VENDA CHORAL MUSIC: COMPOSITIONAL STYLES

by

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PREFACE

(i) ABSTRACT

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Black choral music composers in South Africa, inspired by the few opportunities available to them until recent times, have nonetheless attempted to establish, perhaps subconsciously, some choral tradition and, in doing so, incorporate African musical elements in their works.

My research traces the foundations and historical development of choral music as an art amongst Vhavenda, and the contributions made thereto by a number of past and present Venda composers that this researcher could manage to identify and trace, to the music of the people. The selected composers are Stephen Maimela Dzivhani, Matthew Ramboho Nemakhavhani, Derrick Victor Nephawe, Joseph Khorommbi Nonge, Israel Thinawanga Ramabannda and Fhatuwani Hamilton Sumbana.
Through the application of multiple methodological lenses, the study sets out to analyse, describe, and interpret Venda choral music. Of particular interest is the exploration of the extent to which the “formal” education that was brought by the Berlin Missionaries influenced Venda choral musicians, particularly the selected Venda choral music composers. Also crucial to this research is the exploration and identification of elements peculiar to indigenous Venda traditional music in the works of these composers. The question is whether it was possible for these composers to realize and utilize their potentials fully in their attempt to evoke traditional Venda music with their works, given the very limiting Western tonic sol-fa notational system they were solely working with. The project also briefly traces the place of Venda choral music within the South African music context and its role within the search for cultural identity.

The research has found that the majority of Venda choral music written so far has generally not been capable of evoking indigenous Venda traditional music. Whilst these composers choose themes that are akin to their culture, social settings, legend and general communal life, the majority of the music they set to these themes does not sound African (Venda in particular) in terms of the rhythms and melodies. The majority of the compositions under scrutiny have inappropriate settings of Venda words into the melodies employed. This can be attributed to the limitations imposed by the tonic sol-fa notational system, which was the only system they were taught in the missionary schools established around Venda and which, itself, was flawed as well as the general lack of
adequate music education on the part of the composers themselves. Despite these limitations and the very few opportunities available to them, Venda choral music composers nonetheless managed to lay a foundation for choral music as an art amongst their people (Vhavenda).

KEY TERMS

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(iii) Declaration

I declare that VENDA CHORAL MUSIC: COMPOSITIONAL STYLES (title of thesis) is my own work and that all the sources that I have used or quoted have been indicated and acknowledged by means of complete references.

................................................................. ........................................
Ndwmato George Mugovhani                          Date
(iv) Acknowledgements

There are not enough words to express my sincere gratitude to George King, my chief promoter and a renowned choral music practitioner, who is also the Chair of the Department of Art History, Visual Arts and Musicology at Unisa. I will forever be indebted to his constant encouragement and caring support throughout the years of my designing this document, and his academic prowess and assistance with the final layout of the document.

Professor Daniel Geldenhuys, a professor in musicology in the same department, could not have come in at the most much-needed time. His experience in postgraduate research and professional assistance in the overall discourse has empowered me academically.

Dr Jonathan Drury, Senior Lecturer in the same department, who was joint promoter initially before he retired and migrated to America, also deserves unpretentious acknowledgements for shaping the focus of this research. His constant probing and questioning on my initial drafts resulted in our arrival at the final argued point.

To Phindile Joe Nhlapo, a former colleague at the University of Venda Music Department and a friend, all I can say is “Ndo livhuha”. He put aside many of his more demanding and urgent projects to help me with the typesetting of the music that I had collected, which was admittedly not in good shape. Joe is responsible for the final product of the music, which is represented here in dual notation.
In order to trace and place the existing Venda choral tradition within the context of Venda history, culture, tradition and language, it was incumbent and very significant for this research to consult a number of relevant sources. For such valuable information and sources I am highly indebted to Dr Mphaya Nemudzivhadi, a history scholar and retired academic who did all his postgraduate research on the history of Vhavenda. Not only did he provide this research with valuable information orally in a number of interviews, but he also made most of his writings readily available.

Professor Victor Ralushai, an Anthropology scholar and the former Vice Principal of the University of Venda, has always been a strong proponent of research on Venda history, culture and music traditions. He has always encouraged us “young academics” to contribute in this area. Thank you for eventually succeeding in opening my eyes. I undertake to continue unearthing this treasure further.

I also want to acknowledge the various contributions of the many people I have interviewed on this subject that is of interest to them; choir conductors and choristers, veterans and former choirmasters, general choral music lovers and a number of people of other South African Black languages.

Thanks are also due to my “brother” Dr Mashudu Mashige, Senior Lecturer and Head of the English Department at the University of Venda, for being kind enough to find time in his very busy schedule to proofread and edit this document. God bless you, and may the soul of “our father” Mr PLB Mashige, who is my mentor in choral music, forever rest in peace.

To my wife Mashudu, my lovely children Takalani, Mpfariseni, Fulufhelo and Tendani; you were a very strong pillar of support, particularly when my father was seriously ill to an extent that I nearly relinquished this project. Thank you!
Finally, most grateful thanks to SAMRO (South African Music Rights Organisation) for their generous financial assistance in this project.

I hope and wish that this document does not end up lying in some unnoticed corner, for many Vhavenda would appreciate to see all South Africans, through this humble contribution, eventually take note of Venda choral music.

Ndį nne Ndawamato Mugovhani Netshiswinzhe, murwa wa Rakuambo na Munzhedzi, Rakuambo wa Vhatavhatsindi vhaila- mutshila wa mbudzi, hone mutumbu vha tshi la, Munzhedzi e wa Vhalaudzi vha Tshinavhe tshinavhela vhavhuya. Ndį nne mukololo wa govhani la Lusidzana, Luonde.

NDAA!
Introduction

Aim, Rationale and Hypothesis

This study traces the foundations and historical development of choral music as an art amongst Vhavenda, and the contributions of a number of past and present composers to the music of Vhavenda (the Venda people). It examines a number of selected choral works by Venda speaking composers such as Stephen Maimela Dzivhani, Matthew Ramboho Nemakhavhani, Derrick Victor Nephawe, Joseph Khorommbi Nonge, Israel Thinawanga Ramabannda and Fhatuwani Hamilton Sumbana.

