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Prospects and challenges of teaching and learning musics of the world's cultures: an African perspective

Perspectivas e desafios de aprender e ensinar músicas das culturas do mundo: uma perspectiva africana

Rose A. Omolo-Ongati

Maseno University (Kenya)
romollo30@yahoo.com

Abstract. African music is an intrinsic part of some social event or occasion. The music is a communal functional expression closely bound up with daily human living and activities. Performance practice of African music is governed by function and context association, rule and procedure that determine how the music should be performed. These underpinnings provide that the effectiveness of African songs depend on the context in which the music is both heard and performed. The impact of globalisation has made the world become a small place, bridged and linked by modern technology. Musics of the world, both local and global, are available through the mass media. Many of such musics are used for teaching purposes outside their cultural contexts of performances. With these principles and belief systems underlying the practice of African music, how should the music be treated, transmitted/handed down in its transferred context? An attempt has been made to answer this question. The African perception on the learning of music is that music cannot be properly understood and appreciated without the knowledge of its social and cultural context. This paper examines the viability and practicability of this theory in cases where music is taught out of its cultural context. The challenge for the borrower is to determine how the owners of the music define it since 'music' has various components in African culture. Five important terms come into use when dealing with the teaching and learning of world musical cultures: Borrowing, appropriation, adaptation, accommodation, negotiation. This paper discusses these terms using one of the widely travelled 'Kenyan' popular music by Fadhili Williams, Malaika.

Keywords: music education, African music, music in cultural contexts

Resumo. A música africana é parte intrínseca de alguns eventos sociais. A música é uma expressão funcional comum diretamente ligada às atividades diárias das pessoas. A prática musical da música africana é regulada pela associação entre função e contexto, regras e procedimentos que determinam como a música deveria ser executada. Esses pontos indicam que a efetividade das canções africanas depende do contexto onde a música é ouvida e executada. O impacto da globalização tem tornado o mundo um espaço pequeno, conectado por tecnologias modernas. As músicas do mundo, local e global, estão disponíveis através da mídia. Muitas dessas músicas são usadas como propostas de ensino fora do contexto cultural da execução das mesmas. Com esses princípios e crenças subjacentes à prática da música africana, como a música deveria ser tratada, transmitida/manipulada em novos contextos? Este texto procura responder a essa questão. A percepção africana sobre a aprendizagem da música é que ela não pode ser propriamente compreendida e apreciada sem o conhecimento de seu contexto cultural e social. Este texto examina a viabilidade e prática dessa teoria em casos onde a música é ensinada fora de seu contexto cultural. O desafio para aquele que toma emprestada a música de um contexto é determinar como os autores daquela música a definem, considerando que a música possui vários componentes na cultura Africana. Cinco termos importantes podem ser usados para lidar com o ensino e a aprendizagem das culturas musicais do mundo: emprestar, apropriar-se, adaptar, acomodar, negociar. Este texto discute esses termos usando como exemplo uma música queniana muito popular chamada Malaika, de Fadhili Williams.

Palavras-chave: educação musical, música africana, música no contexto cultural

Introduction

Teaching and learning musics of the world's cultures have been at the core of debate by music educationists, music artists and scholars in other fields (anthropology) the world over. The issues of concept, content and context, methodology, resources, human expertise, facilities, style/idiom, and curriculum development have engaged the minds of many scholars, yielding diversified perspectives and beliefs on the viability of teaching and learning world musics. These issues have been problematic to the extent that some scholars have passed a death sentence verdict on the subject as an over ambitious endeavour that cannot be achieved, contending that the world cannot be referred to as a global village (Kofie, 2004)[1]. Some have claimed that musics of cultures foreign to us cannot be understood easily, if at all. Others believe that because of the diversity and uniqueness that exist within cultures where these musics come from, there can never be a universal approach to the teaching of musics of the world's cultures, not even developing some respect and admiration, an attitude referred to by (Elliott, 1994) as "cultural democracy". They wonder whether world music does more to promote or erase musical diversity. Others even complicate matters more by bringing in the cultural nuances of context and association claiming that teaching a piece of music to a non-native audience without reference to the social situation and context in which the music was born is a big mockery of that connection. They see "indigenisation" as a response to globalisation, a resistance to cultural imperialism and essentialising tropes of homogeneity. These people also hold an emic view that music is bound to culture and that no one outside that culture can penetrate it. According to them, music should not be a commodity but should be in its very essence communal, spiritual and a totally shared experience. (Keil; Steven, 1994) supports this view when he proclaims that there should not be a music industry. He insists that music should not be written or mechanically reproduced and mass mediated. It should exist live, for the moment, in present time and the makers should be rewarded with happiness and barter-like reciprocation. The bone of contention has always been that the appropriators of the music do not remember to reward the music owners, and the concern is therefore the loss of rights of those from whom the music is borrowed, especially when power, prestige and large sums of money become involved.

