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Journal

Journal of Altered States of Consciousness, 5(3)

Author

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Publication Date

1980

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Peer reviewed

J. ALTERED STATES OF CONSCIOUSNESS, Vol. 5(3), 1979-80

THE ROLE OF DREAMS AND SPIRIT POSSESSION IN THE MBIRA DZA VADZIMU MUSIC OF THE SHONA PEOPLE OF ZIMBABWE

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ABSTRACT

Among the Shona speaking people of Zimbabwe/Rhodesia, the music of the twenty-one note Mbira Dza Vadzimu combined with singing and dancing create a necessary context for communication with the spirits of the ancestors. Communication is established through a chief medium for the community and possession only occurs after long periods of music and dancing. The music used for these ceremonies is drawn from the style of the widespread panpipe ensemble, Ngororombe, and shares important formal and melodic traits with all other forms of Shona music. The omission in the Mbira Dza Vadzimu music of potentially disruptive elements common in other Shona music such as drumming and call and response singing patterns, suggests a conscious effort to maintain in this music an atmosphere conducive to spiritual possession. A second and important link in this music to the realm of the ancestors is in the manner in which the repertoire itself is enlarged. New compositions are frequently learned by the musicians of the community through dreams in which the dreaming musician is taught to play a new composition by an old man. The old man who appears in such dreams is acknowledged to be the spirit of one of the old musicians who provided music for these ceremonies in former ages. The compositions learned through dreams are accepted as those same compositions which were used in those ceremonies of many generations past.

Speakers of the Shona group of language comprise the largest number of inhabitants of Zimbabwe, the country which is today known as Zimbabwe/ Rhodesia but which previous to the establishment of a popular vote and a representative form of government was known simply as Rhodesia. There are no major differences between the various dialects of Shona spoken in Zimbabwe and speakers of one type of Shona seem to communicate freely with speakers of another. This linguistic unity is also reflected in Shona music. Regional song and dance styles also retain the most characteristic elements of the general Shona music style.

Of the many types of music to be encountered in Rhodesia, several are for general community entertainment. Included among these are the organized amateur groups of male performers who dance, sing, and play drums in special style/repertoires such as the Chiwayawaya and Kwaira and also the ensembles of panpipe players called ngororombe. The most frequently encountered and most widespread instrument is, however, the mbira or njari. Although some forms of this instrument are used to accompany the voice in songs for general enjoyment, one special form of the mbira is used throughout Zimbabwe in connection with the various rituals and observances associated with the spirits of the ancestors. This instrument, the Mbira Dza Vadzimu (The Mbira of the Ancestors) is used exclusively for this ritual purpose. It is shown

in Figure 1. Its relatively large body is a solid piece of wood and the metal lamellae attached to it are rather wider than those of the other instruments of the mbira type found in Zimbabwe. This mbira has broken bits of the shells of land snails fixed to its face. The entire instrument is fixed into a large calabash resonator to which additional snail shells have been attached. Particularly on the more urban variants of the Mbira Dza Vadzimu, bottle caps are more common today than snail shells. One of the earliest descriptions of the Mbira Dza Vadzimu was given by the German geologist, Carl Mauch, in the journal of his visit to the Zimbabwe ruins in 1871. Mauch included a sketch of a Mbira Dza Vadzimu which he heard played there and also notated one example of a composition. Mauch's sketch suggests an instrument with thinner keys than those used today. This original work of Mauch's has been carefully re-examined and clarified by Gerhard Kubick [1]. The instrument described by Mauch has six keys more than the Mbira Dza Vadzimu as it is found today in use by the Shona people. One can today only surmise what possible effect these extra keys may have had on the music for this instrument.



Figure 1. Mbira Dza Vadzimu outside of its calabash resonator.

The present use of the Mbira Dza Vadzimu among the Shona has great social significance. It is associated exclusively with the traditional ancestral spirit observances. The past ten years have seen a continued increase in the number of Mbira Dza Vadzimu players and a more open interest in traditional Shona religion to such an extent that it has become a matter of some concern to the Ian Smith government during its last years who remained ever alert to new sources of possible African insurrection.

Although renewed interest in the rituals of the ancestral spirits may in some way be connected with the recent nationalistic movements, its importance to the Shona people seems even deeper. The very nature of music used in the ritual, the manner in which it functions in the ritual, and the method by which the music is conceived and composed (to use a somewhat inappropriate European music term), provide an elemental link between all participants in the ritual as well as having the potential of great personal significance to each member of the group.

MUSIC IN THE RITUAL

The role of the mbira players is important in that they provide the means by which the words of the ancestors are heard directly, through ritual possession of the chief medium, often an mbira player, or somewhat indirectly by means of those compositions which they brought back from the realm of the spirits through dreams. This role is more clearly defined in its importance to the Shona than the impression which might first be understood by these words. In some real sense the Shona, in particular, each of those who are allowed, serve as the host for an ancestral spirit, enter the realm of these spirits in a way which they conceive as quite tangible. The line between dreams and states of possession seems to be a matter of degree of intensity rather than a distinctly different

type of spiritual activity. Songs together with their instrumental parts can be conceived in a state which we would describe as dreaming but which the musician also speaks of as a time when he receives a message in music from the spirits of the ancestors. Likewise, the medium will interpret what we would again call his dream, as a message in another form from the spirits. The ritual possession, which only occurs in the context of the formal gathering of the large communal group, is a period in which a similar communication with the spirits takes place but in this case, the spirit, with the passive compliance of the medium's voice can join the community in song and dance and can also talk quietly and soberly with them but directly in words and music rather than symbolically through the sleeping state of the musician/medium. To the Shonas, the medium's role is the important one. I refer to the role of the musician only because both functions are not always combined in one person. Not all the mbira players become possessed by the spirits of the ancestors nor do they all learn music or receive messages in their dreams.