Another important aim of this study is to explore and present biographies of the chosen composers. Both these composers’ lives and their diverse song texts will help shed light on their cultural background, their intentions, idiosyncrasies or distinctive stylistic features that make the one different from the other, themes and thoughts and the philosophy(ies) behind their compositions. These composers wrote on a variety of subjects; such as history, society, culture, customs, nature, events and everyday occurrences.

While South African indigenous choral music choral music is frequently performed, as compared to other art forms like drama, film, dance, visual arts and others, it is infrequently taught in South African schools and tertiary institutions. It is comparatively less researched, less archived, less recorded and very less published in South Africa (Mugovhani, 1998:5). Some profiles of a number of South African choral composers appear in Yvonne Huskisson’s The Bantu Composers of Southern Africa, published by the South African Broadcasting Corporation (SABC) in 1969 and her Black Composers of Southern Africa published by the Human Sciences Research Council (HSRC) in 1992.
Huskisson was a pioneer in research on South African Indigenous choral music. Lately Grant Olwage has done some research on this genre in his thesis *Music and (Post) Colonialism: The dialectics of Choral Culture on a South African Frontier* (2003). Some references to South African choral music are also found in Beverly Parker’s article “Contemporary South African ‘Serious’ Music Compositions and Criticisms in Relation to Identity” in papers presented at the conference Playing with Identities in Contemporary Music in Africa, which was held in Finland and published in 2000. In view of the rather sketchy manner in which South African indigenous choral music composers were represented in the publications mentioned above, understandably so if one considers that those publications attempted to cover a very broad spectrum of all South African composers, this research project has attempted to add more detail to the Venda composers, who are the central focus of this research. Another factor is that some of the composers under scrutiny, such as Nemakhavhani, Nephawe and Nonge, have long retired from their respective careers (Nemakhavhani as church minister and Nephawe and Nonge teachers), and may pass on to another world before their original contribution to the knowledge about Venda choral music is captured. Dzivhani (composer) and Mulaudzi (one of the most valuable respondents) have already passed away.

Also crucial to this research is the exploration and identification of elements peculiar to Venda traditional music in the works of these composers, particularly whether it was possible for them to realize and utilize their potential fully in their attempt to evoke traditional Venda music with their works. Agawu (Agawu, 2003: 173-197) has shown through the examples he gave in defending and celebrating analyses from different eras of African musicology, that while there is obviously “no way not to analyse African music”, we should subscribe to the notion that some approaches may prove more useful than others, and that all are helpful and useful for developing our understanding. In the final analysis, the merits of the selected compositions in this study are examined and “judged” mainly as a genre in their own right, and not solely based on their “Venda-ness”.
Whilst it has also been very significant to examine the selected choral works against the composers’ own home language, Tshivenda, which has such tonal semantic meaning, in no way did this study try to base its final report (critical findings and recommendations) solely on the music’s relationship with the language, that is, the music compositions’ “adherence to their “Venda-ness”. The analysis is also based on such musical parameters as melody, duration and dynamics, as well as the elements of harmony, texture and structure, and their relationship with traditional Venda music.

It was also necessary in this study to identify and briefly discuss the general characteristics of traditional Venda music within the broader context of African music, for it will be against this background that I make brief commentaries on the compositional styles of the selected composers. Whilst it was necessary to interrogate a number of sources on the diverse regional characteristics of African music, in the end I had to narrow the scope to that of South African indigenous language groups, particularly those dealing with Venda music, while occasionally making direct and indirect references to other parts of Africa. It was interesting to note that the evidence drawn from the literature on Venda music sometimes, in the words of Agawu (Agawu, 1995:2), “reinforces, sometimes undermines, these characterizations” of the music of the African continent. Because of the particular character of the Venda language, the research will concentrate mainly on such parameters as melodic structure, from the pitch, and the rhythm point of view.

It was also significant to this study to identify and describe the factors that shaped the Venda choral tradition: the history and culture of the people, their socio-political and religious circumstances, and so on. As Markus Detterbeck contends, “cultural practices cannot be investigated without considering socio-political circumstances and that musical structures cannot be dislodged from social and political structures” (Detterbeck, 2003: XIX).
Although John Blacking whose pioneering works, particularly *Venda Childrens’ Songs*, have remained a pillar down the years, Cora van Tonder and Jaco Kruger have recently researched indigenous Venda music and thereby helped thrust Vhavenda into the limelight. Though their valuable contributions are highly significant, there remains research on Venda choral music. In this project, I attempt to extend our knowledge on the subject.

My research activities in this genre began well over a decade ago with my involvement in South African indigenous choral music as choral director, adjudicator and occasional composer. Before then my special interest was in training and conducting choirs and winning trophies.

During my last two years as a student at the University of Cape Town, my focus shifted. A sudden intersection of contemporary critical theory, which has since remained a principal interest for me, began whilst I was leading the University of Cape Town Choir for Africa, a group I founded and directed since its formation in 1987 whilst I was a student at UCT’s South African College of Music. I began to study our choir’s repertoire critically. This included the music of South African indigenous choral music composers, notably JP Mohapeloa, Mike Moerane, JSP Motuba, Mzilikazi Khumalo, PJ Simelane, Mike Ngqokolo, SJ Khoza as well as others. The compositional matrix of rhythms, melodic shape and harmonic texture in those works suddenly intrigued me enormously, as a result of the formal training I was receiving and the skills I was acquiring through my music studies, mainly in Western music. My choristers (the majority of whom were also UCT students, though not studying music) and I would constantly engage in aural analysis of the compositions we sang. At times, we would record some of the works that we were working on and, later, engage in listening sessions.

Since the UCT Choir for Africa comprised Xhosa, Zulu, Tswana, Sotho, Pedi and Tsonga speaking choristers, our repertoire mainly covered compositions whose language texts the majority of the choristers could easily identify with. There were times I constantly resigned, albeit with a lot of stoicism and not showing it, to the
democratic satisfaction that I had to display when I would introduce a Venda choral song and it would be subtly shot down. I was the only Muvenda and democratically I had no support. It was quite unsettling at times. Nevertheless, the desire to study Venda choral music continued to mount in me as the years progressed.

