydian mode (Bb C D Eb F [G] Ab [Bb]), bb. 77–101, this mode emerges as the music's prevalent tonal unifier.

#### Umrhubhe Geeste

Writing that this work's title "refers to the mouth bow—umrhubhe a traditional Xhosa instrument—that features in this piece, [and] an Afrikaans word meaning 'spirit' " (Caplan 2016: 12) Caplan unfortunately conveys a vague understanding of Afrikaans. "Gees" may refer to having or conveying spiritedness, or it may refer to the essence of a person's soul or even the soul of a musical instrument, while "geeste" may refer to the souls of numerous people or multiple heritages of an object such as a musical instrument. Possibly it is the latter that may be implied as the umrhubhe—an African musical bow known by numerous names across the continent—has derivatives as far-flung as India (malunga) and Brazil (berimbau). Through merging, in this work, African-Middle Eastern-Western musical characteristics it is possible that the latter is what Caplan intended to convey.

At 111 bars in length this work is slightly longer than *Kundi Dreams*, but its tripartite set of influences makes it the most complex of the three works analysed in this article. Typically African in its expectations, the *umrhubhe* player simultaneously manipulates two or more performance activities. Hester (2010: 41) notes that "[E]ven players of simple solo instruments (such as the musical bow or flute) manage to manipulate the instrument in such a way to produce simultaneous sounds by playing overtones with the bow, by humming while bowing, and the like." In keeping with this convention Caplan's score requires the *umrhubhe* player to produce overtones, whistle, vocalise, play with the violin bow, tap with a stick, and pluck with the alternative hand; aspects drawn from localized Eastern Cape performance practice (Dargie 2011).

Opening with two ostinato patterns created by the *umrhubhe* (lower ostinato produced through the violin bow and upper ostinato created through overtones) parallel fifths and major triads result from the merging of each ostinato strand. Commenting that "the richest [...] sphere of harmonic imagining remains the traditional [African] repertory", Agawu lists the importance of "a variety of scale constructs [...], voice-leading routines (including parallelism and voice crossing), and incidental (often

dissonant) harmonies" (Agawu 2016: 304). Parallelism, crossing of parts (bb. 9-13) and a quintal (dissonant) formation found at b. 6<sup>2.2</sup> underpin this work's African orientation (see Figure 7). Basing the first thirty-six bars on the Xhosa hexatonic scale (D E F# G# A B) the music's tonality based on this scale becomes clear once the oboe joins the conversation. Together with these African inspired harmonic features Caplan allows the oboe's initial eight bars to unfold, drawing from African and Western compositional features with descending motifs largely beginning after the principal beat (African), intermingled with Western-styled sequential patterning (bb. 7–8<sup>2</sup>); the three-note motif drawn from the oboe's opening notes (b. 5).



Figure 7. Caplan: Umrhubhe Geeste, bb. 1-14.

Following this initial expression of ideas, new ostinato patterning emerges (b. 13). Here the upper ostinato pattern starts after the principal beat while the lower ostinato introduces a varied form of the two-note (D–E) design. With the upper ostinato, articulated through whistling, creating counterpoint to the two-note evenly spaced lower ostinato, the oboe shows how initial ideas are developed through criss-crossing a wide instrumental range and introducing shorter note values. Preparing for the

emergence of varied ostinato patterning (from b. 24) structured in compound duple (6/4), Caplan interrupts the hitherto simple quadruple with a bar in simple duple (2/4) immediately preceding the onset of compound duple. This new ostinati patterning, replete with parallel fifths and octaves, includes sung glissandi; an effect imitated by the oboe (see Figure 8).



Figure 8. Caplan: Umrhubhe Geeste, bb. 25-26.

Interrupting the 6/4 momentum is a bar in irregular time (5/4) before 6/4 resumes with a rhythmically complex bar (b. 31). Here, evenly spaced quavers in compound duple (*umrhubhe*) are placed below the oboe's notation, better expressed as an additive time signature: 3 + 3 + 4 + 2/8. This creates cross-rhythm with its effect intact for the following five bars. Yet, greater rhythmical intricacy emerges as the work evolves; very apparent from bars 37 through 40. Following a period in compound duple (6/4) a hemiola is introduced at b. 37 where the time signature effectively changes to simple triple (3/2). In the ensuing bar the aural (and visual) effect of simple triple (3/2) played by the oboe appears simultaneously with the *umrhubhe's* two strands articulating compound duple (6/4), highlighting a hemiola. This is reinforced at b. 39 where both performers play in simple triple (3/2) only to move onto compound duple in b. 40; three pulses alternating with two pulses creating the hemiola effect.