Figure 2. Musicians of the group Mucheteera Mujuru in Chiduku Province,

Much of the information discussed here is drawn from two primary sources with whom I had contact during 1971: Mucheteera Mujuru (see Figure 2), an important religious leader and mbira player from the Rusape area of Chiduku; secondly, another important religious leader and mbira player Hakurotwi Muude (see Figure 3), who lives in the African township of Highfields just outside of Salisbury but whose ancestral home is in the province of Mondoro. Two written sources here of importance: Paul Berliner's *Soul of the Mbira* [2] and the booklet of Andrew Tracey published by the International Library of African Music entitled *How to Play the Mbira Dza Vadzimu* [3]. Tracey's booklet relies primarily on the playing of a Shona musician called Gwanzura Gwenzi who also resides in Salisbury.

There are some interesting contrasts between Mucheteera and Muude. Mucheteera is the religious leader or chief medium of his small village in Rusape. He is an mbira player but technical proficiency and special attention to musical polish and technique seem to be less important to the general style used in this very sincere and almost austere community. Mucheteera's group has regular annual ceremonies for which all the people gather in the main house or banya. These ceremonies may last for several days. During these times, music goes on almost continuously and anywhere from four to eight or nine musicians may be heard playing at any one time.

Hakurotwi Muude is an urban African, who although regarded as an important religious leader and medium amongst his people, works during the day as a car upholsterer in a European-owned automobile firm. He is rather well-known as a professional musician having made some 45 rpm recordings and, on occasion, has performed at Rhodesian Broadcasting Corporation's African Service. Every Friday evening at his home in Highfields township just outside Salisbury there is a bira, an enactment of the ancestral spirits' ceremonies to which all the members of his group are invited. He also frequently visits his family at his ancestral home in Mondoro province, where his aunt is also a very important spirit medium.

The ceremonies themselves, whether they are held in the rural provinces or in the urban African townships outside a major city like Salisbury, are basically similar. Music is essential to the ceremony, being played almost continuously by anywhere from two to eight or more mbira players with one or two hosho or rattle players. When the listeners are so moved, they may join in by adding interlocking

hand-clapping patterns. The music goes on more or less continuously from early evening, when these ceremonies begin, until well into the night, and in the rural areas, very often until dawn and may continue sporadically all during the day following it. Whenever one of the participants is so moved, he may join in singing with or perhaps “over” the music or may suddenly rise from the floor and begin to dance for a few moments. There is nothing formerly structured such as group singing or fixed or formal dancing, but both singing and dance are regarded as an accepted response of any of the participants to the spirit of the music.

The overall effect is that the music provides an atmosphere that becomes almost tangible and since the music is continuous, this atmosphere quickly becomes all-pervasive as well. The participants in the group absorb the atmosphere constantly and whenever the level of absorption is sufficiently high, they respond by either singing or dancing, or by becoming possessed. Being



Figure 3. Musicians of the group of Hakurotwi Muude of Salisbury here playing in their tribal ancestral home on Mondoro Province.

possessed in this way is not regarded as particularly unusual but rather as a matter of course. Only a few members of the group do, in fact, become possessed at any single event. The high point occurs when the leader of the group himself becomes possessed. When this happens, he is always possessed by the same spirit, usually one of the important ancestral spirits. The spirit speaks to the group about their history and traditions, and at the same time, may offer moral guidance. While the spirit may dance and sing, there are also long periods of quiet monologue or dialogue between the spirit and members of the group. Important symbols of religious significance in the ceremony are the use of black ostrich feather crowns and black cloth robes. The drinking of maize beer, called ndoro, is in some instances part of the ritual.

In witnessing an event of this type, one is perhaps less likely to view it as ritual than as a social gathering in which after a time the older generations are invited to join, albeit in spiritual form. The spirits of the ancestors being older than the oldest in the village, are treated with great respect, their words and wisdom adhered to and they are invited to dance together with others of the community. Throughout this, the atmosphere of spontaneity is preserved.

Since there is no ritually formalized aspect to such an event, the music itself serves to cross the threshold beyond the present and to form the bridge by which the spirits are able to enter into dialogue with the members of the village. The music of the Mbira Dza Vadzimu shares many common characteristics with other Shona musics. There are some aspects of it which make it particularly suitable for the purposes both of joining a group of people into synchrony during the entire event and also to foster an atmosphere conducive to possession.

