

## AFRICAN AND EUROPEAN MUSICAL CULTURE IN THE FEDERATION OF RHODESIA AND NYASALAND

*The African Music Society is delighted to learn that practical steps are being taken towards the proper encouragement of the study and practice of African music within the Federation of Rhodesia and Nyasaland. With the kind permission of the sponsors, the Rhodesian Academy of Music, Bulawayo, we reprint the memorandum which embodies their scheme. Editor.*

As a result of the emergence of Africa from its long isolation from the rest of the world and of the growing impact of Western civilization on the indigenous inhabitants of this continent, a considerable body of enlightened opinion is concerning itself with efforts to ensure that the worthwhile elements of African culture are not submerged in a flood of "culture", manufactured—often for purely commercial reasons—in other parts of the world.

In those countries of Africa where the white man, if present at all, is a temporary resident, there is much to be said for encouraging Africans to develop their music along purely indigenous lines, avoiding, as far as possible, any external influences that might be foreign to a society of their own making.

In countries like the Federation of Rhodesia and Nyasaland and, particularly, in Southern Rhodesia, the permanent presence of a large white population makes it virtually impossible to keep the cultures in water-tight compartments and efforts to do so are likely to be doomed to failure. Indeed, it is questionable whether such efforts should be made, even if there was any hope of success, since the whole motive underlying the enormous political and sociological experiment which is beginning to gain momentum in the Federation, is one that visualises rapprochement between the races rather than the maintenance of rigid separation.

On the other hand, if the situation is left to solve itself, it seems inevitable that the poorer and simpler elements of Western music will gain the upper hand in the minds of Africans, since the serious pursuit of music-study is regarded as an expensive luxury even amongst Europeans, and it is unlikely that Africans for many years to come, will be in an economic position to contemplate such study on their own initiative.

We believe that there is much that is fundamentally worthwhile in African indigenous music and that the study and practice of its particular idiom will open new avenues to European exponents and audiences. We believe, also, that there is much that is fundamentally worthwhile in Western music which will open new avenues for Africans and there is no more likely place in the world than the Federation for a truly new and significant art form to arise, deriving its inspiration from two diverse cultures and, at the same time, serving to provide another bridge between peoples whose experiment of living together is one of the most far-reaching and vital adventures of the present century.

In nearly all the branches of knowledge which have contributed to the building up of Western civilization, the African peoples are at the receiving end of the educational process and it would not be surprising if psychic tensions in both races resulted from this situation. In the art of music, however, Africans have something vital and original to contribute to the common pool, and the opportunity of doing so may well provide the substance for a lasting mutual respect and give Africans a greater confidence in their own inherent qualities.

The Rhodesian Academy of Music, in launching the project based on the foregoing considerations, is deeply conscious of the dimensions of the task. By itself, without financial backing and the advice and assistance of knowledgeable people who have made a special study of African music and without the support of Africans themselves, it will be able to achieve very little, but we have every reason to believe that all these will be forthcoming.

The purpose of this Memorandum is to acquaint those interested with the Scheme and seek such financial assistance for its achievement as they may be able to give, or such comments and criticisms that they may be able to offer, which will help to ensure that the work is carried out in the soundest possible manner.

Two appendices follow, which elaborate respectively the main principles and a suggested programme of activity. The work would begin initially in the Bulawayo African Townships, where negotiations are afoot for the necessary facilities. It is hoped that it will soon be possible for an advance to be made on a much wider front but there is much to be said for concentrating effort at the outset until experience has been gained which will stand in good stead for the future.

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## THE APPROACH TO MUSIC IN THE FEDERATION

The future of Music in Rhodesia poses the following questions, in respect of the widely differing cultures that the two principal races in the country have so far evolved:--

- (1) Are the two cultures, as they exist at the moment, to be individually fostered and developed to the exclusion of each other?
- (2) Is the more generally acceptable culture to be allowed to supersede the less acceptable one, so that the latter disappears?
- (3) Is an attempt to be made for each race to study the culture of the other, so that a sort of parallel development goes on, each respecting the other and—as far as possible—understanding, appreciating and practising the other?
- (4) Is the attempt referred to in (3) to be aimed, instead, at evolving a composite culture in which the best elements of both survive in an essentially Rhodesian art form?

We believe that (4) should be the ultimate aim, if a multi-racial community is going to be successful. Clearly demarcated differences of culture maintained racially have, we think, always led to a sharpening of the divisions between men. The numerous examples in recent years of failure in maintaining harmonious relations between different races in various parts of the world may well have been largely due to the failure to evolve—or even to contemplate—a common culture. Positive religious differences have frequently been an insurmountable barrier which has prevented progress being made but, in this respect, it is fortunate that extreme religious attachments are not so predominant in this part of the world.

Difference in cultural *levels* amongst people of the same race is, on the other hand, an understandable and probably inevitable circumstance and one that would be far less likely to create divisions.