There are however, others who see a lot of potential and prospects in teaching and learning world musics. Current developments in the social, political and economic life of peoples around the globe has created fresh awareness of the great diversity and diffusion of cultures. The confrontation and convergence of cultures has become inevitable due to modern technologies that continually reduce the globe in size with tremendous speed. Consequently the musics of the world have combined with each other – combined elements of melody, rhythm, harmony, performance practice, instruments, to produce new kinds of music appealing to a large multicultural audience (Nettl 1998, p. 23). As a result, the ever-growing clarity of ethnic boundaries and cultural distinctions have fertilised aspirations for socio-political autonomies – a condition that has also created the need to build channels of communication, not from a hegemonic perspective, but on principles of equality, respect and understanding (Santos 1994, p. 25).

People travel across and beyond national boundaries. In the same way, music travels and is continually being created, recreated, modified/refashioned, adapted and reinterpreted, transcending the limits of local culture and the personal self. This has made the musics of the world cultures to be more readily available to most people through the mass media. Thus, we come to learn cultures of other people through their music over television, acting as a cultural stage.

Whether it is an issue of searching for a supplement to add to one's culture, adding to our list an expanded notion of music, providing a platform for minorities and majorities to interact through musical activities, or encouraging a form of exchange in order to create a new expression, world music as a global phenomenon is a reality that we have to contend with. Our increasing awareness of cultural variation in musical practices and the rate of global musical interaction force us to reconsider how to respond to these developments. Therefore, denying the existence of world music is refusing to see the reality.

This paper discusses the prospects and challenges of teaching and learning music of the world's cultures by attempting to answer the following questions:

1) How can music be understood and appreciated outside its cultural context?

2) How do we make a case for studying and teaching specific musical culture?

[1] Personal communication, Nov. 22, 2004

3) When music travels and is used for teaching in a decontextualised context, how should the music be transmitted or handed down to the learners? Should traditional formats of instruction be maintained?

African perspective on music making

African music arises naturally and spontaneously from the functions of everyday life. There are functional roles that connect music to the daily lives of those composing it, performing it or listening to it, giving it its cultural integrity. Consequently, African music represents an extremely "high context culture" closely tied to the particularities of place and time (Storm, 1972, p. 25). The contexts of performance dictate the content, venue, and participants of a particular musical genre. Music is seen in terms of its role in the society, and therefore its meaning.

The aim of African music has always been to translate the experience of life and of the spiritual world into sound, enhancing and celebrating life through cradle songs, songs of reflection, historical songs, fertility songs, songs about death and mourning and other song varieties (Bebey, 1969). Musical practice is therefore particular to musical beliefs and musical beliefs are particular to and determined by the particular culture in which they arise. Music therefore is closely bound up with the details of daily living and is interwoven with every part of an African life, as is expressed by (Elliott, 1994) that music is something that people do and make in relation to standards of informed musical and cultural practice. It is a diverse human practice. African music is considered good when it achieves it utilitarian objectives i.e. the purpose for which it was meant.

Music is culturally cultivated. In African communities, the selection and use of any component of musical vocabulary, like rhythm, is ethnic bound. Music making is essentially a matter of knowing how to construct musical sound patterns in relation to the traditions and standards of particular musical practices (Elliott, 1994, p. 12). Individuals, whose musical experiences are rooted in a particular society, naturally develop standard musical responses based on the collective experience of that society. These collective experiences are in most cases circumscribed by tradition and history. Consequently, the boundaries of musical culture are defined and preserved by their contextual association and mode of application within that cultural matrix (Anku, 1998, p. 75).

