This is the published version:


Available from Deakin Research Online:

http://hdl.handle.net/10536/DRO/DU:30007011

Reproduced with the kind permission of the copyright owner

Copyright: 2007, Sun Press
ENCOUNTERING SOUTH AFRICAN MUSIC FROM AN AUSTRALIAN PERSPECTIVE: A KALEIDOSCOPIC VOYAGE OF DISCOVERY

Dawn Joseph, Deakin University, Australia

ABSTRACT

African music is a kaleidoscopic diversity: a rich mix of race, language, creed, colour and culture. A new approach to teaching and learning of African music explores the impact of "musical identity" and "teacher change" in Australian teacher education settings. This essay considers the findings of a project entitled Masakhane: Music in the Making. The Nguni word "masakhane" (let us build together) aptly describes experiences of students at Deakin University, Melbourne. The essay also reports on a Melbourne teachers' project (Smaller Steps into Longer Journeys) that investigated teachers' use of African music in schools. The embedded and assumed goal in this essay is a call to challenge and transform current curriculum content and delivery, while questioning student and teacher perceptions of musical identity. Findings from interview, questionnaire and web-based survey data indicate that African music excels as a vehicle for promoting multiculturalism and cross-cultural understandings. It is argued that the inclusion of this new and different art form may shape and contribute to the creation and recreation of an individual's perception, understanding, respect and tolerance of another music, culture and identity as part of a more global experience.

1 The term masakhane (let us build together) is an Africa term taken from Nguni people. "The Nguni peoples are classified into three large subgroups, the Northern Nguni, the Southern Nguni, and the Ndebele. The Zulu and the Swazi are among the Northern Nguni. The Xhosa are the largest Southern Nguni society; but the neighbouring Thembu and Mpondo are also well-known Southern Nguni societies, often described as subgroups of the Xhosa. Each of these groups is a heterogeneous grouping of smaller (also heterogeneous) ethnic groups. Four of South Africa's official languages are Nguni languages; primarily the Zulu, the Xhosa, the Swazi, and the Ndebele peoples speak isiZulu, isiXhosa, siSwati, and isiNdebele, respectively. Each of these languages has regional variants and dialects, which are often mutually intelligible" (Nguni, http://countrystudies.us/south-africa/46.htm)
MUSIC AND IDENTITY

PROLOGUE

This essay presents a theoretical framework for my teaching and research on encountering African music from an Australian viewpoint. It outlines some pertinent theoretical perspectives concerning musical identity, African music and culture, the concept of the “other”, music as culture, approach to teaching and learning and the notion of change. It concludes with some findings from the student\(^2\) (interviews and questionnaire) and music teacher\(^3\) projects (web-based survey and interviews), indicating that African music excels as an appropriate vehicle for promoting multiculturalism and cross-cultural understandings, thereby leaning towards the *ubuntu* concept of music making. It is argued from a sociological perspective that the inclusion of this new and different art form may shape and contribute to the creation and recreation of an individual’s perception, understanding, respect and tolerance of another music, culture and identity as part of a more global experience.

Music is a primary channel of communication and an effective vehicle through which people construct new identities and shift their existing ones, as spoken language does. I locate myself as an “agent of change” (teacher and researcher) currently working with Australian teacher education students of predominantly Anglo-Celtic backgrounds to give them an African music encounter that will influence and impact on their own musical identity. Since African peoples are ethnically, culturally and geographically diverse, only some generic commonalities were studied (oral/aural tradition, call and response, customs and traditions); students engaged mainly with South African and Ghanaian music through listening, moving, singing and playing.

\(^2\) I undertook research at Deakin University with teacher education students (2003 and 2004) into the use of African music (students were in their fourth year of study of the Bachelor of Education Primary degree). The project called “Masakhane: Music in the making” included the teaching of the recorder, classroom instruments, as well as African instruments (*djembes*, bells and rattles). The project reported on findings from questionnaire and interview data on attitudes, beliefs, competence and motivation, cultural and pedagogical understandings of generalist primary teacher education students in relation to a new genre (African music) through which music and culture was taught (Joseph 2002, 2003 & 2004).

