III.4
Mbira Music | Musics, Structures and Processes

6 September 2012 — Lecture room ZHG 005
9.30–11.00, 11.15–13.15, 14.00–16.00 und 16.15–18.15

Convenor: Klaus-Peter Brenner (DE-Göttingen)

The Shona-speaking peoples of the Zimbabwe/lower Zambezi cultural area and their historically and culturally related neighbors have developed, and are the bearers of, an extraordinarily rich cluster of lamellophone traditions – rich in terms of the diversity and complexity of the instruments' morphology, tuning plans and tunings, as well as in terms of the grammatical complexity and stylistic coherence of the musics to which they are structurally linked by a long historical process of co-evolution. Most of these traditions belong to a geographically distinct and relatively homogeneous style area that is characterized by a unique system of cyclical harmonic sequences pervading and governing the music.

Since 16th century missionary father Dos Santos, 19th century travelers David Livingston and Carl Mauch and early to mid-20th century scholars Hugh Tracey, Günther Spannaus, Heinrich Husmann[1] and Michael Gelfand started to explore the terrain these traditions have, up to the present day, persistently gained ethnomusicological attention. Research has followed different agendas and covered a wide range of issues including the instruments' organology, the etymology and geographic distribution of their names, the typology and evolutionary genealogy of their tuning plans, their playing techniques, the ensemble structures associated with them, their musics' complementary multi-part organization, pattern cognition and perception, concepts and strategies of improvisation, performance settings, vocal extensions and poetry, modes of transmission, repertory structure and evolution, as well as the wider cultural dimension of their function, meaning, aesthetics, religious and political symbolism in shifting rural and urban contexts, and their recent adoption by growing global world music networks.

1 Both Günther Spannaus (1901–84) and Heinrich Husmann (1908–83) became professors at Goettingen University later – Spannaus as the director of the Institute of Ethnology from 1959 to 1966, and Husmann as the director of the Department of Musicology from 1960 to 1977.

Among the issues on which, with respect to some of these lamellophone traditions, research activities have been (re)intensified more recently are the – largely implicit – grammars which are underlying and governing these musics and their systemic interrelation with the respective lamellophone type. The symposium is going to highlight some new research concerning especially these cognitive aspects. Specific topics to be addressed will include (not least with regard to some of the less well known lamellophone types from the periphery of the style area under discussion):

- the interrelation between a specific type of mbira and its music, including the ways in which, on the one hand, its tuning plan and playing technique channels musical creativity, and, on the other hand, the ways in which the tuning plan itself is subject to gradual modification in the course of a slow historical process of evolutionary change,
- the filiation of tuning plans, and the emergence/invention of new tuning plan variants as a reaction to modified musical demands, especially in the course of recent developments,
- the interrelation between deep structures (harmonic sequences) and surface structures (individual mbira pieces, their interlocking parts, combining specific metro-rhythmic models with specific variational spaces in terms of the melodic and harmonic organization of the tone material),
- the interrelation between standard versions of mbira pieces and the variational spaces associated with them which, in some cases, can be extended up to the point of blurring the line between two different mbira pieces' identity,
- the cognitive strategies of improvisation (in the sense of model- and rules-bound variation, and in the sense of a player's real-time choice of stock material according to a cyclical sequence of time-slots) which play – in various degrees of density (depending on decision frequency and scope of choice) – an important role in these musics,
- the interrelation of the two co-improvising hands of one player,
- the interrelation of two mbira players' co-improvisation according to the kushaura/kutsinhira concept,
- the macro and micro structures (structured inflections of elementary pulsation) of metro-rhythmic and motional patterns underlying mbira pieces and their hosho (rattle) accompaniment,
- the system of structural interrelations of different mbira pieces, their variants and versions which constitute the repertoire of an individual player or a specific network of players,
- the historical/evolutionary dynamics of such a system,
- the – again largely implicit – (phon)emic concepts behind the much debated (phon)etic variability of the mbira tunings,

- the interrelation of (phon)emic tuning variability, perception and classification of mbira pieces, and repertoire structure,

The symposium will also address some of the methodological and theoretical implications of these topics as well as the history of, and specific contributions to, their ethnomusicological exploration. Methodology will be discussed especially with respect to the problems of tacit (implicit, non-verbalizable) emic musical knowledge, where the researcher has basically the choice between

- the classical methods of transcription and analysis of field recordings,
- the application of computer-based interactive experiments in order to explore the musician's knowledge while circumnavigating the necessity of its verbalization,
- the possibility of involvement in a long-term (mutually transculturative) process of communication with an individual musician/music teacher during which the researcher may absorb some of the musician's tacit knowledge himself, whereas the musician may absorb some of the researcher's explicit concepts, and
- the combination of two or of all three of these approaches.

