



**the eastern cape**  
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**SETTING AN AGENDA FOR THE PRESERVATION; PROMOTION;  
DISSEMINATION AND PROTECTION OF INDIGENOUS MUSIC AND ORAL  
HISTORY IN THE EASTERN CAPE PROVINCE.**

By

Alvin Petersen  
Music Department, University of Fort Hare, South Africa

Why is it important to preserve; promote; disseminate and protect indigenous music of the Eastern Cape – or from any other province in South Africa? Who should do this research and what should the research brief entail? How can this fit into the big picture which is couched in the all-too-familiar terms: "nation building"; "African renaissance" and the like? This paper seeks to provide answers to the above as well as to contextualize this initiative within its national and international settings.

Patricia Shehan Campbell (1989), who is a researcher on the use of indigenous musics in education, says that every folk song of a nation describes a moment within its history. Some of these moments are glorious and others best forgotten - and nothing captures it as effectively as song; dance and other forms of cultural and artistic expression. Consider, for example, Beethoven's use of the song *An de freude (Ode to joy)* in his Ninth Symphony. When he got to the point of composing the symphony where he decided that no instrument could capture this quite like the voice, he decided to incorporate singing within the symphonic compositional framework. *An de freude* represents mankind's universal quest for freedom and democracy in a way in which the spoken word cannot. Bringing this closer home: Dr. Wally Serote suggests that indigenous music; oral history and social context are intertwined. Many old Xhosa songs illustrate this very well. For example, the song *Umzi kaMzwindile* has a line which reads: *Ndemka nehlungulwana*, meaning "I have gone with the little crow". The inference here is that the person has died - and in the old days the dead were left in the open for the crows (Dargie 1988: 122).

In an era of globalization, it becomes inevitable that indiginization becomes a natural response. Local music forms such as *kwaito* represents a local reaction to the global onslaught of USA-mediated musical forms. As we say in the Western Cape, "Local is lekker."

Within the context of the history of South Africa, with particular reference to the last three-hundred years, it is of quintessential importance that a new voice is given to our indigenous musics. The artistic expression of the marginalized (here I include Black; Coloured; Indian; etc.), whether it be music; dance or any other form of artistic expression, was seen as primitive, ungodly and devoid of artistic excellence.

Many early accounts of Western European encounters with African indigenous music make for interesting reading. One such account is that of Grevenbroeck and it dates back to the year 1689:

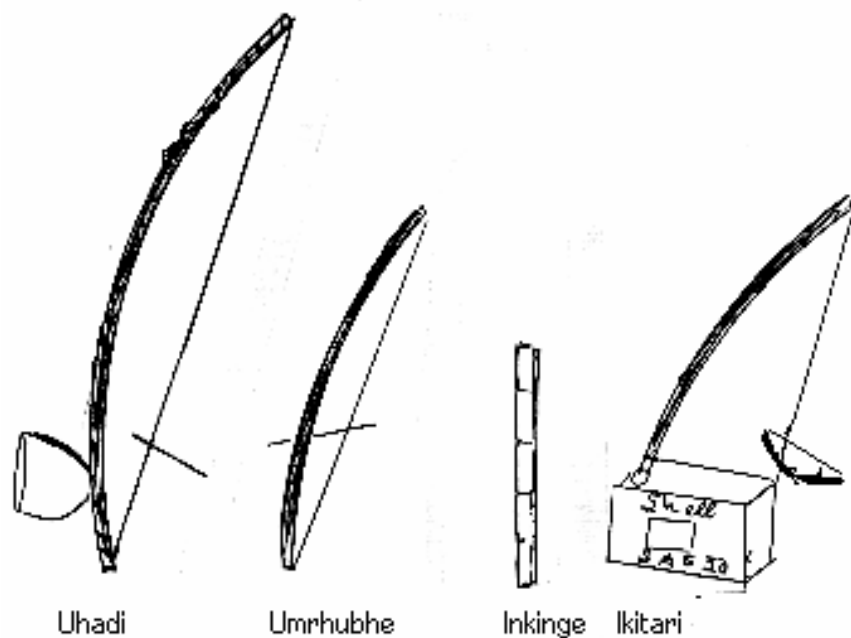
Their women sing an old song, nearly always the same, and to accompany it they strike their hands on a skin which is stretched over a pot which is made fast by bands and *riems* which does not make a pleasant impression upon European ears. The tambourine players sit with their legs crossed underneath them, on the ground, now raising their eyes to heaven and to the moon, and now lowering them towards the ground and to the pot filled

with the milk, making their music in their own way and with redoubled shrieking. (Jones 1957: 10)

About Xhosa music Lichtenstein (*circa* 1806) said:

The Koossas are much behind hand with some of their neighbours with regard to music. Instruments proper to themselves they do not have, for only those of the Hottentots are to be seen among them, and not so well constructed (cited in Dargie 1988: 41).