Introducing a variation to the Xhosa hexatonic scale at b. 37 Caplan (2016: 14) explains that the "Swazi [use] this scale with one small difference. The stopped note on the bow is fingered as a semitone above the open string [producing] a different scale D  $E\flat$  F# G G# A B $\flat$  [...] I have listened to many recordings of Swazi singing which use this distinctive sounding scale. Sometimes not all the notes in the scale [are] used and certainly not perfectly pitched either but the effect was there." Arising from this scale are two alternating chords (D F# A and E $\flat$  G B $\flat$ ) as noted from b. 37 (see Figure 9).

From b. 41 a Middle-Eastern feel enters the music. Asserting that this derives from the Swazi hexatonic scale which "almost has a Middle Eastern sound" (Caplan 2016: 14) Caplan misses the point that this section is based on a Shahnaz (Arabic) maqam (D  $E \triangleright F \# G A B \triangleright C \# [D]$ ), articulated in full (b.  $42^{2+3}$ ), with its double set of augmented second intervals. With multiple examples of 3/2 polyrhythms, twirling figurations, wide leaps, and quickly moving chromatic scales this section (bb. 41-80) resembles passages played on Middle Eastern melodic instruments. A moment of quietude (bb.  $55^2$ –62), based on G Aeolian with longer note values and mainly conjunct motion, interrupts the

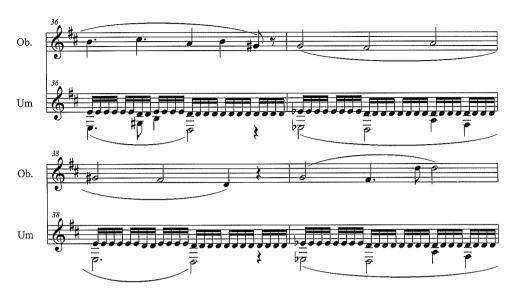


Figure 9. Caplan: Umrhubhe Geeste, bb. 36-39.

oboe's technical flurry. Alternating D and Eb major broken chords in rising formation against a drone on D (bb. 77 – 80) Caplan emphasizes the harmonic features of the Swazi hexatonic scale (*ibid*.: 15) though this passage could also refer to the Shahnaz maqam.

Starting from b. 83 through b. 108 an evocative sense pervades with the voice intoning an octave lower than the oboe (see Figure 10). This lower rendition following the oboe's melodic contour moves into double octave parallelism (bb.  $87-90^{1}$ ),



Figure 10. Caplan: Umrhubhe Geeste, bb. 85-94.

compound third consecutive movement (bb. 91–91, and compound fifth parallelism (bb. 93–94). After a short interjectory passage where the oboe and *umrhubhe* perform the ostinato pattern in parallel motion at the distance of a perfect fifth (the voice intones the melody), the closing phrases enter with the voice and oboe performing in octave parallelism. Reprising initial Xhosa melodic shapes (including the "whistling-motif", bb.96–100), with material derived from the Eb section, the twenty-five bars from b. 83 are innovative in their merging of African-Middle Eastern styles replete with Western-African instrumentation.

As with the other two works analysed in this article, this work is structured around a loosely-fitting (Western) ternary design, with the reprised material showing detail where numerous thematic strands crystallize into a merged idiom, sonically replicating the essence of African art music; multiple independent thematic strands (as in the African aesthetic) merged with aspects of Western art music.

#### Conclusion

Exemplifying African art music's tenets these three works showcase Caplan's abilities as a performer on a variety of African instruments. The works also highlight his knowledge of compositional features, especially homophonic parallelism, scales, polyrhythms; the ingredients to sonically sculpture an African ambience. Applying this knowledge to musical composition Caplan makes Euba's notion of "creative ethnomusicology" a living reality. With knowledge of Middle Eastern music practices not tangential to his application of African and Western musics, but integral to his understanding of musics from a range of cultural backgrounds, Caplan embodies the essence of African art music.

Lamenting about "what is badly needed in African today", Agawu (2016: 304) urges for greater "compositional exploration drawing on [...] traditional [African] resources [...] in accordance with aesthetical and ethical imperatives of each composer's cultural and artistic credo." My suggestion is that Anthony Caplan is one such creative individual able to enmesh wide-ranging cultural strands into a workable, understandable, and musical entity.

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