

COMPOSITION PORTFOLIO

by

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ABSTRACT

Indigenous Zimbabwean music is complex in its make up and reveals spiritual beliefs, modes of expression, communication patterns, and forms of entertainment. The goal of this composition portfolio is to create pieces that are imbued with the spirit of indigenous Zimbabwean music making as passed on from father to son. The pieces composed include thorough-composed (pre-determined) solo and ensemble frameworks using mostly marimbas based largely on Shona scales and tuning, but also adding mbira, hosho and djembe. All of this is presented within complex structural manipulations that include African and some Western elements of formal music structure. The compositions feature two interlocking parts, known as *kushaura* and *kutsinhira* (call and respond), which are traditionally played in a simultaneous manner by two or more musicians. In this portfolio, these voices are spread across a range of players where the interplay between the parts produces complex polyphonic and polyrhythmic musical relationships. The compositions explore modal changes which add excitement, variety and an extra layer of complexity to the pieces. The final artefact is presented as a multimedia submission recorded as a documentary in real time, which is a representation of the embodied making of the music, central to this project. As music was passed down through folk tales, religious gatherings, rock paintings and sources of art, the narration is the key element in expressing that knowledge dissemination is not only text bound, but also embodied and orally shared.

Dedication

This portfolio pays tribute to my father Richie snr Lucas Musambasi in his advanced stage of Alzheimer's disease. My father's historical music knowledge is impeccably retained as is his understanding of how music relates to our society and culture. This has highlighted, for me, the value and place of music in our society; its cultural and social function is reinforced.

The portfolio also pays tribute to the centuries of African indigenous embodied compositions that were passed through oral traditions by our forefathers.

To Makosi B. Musambasi, my sister. You fought strong.

Vous avez lutté fort

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS


- God, to whom all praise belongs for guidance during these compositions every step of the way.
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- Professor Jeffrey Brukman, my supervisor who taught me how to embrace and express my uniqueness.
- Mom and Dad, the giants on whom I stood.
- My wife, daughter, siblings and friends for the moral and emotional support they freely gave to me.

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Reflexive Commentary

Introduction

Indigenous Zimbabwean music through its performance and practice reveals spiritual beliefs, modes of expression, communication patterns, and forms of entertainment (Hilde 1997). These features underpin this composition portfolio where the goal is to create works that are imbued with the spirit of indigenous Zimbabwean music making as passed on in the oral tradition, or in this instance from father to son.¹ Oral tradition is an unwritten source of information suitable for oral transmission, its preservation dependent upon the powers of memory of successive generations of human beings (Vansina 2017). Mbathio Sall (1999, 1) comments,

Very frequently in Africa, it is the father who brings up his son. The young boy who goes with his father to the farm, hunting or fishing, receives not only technical instruction but all ways of information on the natural habitat or social life, which pretext is generally found in the task that they are accomplishing or the meetings made on the way.

This is certainly relevant to my upbringing in Zimbabwe, where my father was born too.

This portfolio adopts the concept of creating music through text. The music explores the ways in which textual narratives, emotions, and linguistic patterns can be translated into musical compositions, opening up new avenues for artistic expression and interdisciplinary collaboration. Akin Euba (2001, 122) writes,

If musical instruments and texts in their individual roles are strong signifiers, the combination of the two reinforces signification, as in the use of musical instruments as speech surrogates.

¹ The Republic of Zimbabwe, is a landlocked country in Southern Africa, between the Zambezi and Limpopo Rivers.

The pieces in this portfolio include thorough-composed² (pre-determined) solo and ensemble frameworks using mostly marimbas where the music is based largely on Shona scales and tuning, developed from rich *mbira* tradition. Additional instruments add character and the *Hosho*³ and *Ngoma*⁴ join to perform within a complex structural manipulation that includes African compositional elements intertwined with a variety of Western elements of musical formal structure. The compositions generally feature two interlocking parts, known as *kushaura* and *kutsinhira* (call and response) which is the defining characteristic of the pieces, which are played simultaneously by two or more musicians. These parts are spread across a range of players where the interplay between the parts produces complex polyphonic and polyrhythmic musical relationships (www.tinotenda n.d.). The compositions explore existing Western modes such as G Mixolydian and F Lydian to name two, where modal changes add excitement, variety and an extra layer of complexity to the pieces. With this submission the final artifact is a multimedia submission recorded as a documentary in real time and is thus a representation of the embodied making of the music, which will be explained in greater detail later in this document.

As historically indigenous Zimbabwean music was passed down through the re-telling of folk tales, religious gatherings, rock paintings and sources of art, this narration (commentary) will be the key element in expressing that knowledge through the written text, knowledge that was gleaned orally (Wurz et al. 2022).

The pieces and materials submitted with this portfolio include:

² This term is borrowed from the jazz use and understanding of through-composed where music emulating the jazz idiom is notated and becomes a planned (pre-determined) notated composition. (Except for my instance the notation is not scored on a page but is a sonic scoring relying on sound and memory).

³ Zimbabwean musical instruments consisting of a pair of maranka (*mapudzi*) gourds with seeds.

⁴ Ngoma is a Black African drum made from a hollow wood log and an animal hide.

Chakasara (2023) - Documentary and Recording [08:04]

Muchaneta (2023) - Documentary and Recording [06:52]

Munogweyi (2023) - Documentary and Recording [09:37]

Mqamuli (2023) - Documentary and Recording [07:38]

Matendo (2023) - Documentary and Recording [08:26]

+ Additional recordings are included in the appendix.

I also include the following items in the appendix for reference purposes:

Additional community footage.

Traditional music performances.

I include this commentary discussing the pieces' development, realisation, and contextualisation. This commentary will add depth and richness towards understanding the process and the compositional product.

The Genesis

Traditional music played a significant role in my upbringing, reflecting the society I lived in. My father, Richie snr Lucas Musambasi, married to Sennie Sipa Bamala a South African of Venda origin, used music to pass down traditions and knowledge based on his culture. He is from the Shona *Karanga*⁵ culture which holds music as the centerpiece to communicate the needs of the society in terms of health, rainfall, and their success in enterprise. Now that my father is of advanced years and suffers from Alzheimer's disease, where his memory is no longer reliable, it is an amazing spectacle that when it comes to music his knowledge and appreciation is consistent. My father's historical music knowledge has remained clear as is his understanding of how music relates to our Shona society and culture. This knowledge, which was passed onto him

⁵ Shona tribe from the midlands of Zimbabwe known as the architects of Great Zimbabwe.

through his father and grandfather, is so ingrained in his memory and being, it is little wonder that it remains intact throughout his later years amid his serious health challenges. I spent much of my time with him from a young age learning about music and its place in our society, and even now that he has developed Alzheimer's we are still able to sing and dance to his favourite traditional songs. Not only is this therapeutic for my father (this aspect is not part of this portfolio), but it highlights, for me, the value and place of music in our society; its cultural and social function; and its power to engage with memories. This has impacted my compositions greatly, and this knowledge and creative perspective forms the backbone of this portfolio.

As a child, I was taught about life through music. My father could reference anything to a song as he believed that it is part of our Zimbabwean culture and that everything has its solution in music. The prime interest of this portfolio has been to investigate the use of sonic evidence as a tool for dissemination where the use of Western staff notation or written transcription is avoided, with a particular focus on how new technologies within the Digital Humanities can be utilised in documenting composition practice⁶. Drucker (2021, 5) writes, "Digital tools and platforms have greatly augmented humanities work". This statement is at the heart of the dissemination of this composition portfolio. As we navigate revaluing indigenous ways of being and Indigenous Knowledge Systems (IKS) we have to have the courage to enter academia understanding that ancient forms of knowledge sharing need new tools to remain relevant in this world. Therefore, this portfolio is more than a homage to my father, it also pays homage to the centuries-old tradition of knowledge being passed from one generation to the next through oral recounting. Importantly however, this ancient form of knowledge dissemination is closely linked to aspects of Western music expression and modern technology which also permeate the aurally constructed score. Not only does Western musical expression form part of the historical development of Zimbabwean contemporary music practice, but the use of digital modes of recording

⁶ For more information see Shanangurai, R., & Maguraushe, W. (2019). 'Vitiating oral African musical traditions by (mis) representing them through Western notational systems'. *The Dyke*, 13(1), 74-95.

have assisted in making this music accessible, shareable and popular. Kiwa et al (2023, 2) concur and write,

Zimbabwe, like many African countries, has a rich cultural heritage that has been handed down through generations. However, with the development of computer technology, there has been an evolution in the transmission and preservation of traditional culture.