A stronger sense of group participation in the music is engendered by having each piece begin and end informally. The compositions seem to grow organically out of the meanderings of one or two players which gradually coalesce into a full performance. After some time, anywhere from ten minutes to a half-hour, the full participation seems to wither away again. At this point it seems that most of the players have determined that it may be time to stop and play something else. This free atmosphere is very different, say from the performance of a Chopi Ngodo ensemble in Mozambique, in which the entire group begins and stops with great precision, indicating without any verbalized message to the audience, that the players are a well-organized, cohesive unit and are in absolute control of the performance and thus are very separate from the audience. There is of course, also a strong sense of audience participation in Chopi performances. It is merely that there is a different type of role distinction made between the musicians and the rest of the community in these specific Shona and Chopi contexts. In the music of both of these groups there is a strong, predictable element, both rhythmic and melodic, which thus permits the

listeners to concentrate more deeply on the sound and possibly to become more aware of the subtleties.

One important aspect of the Mbira Dza Vadzimu music is one which may help to create an atmosphere which is conducive to spirit possession. This is the fact that in terms of general sound and style it is very closely related to one of the most widespread and perhaps oldest forms of Shona dance music, that of the panpipe ensemble ngororombe (see Figure 4), a style already associated with the oldest elements of their culture, that they are more susceptible to entrancement in the intense atmosphere of the spirit ceremonies.

THE STRUCTURE OF COMPOSITION

The nature of the compositions themselves is perhaps somewhat deceptive. From the vast body of compositions or tunes, there appear to be a great number that have rather similar patterns. One of the most widespread and often varied compositions is Nyamaropa, the title of which refers to meat which is being used as an offering to the spirits. There are several different versions or settings of Nyamaropa, many of which may be known by specific qualifying names. Other examples are clearly borrowed or based on Nyamaropa, for example, the composition Mahororo is recognized as a separate piece both by Hakurotwi Muude and Gwanzura Gwenzi, but simply called another version of Nyamaropa by Mucheteera Mujuru.

Many compositions have unique and specific titles. There may be certain words or phrases that are commonly associated with them, and although there may have been more complete songs, no specific and complete song texts are usually sung with the composition today. The singing is a personal expression of the singer who can either select a melodic line from the many possible contours available in the mbira part, or create new lines in specific vocal styles and may interject a few words or phrases that are appropriate to the context of the composition, or may sing in a more wordy style. Some of the compositions have as titles the names of animals such as Shumba, the Lion. In these cases, Hakurotwi Muude has said that the animal refers not to the spirit of the animal itself, but rather to an animal seen by the chief medium in his dream. This animal then represents the spirit of the ancestors attempting to communicate something to him in his dream, and the specific guise in which the ancestor appears in the dream is in itself a message.

The Mbira Dza Vadzimu as is commonly used today by the Shona people has twenty-two keys. The arrangement of the keys is according to patterns most convenient for playing the traditional compositions. The thirteen keys on the left side are all played by the left thumb. The next three keys to the right of the longest key in the center are played by the thumb of the right hand while the last six keys on the right are plucked from underneath by the right forefinger.



Figure 4. Ngororombe players in the Nyahuku region of northeast Zimbabwe/Rhodesia

Andrew Tracey has worked out a system of notation which is useful for transcribing mbira music because it illustrates the fragmentation of the melodic line between both hands. (See Example 1 shown below.) It is based on the western staff notation but modified to function as a tablature. Minute irregularities in rhythm, in part the result of individual or the general style, as well as the subtleties of melodic variation, are beyond the scope of this work. For the present, we may think of the Shona mbira music as metrically regular. Tracey's notation makes use of printed paper on which the metric units are already indicated as lines going across the staff. A bar extends through the middle between the two staves, and noteheads are drawn above or below according to whether they are left or right hand. The characteristic form of these mbira pieces fits into a rhythmic cycle of forty-eight pulses or beats subdivided into four sections of twelve beats each. These forty-eight-beat cycles are repeated over and over again with minute rhythmic and melodic variations. The basic pattern of tonal relationships and fundamental contour of the piece, however, remain the same. Thus, each statement of the basic piece will consist of two pairs of staff lines or forty-eight beats. The rests are indicated simply by retaining the original lines without any notehead attached to it.

However, viewed in this way or in almost any notation system, the music for the Mbira Dza Vadzimu appears deceptively simple. Although they are at times played by one musician, all of the compositions are constructed in two interlocking parts, which are then doubled according to the number of players. The main or basic part is called the kushaura, the starting part or leading part and the second part which is by no means secondary in importance is called the kutsinhira, to sing a refrain or exchange or to answer. The two parts are based on the same general melodic and harmonic movement, but are generally in contrastive rhythms. The kushaura is generally thought of as the simpler as well as more basic part while the more advanced player might play the kutsinhira part. Although the kushaura is considered the basic part of the composition, the hand-clapping patterns and most noticeably the hosko beat, as well as the dancers' steps, synchronize much more obviously with the kutsinhira part, so the overall effect of hearing the ensemble is that the rhythm played by the kutsinhira is the one which dominates. In general it appears that the kushaura parts vary greatly from one composition to another whereas, although the kutsinhira part always follows the harmonic and melodic contour of the kushaura, their rhythmic patterns seem to be more regular.

Example 1:
Tracey's *mbira* notation and the actual sounds.