Participants are going to share their most recent work and reflect on what they regard as important directions for future research.

9.30–11.00 Session I (Chair: Klaus-Peter Brenner)

9.30 *Michael Baird (NL-Utrecht)*
The Kankobela of the Batonga – today and in the future

10.00 *Marcel van Dijk (NL-Amsterdam)*
The basic kalimba core in musical perspective

10.30 *Sheasby Matiure (ZW-Harare)*
The Nyunganyunga Mbira in Zimbabwean Schools: A Historical Legacy of Kwanongoma College of Music and a Dumisani Maraire Number Notation Innovation

11.15–13.15 Session II (Chair: Claire Jones)

11.15 *Perminus Matiure (ZW-Gweru)*
Hybridization of the Shona *mbira* instruments: the birth of *karimba shauro*, *nyunganhare* and *karimba nhovapasi*

11.45 *Tony Perman (US-Pomona)*
Brevity, Ambiguity, and Expressivity in *Mbira dzaVaNdau* Performance

12.15 *Joel Laviolette (US-Austin)*
Tuned Overtones, Interlocking Hands, and Resulting Melo-rhythmic Patterns in *Matepe* Music

12.45 *Laina Gumboreshumba (ZW/ZA-Grahamstown)*
»The System of the *Mbira*«

14.30–16.00 Session III (Chair: Gerd Grupe)

14.30 *Paul Berliner (US-Durham) and Cosmas Magaya (ZW-Harare)*
Cross-cultural Collaborative Research on Shona Mbira Music

15.30 *Claire Jones (US-Boston)*
Shona Mbira Tunings and the Production of New Sounds: The Mbira Orchestra of Garikai Tirikoti

16.15–17.45 Session IV (Chair: Paul Berliner)

16.15 *Jennifer Kyker (US-Rochester)*
The role of *hosho* in *mbira dzavadzimu* performance

16.45 *Gerd Grupe (AT-Graz)*
The motional domain of mbira music: Perceptive and metro-rhythmic implications of mbira fingering patterns

17.15 *Klaus-Peter Brenner (DE-Göttingen)*
A cognitive fireworks of model-bound two-handed improvisation: *Mbira dzavadzimu* master Ephat Mujuru's ›deep‹ *kutsinhira* rendition of *Bukatiende diki*

17.45 *Gerhard Kubik (AT-Wien)*
Mbira Music and Scott Joplin's *Bethena*
(paper will be read in absence of the author)

Friday, 7 September 2012
Lecture Room, Department of Musicology, Kurze Geismarstraße 1

9.30–16.30 *Meeting*
Opportunity for informal extension of the discourse and playing/listening to mbira music

Abstracts

Michael Baird

The Kankobela of the Batonga – today and in the future

I first recorded kankobela in 1996, and then again in 2008 when it became sadly clear that the instrument is disappearing fast. So I returned later in 2008 on a second field trip specifically to find and record as many kankobela players as possible, before this beautiful music disappeared forever. On the Zambian side I located 8 players (of which I recorded 7) and on the Zimbabwean side 10 were located in the area from the west of the valley and the Binga district (of which I recorded 7). In 1957 Hugh Tracey recorded extensively in the Zambezi Valley at the invitation of Elizabeth Colson, and found at least one player in every village: within the space of 50 years the tradition is dying out. What are the reasons for this disappearance? No two players sound alike – it is a very individualistic mode of expression. Is there a common collective basis for this music? The kankobela sounds different to other lamellophone traditions. It just does not fit in with Andrew Tracey's proposition that the karimba is the mother of all plank-model lamellophones. Perhaps the kankobela is the oldest of them all…

Marcel van Dijk

The basic kalimba core in musical perspective

The major musical function of lamellophones is to provide a steady harmonic and rhythmic stratum as accompaniment to a singing voice. The class of instruments with a concentric, V-shaped tuning plan has the ability to produce fast triadic patterns. The ›distichous‹ tuning plan can be considered an archetype. The arrangement of the keys is such that swift accompanying patterning is possible with a minimum of sideward thumb movements. This is in contrast to instruments with a linear ascending tuning plan.