African musical forms are formed out of a spiritual impulse. Spirituality is its core and power. It is the essence of a particular musical form that outlines the style/idiom. So, one can tamper with the forms in order to maintain the spirit. Okumu (2005)[2] maintains that it is more important to preserve the spirituality in African music than the tunes, because that is what forms the basis of the discipline. Recognition of the main pulse and time line in African music is therefore an important aspect to consider when teaching this music to non-native learners. The rhythmic aspect of African music is so intricate that various scholars (Chernoff, 1979, Tracey, 1986) have described the rhythm as crossing and conflicting respectively. But looked at them critically, African rhythms do not conflict and they do not cross. Nzewi (1997) says that the term cross rhythm is misinforming and inappropriate. He argues that the idea of crossing implicates movements in contrary or opposing directions, and adds that a community/family/team does not work together at cross-purposes. This musical structure, which has depth essence, derives from the African philosophy of inter-independence in human relationships. The rhythms do not go against the main pulse, but fall within it. They are therefore complementary and not conflicting together as (Tracey, 1986) proclaims. One thing that needs to come clear is that in African music, simple times have their interfaces in compound times. Within a performance in 4/4, one is able to play rhythmic patterns or dance in 12/8 times. The 12/8 is therefore an interface of 4/4 since the 4/4 metre has the same pulse feeling as 12/8 in performance. The structural combination of a pattern in common metre 4/4 with a pattern in compound metre 12/8 is rationalised and performed in the African thought perspective as two with three, an inter rhythm that normatively implicates tonal depth (Nzewi, 1997, p. 36). This is why an identification of the pulse is paramount in African music. An African is used to timbre that contrasts rather than blend. Doubling of parts in instrumental performance is not an African practice.

Blacking (1977) maintains that music making is a symbolic expression of societal cultural organization, which reflects the value and the past and present ways of life of the human being who creates it. Omondi (1992) supports Blacking when he observes that African musics and dances arise directly from the life of an African society, and is performed to express shared values. This means that the genres nearly always carry some information, which for most part is intended to elicit some response from the listeners to whom it is performed. African

[2] Personal communications, Jan. 20, 2005.

music is therefore a performer-participant kind of music, not performer-audience. This implies that, to function properly, African music requires a unique kind of culturally inside, participatory sharing/loving knowledge that according to (Lees, 1994) is perhaps less a mode of understanding and more a mode of feeling.

African music is learnt in a form of practical knowledge i.e. knowing in action. Africans believe that true knowing comes from actual experiencing, through interactive music making. Africa also perfected the philosophy and practice of holistic music education, which enables the competent composer to be, equally, a competent performer and critical audience (Nzewi 2001). The moment one starts singing, movements automatically come in. Music connects with participation without which, there is little or no meaning to music making. Aural instruction, with students participating actively in music making through imitation by doing, should be the teaching-learning process. The virtual musical experience which lays emphasis on abstract literary and non-participatory auditory encounters with music is not an African concept. It leads to partial music knowing.

African music has been ringed with functions and contextual associations confining the music to its meaning and place in the society. But gone are the days when African music was either reduced to a functional status or endowed with a magical or metaphysical essence that put it beyond analysis, especially whenever the social or extra musical context was ignored. After all, what music does not serve functional ends? The musics that were protected by context associations are now performed out of their cultural contexts for aesthetic listening and appreciation due to the process of cultural dynamism and interpretation that is going on at a furious pace. This has transformed most African music into contemplative art form. Nercessian (2002) is therefore right when he concludes that time and space are increasingly compressed in such a way that cultures cease to enjoy the "purity" that might validate the emic-etic dichotomy. When dealing with the musics of the world culture therefore, a polysemic approach to meaning in music should be embraced.