Each of the forty-eight beat basic compositions can be divided into four twelve-beat sections. The music is cyclical in the truest sense of the word not only in that it repeats again and again, but also in that the starting point of the cycle is not fixed, nor is there a clear agreement as to where the cycle begins. As a matter of fact, different players tend to start playing the pattern at different points in the cycle. The actual starting point for each player is not important. Once a composition begins, other players join in at whatever point in the cycle they choose, but it is the synchronization between parts which must be preserved. Therefore, while the division into four sections of twelve beats each is clear, the exact division points between them may not always be distinct; that is, one or two notes of the ending of a twelve-beat section might also be regarded as the beginning few notes of that next twelve-beat section.

The overall effect of the interlocking of kushaura and kutsinhira, the hoshho and handclapping rhythms, is a richly layered texture in sound which provides a dense material atmosphere in which all participants, audience and mbira players alike, become absorbed listening to any number of possible melodic and rhythmic fragments. In this setting, the distinction between a grouping of sounds actually heard and those which the listener/performer imagines, and thus is moved to create at the moment becomes diffuse. It is in both the structure of the composition as well as the manner in which it is played that a combination of predictable and new elements are contained. This static yet constantly varying texture draws all deeper into the sound until no separation exists between performer and listener, nor between creator and reproducer. The intensity of the group participation is such that any one of those in the room may be moved to dance, to sing and inevitably, a few to become possessed.

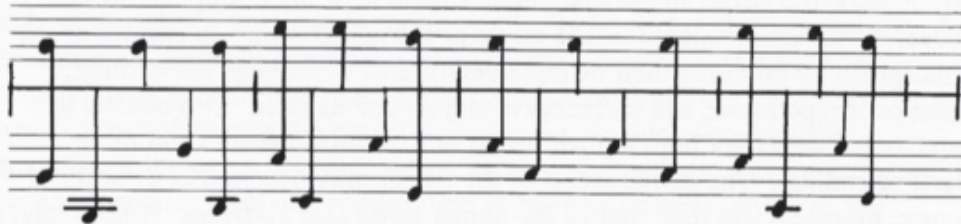
The original inspiration for the formalized aspect of the composition may have come in a dream to the mbira player. The same atmosphere of the original inspiration is reproduced in the group performance, and through the insistent repetitions the entire group is drawn into the atmosphere of the dream. It is certain that by repeated experience all the members of the participating community have been conditioned to this form of response. Likewise, the conditioned response to the music may well have had an effect in turn on the form and the style of the singing, dancing, and playing of the mbira. What is noteworthy is that the end result manifests itself in an overall style which stands out in marked contrast to the xylophone ensemble of the Chopi mentioned above. In the Chopi ensemble, the music or the musicians are in control of the atmosphere by imposing their own pre-determined beginnings and endings, number of repetitions, and entrances of singers and dancers. This control is emphasized with the Chopi in their use of brilliant introductions and often startling endings. The participation of the community becomes as a matter of course, more reactive than that of the Shona Mbira Dza Vadzimu. Admittedly, a major assumption is being taken for granted; that is, what is perceived as predictable or contrastive by one group would find some parallel perception in the other groups. Hopefully, the responses of each community to these different types of performance format are suitably strong evidence of the deliberate intentions of these responses. There are other types of Shona music which, had they been required to serve as the source of the ceremonial bira, might have altered the context of the ritual as it exists today. One element of Shona style notably absent from the Mbira Dza Vadzimu style, is the call and response or leader and chorus format, a technique which certainly has been used pervasively in other forms of Shona music. This technique so formalizes the resultant music and separates the participants into distinctive groups that its use in the cohesive texture and spontaneous atmosphere of the bira ceremony is unimaginable.

The structure shared by all of the compositions in the Mbira Dza Vadzimu repertoire cannot be accurately described as a melody type nor even as a ground or bass line over which variations are superimposed. Rather, it is more accurate to think of the structure of this music as a series of four sections which are harmonic/melodic fragments which follow each other in regular order. The four sections are repeated always within the same number of fixed beats. The kushaura and kutsinhira parts are the delineated aspects of the individual compositions themselves which have been abstracted from the tonal material of four harmonic/melodic sections of the piece. The rhythmic and melodic contour of this abstraction, especially as it is exemplified in the kushaura part, gives a particular character to that one ordering of the possibilities available with the rotation of the harmonic fragments. This ordering is what is recognized as the composition.