My father used songs to shape my social relationships, explaining everything beyond just biology. Historically, this upbringing is aligned with oral societies where songs, dance, and performance embody people's aspirations and expectations (Whatley 2022). Music is used as a tool for everything, we sing and dance for joy, grief, love, sorrow, hate, and even during labour and work. Songs are an expression of a whole people's experiences (a societal practice), not a solitary event. Therefore, in the Zimbabwean society in which I was raised, indigenous music revealed spiritual beliefs such as *kurova guva*⁷, modes of expression, communication patterns, and forms of entertainment (Kyker 2009, Music in Africa (online) 2015).

As a person from the Shona culture in Zimbabwe, I can state that Shona songs are usually a medium of instruction for young boys and girls. It was through songs that all social relationships were sealed, bonded, and regulated (Hilde 1997). There were songs to praise⁸, urge⁹, ridicule¹⁰, and reprimand¹¹. This is in line with communication styles of most oral-based societies on the African continent (and other similar societies across the globe) (Bartolome 2018).

⁷ A ceremony held to welcome home the spirit of the dead.

⁸ Song called *Dhlala* meaning "dance".

⁹ Song called *Nhemamusasa* meaning "build a home".

¹⁰ Song called *Vahera varungu* meaning "ladies from the chihera tribe act like they are not black".

¹¹ Song called *Hwahwa* means "stopping people from highly consuming alcohol".

Embodiment and recollection

In preparing this portfolio I found performance to be a vital aspect of my compositional direction, with the added dimension that the use of technology offered new avenues for ensemble interaction and modes of performer-to-audience communication (Webb and Layton 2023, Webb 2021). My music is based on its performance, where that embodiment and its creation become the artefact. It is my belief that knowledge is created in the action of playing and memory is retained in the same way that my father remembers songs, through that re-lived embodiment and act of recollection (Roberts 2023). While a recording of the performance can be used to reproduce it, the essence of the music is tied to its performance, and the creativity inherent in that production. This approach lies at the heart of perpetuating the oral traditions that have lived for so long in our society and kindled the value of IKS (McConnachie 2021). The intention of this portfolio, aside from using digitisation as a dissemination and interpretation tool, is to present the development of oral-based, traditional music making where the act of performance and creation of new music (compositions) are entwined in a single process. This transgressive approach challenges established norms within music scholarship relating to music capture and dissemination. A transgressive approach according to McConnachie et al (2024, 8) relates to “moving beyond and questioning established boundaries”. Thus, as an indigenous music practitioner I present my compositions in their traditional format, where sound is used as the medium of transmission but now with digital technology the dissemination tool. It is hoped that this process will reawaken an appreciation for this type of knowledge transfer, and promote the value that it has for wider society, relationships within communities and for greater meaningful interaction.

Context of a novel approach to composition and dissemination

Indigenous Zimbabwean music, in my experience, often has a joyous sound, but reflects a deeper sadness through the text. This apparent paradox can only be culturally contextualised and is an example of the blended approach that this

portfolio offers. I studied Western music theory and the piano and this knowledge has helped me to use aspects of Western art music in my composing. This was supplemented during my secondary level schooling where, for my O-level examinations, I studied forms and structures of Western music including genres such as the Symphony and Concerto. However, in keeping with the ancient indigenous approach to composition as taught by my father, my compositions are not notated in the traditional Western sense where the score is the artefact and can be repeated across a wide range of time through reading and reproducing the written score. Importantly, my music is based on its performance, the action of which within that moment becomes the artefact.

Therefore, my intention is not to create something new, but to reimagine and expand from what is already known through the knowledge passed on by my father. Thus, I call the knowledge creation not new but novel, and define it as something that implies a greater degree of originality or uniqueness, something that is innovative, fresh, or groundbreaking in some way. Therefore, the pieces that I have composed include through-composed (pre-determined) solos for individual instruments mostly using the diatonic marimba. There will also be some works that are based on the ensemble framework largely using the marimba instrument based on Shona scales and tuning, but also adding *hosho*, and *djembe* all within a complex manipulation that includes African and Western elements of formal structure. I explore modal changes which add to the excitement and variety in the composition. These changes of mode are not common in indigenous Zimbabwean music, yet are effective in Western music, and their incorporation in my compositions adds an extra layer of complexity and shows the existence of both cultural domains which remain, despite political independence, within Zimbabwean national society .

However, indigenous ways of being and understanding the world remain important. I remember my father teaching me how rhythms on specific instruments have the power to invite certain traditional spirits into the embodied world (Oikelome 2021). Although this power hasn't changed, over time the function and place of music in

African society, in particular, has changed and new manifestations or applications of older forms have emerged. In the modern world what were once animal hunting songs (*Mbavarira*) may now be used before one goes out and seeks to make a difference in the world, or hunt for a job (Omoregie 2007). My father explained that the concept of hunting remains intact even though the model is different. These realisations are important as they impact my compositions which, though they draw from ancient musical heritages, are often placed in the here and now. Another example includes how the rhythms of *Mhande*¹² music communicates with *Majukwa* which are rain spirits. *Mhande* is based on a polyrhythm of 3 against 4 and is a well-known rain making mode within the traditional music genre of Zimbabwe (Rutsate 2011) . These spirits then work as an advocate to the Creator, *Musiki* or *Mwari*, requesting rain. In the same regard the concept uses *Mhande* to summon the universe to be friendly to us in the modern day just like *Mbakumba*¹³ which was always used as a thanksgiving dance by my father.

As explained earlier, my father married a South African, and my nanny (caregiver) was a South African. I decided to use elements from the amaXhosa people, an African cultural group in South Africa as I am studying at a university based in the Eastern Cape of South Africa, an area traditionally associated with the Xhosa people. Further, during my time at the university I came into contact with many Xhosa people and played music with them in a number of settings. The combination of Shona and Xhosa patterns reflects the love story of my parents and the complete combustion describes my love life. Music is an integral part of the cultural heritage. The Xhosa heritage is traditionally portrayed and music composed through a combination of oral tradition, rhythmic patterns, and storytelling, which is exactly how music is composed in Zimbabwe thus I borrowed some elements from it (Dargie 2013) .

¹² A traditional performance done by the *Karanga* people as a rain making ritual.

¹³ Known as *shangara*; a polyrhythmic tap dance accompanied by clapping, voices and serious tap dancing.

In the composition process, I drew inspiration from my love story: nature, history, daily life, and spiritual beliefs. I used a variety of traditional instruments, such as the marimba, drums, mbira, and shakers, to create melodies and rhythms that reflect the emotions, experiences, and values of both the Xhosa and Shona people with a modern feel to them. My father also introduced me to another form of *mbira* called *mbira dzepasi*.¹⁴ These performances include the deep and spiritual songs that are not played for dancing but mostly for meditation. The pieces have very complicated cycles due to their use of irregular time signatures. These patterns have emerged in my compositions and as a composer I use this knowledge to place it into works that also include aspects of Western composition intertwined in their construction. As explained above, traditional Shona music generally features two interlocking parts, known as *kushaura* and *kutsinhira* (call and response), which are played simultaneously by two or more musicians. These parts are the same phrases played a pulse behind each other creating cross rhythms. They can be spread across a range of players to create a large ensemble, where the interplay between the voices produces complex polyphonic and polyrhythmic musical relationships which are crowned with singing that is characteristic of traditional Zimbabwean music (Berliner 2020). In some instances, as you will hear in the compositions in this portfolio, it is my intention that the instruments will be used to generate and communicate the musical aspects usually associated with singing. As previously mentioned, most common songs from the Shona culture typically emphasises triplet-styled groupings, and the metric organisation of many songs aligns with compound time signatures such as 6/8, 9/8, 12/8 (Chigamba 2019). However, Tracey's research shows that there is much use of 5/4, 10/4, 2/4, 4/4 patterns in indigenous Zimbabwean music (Tracey 1961). I use the 5/4 signature in one of the compositions.