In our listening sessions, my main objective was to find out whether the choir members themselves could “hear” anything in the repertoire that was typical of the indigenous traditional music of their respective language groups. Elements such as texture and structure, and parameters like rhythms and melodies were easily picked up in the compositions. My choristers could easily pick up sections of the compositions and place them within the context of the traditional music of their own people.

This sparked my interest in research about South African indigenous Choral music. It continued to feel pressing in its own way for a number of years whilst I tried to ignore and suppress it. Eventually, for my first major research engagement in this genre I became particularly interested in one of the most popular Zulu contemporary choral musicians, Mzilikazi Khumalo. The research topic for my Master of Music degree reads thus; *The Manifestations of the African Style in the works of Mzilikazi Khumalo.*

My current research now explores the foundations and the historical development of choral music as an art amongst Vhavenda, and the contributions thereto by a number of past and present Venda composers that this research could manage to identify and trace, to the music of the people.

This project will also briefly discuss the historical development of South African indigenous choral music. The purpose is to demonstrate how South African indigenous choral music composers, in their attempt to establish some choral tradition that would determine their cultural identities, tried to incorporate
indigenous musical elements into their choral works. There has been a feeling in recent years that Venda choral music is also beginning to incorporate some indigenous musical elements.

The crucial questions remain: To what extent has Venda choral music written so far been able to evoke aspects of traditional Venda music? To what extent do Venda choral music compositions reflect Tshivenda tone language? Can tonic sol-fa notation fairly represent the traditional Venda music rhythmic conceptions and the subtle nuances prevalent in the texts, or are the musical conceptions compromised in some way by this notational system?

Also crucial to the research is an investigation into the reasons why Venda choral compositions by Venda composers, unlike those of all other South African indigenous languages, are scarcely performed and hardly prescribed for choral competitions and festivals in South Africa. Could it be due to lack of publicity, ethnic red tape, or a deliberate marginalization of the language by those with necessary powers? If so, why?

**Methodology**

Considering Agawu’s assertion of “the unhealthy tendency of confining one’s attention simply to the intensive study of the score alone” (Agawu, 2003: 174), it was prudent for the study to be conducted employed at the same time. The research had to take account of several different approaches employed at the same time. The research had to take account of the context of each composition; historical context, circumstances of its creation, the life and personality of the composer, and the views of other interested stakeholders and choral musicians around South Africa. It was, therefore, essential to get the voices of the people relevant to the studies to air their views. To this end, the study employed several methods: interviews, discussions, active participations, remarks and so on, and reconciled the information into one.
The research was conducted mainly in the Limpopo Province amongst Vhavenda, with contributions from some interviews involving a few relevant respondents from the Gauteng Province in South Africa.

Research Tools

The fieldwork portion of this research comprises interviews with a cross-section of members of the choral music community. These include five (5) of the selected composers (Ramboho Nemakhavhani, Derrick Nephawe, Joseph Nonge, Israel Ramabannda and Fhatuwani Sumbana), choir conductors (Edison Rasikhinya, Lillian Montjane, Eddie Nephawe), choristers (David Magadze, Vincent Netshivhodza, Mulalo Dagada and Lucas Mabitsela) veteran choirmasters (Stephen Dzumba, Adalbert Mulaudzi, and Julius Lidovho), and people of other languages (Mzilikazi Khumalo). A total number of 11 respondents were involved. There were different questions for different groups and some prepared questions to guide the interviews. There were, therefore, Direct Interviews and Questionnaires.

The following questions were included for Composers:

- What were the major influences to your growth as a composer?
- Describe the circumstances under which you composed each of your works. For example, what was the socio-political climate of the time?
- Did you compose your music out of personal inspiration or emotions? What inspired you?
- What has influenced/influences your style?
- Do you see yourself as contributing to Venda music, and if so, in which way?
- Did you find the Western tonic sol-fa notational system limiting, as alleged by Huskisson and others, to your aspirations?

The informants or respondents that were interviewed included the various composers who are still alive and whose works have been selected. At time of
the interviews, the composers were all found around the Vhembe District of the Limpopo Province, which formed part of the former Venda.

Choir Conductors and Choristers

The following questions were included:

- Have you ever sung a Venda choral composition?
- Have you heard a Venda choral composition?
- Why have Venda choral compositions been least performed compared to those of other composers of other South African Indigenous languages?
- Describe the relationship between the music and the text.
- Do these Venda compositions represent Tshivenda tone language?
- Could you recognize any structural similarities between traditional Venda music and Venda choral music? Describe the relationship, if there is any.

Interviews were conducted with conductors and choristers of the established community, church and school choirs around Venda; such as the Thohoyandou Lutheran Church Choir, Tshakhuma Virtuoso Singers, Thohoyandou Bel Canto Chorale, Mashamba Trinity Chorale, Mukondeni Sweet Melodies, TshiEMUEMU Secondary School Choir and Tshifhena Senior Secondary School Choir. These choirs have sung, and some are still singing, some of the compositions of the selected composers. The interviews were mainly conducted in 2002 and 2003.

Veteran Choirmasters

The analysis of the selected music in this thesis was not solely based upon “paper music”. I have perform the greater portion of the selected scores with various choirs on various occasions.¹

¹I have performed the following compositions with the following choirs: Nonge’s Compositions with Bel Canto Chorale: Muvenda and Mutshutshu. Nephawe’s Compositions with Venda Singing Pioneers include: Tanganedzani Vhaeni, Zwo ndina,Milamboni ya Babiloni and Yehova ndi mulisa wanga. Sumbana’s Compositions with Bel Canto Chorale: Li do vhuya la mulovha and Vhuzulapo Afrika Tshipembe
Several information gathering mechanisms revealed themselves during these sessions. The most exciting innovation was the decision of working from the premise that the compositions must be able to communicate with the audience, and that ‘audience-response’ could, therefore be looked at as part of the information-gathering mechanisms.