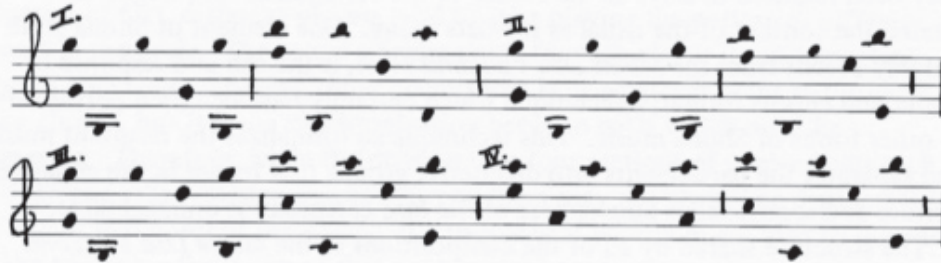
Nyamaropa is a well-known composition and one which appears in many variant forms as well. It is said by Shona musicians to be the oldest Mbira Dza Vadzimu composition, Example 2 illustrates one basic form of the kushaura part. The four harmonic/melodic sections are indicated by the Roman Numerals I, II, III and IV. Each section is of twelve beats, thus two appear on each line of twenty-four beats. The harmonic structure of these four fragments is given in a single staff reduction in Example 3 (shown above), with pitches as they actually sound. The harmonic groupings are indicated by brackets. The pattern of shifts of these harmonic groupings superimposes another rhythmic contour on each composition. It is this pattern of harmonic changes which most clearly delineates the contours, followed by the instrumental and vocal lines. The variants that occur in a performance in the vocal line and in mbira are almost like meanderings through the maze of tonal possibilities suggested by the abstracted pattern. Such a

pattern as in Example 3 would not be spoken of or abstracted by the Shona. There is a strong sense of the integrity of the composition itself and its variants which would render an abstract pattern or the need for it, meaningless to Shona musicians. Nonetheless, it serves here to illustrate what a listener hears, with each repetition of the forty-eight-beat pattern etching deeper into the memory the contours of the form of which Example 3 is only a frozen abstraction.

What is apparent in many of the forms of Shona music is that something like this four-section or four-phase structure permeates it, even in the case of solo singing. After having heard hours of this patterning, one begins to feel the presence of a tangible form, of clusters of tones through which singer or mbira players pick out a path. The pattern — tonal, rhythmic and harmonic, gradually becomes fixed in the memory by successive hearings until an image of the possible parameters of the specific composition becomes so clear that it is not surprising that a creative individual could dream additional variants. While almost all compositions share the formal structure of four sections of twelve beats each, the manner and place in which the tonal centers are shifted is unique to each piece.



Example 2:
Nyamaropa.



Example 3:
Nyamaropa actual sounds.

In another composition, *Mandarindare*, we note the same subdivision into four sections of twelve beats but with a different pattern of harmonic shifts, given once again in the single staff transcription below it (see Example 4, shown above). This version is based on the manner in which Hakurotwi Muude played it during the summer of 1971. It is a composition which has become associated particularly with him— He describes the title as meaning “walking slowly and carefully as though in attempting to walk through a shallow river,” and further says that this is music that was played as the chief spirit medium, Chaminuka, in order to save his people, surrendered himself by walking to the camp of the Ndebele Army. When they could not kill him, Chaminuka advised the Ndebele that he could be killed only by a small boy with a sharpened wood stick. How much of this story is based on historical fact and how much is based on the collective knowledge drawn from dreams, it is impossible to say. However, the knowledge of this study certainly colors the hearing of this music whenever it is played.

One additional composition, *Nhema Musasa*, Example 5 (shown on pages 225 and 226), will



Example 4:
Mandarindare.

serve to illustrate the individual differences which arise from the pattern of shifting harmonic centers as well as to outline the general characteristics of the style as it is delineated in the four phrase, twelve-beat structure. In this example the single staff line transcription combines the notes of both the kushaura and kutsinhira parts omitting for purposes of discussion here three notes which are doubled by both instruments. The kushaura in many compositions seems to have the strongest individual character, but as variations begin to fill in the open spaces, the kutsinhira part enters and further covers the contour of the kushaura because of the doubled notes. With the filling in of rests and the use of identical range and timbre of both instruments, something more like the single staff line version comes to be heard. In fact, the characteristic contour of the kushaura part, that is, the pattern of its leaps and rests, becomes absorbed and gradually lost in the rich texture produced by several different variants and by many kushaura and kutsinhira players, each adding his own variants. Therefore, what remains audible and what continues to serve as the consistent unifying element of the performance and which is characteristic of the particular composition itself, is the pattern of the harmonic rhythm

In this transcription of Nhema Musasa, this harmonic rhythm is divided into groups of beats as follows: I; 4-3-5; II; 4-3-5; III; 4-3-5; IV; 7-5. Paul Berliner, in his analysis of the same piece, gives it a pattern of 5-4-3 throughout [2, p. 80]. The apparent discrepancy is worth noting. There are some small differences between the two kushaura parts which prompted me to regard section IV as divided into 7-5 beats. The more glaring discrepancy between my use of 4-3-5 beat sections and Berliner's use of 5-4-3 beats throughout is largely one of illusion. His transcription, Example 6 (shown on page 227) begins at the point which, in my transcription, is the five-beat unit of section II. Berliner in his discussion of the form, describes the four-section form in a manner that gives the impression that there is a fixed starting point and ending point [2, p. 75]. Later, however, he states that in practice musicians may begin to play a piece at any place in the four section cycle and similarly may choose to end at any point. The patterns must synchronize with what is being played by the other mbira players during the performance, but it is possible that each musician may think of the beginnings and endings of each piece as occurring at those places where he first learned them. The version which I have given above, Example 5, for Nhema Musasa, is based on the form in which it was taught to me by Luken Pasipamire.

