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A Philosophy for Music Education in Zimbabwe

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This article is an articulation of the rationale employed in designing the regulations for the Bachelor of Education in Teacher Education, Practical Subjects: Music Option. The degree is on offer for the first time at the University of Zimbabwe during 1994 and 1995. This is a two year programme with the stated aim of preparing lecturers to "become effective and efficient in their area of professional specialisation." The programme is comprised of 10 courses, three of which are in general education. Excluding the individual research project, six courses remain in which to cover music content, music education methods and music performance. With such limitations of structure and time, difficult choices had to be made on what could and could not be included. The programme had to strike a balance between two aims: to offer students the opportunity to expand their individual musicality and, at the same time, to enable them to develop skills applicable to Zimbabwe's unique needs in music education.

UZ's curriculum differs from the conventional format of Bachelor of Music Education degrees in Europe and the Americas in several significant respects. Foremost is the departure from the dominating perspective of the classical canon of Western art music. Most programmes based on European prototypes require at least a year's study of the history and appreciation of Western art music and virtually nothing on the music of the rest of the world. In contrast, the curriculum at UZ offers two years study of the musical culture of Zimbabwe within the framework of the discipline of ethnomusicology. Most conventional music programmes require two years on the theory of music, focusing on Western notations. UZ's single year course in music theory, while presenting the elements of

Western notation in their musical context (Western classical art music), also focuses on the development and use of notations for the representation of music from the oral traditions of Southern Africa.

Practical components of European/American style programmes are generally limited to instruments which have a repertoire of music in the classical tradition. The UZ degree offers the possibility that the major instrument studied may be one for which there is no systematic written repertoire, eg. mbira. Conventional music education degrees require expertise on the piano keyboard, although there is a trend toward the option of guitar. The UZ requirement is for basic expertise on guitar, marimba, mbira, drum and hosho.

These departures from convention have evoked concern from some academicians who would prefer that a music degree be based more firmly on the classical canon. Their arguments are founded on the following assumptions:

- (1) Western classical art music is a universal, transcultural phenomenon.
- (2) Principles of the classical canon provide a basis for understanding all musics.
- (3) Understanding of Zimbabwean music would be enhanced by an understanding of classical music: "A man who knows only England does not know England."
- (4) The complexity in the structure of classical music deserves analytical presentation; folk musics, such as those studied in ethnomusicology, do not contain such complexities and thus deserve less time.
- (5) There is a hierarchy among the subjects of academia, based on their distance from the concerns of everyday life. Hence mathematics is higher than bookkeeping and accounting. History is higher than

sociology. And there is a parallel hierarchy among musics. For example, the classical canon is higher than reggae. The "highest" musics should be studied at university.

I would counter these points with those below. Western classical music is universal, not due to any inherent superiority, but because it has been carried throughout the world by its adherents. If breadth of dissemination is the measure of value, then Western *popular* music deserves study because it is certainly the most powerful transcultural influence on living musicians.

The principles of the classical canon are simply conventions of a particular culture and are not universally applicable to world musics. Classical music embodies philosophical tenets of Western culture, as other musical structures embody the philosophies of their own societies. True, an individual gains insight into his or her own cultural norms and values by viewing them as an outsider. But the classical canon does not represent the only outside vantage point; knowledge of any other music could also provide a broadening of perspective. The structural principles of Western art music do not subsume all musics, cannot provide a mode of analysing musics which proceed from diverse environments and world-views. The theories developed through ethnomusicology come closer to providing an overarching framework for understanding musics of the whole Earth, including our own Zimbabwe tradition.

The Western classical canon, through development of notation, evolved linear and vertical extensions of the molecular building blocks in European folk music. An informed listener hears "complexity" of melody, form, and simultaneous sounding of tones (harmony). Other cultures have elaborated melodies, rhythms and timbre, in "intensional" rather than "extensional" ways (Vulliamy, 1980, pp. 33-43). Western-trained ears find it difficult to hear the complexities other cultures have created through processes of subtle modulation. Hence they tend to label these musics "simple."

There are higher and lower musical achievements in all genres. However, there is no absolute basis for saying that one type of music is more worthy of study than another. To argue that Western classical music communicates idealized truth because it is removed from mass culture contradicts the meaning of music as a social construct. "Once the significance of music is taken to be socially located, any circle of argument predicated on the notion of inherently superior and inferior minds is broken" (Shepherd, 1983, p. 25). Comparisons reveal that one music is different from another, but valid judgments of musical works can only be based upon the aesthetic principles governing the creation of each type of music. Thus every music should be studied and judged on its own terms.

