

Ngoma Dolce Music Academy: the first three years of a musical adventure

In 2010, Moses Kalommo and Paul Kelly started a music school in Lusaka, the capital of Zambia. Now that we've been doing it for 3 years, it's time for a little reflection.

Why would anyone want to do such a thing as set up a classical music school in the heart of Africa? Africans are conspicuously under-represented in international, classical music, so doesn't this mean that there's enough fun in indigenous music to keep everyone happy without any need for the rigours of a formal classical education? Well, we don't think so, and Moses' own musical story may help explain why. As a young musician, Moses was living in Lusaka and wanted to learn the violin. He used to travel to Harare every week for lessons, leaving on Friday and returning on Saturday, a journey of 6 hours each way. Eventually, he joined the music camps then operating every year, and got the senior musical education he always wanted. He is now a full time music teacher in a private school in Lusaka, and regularly visits the conducting workshops of the Royal Schools of Music.

Moses and Paul met through the Lusaka Music Society, and together sang in its choir and an *a capella* group, Vox Zambezi. It was Moses who first suggested that the logical development of the small music scene in Lusaka would be to start a music school so that other children interested in music wouldn't have to travel so far! So we set up a small school in a rented house with two teachers, Obrien Mweemba and Cathrine Mukupa. The Academy has three objectives. First, to give lessons to paying students who progress through the examination sequence of the ABRSM. The Academy is now the Zambian examinations centre for the ABRSM, and our results are improving all the time. Second, to act as a focus for musical activities, including rehearsals, recitals, lectures and meetings, and to allow musicians to meet and make music. We are broadening this objective to include professional development for music teachers, who need stimulation and support to remain effective. Third, to reach out to children in less well-resourced communities to provide opportunities for learning and participating in music. Through the generosity of the Canadian charities Rose Charities and Malambo Grassroots, we have been able to provide weekly choral and instrumental lessons for the entire choir of a local school, Kamulanga, in the southern part of Lusaka. One of the Kamulanga School students recently wrote to us "thank you for giving me the opportunity to learn music [viola], it's part of my life, it flows in me". This flow has recently been on display in some performances our students gave as part of the Lusaka music festival "Promenades Musicales", both on their own and as part of a performance of Carmina Burana.

Currently, the situation is very exciting. We have seven teachers: Cathrine (piano), Lulu (singing), Obrien (strings), William (guitar), Morgan (piano), John (brass) and Chucks (drums, including Zambian drumming). We have almost finished building a new, bespoke, music school on a piece of land where we have room for expansion. We have a good selection of instruments (mostly donated second-hand). And we have the support of many well-wishers and friends including Theo Bross, a cellist from Stuttgart, and the trustees of the MUZE trust,

including Mark Williams (Jesus, Cambridge) and Peter Phillips (Merton, Oxford) who are wonderfully supportive. The MUZE trust is about to launch a programme with the Estelle trust to send four Oxbridge students to join us in the summer holidays.

What is the future of classical music education in Africa? Actually it is surprisingly exciting. While Ngoma Dolce is finding its feet in Lusaka, there are other initiatives elsewhere on the continent. A street orchestra in Congo gives amazing performances. A school in Luanda, Angola, inspired by El Sistema, recently visited Lusaka and this promises future collaboration, particularly for the teachers. South Africa has long had a tradition of excellence in classical music, and this is true in Zimbabwe too. This list is not exhaustive. An emerging need, to our mind, is to start schools, no matter how small, where musicians can interact and develop. Most of all, Africa needs professional development for a new generation of teachers. Without high quality teachers, all the classical musicians will be self-taught and will never reach their full potential. Of course, instruments are important also, but the hardest (most long-term) thing is to develop the teachers, and we are working on this as hard as we can. The MUZE trust (www.muzetrust.org) has a mission for Zambia.