This apparent discrepancy in perceptions of the beginning points in the cycle of any piece does not effect the performance in any perceptible way. The synchronization between the parts is maintained regardless of which musician begins the piece or of which point in the cycle he chooses to start with. This reinforces the sense that the instrumental version of the composition is truly cyclical and that it serves as a continuous ground for the entrance of the vocal lines. The order of the four sections, once

begun, is strictly observed, but the cycle continues without regard to where the players join in nor to the point at which they stop. It is tempting to offer the subjective impression that the cycle is going on continuously whether it is being played or not and that the musicians only make it audible while they are playing.

The musical score consists of eight systems of two staves each. The parts alternate between Kushaura and Kutsinhira. The Kushaura parts are characterized by a steady, rhythmic pattern of eighth notes, while the Kutsinhira parts feature a more complex, melodic line with some rests. The notation is presented on a grand staff with two five-line staves per system.

Kushaura

Kutsinhira

Kushaura

Kutsinhira

Kushaura

Kutsinhira

Kushaura

Kutsinhira

Example 5 (Part 1):
Nhema Musasa

Example 5 (Part 2):
Nhema Musasa, combined Kushaura and Kutsinhira

THE MUSIC OF THE NGOROROMBE ENSEMBLE

Berliner quotes one musician as saying that the reason the mbira was first invented was in order that a single musician could play all of the parts of the ngororombe panpipe ensemble himself [2, p. 65]. Certainly, the relationship in terms of texture and structure between these two different types of music is a very close one. In the ngororombe ensemble, each panpipe player holds a set of four to six pipes in one hand. While blowing into the pipes in a fragmented pattern which interlocks with the patterns being produced by the other players, each also sings a few notes in the spaces left between the notes sounded on the pipes, which greatly increases the number of tones which might be produced by each player. In his free hand each player holds a rattle with which he marks out a pattern which compliments his own panpipe pattern. The resultant texture is indeed rich in the same type of fragmented harmonic texture which characterizes the mbira playing.

The four section form used in the mbira music is also characteristic of the ngororombe music. The voice parts are more tightly bound to the instrumental parts than in the mbira music since the player can only manage to sing one or two notes before resuming the blown patterns of the panpipes. Although the sounds of the human voice and blown tubes of the ngororombe predominate in contrast to the sound of the metallic keys of the mbira, the texture of both ensembles consists of a great number of isolated tones which combine to allow the ear to select a number of different possible melodic lines. Examples 7 and 8 (shown on pages 229 and 230) give two performances of ngororombe ensembles from the Mkota region of Zimbabwe. In Example 7, the four section structure of the piece is shown clearly. Each section is divided by a bar line in the transcription. The single staff reduction is a simplification of the actual complexity of the real performance for the sake of showing the pattern of harmonic changes more clearly.

The abstracted form given in this transcription does not accurately represent the effect of the real sound of this music. All the minute substitutions and variations that appear sporadically as the ngororombe phrases are repeated over and over again are an important but here missing element. In addition, the effect obtained by hearing the several separate layers superimposed on each other creates the illusion of hearing fragments of melody which are, in fact, made up of certain notes of different parts which the listener begins to mentally lift out of what is actually being played. The stratified texture of ngororombe music is in this way similar to the Mbira Dza Vadzimu music. Both create an ambience in which the listener can selectively let his imagination arrange relationships between the sounds that may not, in fact, be played by anyone in the ensemble.

It is perhaps misleading to abstract the clusters of harmonic relationships from these compositions. Shona musicians do not abstract them in this manner but always illustrated the relationships in a piece by actual performance of either the basic part or by demonstrating variants. There is, however, a distinct sense of a tune which winds its way through the series of harmonic relationships. The clearest illustration of this type of tune appears in the second vocal line of Ex-

The image shows a musical score for 'Nhema Musasa' transcribed by Berliner. It consists of four systems, each with two staves. The top staff is labeled 'Berliner' and the bottom staff is labeled 'Pasipamire'. The systems are numbered I, II, III, and IV. Each system shows a melodic line with various ornaments and a corresponding line on the lower staff. The notation includes notes, rests, and dynamic markings.

Example 6:
Nhema Musasa transcribed by Berliner (*kushaura*)

ample 7. That line is quoted in Example 9 (shown on page 230). This singing style, called mahon'era, can be used in ngororombe or mbira music and appears to fill out the lower outline of pitches in the composition by selectively meandering through the harmonic pattern. In Example 7, the fragments of the first two measures are identical. However, in the performance the distinct presence of a note in the panpipe part at the end of the second measure anticipates a pitch from the next section and prepares for the harmonic transcription. In Example 7, this panpipe note appears in brackets at the end of the second measure. This meandering melody along with the higher voice part which seems to yodel in alternation with the panpipe in a style similar to the huro style of mbira singing together seem to cement the fragmented instrumental parts into the cohesive, melodic, harmonic motion of the piece. Put another way and as Berliner states, the singing enables the player to illustrate the composite melodic line he is hearing at the moment in the instrument part.

The ngororombe and mbira music provide a musical context which allows performers and audience to predict the general contours of the composition while allowing each to delve deeper and deeper into the texture and to provide

new combinations of sound to be played or imagined. The high degree of predictability produced by the numerous repetitions of the piece provide the context for the various forms of participation. Under such circumstances and in a social context in which trance and possession are accepted and desired forms of participation, it is not difficult to imagine the effect that this type of musical structure might have on those susceptible to possession.