The cross pollination of Western to African music to create a new and unique sound has always been inevitable. This is because there are many music schools and music departments in junior and senior schools in Zimbabwe that incorporate mandatory

¹⁴ Meaning: From the Earth

Western music education in their curricula. However, creating music on diatonic instruments and Shona tuning instruments has led to the use of some Western theory elements to expand the music and create much more complexity. For example, in the compositions I make use of the pentatonic scale because the five-note grouping makes for the creation of melodic phrases regardless of their order and placement. There is exploration of the Western scales using arpeggios, as well as the C major scale descending from the mediant note. There are also changes in modes modulating up by a major second and in some instances by a minor third. The use of seventh chords adds more harmonic complexity and colour to the music. Pooley (2018, 184) writes,

Agawu contends that the “deep structures” of African music are reducible to the same structural hierarchies and terminologies as western music; it is the framing that is universal.

By incorporating Western music elements into African music, it allows for experimentation and innovation within the traditional African musical framework. Having Western music elements in African music is important because it allows for cultural fusion, promotes intercultural understanding, enhances global visibility since one can argue that we are living in a post-westphalian order.¹⁵

Oral/Aural/Ancient composed music structures and the use of the e-portfolio

Taking inspiration from a variety of scholars (Kahn 2014; Hubert, Pickavance, & Hyberger 2015; Watson et al. 2016) who support the idea of an e-portfolio as being a high impact practice (HIP), I present this research in digital format. Hubert et al. (2015) refer to the e-portfolio being composed, which is particularly fitting in this context, and it has been identified as an effective tool in supporting practice-based output (Nettleton, Lowe, & Dorahy 2008). In this case, the versatility afforded by the medium was ideally suited to the creative nature of the music discipline where the

¹⁵ Deterritorialisation of the world.

outputs are predominantly performance or practice based, thereby linking the ancient oral tradition of embodied composition to the latest technologies available.

The process

The final artefact was recorded as a documentary in real time and thus is a representation of the embodied making of the music (Clayton, Dueck, & Leante 2014). I use elements of performance art, as referred to above, which comprises music creation, acting, storytelling and film to present the composition e-portfolio. This artefact draws on the traditions and history of the society of Zimbabwe, making it identifiably Zimbabwean and culturally bound.

For the above reasons my portfolio is particularly varied and focuses on or includes the following aspects:

- I use the ancient mbira tuning system on the marimba, which is the original tonal system that was developed for the Zimarimba¹⁶ in Bulawayo in the 1950s by Andrew Tracey and Robert Sibson at the Kwanongoma College (Moyo 2022); In place of adding a singing voice, soprano and bass marimba instruments will be used to generate and communicate the traditional musical aspects usually associated with singing. This was done because usually music indigenous to Zimbabwe is composed for dance with voice. The bass imitates what would be sung by the bass voice and it is also harmonically supportive showing the harmonic outline.
- I use 5/4 time, investigating ensemble interactions of a rare form of traditional music called *mbira dzepasi*.¹⁷ This style is associated with irregular time but is still unusual from a Zimbabwean context as it is not frequently found in indigenous music of the country. A *Mhande* piece in which the aesthetic is related to the concept of *Majukwa*, rain-making music. *Mhande* is based on a polyrhythm of 3

¹⁶ Andrew Tracey's term for the Zimbabwean marimba.

¹⁷ Mbira music from the earth.

against 4 and is a well-known rain making mode within the traditional music genre of Zimbabwe (Rutsate 2011).

- The use of elements from South African traditional music, paying homage to the roots of my mother. I mainly use elements from Nguni music such as overtones in the resonance of the marimbas, gumboot stomping effects and varying South African melodic content in the lead parts.
- Solo marimba piece with percussion accompaniment where compositional tools from *mbakumba* music are applied.

Each song will have a story attached to it as part of its score and conception.

Analysis

Chakasara (2023)

Chakasara (What Survived) is a piece composed as a reflection on a period in my life where my spiritual and physical being is likened to that of a wilderness. This is in an era (time) which is lacking in sustenance while traversing a metaphorical barren terrain. To express this I have chosen a marimba ensemble with *hosho* (shakers) and *Ngoma* (animal skin drums with bongo tuning) as the accompaniment. These instruments form the backbone of Zimbabwean indigenous musical expression as I know it, which I experienced through embodied learning (Tracey 1961). It is heavily influenced by *Tozvireva Tingaputike Neshungu*¹⁸ by *Mbira dzenharira*¹⁹ (Mbira DzeNharira, 2000).

Example. 1

Mbira DzeNharira.

[Tozvireva Tingaputike Neshungu-Mbira DzeNharira](#)

The wilderness

The sun has to shine, that is its purpose. It melts the ice and heats the water, warms some, and burns others. What happens to the recipient may not be the intention of the sun but it has to keep on shining.

These are my thoughts that surrounded the creation of this composition. They were the inspiration for the music. On this day to me, it was another day in the unforgiving wilderness. A wilderness that accepted no excuses and swallowed up multitudes daily. A wilderness whose appetite for dreams was insatiable. I winced as pain streamed

¹⁸ Meaning: There is a need to talk about it and let it out or one might blow-up with pain and anger.

¹⁹ Mbira group based in Zimbabwe.

through my cells like liquid fire. I was tired and with the end nowhere in sight, carrying on was nothing short of a suicide mission. The hissing sounds like a kettle of vultures flying overhead reminded me that I wasn't alone, though not in a good way. *Every journey has a destination*, I always thought. But would I live to see this destination? I am in a foreign land facing racism in almost every institution. I had been trekking for miles and my water bottle was as dry as my lips. Memories were whistling from a corner in my mind and I knew better than to let the memories cloud my mind and slow me down. It was a daily struggle I didn't always win. As my strength ebbed away at the sight of vivid mental pictures, I fell to my knees and looked up at the sky, hands clasped. "Lord, you're my strength." A whimper. It was a desperate attempt to hold on to consciousness and sanity, but Pandora's Box was already open.

Analysis

This scene helps me visualise the creative process, and how the instruments at my disposal will be utilized as well as the style and form of the melodic structure. I used the Zimbabwean marimba ensemble to compose the music. This ensemble has five parts namely soprano, alto, tenor, baritone and bass (modeled after the voice types associated with scoring for traditional Western choirs).

I composed *Chakasara* with the intention of creating a soundscape reflecting an emotional wilderness. In doing so I wished to set the rhythmic underpinning on the tenor marimbas thereby reiterating the never-ending, constant thoughts that plagued these surges of emotions; a musical identifier within the core of the composition.

The Music

The instrumentation for this composition is as follows:

- Soprano marimba, Communicates and expresses my wavering actions in the wilderness. Its lowest note C serves as the initial tone for both its lower and upper registers which offer a sharp tonal quality to produce high-pitched soprano melodies. The soprano marimba is used to generate and communicate the musical aspects usually associated with singing.
- Alto marimba, Communicates the reflection of the reactions by the society or community. Its lowest note G serves as the initial tone for both its lower and upper registers which offer sub-melodic lines and harmonies. The alto marimba is also used to generate and communicate the musical aspects usually associated with singing.
- Tenor marimba, These are the constant thoughts that plague during times of depression. These will sound throughout most of the work referring to the persistent, forever recurring and overriding thoughts that plagued my consciousness throughout my depressive episodes like a seemingly unending, inconsolable traversing through the wilderness. Since the tenor is typically given accompaniment responsibilities in songs, it bolsters the tonic, subdominant, and dominant harmonic zones. Psychologically it offers emotional conditioning and anxiety management.
- Percussion (shakers & drum), These are the norms and values that guide life during stable and turbulent times of life.
- Bass, The guide that keeps the community in line. Usually the teaching of the elders. Many broken and audible movements should occur from the bass, and their execution should organically react to the soprano's main melody and, eventually, to the tenor's. Hence, bass lines permeate the entire ensemble and firmly anchor the entire response package.