He was probably referring to one of at least four different kinds of bowed musical instruments of the Xhosa. It could have been the *ikitari*; the *uhadi*, the *inkinge* or the *umrhubhe*.



**Fig. 1 Xhosa musical bows**

African perceptions of what ‘music’ is; how it is created and even how it should be learnt; are all very different from the west. It is composed and performed by groups, rather than by individuals, and is preserved by oral/aural mechanisms. As an inevitable result, relatively few forms of South Africa's indigenous musics are preserved in the form of audio recordings and written transcriptions.

A start was made in the year 2000 to correct past imbalances when Dr. Ngubane, the Minister of Arts, Culture, Science and Technology, mandated a team of academics and some of his own personnel to produce a strategic plan for indigenous musics of South Africa. This task team had as its terms of

reference the collection; preservation; promotion and protection of South Africa's indigenous musics. I am a member of this team and we named ourselves the National Indigenous Music Panel (NIMP). Two years after its founding, we produced the document: *Towards A National Strategy For Indigenous Music*, co-edited by Caesar Ndlovu<sup>1</sup> and myself. It contains a number of key areas, some of which are discussed below:

### **Collecting of library and archival material**

#### ***Purpose***

- Creating a database of musicians in the forms of writing biographies, articulating musical styles and performance contexts of performance
- Drawing a music map of South Africa
- Compiling song anthologies and developing materials suitable for use in the school

### **Preserving**

#### ***Purpose***

- To make South African indigenous musicians accessible to a wide variety of interest groups, e.g., ethnomusicologists; music educators, sound archivists; performers; students and school learners.

### **Dissemination of African Music and Dance**

- To create employment opportunities for indigenous musicians
- To create and sustain a lively interest in indigenous musics of South Africa on the part of music educators; ethnomusicologists; music educators; playwrights and various other interest groups

The area of dance was regarded as a special case because the NIMP working group regarded it as the one area in which the various South African cultures could be showcased. We believed that the creation of a government-supported national dance troupe would go a long way towards promoting nation building. As part of the First National Indigenous Music Conference, held at the Playhouse (Durban) between 05 October and 07 October 2000, a dance troupe performed under the co-directorship of Nomsa Manaka and Jonas Gwangwa. It was history-in-the-making because it represented the first time that a serious attempt was made at showcasing many and varied styles of dance. This dance company is now known as the National Classical Music and Dance Troupe (NCMDT) of South Africa and its aims and objectives, as articulated in its business plan, are as follows:

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<sup>1</sup> Professor Caesar Ndlovu is the Executive Director of the Playhouse Company in Durban.

- To undertake research studies in various forms of traditional and modern dances making up the national cultural dance-landscape
- To run education and training workshops in these art forms
- To preserve South African classical/traditional dance and music forms that reflect the multicultural nature of South Africa's heritage
- To perform in venues in the provinces nation-wide, especially on national days and historic events
- To contribute significantly to the unification of the nation via a single multi-racial and multicultural national song and dance troupe
- To teach South African values and norms through the study and performances of South African music and dance.

The NCMDT should be regarded as a work-in-progress rather than a *fait accompli*, since it is envisaged that, over a period of time, it will develop a professional, representative repertoire of training and performances around the country. At the time of writing a full-time company has yet to be established - as a Section 21 company, to give it the necessary autonomy and legal status under the caretakership of the National Arts Council.