\(^3\) The African music teacher project took place in 2004 through an anonymous web-based survey (see http://education.deakin.edu.au/music_ed/afr_mus-survey) for primary and secondary music teachers in Melbourne (see Joseph 2004 and 2005). In 2005 voluntary interviews were held with music teachers as an extension of that project. The focus of that project was to investigate the extent to which effective teaching and learning of African music take place at both primary and secondary schools in Victoria and how students’ and teachers’ identity might change with a new genre (see Joseph 2004 & 2005).
Within an Australian context music has moved from imperialism, assimilation, integration to multiculturalism (Southcott & Joseph 2005). Hence by experiencing and exposing students at university and school level to “the other”, there may be a kaleidoscopic voyage of discovery about African music and an enculturation into a new music identity. With respect to my voyage, thought process should move away from the Western thought process summed up by Descartes – “I think, therefore I am” – to the African thought process of ubuntu — “A person is a person by virtue of other people” (Oehrle & Emeka 2003, p. 39). Descartes’ idea fosters strong individualism, while ubuntu fosters the development of the communal spirit. These two ideas, as suggested by Oehrle and Emeka (2003), are opposite sides of the same coin, providing an opportunity to experience and explore one’s own music and identity and those of another.

LOCATING MYSELF IN AN AUSTRALIAN SETTING

As a South African music educator, I face the challenge of preparing Australian teacher graduate students in a global village to include a variety of musics and cultures. My own social location as a music educator is not one that comes from a privileged South African community. My work does not entail unconsciously constructing and rescuing my students; rather I strive to explore and make connections with the broad diversity of people, their lives, musical heritage and culture through the teaching of African music. Hence I position my teaching as a music-as-culture approach to teaching that is closely aligned to the notion of teachers as preservers and transmitters of their own cultural heritage (Campbell, Williamson & Perron 2001).

I find myself in what Mazrui (1986) refers to as a “triple heritage”, placed between three worlds—Indian, Western and African. I was born in South Africa, of Indian descent, grew up during the years of apartheid for more than three and a half decades before emigrating to Australia. The values, beliefs, and cultural and educational systems of “the rainbow nation” are challenged in communicating African music to my Australian

---

4 The word ubuntu is a sub-Saharan African ethic or ideology focusing on people’s allegiances and relations with each other. The word has its origin in the Bantu languages of Southern Africa. Ubuntu is seen as a traditional African concept – “humanity towards others,” or “I am because we are,” or “A person ‘becomes human’ through other persons”, or also, “A person is a person because of other persons”. Another translation could be: “The belief in a universal bond of sharing that connects all humanity.” (see Ubuntu n.d.).

5 The term “rainbow nation” was coined by Arch bishop Desmond Tutu of South Africa (see Tutu, 1994). The rainbow people refer to all people of God both black and white. Tutu reminds us that we have different colours representing different people to make us the rainbow people of God. As South Africa has a unique composition of people of different
tertiary students. I align myself with the view that Campbell, Williamson and Perron (2001) refer to in their book *Traditional Songs of Singing Cultures*, namely that teachers are preservers and transmitters of their own cultural heritage. Habermas (2003) describes this form of communication as a powerful tool for people to learn from one another.

This learning from each other impacts on and influences one’s identity, and recognising such communication helps one to understand and generate new knowledge. Therein lies the possibility of transformation, in that music identity is not something that is a fixed entity but rather a “transitional phase” identity (Kinchloe 1999), one that is ever-evolving. By connecting and reflecting upon my teaching and my students’ cultural identity, I understand the consequence of my work in the social development of my students.

**MUSICAL IDENTITY**

Musical identity is a multifaceted phenomenon. Thorsén (2002) asserts that a person’s identity is a mosaic – a unique set-up of dimensions that is influenced by a variety of factors (social class, ethnic heritage, national belonging, upbringing and religion). Hence we are constantly constructing our identity in relation to our heritage and aspirations. Fornäs (1995) claims that identity formation is a lifelong process rather than a product, and it is through our interaction with others that we create and reassess our identity (Björck 2000).