Introduction

Example 1

Musambasi: *Chakasara*, 0:00 - 01:06

<https://youtu.be/cHqsV9Ofk4s>

This piece starts with the shakers taking the form of the *Chakwi Chakwi*. *Chakwi* is a song for the *mashave* (healing entwining spirit) serves as an example. The *machakwi* are *mashave* from under the water [Chigamba 2019]. The marimba plays a major role in creating the narrative of the song. For example, the *hosho* rhythmically recreates the sound , “*cha-kwi*” as equal value syllables - “ *cha-kwi, cha-kwi, cha-kwi*”. Attracted by these sounds the *anaChakwi* spirits are summoned. They also demand for the *mbira* to be played and it is said that the song was first heard on a rock, in the river. Thus, the marimba and *mbira* often accompany the *hosho* and complement each other's polyrhythmic contrasts (Scherzinger 2001). The tenor marimba has the same syncopated rhythm with the shakers.

Remaining within the tenor range is another strand with a repetitive beat like a pounding headache or the pulsating repetitive thoughts that run across one's mind, over and over again, in a state of depression. The second tenor line is the same rhythm as the drum, especially from its left hand. To be in the wilderness is a trying time and one's thoughts and emotions are very haphazard - all over the place. In this piece the second tenor marimba showcases a train of thought where each hand is used to communicate different emotions. The use of the polyrhythmic patterning is a reflection that two or more issues as they compete within one can lead to a mental health breakdown.

The third marimba part that comes in at 00:18 of the introduction is an alto which is constantly going to be the response from the lead line. The part will recur in most of the music and even influence the lines from soprano and bass later in the music by creating harmonies.

Finally, at 00:29 Soprano Marimbas come in with the lead line which is narrating the main theme of the wilderness. This is the main line of the piece which will be the main theme of the piece. There is a second alto line separate from the first one that

would mainly only harmonise the lead line from 00:37. This alto line represents someone in the community who shares the same sentiments.

Second phase

Example 2

Musambasi: *Chakasara*, 01:06 - 03:03

<https://youtu.be/L4TsBxCbe5M>

The soprano marimba and alto marimba start with commanding lines representing the screams of frustration. The technique used involves using only one mallet in each hand to play single notes and merge into melodic phrases 01:06. The break from the bass and other responding marimbas from 01:06 to 01:11 is to highlight the voice of the frustrations.

The leads sometimes take shape from the response. This is to express how sometimes the voice of the community around you is louder even in your thoughts. It comes in with the bass. Hence from 01:26 to 02:24 the leads are playing as a harmony to the main response alto line.

There is a break from the bass and percussion parts 02:24 - 02:43. This to highlight the main theme line from the lead marimba as heard from the introductory line. It is important to give the listener the clarity that we are still communicating the same message of the wilderness from the beginning.

Bridge²⁰

Example 3

Musambasi *Chakasara*, 03:03 - 04:59

<https://youtu.be/7MwwYOpv2fk>

²⁰ Music that contrasts from the main theme and is derived from Western music.

This is the part of the piece that expresses the despondency of the narrator. It represents low spirit and loss of hope and courage. The soprano lines are meant to bring out a yodeling effect (*mohon'era*)²¹ in the representation of crying. The effect represents the rage in the voice as presented by the consonance in the music played by dampened arpeggios. There is a point however, where the soprano is soloing using the high end of the marimba 03:51 - 04:20. In its halting momentum at the beginning, especially prevalent with pauses between the notes, the sonic impact reflects intense sobbing, almost choked with emotion unable to utter a fully-fledged thought. Here the melodic movement is descending, representing the cascading sense of emotion which accompanies such deep sorrowfulness; it shows what is actually in the heart. The response to this point is *mohon'era* in the representation of loss of hope and courage.

Example 4

Musambasi *Chakasara*, 04:49 - 07:25

https://youtu.be/jNH454mKf_k

The music is back to the same phrases from the introduction with the main theme line 04:49. However, now there are more pauses from the leading lines. The lead soprano is playing the introductory line whilst the alto continues harmonising. At this point the community and the composer's train of thought are no longer a reflection of each other, rather coexisting and learning to live with their differences 05:18 - 05:38. The piece eventually resorts back to initial introductory arrangements distinct at 05:38 as a reflection of where it started.

There is a break for the rhythmic section which will signal the moment of silence of voices. This is important to express the moments when there is silence and deep rumination in my thoughts in the emotional wilderness.

²¹ Syllabic singing without meaning, including yodeling; and song texts.

Ending

Example 5

Musambasi *Chakasara*, 07:26 - 08:04

https://youtu.be/_fppmChXxzg

The piece ends with a recapitulation of the introductory marimba phrase, the main theme. The ending is intentionally abrupt as the composer takes guidance from *Bira* music.²² The players are stumbling over a certain set of pulses when the texture becomes stodgy and the music doesn't flow seamlessly.

²² An all night music ritual done by the Shona people of Zimbabwe calling on the ancestral spirits for guidance and intercession.

Muchaneta (2023)

Muchaneta (You Will Get Tired) is a piece composed for the time and period after my mental health wilderness which I consider to be a tale of woe. It is composed for the marimba ensemble, though in this piece I investigate transferring a rarely performed form of music making onto the marimba ensemble: an infrequently experienced form of traditional music called *mbira dzepasi*.²³ As explained by my father, these are the deep and spiritual songs that are not for dancing but mostly for meditation as they have very complicated cycles due to their use of irregular time signatures. This form is close to extinction as a *mbira* form of expression due to different methods being introduced to meditate as years elapsed. This style of music is also rarely encountered due to its high level of complexity. I consider *Mbira dzepasi* to be the most appropriate form to express a tale of woe due to its characteristic rhythmical shifts.

A tale of woe

My sister has been diagnosed with breast cancer. What shall I do?

The following paragraphs are taken from my diary...

I was in Cyprus for my undergraduate studies, January tends to be a fairly cold month in Nicosia, Cyprus, and that Tuesday morning was no exception. Tearing myself from sleep, I glanced at my bedside clock. I had woken up late. Again. Late nights were taking a toll on me and a newfound love for long evening walks was not doing me any good either. The blistering cold did little to deter me. It was as if all I did was seize the day in the night. But responsibilities stayed around to knock on my door every morning. Thank goodness school isn't one of them in January, I mused with a smile.

²³ From the earth: a genre of music used for meditation.

The buzz from my phone cut through my thoughts and brought me back to Earth. I picked up my iPhone and glanced at the screen. It was a text message notification. I opened the message and the words that greeted me were like a dagger plunged in my chest. Five minutes before this, I had been optimistic that my allowance was on its way and a text message from home would confirm it. But the confirmation I received was not the one I was looking for.

A foreboding had dogged my heels for a while and I had shaken it off, only to see it resurface with more insistence. Prayers had eased my mind a bit, for I trusted God to either deal with what was coming or give me the strength to deal with it. But what could be coming? I was no stranger to being penniless from time to time or falling ill. In the journey of life, it's often easy to assume the worst has already occurred after encountering trials and tribulations. I sat on the bed, lost in deep thought. How could God allow such a thing to happen? How could a family of right and honest living people have pain pay them such an unfriendly visit? What could be the reason for such?

My dad has been diagnosed with Alzheimer's.