Although it was not the focal point of information gathering and, therefore, not pursued intensively in this present study, this mechanism contributed considerably towards getting the views of this important component of the genre in question (veteran choirmasters). Undoubtedly, if this research methodology looked at intensively in future, it could become one of the most exciting mechanisms of information gathering.

The following questions were included:

- Have you ever sung a Venda choral composition?
- Have you heard a Venda choral composition?
- What do the different Venda choral compositions mean to you?
- Do you hear anything Venda about the music when you listen to it or perform it?
- Do Venda choral compositions evoke traditional Venda music?
- What is it that you do not feel or hear appealing in Venda choral music? Rhythms, melody, or harmony?
- Why have Venda choral compositions been least performed compared to those of other composers of South African indigenous languages?

The veterans who agreed to be informants and respondents on this study were: the late Adalbert Mulaudzi (choirmaster and former Venda music inspector), Stephen Dzumba (retired choirmaster, former high school principal and inspector of schools), Joseph Nonge and Derrick Nephawe (veteran choirmasters and composers).
General Choral Music lovers
The following questions were included:

- Have you heard any Venda choral composition before?
- How do you compare it to the compositions of composers of other South African Indigenous languages?
- What is it that you do not feel or hear appealing in Venda choral music? the language, rhythms, melody, or harmony?
- Why have Venda choral compositions been least performed compared to those of other composers of other South African Indigenous languages?
- What do you suggest could be improved, if you think there should be any?

Random sampling was adopted for this group of people, which includes people who just love choral music but are neither composers, conductors nor choristers. The non-practitioners attend choral festivals and annual competitions coordinated by the Phalaphala FM, Metropolitan Life, Kanana Bread and others in Thohoyandou. This is where local choirs performed some of the selected compositions.

People of other languages
The following questions were included:

- Why has Venda choral compositions been least performed compared to those other composers of other South African Indigenous languages?
- What could have contributed to the low profile?
- Do Venda choral compositions evoke traditional Venda music?
- What is it that you do not feel or hear appealing in Venda choral music? Rhythms, melody, or harmony?

It was significant to have an eminent choral music practitioner like Mzikazi Khumalo as one of the respondents who offered his opinion on Venda choral music, because his vast experience in choral music and his knowledge of...
Tshivenda as a language gave him an added advantage to offer valuable and informed opinions and suggestions.

Open-ended Question interviews were also conducted amongst 11 past and present Venda choral musicians, including three (3) choir conductors, five (5) choral music composers, three (3) veteran choirmasters, and one (1) person of another language.

In a number of cases, I quite often found that going with particular questions and issues one wished to discuss with informants does not always yield good results. Letting the informant to guide the interview yielded better results, for the informants quite often felt comfortable and confident to provide the information. It also turned out that a second interview with the same informant is usually more informative.

The researcher sometimes discovered that the content of the interviews could not be determined by the questions asked. What came out from “convergent interviews” (Allen, 2000: 14) (information coming almost entirely from the informants and not guided by the prepared questions) yielded better results.

**Significance/Atmosphere of Interviews to the informants**

The interviews occurred at different places; mostly at the homes of the informants, at my home, at my workplace. The interviews were generally very amicable, and most of the informants were enthusiastic and excited to be interviewed on their art and the prospect of featuring in documentations and publications. The interviewees were happy at the prospect of ultimately finding a platform for the promotion and preservation of their music.
Archival Material

For information about, and the identification of, the majority of the composers, I am particularly indebted to Mr. AD Mulaudzi, a former Music Inspector in the then independent Venda homeland who has since passed away in 2002. With his help and a number of interviews I had with him, it was possible to trace the foundations of Venda choral music and its historical development. It was especially through him that I gained access to some historical archives of one of the most dominant churches in Venda then, the Evangelical Lutheran Church. It was this same church, as will be evidenced later in the thesis, which bred most of the composers in question (both academically and religiously).

Most of the literature on Maimela Dzivhani, the first Muvenda qualified teacher and first person to compose a Venda choral song on paper (Mulaudzi, Interview, 2001), is obtainable from the archives of this Lutheran Church, to which the late Mulaudzi also belonged. The valuable information about Dzivhani served as a springboard for this research to explore the choral development of Vhavenda through the other composers that came after him. It was the same Mr. Mulaudzi who introduced me to the first book that I read about South African choral music; Yvonne Huskisson’s *The Bantu Composers of Southern Africa*.

Huskisson contends that as early as 1964, some South African indigenous choral music composers were already inspired to write serious choral compositions that were basically ‘traditional’ in style and feel, but that the chief deterrents to this development were the Western forms and notational systems which did not lend themselves, and the “limitations imposed by the tonic sol-fa system” (Huskisson, 1969: XIV).

After the compilation of the list of the composers the researcher and other Venda choral musicians, with the generous assistance of Mr Mulaudzi, could identify, their music was collected. Admittedly, some of the music could not be located, primarily because some of the identified composers passed away a long time
before this research was embarked upon, and their music was unfortunately not preserved by their families or anywhere on paper. A number of other compositions that are still in some older Venda choral musicians’ memories are, unfortunately, untraceable. These were some of the determining factors for the sample of this research, that is, the selected composers and the repertoire obtained and utilized.

**Primary Source**

The research material on which chapters II, III, IV and V are based for the most part comprises of analysis of the transcriptions of collected scores.

The primary sources for this study are the scores of the compositions and the Evangelical Lutheran Church Hymnbook. The music that this research managed to collect, all of which was written in tonic sol-fa, was first proofread by the researcher together with the owners (composers) and thereafter transcribed to staff notation. This study presents the music in dual notation (tonic sol-fa and staff notation).

This project has compiled eighteen different choral compositions from the various composers. Whilst each composition is treated as a case study, and will, therefore, impact considerably on the differentiation of the compositional styles, this study has furthermore compartmentalized the choral compositions into categories, as will be noticed in the various chapters.

The material from the interviews forms the primary basis for the research findings and the recommendations in the epilogue.