On the Lala Kankobele, as on many other similar instruments, the accompaniment is played by using differentiated sets of keys and standard thumb patterns. The tuning plan of this type of instrument – which combines the archetypical model with two mutually mirro-

red segments – is in fact an optimal arrangement. With a limited amount of keys different chords can be played, together with short melodic clusters and dyads underlining the sung melody, using one of two possible roots. The key arrangement, however, is linked to a musical style based on pentatonic or hexatonic scales, and playing in parallel fourths.

The broad distribution of this specific tuning plan, also known as the *8-note core kalimba*, might well be attributed to its efficiency, versatility and flexibility. Its footprint is left on the Mbira dza Vadzimu in the form of a ›frozen‹ key configuration. It is the remains of a powerful mechanism that has become detached from its original musical context.

Sheasby Matiure

The Nyunganyunga Mbira in Zimbabwean Schools: A Historical Legacy of Kwanongoma College of Music and a Dumisani Maraire Number Notation Innovation

The Nyunganyunga is a fifteen key type of mbira that originates from the north western parts of Mozambique and was brought to Kwanongoma College of Music in Southern Rhodesia, now Zimbabwe, by Jack Tapera. Kwanongoma College of Music was an institution created in the early 1960s as a center for training African music teachers to teach music in African schools of the then colonial Southern Rhodesia.

In this paper I present the historical legacy of a defunct institution of music education in Zimbabwe, that is, the Kawanongoma College of Music. I present the ideas and innovations of Robert Sibson which led to the creation of this historic institution. I further discuss innovations of this institution regarding musical instrument building and, in the process, I focus on the standardization of the Nyungwenyungwe mbira, later known as the Kwanongoma mbira and now the Nyunganyunga. I discuss the way this instrument has become a school musical instrument in Zimbabwe. I present the Maraire innovation of number notation which has become the basis for teaching this instrument in Zimbabwean schools. I conclude by a hands on activity where symposium participants will learn a basic pattern on the instrument through number notation.

Perminus Matiure

Hybridization of the Shona *mbira* instruments: The birth of *karimba shauro, nyunganhare* and *karimba nhovapasi*

The Shona are an ethnic group occupying areas surrounding Harare, the capital city of Zimbabwe, and areas to the East, South-East and West. The Shona's cultural heritage embraces, among other things, a strong *mbira* legacy comprising different types of *mbiras* as well as a rich repertoire of traditional *mbira* songs. These *mbiras*, especially *njari*, *matepe* and *nhare,* have been highly efficacious in sacred ceremonies like *mapira* in which the music is used to evoke spirits in spirit mediums. The tuning systems and pieces were inherited from the fore-

fathers. However, technology and the desire to improve the resultant sound on *mbira* triggered some *mbira* makers to innovate different *mbira* hybrids by adding keys or altering the position of certain keys on *mbira*. Examples of such *mbira* makers are Chaka Chawasarira and the Mbira dzeNharira group who added some keys on *nyunganyunga* and *mbira dzavadzimu* respectively. Consequently the move resulted in several hybrids of *mbira* with new tuning systems whose music is more appealing to the contemporary ear. Although these hybrids differ in the number of keys and their arrangements, they can still play common pieces like *nyamaropa*, *nhemamusasa*, *mahororo*, *taireva* and many others. Several *mbira* researchers and players concur that the need to improve the resultant sound on *mbira*, together with the impact of modernity, are the driving forces behind innovation of *mbira* hybrids.

This paper unpacks musical ideas and concepts that prompted the writer to innovate three *mbira* hybrids: *karimba shauro* (lead), *nyunganhare* (rhythm) and *karimba nhovapasi* (bass). The presentation will be supported by practical demonstrations and film clips. The bulk of the data informing this paper is drawn from a field study carried out in Hwedza District, Kwanongoma in Bulawayo and the Mbira Centre in Harare between 2005 and 2011 to solicit data concerning *mbira* tuning systems and arrangement of keys.

