

THE TRADITIONAL MBIRA ON STAGE:
A STUDY OF CONTEMPORARY PERFORMANCE PRACTICES

by

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ABSTRACT

This thesis explores the challenges (visual, aural, ethical, and spiritual) performers face when playing *mbira dzavadzimu*, a traditional Zimbabwean musical lamellophone, in a contemporary concert stage setting. In addition to examining historical, philosophical, and theoretical issues regarding changing performance practice and staging techniques in different contexts, the document includes analyses of mbira performances from internet video postings and documentary films. Analysis draws upon the personal testimonies of Zimbabwean musicians and involves the critique and application of theoretical perspectives of Adrienne Kaeppler, Richard Schechner, and Erving Goffman, among others. Results indicate that experimenting with stage set-up, utilizing technological enhancement, and encouraging audience-performer relationships creates an experience that is closer to that found in Zimbabwean mbira performances.

I. INTRODUCTION

“As a musician I become the pivot between people and spirits.”
—Chartwell Dutiro (2007: 3)

Intent and Scope

This project will address the issues performers encounter when the traditional Zimbabwean *mbira dzavadzimu* is played in a contemporary concert stage context. The mbira is a hand-held instrument that consists of a board with metal tines that are plucked with the thumbs and right-hand index finger.

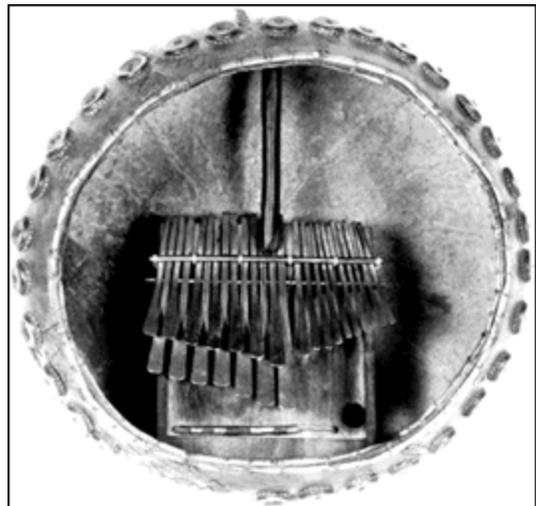


Figure 1: Mbira Dzavadzimu
Image from www.dharmanet.org/mbira/aboutmbira.htm.

According to the Hornbostel-Sachs organology system, it is classified as a plucked idiophone (an instrument whose sound is created by the vibration of the instrument itself) or, more specifically, a lamellophone (an instrument whose sound is created by the vibration of thin plates) (Hornbostel and Sachs 1961: 16). While regional variations of the mbira exist in Africa, this thesis will focus on the mbira dzavadzimu (“mbira of the ancient spirits”) of the Shona culture in Zimbabwe. Because of its deep spiritual connotations, the traditional culture surrounding mbira performance has survived despite

the drastic transitions the country has been through since independence. Furthermore, the mbira has a strong global subculture; Zimbabwean and non-Zimbabwean mbirists are increasingly being found on the world stage. In the transition from the old to the new context, mbira performance practices are compelled to adapt.

In order to understand the complexities created in the new context, one must be aware of the traditional context of Zimbabwean village performance. Mbira is played in a variety of situations, from funerals to weddings to rain-making ceremonies. Oftentimes mbirists perform in all-night *mapira*, ceremonies involving ancestral spirit possessions, during which the Shona people show honor to and ask advice from their ancestors. The spirits of deceased family members communicate through living family members called spirit mediums, and the mbira is the vehicle that draws the spirit to “come out.” The ceremony includes not only mbira players but also singers, dancers, *hosho* (rattle) players, drummers, and handclappers. Since the family members in attendance participate in the ceremony, there is no performer-audience separation found commonly in the Western stage context.¹ The setting in which the performance takes place is small and intimate—an ideal environment for the mbira.

However, many Western stage venues are not small and intimate. When the mbirist performs on a concert stage, the separation between the performer and the audience brings with it challenges, such as volume, visibility, and lack of communal musical contribution. There also is a cultural unawareness of the spirits who have much

¹ The term “Western” is referring to culture in the United States and Europe. Throughout the paper, the Western stage or Western theater is mainly used to describe a performance environment in which the audience and performer are separated.

to do with this music. In response to these challenges, I will examine various techniques to help fill this separation—techniques such as using stage configuration, audio amplification, and visual enhancement to narrow the gap between audience and performer; using audience participation to create an interactive community; and using various elements of Shona ceremonies to set a spiritual atmosphere. Other philosophical issues are addressed, too, such as nationality and gender of the performer, musical “ownership,” and changing the context from sacred to secular. For example, because much mbira repertoire is used in ceremonies for spirit-mediums, a staged performance may be deemed sacrilegious by Shona standards, and responses to such concerns are investigated.

Other solutions may be found in non-traditional mbira music. While mbira traditionalists work to preserve the music and its culture (indeed, a noble cause), answers to some of these staging questions may come from popular musicians, both Zimbabwean and non-Zimbabwean, who physically adapt the mbira. Performance techniques utilized by artists such as Thomas Mapfumo, Dan Pauli, Joel Laviolette, Stella Chiweshe, and others are options. Furthermore, one must look at the Zimbabwean culture when deciding how to overcome these concerns. I argue that traditional performance of Zimbabwean mbira music on the contemporary concert stage—which often physically separates the performer from the audience, contrary to the original context’s intimate setting—can be enhanced through a performer’s awareness and conveyance of the mbira’s cultural, social, and spiritual functions.

Methodology

To create a guide that provides suggestions for mbira performers on the Western stage, it was necessary to examine a variety of source material. Two approaches were utilized to collect data: literature review and performance analysis. During the first approach, literature on a variety of topics was reviewed for data, topics such as mbira cultural background and practices, related performance studies that transfer to mbira, audio amplification techniques, and interviews done by other authors with both Zimbabwean and non-Zimbabwean mbirists. This information provided suggestions for both the physical and philosophical challenges of putting mbira on stage. The other approach was mbira performance analysis. My main sources were YouTube and documentary clips. In these examples, I looked for solutions mainly to physical challenges created by the separation between the performer and the audience (volume, visibility, interaction, and creating a specific atmosphere). I considered questions such as: What options were available to this performer? What has the performer chosen? What do these choices imply? After borrowing techniques from observed examples and reviewed literature, I adapted the data for various types of mbira concerts based on performance intentions and audience expectations.

The aim of this guide is to balance the theoretical and social aspects of musical performance, two aspects that share equal importance in performance studies. As Alejandro Madrid says in his article “Why Music and Performance Studies? Why Now?” (2009):

[P]erformance studies as a field asks not what actions, events, or cultural manifestations are but rather what they do. Performance studies does not seek to describe actions so they could be faithfully reproduced later; instead, it attempts to understand what these actions do in the cultural field where they happen and what do they allow people to do in their everyday life.

By combining social and cultural facets with theoretical music performance facets, and simultaneously seeking collaboration between tradition and modernity, a guide to mbira performance can be created that supports an effective presentation environment.

Organization

Chapter IV covers background information on the Shona people and their music, including Zimbabwean political and musical history, music in Shona culture, various types of mbira throughout Zimbabwe, and specifics on the mbira dzavadzimu, such as instrument structure, musical form, and the Shona spirits for whom the mbira is played. Chapter V introduces issues that come up when the mbira is put on stage, philosophical issues including musical “ownership,” performer nationality and gender, moving a sacred instrument from a sacred setting to a secular one, and reasons for doing it. Chapter VI examines physical staging challenges. After a brief look at tuning, three sets of data are examined for the purpose of creating a pool of optional techniques that may be used in a mbira concert. Following is an exploration of literature on audio amplification. Chapter VII considers the performance categorization theories of Adrienne Kaeppler, Richard Schechner, Erving Goffman, and performance frames specific to Zimbabwean mbira music. Chapter VIII combines the analysis, literature review, and theory of the previous

chapters into an assemblage of suggestions suited for mbira performances of two different styles (culturo- and techno-interpretive) within two different frames (didactic and theatric). Finally, Chapter IX wraps up the paper with final thoughts and propositions for further research.

II. JUSTIFICATION

The mbira is increasingly making appearances in the global community in front of international audiences in secular settings not associated with local ancestral ceremonies (Palmberg 2004, under “Music in Zimbabwe”). This change of context implies that there is an increase in the mbira’s use in non-traditional music, such as Zimbabwean pop, experimental music, and global fusion bands. Rather than supporting two separate schools of thought—traditionalists versus non-traditionalists or modernists—I advocate the co-existence and collaboration of the two. It may prove worthwhile to take techniques utilized in contemporary mbira performance and apply them to traditional mbira performance on stage and vice versa. Furthermore, this cross-fertilization approach encourages performers and scholars to expand their notion of performance practice by considering both what music is and what it does for people.

To develop an environment in which the mbira can exist—socially, pragmatically, and theoretically—a modified performance guide would be a useful tool; there is not yet a guide to mbira performance with an emphasis on contemporary concert stage adaptation. To address the challenges of performing the mbira on the contemporary concert stage, a performer must take into account performance technique—stage configuration, visibility, and sound quality—as well as matters beyond—customs linking performance to the larger cultural and social environment. This study will address the physical and philosophical concerns regarding modern performance of the mbira, (hence the “modified” performance guide) and include pragmatic suggestions for performers. It will be important not only because of its applied methodology and philosophical inquiry,

but it will also contribute to the ongoing global dialogue about the place of traditional music in the contemporary world of music performance. In other words, solutions to mbira-specific issues may carry over to other traditional instruments that encounter similar challenges.

Part of my methodology was to examine literature that contributes to this study. To extensively cover all relevant topics would mean spending years on research and devoting hundreds of pages to documenting it. Therefore, I briefly reviewed many different authors but only chose a few on which to focus in this specific thesis paper, although references are made to a few others.

First, I reviewed the work done thus far on mbira performance. There has been literature on the instrument and Shona culture since the mid-twentieth century; Paul Berliner (1980, 1993, 2006), Chartwell Dutiro (2007), Claire Jones (1992, 2008), Dumisani Maraire (1984, 1990), Andrew Tracey (1961, 1970, 1972), and Hugh Tracey (1932, 1961) are just a few that have written on the mbira within its traditional context, while Thomas Turino (1998, 2000) has written on the politics of Zimbabwean popular music. Recently there has been a focus on applicable mbira performance studies; Erica Azim (1999) and Perminus Matiure (2008) have written articles on teaching and learning to play the mbira. One source I used frequently is Paul Berliner's book *The Soul of Mbira* (1993). Berliner wrote the book not only to introduce the mbira to the Western reader but also to draw general attention to one of Africa's melodic instruments. At the time in the late 1970s, it was a popular misconception that African music consisted of only drumming. Another source that provided data and personal accounts from Zimbabwean

mbirist Chartwell Dutiro is *Zimbabwean Mbira Music on an International Stage* (Dutiro and Howard 2007). In Chapter 3 of this book, “Spiritual Continuity amongst Musical Change,” Thomas M. Preston writes on a similar study. He asks Dutiro about the challenges of performing a sacred instrument on a secular context. Also, in January 2010, I attended Erica Azim’s Mbira Camp during which I learned much about Shona culture and the mbira, and I began to learn to play the instrument.

There is also theoretical work that relates to this project. Mantle Hood (1960) has written on the challenges of bi-musicality, a term he coined to describe the study of music from two different cultures. This theory could be applied to performance by a non-Zimbabwean mbirist. Victor Turner (1982) and Richard Schechner (1974, 1993) have written on performance as ritual, useful frames for examining a mbira player’s attempts to capture the ritualistic aspect of mbira performance. Alejandro Madrid (2009) argues for combining social theory and music theory in performance study, a concept I find useful for addressing the social and theoretical aspects of mbira performance. Music techno-culture has been examined by Leslie Gay (2006) and René Lysloff (2006). Their idea is that when technology (such as audio and visual enhancement) is combined with traditional music (such as mbira), a new—but not negative—culture is created. Similarly, Louise Meintjes (2003) speaks of technology as empowerment in her studies of the modernization of traditional South African music and the affect “overseas” performance has on African musicians. In contrast, Richard Dorson (1976, 1982) has written on folklorization, which he and many scholars view as a somewhat negative process during which the culture is distorted and appropriated. It limits the influence of traditional music

on other musical spheres. When music is folklorized, it only has strength at folk festivals, although in this setting there is the danger of exploitation. Such issues are examined in studies of festivalization, a topic that is discussed by Timothy Taylor (1997) and Graeme Ewens (1991). Ted Solís (2004) has written on academic world music performing ensembles, considering theoretical, ethical, and practical issues. I share these concerns in my examination of mbira performance practices.

In Chapter VII, I concentrate on the performance theories of three authors: Adrienne Kaeppler (2010), Richard Schechner (1976), and Erving Goffman (1986). I reviewed their theories and applied them to mbira performance. Schechner has categorized performance into ritual, entertainment, and everyday life depending on the context of the performance, while Goffman has created a hierarchy of performance purity depending on the beholder of the performance. Kaeppler was especially useful not only for her categorization of performance, but also for her views regarding traditional music. She has written about hula music and dance as a globalized phenomenon. Some of her comments easily translate to mbira performance on stage.

While there has been a plethora of literature on the mbira and topics relating to contemporary performance practice of music, nothing has focused on the combination of traditional mbira and contemporary stage techniques with social aspects in mind. It is my hope that this thesis realizes such a feat.

III. DEFINITIONS

The purpose of this section is to introduce and define terms of larger issues.

Zimbabwean words and music technology terms will be discussed when first encountered and included in the glossary.

Authentic:

“Authentic” is a loaded word. Simply, it can mean not false or copied, genuine, real, or trustworthy. It can also mean “as close as possible to the original,” but then what is the original? In music, one cannot trace the evolution of a kind of music or an instrument by a single thread. There are always outside influences from neighboring cultures and changes that occur through generations that affect music and instruments. Initially, I was contemplating using the term authentic to describe a mbira concert that strives to be as close to the original context as possible, a “traditional” performance, but (1) the term is too loaded and vague, and (2) it made more sense to look at mbira in a variety of staged concert contexts, thus eliminating the idea of striving for one specific “authentic” performance. Furthermore, Richard Taruskin suggests treating authenticity as a process, not a goal; it “is not a thing achieved but a perpetually self-renewing challenge” (1995: 81).

One cannot actually put an exact replica of a *bira* (possession ceremony) on stage; it would be unreasonable to build a *banya* (hut where the bira takes place), a real fire in a building would break fire safety regulations, the location would be far from the ancestor’s resting places, the length of a bira is too long for conventional theatre, and the entire

village would have to be present. An exact replication of a bira on stage would be irrational and therefore should not be the goal of a mbira performance. However, a performance with bira-based elements would provide many things: a spiritual atmosphere, an opportunity to share information about Shona culture, a way to perpetuate mbira music, a chance to entertain, etc. Rather than considering the process of putting traditional mbira music on stage as an “authentic replication,” perhaps a “faithful” or “respectful representation” is a better way of thinking about it. After all, “authenticity ... is knowing what you mean and whence comes that knowledge. And more than that, even, authenticity is knowing what you are, and acting in accordance with that knowledge” (Taruskin 1995: 67). “The word [authenticity] needs either to be rescued from its current purveyors or to be dropped by those who would aspire to the values it properly signifies” (1995: 68), which is why I attempt to avoid its use in this paper.

Frame:

I am using the definition of “performance frame” from Erving Goffman’s essay entitled *Frame Analysis* (1986). According to Bennett M. Berger’s forward, a frame is “a particularly tangible metaphor for what other sociologists have tried to invoke by words like ‘background,’ ‘setting,’ ‘context,’ or a phrase like ‘in terms of’” (Goffman 1986: xiii). Frames “attempt to convey that what goes on in interaction is governed by ... principles ... The character of a frame is not always clear, and even when it is, participants in interaction may have interests in blurring, changing, or confounding it” (Goffman 1986: xiv). Frame implies something further than mechanics; it implies a social

interaction within parameters of convention, and I want to utilize that social aspect in this paper.

Theatre versus Theater:

I will use the English spelling “theatre” when referring to the practice of the art, the works, and their production. I will use the American spelling “theater” when referring to the physical building. In quotations, I preserve the spelling of the author; most of the authors in this paper follow the same guidelines I have constructed.

Tradition:

Many scholars agree with the idea that tradition is more complicated than a simple definition can convey. According to Adrienne Kaeppler, “tradition” is an ongoing process. In her work with Hawaiian hula, she mentions that traditional hula “ranges from evolved versions of old ritual forms, to contemporary versions of formal hula in honor of the chiefs, to what have been called ‘folk dances’ at backyard parties” (Kaeppler 2010: 189). She also refers to recycled versions of old forms of hula or chant that are influenced by modern dance or contemporary music and that sometimes receive the name “contemporary traditional.” She uses the term “classical” to describe Hawaiian hula recycled from ritual. Because traditional implies something established, fixed, and habitual, while it is actually an ever changing phenomenon, the term classical is another option.

Zimbabwean mbirist Chartwell Dutiro says, “Tradition is based on the people and surroundings where you grew up, the food, the smells and the beads that represent the ancestors. I keep my ancestors around me, although I am in a different country, so you can take me out of the place where I grew up, but you can’t take the place out of me. Every time I play the mbira I just plug into the music that is always around me. If I am comfortable, I am playing the right way. Tradition creates a solid wall from which each song is hung, swinging in a way that is Zimbabwean” (Dutiro and Howard 2007: 5). He also mentions the Western tendency of scholars to categorize concepts into bipolar opposites. The split between urban and rural – modern and traditional – is not a dichotomy that causes friction but a partnership (Dutiro and Howard 2007: 20).