The classical canon does not have a monopoly on providing the sublime experience of music. The paths are many and varied. To participate in a communal rendition of "Nhemamusasa" with full awareness of the nuances of the performance, bringing to the music a knowledge of its past and present context, appreciating the patterns of human behavior reflected in the musical structure, reliving the emotions felt during previous hearings--such an experience can be as meaningful as that elicited by the strains of Palestrina floating through the vaults of a Gothic cathedral.

Further arguments for a less Zimbabwe-based curriculum include the following:

- (1) An exclusive emphasis on indigenization reflects an Africa of the past and does not prepare potential leaders to take their place in a society which must survive in a global community of nations.
- (2) African students have been adept at taking academic disciplines and applying them to serve their needs. For example, Zimbabwe had no critical perspectives of written history but modern scholars have found it useful to use the discipline to develop a written narrative of their own story. They should be given the same opportunity in music.

- (3) A curriculum without adequate emphasis on the classical canon will handicap our graduates when they apply for candidacy for music degree programmes in Europe. Ethnomusicology has limited credibility in those institutions; applicants are expected to have extensive background in Western classical music. We are limiting the horizons of our students if we cannot, through this degree, prepare them for acceptance into a Bachelor of Music programme at the University of London, or comparable institution.
- (4) How are we providing for the student whose primary interest is not African music, one who wants to acquire a deeper understanding of the Western classical tradition.

These are important considerations but, in my view, they are overridden by the need to affirm our own musical culture. Because music is a fluid art form, it is capable, perhaps more than any other of the arts, of adapting and incorporating elements from foreign traditions. While European music has certainly had an impact on the musical culture of Zimbabwe, elements of African musics have proved powerful in influencing music from all parts of the planet. Recognition of this give and take is important. It is not insular thinking to look at African music first and then at its dissemination to other parts of the world. "Moving into the twenty first century" has often become a rationale for people of the developing world to accept and revere the culture of technological societies. A study of African music from the inside out illuminates and /reinforces a reverse flow of influence, in contrast to much of what happens globally.

The ethnocentric approach to the study of music in American and European institutions is beginning to draw criticism from many educationists. However, it is justifiable for such institutions to stress knowledge their own musical traditions. It is also justifiable for the institutions in Southern Africa to stress knowledge of their own musical conventions. One would hope for a future in which music programmes world-wide will encourage a global perspective. In the spirit of universality, Western institutions of music should come to acknowledge fluency in musical idioms other than their own. How will this be

accomplished if the very institutions concerned abdicate on providing an in-depth study of their own musics and instead, load the curriculum with courses on Western tonal harmony and the history of the European classical canon? By elevating such courses to dominance, out of proportion to the influence the music has had on the indigenous culture, we would be perpetuating the imbalance, not contributing to the future solution. Were the UZ to offer a four year Bachelor of Music programme, an option course on history and appreciation of the classical canon would certainly be in order. The education degree has other priorities. No single programme can offer all that there is to know. Every curriculum is incomplete in that sense.

African musicians acknowledge (with some reservations) the utility of Western notation in recording, preserving, and creating their own musics. A study of notation, "music theory," is therefore necessary and is one of the six music components of the programme. To pursue the parallel to history: while the format may come from the discipline, the content is of the people. One would not expect a "History of the Shangani" to be a narrative of the circumstances leading to the voyages of Prince Henry the Navigator. Neither is it defensible to spend a large portion of limited time delving into the intricacies of applying the conventions of seventeenth century Italian keyboard styles to reconstruct the harmony over a figured bass.

Any student who chooses to enter this programme has implicitly agreed to accept the emphasis provided, as much as a musician from Bali must complete the basic requirements for a degree at the University of London. However, the programme has built-in flexibility in the choice of major and minor practicals, in the choice of ensemble participation and in the choice of an individual research project. In recognition of the importance of the classical music tradition in academia, Western art music is substantially represented in the programme. Presentation of music theory must and will be in the context of the music it was devised to represent, music of the classical canon. The half-course in performance and methodology is evenly divided between Western and African instruments and techniques. Either the major or minor practical instrument must be one in which the

repertoire is written in Western notation. And the professional course in methods of teaching music will be taught from the lecturer's perspective, reflecting a background in Western classical music. The programme is designed to promote as much breadth as time allows. An individual student can use the degree requirements to develop personal strengths and supplement areas of weakness.

Of course, it would be tragic if this degree were a dead end. One objective of good teaching is imparting the notion that learning continues after the awarding of the degree. A graduate of this programme will be aware of the body of knowledge still beyond his or her mastery. A serious student can peruse the wealth of written and recorded materials on the classical canon in preparation for further work elsewhere. But where else in the world could one find the opportunity for an in-depth study of the musical culture of Zimbabwe?

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