This type of music is not set using the regular time signatures known and popular in Zimbabwean music, but there is always a point within the music where it diverts back to regular traditional time signatures. I was heavily influenced by the traditional song titled *Dangu Rangu*. There are many versions depending on tribal regions however my own experience comes from the Midlands part of Zimbabwe²⁴ as demonstrated by a YouTuber called Gwenyambira (Dangurangu 2013). https://youtu.be/QQX6R2PecuA?si=t_8IMOC9G2dezM8X

²⁴ Midlands is a province of Zimbabwe. It has an area of 49,166 square kilometres (18,983 sq mi) and a population of 1,811,905 (2022). It is home to various peoples. Located at a central point in the country, it contains speakers of Shona, Ndebele, Tswana, Sotho and Chewa, as well as of various other languages. Gweru, the third-largest city in Zimbabwe, is the capital of the province. (Zim.Gov.zw)

This music can go on interminably with modal changes throughout the piece (wavering with different modes). In this composition, it represents the rollercoaster of emotions during my period of woes. The piece interchanges different modes, as a clear representation of the myriad, randomized thoughts since thoughts are not Hyphenated.

The Music

The instrumentation for this composition is as follows:

- Soprano marimba, Conveys the message of the different stages the mind goes through prior, during and post meditation. Its sharp tonal quality is used to express the jagged, hurting, fragmented edges of painful experiences.
- Alto marimba, This musical strand with its more mellifluous tonal quality derived from the alto marimba is used to put across the norms and values that keep our mind rooted in those things we believe in during times of distress. It also forms part of the lead melodic material used to convey a plethora of competing thoughts and emotions.
- Tenor marimba, These lines represent the constant thoughts that surge through the mind in the time of meditation.
- Percussion (shakers & drum), These are the norms and values that guide the mind.
- Bass, The foundational line in music making and the guide that keeps the mind rooted on why we are actually meditating. In this case the diagnosis of chronic illnesses for both my sister and father. Many broken and audible movements occur from the bass, and their execution organically reacts to the soprano's main melody and, eventually, to the tenor's lines creating an intertwining of thematic material that is aligned with the shifting emotions and levels of emotional pain experienced through the expression of this piece. Extended

moments of silence reveal how one can be lost in their thoughts during meditation.

Introduction

Example. 1

Musambasi *Muchaneta*, 00:00 - 01:24

<https://youtu.be/OA1DbZIKGUo>

The music begins with two tenor marimbas, one of them playing a consistent rhythm like a sharp stabbing pain representing emotional agony. The rhythm is in double beats per bar with a poking effect. The second tenor marimba plays a rhythmic arpeggio creating a dense and layered sound together with the first tenor to evoke a sense of discomfort and unease. These two tenor marimbas are the anchors of the rhythm section for the first cycle which runs till 01:24. There are two additional tenor marimbas that join at 00:12 bringing harmony and contrast. These give an additional layer of complexity to the sonic texture.

The introduction of the lead marimbas occurs at 00:24 with rhythmic introductory lines. These lines mainly represent the frustration prior to having an encounter with self during the meditation. The lines are ascending with acceleration towards the end of the bar expressing the palpitations one may experience prior to the meditation due to anxiety. Then at 00:36, the main lead line comes in. The melodic patterns have a descending feel giving a falling melancholic and sorrowful quality to the phrase. 00:59 introduces the timbral and rhythmic pull across the parts to enable the listener to distinguish the section which will be repeated at a later stage.

Example. 2

Musambasi *Muchaneta*, 01:24 - 02:24

<https://youtu.be/Axac-mYVmgE>

The leads then move to conversational playing at 01:24-02:12 where the alto marimbas imitate the phrases that the soprano is playing. In African music making it is usually regarded as harmony by imitation. When meditating the mind usually has conversations with what is already established in the mind, therefore this place just signals settling in the meditation and the mind in agreement with good norms and values. This section represents the conversations that may be happening in one's brain.

The first bridge

Example. 3

Musambasi *Muchaneta*, 02:12 - 02:36

https://youtu.be/mdDE_A0pW0g

There are always deviating thoughts before one loses control of what one is thinking about. The solo section for the lead soprano represents the deviating thought as it moves away from the soft moving melody to a more rigid ascending and descending melodic movement. This is backed by alternating high and low tenor marimbas sonically communicating the variation of the shallow and deep thoughts of the composer.

Lost in Meditation (This is the phase and cycle without bass.)

Example. 4

Musambasi *Muchaneta*, 02:36 - 04:10

https://youtu.be/G6oKK_5ijBo

This creates more space for other instruments to be highlighted. The mind has lost control of what it can actually comprehend. This is the heart of the piece. It comprises polyrhythmic movement for the soprano, alto and tenor marimbas to shine, a conversation more stable and equanimous. The flow of pain can be likened to the

rise and fall of a musical passage, where moments of intense pain are followed by periods of relief or lessened discomfort. This section represents hope within the crisis as mentioned above. The music is wavering with a rollercoaster of emotions.

There is a melodic manipulation and brightening the dampened tenor marimba to introduce the modulation at 03:48 to represent added courage with a stronger intuition.

The slowing down of the music at 04:02-04:10 highlights moving back to sadness and worry as it hits the mind again that one is in agony. It connects to the main line from the first cycle.

Example. 5

Musambasi *Muchaneta*, 04:10 - 05:34

<https://youtu.be/MeBjGb3OnKE>

The lead line plays alone from 04:10-04:22 communicating the feeling of loneliness and isolation referencing a foreign land. The framework for variation in mbira playing comes from repetition, therefore the first cycle repeats but in a different key to show that it is a different sense of woe that is being dealt with also in reference to the repetitiveness of mbira music [Tenzer, 2017].

Example. 6

Musambasi *Muchaneta*, 05:55 - 06:53

<https://youtu.be/aPrhr5jlaEs>

Abrupt modal change back to the section of hope representing a sudden realization that hope shapes the sense of existence. This is a representation of the phrase "there is always light at the end of the tunnel". The piece ends with this section of relief as a sign of resilience created by the meditation. The hard ending is a cliffhanger where

the composer leaves one wondering if there is more to come. This is to represent how one switches back to normal after meditation.

Munogweyi (2023)

Munogweyi (What are you Fighting) is a piece composed in search of miracles during the fight for life. It is another marimba ensemble piece in the *mhande* form—the third composition of the portfolio.

Unified by Love

“Community is not an ideal; it is people. It is you and I. In community we are called to love people just as they are with their wounds and their gifts, not as we want them to be.” (Vanier 1989, 43).

My sister has been diagnosed with cancer. My father has been diagnosed with Alzheimer’s. I am looking for a winning solution against this hill of struggles. I settled on the quest of finding love.

My private thoughts and ruminations are that, love is the evidence of salvation and the facilitator of spiritual growth. Without love, it is impossible to progress as a human being. The touch of love brings life, peace, and joy. Love speaks eloquently where pride screams over the heads of the audience. Love gives selflessly whereas lust takes shamelessly. Love propels where lust compels. If the world could choose the power of love over the love of power, everything would take on a different complexion. Racism would be defeated in a day, infidelity would become a thing of the past. Inferiority complexes would fade away in the minds of many as they came to love themselves with nobody else looking down on them. Depression would be shaken off as those who are sad become aware that love surrounds them and they don’t have to continue the fight on their own. Nothing can keep love out. My father and sister were love personified.

The girl in front of me is. Lord knows she looks heavenly.

As a child, I was taught about life through music. My father could reference anything to a song, he believed that it is part of our culture and that everything has its solution in music. For example, one day while seated at the Munyati river playing the mbira with clear blue skies above and the sun scorching down, he told me to switch the song to a *Mhande* song to summon the rains.²⁵ *Mhande*, as explained before, is a well-known rain-making mode within the traditional music genre of Zimbabwe. Over time the function and place of music in African society, in particular, has changed and new manifestations or applications of older forms have emerged. So in this instance, I have used *Mhande* as the tool to create a loving community. It's like a double entendre where I am in search of the love of humanity, the love of self but also looking for the love of a person. What am I fighting? Am I feeling this way because I am all alone in a foreign land? Is it racism? What do I need?

The Music

Instruments

- Soprano marimbas insinuate themselves to us similarly as small children with high pitched voices. They are like little, fast legs playing games, singing and laughing. Its root note C serves as the initial tone for both its lower and upper registers which offer a sharp quality to produce high-pitched soprano melodies.
- The tenor marimbas represent the younger generation who are studying in Colleges and those already in the working class with a steady but enthusiastic approach to life.
- Bass marimba mostly plays a few notes depicting how the elderly in the community give guidance and wisdom and act as pillars of reference to the younger generations.
- Percussion illustrates the effect of a journey.