**Secondary Sources**

In order to trace and place the existing Venda choral tradition within the context of Venda history, culture, tradition and language, it was incumbent and very
significant for this research to consult a number of relevant sources. For such valuable information and sources I am highly indebted to Mphaya Nemudzivhadi, a history scholar and retired academic who did all his postgraduate research on the history of Vhavenda. Not only did he provide this research with valuable information orally in a number of interviews, but he also made most of his writings readily available to the researcher. Sources from both the University of Venda Library and the Venda Library at Makwarela also provided valuable information about Vhavenda, written by early Venda writers on their own people, Vhavenda.

Through readings of a number of other sources on South African indigenous choral music, particularly its historical development, the researcher was able to explore and determine the place and significance of Venda choral music within South Africa.

Some of the selected Venda composers’ profiles appear in Huskisson’s text referred to earlier. Having realized the rather sketchy manner in which these composers were represented in the said text, questionably so when one looks at the way those of other South African indigenous language groups are presented, this research has attempted to add more depth to them.

Research pertaining to indigenous South African life in other disciplines such as history, politics, sociology, ethnomusicology and literary studies became part of the secondary sources.
A Brief History of the Culture and Customs of Vhavenda

“We stand as tall as we do, because we are standing on the shoulders of all the generations of our ancestors” (Nemudzivhadi, 1985:18). It is, therefore, crucial for this research to trace the place of the selected compositions within the context of Venda historical and cultural foundations.

This document, therefore, also briefly describes the history, culture, customs, and indigenous music traditions of the people to which the composers in question belong (Vhavenda), for it is important for this research to trace how these could have shaped the composers thoughts, the themes they chose and the compositional styles they eventually adopted. Blacking contends that musical styles and attitudes are anything but cultural acquisitions, and that if we are analysing the music of a particular culture or society, we have to study the meaning of that music to their culture (Blacking, 1964: ix).

Undoubtedly, more can be written about Vhavenda, but such a task is best being left to history scholars, for it is outside the scope of this thesis. A brief outline, enough to shed light on who Vhavenda (Venda speaking people) are, so that we could best understand their music, will suffice.

Vhavenda (Venda speaking people) have lived in South Africa, at their present area that before 1994 was known as Venda, for many centuries. Reverend Gottschling, one of the German missionaries under the Berlin Missionary Society, who came to work in Venda towards the end of the 19th century, contends that very little is known about Vhavenda history. He attributes this to the absence of written books at the time and that “they never allowed a missionary or any European who could have learned from their old folks to settle amongst them” (Gottschling, 1905:365).
Nemudzivhadi observes; “Vhavenda like any other nations of the world have a beginning; a place of origin from which they migrated; as well as places through which they passed. Although here and there a memory is preserved which throws light on the events of those momentous days, many of the details of their wanderings and experiences have been lost in the midst's of time” (Nemudzivhadi, 1985:18).

It has now been established that their place of origin was a place called Matongoni, at the lower basin of the Congo around the Great Lakes in Central Africa (Nemudzivhadi, 1978: 2). From their tradition and legends, it could be gathered that Vhavenda are a degenerate nation that has seen better times (Gottschling, 1905:365). They had their great king called Mambo. It was more than eight centuries ago when the ancestors of Vhavenda started to migrate southwards under the leadership of Dimbanyika, Mambo’s son and successor. The migratory system, the shape of which assumed a wave of tribal divisions, flowed southwards from the Great Lakes region (Benso, 1979:1-10).

Vhavenda nation comprised different tribes then, each with its own norms and values. The tribes were Vhangona, Vhatavhatsindi, Vhalembethu, Vhambedzi, Vhalemba and Vhasenzi. Each of these major tribes was further sub-divided into smaller units (clans); for example, Vhasenzi has Masingo, Vhandalamo, Vhalaudzi and others (Nemudzivhadi, 1978: 2).

It has also been established that by the end of the 12th century, Vhangona, the earliest tribe who were under their prominent leader Raphulu, had already established themselves this side of the Vhembe (Limpopo) River, which they called Venda. Their area stretched from Vhembe River up to the present Phalaborwa and Chuene’s Poort. By 1929, the tribe already had sixteen generations of existence in Venda (Nemudzivhadi, 1985:19).

Vhavenda had a culture that distinguished them clearly from other African language groups in South Africa (Blacking, 1967: 15). They were more closely
linked with the culture of the people of Zimbabwe, especially the Vhakalanga ethnic group, in terms of legends, customs, language and their musical traditions. This will be further evidenced later in the discussions. According to Reverend Gottschling, it has also been suggested that Vhavenda also have some cultural linkage with the Swahili of East Africa (Gottschling, 1905: 365).

Before the advent of Christianity, Vhavenda always strove to preserve their traditional cultural institutions. They are a patrilineal and virilocal people, many of whom still practise polygamy (Blacking, 1967:15), and many still worship their families’ ancestors. They believed in the gods as their supreme beings. The first was called Khuzwane, who they believed had created all things and could be compared to God. The second was Raluvhimba (Mwali), who they believed, rewarded the good and punished the evil, and the third, Thovhela, was regarded as an intermediary between the supreme beings and man. The last, and perhaps the most important to Vhavenda, were vhadzimu, the totality of the good souls of the ancestors who were believed to exercise some influence on the living. Resurrection such as in Christianity was not known, but the immortality of the soul was expressed in the fact that the spirits of the dead became vhadzimu (Benso, 1979: 19).

Blacking’s observations and remarks that there is still a distinct social division in Venda society between commoners (vhasiwana) and the children of kings and chiefs and their descendants (vhakololo) (Blacking, 1967:15) is still evident today.