In a highly organised art, like Music, the large mass of people are unlikely to be able to express themselves other than in the simplest forms—and these should be related to the living realities of their lives, if they are to have any validity. With changing environment, there are bound to arise new forms of artistic expression and these, to be genuine and significant, must grow from indigenous soil. Exponents of existing idioms must be encouraged to develop these idioms in the context of the new society in which they live, for otherwise something else will take their place; something which does not come spontaneously from the spirit and is, therefore, to some extent spurious. This is true of Europeans and Africans alike and the new environment in which they find themselves should lead to a mutual appreciation of each other's art and the assimilation of such new ideas as are thereby seen to be appropriate and worthwhile, until something in the nature of common idioms has been found.

The employment of new idioms may well have the effect of releasing a flood of creative energy and of spurring advanced composers to develop a style apparently removed in spirit and beyond the immediate appreciation of the general mass of the population. While this is not necessarily a bad thing in itself, the prime concern of the educational project that is envisaged is not with such advanced workers. It must have as its object the informing of ordinary people; and those composers will serve the project best who, while leading, keep close contact with those whose awareness they would stimulate.

African music depends a great deal upon rhythmic sophistication for its complexity. Harmonic erudition is not as significant as it is with Western music and the absence of any notation has restricted the building up process which is common to all major cultures. Generally speaking, Africans have, if anything, a greater sense of intonation and rhythm within the confines of their own music than Europeans have within theirs and, if an appreciation of the subtleties of chromatic tone relations can be acquired by the former, while the latter are having their imaginations stirred by wider rhythmic possibilities, we may produce something in the Federation that will open the eyes of the world.

But music must be written down. Recording is all very well but other people want to play new music before they will regard it as anything other than a novelty programme on the radio. The African must write it down himself in the international language of music. He must, also, be acquainted—just as musicians elsewhere are acquainted—with the work of others, if he is to enter a world community on equal terms and not remain merely a museum piece for the objective study of the musicologist and the sporadic curiosity of others. And it is not only the future leaders of artistic expression that require to become coherent and knowledgeable in musical matters. There must be a large body of performers and an even larger body of appreciative listeners, who have been schooled in the technique of music, to provide the necessary ground in which a culture can take hold, grow and, through critical evaluation, reach a significant maturity.

In any event, Africans should become increasingly competent in the practice of the arts, particularly if they are to lead others to an appreciation of their own forms of expression. A singer, for example, will not make much progress without intensive voice-production training. Nature has given people varying talents but none of them is adequate without nurture and development by well-proved methods that have grown up over the centuries in Western countries. The goal of Federal partnership is the acceptance of competence as the standard of the measurement of a man and this competence must cover all fields of human activity.

It is a simple fact of history that, through the ability to place ideas on permanent record, most of the world outside Africa south of the Sahara has for thousands of years been building up an enormous wealth of knowledge in the application of thought to matters of physical and aesthetic experience. This knowledge is already being made available to Africans in many other fields of activity. The adoption of techniques that have long proved their validity in the enhancement of competence will not stifle the essential creative spirit of the individual but, rather, will bring it to full flower and enable it to be expressed coherently for all the world to appreciate.

Above all, the competent use of a common musical medium—whatever thoughts are expressed through it—will do much to earn the mutual respect of peoples for each other, just as a similar undertaking in all the highest activities of man will sweep away barriers that purely material equality alone is likely to emphasise.

This is a gigantic undertaking. It is one that has frequently failed, even between peoples of the same colour. But it has got to succeed in this country, if there is to be any lasting happiness for its peoples. The proverbial good nature of the African and the increasing desire of the European to accept competence as the yardstick, are factors that entitle us to believe that, provided rapprochement is sought on *all* fronts of human activity, we may succeed in this vital experiment where others have failed.