As a music educator, I am cognisant of the fact that my teaching of, and my students’ learning of, African music is a form of social articulation of difference from a minority perspective within an Australian setting. I seek to empower cultural hybrids as part of an ongoing negotiation that emerges in moments of historical transformation at higher institutions. Music fundamentally shapes who we are and helps mould the image we have of ourselves, and the way we want others to perceive us (Bumbaco n.d.). It thus helps us to express aspects of our personal identity, national identity and youth identity. MacDonald, Hargreaves and Miell (2002) draw attention to the fact that many individuals also construct identities within music, for instance, as a performer or as a teacher. This position within music was evident in both the student and teacher projects in African music. I concur with Thorsén (2002), who believes that music is connected to identity and it is within such an understanding of one’s own and other music that culture is then viewed as pluralistic.

cultures, people have to learn to live and work alongside each other and have an understanding of another.
African music and culture

Although Australia is a pluralistic society, in teaching predominantly Anglo-Celtic students I endeavoured – like Ntuli (1999) – to “decolonise their music minds” and create pathways for dialogue to African indigenous knowledge and culture in the hope that students’ musical identity would be challenged by such “social travelling” (Palmgren, Löfgren & Bolin 1992). In Australia it seems essential to be familiar with music of “others” in order to understand what an Australian music identity is, because “the need for identity, which is the need to distinguish oneself, exists only with respect to others” (Civilization Corporation 2001).

The meaning of music in African societies is no different to its meaning in other societies. It has an aesthetic significance with long traditions and values that are associated with the people and represents part of their identity. A large part of that identity is the concept of music making, making meaning and sharing, which Nketia (1966) aptly describes as part of the traditional way of life, and not as embellishments of it. Music making is, therefore, an index of a living community and a measure of the degree of social cohesion among its respective units. Nketia’s student, Aduonum (1980), restates this view as follows: “African music is life, it permeates all daily activities” (p. 19). There is no single way to describe African music, “it is best understood not as a finite repertoire but as a potentiality of numerous repertoires of song and instrumental music that originate in specific African communities, performed regularly as part of play, ritual and worship” (Agawu 2003, p. xiv). Hence, African music can be conceptualised in terms of musical and extra-musical purposes forming a significant socialising aspect to the music. This view is supported by Nzewi’s (2003) notion that African music is “formulated” to perform differentiated tasks in the social, religious, political, economic and health systems (p.15).

An aspect of this varied task is the notion of using music as an education tool to learn about and or get to know other musics. Hence music serves as an engaging hands-on activity and/or experience, as well as a form of knowledge system. Such a knowledge system, Nzewi (2003) points out, can be reduced or transformed by educators for formal education. Hence it can be argued that what is transmitted by music is just as important as how it is transmitted (for more discussion see Amoaku 1998; Kidula 2003; Oehrle & Emeka 2003; Nixon, Uzoigwe & Kigozi 2003; and Nzewi 2003). Part of this transmission in arts education in Africa faces limitations in terms of time, materials, teacher abilities and curriculum (also see Flolu & Amuah 2003; Mans 1997, 2006; and Okumu 2004). Although music and society are closely aligned in Africa, Mans (2006) aptly makes the point that African education is socialisation, helping one to be humane in social,
spiritual and pragmatic senses (for more discussion see Asante 1987; Ani 1994; Blacking 1973, Mans 1997; Nketia 1998; and Nzewi 2003). Such an understanding provides an inroad for dialogue to learn about “other” music, people and culture.

CONCEPT OF “OTHER”

Hall (1984) believes that members of a given society internalise the cultural components of that society and act within what is culturally acceptable for that society. In his view, we become aware of this control mechanism only when it is severely challenged, for example, by exposure to a different culture. This essay argues that developing an inclusive approach to other types of music in a changing world is a constant challenge and necessity. The question to ask is “Why should we as educators provide such an experience of ‘the other’ to our students? How might this impact on their current musical identity?”