Tony Perman

Brevity, Ambiguity, and Expressivity in *Mbira dzaVaNdau* Performance

The mbira dzaVaNdau is unlike any of the other lamellophones commonly played in Zimbabwe. While obviously related, its cycles are more varied, its rhythmic tension and ambiguity less predictable, and it is almost exclusively a solo, secular instrument. By examining the sound of the mbira dzaVaNdau and the varied pieces played on it, I explore how the holistic presentation of rhythm, melody, and harmony, as developed in the subtle and ambiguous exploration of pitch, timbre, and texture bring us closer to fully understanding how such music is organized and becomes powerful. Through a sustained comparison with the mbira dzavadzimu, I address the unique characteristics of mbira dzaVaNdau performance. In attending to such pieces as *Chifembera*, *Baba Enda Joni*, *Ndaremba Kusewa Gudo*, and *Madanga*, I examine how the layering of patterns, as defined by the fingers that play them, the register of the patterns themselves, and overt rhythmic tension contribute to brief, dense, and repetitive performances that undergird improvisational play and vocal expression through song. Unlike the repertoire of the mbira dzavadzimu, the mbira dzaVaNdau's music utilizes a variety of cycle lengths, beat patterns, and harmonic sequences. The elementary pulse is less commonly audible, the beat is rarely reinforced by the hosho, and cycles played, due to their variability, are less predictable. Mbira dzaVaNdau performance embodies expressivity through brevity, and clarity through density. Freed from the responsibility of ceremonial

performance, the Ndau mbira can contribute to musical games, social commentary, poignant expressions of personal anguish, or stories of joy and whimsy.

Joel Laviolette

Tuned Overtones, Interlocking Hands, and Resulting Melo-rhythmic Patterns in *Matepe* Music

One of the most exciting things to me about the uniqueness of the *matepe* is the use of the overtones of low bass notes to create interlocking melodies with the right hand. *Matepe* makers tune the overtones to two octaves above their respective fundamental. Playing the *matepe*, you are essentially hocketing with yourself and creating these *kushaura/kutshinira* interactions as a soloist. Some authors have mentioned this in passing, but its depth has not really explored (this includes the study of the resultant melodies and how different rhythmic patterns can arise by bringing out overtones). I will analyze this phenomenon on the basis of some exemplary transcriptions, and also give some practical demonstration on the *matepe*. I will touch on some of the rhythmic variations of the right hand of the *matepe* piece ›Much-enjedza Mutonga‹ and demonstrate how those same overtones can create different rhythmic variations.

Laina Gumboreshumba

»The System of the *Mbira*«

This paper emanates from my M.A. thesis entitled: Understanding form and technique: Andrew Tracey's contribution to knowledge of lamellophone (*mbira*) music of Southern Africa (Rhodes University, 2009).

Andrew Tracey's pioneering publications are a landmark in understanding *mbira* music. My paper discusses Tracey's theory of form and harmonic structure in *mbira* music, which he terms »the system of the *mbira*« (A. Tracey, 1970, 1989). His theory has influenced and contributed to the work of ethnomusicologists, musicologists and composers, and his technical analysis of *mbira* music has been the foundation of many subsequent publications by other scholars. A demonstration of Tracey's theory will be shown with footage from his film, »Technique of Mbira dzaVadzimu« and by performing selected *mbira* songs which illustrate how *mbira* music originates from a musical principal. The »standard Shona chord sequence« identified by Tracey will be discussed to show how it affects the structural interrelations of various *mbira* pieces and examples of such *mbira* pieces will be given.

As a Shona *mbira* player myself, I will briefly give my own personal experiences with *mbira* music and an insider's perception of the interpretation of the music in performance. I will highlight how the resultant *mbira* song melodies interplay or make conversation(s) with the listener/*mbira* player. I address how insiders do not hear the music in terms of Western

concepts of form in music, but rather understand it in their own way, which is linked to their culturally-based vocabulary of the music. The effect of repetition, or what I term the »spirality« of *mbira* music, is an element/characteristic of African music that will be briefly addressed in terms of the significance of its effect upon the listener or *mbira* player.