Appropriability of music in recontextualised context

Appropriation of music is everywhere, and the existence of world music is a result of appropriation. A great deal of music is appropriable by cultures foreign to it, while some are not. This is due to certain independence or autonomy of meaning which, as (Nercessian, 2002) puts it, is not only an attribute, but also a necessity of musical production. The big question is: Why appropriate particular musics, and which musical elements are appropriable by a particular culture? Macmillan English Dictionary For Advanced Learners defines appropriation as the action of taking something, especially when you have no right to take it. In our case, it is the action of taking music from a culture where you do not belong to. The music does not belong to you but through negotiation with the owners, you can own it. When you re-invent and re-interpret music to make it work for you and become part of your system, then the music has adapted to a different environment and can now be accommodated by that musical culture. We therefore create or construct our own identity of/in the music to establish a different meaning from its meaning in the country of origin. But the whole of this process is not possible without the act of borrowing.

Why do we borrow music foreign to us, and when we borrow these musics how should we treat them? To answer these questions I will recount my conversation with African delegates in the ISME 2004 conference in Tenerife, Spain. Bosco,[3] a delegate from Zambia supported the idea of borrowing music foreign to our cultures reasoning that it gives one more reasons to seek contact and become acquainted with new people including people with national, ethnic, or cultural backgrounds different from ours. He reiterates that achieving an understanding of and identification with other people's diverse forms of expression, not least, how they express themselves musically, helps to open new channels of communication. Onyeji,[4] a delegate from Nigeria insists that one should treat the borrowed music "with respect". And what does that entail? Treating the music in a way that if he encounters it in a different environment, he is able to recognize it i.e. maintaining the spirituality of the music. He suggests that before borrowing music, one must inquire the most important features or elements that should be maintained in order not to distort the music. This would keep the musical experience real. This is what I refer to as negotiation process, which makes it possible to treat a song with respect it deserves.

Most of the time we borrow something because there is need. Borrowing always serves the

[3] Personal communications, July 12, 2004.

[4] Personal communications, July 12, 2004.

need of the borrower. It is this need that makes clear our intentions of borrowing musics from foreign cultures. Are we borrowing to understand what the musical sounds express, or maybe to know the lifestyle, behaviour, and the values certain people hold? Whichever is the case, it is important to establish which aspect of music one is preoccupied with. In the African culture, music has three components i.e. sonic (or the music itself), behaviour, (brought about by human activities) and, concept (the idea and beliefs about music). If you are concerned with the last two aspects of music then you must learn the techniques, understand the theories and survey the cultural context to which the music belongs. Consequently, the theory that music cannot be properly understood and appreciated without the knowledge of its social and cultural context is applicable or not depending on which component of music one is preoccupied with. The necessary prerequisite for one to have a meaningful experience when borrowing music will be quite different depending upon which aspect of music one is dealing with at the moment, whether sonic, behaviour or concept/context.

The aspect of music one is concerned with and the intentions of borrowing will eventually determine the teaching method to use i.e. do we want to master an entirely new instrument, or analyse the melodic structures and intervals in a particular musical tradition. Whatever our intentions are, we need to analyse our perspectives on music first. This will determine what we teach and how we teach it.

As we appropriate musics of foreign cultures, we need to realize that there is the nucleus of a musical system that holds it together giving it shape and value, outlining the idiom. These are sometimes referred to as the deep structures by (Nzewi, 2003). Then there are the surface structures, which may be altered, eliminated or introduced and reinterpreted in the face of confrontation or change (Hampton, 1979). I refer to these as variables or the appropriable components. To elucidate this point I want to give an example of a well-known tune brought to Kenyans by the missionaries, and popularly used to teach the concept of a round, “Row Your Boat”. Different ethnic communities in Kenya have appropriated the song to fit their own needs. One ethnic group, the *Luo,* is worth mentioning since, unlike the other communities, they have not translated the text but have looked for *Dho-Luo* words with rhyming sounds, but with a totally different meaning to the original. Their version is *Rao Rabet* (the elephant is huge). Here are the two examples:

Row |Row| Row| your |boat

Rao |Rao | Rao| ra |bet----------the Elephant, the elephant the elephant is big.

Gentle| on| the| stream|

Gino | nyono| piny | ---------- if that thing steps down

Merrily| merrily| merrily| Merrily|

Wololo| wololo| Wololo| Wololo|

Life’s | but | a | dream|

Gino | nyono| piny---------- that thing steps down

The nucleus in this case (the tune) is constant and the variable (the text) has been changed to fit the needs of the *Luo*. They have therefore accommodated the appropriated version of the borrowed music to be able to gain a culturally relevant musical experience and meaning from the same. The music has now adapted to the changing situations. Should we still insist on a culturally situated sonic interpretation after the music has travelled and gone through these processes? The music has now acquired a new identity and has regenerated a new cultural heritage different from what appertains in the West. Applying the cultural nuances of rule and procedure or context and association in this case become not only imperceptible but also irrelevant, for at this level, music appropriation and use serve the purpose of aesthetic experience, making music an object for contemplation.

