

# Arts and Africa

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ARTS AND AFRICA

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ALEX TETTEH-LARTEY

Welcome to 'Arts and Africa'. This is Alex Tetteh-Lartey, and today we hear about the traditional music of Zambia.

MUSIC "Chando"  
by The Big Gold Six.

Mwesa Mapoma is an ethnomusicologist and Senior Research Fellow in the Institute of African Studies at the University of Zambia. For many years now he's been working on an analysis of the music of the Bemba people who live in the Northern and Central provinces of Zambia and on the Copperbelt.

MUSIC

Now Mwesa now what was that song ?

MWESA MAPOMA

Well its a song called 'Chando'. 'Chando is the name of a person. It was played by the Lusaka Radio Band, who then changed their name to The Big Gold Six. Its one of the Latin American influenced form of new music in which the guys pick up local tunes and try and present them in a form which they think is going to be more acceptable to a much wider audience not only in Zambia but also outside.

TETTEH-LARTEY

What is Zamrock ?

MWESA MAPOMA

Well some people call it Zamrock, but Zamrock is really Zambian traditional music which is played to the modern pop flavour, but you could hear some of the rhythms which are used, particularly Zambian rhythms and the boys are choosing songs or melodies which are from traditional groups within Zambia and they call this Zamrock.

TETTEH-LARTEY

Well I think you could give us an illustration of a purely traditional form of music after this.

MAPOMA

I think the next thing one could consider as a follow-up of what Alick Nkhata had done was something that was going on somewhere in other areas where small groups of people trained primarily in the mission place, started taking traditional songs and singing them without any instrumental accompaniment and quite a few groups came up - The Crusaders, who are one of the most famous groups at the moment, and we also had The Mapoma Brothers - my young brothers and cousin who used to sing. They had taken, for example, a children's song called "Shikiti, Shikiti". You put one child in the middle and the others are else where, and they sing "Shikiti, Shikiti", - the song goes something like this.

SINGS "SHIKITI, SHIKITI".

AL

TETTEH-LARTEY

Well, The Mapoma Brother - they're your brothers ?

MAPOMA

Yes, two brothers and a cousin. But the singing here - some people have commented before - think that it is the western way of harmony but not really, its just the way the traditional people sing. The only thing which has happened is that instead of harmonising at the bottom, they are also harmonising above, but in the traditional Bemba form. And another thing they have done is to slow the music down. And by slowing it down it somehow tends to change the character of the music and it fits into a form that people can easily identify as western music. Which brings up a point that those issues which are raised when isolating a cultural process and areas within music might not be in the music but rather in the mode of presenting that music, which in this case, they have slowed down instead of changing the context and the structure of the music.

TETTEH-LARTEY

What is the attitude of people in Zambia to African traditional music ? What attempts are you making to educate them from the beginning - do you take them young - probably in the schools ?

MAPOMA

Well, this is another point that many African countries are tackling now on how to try and educate the young, because in Bemba we have a saying "to the growing tree the future generation" - meaning "the young people are the ones who are going to carry on the traditions". So if we're going to have the young people moving away from traditional music we are going to have problems. So school, which is the area where problems in fact are started is now being the target. We find in music that to a certain extent has got a meaning to it, and one of the songs which I would like to demonstrate is

MAPOMA

'Nunde', which means "let me join".

It's a story song in which children are taught how to be helpful within the society. It's a story about a hunter who married three wives but on occasions he disintegrates. The three wives would go and pick his little pieces up and join him up together and give him life. The one who picks him up would start by singing. The second one comes in - she has to join the pieces, and she sings. The lucky man is now fully joined together, but he hasn't got life, and the last wife is the one who gives him life. The man is given life and he joins his three wives happily and stays with them. But one thing went wrong at one stage. After being joined the one who gave him life refused to breathe in and give him life, which was another way of showing that although you've got to work together as a group in a society you also have got to see how you respect various people in what they do. The husband didn't respect the wife who gave him life, but loved the beautiful ones who picked up the pieces and joined him, and the other one who he did not like made him die completely.

What we are doing is to make the children realise that it isn't only music which is there, but there is another aspect which is presented by older people. So we look at the various musicians who are at present in our society and we show them, by playing either music from those people or by actually bringing in the musicians to perform to the children. The children in Lusaka and in the urban areas are at the moment the main beneficiaries. We have The National Dance Troupe, in which some of these guys are and we take them and play to the children. There are people who make jokes about

There are people who make jokes out of the social interaction of people, and here is an example of Mulenga Abelo who, is singing about a beautiful woman who pretends that she doesn't want to be picked up.

MUSIC: ICANAKASHI NKUMENYE sung by Mulenga Abelo.

TETTEH-LARTEY

Well, women have been attacked throughout the ages for hypocrisy haven't they! When a woman says no she means yes! I wonder what the reaction to this song is in Zambia?

MAPOMA

Well, some men really take a very keen interest in the song and they laugh at it, and as for the other reaction I'll leave it to you because you seem to be more experienced in women's reactions! LAUGHTER.

TETTEH-LARTEY

Well thank you very much Mwesa. Mwesa Mapoma, Senior Research Fellow in ethnomusicology at the Institute of African Studies at The University of Zambia. And that's all from 'Arts and Africa' for this week. Don't forget to join us again at the same time next week. Until then this is Alex Tetteh-Lartey saying goodbye.

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