Paul Berliner and Cosmas Magaya

Cross-cultural Collaborative Research on Shona Mbira Music

For forty years, ethnomusicologist Paul Berliner and mbira master Cosmas Magaya have been involved in an interdisciplinary project documenting the mbira repertory and its creative practices. A multi-volume book based on their collaboration is due to be published by The University of Chicago Press in 2012. The book is a mixed-genre work, combining the goals of music scholarship (ethnography and music theory), pedagogy, and music advocacy/activism. It is concerned with analyses of Shona mbira music (its creative processes and aesthetic values), with documentation of its practices of transmission, and with cultural preservation. In their joint presentation, Magaya and Berliner will discuss the methodology of their collaborative research and its varied challenges, including the complexities of carrying out research in Zimbabwe at a time of heightened racial tension as well as the politicization of music during the liberation struggle. The challenges also include interpreting the music's basic vocabulary and its transformational processes within an oral tradition in which innovation is an inherent feature of performance. Other challenges involve developing suitable models for re-presenting the repertory and practices that can play complementary roles in the music's preservation and international dissemination, ultimately, lending support to musicians and mbira makers in Zimbabwe. The presentation will sample the project's findings and feature a demonstration of the improvisational techniques by which artists in the mbira tradition uniquely render/re-create compositions in every performance.

Claire Jones

Shona Mbira Tunings and the Production of New Sounds: The Mbira Orchestra of Garikai Tirikoti

In 1999, the group Mbira DzeNharira (mbira of the Nharira Hills) burst onto the Zimbabwean commercial music scene with a recording so popular it became the first by an mbira ensemble to reach the top twenty on the popular music charts. A major factor in the group's success was the sound and texture generated by an innovative orchestra of five differently-tuned mbiras (all Zezuru mbira dzavadzimu, also known as mbira huru). In the ensuing years similar ensembles have proliferated in and around Harare. Some, Zimbabweans as well as Westerners, decry the orchestras as 'un-traditional.' Yet the orchestral tuning system, introduced by mbira player and maker Garikai Tirikoti, derives from the same harmonic system

that underlies the repertoire of the large Shona lamellophones. Most of the traditional mbira songs share a standard harmonic sequence (first described by Andrew Tracey in 1970) which can start on any pitch of the mbira. The resulting transpositions or modal shifts—there are seven possibilities—have given rise to much of the mbira repertoire. Once accustomed to playing the standard sequence from different keys, I maintain that it is no large leap to tune one's mbira from a different key. The Tirikoti orchestral mbiras are tuned so that the shared scale starts from a different key on each instrument, yielding seven distinct but related tunings. Given the flexibility built into the mbira system, the mbira orchestra continues the tradition of producing new sounds from a seemingly restrictive structure.

Jennifer Kyker

The role of *hosho* in *mbira dzavadzimu* performance

In his pioneering study of the Zimbabwean *mbira dzavadzimu*, Paul Berliner suggests that the rhythmic pattern established by the *hosho*, or gourd shakers that accompany *mbira* playing, is an integral part of an *mbira* ensemble. Despite its vibrant, sonically prominent contributions to *mbira* performance, however, *hosho* has not played an equally prominent role within the scholarly literature on the *mbira dzavadzimu*, which has addressed *hosho* playing only in passing.

Drawing upon extensive fieldwork, I offer an analysis of the influence of *hosho* on *mbira* ensemble performance. In addition to addressing how the macro-rhythmic pattern established by the *hosho* functions to integrate elements of the *kushaura* and *kutsinhira*, I argue that the *hosho's* role in establishing a particular performance tempo exerts a significant influence on which versions of a particular piece *mbira* players choose to employ, with important implications for issues of improvisation. Drawing upon songs such as *Chipembere*, *Nhemamusasa*, and *Mahororo*, I illustrate how the *hosho's* role in determining tempo makes important contributions to the development of new versions of *mbira* pieces, as performers respond by elaborating upon versions of familiar pieces when possible, or conversely, by simplifying them when necessary, often during the moment of performance. Finally, I observe that hosho performance is heavily dependent on embodied knowledge, which is necessarily tacit rather than verbalized, posing particular problems for analysis. Given the complexities of patterns of micro-rhythmic inflection in *hosho* playing, I suggest that the transmission of this embodied knowledge, through sustained relationships between researchers and musicians, can greatly enhance our understanding of the role of *hosho* within *mbira dzavadzimu* performance.