The First National Indigenous Music Conference, hosted under the auspices of the Department of Arts, Culture, Science and Technology, brought together many: practitioners of indigenous music and dance; musicologists and ethnomusicologists; archivists and other museum personnel; superstars and aspirant stars; *sangomas* and *imbongi*; tribal elders and royalty; and, last but by no means least, politicians. Lest I fall into the trap of turning this presentation into a conference report-back, I choose rather to encapsulate some of the sentiments expressed by guest speakers, in the form of choice phrases:

We have been loyal to the music of the west. The challenge that we now face is to be loyal to that which is our own. I urge you to take the question of archiving seriously and to embrace it as part of your culture and give it contemporary relevance. (Prof. Kwabena Nketia<sup>2</sup>)

You have beautiful music. You are asleep. Success comes out of your foundation. Your foundation is culture and especially your indigenous culture. There is a great richness in Africa and we must enhance it. (Mr. Welcome Msomi<sup>3</sup>)

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<sup>2</sup> Prof. Nketia is the author of the most widely-published book on African Music, entitled: *The Music of Africa*.

<sup>3</sup> Mr. Msomi is the Chairperson of the National Advisory Board for the Performing Arts Councils.

We [African musicians] were called vagrants, while classical musicians were called musicians. Nowadays, when I listen to Ladysmith Black Mambazo, I say: “Alleluiah.”  
(Miriam Makeba)

We are blessed in this country, since we have a wealth of music. We must not let it go to waste. I was very happy to perform my indigenous music and to become famous in the process. So was my bank manager. (Joseph Shengu Shabalala)

Members of the NIMP working group as well as DACST officials, visited Hungary between 01 and 08 October, 2001 and the purpose of our visit was two-fold:

- To consult broadly with Hungarians concerning their methods of preserving, promoting, protecting and disseminating Hungarian indigenous musics, and
- To attend the 20<sup>th</sup> International Conference of the Audio Engineering Society

When we returned, we made a number of recommendations to the Minister Ngubane, chief of which was, as we saw it, the proposed establishment of a South African House of Traditions, or *Inqolobane*. This idea was conceived when we had visited Hungary Heritage House in Budapest. It had been established by the Hungarian Ministry of Culture to preserve, co-ordinate, disseminate and promote indigenous musics of Hungary. The main purpose of Hungary Heritage House is to revive Hungarian culture in all its facets and geographical areas, which include Rumania, Transylvania and the Carpathian Basin. Towards this end, there are 23 members of staff tasked with the responsibility of creating a database of musicians/dancers and music/dance styles.

In the Eastern Cape Province, the one organization which already has all the features of a South African House of Traditions, is the International Library of African Music, in New Street, Grahamstown. This facility should be regarded as a provincial, if not, national, treasure.

In 2002, NIMP merged with the National Oral History Project (NOHP) and this merged organization is known as the National Music and Oral History Project, or NIMOHP. This was done since oral history, music and dance all exist as a single entity within African communities. NIMOHP produced a 5-year plan, an important facet of which was its recommendation that the project should be piloted at selected tertiary institutions in South Africa.

In February 2003 members of NIMOHP visited the Institute for African Music and Dance in Ghana, where, for the first time, an African context was afforded to the ideas of collection; preservation; and the like.

In 2003, the music departments of three universities, namely, the University of Venda; the University of Zululand and Fort Hare were awarded funds by the Department of Arts and Culture to conduct pilot projects in indigenous music and oral history. The fact that the University of Fort Hare has been selected as one of the recipients of funding is significant, both for the university as well as the province. I envisage that this project will be undertaken as a joint initiative between the Music Department; the National Heritage and Cultural Centre of the University of Fort Hare, and the provincial Department of Arts, Culture and Sport.

It is hoped that fieldworkers will be drawn from the areas and communities to be researched. Ideally, they should be unemployed young adults who (preferably) have tertiary qualifications and/or fieldwork experience. They will be trained over a period of two weeks in the following areas:

- The methodology of collecting oral and musical data
- The use of field cassette tape recorders and other electronic equipment
- The use of various questionnaire formats particularly those related to participant observation techniques
- Ethical issues

The University of Fort Hare already has a head start in Xhosa music research largely because of the groundbreaking work of Prof. David Dargie, who, over a period of several years, has been collecting ; transcribing and classifying Xhosa music as well as other South African music genres. This has culminated in the production of fifteen compact cassette<sup>4</sup> recordings as well as accompanying explanatory booklets.