Phyllis Martin and Patrick O’Meara also discuss modernity and tradition. When considering non-Western music, the terms “traditional” and “modern” can oftentimes be misleading. “Traditional” is commonly associated with isolation and static lifestyle and value systems, while “modern” oftentimes implies progress and dynamism due to Western ideas and technology (Martin and O’Meara 1986, 7-8). In reality, both traditional and contemporary cultures are living, changing entities that co-exist under the influence of one another—a concept around which my thesis revolves.

Traditional mbira music, according to Azim, means it can draw the ancestor spirits (2010). Therefore, specific spirit-drawing songs played on stage would be considered traditional because, though the spirits may not “come out” in that context, they have the potential to draw the spirits. According to Albert Chimedza, traditional mbira music (a specific repertoire) is a genre that is played on the mbira, but the

instrument can be a modern one involved with experimentation and contemporary music: “If you have a guitar it can play jazz, it can play classical music, it can play flamenco, and it can play Latin.” Today, it is the same with the mbira. “The definition of the mbira will just change with the level of influence it can attain in the music world” (Chimedza 2002-3). There is beginning to be a divergence between traditional mbira music and the mbira as an instrument. This divergence is met with some resistance from traditionalists. Paul Brickhill says, “The thing about mbira as an instrument [is that it] is so ancient and so unchanged over centuries; it is at least a thousand years old. For people in this country, mbira has never just been removed from its cultural and social context” (2003). In this paper, the definition of “traditional” depends on the context in which it is used, although I attempt to reserve the term to performance that draws spirits.

Figure 2: Map of Zimbabwe

Image from <http://www.lib.utexas.edu/maps/zimbabwe.html>.



IV. BACKGROUND: SHONA PEOPLE AND THEIR MUSIC

Political and Musical History of Zimbabwe

Of the 13 million people living in Zimbabwe today, approximately 10.5 million are Shona (Lewis 2009). Shona is the name given to the group of people living in Zimbabwe and small parts of Mozambique and Zambia between the Zambezi and Limpopo Rivers. The language is a member of the Bantu family of languages in sub-Saharan Africa and encompasses several dialects including Karanga, Korekore, and Zezuru, among others (Lewis 2009 and Berliner 1993).

The *Garland Encyclopedia of World Music* divides the history of Shona music into three periods that correspond with the political history of Zimbabwe: pre-colonial, colonial, and the struggle for independence (Kaemmer 1997: 745). During the pre-colonial period, indigenous music was practiced (and elements still are to this day). Starting in the 1200s, the area that is now Zimbabwe was ruled by the kingdom of Monomotapa. Archeological evidence of early Shona culture is seen in the ruins known as Great Zimbabwe, which date back to this time. The kingdom declined by the 1600s and was replaced in the next two hundred years by independent chiefdoms when Ngoni culture influenced Zimbabwe. In the 1830s, the Ndebele people entered Zimbabwe's Matabeleland from the south due to Zulu violence and Boer migration in (the territory that is now) South Africa. These outside influences not only affected Zimbabwe politically and socially, but musically as well, introducing new instruments and styles.

When European hunters, traders, and missionaries arrived in the 1800s (during the colonial period), European music and musical values began to influence Shona music,

particularly through churches and mission schools. Western harmonies of choral church music became integrated with Shona music. Also during this time, Shona music was exploited or deemed evil by missionaries; this was the decline of traditional Shona music. The Europeans established a regime in 1890 that lasted ninety years, and in 1898, the area became known as Southern Rhodesia.

During the third period, Zimbabwe was struggling for independence. Between the 1930s and 1960s, black opposition to colonial rule grew and was greatly prompted by the Land Apportionment Act.² This act restricted the access that black Zimbabweans had to land, forcing them off their farms. Various nationalist opposition groups formed in response, including the Zimbabwean African People's Union and Zimbabwean African National Union. Civil war ravished the country until 1980 when independence was finally declared with Robert Mugabe as prime minister. Music played a large role in that fight; traditional practices and instruments made a comeback by becoming national icons.

However, independence did not mean the end of Zimbabwe's troubles. Economic crisis, corruption, and the aftermath of colonization meant turbulence for the country. In 1998, an economic crisis struck Zimbabwe resulting in strikes and riots. The economic downfall and "de-industrialization" of Zimbabwe prompted distressing Zimbabwean jokes such as the following: "What did we have before candles? –Electricity" (Azim 2010). In 2000, black Zimbabweans began violently seizing hundreds of white-owned farms, reclaiming land deemed stolen by settlers. Over the next ten years, bad news plagued Zimbabwe. Food shortages created famine, incredible inflation reduced currency

² The Land Apportionment Act of 1930 divided land among the whites and the Shona and Ndebele, forcing indigenous families away from land they owned for generations.

value by 1000%, cholera epidemics led to the collapse of the health care system, media freedom was limited, and the 2005 “clean-up” program destroyed thousands of shanties, leaving over half a million Zimbabweans homeless. There were suspicious accidental deaths of opposition politicians, and elections deemed flawed by opposition and foreign observers kept Mugabe in power. In 2005, the U.S. named Zimbabwe one of world’s six “outposts of tyranny.” As recently as June of this year, a new wave of attacks on commercial farmers had begun. However, through all the turmoil, the mbira has remained a part of the Shona culture in Zimbabwe and is becoming a “modern” instrument in new Zimbabwean contexts.³ Says Zimbabwean mbirist and composer Chiwoniso Maraire, “The instrument is so connected to the spiritual world, besides being of entertainment, I think this is what helped it survive the transitional period that the country went through” (2003).

Music in Shona Culture

Early Shona music was possibly influenced by the style of yodeling from various central African Pygmy cultural groups and the tonal harmony of the San⁴ people based on hexatonic and heptatonic scales (Kaemmer 1997: 744). Early Shona musicians used drums, musical bows, panpipes, and mbira. The Shona value music highly and traditionally connect it with supernatural power. In folktales, songs could charm, distract, or control characters. Exceptional musical performances could cause people to “run off and allow their cooking pots to boil over” (Kaemmer 1997: 752).

³ Mbira in new Zimbabwean contexts is mentioned in Chapter III.

⁴San were ancient people living in southern and central Africa during the Stone Age.

There actually is no word in the Shona language for the concept of “music,” but rather there are separate words for singing (*kuimba*), playing an instrument (*kuridza*), and dancing (*kutamba*). The lack of this term perhaps implies that Zimbabwean music is not a concept that is isolated from the activities in which it is situated, like those of Western culture; instead, it is an integrated part of daily life. The Shona also place songs (accompanied by instruments and dancing) into the categories of traditional (*nziyo dzepasi*) and modern (*chimanjemanje*), not counting church and school songs introduced by European colonizers. Traditional songs are classified by function, such as hunting songs, play songs, funeral songs, children’s songs, and spirit songs (Kaemmer 1997: 753). Work songs are sung while threshing and grinding grain. Song functions as social commentary; one can publicly ridicule and criticize wrongdoers. In the presence of other women, singing provides an outlet for a woman to release domestic grievances without fear of retribution from her husband (Kaemmer 1997: 753). According to Chartwell Dutiro, there are several functions of music in Shona culture. It is inseparable from beliefs and activities, it appeases the spirits, it carries history and culture, it binds the community together, and it binds the living community with the community of deceased ancestors (Dutiro and Howard 2007: 19).

Mbira in Africa

The mbira is found all over Africa and goes by a variety of names; in Zimbabwe alone, several variations exist. The *matepe* of the Korekore people is found in north-eastern Zimbabwe and Mozambique. It has twenty-four to twenty-nine keys and is used

to play light but fast music with complex rhythms. The *njari* is from the Zambezi River Valley and was originally played for guardian spirits but expanded its repertoire to accompany non-ritual singing in the twentieth century. The *likembe* can be found in central Africa, and the *kalimba* is played in Zambia and Malawi. The *karimba* is from the Zambezi Valley in Mozambique and Zimbabwe. The Hugh Tracey kalimba is a prototype of forms of mbira in southern Africa and a hybrid of African and Western traditions developed by Tracey. It is important to understand, as Dutiro points out, that there is no spiritual hierarchy with these various instruments; they have differences depending on region but no order of importance (2007: 20). Of all the regional variations of the mbira in Africa, this thesis will focus on the *mbira dzavadzimu* of the Zezuru⁵ culture in northern Zimbabwe; it drew my attention because it is one of the largest instruments and is one of the mbira most often used in rituals.

Mbira the Instrument

The mbira is an old instrument, possibly up to 1000 years old (Azim 2010 and Brickhill 2003). The presence of mbira tines in archeological excavations indicates the early existence of the instrument in Zimbabwe (Kaemmer 1997: 744). In each culture, the instruments used in religious ceremonies are usually the most important to that group of people (Azim 2010), and this is true for the *mbira dzavadzimu* (henceforth referred to simply as mbira). During the pre-colonial period, the mbira was used for entertainment and rituals of the chieftainships. When European immigrants came to the central plateau

⁵ Zezuru is a dialect of the Shona language; both terms indicate the language and the people who speak the language. Typically, the *mbira dzavadzimu* is said to come from the more general Shona culture.

of Zimbabwe, many traditional aspects of Shona mbira music were lost and survived only through a few practicing mbirists, most of whom lived in places where colonization was sparse (Kaemmer 1997: 755).

During the struggle for independence, indigenous music, and mbira especially, became a symbol of Shona culture. Mbira and its related ceremonies were a way to politicize rural people in Zimbabwe, those who were not as politically aware as urbanites, and rally them to fight against their present living conditions. At ceremonies involving the mbira, political conversations, as well as spiritual activities, occurred, and subtle political lyrics found their way into mbira songs (Kaemmer 1997: 755). The term *chimurenga* was applied to new songs about the uprising.⁶ Chimurenga's eclectic style attracted a wide audience; the songs contained elements of modern rock, church hymns, Ndebele songs, indigenous dance music, and traditional mbira songs.

The mbira is a hand-held instrument that consists of a rectangular wooden board with metal tines. The mbira I own is approximately 19 centimeters wide, 23 centimeters long, and 4 centimeters deep, the average size of an instrument. The tines are attached to the board with metal beams, one at the top of the instrument holding down the tines and one five centimeters down underneath the tines to lift them from the board. The longest tines are in the center, and they get increasingly shorter toward the edges. The tines are plucked downwards with the thumbs and upwards with the right-hand index finger. During pre-colonial times, the tines were made of iron. The Shona had been expert iron smelters and ironworkers since the first few centuries as is evident by clay furnaces and

⁶ The same nonmusical term originally referred to the uprisings of the late 1800s against white settlers.

tools found at archeological sites. European colonization put a stop to these prolific communities for fear that the Shona would create weapons and revolt (Dewey 1990). Starting in the late twentieth century, the tines were more often made from scrap metal—pounded out nails and springs.

The mbira has a range of about three octaves utilizing seven distinct pitches in twenty-two to twenty-eight tines. Although pitches exist in octave equivalence, they are considered to be the same pitch in Shona musical culture (Kaemmer 1997: 747). The mbira has a solid-bodied soundboard with metal beads or shells mounted on a metal plate. This device creates a buzz, similar to a snare drum or the fuzz-tone of an electric guitar, when the tines are plucked (Berliner 1993: 11). A common musical aesthetic found throughout much of Africa, this buzz is an essential part of the mbira's sound, adding complexity and volume to the instrument. The mbira itself produces a subdued sound, so it is usually played inside a resonator called a *deze*. The *deze* is made of half of a large calabash gourd, and the mbira is kept in place with the *mutsigo*, a stick wedged between the mbira and the *deze*. The *deze* also has shells or beads on it to create buzzing. Today, the *deze* is oftentimes made of fiberglass rather than gourd; similarly, bottle caps frequently replace the shells or beads on the mbira and *deze*.

Mbira Music

The traditional song of the mbira consists of recurring rhythmic and harmonic cycles.⁷ Typically, there are four harmonic segments, or phrases, that repeat, each rhythmically made of twelve pulses, which means a full cycle of four phrases is forty-eight pulses. According to John Kaemmer, many non-ritual songs have fewer than twelve pulses in a harmonic segment (1997: 749). Because of the twelve pulse phrase in ritual songs, one can feel the beat in duple meter (two beats per phrase), triple meter (three beats per phrase), or quadruple meter (four beats per phrase). This flexibility of meter allows the performer to create polyrhythms, making the music sound rhythmically intricate particularly to Western ears. Another way mbirists produce musical complexity is by emphasizing certain notes of the pattern, playing them louder than other notes. This change of emphasis causes the melodic and rhythmic structures of the song to shift.

The mbira can be a solo instrument, but in its traditional use in religious ceremonies and secular musical events, it is part of an ensemble. This ensemble includes at least two mbira players because each song has two interlocking parts called the *kushaura* and *kutsinhira*. The *kushaura* is the lead part and the *kutsinhira* is the following part. When the *kushaura* improvises on a high line (playing a melody on higher pitches), the *kutsinhira* also plays a corresponding high line. Sometimes the *kutsinhira* is the exact same part as the *kushaura*, just displaced by one pulse creating an echo effect when the two are played together. Other times the *kutsinhira* has a differing part. Occasionally, one

⁷ Although Western music terminology defines “song” as vocal music, I call the music the mbira plays a song because (1) singing usually goes hand in hand with mbira and (2) that is the term used in much of the literature on the instrument.

mbirist can play a variation of the song that contains major elements of both parts, but this technique requires considerable talent.

Other ensemble instruments include the *hosho* shakers, handclapping, and sometimes drums. In Glendale – a commercial township on the Tribal Trust Lands near Harare – Chartwell Dutiro talks about drums accompanying the mbira, singing, and dancing at bira ceremonies. In contrast, ethnomusicologist Paul Berliner, who researched in Mubayira near Musonza in the Mhondoro Tribal Trust Lands, says there were no drums in the bira ceremonies he witnessed (Dutiro and Howard 2007: 2). The *hosho* are rattles made of knobby gourds filled with seeds. In modern times, they are sometimes made of tin cans and stones (Kaemmer 1997: 752). When played with the mbira, two *hosho* are played, one *hosho* in each hand. The rhythm is usually four beats per phrase, which the bass note of the left hand *kushaura* part and the dancing follow. Mbirist Joel Laviolette describes the relationship between the *hosho* and the mbira music in an interview:

The shakers are playing a “click-swish” sound or maybe a “chi-kee-e” sound. It is playing a swinging type of triplet rhythm. So in that pattern, there is a solid “click” sound (*chi*) that happens, and there is a “less solid” place where there is “swish” for the “upbeat” (*kee-e*). When you are listening to this music, people are clapping on the “click” sound, and more often than not, the bass drum sound and the bass of the mbira is playing on the “swish” (Holdaway 2009, under “Interview with Joel Laviolette”).

Typically the mbirist sings while playing the mbira, following the resultant melodies from the left and right hands.⁸ In fact, the mbira probably got its beginnings by imitating interlocking vocal parts. Even without the mbira, a cappella singing follows the harmonies of the mbira (Kaemmer 1997: 750). The tonal pattern of the spoken Shona language affects song texts. There are three styles of Shona singing: *mahon'era* (a low, soft, syllabic style that interweaves with the lower part of the mbira), *huro* (a high, penetrating, melodic style that consists of vocables⁹ with yodeling), and *kudeketera* (poetic texts). All styles allow the singer to improvise. Like the kushaura part on the mbira, the lead singer can improvise the melody and text of the song, interchanging fragments of text or occasionally making up new text. The mind of a Shona improviser is like a storehouse of patterns and formulae for both singing and mbira playing.

Spirits and Their Ceremonies

Spirits are very important in traditional Shona culture. There are two kinds of spirits: ancestral spirits (*vadzimu*, singular *mudzimu*) and wandering spirits (*mashave*, singular *shave*). Mashave are considered to be foreign and non-human spirits that guide humans by bringing them inspiration and talent. There are different kinds of mashave; for example, *shaverembira* are the spirits that inspire one to play mbira (Azim 2010).

Vadzimu are the spirits of the deceased ancestors of the living Shona people. After a family member dies, the body is buried. After about a year, an all night ceremony called

⁸ Resultant melodies are linear melodies made of fragments of other stacked melodies. One note may be from the left hand of the mbira and the next may come from the right hand. By adding them together they create a new melody.

⁹ Vocables are nonsense words or vowels used in song.

kurova guva takes place to welcome the spirit back to the earth where it will watch over the family.

There are ceremonies for each kind of spirit. A ceremony for a shave spirit takes place in the daytime and resembles more of a party in Western terms. Because the shave is foreign (i.e. non-human), “foreign” food is eaten; this is any food not usually eaten on daily basis.¹⁰ Typically, only the wealthy can afford meat (fish, goat, and chicken). A poorer community would only have meat for special occasions, such as a shave ceremony (Azim 2010).

Mapira (singular *bira*) are ceremonies for *vadzimu*. Dutiro observes that “overall, [mapira] are part of the shaping of a community in its morals, beliefs, order, family structure, and, most significantly, identity. [Mapira are considered] central to Shona culture, as a platform for people to interact between the living and the dead, in which music is the vehicle for this interaction” (2007: 18). Mapira are similar to a Western festival because they combine food, music, dance, singing, and drink, but they do not happen outside in the open (Dutiro and Howard 2007: 17). They are for the creator (*Musika Vanhu*), and to communicate with *Musika Vanhu*, one must go through the ancestors. The ceremony takes place all night long and is used to call a specific spirit, although other spirits may show up as well. The older the ancestor spirit (the longer the ancestor has been deceased), the more living relatives that *mudzimu* has, so large mapira are held for very ancient spirits (*makombwe*) (Azim 2010). During the *bira*, the

¹⁰ Foods that are eaten on a daily basis are *sadza* (made of ground maize), greens, cabbage, eggs, and caterpillars (Azim 2010).

participants eat *sadza* (maize), drink millet beer, and oftentimes an animal is killed to feed everyone, which is likely to be the whole village.