²⁵ The river rises in Mashonaland East, just north of Chivhu, and approximately 100 km (62 mi) south of Harare.

Introduction (00:00-00:45)

Example. 1

Musambasi *Munogweyi*. 00:00 - 00:45

<https://youtu.be/XMRMZVXc1Wg>

The *Ngoma* will have the effect of footsteps the entirety of the song to symbolise the Chinese proverb “A journey of a thousand miles begins with one step “ The percussion illustrates the effect of a journey in a meaningfully sonic manner 00:00-00:07, and it starts with the left hand of the tenor player playing the same rhythm as the drums emphasizing footsteps. At 00:07 the right hand completes the variation. The tenor marimba in this piece represents my complementary rhythm section, depicting my life when I was a college student steadily building relationships 00:15, while the second tenor marimba enters with the *mhande* rhythm usually played by the leg stomping with *Magagada*.²⁶

00:23 The first soprano marimba creates rhythmic colour by creating complex polyrhythms and harmonies. This symbolises the little nostalgic voice from childhood that encouraged me to find a community that would complement the love I grew up knowing. At (00:30) the lead line with a rolling technique is introduced: this technique involves rolling (or gliding) the mallets across the bars of the marimba to create sustained or continuous-like sounds. During this section, the aim is to create communicative playing, where each instrument is summoned so that each instrument can communicate the same message but in its own unique style and timbre. This represents a community comprising different generations and personalities living and working together despite their differences - moving beyond these differences and living as a community with a common purpose .

The first cycle (A call for love Amongst Humanity)

Example. 2

Musambasi *Munogweyi*, 00:45 - 01:30

²⁶ leg shakers

<https://youtu.be/4vOvmUMaN5E>

The main line of the piece which is heard multiple times through the piece starts at 00:45 and is played by the soprano marimba. The style used is anthemic, where the melody is to be harmonized by the other soprano marimba. The cohesion of the polyrhythmic variations from 01:00 -01:30 expresses this sense of cohesion as the bass gives giant step movements, with the soprano dazzling with rolling lines whilst the tenor section provides steady rhythmic movements.

The second cycle.

Example 3

Musambasi *Munogweyi*, 01:30 - 02:01

<https://youtu.be/DIXIdiqlQZg>

A rhythmic sense that sounds fast is introduced which symbolises the quickness in adopting norms and cultures by the children of the community. The stomp effect from the drums symbolises a pulse of life that never stops, although the children are suffering from drug abuse derived from the experimental nature of children and outside influence, it seems they are using drugs as a voice. The tenor marimba plays a descending scale variation to compliment the high pitched melodic lines by the soprano marimba which initiates the balance that creates the idyllic society we have. However, when the bass comes back 01:46 it comes with a single and spaced motion signifying the calm in the elders who foster love among the different age groupings for there to be conversations surrounding a unified community.

The third cycle.

Example. 4

Musambasi *Munogweyi*, 02:01 - 02:31

<https://youtu.be/vZvhXfqS6-Q>

The solo cycle appears here where the soprano marimba plays a solo using the twirling triplets technique as a cry-out form of expression yearning for more love in society. I

have always thought the correct representation of a community is usually expressed by the behavior of the children, thus the use of the soprano marimba as the twirling effect likened to crying. The "arpeggiated" chord progression in this particular section performed on the other soprano marimba shows the diversified contribution of every child's individual talent and expertise that can still be nurtured.

The Fourth Cycle (The Bridge)

Example. 5

Musambasi *Munogweyi*, 02:31 - 05:33

<https://youtu.be/L039pMQ1DIY>

This is the section where love is expressed between the soprano and alto marimbas as they engage in conversation. This symbolizes the community of people with whom they are in contact. The bass still gives us the stomps expressing the consistency from the elders in showing love in my micro-community, though overall this section aims to depict the beauty that is apparent when all work together as one despite differences. The steadiness of the whole section resonates with the traditional saying "there's no hurry in Africa", it portrays beautiful sunny days in an African setup.

In this "happy cycle" where 03:32-04:02 represents the peak of this "happy" bridge. For me, this cycle of love culminated the moment I encountered a beautiful girl, and I knew I had reached the peak of life. The lead line helps us feel the emotion through playing a mellifluous and expressive solo.

The modal changes and technique variations of bright and dampened 04:32-05:10 tell us how life can be dynamic for both young and the old; however with love you can conquer all hurdles. At 04:48 the music reaches the climax of the modal change which expresses how I am still experiencing that peak of happiness. I have met that girl again for the second time. The love found from the community is now projecting into my romantic life.

Return of Cycle 1

Example. 6

Musambasi *Munogweyi*, 05:33 - 06:48

<https://youtu.be/KA89FWznL9I>

We are back to a call for love but in a different key now. This is now a different community, love is going to encompass more than just that of the community and the community is going to embrace more than rural life. This is more of a letter to the past communities dating back to millenia.

Cycle 5 (falling in love with a beautiful girl)

Example.7

Musambasi *Munogweyi*, 06:49 - 08:13

<https://youtu.be/uGt6lx5ITv8>

The music is no longer frenetic. It now has an underlying voluptuousness in its rhythmic and thematic content that speaks to caressing movements and intertwining physicality. The soprano expresses these caressing movements as a solo from 07:46 symbolising my expression of interest in her and asking her to be mine.

Final return to Cycle 1 as the music moves towards its conclusion

Example. 8

Musambasi *Munogweyi*, 08:13 - 09:37

<https://youtu.be/45nle8NrQQ8>

It is a final call for humanity to find love in every form because love is indeed a beautiful thing. The music is back to the cohesive polyrhythmic patterns. The use of minor chords and the chromatic notes throughout the piece shows the closeness of the relationship that managed to fight through the hardships and ups and downs in everyday life. All that resolves as life goes on is love.

It fades out with the same variations from the beginning ending the chapter. The fade out ending serves as a metaphor for the ephemeral nature of life or experiences. It reflects how it is important to love one another in the present moment as it can just disappear at any moment highlighting life's fragility.

Mqamuli (2023)

Mqamuli (The Breaker) is a piece composed with elements borrowed from South African traditional music, which pays homage to the roots of my mother and my childhood nanny who was Zulu. It is composed using a marimba ensemble.

The double entendres

The first of many dates. Something melted on the table on the second date and it wasn't cheese. Hearts beating at the same pace heralded the advent of something new.

I gazed and beheld, it was very good. Her very eyes were like a glass of cool water on a hot afternoon. Her summer dress complemented her curvy body well. The glow she seemed to always possess was accentuated by the sunset. She was walking towards me. A sweet scent permeated the atmosphere as she came closer. Dear God, I hope this is no mirage. I've been dying to see her all day... My, I can feel her palm in mine. This is real. The oasis is nearby. Thank you, Heavens.

Lover: "Well, hello to you too."

"Sorry, dear. I'm just so happy to see you."

Lover: "How have you been?"

"Can't complain. You?"

Lover: "Can't or won't complain?"

"You know the answer darling."

A pause. I had spilled more than I had intended to spill. But such was the influence of the girl on me that I couldn't barricade her from entering my mind on any day. It had been like that from the day we had bumped into each other at Near East University.

We had seen each other a few times before then but the conversations had been brief and subdued. Soon enough, we began seeing more of each other after the run-in and love blossomed. "You're smooth and blunt at the same time, I almost don't know what to expect from you" was the statement she'd wanted to utter before she agreed to go on a date with me—the first of many dates. Something melted on the table on the second date and it wasn't cheese. Hearts beating at the same pace heralded the advent of something new.

When the sad news about my father and sister came, she became a source of strength. I was fast losing interest in all that surrounded me, languishing in despair. The girl would visit my apartment, prepare food, and eat with me while watching a movie. The evening would descend into chatter and somber moments after which she would depart, leaving me in good spirits. With my mind off things for a moment, I could be creative and use a voice recognised by many - "*MUSIC*".