That indigenous music and oral history should both be the twin focus of research projects in the Eastern Cape province is of utmost importance, since these should raise the profile of both the culture bearers as well as the province as a whole. When setting an agenda for indigenous music and oral history all role players must be involved, including the provincial Department of Arts, Culture and Sport and the board of the National Arts Festival. We are indeed fortunate to have someone of the calibre of MEC Balindlela, who has graced the First National Indigenous Music Conference with her presence. It was there that she said: “The harvest is great and we need more reapers – to bring all provinces together [through indigenous music] is an African dream.”

A working group collectively known as the Indigenous Music Project had its inaugural meeting at the Katberg Hotel between the 22<sup>nd</sup> and 24<sup>th</sup> October, 2002. The members consisted of officials from the Department of Arts, Culture and Sport, staff of the music departments of Rhodes University, the

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<sup>4</sup> For a full listing of these, please refer to my references at the end of this paper.

University of Transkei and the University of Fort Hare. At this meeting no fewer than 16 indigenous musical instruments and a number of Xhosa song and dance categories, were identified. The mission of the Indigenous Music Project was formulated as follows: “ The promotion of music in the Eastern Cape Province will help to build a sense of community awareness, promote the previously disadvantaged musics, multicultural understanding, provide recreation, entertainment and enjoyment, become an education tool, encourage tourism, sustainability and bring people together.” This is a tall order in anyone’s estimation. Is it possible or even desirable to bring people together in their hundreds or thousands through indigenous music? At that meeting there was broad agreement that auditions and workshops in towns representative of all of the 24 municipalities of the Eastern Cape Province be set up, and to use the very best of these for an Indigenous Music Day. The target areas are outlined in Table 1:

<b>Target Towns</b>	<b>District</b>
Buffalo City	East London
Butterworth	Mnqumane
Fort Beaufort	Nkonkobe
Stutterheim	Amahlathi
Idutywa	Mbhashe
Mt Frere	Umzimvubu
Humansdorp	Kouga
Port Elizabeth area	Nelson Mandela Metro
Umtata	K.S.D.
Lusikisiki	Ngquza
Mt Fletcher	Ulundi
Sterkspruit	Senqu
Libode	Nyandeni
Lady Frere	Emalahleni
Queenstown	LuKhanji
Cofimvaba	Ntsika-yethu
Qumbu	Mhlontlo
Cala	Sakhisizwe
Aliwal North	Maletswai
Graaf – Reinet	Qamdeboo
Cradock	Inxuba Yethemba
Umzimkhulu	
Engcobe	
Grahamstown	Makana

**Table 1**

Factors which militate heavily against the success of a venture such as this is the large distances between towns as well as the compounding factor of bad roads. Still, I believe that this is a worthwhile venture since it should contribute considerably towards establishing a database of Eastern Cape indigenous musicians; dancers; and those who have intimate orally-transmitted knowledge of the culture.

Recording companies as well as the SABC should do well in getting involved with South Africa's indigenous musics. The programme on SABC2, called *Meloding* which presents songs as well as

snippets of information which are presented in script - can easily be adapted to encompass indigenous music.

There are many different organizations who would be very interested in hearing more about South Africa's indigenous music and oral history. The list below is by no means complete:

- Community Music Commission of the International Society for Music Education
- Center for Black Music Research (Chicago)
- International Council for Traditional Music and Dance
- International Centre for African Music and Dance (Ghana)
- International Association for Sound and Video Archivists
- Audio Engineering Society

It was the Roman poet and author, Martial, who once said: "*Ex Africa, semper aliquid novi*". - "Always something new from Africa." Perhaps I should add: "Watch this space for details."

## References

Dargie, D. (1988) *Xhosa music - its techniques and instruments, with a collection of songs*. Cape Town and Johannesburg: David Philip.

Jones, A.M. (1957) Drums down the centuries. *African Music* Vol. No. 4.

Nketia, J.H. Kwabena (1974) *The music of Africa*. London: Victor Gollancz Ltd.

Shehan Campbell, P., and Anderson, W. (1989) *Multicultural Music Education*. Reston Va. Music Educators National Conference.

## Discography

A selection of compact cassette disk recordings made by Prof. David Dargie:

*African Sunday marimbas*

*Magical musical bow* (with accompanying booklet)

*Make and play your own musical bow* (with accompanying booklet)

*Umngqokolo Thembu Xhosa overtone Singing* (with accompanying booklet)