The bira is an opportunity for the family to communicate with deceased ancestors, to ask for advice and show praise. The spirits correspond with family members by possessing certain people in the community called spirit mediums. A spirit medium can be male, female, adult, or youth and is highly respected in the traditional community. The life of a spirit medium is arduous; sometimes a medium lives alone for a time without shoes or clothes and relies on the village to bring food (Dutiro and Howard 2007: 3). A mudzimu permanently resides in a specific spirit medium, although the spirit only comes out (*kubuda*) to the community during mapira. The medium then goes into a trance, and whatever he or she says is considered to be the words of the mudzimu.

In most cases, an efficient way to call a mudzimu and to lull a medium into a trance is with music, and mbira is the key. Supposedly, each spirit has its favorite mbira songs, and when they are played, the spirit will come. The musicians are usually hired and travel from village to village to perform in mapira. However, local musicians can be used if they are available. Mbirist Stella Chiweshe tells a story about how her village did not have its own mbirists, and the vadzimu of her family requested that someone learn to play so they need not hire “outsiders” for ceremonies (Hallis 1989). Dutiro reflects on his life as a traditional mbirist: “Sometimes, people who worked in Harare had to come back to the village to consult the ancestors, and they would wake me up in the depth of the night to play. It was hard, but this is why I have to feel I was chosen” (2007: 3).

The bira begins when participants assemble inside a kitchen hut or a *dare*, the consultation room for mapira (Dutiro and Howard 2007: 3). A hut called a *banya* is another small building where the mapira take place. Spontaneous singing and dancing occurs until the mbirists begin playing a favorite song of the mudzimu. The spirit medium sits on a mat near the musicians and receives a refreshment of hot water with a coal in it. The music stops and the host explains to the spirit within the medium the purpose of the ceremony. The musicians and participants clap together to welcome the spirit, and then the music resumes. The spirit medium and other participants are possessed by spirits, move to the music, and are covered with special cloths. Typically, mediums and musicians at mapira wear specific colors like black, white, blue, or combinations of those, and avoid red. For example, the Mujuru family (famous mbira family) wears all black during ceremonies (Azim 2010 and Zantzinger 1978). Soon the music stops and participants converse with the spirits through the medium. The participants and the medium sing and dance together for the remainder of the night (Kaemmer 1997: 754). According to mbirist Chiwoniso Maraire, the bira is a “very moving, very powerful” experience (2003), and to replicate the same sort of musical setting and spiritual atmosphere on the concert stage for Western audiences has the potential to be equally as moving and powerful.

V. MBIRA ON THE CONCERT STAGE

This chapter will examine mbira performance within the frame¹¹ of the Western concert stage. The topics covered pertain to the cultural, social, and spiritual challenges encountered when mbira performance changes frames. These topics are: reasons for bringing mbira to the stage, musical “ownership,” nationality, gender, and concerns of moving a sacred instrument from a sacred setting to a secular one. Finally, I will introduce the physical challenges (visual, audio, stage configuration, and interaction) that require attention when mbira is performed on stage.

Before I delve into the issues, here is a brief background on mbirists on stage. There are quite a few Zimbabwean mbirists who have toured internationally. Mbirists such as Musekiwa Chingodza, Stella Chiweshe, Chartwell Dutiro, Forward Kwenda, Cosmas Magaya, Dumisani and Chiwoniso Maraire, Ephat and Fradreck Mujuru, Renold and Caution Shonhai, Patience Chaitezvi, and more have toured the U.S. and other places around the world, many in association with Erica Azim and her organization MBIRA.¹² More traditional mbira ensembles and pop music ensembles using mbira have also toured internationally. Thomas Mapfumo and the Blacks Unlimited use mbira and mbira songs adapted for electric guitar. Mapfumo is most famous for singing his *Chimurenga* (revolutionary) songs during the struggle for independence. Other bands that include mbira are Oliver Mtukudzi and the Black Spirits, the Harare Mambo Band, and Vakaranga Venharetare: Women of the Spirits.

¹¹ For more on “frame” see Chapter III and Chapter VII.

¹² For more information, go to www.mbiras.org.

There are quite a few Western mbirists as well, although not as many play traditional mbira music and some play other types of mbira, not necessarily mbira dzavadzimu. Erica Azim plays mbira dzavadzimu around the world and runs the organization MBIRA, which supports Zimbabwean mbirists. Mbirist Chris Berry created the fusion band Panjea that sometimes uses mbira. Joel Laviolette plays mbira dzavadzimu and runs Rattletree Marimba, which includes a discussion forum on Zimbabwean music. Dan Pauli created an electric mbira, an instrument used in concert by other mbirists such as Chris Berry and Stella Chiweshe (Laviolette, Rattletree Marimba: Lessons and Discussion forum, comment posted December 10, 2008). Others include B. Michael Williams, Mark Holdaway and Martin Klabunde (on kalimba), and a handful of rock and pop artists: Imogen Heap, Mal Webb, Glenn Kotche of Wilco, Trent Reznor of Nine Inch Nails, and Maurice White of Earth, Wind, and Fire.

Reasons for Putting Mbira on Stage

There are several reasons Zimbabwean mbirists play on the international stage rather than solely for village entertainment or ritual. In actuality, most of the Zimbabwe mbirists touring internationally still play for ceremonies when back home. A Zimbabwean living in an urban area may not perform in rituals either. Obviously, it depends on the mbirist's background and intentions as a musician. All that aside, why do mbirists play on the concert stage? In Zimbabwe, performances of sacred music and dance are performed in secular contexts for reasons such as education and exposure of Shona traditions, perpetuation of Shona cultural identity, and income (Thram 2003: 115).

Other reasons may include fame and other opportunities gained by performing “overseas.”¹³

Since the birth of ethnomusicology, there has been the idea of “rescue ethnomusicology;” the only way to save these beautiful “exotic” cultures is to preserve them with recordings and detailed observations and then introduce Western society to them. Although this idea is a bit romanticized, the intentions of these early ethnomusicologists were good. I must admit that I too fell into the “rescue ethnomusicology” mindset, thinking that the main reason to put mbira on stage was to introduce it to the Western audience (who would then protect and cherish it) and keep the musical tradition strong. There are a few other mbira preservationists who think this as well, mainly Erica Azim.

While the idea that traditional mbira is under threat of extinction may be somewhat true (it depends on your definition of “traditional”), Zimbabwean mbira-maker and promoter Albert Chimedza suggests otherwise. He explains that this romanticized view is simply “projected in terms of preserving culture, but you only preserve something that is dead” (Chimedza 2003). Mbira is alive and contemporary, being picked up by children to play nontraditional music such as reggae, classical, and Zairian. “This is healthy ... [Mbira] is vibrant, it is not dead” (Chimedza 2003). Chartwell Dutiro agrees; today Zimbabwean musicians play both at traditional ceremonies for ancestors and in big cities worldwide (Dutiro and Howard 2007: 5). Contrary to Chimedza’s comment on only

¹³ The term “overseas” is borrowed from Louise Meintjes’ book *Sound of Africa!: Making Music Zulu in a South African Studio* (2003). She describes going overseas as getting an international “break” (240). It is “contacts, ins, and hard work with rewards. It is the latest in technology. It is expertise and opportunity.” It signifies wealth, creative control, and “a means of access of plentitude” (242).

being able to preserve something that is dead, preserving traditional music before it begins the process of disappearance is a worthwhile undertaking.

Money is a logical reason to play internationally. Because of the economic crisis that struck Zimbabwe in 1998, many Zimbabweans suddenly found themselves in need of financial assistance. Mbirists could support themselves and their families by gaining international recognition, recording albums, and touring overseas. Erica Azim brings mbirists to the U.S. so they can play in concerts and make professional recordings to sell. Certainly, non-Zimbabwean mbirists can also make a profit giving concerts and selling albums, but Azim's program gives the chance to Zimbabweans who may not have the same opportunity in Africa. Furthermore, the MBIRA.org website allows people to make tax deductible donations and assures customers that the money they spend on merchandise will help support the 220 musicians and eighteen mbira makers with whom Azim interacts. "Buying a CD from MBIRA.org will give the musicians on it twelve times more money than buying elsewhere," she says in an article in *Kalimba Magic* online newsletter (Azim 2009, under "Buy Zimbabwean Music and Save Lives"). There are 130 CDs to purchase on the site, two of which are recordings of live performances.

Fame and opportunity are other incentives for international touring. Until recently, radio stations in Zimbabwe helped perpetuate a preference for imported pop. In the past, Western rock and roll received more play because record companies would buy airtime to promote their products, but there was no sponsor for African music. Yet traditional Zimbabwean music was highly respected abroad (Dutiro and Howard 2007: 4). Because of exposure to "foreign" music, it was preferred, and traditional mbirists (and

pop bands utilizing mbira) found attention overseas. Dutiro (mbirist in Thomas Mapfumo's band), recounts how only after they became an international phenomenon were they broadcast on Zimbabwean radio (Dutiro and Howard 2007: 5). Of course, there is another reason to play mbira on a concert stage for an audience – art. The mbira is a beautiful, tantalizing instrument that holds its own on a concert stage.

Musical “Ownership”

There is the matter of “ownership” and mbira music. The notion of a mbira composer in Zimbabwe is a contemporary idea because traditional songs of the mbira come from the ancestors through dreams or flashes of inspiration. “Creative activity in singing and playing mbira [consists] of inventing new ways of playing an existing song, rather than creating new songs” (Kaemmer 1997: 752). The way of playing a song can actually go in and out of fashion. According to Azim, there is no such thing as a new song because the songs have always existed. If a mbirist plays an unfamiliar song, it is not new because it has already existed; it just has not been played by a human in a long time (Azim 2010). Furthermore, a mbirist should not have an ego about his or her talent because the spirits that give the talent (shaverembira) might leave; it is not about the mbirist, it is about the spirits (Azim 2010).

The story gets complicated when modern artists use mbira music in their acts. For example, Thomas Mapfumo uses traditional mbira songs when he performs with his band The Blacks Unlimited. He became very popular in Zimbabwe because he borrowed

traditional village songs, sang in Shona, and his guitarist Jonah Sithole imitated not only the interlocking parts of the mbira but the sound of the overtones and buzzing as well. In the mid 1980s, Dutiro joined the band and played mbira. However, although Mapfumo uses traditional songs, he claims they are his compositions because he changes the words, and he earns royalties for them (Dutiro and Howard 2007: 21). Dutiro disagrees with Mapfumo's actions and insists that he himself does not compose songs but rather arranges them (Dutiro and Howard 2007: 3). This is an issue to keep in mind if programs are distributed at a mbira concert; would the songs be accredited to the ancestors?

Nationality

At one point in Erica Azim's travels, the issue of whether it is appropriate to teach mbira to a white woman came up. The verdict was that it is acceptable. It was explained to her that we are all kin; Azim is just a more distant relative. The term for this relationship is called "fictive kinship" in anthropological studies.¹⁴ Through this bond, it is acceptable for non-Zimbabweans to perform and learn mbira. However, perhaps an awareness and understanding of the bond created by ancestors could be a part of a mbira concert. Acknowledgement of the ancestral connection justifies the performance of a non-Zimbabwean mbirist and provides an opportunity to teach the audience about Shona spirits.

Another way to tackle the issue of nationality is to examine the reasons Zimbabwean mbirists play, and that is because the ancestors want them to play. In several

¹⁴ For an example, see Janet Carsten 1995.

accounts, mbirists describe their musical beginnings. Says Dutiro, “It’s almost as if I was chosen. I don’t remember having lessons; I just picked things up from here and there and the whole thing came together until I was playing for the community... Becoming a musician was beyond my control; it was inevitable” (Dutiro and Howard 2007: 2). As a young girl, Stella Chiweshe felt a strong urge in her heart when an ancestor spirit requested that one of his kin learn to play mbira (Hallis 1989). Oftentimes the ability to play mbira comes from the spirit of a relative, such as a grandfather to his grandson, in a dream (Kaemmer 1997: 752).

The urge to play is also prompted by mbira music. “The music is mbira music and, rather like the way I was chosen to play mbira music, it is the sound of the music that chooses the musicians. It is the sound that makes it right” (Dutiro and Howard 2007: 6). During my time at the Azim Mbira Camp in January 2010, I learned how my fellow campers were introduced to the mbira. Many told stories about how they were mesmerized by the sound and felt an urgency to learn to play.

Because mbirists were called by either ancestors or the music itself, and because all humans have ancestors, it seems safe to deduce that non-Zimbabweans can be called to play mbira, therefore negating nationality as an issue connected with mbira on stage. Furthermore, Dutiro makes several comments praising non-Zimbabweans’ mbira musicianship. “Zimbabweans are inspired by whites playing their music” (Dutiro and Howard 2007: 6). One of his students from London, Ian Grocott, once learned a new mbira variation from a dream and taught it to Dutiro. He has collaborated with many artists from around the world and says, “Western musicians I’ve worked with have

mastered the music better than many Zimbabweans” because they are musicians (Dutiro and Howard 2007: 5). He goes on to say that if Zimbabweans can master guitar the way they have, then Westerners can master the mbira.

Others disagree. Zimbabwean musician and cultural director Paul Brickhill describes a mbira performance by an English group visiting Harare, Zimbabwe. “It was really amazing to people here, but, and I am not trying to say a bad thing but it was not mbira ... It was well played, it was played in the tradition of the instrument, the singing was certainly in Shona. But whatever indefinable quality you would put with mbira was not part of this group. A lot of people were talking afterwards about this question: What is mbira and to what extent is it rooted in the sense of Shona culture and to what extent can it travel?” (Brickhill 2003). That is the question, isn’t it.

The ancestors do not only communicate with Zimbabweans. American mbirist Chris Berry spent years in Zimbabwe learning and immersing himself in mbira culture. He was one of the first Westerners to play in spirit possession ceremonies. He described his experience: “Some of the old ancestors who came back spoke to me through these people” (Panjea website). They told Berry that the United States needed him to share what he learned in Zimbabwe. This account is evidence that non-Zimbabweans can receive the call to play mbira through direct communication from the ancestors.

Gender

The majority of mbirists in Zimbabwe are male but there are women mbirists as well. Traditionally, women and men may have had more divided roles when it came to

musical performance, but in modern days those lines have become blurred, particularly in the area of entertainment and public performance. For example, a dance that traditionally was performed by only women may now include men when done for entertainment purposes. To this day, men typically play drums for public performances but women too know how to play them (Kaemmer 1997:753). While men traditionally played mbira, women now learn it without losing esteem.

However, there have been mixed reports about Shona musical practices concerning gender roles. According to Erica Azim, it is not uncommon for young girls to learn mbira from their brothers. When they grow up, two things stop them from continuing. The first is time. When a woman gets married, she is often too busy with her family to be able to continue practicing mbira. The second thing stopping women from playing mbira is social stigma. It is considered whorish to play mbira with other men (Azim 2010). Since Patience Chaitezvi plays with her relatives, it is acceptable. Stella Chiweshe was told she could not learn mbira as a girl because a woman who plays mbira is a bad cook; a woman needs to focus on her domestic duties not music (Hallis 1989). Luckily, her uncle taught her to play and she still tours the globe sharing her musical talent.

There are several other famous Zimbabwean female mbirists, namely Patience Chaitezvi, Irene Chigamba, Beulah Diago, Chiwoniso Maraire, and the all-women mbira group Vakaranga Venharetare: Women of the Spirits. Because a staged mbira concert would be for entertainment rather than ritual, is it more acceptable for women to play mbira in this context?

From Sacred to Secular Context

It is frequently forgotten that the transition from a sacred to secular venue is not limited to a “tribal”-to-Western movement but exists in a Western-to-Western movement as well. The sacred Roman Catholic Masses, for example, were originally written for church worship services in a liturgical context and were later adapted to be performed in the secular concert hall. In these adaptations, however, segments of the Mass were omitted, and typically only the Ordinary is set for concert performances.

Some mbirists claim that location is important for spiritual ceremonies. When Zimbabweans moved from the Tribal Trust Lands to townships and suburbs (during a rise in urbanization), they were separated from “their ancestors’ gravesites where [the spirits] could communicate within their spiritual spaces” (Dutiro and Howard 2007: 20). Not only was this change of location hard on ancestor communication, traditional songs were given new musical settings. Urban relocation causes people to search for authenticity and identity with influences from the new location and past experiences (Dutiro and Howard 2007: 21). New musical elements find their way into old songs while old songs find their way into new musical styles. Do these new settings make the songs recognizable to vadzimu?

When asked how the change of context—from sacred to secular—affects the mbira music performance, Dutiro responded with the analogy of the guitar. The missionaries brought the guitar to Shona villages and used them to play hymns. Over the years, the Shona learned how to play the guitar and then adapted it to fit into Shona musical ideas. They identified with the music and “even felt the spiritual aspect of their

music played on guitars” (Dutiro and Howard 2007: 21). The spirits can recognize the mbira music played on the guitar. Therefore, just as a foreign instrument (guitar) can become a spiritual instrument in a familiar setting (Zimbabwe), a foreign setting (overseas concert) can become a spiritual setting with a familiar instrument (mbira).