Rich legends and superstitions have been woven into the fabric of the daily lifestyle of Vhavenda, and today these legends are alive and well and are still found in some of the rural areas that are still predominantly inhabited by Vhavenda in the Limpopo Province of the Republic of South Africa. One of the most talked about legends, as will be shown later in the thesis, is directly linked to one of the selected choral compositions.
Musical Traditions of Vhavenda

Traditional Venda music is closely integrated with Venda cultural norms and values (Vhuvenda). Music formed the very basis of a Muvenda child’s discovery of himself and his place in society as he grew into adulthood. Through music, he learnt how to behave in various situations. As early as possible the child learns the musical games and songs that have become known as nyimbo dza vhana (children’s songs). From his earliest days, he learnt that there was a song or music for every occasion, every mood and every custom. Such songs are sung by day or at night. Girls have special songs for accompaniment while doing their chores, and boys sing and play instruments in the fields while looking after cattle and goats. Even counting is performed by means of songs. Songs also serve as a means of regulating social relations between boys and girls. Particular songs reinforce rules of proper behaviour. As they grow up, they gradually learn to sing more intricate melodies and more complex rhythms, thereby gradually graduating into adulthood. A Muvenda child was born into an environment rich in music. There was also music for all the different rituals, religious ceremonies, initiation ceremonies, recreation and work. Whenever a number of people are gathered for a purpose; such as work in the king or chief’s fields, building a hut or hunting, the completion of the task would always warrant an occasion for beer-drinking, which is followed more often than not by singing and dancing (Benso, 1979: 15).

Instrumental music, dancing and song formed an integral part of nearly all the social activities of Vhavenda. Vhavenda have a rich variety of traditional musical instruments. One of the most important communal instruments is the drum (see figure 1). It is made in three sizes and shapes: *ngoma* (the largest), *thungwa* (similar in shape to the largest, but smaller) and *murumba* (conical shaped). They are all made of solid wood curved inside to produce resonators and covered with dry animal (usually cowhide). Usually these sets of drums (one ngoma, one
thungwa, and two or three mirumba) are kept in the homes of chiefs and/or headmen. The ngoma has an important function; hence, it is always kept in a safe place and only played during the most important of occasions (Blacking, 1964: 12).

Another most important set of communal instruments is nanga (the end-blown pipes). These are used in the most popular and unique Venda musical ensemble called Tshikona (see figure 2).

Tshikona is performed for very important ceremonies and rituals such as the installation of a new ruler, the commemoration of a ruler’s death (dzumo) and the sacrificial rites at the graves of a ruler’s ancestors (Blacking, 1964: 48). Tshikona music even served to maintain ties between different communities. Parties of musicians would sometimes be sent by one chief to another’s territory to entertain and to be entertained for a few days. This musical expedition is called bepha. Bepha could be sent by one ruler to another for a variety of reasons, the most common of which is to express sympathy (u imela) for the death of a member of his lineage. Nowadays Tshikona can also be performed at any other entertainment occasions sponsored by rulers or other prominent people; such as political gatherings, inauguration of the country’s president or a university chancellor or principal, and so on. Other smaller ensembles frequently used for bepha (entertainment expeditions) are Tshigombela (traditional amusement dance and song for unmarried girls) (see figure 3) or Tshikanganga (traditional amusement dance and pipe playing for boys). The chief who receives them is bound to return the complement. (Benso, 1979: 37).

Another traditional musical practice prevalent amongst Vhavenda is Malombo, which Blacking named “possession dance”. This is one distinct ritual musical practice that unmistakably links Vhavenda with Vhakalanga or Vhashona of Zimbabwe. The music is performed by a woman (or occasionally a man) who, upon being told that her illness is spiritual, has to dance day and night (usually for a week) until the spirit of her ancestors enters her. The spirit is then identified
and talks through the patient in a language that mixes Tshivenda and Tshikalanga. The music is a combination of drumming, singing and dancing (Blacking, 1964:36-37).

In accordance with Venda traditional custom, Tshikona and *Malombo* musical performances are reserved for solemn and important rites. People in Zimbabwe, especially Vhakalanga who are regarded as part of Vhavenda ancestry, practice the same music and custom rites (van Tonder, 1987:2-3).

![Fig. 1 Traditional Venda Drums](image-url)
Fig. 2 Tshikona

Fig. 3 Tshigombela
Traditional Venda music was also overtly political. It would sometimes be performed in a variety of political contexts and often for specific purposes. Performed chiefly by commoners, it was sponsored by rulers (Blacking, 1967:16). This environment of patronage, however, should not be construed as akin to that which was experienced by Western music practitioners (composers and performers) during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries (Renaissance and Baroque periods). Venda musicians could spontaneously begin a song during a beer-drinking session, sometimes subtly ridiculing a ruler (chief or headman), without any cue or request from anyone. There was, therefore, some freedom of choice of time and place to make music, and the themes they chose were not always governed.

Musical activities of Vhavenda were therefore under the patronage of people themselves (rulers and commoners). This made everyone aware of oneself and of one’s responsibilities towards others such as mahosi (kings), magota (chiefs) and vhakoma (headmen). Music thus played an important part in the social and political life of every Muvenda (Blacking, 1967: 15)

Whilst this study recognises that pure instrumental music is not uncommon amongst Vhavenda, as was evidenced by the large number of popular instrumental ensembles such as Tsikona, Tshikanganga and others mentioned earlier, it is also significant to mention that the exploration and discussion, which is primarily based on previous literary discourse available on the subject, will be more confined to choral music.
Characteristics of Indigenous Venda Music

As stated in the beginning, one of the primary aims of this study is to evaluate the relationship between the selected choral music and the elements peculiar to traditional Venda music.

Studies in previous and contemporary literature on African music reveal the view that “song holds the key to understanding African musical cultures” (Agawu, 1995:2). “Klaus Wachmann’s view that there is hardly any music in Africa that is not in some way rooted in speech is echoed in Chernoff’s remark that African music is derived from language “(Agawu, 1995:2). Agawu contends that other scholars such as Francis Bebey and David Locke, much as they have concentrated more and done some outstanding studies, out of which they have produced commendable literature on “drumming-based African rhythm” (Agawu, 1995:2), hold the same view.

In African music, there is a strong link between speech-tone and melody. As in speech, correct tone is essential for conveying the meaning of words. The basic principle is to allow the rhythm and the melody of a composition to grow from accents and tones of the words. Words affect the relative pitches of the syllables, whilst the overall sentence shape affects the musical phrase as a whole (Dargie, 1988:68-75). According to Bebey, in Africa it is impossible to estimate which came first between speech and song. Much African music is based on speech. The bond between language and music is so intimate that it is actually possible to tune an instrument so that the music it produces is linguistically comprehensible (Bebey, 1975:119).