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## DRAFT PROGRAMME FOR THE DEVELOPMENT OF MUSIC IN THE FEDERATION

1. At the outset, it is felt that the diatonic scale and its associated chromatic scale should be the basis of the music of the Federation. The point is of so fundamental a character that the reasons for advancing this view are dealt with as follows at some length:-
  - (i) Although truly indigenous African music employs other intervals than those of the diatonic scale, Africans themselves are already becoming more familiar with the latter as a result of the mass of imported records they listen to and of the Radio programmes and the various European performances that they hear. In addition, the activities of the Mission stations and African schools have, over the years, rightly or wrongly, implanted the diatonic scale in their minds. It is suggested that the majority of Africans, in Southern Rhodesia at any rate, now tend to sing in intervals that approach more closely to the diatonic than to any other scale.
  - (ii) The chromatic scale offers greater possibilities of harmonic development than truly indigenous African scales, of which the most advanced is heptatonic, with no leading note in the usual meaning of that expression.
  - (iii) Limiting Africans to indigenous scales, which many of them have largely forgotten and, in some cases, never known, might be resented by Africans who are anxious to express themselves fully and effectively. It might be regarded as a segregating measure, as indeed similar attempts in some parts of Africa have, it is believed, been regarded.
  - (iv) The promotion and enshrinement of indigenous African scales will keep African music in a watertight compartment and prevent the development of a composite musical culture; for it is extremely unlikely that Europeans living in the country would accept a scale that they would regard as imposing limitations on aesthetic development.
  - (v) There is nothing to stop the continuance, if it is desired, of particular instruments tuned to an indigenous scale for particular reasons, as in the case of the bagpipes in Scotland. No one, however, would suggest that Scotsmen should have all their music limited to the scale of the bagpipes.
  - (vi) The existence of indigenous scales peculiar to the peasantry of a country or region is not uncommon but it does not normally become the basis for published national music. In Hungary, for example, Bartok has based much of his music on folk-song and drawn attention to the existence of non-diatonic scales. But his music is not written in the indigenous scales. Nor is it any less Hungarian on this account. It is also fairly certain that no Conservatoire or Academy of Music in Hungary teaches students in indigenous scales.
  - (vii) The use of *additional* tones to the existing chromatic scale is another matter altogether and one that it would certainly not be wise to be dogmatic about. If musicians feel the need of even further complexity, then they are certainly entitled to obtain it.
  - (viii) Music based on an indigenous scale would be unlikely to be played to any appreciable extent elsewhere and, whatever its quality, it would lose out in world appraisal.

2. Subject to the foregoing, it is then proposed that transcriptions into staff notation of the best extant recordings of appropriate African music should be made. By far the more important feature of this music is its rhythmic quality, and the bending of the tones here and there to fit them to the diatonic scale will, it is felt, have less effect upon the essential idiom of the music than some may fear.
3. Africans would be trained in the Theory of Music as applicable to staff notation and would be given aural training, together with instruction in vocal and instrumental technique, using as far as possible transcriptions of African music as the teaching material. They would not, however, be denied access to music of other parts of the world, although great care would be taken to ensure that a full knowledge of African music was obtained and a genuine respect for it encouraged.
4. In particular, efforts would be made to encourage those already possessing a knowledge of the drums of the *Marimba* (xylophone), or similar instruments, to obtain a wider knowledge of music, so that their performance could be further enhanced and intelligently integrated with other instruments. The building of *Marimbas* tuned to the diatonic scale would be experimented with.
5. As soon as a significant quantity of good African transcriptions was available, the European students of the Academy would be encouraged to include this music in their study. The use of the *Marimba* as an instrument in its own right, in percussion bands and in the orchestra, would be encouraged.
6. African School bands based on the Drums, the *Mbira*, and the *Marimba*, together with, say, flutes or recorders and singing would be encouraged. This work would be largely the responsibility of the African Schools themselves but courses for teachers would be provided by the Academy to ensure that their work was competently handled.
7. Competent musicians of all races would be encouraged to transcribe or compose works for the foregoing combinations.
8. Finally, the goal would be to develop, in as many students of all races as possible, the highest degree of musicianship, together with the emergence of a school of composition that will produce major works, in which the use of such African instruments as are original and worthwhile, in association with appropriate European instruments, will be encouraged.

The flute, for example, is an instrument which is indigenous to Africa in a crude form. The advantages of the more highly developed European instrument would enable far greater opportunities for expression in the African idiom to be obtained.

There is, in the limit, no real reason in the long run why any instrument which an African musician wishes to use should not be available to him, if it helps him to express himself, and he should certainly not be denied access to it. Care, however, will be exercised to ensure that, in the whole process of musical education of Africans, the significant and worthwhile elements of African culture are maintained.

9. A problem, for which there is at the moment no ready-made solution, will be the establishment of standards of measurement of competence in musical knowledge and performance. Up to the present time, music students in the Federation have had their work assessed by external examinations conducted by acknowledged authorities in Britain. While it is extremely wise for a young country to subject itself to an objective evaluation based on mature world standards, such a procedure would be obviously inappropriate in the present case. An acceptable level of scholarship is something which have to evolve naturally and leading African musicians will be encouraged to play the principal part in bringing this about.
10. The language problem is another difficulty. There are so many diverse tongues in use that it would be impracticable to do other than employ English as the principal medium for tuition, at least as far as the focal point of study is concerned. It is desirable for students to have attained already a reasonable standard of general education and many of them will, in fact, be teachers, so a knowledge of English can be taken for granted. Language is so much an integral part of singing, however, that as long as African languages continue to be generally employed, so long will serious account have to be taken of them. It will be essential for leading African musicians, as they emerge, to give their attention to this important matter. In the course of time, no doubt, the problem will solve itself, for it seems unlikely that a real partnership can be evolved if twenty or so different languages are going to persist throughout the country indefinitely.