If a ritual song is played on mbira during a staged concert rather than a ceremony, do the ancestors still possess their mediums? When I first started this investigation, I was concerned that, because much mbira repertoire is used in spiritual ceremonies, a staged performance may be deemed sacrilegious by Shona standards. However, in an account from Diane Thram (2003: 112), the performers simply communicate to the *vadzimu* the nature of the specific context, that it is a secular mbira performance and there is no intention to draw the spirits to “come out.” Performers do, however, ask the spirits to be with them during a performance, and the spirits “respond by enabling the band to play well, to create an atmosphere where foreign audiences connect with the spirituality of the music” (Dutiro and Howard 2007: 22). The key to spiritual energy is that ancestors are respected (Dutiro and Howard 2007: 25). Furthermore, while mbira songs used for entertainment are not used in religious contexts, songs designated for religious ceremonies may be performed outside of their ritual context (Berliner 1993: 74).

Mbira is the Spiritual Key

Not only is it crucial to keep the line of communication open between the *vadzimu* and the participants during a secular performance of sacred mbira music, the instrument itself is important. It represents community and identity. For example, one

interpretation is that the tines are the people in the community and the small tines represent the children (Dutiro and Howard 2007: 20) The mbira is also a source of spirituality and is arguably more spiritually important than the location of the performance. The mbirist and his or her mbira share a sacred bond; the spirits of the mbira maker and the performer are inside the mbira, and when the mbira is played, those spirits travel through space and time to connect with the vadzimu. Sound, setting, ancestors, and performance intentions all merge and find reference in the mbira. “I cannot play with a band unless the mbira is central,” says Dutiro. “The music’s power comes from this instrument...so the spirit of the mbira, and its sounds, is what makes [mbira music ensembles] spiritual in different settings” (Dutiro and Howard 2007: 21). Even if a performance is far from the land of the ancestors, “the spiritual connection can be kept through one important object—the mbira... [It is the] key to unlocking the spirits” (Dutiro and Howard 2007: 23).

VI. PHYSICAL SEPARATIONS:

FROM COMMUNITY SPACE TO THE CONCERT HALL

On the typical Western stage, the separation between the performer and the audience brings with it challenges, such as volume, visibility, and lack of communal musical contribution. In response to these challenges, I will examine various techniques to help bridge this separation—techniques such as using stage configuration, audio amplification, and visual enhancement to narrow the gap between audience and performer; using audience participation to create an interactive community; and using various elements of Shona ceremonies to set a spiritual atmosphere. These techniques will be examined in this chapter and suggestions will be made in Chapter VIII.

Tuning

On a side note, one of the other physical challenges of performing mbira out of its original context is tuning. Specific tuning of the mbira is not as important in performances where the mbira is the only melodic instrument. In that case, the mbira can be tuned in the traditional way, which is similar to Western tuning but includes not only relative pitch but timbre, loudness, overtones, and fundamental tones. Because of these added elements, the English term *chuning* is becoming more popular (Berliner 1993: 62). When the Western ear listens to the traditionally chuned mbira, the pitches sound like a Western scale with the exception of a few pitches that sound a bit “off.” Sometimes the overtones are louder than the fundamental tones, and of course, the buzz is an added

timbre. There are quite a few different chunings on mbira; Erica Azim's MBIRA.org website sells fourteen different traditional chunings. In Zimbabwe, different districts prefer different chunings. Sometimes mbirists use a change of chuning to get variety in the sounds they produce or to match the vocal range of the singer (Berliner 1993:60-62).

If the mbira is played with a Western ensemble (guitar, bass, keyboard, etc.), tuning may be an issue. Is the mbira re-tuned to match the tuning of the Western instruments? Does the chuning of the mbira mean that it is an unlikely candidate for fusion performances between Western and African instruments? While listening to Thomas Mapfumo and the Blacks Unlimited, none of the instruments seem out of place. I hypothesize that the mbira is re-tuned to match the other instruments.

Performance Analysis: Descriptive Observations and Implications

The objective for analyzing performances of mbira, or related instruments, was to form a pool of techniques that would provide a mbira performer with suggestions that could be pieced together to create an ideal performance, depending of course on venue and performance frame.¹⁵ I searched for such techniques in a few places, categorizing my sources into three sets: concert performances, tutorials, and documentary clips. Refer to Table 1 and Table 2 in Appendix A for the raw data. Sets one and two (examples A1-B6: concert performances and tutorials) can be found on YouTube.¹⁶ These are mostly amateur recordings, abundant but usually of low quality. Although I viewed many clips, I chose to analyze only ten YouTube clips that included aspects that could transfer to a

¹⁵ More detail on performance frames is found in Chapter VII.

¹⁶ Example B6 is the exception, coming from the *Kalimba Magic* online newsletter.

mbira concert. The examples in set three (C1-F1: documentary clips) come from VHS recordings of documentaries and short films about the mbira.

As a relatively new medium, YouTube has proven useful in several ways. First, YouTube provides a space for people to post and share their experimentations with technology used in performance; I found helpful clips of kalimbas with pickups or contact mics attached to them or built into them. The kalimba is an instrument related to the mbira dzavadzimu, and amplification techniques can potentially carry over from one instrument to the other. Also, the comments section below the video clips sometimes provide helpful information. One of the disadvantages of YouTube is the low quality of the visual and audio recording. I struggled with clearly seeing evidence of audio amplification in the live concert clips. Also, poor labeling of clips left me questioning some of the data. Furthermore, a few of the clips I analyzed earlier this year were taken off YouTube, forcing me to find replacement clips.

The data I collected from these three kinds of sources fall into the categories of (1) stage configuration, (2) audio amplification, (3) camera work, and (4) interaction. First, when looking at stage configuration, I tried to answer questions such as the following: Is the setup beneficial or detrimental to the mbirist-audience relationship or the audience's view of the instrument?¹⁷ Are the performers arranged in a way that engages the audience, perhaps encouraging audience participation? When an audience was not present, I imagined one would be in whatever direction the performer was facing. Second, when collecting data for audio amplification, I looked for visual evidence of

¹⁷ Can the audience see and hear the mbira clearly?

equipment on or near the instrument or a verbal explanation from the performer. Third, when considering video camera work, I observed various shots, angles, and operating styles, and inferred about camera types, information that can be useful for a mbira performance in need of visual enhancement. (4) Audience-performer and performer-performer interaction was observed to see under what kind of conditions audience participation is cultivated. Audience participation may be one way to recreate an artistic representation of a bira. These four data categories correspond to columns of Table 2: Analysis Observation Table found in Appendix A. I also recorded data in the table documenting venue and participants.

Concert Performances: A1-A4

The first set of analysis reviews concert performances including Zimbabwean and non-Zimbabwean mbirists; see A1-A4 in Table 2. Since some of the performances were electric, it is implied that the mbira were amplified along with the other instruments. While the clips provide evidence that “it can be done,” how the artist did so is unclear due to poor visual quality and distant camera shots.

Example A1 shows Zimbabwean Stella Chiweshe and her band performing at the 2006 World of Music, Arts, and Dance (WOMAD) International Festival. The setting is a raised stage, one similar to a proscenium theater.¹⁸ One can observe the audience dancing and cheering below, from where the camera operator captures the performance in a low quality audio and visual recording. The camera is manned as made apparent by the shaky

¹⁸ See Chapter VIII for theater types.

footage and the tightening and widening of shots. Having the camera manned has a disadvantage in that the footage may be shaky, especially if the quality is low, but it has the advantage in that the operator can zoom in and out, getting a variety of shots.

Chiweshe sits on a chair playing a mbira with no “natural” form of amplification, like a *deze*. A *hosho* player and drummer play standing in front of her. On stage left, a marimba player performs his part weaving it with the mbira’s interlocking rhythms. Both the marimba and Chiweshe are poorly lit, hidden from view by the shadows of sound equipment. In a mbira concert, I would choose a different configuration by putting the seated mbirist in front of the standing *hosho* player and drummer so that the audience could clearly see and hear all the performers.

Two air microphones (as opposed to contact mics) are aimed at the marimba, and Chiweshe has a singing mic. Neither the *hosho* nor the drum is amplified. Interestingly, the mbira is made of two pieces of wood attached vertically in the middle. This is the mbira that Dan Pauli has constructed specifically for electric amplification.¹⁹ It is difficult to see due to the poor visual quality, but each half has its own pickup to better control the volume of the instrument. In the clip, the viewer can see the pickup taped to the back of the left side. A white cable runs from the instrument’s right side down Chiweshe’s leg and is lost in the collection of cables on the stage floor.

Example A2 is a performance of Zimbabwean Thomas Mapfumo and his band the Blacks Unlimited at a live concert. The date and location of the performance is unknown, but I chose this example for a few reasons. First of all, although not much attention is

¹⁹ See “Literature on Audio Amplification” for more detail on Dan Pauli’s electric mbira.

given to the three male mbirists, the professional quality video recording and editing provides evidence that the mbira are electronically amplified. The other instruments on stage include electric guitar, electric bass, drum set, congas, hosho, three female backup singers, various other male backup singers with cowbells and cabasas (African and Latin American shaker), and Mapfumo on vocals. The mbira must compete with these other instruments, but they can be heard on the recording, so audio amplification is implied. It is difficult to see—after all, it is a YouTube video—if the mbira have pickups or contact mics on them. There appear to be no air mics on stands for the mbira. A few times, it looks like there may be a white cable running from one mbira to the floor, presumably going to an amplifier or monitor. On one deze, there is a piece of white tape through which one can see a circular shape beneath. This could either be a patch for a crack in the deze, or it might be a pickup or contact mic taped to the deze to pick up its vibrations.

Another reason I chose this example is to comment on the stage configuration. There is a platform midway upstage on which the mbirists, drum set, and other equipment sit. The mbirists sit in chairs and seem to be lost in the equipment, similar to example A1. Personally I would want to see the mbira in a more visible location on stage, but one must look at the context of this concert. This is Thomas Mapfumo's band; it is about his singing and his revolutionary messages.²⁰ While the mbira plays an important role in the style of music, it is not the center of attention. In the ideal staged mbira concert, I would attempt to put the mbirists more in the spotlight.

²⁰ More information on Thomas Mapfumo is found in Chapter V.

A third reason I chose this example is to comment on the audience's participation. A few times the camera gets a shot of the audience, and they are not sitting still in seats like a Western audience would at a concert hall; they are all standing, clapping, singing along, and dancing to the music. Of course, this is Zimbabwean pop music, and a Western audience would stand, clap, sing, and dance at a pop music concert as well. During a concert that focuses on mbira, such a virtuosic concert, would the audience have a similar reaction? Do such concerts exist in Zimbabwe? I hypothesize that they exist more commonly in the Western world, but then the audience would be trained to passively sit and absorb the music. How can a mbira performer create an atmosphere that would encourage a Western audience to get up and dance (participate) as the music moves them?

Example A3 is a series of still photos of a Thomas Mapfumo and the Blacks Unlimited concert set to their music. This is a different concert than the one filmed in example A2, but many of the same observations were made. This performance has much darker lighting; it is even more difficult to see details. In the first picture, two mbirists sit in chairs facing the audience. They appear to be further downstage than the other concert (closer to the audience), a more appropriate location if the intent is to focus on the mbira. The same white tape can be seen on one deze. Along the leg of the other mbirist runs a red cable from his lap to the floor. Could this perhaps be for audio amplification? I believe it is, although it is too dark and blurred to see for certain.

Example A4 is a live performance set in a smaller, more personal venue – a private home. This performance clearly takes place during a small party; there are wine

glasses on the coffee table and one can hear people chatting in the background. In this clip, three Caucasian mbirists play sitting on a couch facing the party guests. Presumably, the performers are also guests, not hired musicians. Toward the end of the clip, a woman starts playing the hosho while walking by the couch, indicating a casual atmosphere.

Because of the small, personable venue there is no need for audio amplification. However, the camera work of this clip is worth noting. A manned camera gets a wide shot of the entire trio and then zooms in on one player. The viewer can see that both mbira with deze and without are being played, but the mbira on which the camera zooms has a deze. This angle over the player's left shoulder works well to show his hands and the keys of the mbira. In fact, a viewer familiar with the layout of the mbira can follow the song while watching the performer's fingers. With this camera angle and the ability to hear what the mbirist is playing, one can also observe the interaction between the kushaura (lead) and kutsinhira (following) parts. Typically, when the kushaura player improvises on higher pitches, the kutsinhira player follows. In this case, with this song, the kutsinhira part mimics the exact same kushaura part one pulse behind creating an echo effect. The viewer of the clip can see the mbirist playing the higher pitches and can hear the echo of the player sitting next to him.

Tutorials: B1-B6

The second set of YouTube clips consists of tutorial videos. These performers are most likely Zimbabwean and non-Zimbabwean mbirists recording themselves playing a

song for the viewers to learn.²¹ Interestingly, this is similar to the way people learn to play the mbira in Zimbabwe; someone shows you how and you learn by rote. The only difference is the teacher is a stranger who is connected to the student through a virtual, cyber-relationship; it is interesting to note the comfort we feel with this anonymity on the web. The tutorial clips mainly provide examples of audio and visual technology. Examples B1-B4 show possible camera angles that could be used in a concert setting while B5 and B6 demonstrate possible audio amplification techniques.

All the camera work in examples B1-B4 are close ups of the mbira. The shots are tight because the purpose of the clips is to teach viewers to play mbira songs; the cameras are close enough to watch which individual tines are plucked. Example B1 is a close up of a mbira in a *deze*. The camera is stationary and aimed along the right arm of the mbirist.²² With this angle, the viewer can clearly see the hands and mbira, although it is a slanted view and the image is pixilated. The audio feed on the camera contains a distracting amount of static but it picks up the buzz from the bottle caps. In a mbira concert, I would consider using this camera angle. However, unless the camera has very quality audio capability, I would rely on other sources for the audio feed.

Example B2 provides an extreme close up of the keys. There is no *deze*, but it would be visually excluded anyway due to the tightness of the shot. It is difficult to conceptualize where the camera is situated in relation to the performer. The shot seems to be from the point of view of the performer. Does this mean the camera is directly in front

²¹ It is difficult to know the nationality of the performers without personal contact. The relevance of their nationality for these examples is irrelevant to my research since I am specifically searching for data on amplification and camera work.

²² Throughout the clips I could distinguish between stationary and manned cameras by monitoring the shakiness of the background behind the mbira.

of the performer's face, over his head, or attached to his neck or chest? The shaking of the instrument appears to be the result of it being plucked and the background is still. This data indicates that the footage was probably shot with a stationary camera; when a camera is attached to or held by the person, it is typically shaky. Whether it is attached to the performer's body (what I termed "body camera") or not, that sort of inconspicuous technology could be an option for a mbira concert.

Like example B2, it is difficult to determine where the camera that recorded example B3 is located. The background is slightly shaky indicating that the camera is on the player's body or being held by a separate camera operator. In the shot, one sees the mbira in a *deze* (even the way the *mutsigo* is holding the mbira in place) and the hands of the mbirist. The camera appears to be over the mbira player's head or slightly to the right; the viewer sees the mbira from straight on. This is an example of a shot a body camera can get if used at a mbira concert.

Example B4 presents a wider shot that catches not only the entire mbira (without the *deze*) but the mbirist's legs as he sits cross-legged on the floor. The camera shot shows the hands on the mbira clearly. Like B1 and B2, the camera appears to be stationary, and like B3, the shot is coming from "over-the-head" or slightly to the right; it is just the stationary version of B3, meaning that the angle of this shot can be achieved both by stationary and manned cameras in a mbira concert. The decision is whether to have a camera operator on stage, a camera set on a stand, or a camera attached to the body of the player.

B5 is a clip that kalimbist Mark Holdaway posted on YouTube to display how the Hugh Tracey Celeste Diatonic Junior (Hugh Tracey Hotshot-11) kalimba can be run through a guitar effects pedal and plugged into an amplifier (a Peavey amp). This kalimba has a piezoelectric pickup installed inside it when it is built in South Africa. In the YouTube comments section, Holdaway mentions that the Pintec AP10 pickup also works if one is not already installed in the kalimba. Because the mbira is similar to the kalimba, these kinds of pickups, their placement, and their amps may be used to amplify the mbira in a large venue. The video camera is located to the right of Holdaway catching his right side and the guitar pedals on the amplifier pushed against the wall. This is a good shot to use if one wants the viewer to observe the performer and the amplification equipment, seeing the techno-culture involved in a bira reinterpretation, not just the traditional culture.

Example B6 is a clip Eric Freeman posted in the *Kalimba Magic* online newsletter. Freeman has been working with Blasé Provitola to adapt the body of the kalimba and Benjamin Todd to tweak the tines to create an electric bass kalimba. When Freeman flips the kalimba over, a still camera catches the K&K pickup taped to the back of the kalimba. He says by putting the pickup under the bridge there is a direct signal and no feedback. However, in Percy Mwana's article on klaimba pickups, he warns against putting the pickup directly below because it can pick up unwanted buzz (Mwana 2007, under "Kalimba Pickups").²³ Freeman runs the sound through a compressor and a tube amplifier, and adds overdrive distortion to it. This bass kalimba has a solid body unlike

²³ For more on Mwana's article, see discussion in "Literature on Audio Amplification."

other kalimbas but like the mbira. Perhaps taping a pickup on the back side of the mbira would work in an equally effective way.