Thompson (2002, p. 16) points out that “the other” is often constructed as a homogenised category which is “static to geographical spaces”, while Hall (1997) refers to the notion of “other” as “representing difference” as contingent and representative of diversity. In relation to this “difference” and “other”, music can be understood then as an aspect of the culture of which it is part and also contributes to the way people assert their identity.

Miller (1989) affirms that understanding the differences between cultures not only opens the way to a deeper appreciation of the people who create and use that music, but it also brings a new perspective to the Western musical world. In Africa “music” as a concept is commonly referred to as a verb rather than a noun, supporting the notion of “music as making and doing”. Elliott (1995) refers to it as “musicing” and Small (1998) uses the term “musicking”, describing the idea of any activity that relates to music.

Incorporating music of another culture, or finding oneself in someone else’s music, may assist in assimilating new elements and experiences into one’s own background knowledge, thereby establishing new understandings of musical style and the broader culture (Nketia 1988).

A KALEIDOSCOPIC VOYAGE: MUSIC-AS-CULTURE APPROACH

I refer to this section as a “kaleidoscopic voyage”. By crossing musical boundaries in a changing world, the inclusion of the “other” is a multicultural experience, although one’s practice does not always demonstrate a real awareness of what this might be. Reimer (1993) cautions that, because Australia has a “multi-musical culture”, care should be
Encountering South African music from an Australian perspective

taken not to marginalise or patronise one ethnic group’s music over another. Hence the National Agenda for a Multicultural Australia (Office of Multicultural Affairs 1989) identifies a “cultural identity” dimension (the right of all Australians to express and share their individual cultural heritage) and a “social justice” dimension (their right to equality of treatment and opportunity and the removal of barriers associated with race, ethnicity, language, culture, religion, gender etc.) to overcome multicultural barriers and incorporate “the other”. Such “dimensions” of inclusion create the opportunities to cross music boundaries in a changing world where music-as-culture can be a vehicle to effectively teach and learn beyond exoticism and tokenism.

The music-as-culture approach exposes students to other cultures and musics, thereby exploring what Oehrle (1991) calls “cross-cultural possibilities” more fully, richly and critically than previously. She adds that “a growing awareness of other cultures is not only more possible but also necessary to achieve” (p. 26). This is especially the case within an Australian context, given the diverse society in which we live and work. Volk (2004) points out that “the greater the knowledge one has about the culture, and the expectations or rules of its music, the greater the understanding, or perception of meaning, of that music will be” (p. 6). A challenge I face as a music educator is the need to find ways to encompass a broad range of musical genres in my teaching.

The use of African music in my own teaching at Deakin University and the African music teacher research project (see Joseph 2002, 2003, 2004 and 2005 for findings and discussions), reveal that the teaching and learning of African music as expressions of “the other” was seen as an effective way not only to cross music boundaries but to transmit music knowledge, skills, confidence, competence and understanding of another music and culture. I refer to Music here with a capital M as Campbell (2004) points out; few students know “Music” in its global and cross-cultural manifestations. Such knowledge, she claims, can only come by discarding “the West is best” perspective (Campbell 2004, p. xvi). My hope in my teaching and research is that students’ and teachers’ music identity may be receptive to change.

NOTIONS OF CHANGE

The topic of change in teachers and teaching is complex because of the very different approaches to the concept of change (Richardson & Placier 2001). The caption “I think, therefore I am resistant to change” (Duffy 2003, p. 1) aptly describes perceptions that both students and music teachers hold about engaging with a new music and genre, and how they may alter their musical identity. Clarke and Hollingsworth (2002) consider
teachers as learners and schools as learning communities. It is through such pathways of educational change that the notion of “other” and multicultural music is considered.

Since learning and change are interconnected, the use of African music gave my students the opportunity to reflect and discuss wider social issues than just what they experienced aurally or visually in terms of sound and movement. Such an innovation was a “change in action”, something different to what students normally experienced at university. Within the school context, teachers reported (Joseph 2004) that the use of African music is an effective medium to teach other Key Learning Areas (KLAs).