Gerd Grupe

The motional domain of mbira music: Perceptive and metro-rhythmic implications of mbira fingering patterns

The motional domain has long been an issue in scholarly writings on African music. Regarding mbira music, Andrew Tracey (1970), Robert Kauffman (1979), and Paul Berliner (1978, 1981) have mentioned this aspect of mbira music, however, without going into detail.

Based on a number of pieces learned from Shona mbira players, their use of its four playing areas has been investigated. Specific versions of a piece may be characterized for instance by omitting one manual completely or by constantly alternating between two playing areas. In fact, elaborate motional patterns appear to be a characteristic feature of mbira music. While eluding observation by a listener whose perception is shaped by gestalt effects and auditory streaming, they form an integral part of the performance when viewed from the musician's own perspective. Since these fingerings also produce audible rhythms, the motional and the rhythmic dimension combine in what can be called motional-rhythmic patterns.

There are basically two different types of these patterns. While some support the beat, others tend to mask or veil it, especially when the tonal arrangement of notes is built on binary or quaternary figurations which contrast the basic ternary subdivision of the beat. These patterns belong to the building blocks (Nettl) of mbira music just like the harmonic sequences that constitute its tonal and melodic basis. They do not limit the musicians' options, however, who rather use them creatively and modify them in their performances.

Klaus-Peter Brenner

A cognitive fireworks of model-bound two-handed improvisation: *Mbira dzavadzimu* master Ephat Mujuru's ›deep‹ *kutsinhira* rendition of *Bukatiende diki*

My paper targets the issue of improvisation in *mbira dzavadzimu* performance in the light of one particular musician's personal practice. The study that I am going to present here is based on the transcription of one complete ensemble performance of the piece *Bukatiende diki*, played by the *mbira dzavadzimu* masters Gaspar Nembire (*kushaura* part) and Ephat Mujuru (*kutsinhira* part) and analytically recorded in 1993. I will exemplarily study the model-bound (but within this confinement highly inventive and explorative) improvisational practice of the latter. By means of a linguistically inspired method of analysis I will show, firstly, that Mujuru's real-time decision behavior is characterized by a constantly high decision frequency and by a constantly broad scope of choice, and that this applies to the full cycle of the abstract model as well as to the complete length of the performed 32 model realizations. Secondly, I will show that both of his hands participate with almost equal frequency in this abundance of real-time decisions, and, thirdly, that they do this – most surprisingly – completely independently of each other. The result of this analysis can be interpreted not only as

representing an extremely dense particular musical performance. It can also be taken as a snapshot of this particular master's – by his own account ›deep‹ – musical competence concerning the *kutsinhira* part of *Bukatiende diki*, a competence which in turn must be regarded as the result of a decades-long personal process of creative elaboration and persistent brain and finger training.

Gerhard Kubik

Mbira music and Scott Joplin's *Bethena*

– paper will be read in absence of the author –

This paper was stimulated by a brief beat perception experiment involving myself and a member of our jazz group in south-east Africa: Sinosi Mlendo. The test record was Scott Joplin's concert waltz *Bethena* on piano roll. Both of us discovered independently that we did not hear this piece as a waltz, but related Joplin's patterns to a beat as in Zimbabwe mbira music. This finding may have wider implications and even answer a long-standing question posed by musicologists in the mid-20th century: Why is it that neither jazz nor African music use ¾ meter? Our answer is that there are plenty of ¾ divisions, e.g. in the right-hand variations of a boogie-woogie pianist, and in many xylophone and mbira styles in Africa, but that they are integrated and absorbed within 12-pulse cycles, divisible by 6, 4, 3 and 2. The reference beat of musicians and dancers divides the 12 by four, creating a basis of triplets. ¾ rhythms are part of the polymetric scheme, but appear as overrhythms, not as a series of impact points representing a reference beat.