Documentary Clips: C1-F1

The documentary examples provided data on stage configuration, camera work, and interaction. The first five documentary clips come from the video *Mbira dza Vadzimu: Dambatsoko, an Old Cult Centre*. During this specific weekend in 1985, the village prayed for peace between whites and black in Zimbabwe. Various rituals and ceremonies took place.

In the first example C1, the religious leaders, musicians, and other participants walk in a processional from the banya (the ceremonial hut where the village's spirit medium and others perform religious activities) to the *mutoro* (prayer house). The group, wearing all black clothing, walks down the path three or four people across. Three male mbirists and one male hosho player make music as they walk. The camera catches a wide shot of the group approaching and passing. This example suggests that a processional may be a good way to set the mood in a theatrical mbira performance. A processional could take place down the aisles of a theater. While a processional like this does not take place at a bira specifically, a processional may (1) set a spiritual mood in a theater, (2) give audience members near the aisles a chance to see the performers and the instruments close up, and (3) engender a feeling of unity, family, or community—as in a Zimbabwean village. Example C5 also reviews a processional and recessional.

Example C2 takes place once the group arrives at the mutoro. Only a few of the religious leaders enter the mutoro, while the musicians and other participants sit outside on the ground and on scattered boulders. The musicians, and a man clapping his hands, sit together in a tight bunch on a boulder. Three women sit close by. The mbirist who is singing alternates with the women who also sing, trading solos. The camera gets shots of the whole ensemble and close ups of individuals. This example illustrates how musicians can be grouped together to show their interaction. Also, using props such as (fake) boulders and facades of huts (to represent the mutoro) may help to set the mood.

Example C3 presents a bira, the ceremony to call a mudzimu (ancestor spirit) to “come out” in the spirit medium and converse with its living kin. All musicians, the spirit medium, and the other participants are inside the banya. Seven or eight male mbirists sit in a slightly curved line with their feet straight out in front of them. Two male hosho players sit behind them close to the back wall. Some participants sit behind the musicians but most sit to the sides. The spirit medium sits on a mat in front of the mbirists. Muchatera Mujuru is the highest spiritual leader in the village and he sings and plays mbira. As the ceremony continues, the female spirit medium and another woman dance in front of the group of mbirists. (This setup of dancers in front of seated mbirists in a soft arch occurs in example C4 as well.) The camera alternates between zooming in on individuals and out on the whole group. This example shows the way the musicians and participants in an actual bira are positioned. This same setup seems to work very well for a theatrical version of a bira. However, because of the presence of a camera and crew, I have no way of knowing whether this ceremony was changed at all for video recording

purposes. Did the spirit medium sit closer to the mbira for the camera operator to get a shot of both?

Example D1 shows a small ensemble of musicians playing outside in what looks like the front or side porch area of a house. Two male mbirists sit close on a stone bench while a drummer sits to their right. The hosho player and a couple of men clapping stand around them, casually leaning on walls. Children dance in the arch the musicians create. Once again, this arch formation with dancers in the center is common because I have noticed in other examples. The camera starts with a close up shot of mbirist Ephant Mujuru and the deze of his mbira. The shot widens to include the ensemble and then zooms in on the deze, creating a solid background for the main titles of the documentary. Example E2 is very similar to this clip except there are no children dancing.

Example D2 is an important one for camera work data. It is a solo by Ephant Mujuru. He sits on the same stone bench as in D1, and the clip begins with him putting his mbira in his deze, stabilizing it with the mutsigo. The camera is manned and shoots over Mujuru's left shoulder. When he starts playing, the camera zooms in to see his finger work. The mbira is artistically framed by the deze and Mujuru's shoulder. When the camera zooms out, the viewer can see Mujuru move his head to the rhythm of the music. These two shots, a close up of his hands from over the left shoulder and a wider shot to see his reaction to the music, can be used in a concert. While the audience probably would be able to see him move to the music, this may be useful in a very large venue.

Examples E1, E3, and E4 are beautiful clips from a documentary featuring Stella Chiweshe. These clips provide examples of artistic and effective camera work and stage configurations. E1 opens with an extreme close up of Chiweshe's fingers on the mbira from the right side. There is not a deze so the camera focuses on the tines and the fingertips with a blurred background. Her voice is heard singing although the viewer does not see her face.

Example E3 shows Chiweshe playing her mbira without the deze and singing. She sits on a boulder among trees near a rock formation. The camera watches her from the front with a wide enough shot to see her sitting on the boulder. She sways her body as she sings. The camera zooms in on her face, and the viewer senses the emotion she feels. When the camera zooms out, the audio softens and a male narrator speaks the translation of her singing in English. This is a poetic way to convey the message of the song and it could be used in a concert. If speaking over the music seems obtrusive, perhaps written words on a screen would be preferable, similar to supertitles. The other intriguing part of this clip is the sound quality. One can hear the emphasis of different notes on the mbira. Also, one can hear the interchange between Chiweshe's voice and the mbira.

Example E4 is another clip of Chiweshe playing mbira solo in the same location near the rock formation. This time she uses the deze; the sound is noticeably louder, especially the bass notes, and the buzz is more prominent. It would be interesting to have songs that use the deze and songs that do not in a mbira concert to show the audience the difference in sound. In the clip, the camera gets both tight and wide shots of Chiweshe. The close ups show the shells on her deze. Close shots of the deze and mbira that do not

focus on the music but on their construction could also be valuable in a mbira concert. At the end of her performance, Chiweshe snorts a little bit of snuff, which helps her connect with her ancestor spirits. During a mbira concert, inhaling snuff after a performance (or even pantomiming it) may be a way to set a spiritual and ritualistic atmosphere.

Example F1 comes from a documentary about the traditional iron workers of Zimbabwe. In this clip, a demonstration of traditional iron smelting of the Njanja-Shona people takes place. One male mbirist, one male hosho player, and one male drummer sit closely together on a bench forming, once again, a small arch. A woman dances next to the musicians and the other villagers surround them. The men smelting the iron in clay furnaces are very close to the musicians and villagers. There is a shot of a man pumping the bellows of the furnace to the rhythm of the music. The camera also gets a shot of the musicians but it is hard to see them because of the crowd. Because of the excitement, the music, and the recreation of old times, two spirit possessions take place, showing how the spirits can “come out” without necessarily being called. This clip is useful because other activities, like iron smelting, could be demonstrated (to some extent) with props on stage. Such a performance would focus more on traditional Zimbabwean culture, not just music.

A new creation can result from smaller pieces being joined together; one can piece together techniques from existing mbira performances to create an ideal performance, depending of course on venue and performance intention. However, are there unforeseen issues that arise when these creations come to life?

Literature on Audio Amplification

Because of the gap between audience and performer in a Western concert theater, audio amplification may be required. One solution is to use a hand-held air microphone on a stand pointing toward the instrument. However, this equipment is somewhat intrusive and seems out of place if one is trying to recreate an environment reflecting a bira ceremony. Also, one must keep the instrument very close to this sort of mic, limiting movement of the performer and potentially causing problems with feedback. An alternative solution is to use an electronic pickup (a device that picks up the vibrations of the instrument) or clip-on microphone.

New Orleans kalimbist Percy Mwana gives helpful tips and equipment suggestions in an article he wrote for *Kalimba Magic* (2007, under “Kalimba Pickups”). Mwana says the Pintec drum trigger (like a pickup) works well because it has gain adjustment enabling the performer to control feedback or increase the volume; it also versatile. However, it is fragile and requires a special guitar cord (smaller than usual). Hart Dynamics drum triggers are inexpensive but have connection problems. The Kent pickup has a convenient volume dial. The Hugh Tracey kalimba from *Kalimba Magic* comes with a preinstalled pickup. The pickup is installed safely inside the board and is durable. The more expensive (\$100) Thin Line Pickup is designed to go under a guitar's bridge. One can cut a small groove in the wood under the kalimba's bridge and install the pickup. Joel Laviolette has created a mbira with a groove carved out for various pickups, implying that this pickup may also work for the mbira. For outdoors, Mwana recommends the Barcus Berry Insider (installed inside kalimba) or Barcus Berry Outsider

(on bottom of kalimba). Mwana has had good experiences with clip-on microphones with volume dials but did not mention any specific company.

In sound comparisons, the pickup called the Barcus Berry 1455-3 Insider Piezo Transducer was best for an acoustic sound with high end brilliance. The Hart Dynamics bass pedal trigger has the most gain and volume, but did not sound as rich as the Barcus Berry. The Pintec triggers have a more natural sound.

Other tips include using Velcro to mount pickups, which allows the performer to change instruments easily. Also, Mwana suggests not attaching the pickup behind the bridge because there may be unwanted buzzing, but instead to place it on the back near the foot of the instrument. Experimentation is needed to find the “sweet spot.” To keep feedback under control, he puts his amplifier far from the instrument and uses a portable speaker (hotspot monitor) as a personal monitor.

Because the kalimba (like the mbira) is a soft spoken instrument, a pre amp or an EQ (equalizer) unit is necessary for volume and clarity. Mwana suggests the Fishman pre amp (PRO EQ Platinum); the Sans Amp direct input box, pre amp, and EQ; the GE 7 Equalizer Bass Stomp Pedal; or the Seymour Duncan Pickup Booster. The BOSS EQ20 is best for large rooms and outdoors. One can also add effects units, but such recommendations are beyond the scope of this thesis, which is focused on examining ways to reinterpret the traditional bira.

“Your pickup, drum trigger, or contact mic is only as good as your amplifier,” says Mwana, so he suggests models of amps as well. He prefers the old Marshall Acoustic Soloist, then the Fender Acoustic, then the Peavey, and finally the Fishman

Acoustic. These amps cost from \$400 to \$600 or up to \$2000 for the top of the line, although Mwana says the sound difference is not worth the price. A cheaper choice would be to use a keyboard amp or bass guitar amp. For outside performances, Mwana suggests the Korg Pandora processor, the Peavey Solo Amp, or the Roland Micro Cube Amp, all of which run on batteries.

Joel Laviolette also explores the use of pickups and other methods of amplification for mbira. He writes about electric mbira on the Rattletree Marimba discussion forum. On December 10, 2008, he began the discussion and included more details on October 18, 2009. Because there is no “one size fits all” solution to amplifying mbira, some players lay multiple pickups all over the back of the instrument and hope for a good balance, but Laviolette suggests against this. He praises the Oyster external piezo pickup, saying the ability to move the pickup around outweighs the convenience of having one built into the instrument. However, the Oyster is fragile and needs re-soldering every few weeks. Therefore, contrary to his statement about the convenience of an external pickup, Laviolette started experimenting with internal amplification, using a couple of internal pickups each with their own volume adjustment for balance. Using poster tack, he installed three internal piezos, each with a different resistance to allow for balance, into a groove cut in the wood behind the bridge on the back of the mbira. He covered the equipment with a metal-shielded slat of wood, making it invisible from the outside. A ¼ inch plug runs from the side of the instrument to a pre amp (direct input box or tube amp) and then an amplifier. See Figure 3 for an image of this mbira. He also warns against clip-on directional mics inside the deze because they are prone to feedback.

Another mbirist who experiments with audio amplification is Dan Pauli. He created an electric mbira that has the same layout of tines as the mbira dzavadzimu, although some models have extra tines. These mbira are made of two separate pieces of wood attached with a spacer to isolate each side – left and right, bass and treble. See Figure 4 for an image of this mbira. Each side has its own pickup that can be adjusted separately in a sound system to achieve an ideal balance. While the instrument has no buzzers on it, it can be placed into a very large deze with buzzers to achieve that sound (Robinson 1999). However, there are a few downsides to this instrument. First, it does not sound the same as an acoustic mbira, and second, there are resultant melodies that get lost when the two sides of the mbira are split through two amplifiers (Lavolette, Rattletree Marimba: Lessons and Discussion Forum, comment posted December 10, 2008).

Of course, clip-on mics and pickups are not found in a Zimbabwean village context, but when needed to amplify the mbira, they are smaller and more inconspicuous than a hand-held mic. Also, they are attached to the instrument allowing the performer freedom to move around. Whether it is a pickup attached to the back of a mbira or a clip-on mic attached perhaps to the clothes of the player, electronic amplification may be useful in a large venue. If the mbira player is performing with the traditional ensemble, once you aurally amplify one instrument, balance issues arise and other instruments may also need amplification.

Another problem with audio amplification is that it may require alterations of the instrument, which means (1) it has been changed from its original state, an issue of

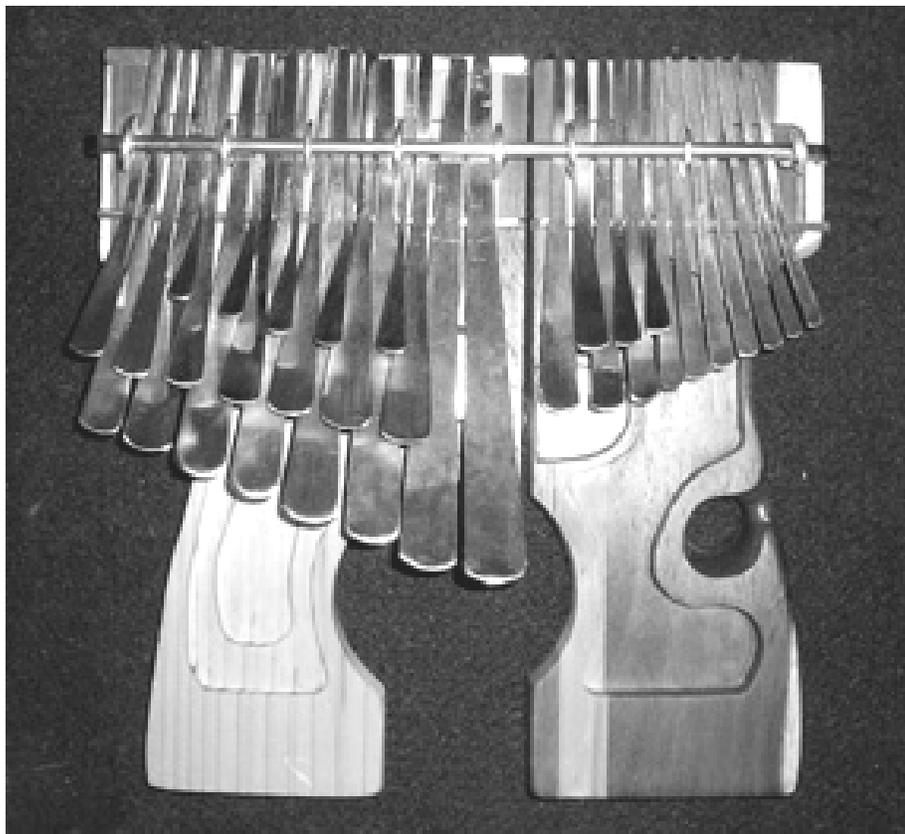
“authenticity,” and (2) mbirists may not want to make alterations to their own instruments. For example, I originally planned on experimenting with my personal mbira to test audio amplification devices but soon realized that I did not have the necessary equipment, the time, nor the desire to cut a hole in my mbira.

Figure 3: Joel Laviolette’s mbira with pickups
Image from <http://www.rattletree.com/phpBB3/viewtopic.php?f=19&t=30>.



Figure 4: Dan Pauli's electric mbira

Image from <http://www.nscottrobinson.com/gallery/electricmbira.php>.



VII. PERFORMANCE FRAMES: THEORIES

When I first began thinking about mbira performances on the stage, I wanted to create an environment for the mbira that was ideal; I wanted to set a standard for mbira performance. It was to be musical and artistic, educational, accurately reflective of its origins, and entertaining. It was to be called the “ideal mbira presentation,” for lack of a better term. However, after researching different types of performances, I decided that the performance depends too much on the setting, the intention of the performers, and the expectation of the audience. Is the audience here for a snapshot of Zimbabwean traditional culture or a production of a spectacle based on African culture, such as *The Lion King*? Is this presentation meant to be more educational with lecture segments or is it a virtuosic recital with limited speaking? There are always multiple intentions to balance. For example, a university lecture recital is intended to inform *and* show virtuosic musicality. To explore the different settings, intentions, and expectations of mbira performances, let us consider the performance theories and categorization systems of other scholars.

Kaeppler: Ritual, Theatre, and Spectacle

Adrienne Kaeppler has developed a categorical breakdown when it comes to globalized performances. She begins her article “The Beholder’s Share” by stating that the cultural background of the audience becomes increasingly irrelevant in globalized performances (such as ballet, tango, and flamenco) but asks if these performances are “understood, admired, or simply spectacle?” (Kaeppler 2010:185). How does one

distinguish between these perceptions? Kaeppler finds the answer in the audience. She refers to the audience as the “beholder,” allowing the word to encompass three kinds of audience members: (1) gods and ritual supplicants including ritual practitioners and congregations, (2) engaged audience members who are able to decode the performance due to cultural background, and (3) spectators to whom the music system is unknown, making the performance simply spectacle (Kaeppler 2010: 186, 187). The performance intention depends on the audience type: “The beholder, and what he or she brings to a performance, determines how the performance is decoded—as ritual, as theatre, or as spectacle” (Kaeppler 2010: 186).

During a ritual performance, the process of performing is key; the beholders (practitioners and congregation) do not always know why the actions are taken but they know they are necessary. In a theatrical performance, the product is most important; engaged audience members derive meaning from the performance. Putting ritualistic music on stage means adding a dramatic element; the performance becomes “artistic renderings of the ritual past” (Kaeppler 2010: 193) changing from ritual to theatre. In spectacle, the beholder need not understand the performance to appreciate it.