While it is clear that the Shona regard the music of the Mbira Dza Vadzimu as a vital element in the bira ceremony and see it related stylistically to the sound of the ngororombe ensemble, it seems likely that the music evolved characteristic elements which were compatible with the requirements of the ritual, rather than that the adherents to the ritual went searching about for an appropriate music. It is quite possible that the mbira styles after drawing heavily from the style of the panpipe ensemble, may have later had a return influence on the ngororombe style. These speculative propositions are put forth here only to suggest that the development of the style could have taken any of a myriad possible paths and that more than likely several simultaneous trails were followed. In the same manner the resultant mbira style must have in some manner also influenced the bira, perhaps in matters of style, speech rhythm, general speed, and duration, for example.

THE ROLE OF POSSESSION AND DREAM STATES

Possession and dreams are important sources of regeneration and stimulus for the Shona region as well as for the tradition of the mbira and its continued evolution. The Shona context presents two distinct functions and conditions for each of these avenues to the spirit world of the ancestors. Dreams which are significant to the ritual or to the music occur only to special people; that is, the medium may interpret his dreams as significant messages from the ancestors. Presumably he knows how to select from his dreams unless all are considered significant. My own impression which seems to be generally corroborated by Berliner is that when a musician dreams of music it is usually considered significant. A person who does not play the mbira but who dreams that he is playing one or being taught to play, regards this as a message from the spirits indicating to him a path he should follow. He will then begin to play or to learn to play.

Musicians who dream of music among the Shona people seem usually to dream that they are playing and being taught to play by an old man or that the old man is playing and they are watching him as he shows them the fingerings for the piece. In this context the dream is always interpreted as the transmission of an old forgotten composition or a new variant of one and that the old man is one of the ancestral spirits. The possibility of the preconditioning of the nature and content of dreams has been postulated recently [4]. Therefore the idea that the cultural context may influence the way in which a dream unfolds as well as the manner in which it is to be interpreted seems plausible.

The image shows a musical score for a piece titled 'Ngororombe' from Nyahuku, Mkota. The score is divided into two main sections: 'panpipes' and 'voices'. The 'panpipes' section consists of four staves of music, with the first two staves representing the melody and the last two staves representing a harmonic accompaniment. The 'voices' section consists of two staves of music, with the top staff representing the vocal melody and the bottom staff representing a harmonic accompaniment. The music is written in a 12/8 time signature and features a mix of eighth and sixteenth notes, with some rests. The score is transcribed by Philip Yampolsky.

transcription by
Philip Yampolsky

Example 7:
Ngororombe from Nyahuku, Mkota

If we consider the medium's dreams and the state of ritual possession as two aspects of the same kind of entry into communication with the realm of the ancestors, the former might be seen as the means by which he gathers symbolic messages in images and in music and the latter as a means by which ancestors can actively interact with the group. In conversing with the mediums individually in the everyday context as well as during possession, the line between the two states or the two realms begins to seem diffuse. Historical facts and dreams of events that occurred in connection with historical events become difficult to separate. During the ceremony, the ancestor may converse and ask questions which makes one feel more like he has been introduced to one of the oldest and most respected members of the group rather than being a participant observer in a religious ritual.

Dreams among musicians are not uncommon and are certainly not unique to the Shona. Although dreaming in music and being able to recreate the dream in actual performance may be more difficult, it is not as difficult as it might at first seem to most. If the individual spends a great deal of his day either singing and playing or thinking about these activities, or singing to himself as he thinks about these activities, dreams in music would seem to be a very natural result. If all of his musical activity is in one musical style or on one instrument with which he is thoroughly familiar, his dreams would then be delineated by that same musical activity and if they could be recalled, could be reproduced in actuality, without undue difficulty.

Although there is much that we would like to understand about dreams and their function, there are certain aspects of the Shona lore concerning dreams which can be explained in terms of what we know thus far. "Story" dreams, that is dreams with images which can be in some way related verbally occur in the REM level of sleep. Abstract images and possible feeling interconnected with them take place during levels 3 or 4 or "deep" sleep (NREM). Most remembered dreams occur just before waking in the REM stage. Perhaps this is because the dreams which occur in the deep sleep period are more difficult to remember and verbalize, but primarily because natural awakening does not occur from level 4 sleep, but sleep must progress to a higher level unless the sleep is interrupted by external stimuli [5].

Those dreams in which Shona musicians learn new compositions would appear to occur during the REM level in which music in "story" or visualized settings could occur. Many of the dreams told by other creative or composing musicians from other cultures also seem to occur in a real visual story context. As yet there have been no experiments in which a musician has been roused from the level 4 sleep to ascertain whether sound imagery occurs in this stage or not. In any case it seems clear that remembering music in dreams occurs most frequently in a setting in which the dreamer himself is playing or is listening to another person play. What we can infer based on present knowledge is that such dreams would occur during the REM stage.