Generally, the melodic outline is dictated by the semantic tone structure of the language of a particular African language group. In Nguni languages such as isiZulu and isiXhosa, there is a tendency towards a constant overall falling pattern throughout each phrase in a sentence. The first phrase tends to begin on
a high pitch and falls towards the end of the phrase. The next phrase again begins at a high tonal level, but not as high as the previous phrase, but follows the same progression; that is, beginning at a high tonal level and progressing to a low pitch. This is the general tendency of Nguni speech patterns. Likewise, Nguni melodies are structured like a succession of teeth in a saw. The tendency is for the tune to start at a high pitch level and to work gradually downwards in this saw-like manner. When there are uninterrupted high-pitched tones or uninterrupted low-pitched tones in succession, the melody might stay at the same level or fall (Dargie, 1988:68-75). In some African societies, any melodic contradiction between the ways a word is spoken and the way it is sung is inconceivable. “Music thus grows out of the intonations and rhythmic onomatopoeias of speech” (Bebey, 1975:120).

Vhavenda do not strictly or always expect a song to sound like ordinary speech, and they generally understand the meaning of texts even if the patterns of speech-tone are distorted by the melody. There are some songs, particularly those for Venda children, in which the speech-tone patterns of the texts are sacrificed almost entirely for musical considerations (Blacking, 1964: 288). This has also become a common feature of the many contemporary compositions composed for church and school functions, most probably due to the acquisition of other cultures and the missionary enterprise earlier alluded to. Nevertheless, whilst it is common to find those artistic conventions that would not be accepted in ordinary speech, most melodies in traditional Venda music are generally influenced by the tones of normal speech (Blacking, 1964: 285 -286).

Generally, when a high speech-tone occurs at the beginning of a word-pattern, the accompanying melody usually begins on the highest tone of the tone row on which the song is based. Speech-tone patterns may influence certain parts of the melodies, chiefly the beginning of phrases. However, whereas descents in speech-tone and melody may not necessarily coincide exactly, a rise in speech-tone is generally accompanied by a rise in melody. Like in most traditional African music cultures, if the text ends on a low speech-tone, the final cadences

Whereas it is common for African rhythm to be heavily influenced by the spoken word, traditional Venda songs do not sound rhythmically exactly like ordinary speech. “Even more economy of expression may be accepted, and correct grammar can be abandoned so that words will fit the metre of the music” (Blacking, 1964: 266). As Blacking, von Hornborstel and others have discovered, even in ordinary Venda conversation, “there are many ideas that are implied without being said” (Blacking, 1964: 266)

Like in most music of other African cultures besides the Nguni, singing amongst Vhavenda differs from speech chiefly because its words are arranged in a strict metrical framework. “Words and music come into the singer’s mind as one in Venda music” (von Hornborstel in Blacking, 1964: 268). Once the basic metre of the song has been established in the first word pattern or line, the remainder of the text generally conforms to the given pattern, and the number of syllables per line is controlled accordingly. The spoken rhythm of the first word- pattern of a song may influence its basic metre. Each line of a song is in itself a total pattern, which can be sung once, or any number of times without affecting the structure of the song as a whole (Blacking, 1964: 268 - 273). It is common in traditional Venda music to find that the spoken rhythms of the first word – pattern of most songs would determine the basic beat.

In most cases real music making amongst Africans occurs when singing, dancing, hand clapping, instrumental playing and drumming are put together and thereby produce a combination of different rhythmic units. African music may therefore have two or more rhythmic patterns operating. Another characteristic of African music is the phenomenon of ‘off-beating’ or accentuation of weak beats, also known as syncopation. In both the polyrhythmic structures and the syncopated rhythms, there is usually a fundamental regular beat underlying them (Merriam, 1959:58). Polyrhythm occurs in Venda music as it does in the music of
other African societies and cultures. This may apply to all the parts or lines that are performed simultaneously, resulting in different stresses at different beats of a particular basic metre. The most appropriate example would be easily identifiable in the combinations of instrumental and vocal music during performances of Tshigombela, Domba, and the predominantly instrumental music of Tshikona.

From the above views, it can be safely deduced that speech-tone has, therefore, considerably more influence on the melodies of Venda songs than does word-stress on their metre.

In traditional African singing, a song may be intended for performance in unison, or as a tune to which supporting melodies, melodic phrases, or isolated tones can be added. It may also be made up of interlocking melodic fragments. Harmony is hereby derived from this instinctive musical sense. Traditional Venda songs can have two different melodies, which may be sung together or independently. This is a common feature in most choruses; especially those derived from story-songs. The melody is embellished by the addition of one or more parts that, sometimes, move independently but most commonly in parallel motion at intervals of a third, fourth, fifth or octave. According to Nketia, this is the traditional approach to harmony and texture in African music (Nketia, 1974:160).

In Venda music, the principle of “harmonic equivalence” (Blacking, 1964: 290) regulates many of the alterations in melodies that follow speech-tone patterns. The movement of the second melody in parallel motion may, however, not always be an exact replica of the main melody, though it usually should employ the same mode. Some African societies employ what is called “polarity, which is the duplication of melodies in octaves, with men and women singing together. Others use homophonic parallelism (especially parallel thirds and fourths). The choice of interval is generally related to the kind of scale pattern on which the music is based. Some parts may be arranged in such a way that an ostinato,
sung by a group, provides a ground above which the solo and chorus parts are sung (Nketia, 1974:166).

In pentatonic music, which is one of the most common musical features in African music, a single line may develop here and there into more than one voice. Some singers may sing a second, third, or fourth above, or a fifth below a note in the main melody, and return immediately to the main melody. This incidence, which is regarded as purely decorative, is termed “occasional heterophony” (Nketia, 1974:166). This is very common in the indigenous music of Vhavenda. It is very common in traditional Venda vocal ensembles to hear a soloist executing some musical variations to the basic melody. The basic melody is derived from the basic theme, which is usually stated in the first word-pattern of the song. This first word-pattern of the song forms the basis of the melody of the chorus, which does not vary. The musical variations are also directly or indirectly influenced by the speech-tone patterns of the basic theme of the text. Vhavenda do not regard such changes in the melodic line more as musical variations than as linguistic variations. (Blacking, 1964: 288-290).