Kaeppler claims that the type of beholder is irrelevant when it comes to the confrontation between tradition and innovation. Hula traditionalists claim that ritual hula performances “have been inherited from gods or at least the ancestors and perpetuated as cultural artifacts and aesthetic performances. Even if their meanings have been changed or forgotten, they are reference points for ethnic or cultural identity” (Kaeppler 2010: 195). This is similar to mbira where the music is given to the living kin by the spirit

ancestors. During its revival in the period of pre-independence, the mbira became a “reference [point] for ethnic or cultural identity.” Another idea that Kaepler raises is that of recycling. Ritualistic hula has been recycled and turned into a genre that has been recycled again to convey Hawaiian ethnic identity. However, hula traditionalists argue that performances that modify the movements and music are no longer hula. Has mbira followed a similar path? I believe it has; ritual mbira has been recycled and turned into a genre that in turn has been recycled to convey Shona and even national ethnic identity during the struggle for independence.²⁴

Occasionally, a spectacle can be transformed into a theatrical performance. Kaepler gives the example of hula school competitions conveying stories in their performances that are announced beforehand (2010: 195). First of all, using the performers as actors allows beholders with little or no knowledge of hula to derive meaning from the performance. Secondly, announcing the story before the performance gives a little more knowledge to all beholders, whether engaged audience members or spectators. Using this technique in a mbira concert can be an entertaining way to convey information. A dramatic storytelling element would supplement the mbira music and increase the audience’s cultural understanding.

Kaepler concludes that the experience of tradition and innovation in global performances is dependent on two things: how do presenters want their performances to be decoded, and how do beholders create cultural meaning from the presented material?

²⁴ More detail on mbira as a national instrument appears in Chapter IV.

Schechner: Efficacy and Entertainment, Ritual and Theatre

Richard Schechner categorizes performance into ritual and theatre, and it is the function and context that distinguishes one from the other (1976: 217). It is the goal of ritual to produce an effect, whether it is to appease the gods or bring about good luck, while the purpose of theatre is to entertain. Schechner provides a succinct list comparing the properties of efficacy and entertainment.

Figure 5: Schechner's Categorization of Performance (1976: 207)

EFFICACY (Ritual)	ENTERTAINMENT (Theatre)
Results	Fun
Link to an absent Other	Only for those here
Abolishes time, symbolic time	Emphasizes now
Brings Other here	Audience in the Other
Performer possessed, in trance [presumed involuntary behavior]	Performer knows what he's doing
Audience participates	Audience watches
Audience believes	Audience appreciates
Criticism is forbidden	Criticism is encouraged
Collective creativity	Individual creativity

“Efficacy and entertainment are opposed to each other, but they form a binary system, a continuum” (Schechner 1976: 206-207). One calls a performance ritual or theatre depending on its tendency towards efficacy or entertainment, although it is never exclusively one type but a balance of the two. Schechner also points out that it depends on the point of view; what happens on the stage of a theater can be considered entertainment, but activities like the preparation, rehearsals, investments, and ticket sales

can be considered efficacy and therefore a part of ritual. Furthermore, Schechner delves into the relationship between the event and the participants (performers and audience): “Ritual is an event upon which its participants depend; theatre is an event which depends on its participants” (1976: 211). Therefore, Schechner’s theory of ritual and theatre depends on the participants, unlike Kaeppler’s theory that depends on the beholder.

Schechner goes on to discuss ritual performing groups that tour around the world. He uses the example of the Turkish whirling dervishes’ performance in 1972 at the Brooklyn Academy of Music. Schechner explains that “the audience had been told that what they paid money to see as an entertainment retained enough of its ritual basis to require a change in conventional theatrical behavior” (1976: 217). In the program was a request to refrain from applause, although in the 2,000-seat opera house applause is a typical activity. This adaptation to “conventional theatrical behavior” can transfer to a mbira concert. Going from one mbira song to the next may be a way to create a flowing and uninterrupted atmosphere.

In 1973, the Shingon Buddhist monks performed ceremonies at the Brooklyn Academy of Music in a smaller, 200-seat room. In the program were detailed descriptions of what the monks were doing, what it meant, and how the ceremony is used in Japan, a truly educational element in performance also meant to be entertaining. “A defined interface between spectators and performers existed; on one side was authenticity, efficacy, and ritual, on the other side was entertainment and theatre” (Schechner 1976: 217). Because it is context that distinguishes ritual (efficacy), theatre (entertainment), and ordinary life (routine), Schechner argues that any ritual can be staged. Using this mixture

of efficacy (its purpose changed from ritual to educational) and entertainment can be a recipe for an effective mbira concert.

While theatre can develop from ritual, ritual can develop from theatre. In the Western theatre there are backstage rituals (“Break a leg!”), orchestral rituals (orchestra musicians rising when the conductor enters the stage), and other conventions that go hand in hand with the theatre-going experience. Because the mbira is taken out of its sacred, ritualistic context, is there some theatrical ritual that could replace the ones lost? For example, a dramatic interpretation of a segment of a ceremony may be both effective and entertaining. The part of the bira when the host explains to the mudzimu why the bira is taking place could work as a way to set the mood of the staged tradition and convey information to the audience.²⁵

Goffman: Hierarchy of Performance Purity

Erving Goffman describes performance as a process that transforms an individual into a stage performer who can be looked at and looked to for engaging behavior by an audience (1986: 124). He discusses the separation between the performer and audience and that there is an understanding in Western theatre that the audience has “neither the right nor the obligation to participate directly in the dramatic action occurring on stage” (Goffman 1986: 125). Because everyone present at a bira participates, breaking through this understanding by prompting audience participation may be a way to (1) get the

²⁵ See Chapter IV for discussion of the format of the bira.

audience excited and involved in the music, and (2) create an atmosphere similar to a bira where everyone is from the same village or even the same family.

Goffman categorizes performances according to their purity, “according to the exclusiveness of the claim of the watchers on the activity they watch” (1986: 125). In other words, like Kaeppler’s theory, it depends on the beholder. While the concept of “purity” can raise unfavorable connotations, Goffman addresses the quality of experience rather than passing value judgment on performers or implying racial undertones. It is the categories in this sense that interest me. (1) The purest forms of performance are those that fully depend on the presence of an audience, such as orchestra concerts, dramatic scripting, nightclub acts, the ballet, etc. “No audience, no performance” (Goffman 1986: 125). (2) One step down is contests and matches, events in which the performers strive for victory while the spectators are entertained. The field, ring, or grounds act as the stage. (3) The next purest form of performance is the ceremony, such as weddings and funerals (and also mapira). The “audience” consists of witnesses and guests who come by invitation, not fee. It is during this level of performance that ritual takes place, according to Goffman (1986: 126). (4) Next on the list are talks and lectures, which are a little more complicated because they can vary. Some lean toward the informative side (briefing sessions for fighter pilots), while others are more entertaining (political analysis provided by stand-up comedians). (5) The most impure performance is the work performance, such as a construction site or rehearsal.

In a Zimbabwean village, traditional mbira is played in ceremonies, which would fall into Goffman’s third form of performance. By putting it on stage, it moves to the

purist kind of performance. By combining mbira performance with informative lecture, it moves from the third purist to a combination of the first and the fourth purist. Of course, being a purer form does not make a performance “better;” it just means Goffman defines performance based on the intentions of the performer and the expectations of the audience, the quality of experience.

Zimbabwean Performance Frames

In my research, I came across mbira performance frames that take place in Zimbabwe, not overseas. These frames include ritual (which has already been discussed), educational, and entertainment (the two latter will be discussed below). Also, Albert Chimedza categorizes frame by listener; he says there are several types of mbira listeners in Zimbabwe (2002-3). (1) There are those who perform or participate in rural rituals. (2) People in the cities enjoy mbira music but will not go into villages to hear it; they wait until it comes to the city, which is not as often as performance in villages. (3) Young people in the increasingly diverse milieu of the city turn to mbira music for cultural identity. (4) Tourists – black and white, Zimbabwean and non-Zimbabwean – seek out mbira music because they are interested in its social context. (5) Some people are fans of a particular mbira band; they are loyal to the music but more specifically to a particular band (Chimedza 2002-3).

Mbira is, and has been since pre-colonial times, performed within entertainment frames. While mbira songs used for entertainment are not used in religious contexts, songs designated for religious ceremonies may be performed outside of their ritual

context, (Berliner 1993: 74) as was mentioned previously. Paul Brickhill is a musician and the director of the Pamberi Trust, which runs the Book Café in Harare, Zimbabwe. As a venue of small musical acts, the Book Café often has mbirists perform. Brickhill talks about his experience with mbira music within an entertainment frame in Harare between the 1980s and early 2000s:

When I started in music in the early eighties, mbira playing with its songs was very much associated with rural, traditional music ... The Book Café, which started about six years ago, immediately started to hire mbira artists. At that time there was virtually no mbira being played by any music venue in Harare. Most music venues were concentrating on Kwasa-Kwasa, what we call Rumba, Sungura, Jiti, and otherwise on modern music, American music, hip-hop, rap, ragga, some reggae, most of them. There was no jazz club or anything like that. So we started to bring in mbira and to begin with people took it like a folk instrument. It is very noticeable how young urban people became interested in developing Zimbabwean music (Brickhill 2002).

Mbira is more recently performed within an educational frame. Before Zimbabwean independence, the Kwanongoma College of Music in Bulawayo, Zimbabwe, began training music teachers for African schools and teaching an appreciation of traditional African music, including mbira and xylophone skills (Kaemmer 1997: 755). This was a departure from the typically Euro-centric curriculum and music programs installed by colonists previously.

Albert Chimedza is a Zimbabwean filmmaker, musician, mbira-maker, and promoter of mbira through the Gonanombe Mbira Centre in Harare. “To be [a] mbira player requires a lot of skill, perhaps fifteen years experience,” he says. “But all this knowledge is not in the formal educational sector. Now if you had an equivalent kind of skill in the formal sector where somebody has fifteen years experience, that would be a

very highly qualified and probably highly paid person. So we are doing our little part in trying to formalize, become like a mbira academy in the country” (Chimedza 2002-3).

The Gonambe Mbira Centre also acts as a contact point to keep mbirists and mbira-makers in touch. An archive of mbira, lists of mbirists and mbira-makers, and a CD catalogue are other valuable resources provided by the Gonambe Mbira Centre. By creating this center, Chimedza not only educates people about mbira but conveys to Zimbabwe musicians that “you can make money with music, you can make money with art; you can promote your country with art and music” (2002-3).

Beulah Diago is another example of a mbirist playing within an educational frame. Diago performs traditional mbira music in the big cities of Zimbabwe, oftentimes exposing young people to it for the first time. Her intention is not to draw spirits for possession but rather to educate her people about traditional music (Bright 1990). She is known as one of the first musicians to take the sacred music of mbira and play it in secular settings, such as the streets and beer halls of Zimbabwe’s urban areas.

VIII. RESULTING PERFORMANCE RECOMMENDATIONS

All About the Frame

Back in the earliest stages of this project, I was going to examine the transition mbira music makes going from a Zimbabwean village context to a specific Western concert stage context – from Zimbabwe to overseas – from one place to another. However, it became clear that location, or even venue, is not the only factor on which performance depends; intentions, expectations, and interactions define a performance. For example, the performance practices that go into a mbira lecture recital differ from those that go into a virtuosic mbira performance, even if both occur in a small recital hall. As Schechner mentioned, one performance contains multiple intentions.²⁶ For example, while a lecture recital’s main goal may be to defend a hypothesis, it also has an element of entertainment. Furthermore, the term “context” does not encompass the social aspects I want to include and thus chose to use Erving Goffman’s term “frame.”²⁷

This chapter will discuss three mbira-specific performance frames I developed after considering those proposed by other authors in Chapter VII: ritual, theatric, and didactic. Like many theoretical categorizations, these frames are not absolutely discrete; they overlap and have blurry borders. I chose to include a ritualistic frame—Kaepler, Schechner, and Goffman all include ritual as a performance category—but because mbira in this frame has already been discussed, this chapter will focus on the other two. I will suggest performance styles, venues, stage configurations, visual and audio equipment,

²⁶ More on Schechner’s balance of efficacy and entertainment was introduced in the previous chapter.

²⁷ See “frame” in the Chapter III.

interactive possibilities, and other techniques that will enhance the effectiveness of a mbira performance within each frame.

Didactic Frame

While neither Kaeppler nor Schechner include an educational category in their performance theories, I feel that this is an important one to incorporate. Goffman has lecture as his fourth level of performance purity, but a performance in a didactic frame would combine his fourth and first levels, lecture and theatre. A didactic performance is intended to convey instruction and information as well as pleasure and entertainment. A lecture recital is a perfect example; it both educates the audience and entertains with art. It oftentimes follows a “show-and-tell” format during which verbal description and musical performance alternate, allowing the audience to observe first-hand things being described. The lecture portions may include information on the music, the people, the culture, the instruments, playing techniques, meaning of lyrics, and how the music ties in with ritual or daily life.

While a mbira performance within a didactic frame might include some program notes, it is more likely that the musical and cultural information is conveyed through lecture, picture slideshow, or PowerPoint presentation. Perhaps the lead mbirist could act as the lecturer, since the person has the authority of starting and stopping mbira songs during a ceremony.²⁸ Because a didactic mbira performance would include spoken or written word, there is less pressure to add extra theatrical elements. The goal of a

²⁸ Or, more likely, whoever is comfortable speaking in public.

performance within a didactic frame would be to convey information through a combination of words and music.

Theatric Frame

Kaepler, Schechner, and Goffman all have theatre as a category in their performance theories. Taking a ritual and putting into a theatric frame is moving from Goffman's third level of performance purity to the first level. While Kaepler also has a category for spectacle, I define spectacle as a way to make theatre grand and awe-inspiring or even educational, as will be discussed below. A theatric performance is music- and dance-based, without as much written or spoken information presented to the audience. Bearing in mind that one of the reasons to stage mbira is to expose and perpetuate Shona culture, the challenge of the theatric mbira performance is to convey some amount of information in an especially entertaining way.²⁹ The audience does not expect to be lectured but may appreciate learning about Shona culture while being entertained by the music.

What can be done to ensure that a theatric mbira performance is both entertaining and educational? Since it is theatre, why not use theatrical elements, such as stories, props, costume, pictures, scenery, and acting? One suggestion comes from Kaepler's example of using dramatic (acted out) storytelling not only to intrigue the audience but to relay cultural information.³⁰ Singing newly composed lyrics in English about Shona

²⁹ For reasons to put mbira on the concert stage, see Chapter V.

³⁰ For more on Kaepler's example of dramatic storytelling in hula, see the previous chapter.

culture could be another way to use an aspect of mbira music to inform the audience.³¹ Dramatized demonstrations of Shona activities, like the iron smelting mentioned above, would also work well within this frame. Like a didactic performance, a theatric mbira performance could also include a “master of ceremonies” character; however, in a theatric frame this role would be more of an audience liaison, someone to prompt participation and excitement. A mbira performance within a theatric frame is not aiming toward “authenticity” as much as it is making the music come alive *and* educating to some extent.

Styles: Culturo-Interpretation and Techno-Interpretation

Before looking at frame-specific suggestions, let me introduce two terms I developed to describe styles of mbira performance on the Western stage. The first is “culturo-interpretation”—the “culturo-” indicating a performance that emphasizes a “true to the culture” attitude, what some would call more “authentic.” The “interpretation” makes reference to either (1) the idea that a performance of another culture’s music can be an interpretation or representation rather than a replication, or (2) the context of the music has changed, making it an interpretation. A culturo-interpretation that requires technological enhancement would use hidden body cameras and subtle pickups. The performance might follow the format of a shortened bira, going from one song to the next without applause between songs, similar to Schechner’s example of the whirling

³¹ This pertains as long as the lyrics are not silly and sentimental like those in *African Footprint*.

dervishes' performance.³² Perhaps other Shona activities, like iron smelting, would be dramatically but realistically demonstrated with props, as long as those activities accompany ritual mbira playing. There may be no visual enhancement since the participants at a bira cannot see the hands of the mbira players. The goal of a culturo-interpretative style mbira performance would be to give the audience a taste of traditional mbira music in a context similar to one found in rural Zimbabwe. In other words, it would be performed close to the way it would be in a ritualistic frame.

The other term is “techno-interpretation”—the “techno-” referring to a mbira concert that would include more obvious uses of technology. A techno-interpretive style mbira performance would differ from an electric pop or fusion band performance because the traditional songs would be played on the traditional instruments found in rural Zimbabwe, only they would be technologically enhanced. The performance would use technology and at the same time embrace it as part of a new mbira culture. Leslie Gay writes on the merging between technology and the musician in his article “Acting Up, Talking Tech” (2006). He says, “Technologies connect a musician to his or her audience while, in effect, collapsing the technology and musician into a single entity” (Gay 2006: 217). Rather than trying to hide the technology, as would be done in a culturo-interpretation, the technology-mbirist amalgamation is celebrated and showcased. The audience would see the way the pickup is attached to the mbira and the camera operator over the player's shoulder would be getting a variety of shots. These images and maybe the English translation of lyrics would be projected on a screen. The goal of a techno-

³² For more on Schechner's example of the whirling dervishes' performance, see the previous chapter.

interpretive style mbira performance would be to show the ways technology can enhance appreciation for a traditional instrument.

Mix and Match: Styles within Frames

The two styles mentioned above can fit into either frame, creating four performance combinations of interpretation: (1) didactic culturo-interpretation, (2) didactic techno-interpretation, (3) theatric culturo-interpretation, and (4) theatric techno-interpretation.