The other use of music as a path to the realm of the spirits of the ancestors presents greater difficulties. The question of which type of brain activity is going on during a possession or trance has not been studied. Obvious difficulties would naturally be present, the laboratory atmosphere would certainly not be considered conducive to most types of spirit possession, and further as it stands now the apparatus required to look at brain wave patterns would restrict the freedom of movement of the subject and therefore would be unfeasible. Although there are descriptive studies of trance and possession ceremonies, none really discuss what may be taking place in the physical system of the medium. It is distinct from the condition of sleep/dream primarily because during the REM stage there occurs a chemical blocking from brain to muscles so that while the brain is functioning exactly as though whatever physical activities visualized in the dreams were actually taking place, the nerves and muscles are blocked from receiving these messages from the brain and the body remains motionless except for a few areas where minute twitching occurs and for the rapid eye movements (REM). The possessed medium, by contrast, appears awake and in command of all his physical activities. He is different from his unpossessed state in that it appears that someone else is now in control of these activities.

panpipes

voices

transcription by
Philip Yampolsky

Example 8:
Ngarorombe from Highfields, Salisbury.

Example 9:
Vocal line from *ngarorombe*, Example 7.

The other use of music as a path to the realm of the spirits of the ancestors presents greater difficulties. The question of which type of brain activity is going on during a possession or trance has not been studied. Obvious difficulties would naturally be present, the laboratory atmosphere would certainly not be considered conducive to most types of spirit possession, and further as it stands now the apparatus required to look at brain wave patterns would restrict the freedom of movement of the subject and therefore would be unfeasible. Although there are descriptive studies of trance and possession ceremonies, none really discuss what may be taking place in the physical system of the medium. It is distinct from the condition of sleep/dream primarily because during the REM stage there occurs a chemical blocking from brain to muscles so that while the brain is functioning exactly as though whatever physical activities visualized in the dreams were actually taking place, the nerves and muscles are blocked from receiving these messages from the brain and the body remains motionless except for a few areas where minute twitching occurs and for the rapid eye movements (REM). The possessed medium, by contrast, appears awake and in command of all his physical activities. He is different from his unpossessed state in that it appears that someone else is now in control of these activities.

The question of what the exact nature of this "possession" might be is beyond our current knowledge and certainly far beyond the scope of the discussion here. Perhaps it is enough to say that if Shona culture defines dreams and the change in the medium during possession as a complex of behaviors that is the result of the presence of the spirits of the ancestors. These behaviors are subsequently modified because of a collective expectation concerning them. Thus, the presence of the spirits becomes tangible in a manner that we can also perceive. New compositions do appear from dreams, the spirit mediums do behave in observably different characters while being possessed.

To return to the nature of the possession it may be feasible to conceive of the state of possession as perhaps being something akin to hypnosis or even self-hypnosis. It may not differ significantly in observable symptoms whether an individual becomes hypnotized/controlled by another real being, or one he creates on the basis of his cultural expectations. During possession or trance all individuals in the bira ceremony may continue to sing or dance. The chief medium of the group may also continue to sing and dance but will also speak to the members of the group. Here the music provides the intensified atmosphere which is conducive to trance and possession. The high point is the participation of the ancestral spirit. The music which induced the participation of the spirit continues after his appearance and becomes now a vehicle by which the spirit can participate with the community.

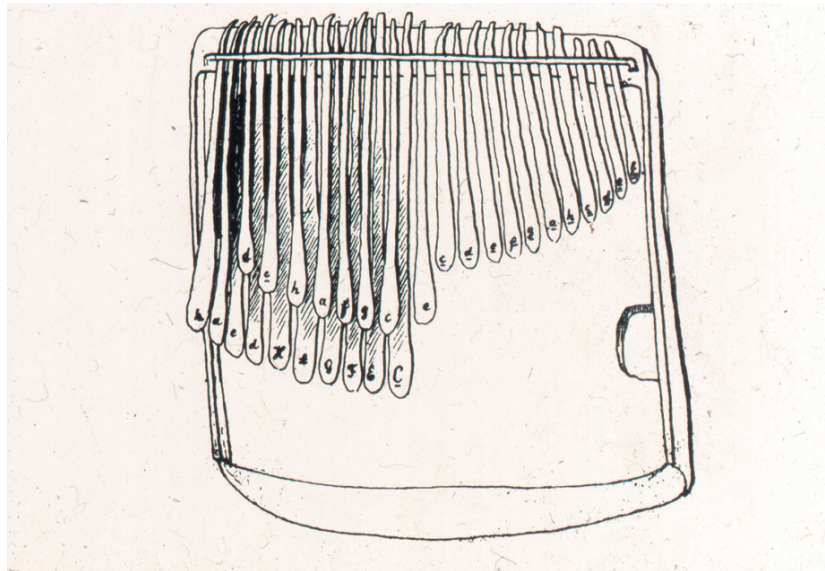
We have then among the Shona people a culture in which communication with the past is brought into a living context by direct contact with the spirit of the ancestors in the bira. But in addition the atmosphere or setting in which the ceremonies occur also continues to grow with the community while retaining a link with the past by the incorporation of compositions never heard before but which derive from the past and which are learned through dreams. To this juncture between the past and the present the music has served as the link, transmitting and creating the context while at the same time probably being influenced by the nature of the message transmitted.

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Mbira after Mauch