**FINDINGS: TRENDS AND FORECAST**

This section of the essay reports on some findings regarding students’ and teachers’ constructing identity within African music through the notions of “change” and the “other”, drawing on what Brookfield (1995) calls a few “lenses” (one’s own reflection, student and music teacher data).

**Student project: Masakhane: Music in the Making**

During the years 2003 and 2004 I undertook research at Deakin University with teacher education students into the use of African music (students were in their fourth year of study of the Bachelor of Education Primary degree). I called this project “Masakhane: Music in the Making”, which incorporated the teaching of recorder; classroom instruments, as well as African instruments (*djembes*, bells and rattles). The term *masakhane* suggests building together what students already know and enriching new learning experiences for them. The project reported on findings from questionnaire and interview data on attitudes, beliefs, competence and motivation, cultural and pedagogical understandings of generalist primary teacher education students in relation to a new genre (African music) through which music and culture were taught (Joseph 2002, 2003 and 2004). At the university level Western music was the only form of music taught in terms of the Orff, Kodály and Dalcroze pedagogy. After the introduction of African music, students stated through both interview and questionnaire data that their levels of motivation increased, they became more confident and competent in their ability to read and play and make music with others. “My confidence and knowledge have grown immensely. It’s more ... I feel a lot more comfortable with teaching something like this and actually participating in something like this rather than before I would never have done anything like it so, yeah absolutely, confidence has grown immensely”. The African method of oral and aural teaching took away the stress of reading formal notation and helped them enjoy and encounter music making within a social context.
Although students were engaged in a number of activities (singing, moving, playing instruments, dancing and dramatising the content of the songs and story telling), they contrasted the African understandings and learning styles with the Western tradition. This intercultural perspective provided a nexus between Western and African ways of knowing and consolidated this fusion of music with dance and movement. Some South African songs were taught in the language of Zulu, Xhosa, Sotho and Pedi. Initially these songs were studied as oral repertoire, as such the subject matter and context allowed for comparisons, contrast, variations, and similarities to be discussed.

Such a multidisciplinary approach incorporated African indigenous knowledge, which encompassed local knowledge that is culture- and context-specific. Students reported that they gained greater musical skills and knowledge about African music as it was “new”, “different” “exciting”, “rhythmic” and “real”. The music coming from Africa authenticated the experience for my students than just reading about it. “It was more real. Otherwise it would be just technical … it was relevant and it is who you are and so you were able to teach it … it’s part of your culture”. Another student said, “having you teach it made a difference. It means more coming from someone who knows the things they are talking about. I could read all I ever wanted about Africa, but I could not teach it with that same passion I guess that you showed us”. Students reported that such vibrant “hands on” engagement (singing, moving and playing) in African music challenged their music identity; they begun to ask questions about who they were. How did a new and different music now shape and change their appreciation of a new genre?

Students reported that their level of confidence and competence in drumming improved. The drumming experience provided a “space” where group camaraderie and bonding was cemented. “We learnt about timbre, beat accent and meter most effectively through drumming”. Although the learning of poly-rhythms was challenging for many students, they reported that “listening [was] an important aspect when learning about rhythms … you can get lost in it if you don’t concentrate on your part and repeatedly play your part”. Students saw the strong relationship between music and movement, particularly through the African repertoire. They commented that, having experienced the African song and dance culture, they now understood how movement is inseparable from song. As one student pointed out in the interview: “Being able to see it on the

---

6 Name of song: *Thula thu*, a Zulu lullaby
7 Name of song: *Sifikil’ Ezibukweni*, a Xhosa action song
8 Name of song: *Ge re Sila*, a North Sotho call and response song
9 Name of song: *Ra Sila Mielie*, a Pedi work song
board is one thing, but having the opportunity to be part of it and sort of contribute your body in different ways was another”.