Another case of appropriation can be explained with the aid of one of the widely travelled Kenyan popular music *Malaika.* The song is a lamentation of a young man to a beautiful girl whom he refers to as his angel. In African tradition one has to pay dowry to the parents of the girl he intends to marry. The young man laments that, although he loves the girl and wants to get married to her, he cannot just because he is poor and cannot get dowry to pay towards their marriage. The mood of the song is a sad one. This record has been redone by about nine artists apart from the original composer *Fadhili Williams*.

Malaika nakupenda Malaika---------- Angel, I love you angel

Nami nifanyeje, Kijana mwenziyo---- What should I do? A young person like you?

Nashindwa na mali sina we----------I have no wealth at all

Ningekuoa Malaika----------Otherwise I should have married you, my angel.

The original version was in Rumba with lyrics in Swahili, and moderate tempo. *Merriam Makeba* a South African, maintained the Swahili lyrics but changed the style to slow Samba, probably to fit her audience at that particular time since she was in exile in America*. Boney M.* also maintained Swahili text, but changed the style to Rock and Roll with a fairly fast tempo to fit the needs of his audience and make them gain musical experience from the same. In the process he compromised the lament mood. A Kenyan analysis *of Makeba's Malaika* would probably render it a wrong choice since a woman cannot refer to her fellow woman as her angel whom she would want to marry. At the same time I do not believe *Makeba* was ignorant of what the music meant. Probably she just liked the tune and wanted to give it some creative dynamics and perform it in another environment. Suppose the people in Europe got hold of *Makeba's* version and decide to use it for teaching, would we expect them to trace the developments of that music from Kenya so they can apply culturally appropriate/ congruent methods in teaching it? They may not even know that the music is from Kenya, because even *Makeba* wrongly introduces it as music from Tanzania, maybe because of Swahili language used. Maintaining traditional formats of instruction may not be possible in this case because that would mean first tracing the origin of the music to the time of the recording.

Challenges of teaching and learning musics of the worlds' cultures

Santos (1994) maintains that, to understand any of the world's cultures, one should understand something of its music because of the importance of music to the self-esteem and cultural integration of each society, and I cannot agree with him more. He reiterates that, in more recent experiences where intercultural conflicts have long threatened the co-existence of people around the world, the knowledge and appreciation of artistic traditions other than one's own, have not only attenuated prejudices but also enhanced the trust and opportunities for social interactions between cultures long divided by race, religion and cultural heritage, as well as political, economic and social heritage. Music arts therefore bridges and mediates between cultures.

In today's geo-political scene, the process of forging international ties is often predicted by an exchange of cultural information and artistic products. This can be achieved through studying musics of the world's cultures. When we teach a variety of musical practices as music-cultures, such teaching amounts to an important form of intercultural or multicultural education. Elliott (1994) says that entering into unfamiliar musical cultures activates self-examination and the personal reconstruction of one's relationships, assumptions, and preferences. Students come to realize that there is clearly not one, but many positions from which a musical culture can be understood and each position has much to offer. Consequently, students are obliged to confront their prejudices (musical and personal) and face the possibility that what they may believe to be universal is not. They therefore learn to have a polysemic interpretation of musical meaning. In the process of including learners into unfamiliar music practices, music educators link music education to the broader goals of humanistic education (Elliott, 1994, p. 13). Elliott seems to suggest that a meaningful teaching of musics of other cultures implies the teaching of new ways of life, conduct, behaviour, moral values, and musical thought. With all these prospects in place, the challenges in teaching musics of the world's cultures are still overwhelming.

Questions such as: How do we make a case for studying a specific musical culture? How much and to what extent can/should a musical tradition and its cultural setting be taught? Which teaching methods should we use? How do we address the phenomenon of change in world's musical cultures if we still insist that music cannot be understood intelligibly outside its culture? These and other questions have been problematic to scholars of world music.