A didactic culturo-interpretation would be most like a lecture recital because it would include spoken explanation about Shona culture and music while staying “true” to traditional mbira music. This might include a verbal introduction describing a segment of a bira followed by a reenactment of that segment.

A didactic techno-interpretation would probably be the most interesting display of cross-culture. Lecture segments would include not only descriptions of Shona culture but ways technology is used with mbira. For example, Dan Pauli’s electric mbira could be displayed and explained before it is played. Manned cameras can zoom in and out on mbirists as they present the mbira to the audience on screens or television monitors.

A theatric culturo-interpretation would probably have the smoothest flow. This would be a performance that would include extensive program notes (like Schechner’s example of the Shingon Buddhist monks’ performance) since there would be no lecture to supplement the music.³³ Because of its goal to stay true to the village context, this kind

³³ For more on Schechner’s example of Shingon Buddhist monks, see the previous chapter.

of performance would have limitations on its use of theatric elements. Some elements, while they may be true to Shona culture in general, may not be traditionally used with mbira, such as certain songs, dances, or other activities.

A theatric techno-interpretation would be the closest thing to a pop or rock concert; there would be no lecture, and technology would be involved. Traditional mbira songs on traditional instruments would still be played, they would just have audio amplification and visual enhancement.

Venues

There are a variety of Western venues in which a mbira concert may take place: concert halls, theater spaces, outdoor festival locations, stadiums, church sanctuaries, museums, libraries, conference rooms, auditoriums, gymnasiums, classrooms, parks, personal homes, classrooms, and more. Some settings are more common for certain frames due to the function of the frame. Didactic performances tend to take place in museums, libraries, classrooms, or conference rooms at conventions where speaking can be heard, while theatric performances are usually found in theater spaces, concert halls, or parks where theatrical elements (lighting, scenery, movement, acting) can be utilized.

Mbira performance within a theatric or didactic frame could take place in any venue, but some are better fits than others. Stadiums or other large venues are unlikely to be the settings for mbira concerts because they are extremely big and there is not enough interest in traditional mbira to fill a venue of that size. A smaller space generates a sense of unity and intimacy, like a bira inside the traditonal banya hut, which would fit only

twenty to forty people (Berliner 1993: 188). However, a small space may not always be available.

What can be done to make a large venue a more ideal setting for a mbira concert? Scenery and lighting can be of service. Free standing panels create dividing walls that break up an expansive background. On the other hand, one must be careful not to make the performance area too small if there is an ensemble accompanying the mbira. In a large theater space, lighting techniques can also create the illusion of a small space. A pool of light focused on the mbira player or ensemble may help visually shrink the stage. Some venues are better for acoustic volume and natural visual access, such as a theater-in-the-round, thrust stage, park, or large open space (in museum or library) where people can walk around performers, seeing all angles and observing at a close distance.³⁴

Audio Amplification and Visual Enhancement

The type of technological enhancement utilized depends not only on venue size but on performance frame and style as well.³⁵ Small venues are not likely to require audio amplification, but a techno-interpretation in either a didactic or theatric frame may include it since its goal is to exhibit the technology *with* the mbira. Most large venues

³⁴ There are four main styles of stage in Western theater – the proscenium, the thrust, theater in the round, and the black box. In a proscenium theater (probably the most common type), the audience faces the stage and views the performance through the “picture frame” of the stage borders. In a thrust theater, the stage juts out into the seating allowing the audience to surround the stage on three sides. A theater in the round consists of a stage situated in the centre of the theater with the audience facing it from all sides. A black box theater can be arranged differently for each show (chairs and staging area are movable) allowing flexibility in stage arrangement.

³⁵ I divide venues into small and large; small being intimate settings such as classrooms, personal homes, concert halls and theater spaces seating under 200, small church sanctuaries and conference rooms, etc. Large venues include stadiums, auditoriums, concert halls and theater spaces seating over 200, outdoor areas like parks and festival areas, etc. Basically, if one requires amplification to be heard, I categorize that as a large venue, and venues needing no amplification are small venues.

probably would require the use of audio amplification. When used, audio amplification is basically the same for both styles (techno- and culturo-interpretations) since pickups allow for less feedback and more room to roam, and they are also discreet enough to be used for a culturo-interpretative performance in a large venue. Pre amps and amplifiers may be hidden or disguised in culturo-interpretive performances.

Visual enhancement would be welcome in most venues, whether small or large, due to the way the mbirist holds the instrument close to the body. The type of amplification depends on the style of performance. Techno-interpretation would use more obvious types of amplification—manned cameras or cameras on stands, screens for projected images—while culturo-interpretations may utilize a small body camera or discrete still camera over the shoulder of the mbirist. Mirrors are another option, particularly for the theatric culturo-interpretation that uses no verbal explanation and uses as little technology as possible. Experimenting with mirrors at different angles may create interesting visual effects. By placing a mirror behind and slightly above the mbira player (similar to some of the camera angles from the performance analysis), the audience may be able to see the hands of the performer on the mbira.

Then again, when a Western audience member goes to a piano concert, where does that person choose to sit? Does that person sit on the left side of the hall to view the player's hands flying over the keys, to witness the virtuosity? Or does that person sit on the right side of the hall, where the piano blocks the keyboard, to simply listen to the music? These are the two options the mbirist has to consider: will the audience be

allowed access (with visual enhancement) to see the virtuosity of the mbira or will the mbira be hidden, perhaps forcing the audience to listen deeper to the music?

Stage Configuration

Reviewing the data collected from the performance analysis, the best sort of stage setup for any mbira performance would be the one most commonly observed. Stage setups of ceremonies and entertainment seem to have the mbirists in an arch with the dancers directly in front of them within the arch. This setup transfers very well to the stage, having the mbirists sitting in chairs (on the ground might be too low, depending on the venue) facing the audience. The hosho player(s) and drummer would stand behind or to the side, and the dancers would be in front sometimes and move to the side to display the mbirists at other times. Even if the performance did not include dancers, the musicians could still use this configuration. Being in a single-file line allows technical equipment (still cameras or manned cameras, amplifiers) to be positioned behind the musicians. The ability to see the mbirists is important because there is so much emotion involved in the execution of the music. In the performance analysis, I noticed that players such as Ephat Mujuru (D2) and Stella Chiweshe (E3) sway to the music and really “get into it,” a component that makes mbira music intriguingly passionate.

Interaction

All four style-frame combinations do have some common objectives: to create a metaphoric village, to set a spiritual tone, and to honor the ancestor spirits. One way to

create an atmosphere of community and familial unity, like that of a bira, is through audience interaction. Interaction helps to bridge the separation between audience and performer. This is what local Tucson musician, Kenya Masala, did recently with his project *Za Boom Ba*, a show during which the audience members become the drummers (*Za Boom Ba*, directed by Kenya Masala, Leo Rich Theatre, Tucson, May 7 and 9, 2010). While the traditional Western theatre experience revolves around an audience passively observing performers on a stage, “Theatre 2.0”—as Masala calls it—revolves around interaction between the performers and audience, breaking the veil that separates the two. It is by no means attacking the established Western theatre tradition, one that has been around for centuries; it is simply a new take on the theatre-going experience. Throughout the high-energy percussion and dance show, the audience members played with the performers with handclapping and instruments.

This sort of interactive experimentation is a way to establish an environment of participation, just like the environment of the bira ceremony. Perhaps rhythms for clapping and responses in songs can be taught to the audience before the show or facilitated during the show to encourage audience participation. Says Dutiro about his mbira performances, “I need to interact with an audience, moving with them” (2007: 6).

Another way to create a bira-like ambiance is through the use of mirrors. If audience members are not able to surround the performers, like in a theater-in-the-round, thrust theater, or open space, then reflective surfaces can provide the same effect. While putting a mirror directly behind the player would not help improve the visibility of the player’s hands, it would allow the audience to see themselves—the reflected faces of the

audience. This gives the illusion that the performer is surrounded by people—surrounded by a family—similar to the setting of family and friends gathered at a bira ceremony. A similar technique is used in the 2002 production of Claudio Monteverdi's *L'Orfeo* directed by Jordi Savall in Barcelona, Spain; the entire back wall of the stage facing the audience was covered with mirrors allowing the audience to view themselves during the beginning of the opera.

Setting the Spiritual Tone and Honoring the Spirits

The method used to create a spiritual tone—to make it clear that the spirits are involved with the performance—depends mostly on the performance frame, didactic or theatric. In didactic performances, the importance of the spirits can be explained to the audience. A spiritual ambiance is thus generated because the audience knows that the music typically occurs in a spiritual context. In a theatric frame, it is trickier because words are not used convey spirituality. A limited amount of speaking is used, but it is likelier that actions may be able to replace words. Actions such as processions and recessionals down the aisles, verbal communication with the ancestor spirits (not possession but similar to praying), and other dramatized rites may help to set a ritualistic mood.

The key to spiritual energy is that ancestors are respected (Dutiro and Howard 2007: 25). If the definition of “traditional” is something that honors or draws the spirits, then a performance that does that—even in a new frame—would, by definition, be a traditional mbira performance. How does one honor the vadzimu in a theatric or didactic

performance rather than a ritualistic performance? One way may be to communicate with them, although not directly through possession but, as mentioned before, through a kind of verbal broadcast similar to prayer—although the only time saw the term “prayer” in connection with spirit communication was referring to the mutoro as a prayer hut.

Spiritual communication could take place in either frame or style of mbira performance. As was mentioned in Chapter V, spirits are often called upon in non-ritual mbira performances to help the musicians play well and “to create an atmosphere where foreign audiences connect with the spirituality of the music” (Dutiro and Howard 2007: 22).

Another way to honor the spirits is to play the music they like. Each mudzimu has its favorite mbira songs, and playing those songs is pleasing to the spirit ancestor, an action that has a function *and* entertainment value for a performance. In Zimbabwe, favorite songs are identified by trial and error. If there is a particular spirit that needs to be reached, then the mbirists perform different traditional mbira songs until one of them prompts the spirit to possess the medium.

A third way to honor the spirits may just be to acknowledge their presence. Dutiro finds it important to communicate with the audience the importance of the ancestors in daily life (2007:17). It appears that simply acknowledging their importance and presence honors them. Non-Zimbabwean mbirists on stage may find acknowledging the spirits helpful to not only to show honor, but to justify their right as a non-Zimbabwean to play Zimbabwean music. As mentioned in Chapter V, all people are related according to Zimbabwean ancestral lines; a non-Zimbabwean and a Zimbabwean share very distant ancestors (Azim 2010).

IX. CONCLUSION

“In changing times, and in different places, the mbira becomes a focus for traditional spirituality to renegotiate the contested domains of ownership and boundaries of identity that modernity questions.”

—Chartwell Dutiro (2007: 24)

Because of its spiritual connotations, the traditional mbira culture has survived throughout Zimbabwe’s history. However, the spirituality of the mbira makes it a unique and challenging instrument to put on stage. When players adapt mbira performance for visual and aural purposes, other issues having to do with authenticity and religious customs arise. For example, how do Zimbabwean traditionalists and ancestor spirits perceive modifications to the mbira? As Paul Berliner puts in *The Soul of Mbira*, “musicians position themselves at different points along the continuum between tradition and innovation by selectively adopting, combining, and transforming musical conventions. Correspondingly, at the very core of the intellectual and spiritual life of Zimbabwe’s music community, there remain impassioned debates over which musical practices are tasteful, which are esthetically viable, which are skillful, and even which are morally correct” (1993: “Author’s Note”). While he speaks specifically about mbira players who play with fusion bands (Western electric instruments combined with mbira), putting modern equipment on an ancient, spiritual instrument may raise some concerns. When I first started this investigation, I was concerned that, because much mbira repertoire is used in spiritual ceremonies, a staged performance may be deemed sacrilegious by Shona standards. However, as mentioned previously, the performers simply communicate to the ancestor spirits that it is a secular mbira performance and there is no intention to draw the spirits to come out.

My point is not that the mbira should not be played in a Western concert stage context, following the canonic practices of Western concert ritual; it is that experimenting with stage set-up, utilizing amplification and visual enhancement, and encouraging an audience-performer relationship will have an impact on both the audience and the performer—creating an experience that is closer to that found in Zimbabwean mbira performances. According to Paul Berliner, “the most powerful effect of mbira music occurs in the context of traditional Shona religion, at a bira, in which the mbira music induces a spirit to possess its entranced medium” (1993: 135). Even though a spirit may not possess its medium at a staged mbira performance, perhaps recreating a similar environment will provide a fresh approach to performances of this traditional instrument.

Future Research

The options for future research on staging mbira are limitless—both theoretical and practical. First of all, a more in-depth look at any of the topics mentioned in the literature review would provide enough information for individual studies. Other mbira performance frames can be investigated while considering Mantle Hood’s theory on bi-musicality (1960); the performance studies of Victor Turner (1982), Alejandro Madrid (2009), Louise Meintjes (2003), and Ted Solís (2004); Richard Dorson’s ideas on folklorization (1976, 1982); and the works on festivalization of Timothy Taylor (1997) and Graeme Ewens (1991).

Another topic for future research is to investigate efforts to incorporate a cross-cultural element to mbira performance. Gilbert Deflo, the stage director of the Barcelona

production of *L'Orfeo*, used elements of Japanese Noh theatre in his stage design (Monteverdi/Savall 2002). What cross-cultural aspects can be brought into mbira music to enhance its performance? At what point does the fusion of different cultures result in something other than mbira music?

While I focused in detail on options for audio amplification, exploring strategies to enhance the visual dimensions of performance merits additional research, especially since technological resources will continue to develop beyond any I have mentioned here. Identifying types of cameras and specific brands with which professionals have experimented would be the equivalent to the study I did with audio equipment. Also, further investigation of how performance frames shape recordings of mbira music is another topic for research. Live performance allows for interaction with the audience, which brings it a step closer to a bira setting. Alternatively, recorded music does not contain that interactive component.

Furthermore, recording studios outside Zimbabwe sometimes require changes to African aesthetics. For example, Dutiro mentions mbirists having to put tape over bottle caps to stop the buzz during recording sessions. After the rattle is taken out, reverb is added (Dutiro and Howard 2007: 5). This action opens the door to a study on the implications of changing the African aesthetic of buzz. Some believe this signature sound is the voice of the instrument. When one takes out the instrument's voice and then adds an artificial voice, what does this do to the aesthetics and meaning of the recording?

Whatever research is done on mbira dzavadzimu, one must contend with varying dimensions of spirituality. "For [Dutiro], communicating with the ancestors is not just a

way of expressing his Africanness in [a foreign setting], but an integral part of daily life, a way of making sense of the world” (Dutiro and Howard 2007: 19). On the other hand, perhaps Westerners are overly fascinated with spirituality. As mentioned in Chapter III, mbira promoter Albert Chimedza suggests exploring the experimental mbira performance possibilities in a way divorced from spirituality. Maybe it is impossible to pinpoint definitive answers to questions about spirituality in mbira performance; there are too many variables, such as personal experience, beliefs, and local culture. It seems that by searching for answers, more questions are raised, question such as: Can culture be separated from spiritual aspects of performance or are they so intertwined they must always occur together? The next step may be to share this study with Zimbabwean mbirists to discover their responses to these questions.

In closing, this thesis project has proved to be more complex than I had expected when I started. Despite the challenges, the study has helped me to realize the nature of the complexities involved with the transfer of music from one environment to another. It is hoped that these realizations can also contribute to the ongoing dialogue about performing traditional mbira music in new contexts and exploring music performance practice in general.