The music is very polyrhythmic with intricate playing techniques, including harmonies and call-and-response patterns, to add depth and richness to the music, and reflect the closeness and intertwining of two bodies and souls in a love relationship. This composition is a reflection of the collective creativity and cultural identity of the combination of Shona and Xhosa groupings, serving as a means of communication, connection, and expression within a period of love.

The Music

Instruments

- Soprano marimba, Narrates the story of love from both the perspective of a child witnessing the love of parents and his own love life. Its root note C serves as the initial tone for both its lower and upper registers which offer a sharp quality to produce high-pitched soprano melodies essential to communicate high emotions like singing birds.

- Alto marimba, it is the reflection of the narration. It is also part of the leads. Its root note G serves as the initial tone for both its lower and upper registers which offer sub-melodic lines and harmonies essential to compliment high emotions from the soprano.
- Tenor marimba, The tenor is typically given accompaniment responsibilities in songs, it keeps the tonic, subdominant, and dominant harmonic zones intact. It is the pulse of the love stories.
- Percussion (shakers & drum), These are going to be a representation of the Xhosa origins of my mother and the influence she had in my choice of a romantic partner.
- Bass, The guide, the voice and actions of my father in grooming me to be a man and husband. Many broken and audible movements should occur from the bass, and their execution should organically react to the soprano's main melody and, eventually, to the tenor marimba's as it is the guide of the love stories.

Introduction phase 1

Example. 1

Musambasi *Mqamuli*, 00:00 - 01:52

<https://youtu.be/WYm4biuyJHA>

This is the main phrase of the piece heavily influenced by Xhosa traditional music with some elements of the calypso style of melody and dance music. There are elements of it constantly throughout the composition such as overtones in the resonance of the marimbas and varying melodies from the leads. This is because I was born to a multicultural marriage. Some of the positive impacts of this type of family include a more diverse life where children can explore the cultures and traditions of both their parents allowing them to be more open minded. The music expresses this as it starts with a percussion section which you will hear through most of the piece to maintain a sense of identity. The percussion section is influenced by Xhosa traditional music rhythms.

The First Bridge

Example. 2

Musambasi *Mqamuli*, 01:52 - 02:32

<https://youtu.be/5nJrNnvC5qM>

The bass marimba plays the role of a typical climax from a Xhosa even Zulu mode usually associated with gumboot stomping (Osborne 1990) especially when it gets to 02:13. This is complimented by the lead melodies which are sometimes gruff and rasping in an expression of call and response with the bass marimba. There is a key change to highlight the change that my father had to go through to adjust to a different culture. This taught us to navigate a new and exciting path which opened up for me to appreciate all the amazing facets of both cultures. The key change also serves as an opportunity to diversify the composition of diatonic marimba settings, as a diverse life can bring about more opportunities and excitement to a child's life.

The third phase

Example. 3

Musambasi *Mqamuli*, 02:32 - 04:45

<https://youtu.be/H2MlwZgfuJM>

Keeping the same rhythm influenced by Xhosa traditional music, the marimba playing style shifts to a *Dendera* style. *Dendera* music of Zimbabwe is an incredibly vibrant and dynamic genre that originated from the Shona people (Pfukwa 2012). A mix of the two brings about exposure where the music is characterised by intricate rhythms, lively melodies, and energetic dancing. *Dendera* has its roots in Zimbabwean traditions and has evolved to incorporate influences from various cultural and musical sources such as the rumba. This is heard from 03:14 as the bass marimba emulates the bass guitar playing the rumba by providing a driving force behind the music, emphasizing the rhythmic patterns and creating a solid foundation for the other instruments to build upon.

This phrase is characterised by the lead soprano and the harmonies and response from the bass and alto marimbas. There is a typical *Dendera* break at the end of the phrase to signal an end of the phrase at 04:40 through- 04:45.

The fourth phase

Example. 4

Musambasi *Mqamuli*, 04:45 - 05:49

https://youtu.be/Go2vNd_0Z1Q

This is the phrase where I incorporate both Shona and Xhosa aspects in marimba parts through showcasing performances with intricate playing techniques, including harmonies and call and response patterns. The leads are formulated around Xhosa music making as shown through their harmonic variations while the bass is situated in the Shona cultural practice and is steady on the beat with broken and audible movements infiltrating at times. Overall, this phrase depicts music that is influenced by factors such as African rhythms, the fusion of Xhosa, Shona rhythms and music practices, the significance of storytelling, and cultural heritage.

There is also a reappearance of one of the main lines from the phrase this time playing the lead at 05:27.

This lead reverts back to phase 1 05:49-06:32. My Xhosa mom had a huge impact on my choice of spouse, thus the reintroduction of phase 1 is my reflection to the girl I am now with. Looking at it from a positive perspective, this motivated me to engage in a multicultural relationship.

The Bridge 2

Example. 5

Musambasi *Mqamuli*, 06:32 - 06:53

<https://youtu.be/phlDXdT3ctY>

Every love story has a phase of turbulence, and this part expresses fighting and instability in the love story. This is expressed by the rough rolling technique used by the marimbas on this section. There are some detrimental effects that come as a result of multicultural marriages including common clashes in culture, an identity crisis and miscommunication. The leads are playing counter melodies to best express this effect. The leads are having a back-and-forth 'argument' showcased through their playing techniques with clashing lines. Clashes can also be as a result of language barriers and miscommunication, thus there is no longer a sense of harmonious coexistence between the leads.

Ending

Example. 6

Musambasi Mqamuli, 06:53 - 07:36

<https://youtu.be/BDgdtbW-YJY>

Back to phase 1 but with early silence from the soprano and alto marimbas 06:53 - 07:14. The silence symbolises the separation of the narration of the love stories and just allows the love to be expressed through action. The tenor marimba and the percussion keeps playing as a reflection of what keeps the relationships going, the pulse of the love stories. Then the piece ends the way it started just like, "*The first of many dates. Something melted on the table on the second date and it wasn't cheese. Hearts beating at the same pace heralded the advent of something new*". It's love again.

Matendo 2023

Matendo (Thanks Giving) is a Solo Marimba piece with percussion accompaniment in expression of gratitude. I apply some compositional tools from *mbakumba* music.²⁷ This is a very joyous pre-determined solo piece.

Thanks Giving

I made a prayer on New Year's eve of 2017. After the eventful and nerve wrecking circumstances during the year, as a composer I was just grateful to live another day. The prayer of gratitude:

“Superlatives can never replicate or exaggerate what you mean to us in this moment, the history and glorious future you've paved for those who love your light. In the beginning was you, before the sky hanging strapless over us was blue, when all was a blur and we never knew life. Then you spoke and it was, Jupiter and Mars in effervescent splendor circling around the Sun we saw before the Son. I'd be lobotomized to not recognize the awesome hand that crafted, the heart that wanted and the power that granted ... All you and we are just a speck of dust on cosmic scales, You are the balance, my source and my portion Jesus, oh the joy of how you make us feel and your consideration towards a hurting world which feels it needs less of you, yet by the grace of you it survives despite being a hurtling world. Oh we can only bow down, for nobody can take the place of you”.

A palm date fell on my head and I looked up. The vastness of the sky instantly stole me from my surroundings. What manner of genius could create such a beautiful scene? Science has struggled to explain how the world came about, for humankind's understanding is too shallow to comprehend how an uncreated creator of all who existed before time itself decided to speak all into existence. Theory after theory falls

²⁷ Known as *shangara*; a polyrhythmic tap dance accompanied by clapping, voices and serious tap dancing.

short and the superior truth triumphs over all. Could you take a look at me, I'm a wonder. And it's all because of God. It can only be the grace of God that keeps enriching my life. I'd rather die overly dedicated than live rudderless without this love I feel. God and his majesty colonised his very thoughts. Tears filled my eyes as I recalled episodes in my life where God had miraculously seen me through. My walk with God was far from perfect but undeniably fruitful. In my heart of hearts, I knew that I wouldn't have survived half of what I had been through without the presence of God. When royalty smiles on you, your elevation is a foregone conclusion. My heart was set on worship and my Lord deserved it.

