

# Towards the Teaching of Kenyan Art & Choral Music in High School Music Education

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Over the past decades, there has been a tremendous growth in the output of choral art music in Kenya. Art music in this case refers to musical works that are written by African composers (Kenyans in particular) who have been trained in Western classical music styles, and therefore combine Western classical music elements with traditional African music idioms in their compositions. Their music is usually African sounding – based from traditional folk melodies and/or rhythms. As a genre, this type of music in Kenya has tremendously grown in performances, as evidenced at music festivals, church gatherings and National Celebrations. For example, at the National Music Festivals, three classes have been designated for art music for all levels of performers – from nursery school children to university students. These classes range from own composition to adaptation and arrangements of African folk tunes and melodies.

My initial curiosity in Kenyan art music was the performance practices of choral art songs and whether there was a commonly agreed way in which Kenyan choral art songs are performed. This was due to a seemingly similar nature in which most of the choirs performed this genre. However, the growth in compositional output and performances of Kenyan choral art songs within secondary schools raised my curiosity further. Since many of the secondary schools were performing this particular genre of music, I was curious to find out whether there was some educational value that the students were gaining from performing these works. I began asking myself whether the perform-



ers actually knew the composers of the music they were performing, and what about the composers did they actually know. I therefore sought to find out from music teachers and choir directors what they knew of Kenyan composers and their music in the hopes that this knowledge was transferred to the students in order to further understand and interpret the music they are performing.

This past summer, I set out to investigate whether Kenyan art music is taught in secondary school classrooms and rehearsal rooms. I carried out this research during the National Music Festival, held every August, in Kenya. This event, which hosts approximately 90,000 participants through 10 days, was a perfect opportunity to meet and interview music teachers from around the country. I also interviewed selected composers of Kenyan choral art music with a view to gain some insights into the composer's minds and intentions when composing these songs.

As part of my investigations with the help from former students of Kenyatta University, I distributed a questionnaire (n=100) to the music teachers and choir directors of secondary schools. In particular, I was interested in finding out the content teachers taught

regarding Kenyan art music, musical examples used, and how important they regarded Kenyan art music in their classrooms. I also extensively interviewed certain composers of art music. From these interviews, I hope to establish content enough for teachers to use when teaching about Kenyan art music from the composers' perspective.

After carefully analyzing the questionnaires and the composers' interviews, I will be able to make a strong case for the inclusion of Kenyan art music as a specific genre in the Kenyan National Music Curriculum. Further research may be carried out on other mediums of composition and not just choral music, including instrumental art music, solo voice art music and many others. This research will add academic/theoretical knowledge to a rapidly developing practical genre with a view to further understanding Kenyan choral art music.

*Duncan Wambugu is a Ph.D. candidate in music education. His research was sponsored by the Madelyn M. Lockhart Research Fund for African Studies, a CAS pre-dissertation research grant, and the UF Office of Research.*