**MUSIC TEACHER PROJECT: SMALL STEPS IN LONGER JOURNEYS**

Having undertaken research with my university students on African music, I decided to further this investigation with music teachers at schools in Melbourne. The African music teacher project took place in 2004 through an anonymous web-based survey (see http://education.deakin.edu.au/music_ed/afr_mus-survey) for primary and secondary music teachers in Melbourne (see Joseph 2004 and 2005). In 2005 teachers were invited to participate in interviews as an extension of the project. The focus of that project was to investigate the extent to which effective teaching and learning of African music takes place at both primary and secondary schools in Victoria and how students’ and teachers’ identity might change in engaging with a new genre (see Joseph 2004 and 2005).

The teaching, acquisition and learning of African music may be seen as change in motion – “small steps towards longer journeys” as the title of the project suggests. When asked “How does African music particularly engage students in such a learning experience?” one respondent stated, “It gave them [students] a greater understanding of cultural diversity, music history and style”. Given the culturally diverse nature of the population in Melbourne, it was considered, as one respondent stated, “necessary for students to have a wider understanding of dress, culture, social and family life”. African music provides a platform for this type of cross-cultural dialogue. All respondents from the web-based survey stated the need for African music to be included in the curriculum because the students enjoyed it so much – many said, “They love it!” Such positive comments about transmitting a new music and its culture indicate that it is worth being taught at all levels in primary and secondary schools.

From the data it was apparent that African music gave students the opportunity to experience another culture through music. As one respondent remarked, “African music instils rhythm and excitement into any program … it is emotive and usually accompanied by movement”. Another respondent commented that, “by engaging students with African music, students also came to understand how music and dance are inseparable in African culture … something not common to Western culture”. By having African musicians or artists-in-residence teach African music, teachers stated that they benefited greatly and learnt just as much as their students. The notion of teacher as learner and the school as a learning community also made students and teachers “rethink” and question their music identity. As one teacher remarked, “Even though I was Western music trained, teaching predominantly Anglo-Celtic students, I started to
Encountering South African music from an Australian perspective

rethink about how I now teach and think about African music ... Having the artist-in-residence and engaging with African music made me much more aware of the social process of how music fits into the lives of African people”.

All respondents agreed that using African music creates a place in the curriculum for performing (singing, playing and moving). As one respondent stated, “It creates an atmosphere of team building in the class and everybody is involved in making music together”, hence the practice of ubuntu. This experience is often not the case in Western music, where we play for each other. This making of music “helps children experience and understand the deeper meaning of another’s culture”, as one respondent stated. This experience gave students the opportunity not only to explore music making at first hand, but also to hear the “story-telling” behind the music which helps to authenticate the transmission of African music to non-African settings. Such learning experience “promotes cross-cultural understanding and fights racism in schools through empathy and understanding”, as one respondent commented.

CONCLUSION

My own teaching was seen as successful as it incorporated new insights for both students and me, linking information and approaches not for their own sake, but to improve cross- and intercultural understanding, as well as instructional practice, hence challenging students’ music identity. The power and rhythm of the “drum and its people” in this instance provided a useful platform in terms of pedagogy, as well as cross- and intercultural dialogue for my students and me. As one student remarked: “We’re also on a level playing field, ‘cause all of us had different backgrounds in music but, when it came to something like African [music], very few of us – in fact none of us – have had the opportunity to actually play it and be a part of it and move to that type of music.”

In the main, respondents from the teacher project stated that the current use of African music in both primary and secondary schools provided them and their students with an understanding and knowledge that encompassed cross-cultural “awareness, competence and tolerance”; as one teacher remarked, “because we have children from different cultural backgrounds in the class, African music is something different from Western music and helps children learn something about those people and their lives and how they make music ... it helps our children appreciate what we have in Australia”.

The ideas in this essay arose out of the need to move beyond only teaching and learning about “Western music”, but rather to consider “the other” at both school and university level. In such thinking “for change” one moves beyond the notion of exoticism and
tokenism to broader meanings. From an Australian perspective, it is through such a kaleidoscopic voyage of discovery through African music that one adopts, adapts and acquires perhaps a new musical identity in a global and diverse world.

REFERENCES


Encountering South African music from an Australian perspective


Office for Multicultural Affairs 1989. Canberra: AGPS.