APPENDIX A: PERFORMANCE ANALYSIS

Set one (examples A1-A4) are live performances found on YouTube. Set two (examples B1-B6) are tutorials found on YouTube. Set three (C1-F1) are clips from documentaries and short films about mbira. The directions I use in the analysis are stage directions; right and left are from the performer's view facing audience, whether there actually is an audience or not. I also use the term "manned" to describe a camera that has an operator, "still" as a camera that is stationary (probably mounted on a stand), and "body" as a small camera located somewhere on the performer's body. Following is a list of abbreviated terms:

l = left	Set A = YouTube live performances
r = right	Set B = YouTube tutorials
m = male	Set C = Zantzinger documentary
f = female	Set D = Zantzinger and Tracey documentary
w/ = with	Set E = Hallis documentary
w/o = without	Set F = Dewey documentary
still = stationary camera	
manned = camera operated by person	
Tech (A/V) = technology (audio/visual)	
Perf. = performance	

This is the format I used to analyze the data using two tables:

Analysis Identification Table

Source – date accessed

Performance (short description)

Code (matched with Table 2: Analysis Observation Table, A1-F1)

Analysis Observation Table

Participants (quantity, gender, what instruments)

Technology (audio, visual)

Venue (setting)

Configuration (staging)

Interaction (between performers, participants, audience)

Table 1: Analysis Identification Table

Source	Perf.	Code
Performances: ordered by date posted.		
Chiweshe, Stella. 2006. "Stella Chiweshe Womad. 2006 #3." Posted November 10 by Onnibus on YouTube. http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=is4RYOEFu2M&feature=related (accessed February 9, 2010).	S. Chiweshe live performance	A1
Mapfumo, Thomas. 2008. "Thomas Mapfumo – Moyo Wangu." Posted September 30 by World Srv on YouTube. http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yMC_5FxdULY&feature=related (accessed May 24, 2010).	T. Mapfumo live performance	A2
Mapfumo, Thomas, and the Blacks Unlimited. 2009. "Maiti Kurima Hamubvire – Thomas Mapfumo & the Blacks Unlimited 1991." Posted September 5 by AboubacarSiddikh on YouTube. http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vHZWvwxWm5Y&feature=related (accessed March 28, 2010).	Pics of T. Mapfumo live performance	A3
Anonymous. 2006. "mbira players." Posted August 11 by Dmsands on YouTube. http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=t7QGhXEU6gk&feature=related (accessed March 28, 2010).	Ensemble at party, manned camera	A4
Tutorials: ordered by data relevance.		
Myriadira. 2009. "Kariga Mombe & Marenja-gandanga mbira." Posted June 11 on YouTube. http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tmuDVE28GFE&feature=related (accessed June 24, 2010).	Still on the R w/ deze.	B1
Blackredtailangel. 2009. "Chigamba Mbira: Left and right hands together." Posted November 8 on YouTube. http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_ODUss-HQLA&feature=related (accessed March 28, 2010).	Still camera, close up of fingertips.	B2
Ale. 2008. "KarigaMombe by Ale." Posted May 17 by Kalimbass on YouTube. http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FzjOjEqytqQ&feature=rec-LGOUT-exp_stronger_r2-2r-1-HM (accessed on March 28, 2010).	Over the head/body camera w/ deze.	B3
Dezesticks. 2008. "Tairava Mbira Huru Dzavadzimu Three Basic Parts." Posted June 14 on YouTube. http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HRJRv165T7U&NR=1 (accessed March 28, 2010).	Still over head/body camera w/o deze.	B4
Holdaway, Mark. 2007. "Electric kalimba." Posted December 12 by kalimbamagic on YouTube. http://www.youtube.com/user/kalimbamagic#p/u/51/vwi0JaJmVTI (accessed April 23, 2010).	Kalimba w/ built-in pickup.	B5
Freeman, Eric. 2010. "Freeman Bass Kalimba." <i>Kalimba Magic</i> 5(1): under "Kalimba Community," ed. Mark Holdaway http://www.kalimba-magic.com/newsletters/newsletter5.02/kalimba_community.shtml#freeman (accessed March 10, 2010).	Kalimba w/ contact mic.	B6
Video: ordered by date published.		
Zantzinger, Gei. 1978. <i>Mbira dza Vadzimu: Dambatsoko, an Old Cult Centre</i> . VHS. University Park, PA: Constant Spring Productions.	Processional to mutoro.	C1
Ibid.	At mutoro.	C2

Source	Perf.	Code
Ibid.	Banya spirit possession.	C3
Ibid.	Ox reparations.	C4
Ibid.	Processional to rushanga shrine.	C5
Zantzinger, Gei, and Andrew Tracey, prods. 1981. <i>Mbira: The Technique of the Mbira Dza Vadzimu</i> . VHS. University Park, PA: Constant Spring Productions.	Opening ensemble.	D1
Ibid.	E. Mujuru solo.	D2
Hallis, Ron. 1989. <i>Music of the Spirits</i> . VHS. El Cerrito, CA: Flowers Film.	Opening/ S. Chiweshe.	E1
Ibid.	Small ensemble.	E2
Ibid.	Chiweshe solo w/ poem.	E3
Ibid.	Chiweshe solo w/ deze, end.	E4
Dewey, William. 1990. <i>Weapons for the Ancestors</i> . VHS. University of Iowa and Massachusetts Institution of Technology.	1988 smelting demonstration.	F1

Table 2: Analysis Observation Table

Code	Participants	Tech (A/V)	Venue	Configuration	Interaction
A1	Chiweshe (f) on mbira w/o deze. M hosho, m drum. Clip until 3:20.	Pickup taped on back of lower side of mbira with black tape. Holes in higher side. White cable running from mbira to monitor. Mbira in two pieces? Is this for sound purposes, for pickups? 2 mics for marimba. No amp for accompanying instruments, hand-held mic for singing. Low quality video from audience, zooms in and out.	International WOMAD Festival 2006 (World of Music, Arts, and Dance).	Mbirist seated in chair in dark surrounded by equipment. Hard to see her. Drummer and hosho standing in front of her in light. About sound, not visuals? Marimba to stage L of others also in dark.	Audience dancing and cheering.
A2	Ashton "Sugar" Chiweshe on guitar, bass, drumset, congas, hosho/maracas, 3 f backup singers, 3 mbira, T.M. Cowbell, cabasa for singers.	Professional video w/ edits. Still and manned camera. Not much attention on mbira. Maybe white cable coming from mbira to monitor. Difficult to see cables – good thing about pickups/contact mics. White tape and circle is maybe a patch.	Stage. Platform with mbira, drumset, amps on it. Cables running everywhere. Mics everywhere for singers.	Mbira players sitting in chairs on platform in back.	Musicians look and listen to each other. Audience dancing, clapping, singing along.
A3	Still pics w/ audio. 2 m mbira w/ dezes, drumset, guitar, bass, singer (T.M.). Clapping.	1st pic of mbira players. 1 mbira has piece of white tape on deze. Can see circle beneath. Patch for tear/hole or amplification?	Stage. Dark and hard to see.	Mbirists seated on chairs facing audience.	Unable to observe due to still photos.

Code	Participants	Tech (A/V)	Venue	Configuration	Interaction
		Other maybe has red cable running down leg. 4 th pic shows mbira but cannot see clearly.			
A4	Caucasian mbirists, 2 m, 1f. W and w/o dezes. At end, one f plays a shakers/hosho. Caption: "traditional African mbira."	Manned over-the-shoulder camera shots. Starts out wide and zooms in. Close-ups and wide shots of players and hands.	House. Clearly a party and mbirists are entertainment. Wine on table, people talking in background.	Mbirists on couch facing people watching. Hosho walks by at end.	Can see communication between players and body movements as they move to music. Can hear high variation interplay between player in focus and player next to him.
B1	1 f (?) mbira w/ deze.	Still camera over R shoulder. Can see hands and mbira. Can hear buzz. Static in sound. Pixels in image.	Unable to observe. Video for teaching purposes.	Seated soloist. Can see mbira on lap.	N/A
B2	1 m mbira w/o deze.	Still or body camera? Camera zoomed in close on both hands but too close to see hand position. Good key shot. Can clearly see which keys are plucked, can follow along.	House/office. Can see drum, desk, and papers in background.	Unable to observe.	N/A
B3	1 m mbira w/ deze.	Still or body camera? Over-the-shoulder or -head. Can clearly see the way the mbira sits in the deze w/ the mutsigo. Can see hands.	House. Can see floor and blankets in background.	Sitting cross-legged on the floor.	N/A
B4	1 m mbira w/o deze.	Camera on lap, around neck, clipped to shirt,	House. Can see floor tiles.	Sitting cross-legged on floor.	N/A

Code	Participants	Tech (A/V)	Venue	Configuration	Interaction
		secret camera pen? Can see hands clearly, not just fingers. Can see how instrument is held. Can hear buzz. Reached to R before footage stopped. What technology?			
B5	Holdaway on HT Celeste Diatonic Junior kalimba (HT Hotshot-11) digitech RP80 cheaper, says MrRedSG. Sound hole and jack hole = about the same.	Still camera from R, shot shows Holdaway and amp. Kalimba with pickup (piezo-electric installed in S. Af.). Pintec AP10 works too. MrRedSG says RP80 cheaper. ¼" jack through guitar effects pedal and plugged into Peavey amp.	House. Amp against wall.	Sitting with amp to L. Guitar pedal on top of amp.	N/A
B6	Eric Freeman demonstrating his bass kalimba. Created w/ Blasé Provitola (body) and Benjamin Todd (tines). Local black walnut solid body with big knot hole. Solid metal, stiff, thicker tines.	Still camera on kalimba. Turns to show K&K pickup taped to back. Pickup under bridge = direct signal = no feedback. Contact mics under bridge. Says it's still glitchy. Running it through compressor and tube amplifier. Then distortion on it (overdrive). Solid body b/c mic-ed.	In his house, can see other instruments and shelves in background.	Standing.	N/A
C1	3 m mbira, 1 m hosho, m/f participants in black following. Leaders m w/	Wide camera shot of them approach and pass.	Processional from banya (where medium and sect perform religious	Walk slowly. Mbira toward front, maybe 2 nd row.	No clapping, just walking. (1985, weekend of prayer for

Code	Participants	Tech (A/V)	Venue	Configuration	Interaction
	hats enter hut to pray. No children but baby on back.		activities) to mutoro (prayer house).		peace between whites and blacks).
C2	3 m mbira and 1 m hosho from processional. 1 man clapping. Leaders in mutoro. 1 mbirist sings and 3 f singing. All in black.	Camera shot of ensemble and then zooms out. Cuts between inside hut, mbira players, and women singing.	At mutoro (prayer house) outside on rocks/boulders.	Mbirists sit on rock with hosho and man clapping behind. Women in bunch on another rock	Man moving (shaking) head to rhythm. F singers and m mbirist/singer alternate singing and do some call and response (?).
C3	7/8 m mbira, 2 m hosho, Mujuru (leader) playing mbira and singing, 2 f in black dancing. 1 is medium.	Camera on ensemble then zooms in and pans to each player.	Banya to call spirits.	Mbirists in line with hosho crouched/seated behind. Feet out in front w/ ankles crossed. Medium in front of arch and becomes possessed. Participants sit behind. (Opposite of stage-audience)	Participants still, perhaps resting? Medium is sitting and moving, jerking, head bobbing. Children watch and sit by fire. Then, everyone claps to greet spirit – mbira stop during clapping. Then start again.
C4	6 m mbira, 2 m hosho, 6 f dancers.	Camera shows various activities. Hear music before we see it.	Music and mediums start indoors to bring spirits (not shown). Then everyone outside to eat.	Mbirists sitting on ground in arch w/ legs in front and hosho sitting behind. Dancers in front of arch.	People dance in front of musicians.
C5	4/5 m mbira and 2 m hosho in processional, ritual, recessional. Music stops when reading names of ancestors. Start again for drinking of beer and recessional.	Camera shot of processional and then various activities in ceremony. Can't hear mbira sometimes b/c of camera location, but can always hear hosho.	At rushanga (shrine enclosure around muhacha tree). Participants sit in forest around.	Mbirists (feet in front) sit closely. 1 hosho close, the other farther away by other participants.	Not much participation. Everyone sitting still. Some kids dance at perimeter of ritual. Mbira stops, all clap to speak to spirits and leader offers snuff. Then mbira start again. Children

Code	Participants	Tech (A/V)	Venue	Configuration	Interaction
					and woman dance nearby. Recessional around banya 3 times to end weekend.
D1	2 m mbira, 1 m drummer, 1 m hosho, 2 m hand clappers, a few children dancing.	Close up on face and deze of mbirist. Zooms out to whole ensemble. At end, zooms back in for close up of deze, creating a solid space for the title.	Outside under some trees, close to a small building/hut. Looks like a front yard area or porch or courtyard, a gathering place in front of a house.	Mbirists sit close on stone bench. Drummer sits stage R of mbirists facing same direction, toward camera. Hosho and clappers around other three. All create a loose arch w/ children dancing in front.	In arc so can see and hear each other.
D2	Solo Ephat Mujuru (m) w/ deze. Shows him putting the mbira into the deze w/ the mutsigo.	Manned camera over L shoulder. Zooms in on finger work; mbira framed by deze and shoulder. Zooms out to wide shot of Mujuru sitting alone on stone bench, can see him move his head to rhythm. New shot of him from front (audience view). Back to L shoulder shot. Alternates between front and L shot. Close up on face and deze's shells from L shot.	Same area as ensemble.	Sitting on bench.	N/A
E1	Solo Chiweshe (f) on mbira w/o deze and w/ singing.	Camera shot of hands only very close from the R side of the mbira. More artistic than functional. Then shots of village,	Outside, but shot too close for details.	Unable to observe.	N/A

Code	Participants	Tech (A/V)	Venue	Configuration	Interaction
		landscape interspersed.			
E2	1m hosho, 1 clapper, 1 m mbira w/ deze and singing.	Camera from R side of group. Slowly zooms in on face of mbirist singing, then zooms back out.	Outside under trees.	Sitting in line in benches, slightly arched in toward each other.	Musicians listen to each other. All three improvise. 1 man in background watching.
E3	Solo Chiweshe (f) w/o deze and w/ singing.	Camera shot of her whole body. Zoom in on face when sings then out again when stops. Sound fades and Hallis reads English translation of words. Zooms in on mbira and then pans to face.	Outside by cave/rocks and trees.	Sitting on rocky ledge.	Can hear emphasis of notes brought out on mbira during improvised solo. Interchange between voice and mbira solo.
E4	Solo Chiweshe (f) w deze and singing.	Camera on upper body but deze blocks hands. Good shot of shells on deze. Zoom in and out of face. Interjected w/ mages of hut paintings. Zooms out to show cave/ rocks. Credits, back to her face, and zooms out. Can hear bass and buzz better with deze.	Outside by cave/rocks and trees.	Sitting on rocky ledge.	Interaction w/ spirits? Sniffs snuff at end.
F1	1 m mbira w/ deze, 1 m hosho, 1 m drummer, 1 f dancer, m/f participants clapping, m pumping bellows to rhythm.	Manned camera. 1 wide shot of group. Cannot see or hear mbirist well. Deze blocking hands.	Outside in Njanja-Shona village of iron smelting demonstration.	Seated closely on benches and ground in arch w/ participants (villagers) all around. Very close to men involved with smelting.	Clapping and dancing of participants. 2 possessions: 1 by chief (vadzimu) and 1 by shave that happened near the music.

APPENDIX B: GLOSSARY

African and Related Terms

Bantu: family of languages in sub-Saharan Africa

banya: hut where the mapira take place

bira (singular). mapira (plural): ceremony during which ancestor spirits communicate with its living relatives through medium possession

Boer: descendants of Dutch-speaking settlers, Dutch word for “farmer”

Bulawayo: major city in southwest Zimbabwe

cabasas: African and Latin American percussion instrument, kind of shaker

chimanjemanje: modern song, excluding church and school songs taught by colonizers

chimurenga: term originally applied to uprisings of the late 1800s against colonial settlers in Zimbabwe, during pre-independence and independence it applied to new songs about uprisings

chuning: tuning that includes not only relative pitch but timbre, loudness, overtones, and fundamental tones

dare: kitchen hut

deze: calabash gourd resonator in which the mbira is played to increase volume, buzz, and overtones

Great Zimbabwe: stone ruins created by early Shona people

Harare (formerly Salisbury): capital city in northeast Zimbabwe

hosho: hollow calabash gourd rattles that accompany mbira

Hugh Tracey kalimba: prototype of mbira forms found in southern Africa, has Western tuning

huro: high, penetrating, melodic singing consisting of vocables and yodeling

kalimba: mbira found in Zambia and Malawai

Karanga: dialect of the Shona language, Karanga cultural group

karimba: Zambezi Valley in Mozambique and Zimbabwe

Korekore: dialect of the Shona language, Korekore cultural group

kubuda: when the spirit “comes out”

kudeketera: poetic texts

kuimba: singing

kuridza: instrument playing

kurova guva: all night ceremony that takes place a year after the deceased is buried to welcome the spirit back to the earth

kushaura: the lead mbira part

kutamba: dancing

kutsinhira: the following mbira part

likembe: mbira found in central Africa

makombwe: the really ancient spirits

mapira: see bira

mashave: see shave

Matabeleland: mid- and southwestern region of Zimbabwe

matepe: mbira of the Korekore cultural group in north-eastern Zimbabwe and Mozambique

mahon’era: low, soft, syllabic singing that interweaves with the lower mbira part

mbira (singular and plural): one tine or the entire instrument, in this paper mbira usually refers to the mbira dzavadzimu

Mhondoro Tribal Trust Lands: area designated for indigenous Zimbabweans south of Harare

Monomotapa: single kingdom ruling Zimbabwe from the 1200s to 1600s

Mubayira: small city near Musonza

mudzimu (singular). vadzimu (plural): ancestral spirits

Musika Vanhu: the creator (God)

Musonza: city southwest of Harare

mutoro: ceremonial prayer hut

mutsigo: the stick that is wedged between the mbira and the wall of the deze to keep the mbira in place

Ndebele: cultural group from South Africa, came into Zimbabwe in the 1830s

Ngoni: cultural group living in southern Africa whose roots trace back to Zulu

Njanja: dialect of the Shona language, Njanja cultural group known for iron-smelting

njari: mbira from the Zambezi River Valley

nziyo dzepasi: a traditional song

Rhodesia: former name of Zimbabwe, name during colonial rule

sadza: traditional food made of ground maize

San: ancient people living in southern and central Africa during the Stone Age

shave (singular). mashave (plural): wandering, foreign, non-human spirits

shaverembira: spirits that inspire one to play mbira

Shona: language and cultural group in northwestern Zimbabwe

vadzimu: see mudzimu

Zimbabwe (formerly Southern Rhodesia, Rhodesia): country in southern Africa

Zezuru: dialect of the Shona language, Zezuru cultural group

Zulu: cultural group from South Africa

Technological Terms

air microphone: microphone that is hand-held or on a stand, the sound travels through the air rather than through contact

amplifier, amp: device that increases the amplitude of a signal

contact microphone: form of microphone designed to transmit audio vibrations through solid objects

drum trigger: device that senses velocity and sends messages to a computer

hotspot monitor: monitor that can be positioned in close proximity to the performer without feedback

monitor: loudspeaker aimed back toward the stage enabling performers to hear themselves

pickup: a device that captures mechanical vibrations and converts them to an electrical signal which can then be amplified, recorded and broadcast

piezo: see pickup

pre amplifier, pre amp: sound equipment used to increase volume and clarity of sound before it is sent through an amplifier

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