

Sekuru's Stories. Jennifer W Kyker. 2019. Online Multimedia Platform. <https://sekuru.org>

Jennifer W. Kyker's *Sekuru's Stories* is a born digital monograph on the life of the legendary Zimbabwean mbira master, Tute Chigamba (b.1939). Hosted on sekuru.org, the site is presently comprised of six extensively cross-referenced and interactive webpage titles and materials that include written text (in English and ChiShona), illustrative photographs, audio examples of music and video materials. Using a wide selection of links, and only guided by individual interests of visitors, the innovative layout allows for variable experiences for exploring topics linked with Chigamba's oral narratives. The overall presentation is that of a dynamic biography whose individual focus, however, provides for a unique experience of Zimbabwe's musical culture and its shaping by both indigenous and colonial institutions, as well as by individual musical subjects.

The following is a summary of content in the extensive drop down menus, considered under each of the tabs displaying on the homepage:

The Introduction has an engaging text focusing on the interwoven processes in Sekuru Tute Chigamba's biography and his Zimbabwean, cultural subjectivity. The texts draw from both documented Zimbabwean cultural and political history, and a narrative embedded chiefly in oral traditions of storytelling, music, and participatory experiences in indigenous religious practice. The menu usefully includes a list of references and guidelines for citing the site's resources, including its photographic images and audio content.

The Early Years tab covers the period of the first two decades of Sekuru Chigamba's life, his formative life experiences, traditions, beliefs and everyday practices that shaped his outlook. Focusing on rurality, white colonial subjectivity and farm labour as rooted legacies, the narratives highlight the role of Chigamba's ancestral role in indigenous musical spirituality. His spirituality includes the evocation of the real and mythical narratives of Zimbabwean people and landscapes that shaped his person.

The Musical Life tab traces Chigamba's unique musical socialisation within common southern African migratory experiences straddling white-owned rural farm labour and outlawed urban itinerancy. The section remarks on indigenous music and religion which are considered a resilient recourse of practicing continuities with Zimbabwean history under successive repressive conditions of coloniality, civil war, *chimurenga* (liberation struggle) and post-liberation developments. The section also highlights the empowering role of mbira knowledge in practices of Zimbabwean individual, sociocultural identities and their relationship with the spiritual and material worlds.

The tab for Independence traces Chigamba's transitory experiences, and the musical roles defining post-independence Zimbabwean culture in the domestic and global sphere of practice. These roles include his increasingly ceremonial role as an elder asserting the historical place of music in Zimbabwean relationships to nature, history, religion and economic sustainability. The section touches on an increasing western engagement with Zimbabwe's musical culture and a reciprocal representation of its mbira traditions in international circuits and academic programmes. It maps Chigamba's involvement in national developments in their profiling of Zimbabwe's cultural heritage. The post-independence collaborations with diverse local and international artists and ethnographers, musicians, mbira students, ethnomusicologists, photographers, documentary producers

include persons such as Paul Berliner, Thomas Turino, Banning Eyre, Jennifer Kyker, Thomas Mapfumo, Stella Chiweshe, Dumisani Maraire, Klaus-Peter Brenner, Chicago Dzviti, Lucy Duran, Tessa Watts, Sekuru Compound Muradzikwa, and others.

The iconic Zimbabwean lamellophone, the mbira, is given a prominent position. The instrument's symbolic status is seen to musically straddle Zimbabwean mythical origins to the present. Its unbroken performance traditions are central to the Zimbabwean conception of the spiritual and its relationship to the living. Indeed, the changes and developments marking the passage of Zimbabwean nationhood are embodied in the instrument's repertoires – rendering itself an archival repository of historical memory and shared cultural experiences. In encoding individual and cultural subjectivity of the everyday, it is an apt tool to explore the discursive relationship of the performing subject. Alongside its scrutiny, the interlocutors have been enabled to highlight the bearing of apparently disparate realms of experience, knowledge and history and indigenous, religious processes in their bearing and sense-making for the individual subject of Sekuru Tute Chigamba. The mbira is thus centrally positioned in a matrix of epistemes, vocabularies, myths, oralities and precolonial trajectories of knowing and being in the world. In this regard a section on Ancestors – as a state of continuity between the condition of the living and “the dead” – is prominently included in its distinguishing characterisation of African spiritual consciousness, and in its embedding in Zimbabwean musical traditions.

Finally, it is the site's “Explore” menu that affords a summary of Zimbabwean culture which is proposed as a participatory experience with Sekuru Tute Chigamba. In Timeline, which dates back to 1895, we learn of Chigamba's grandfather's arrest by the British South African Police – for living in the bush and ostensibly “killing animals” with his two brothers who were *mhondoro* spirit mediums. “Family Tree” reveals the connection of Chigamba's ancestors of mbira musicians to Chingoo, a musician companion to Mutota – the ancient ruler and founding ancestor of the Nhova/Soko royal dynasty. The menu threads also include maps, images, songs, musical instruments, all of which can be perused independently.

Among the first in piloting the digital humanities' engagement with the narrative flexibility of socio-historical and individual subjective cultural experience in sub-Saharan Africa, sekuru.org demonstrates a flexible presentation of diverse cultural, socio-historical and musical performance interest on Zimbabwe. The digital web platform is refreshingly innovative in its extensive cross-referencing of topics across diverse archival, research and oral/aural experiential practices of knowledge making and dissemination in sub-Saharan Africa.

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