The first thing we need to come clear about is that we are teaching music *within* diverse cultures not teaching *about* them. We should therefore concentrate on the musical cultures as the component of the culture of the people we decide to teach. Secondly, however hard we may try; we cannot replicate an external cultural tradition in the classroom. For example, the African concept of time in a performance is decided by participation. The more active the participation the longer the time a performance takes. A formal class is controlled by time; the content therefore has to be organized to fit the allocated time. Thirdly, we need to bear in mind that we are now treating the classroom as the music-making community and therefore we can only bring to class what that environment permits. This has been a problem because African music has a lot of extra-musical activities and that is what brings out the meaning in a performance.

In making a case for teaching a specific musical culture, various approaches have been used. Lundquist (1998) advises us to choose musical cul-

ture that reflects a global perspective. The term "global" is relative and the scope needs to be defined, because anything according to me, which is beyond my worldview in relation to my cultural orientation and exposure, is global, since that is where my view of the world ends. Sometimes we tend to choose certain musical culture because we like or know something about it and hope the students would like it too. In connection to this approach, I would like to recount an incident that occurred when I was a master student in a university in Kenya. The topic was music in African cultures taught by a visiting professor from Nigeria. He chose to teach us the *Ibo* musical culture, and the students' task was to apply/relate the information to what appertains in their cultures. I assume he chose the *Ibos of Nigeria* because he is an insider to the culture and therefore had resources (expertise) and facilities to teach the subject. We were a multi-ethnic class consisting of 9 students from 4 Kenyan ethnic communities i.e. Luhya (5), Luo (2), Meru (1), and Abagusii (1).

- **Prospect:** it was interesting and very captivating for us to learn new musical culture and expand our worldview.

- **Challenge**: Some students had nothing to apply to their cultures from the *Ibo* musical culture because they are divergent, apart from the Luos whose cultures are somehow similar to the *Ibo*.

- **Problem:** the lecture did not establish the cultural backgrounds of the learners in order to find out which aspects of musical heritage from the *Ibo* could be shared universally by the Kenyan students from diverse ethnic communities. Secondly, he has never evaluated the lesson to find out what applied/ not applied to which people, so that he could have bridged the gap to be able to attend to all students.

In the two Kenyan public universities that offer music, we teach Indian music, music of Pakistan. The choice is due to the fact that the Indians have become Kenyan citizens and we have to learn to co-exist with them, respecting and appreciating their culture i.e. good neighbourliness. Secondly, the resources are available in terms of print media and expertise. We are therefore able to use culturally congruent methods to teach the subject because we have a trusted source. The teacher should guide the resource personally and channel the discussion to cover what his/her objectives. An ethnomusicological perspective, which allows us to value each musical tradition for what it tells us about human musical expression, would be useful in this case because we have the insiders to the Indian culture.

Conclusion

The theory that African music cannot be properly understood and appreciated without the knowledge of its social and cultural context is applicable, depending on the component and type of music one is preoccupied with. Musicians decorate, improve, improvise, they borrow and adapt. They rarely simply reproduce music. For this reason it is insensible to say that we cannot understand music without understanding the culture from which it comes, especially when music has travelled. It all depends on the kind of meaning one draws from the music since, as (Elliott, 1994) explains, musical works are multidimensional "thought generators". The human cognition of musical works (even pure instrumental work) always involves several dimensions of musical meaning or information that listeners actively generate in consciousness. It is for this reason that Kenyans sing Lingala music from Zaire with a lot of passion and feelings, yet the language is unfamiliar to them. There are according to Trainor and Trehub (1992) three types of meanings in music namely, emotional (the representation of emotional state), attributional (whereby music evokes particular qualities independent of specific objects or events), and concrete meaning (referring to specific events in the world).

We have to accept that it is not easy for music educators to help students comprehend all kinds of world musics. Collaborative action research with scholars in different parts of the world through sharing of experiences and works in settings such as music education conferences, would expose us to diverse musical cultures of the world. Teaching of world music should not therefore be a mere expansion of intellectual horizon, but rather a societal necessity that helps engender an equilibrium in intercultural understanding, with direct effect on the future lives of world communities.

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