



Forward Kwenda, *mbira*

About the *Mbira Dza Vadzimu*

The *mbira dza vadzimu* (the *mbira* of the ancestor spirits) is the most important musical instrument for certain Shona ethnic groups in Zimbabwe. It is played for rain-making ceremonies and other rituals where ancestral or regional spirits are invoked and possess certain human beings who act as intermediaries between the community and the community. Because the *mbira* is used in this way, some call it *nhare* (telephone). In addition to their ritual role, the same *mbira dza vadzimu* songs can be played for general entertainment, as in tonight's performance. In Shona culture, the sacred and the secular are not opposed and are frequently combined.

Mbira songs are often cryptic, and it is very difficult to say exactly what a particular song means. There are often several levels of interpretation, which one can access depending upon the situation and the depth of one's knowledge of Shona culture. In addition, *mbira* songs often include non-lexical sounds (nonsense syllables, such as wo iye, iye) that encourage participation and intensify emotion.

Musically, *mbira* music is also subject to multiple interpretations. Two or more *mbira* played together create a rich kaleidoscope of sound in which the listener can hear many different melodies and rhythms. The players are usually divided into two groups, *kushaura* (the starter) players who play the main melody and rhythm that defines a song and *kutsinhira* (the follower) players who play a contrasting part that interlocks with the *kushaura*. Generally speaking, if *kushaura* is in a duple meter, *kutsinhira* is in a triple meter or vice versa. If *kushaura* and *kutsinhira* are in the same meter, then their entrances are staggered so that one is "on the beat" and one is "off the beat." This tension between *kushaura* and *kutsinhira* provides much of the richness of *mbira* music.

Tonight's Program

<i>Karigamombe</i>	Forward and Zambezi
<i>Nhemamusasa</i>	Forward and Zambezi
<i>Kuzanga (The Jealous Woman)</i>	Forward, Dino Satya, Sara, Mika, Ernest
<i>Taireva (We Used to Tell You)</i>	Forward, Dino Satya, Sara, Ernest
<i>Shumba Yangwasha (the Son In Law's Lion)</i>	Forward, Satya, and Dino
<i>Ndaire Chirombo (Answer Me)</i>	Forward and Ernest
<i>Nyuchi (Bees)</i>	Forward and Zoe
<i>Sekuru Tinotenda (Thank You, Uncle)</i>	Forward
<i>Nhemamusasa (Making a Temporary Shelter)</i>	Forward and Ernest
<i>Mahororo (Call of the Baboon)</i>	Forward
<i>Marenje (In the Desert)</i>	Forward
<i>Chipembere (the Rhinoceros)</i>	Forward
<i>Mbavarira (Determination)</i>	Forward
<i>Karigamombe (The Unconquerable One)</i>	Forward
<i>Tadzungaira (We Are Confused)</i>	Forward

Zambezi:

Prof. Ernest Brown, director; Sara Dwyer: Teaching Assistant for *Mbira*
Stefan Ward-Wheten, Mika Hirai, Dino Lattanzi, Paloma Azul,
Satya Ferreira, Rumbidzai Ndoro, Jonayah Jackson, and Zoe Kline

Saturday, November 7, 2009

8:00 P.M.

Brooks-Rogers Recital Hall
Williamstown, Massachusetts

Please turn off or mute cell phones.
No photography or recording is permitted.

Bio

Forward Kwenda was born 5 April 1963 in the rural Buhera area of Zimbabwe, an area known for its fierce resistance to colonial rulers and respect for Shona tradition. As a young boy, Forward excelled in traditional dance and recitation of ancient poetry. At the age of 10, he began to play ngoma (drums) and hosho (gourd rattles) for his mother's gombwe (rain-making) spirit. He was given the name "Forward" because of his curiosity about many subjects, enthusiastic involvement in many activities and his singing for liberation war freedom fighters.

By 1985, Forward was playing in a unusually complex style – much to the amazement of master *mbira* players two and three generations his senior. This style was first recorded in 1985 and 1986 by his American friend Glenn Makuna (see *MBIRA* tapes nos. 56, 57, 58, 143), who dubbed Kwenda the "Coltrane of *mbira*."

Asked about his experience of playing *mbira*, Forward responds:

"When I pick up my *mbira*, I don't know what is going to happen. The music just goes by itself, taking me higher and higher until I can end up crying because the music is so much greater than a human being can understand"; and "I just have to get out of the way so spirits can make my *mbira* play – it isn't me – I'm just amazed."

In 1997, Kwenda toured the US with Erica Azim, and recorded the Shanachie CD *Svikiro: Meditations of an Mbira Master*. In 1999, Azim's field recording of Kwenda on a Zimbabwean mountaintop at sunset was included on Ellipsis Arts' *Trance 3 CD*. In February 2000, Kwenda performed at the Kennedy Center in Washington, DC with Erica Azim, and they toured North America during 2000, 2001 and 2002.

The *MBIRA* Recordings Library includes several recordings of Kwenda.

Upcoming Events:

See music.williams.edu for full details and to sign up for the weekly e-newsletters.

- 11/11: MIDWEEKMUSIC, Chapin Hall Stage, 12:15 p.m.
- 11/13: Berkshire Symphony Orchestra, Chapin Hall, 8:00 p.m.
Pre-Concert Talk, Brooks-Rogers Recital Hall, 7:15 p.m.
- 11/15: Berkshire Symphony Orchestra, **Colonial Theatre**, 2:00 p.m.
(Tickets through the Colonial Theatre)
- 11/17: Freddie Bryant and Lewis Porter, Chapin Hall, 7:00 p.m.
- 11/18: MIDWEEKMUSIC, Chapin Hall, 12:15 p.m.
- 11/19: David Demsey Lecture, Presser Hall, 11:20 a.m.
- 11/19: Chamber Master Class: Jupiter String Quartet, Brooks-Rogers Recital Hall, 4:15 p.m.
- 11/20: Visiting Artist: Jupiter String Quartet, Brooks-Rogers Recital Hall, 8:00 p.m.
- 11/20: Kusika, the Zambezi Marimba Band, & Sankofa, **'62 Center**, 8:00 p.m.
- 11/21: Kusika, the Zambezi Marimba Band, & Sankofa, **'62 Center**, 2:00 and 8:00 p.m.
- 11/21: Williams Percussion Ensemble, Chapin Hall, 8:00 p.m.
- 11/22: Shhh Free Sunday: Brooks-Rogers Recital Hall, 1:00 p.m.