I was on a mission to explore the humanity in man and the divinity of God in a way that is a breath of fresh air. It helped me appreciate what is favourable and embrace what is unfavourable.

Let me give thanks for the above.

Mbakumba music is a popular genre indigenous to Zimbabwe that encompasses distinctive characteristics and cultural elements. *Mbakumba* is characterised by its complex polyrhythms and relationship with the *mbira* genre.

In this piece *Matendo* there is a highlight of individuality and improvisation popular with the *mbakumba* genre. Each phrase is unique, creating a mesmerizing display of rhythmic patterns. The drum pattern used in this piece is played on two *ngoma* drums with different tones. This 12/8 pattern adds depth and complexity to the music, creating a captivating rhythm that drives the marimba soloists' rhythms and movements. The combination of drumming, shakers, and marimba creates a vibrant and dynamic final composition.

Matendo plays an integral part in expressing the celebratory music in Zimbabwean culture, showcasing the rich heritage through melodies and traditional rhythms of the

country. It is a unique attempt at having an accompanied marimba solo that combines drumming, and shakers. In this piece, we will explore the characteristics of *Mbakumba* through the lenses of a marimba player. *Matendo* was composed on an alto marimba, and uses musical motifs and melodies that evoke feelings of gratitude, abundance, and togetherness through the use of compact variations and pentatonic scale.

The Music

Instruments

- Alto marimba, This is a thorough-composed solo. Its root note G serves as the initial tone for both its lower and upper registers with higher notes which offer a sharp quality to produce high-pitched soprano melodies essential to communicate high emotions like singing birds.
- Percussion (shakers & drum), The guide and rhythm.

Introduction

Example. 1

Musambasi *Matendo*, 00:00 - 01:12

https://youtu.be/8ovR_uJaGJE

The marimba is a versatile instrument known for its vibrant and resonant sound. The opening line is simply a pentatonic riff moving from a fast tempo to a slower speed for assertion using a technique that involves striking the bars of the marimba right in the middle to create a brighter and more articulate sound. (00:00-00:06).

This is a three-stick introduction (00:06-01:12), not common with the Zimbabwean marimba as it is extremely difficult to execute due to the size of both the notes and the mallets. However, the three-stick introduction adds richness and complexity. It is accompanied by the two-tone *ngoma* and shakers playing the regular *mbakumba* rhythm.

Main Phrase

Example. 2

Musambasi Matendo, 01:12 - 01:31

<https://youtu.be/UcSnPPHD1Wo>

A variation splits the left hand and right hand to create the call-and-response effect on solo playing, in the main phrase of the piece. This is to elicit emotional responses of thanks giving deeply within like a reflection from the inner thoughts.

Improvisation

Example.3

Musambasi Matendo, 02:28 - 04:34

<https://youtu.be/jY4Wy5OI-wc>

There is free and expressive playing that comes at 02:28 through 04:34, this is the section that is full of melodic improvisation staying within the main chordal progression of the piece. There is also an opportunity to showcase the many unique timbral qualities of the marimba thus to highlight the distinctiveness of each note, chord, motif and phrase. This is achieved through use of different striking techniques that create varying timbres and dynamics to showcase the myriad versions of gratitude that overwhelm a period of thanksgiving. Ornamentation and embellishments, such as glissandos, trills, and rolls, are part of the expressive palette through which depth and expression is added expressing grace for so many blessings.

Bridge

Example. 4

Musambasi Matendo, 04:34 - 05:12

<https://youtu.be/optv2rsaChw>

This part is the lowest, slowest, and most expressive 04:34 through 05:12. There is a representation of tears of joy and gratitude with a change of mode to make the effect distinct. The silence from the percussion represents the quietness as one reflects.

Beauty in all situations

Example. 5

Musambasi Matendo, 05:44 - 06:49

<https://youtu.be/K2v82kfsol8>

The fifth phase of the solo comes with a pentatonic scale. The scale was added to bring out beauty in all situations since the scale produces a harmonious blend no matter the ordering of the notes (05:44 through-06:49). This is also to revisit the concept of the opening line. I experimented with different melodic patterns and intervals within the scale to create melodic variations, improvisations, rhythmic patterns and syncopations within the scale to add complexity and interest to the music.

The second bridge

Example. 6

Musambasi Matendo, 07:24 - 07:41

<https://youtu.be/5ZcJqB6xb6s>

The bridge has the dampened arpeggio combination of harmonic and melodic elements to help us transition in the emotional landscape of what eventually leads to thanksgiving. The interchange of quick and slow, chordal and single notes is just an expression of the different emotions felt such as a sense of enchantment, serenity, or even melancholy; but, with a sense of thanksgiving no matter the situation. These patterns of notes create a sense of tension and release leading to the next phase of the piece, the ending with its flowing and cascading notes.

Ending

Example. 7

Musambasi Matendo, 07:41 - 08:24

<https://youtu.be/CCdanpbDdJQ>

The piece comes back to the main phrase getting ready to end. It ends with the same riff as the opening. The rhythmic patterns and the relationship of the right and the

left hand adds depth and richness to the overall sound . The revisit to the phrase is just an assertion of eliciting the emotions of thanksgiving from deep within.

Conclusion

In conclusion, I would like to refer briefly to a quote from Nelson Mandela, who says *“The curious beauty of African music is that it uplifts even as it tells a sad tale. You may be poor, you may have only a ramshackle house, and you may have lost your job, but that song gives you hope”* (African music: Understanding culture through music 2018).

As described in the above commentary, I used storytelling to compose, connecting the past, present, and future. I have found that storytelling plays a central role in Zimbabwean indigenous music, serving as a powerful means of connecting the past, present, and future. I believe that storytelling makes the listener have meaningful connections to the music and gain a greater appreciation for its cultural context. This oral tradition not only transmits culture, values, beliefs, and history but also fosters a sense of identity and belonging within the community. Indigenous music storytelling is a vibrant and dynamic art form that weaves together music, dance, drama, and oral literature to create a holistic experience for the listeners and participants.

Knowledge and memory are closely intertwined, with the process of composing and retaining information relying heavily on the act of performance and recollection. Throughout the composing of the pieces, the performance served as a vital tool for expressing the meaning and communication. I managed to play all the marimba parts, each one at a time. The defining characteristic of the pieces is the use of call and response. It allowed communal participation and engagement in the music, creating a sense of unity and collective identity. It also served as a means of communication and expression within the storytelling, allowing individual instruments to express their thoughts, emotions, and stories through the collective music.

In every piece I used extended techniques such as dampening or muting certain notes with performers' hands, using different parts of the mallets to create unique timbral effects, or incorporating other percussion instruments alongside the marimba for added texture and complexity in the pieces. These techniques, along with others, allowed my marimba pieces to create a wide range of expressive and dynamic performances, showcasing the versatility of the diatonic instrument and challenging the skill level of the player. As Mandela stated, I hope the music uplifts the listener and pays homage to the centuries-old tradition of knowledge being passed from one generation to the next through oral recounting.

ONLINE APPENDIX

Traditional performances

- I. Nyoka Musango. https://youtu.be/_KSINDGOGSc
- II. Tondobayana. <https://youtu.be/nZX3KBhw4FM>
- III. Sango. <https://youtu.be/coRVMmN9IfQ>

Additional recordings

- I. Honai. <https://youtu.be/qYaxKoMk0aM>

Community Footage.

- I. Discussion I had with a community elder. https://youtu.be/_o0FM6P6JxM

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Links to the Music.

Chakasara (2023) - Recording [08:04] https://youtu.be/cpClkp_AqRk

Muchaneta (2023) - [06:52] <https://youtu.be/h6UkXUNOWf8>

Munogweyi (2023) - [09:37] <https://youtu.be/k7mKfcTd204>

Mqamuli (2023) - [07:38] <https://youtu.be/2I9xkkd28l8>

Matendo (2023) - [08:26] <https://youtu.be/WoaZB3ggzss>

Documentary - [34:50] <https://youtu.be/HoJno275x3l>