

---

## From the Director Musical Life in Southern Africa

---

Ruth M. Stone

---

I recently returned from a five-week trip to southern Africa where I worked with the Archives' existing linkage in Zimbabwe, conducted a feasibility study for establishing a linkage in Madagascar, and visited South Africa for an exploratory trip in order to better understand the context of musical research, teaching, and preservation in this region.

### South Africa

My experiences in South Africa provided me with so much more data than I could obtain by reading the world press coverage of the rapidly changing developments these days. I came away with the impression that the contrasts between people's lives are enormous, that many people of all kinds are working to change apartheid, that many are resisting that change, and that music is a powerful force in the political life of South Africa.

We arrived on a plane from Lisbon with a white South African rugby team. As we emerged into the terminal, I observed television cameras ready to record the arrival of what I assumed to be the rugby team. Next to the cameras was a black choir waiting expectantly. As I stood to watch what was developing, I noticed a white man emerge who later appeared to be a church worker. The black choir began their stirring singing in a traditional language as they welcomed him. This was not what I had expected to see. The rugby team emerged with no fanfare or cheers and walked to waiting friends and relatives. This was hardly the scene I had expected as a group of blacks welcomed a white.

Though many of my subsequent experiences did underscore the disparity between blacks and whites in South Africa, the surprises were also important and served to indicate the changes that are rapidly changing the existing system. I was impressed, for example, to visit a community music program, Madimba Institute of African Music, that is part of Funda Centre, a multi-faceted community school on the edge of Soweto in Johannesburg. Here, an instructor explained how musicians were brought as performers-in-residence to show children how to perform, and they provide the instruction in the oral tradition. The program also provides instruction in Western music theory so that students will have a mastery of music in both the dominant and indigenous systems.

### Madagascar

Madagascar, that island nation off of the eastern coast of southern Africa, vividly exhibits its diverse historical influences. The *hira gasy* performance, for example, is a competition of families who alternate on the stage, vying to please the audience with their complex oratory, dances with prominent hand gestures, and Western instruments played with European, Arabic and African characteristics.

In the capital, Antananarivo, the recording of music was found in a wide range of media. On the one hand, I discovered two gentlemen selling wind-up phonographs on the street. These phonographs were intended to play 78 rpm records. Indeed, these entrepreneurs also had some rather well-preserved records, which they played to demonstrate the quality of the phonograph. In contrast, around the corner was a store selling a compact disc of Malagasy music.

At a concert of Malagasy music, a wide range of styles were played employing acoustic as well as amplified instruments. The tubular zither, *valiha*, was employed without amplification by one musician. Another *valiha* player used an electronic pickup to change the otherwise delicate sound of his instrument to a more penetrating sound. Echoes of French and Western popular music mingled with the Malagasy elements.

Madagascar is poised to begin systematic collection, preservation, teaching, and research of local music. I served as part of a team to conduct a feasibility study for this new initiative. Key to this effort is Mireille Rakotomalala, who serves as head of the Department of Ethnomusicology at the Museum of Art and Archaeology. She has single-handedly compiled an extensive annotated bibliography of sources on Malagasy music; collected over three hundred instruments; documented these instruments with photographs and descriptive information; and begun a typology of Malagasy music. She has also begun to collect old 78 rpm discs, as well as contemporary examples of Malagasy music, and she is currently working on a manuscript of Malagasy musical instruments.



*Valiha player.*

## **Zimbabwe**

In the course of the past three years, the day-to-day operations of the Ethnomusicology Programme have been formalized and a clear and articulated curriculum is now in place. A second group of students from Zimbabwe and neighboring countries have begun studying for the two-year diploma in ethnomusicology. Several hundred other students attend individual and group lessons in mbira, marimba, piano, guitar and music theory. One student from Zimbabwe is currently enrolled in the master's program at Indiana University, and a number of doctoral students are conducting research in Zimbabwe through affiliation with the Ethnomusicology Programme.

On this recent trip I observed classes, met individually with students, and consulted Indiana students who are conducting research. In addition I talked to donors about the progress of the program.

The Archives/Library in Harare is gradually improving its holdings and now has copies of a number of Zimbabwean collections which the Archives of Traditional Music possesses. In addition we have provided consultation for the librarian, Peter Katz, concerning cataloging and supplies.

The Ethnomusicology Programme developed from a request and plan generated in Harare by local people who sensed the importance of that area for Zimbabwe.

The Archives of Traditional Music has been part of the catalyst that has participated in the growth of that program. Key to the effort have been members of the Ethnomusicology Trust, local corporations, diplomatic representatives, government ministries, foreign agencies, and foundations such as Ford and Rockefeller. At every stage, however, the directions for growth have been charted by the local group and managed by them. One of the reasons for the success of the program lies, I believe, in the diverse constituency that supports ethnomusicology in Harare.

A trip such as this one blends the archiving and preservation of music with the teaching and research in a complex manner. In southern Africa one can seldom speak of one aspect without implicating another. This travel also provides opportunities to experience the diverse resources and opportunities for the preservation of music in different areas. The Archives of Traditional Music is committed to linkages that help address common problems and seek solutions that will benefit a broad constituency of researchers as well as ordinary people.

**Archives of Traditional Music  
Morrison Hall  
Indiana University  
Bloomington, IN 47405**

**Nonprofit Org.  
Bulk Rate  
US Postage Paid  
Permit No. 2  
Bloomington, IN**