A major characteristic of the formal structure of an African song is the phenomenon of call and response. This may be described as alternate singing by a soloist and the chorus, with no gap in the line of singing (Huskisson, 1969: V). At times, the leader (solo) and the chorus may overlap, resulting in two melodic lines being sung simultaneously. The initial call and response pattern then becomes polyphonic (Merriam, 1959: 62). In some instances, the chorus may also sing the melodic line that identifies the song, while the leader’s melody is for the most part improvised. In such instances, the chorus line remains unchanged throughout the song, while the solo line changes each time it is sung. Call and response songs are usually cyclic in form. Each song is built up of constant repetitions of rhythmically identical cyclic patterns. These patterns derive their melodic shape from shapes of verbal intonation and speech-tone. In cases where the songs are sectional, the change from one part to the next often
involves some change in cycle lengths (both textual and musical material) (Dargie, 1988: 90-91).

Another common feature of the structure of African songs is antiphony. Unlike call and response, which involves solo (leader) and chorus (follower), here two groups (two choruses) are involved in dialogue, with one group usually entering after the end of the phrase sung by the other.

In both antiphony and call and response, the music usually consists of short melodic phrases. Unless the song is used for a special ritual or other purpose, it is usually sung a piacere; that is, the limit to the performance length of a song depends solely on the energy of the performer, (Merriam, 1959: 63).

A common polyphonic style of singing in South Africa, especially amongst most Nguni tribes and Vhavenda, is that of parts operating in alternation, giving rise to overlapping of phrases. At least two voice parts form the basis of this style, and each part may carry its own text. More and more other voices may continue to be added singing non-identical texts, and the result will be an “intricate vocal texture” (Rycroft, 1967: 88-103)

It was in such African musical settings or environment that Venda choral music composers grew up before they had to leave their rural homes to further their studies at Western oriented mission schools, which were the only available schools in Venda at the time.

Vhavenda were the last of the African language group in South Africa to be seriously affected by contact with Europeans. For many decades, the secluded mountainous environment in which they had chosen to live had shielded them from foreign cultural influences, and that allowed the people to vigorously practice their indigenous musical activities down the years without interference. It was also not until 1899 that they finally submitted to the authority of the
Transvaal Boer Republic (Blacking, 1967: 16), and the enterprise of the missions, particularly through schools and churches.

It was only after 1863 that music patronage by Vhavenda rulers began to give way to patronage by the Christian churches. That was when missionary influence started in Venda with the Dutch Reformed Church. The Berlin Lutheran Missionary Society followed them and established mission stations around Venda such as Beuster (later called Maungani) in 1872, Tshakhuma in 1874 and Georgenholtz (Ha Luvhimbi) in 1877 (Kirkaldy, 2000:3-4). The third group was the Swiss missionaries in 1875, followed by the Presbyterian Church in 1902, then the Seventh Day Adventists in 1918. By 1940, most notable missionaries were almost well established in Venda. It was only at the beginning of the 20th century that schools and hospitals also began to mushroom around Venda due to this missionary enterprise (Blacking, 1964: 32).

The establishment of these missionaries in Venda and the resultant encroachment of Western musical idioms and elements saw a breakdown-cum-emergence of a new cultural unit within the communities. There was a wholesome importation of a new musical taste that made traditional Venda music inferior by the standards of educated Vhavenda teachers, ministers of religion and composers.

Although some of the indigenous Venda musical traditions discussed earlier have now become almost obsolete and have been replaced by Western-influenced ones, some aspects of Vhavenda’s former beliefs and the rituals connected with such beliefs have, in a large measure, been retained. Presently there is now a strong movement towards reviving most of these Venda indigenous musical practices. Traditional Music Festivals in Tshikona and Tshigombela and, to a lesser extent, the smaller traditional Venda ensembles such as malende are held annually around Venda community settings, vehemently sponsored and supported by the National Department of Arts and Culture and its affiliates, and the SABC’s Phalaphala FM Radio.
Tshivenda (The Venda Language)

Although in the past they could be distinguished markedly from the other “ethnic” groups in South Africa in the terms of their appearance, customs, habits of life and language, presently the major distinct sign of difference between Vhavenda and the other indigenous South African groups is the language. Hence, today we say Vhavenda are one of the “language” groups in the country. The emphasis has shifted from the “ethnic” group to “language” group when differentiating the indigenous people of South Africa. General habits of life like customs, clothing religion and other traits may still differ slightly from one language group to the other, but the greatest distinction of Vhavenda from the rest is drawn from their language – their vocabulary as well as grammar, “though it has some affinities with Sesotho and Karanga” (Blacking, 1967:15).

As pointed out earlier, Vhavenda have always spoken Tshivenda, albeit with different but closely related dialects (Mathivha, 1966: 3). The different dialects they used were not necessarily determined by their tribal affiliations, but by various factors. For example, certain sounds of the language of people of an adjoining area could creep in over a long period and as a result influence the speech or words of the language of another group. These innovations then become established within that group, and become part of their own language (Poulos, 1990: 8). This has been the main factor that gave rise to the dialects that we find amongst Vhavenda today. The most common dialects found amongst Vhavenda today are:

Luilafuri: This is found amongst Vhavenda living along the Soutpansberg Mountains and the Limpopo valley. The influence of Sesotho sa Leboa language, especially Tlokwa dialect, is evident here. Words such as nyaga for toda (to seek), kwata for sinyuwa (to be angry) etc. characterize this dialect (Mathivha, 1996: 4).
Luronga: This is found in the low areas of Venda south of the Soutpansberg Mountains. It has been heavily influenced by the Lobedu dialect of Sesotho sa Leboa language group and Xitsonga (Tsonga language). Instead of the usual Tshivenda sentence construction like Muthu ane nda amba nae (the person with whom I speak), they say muthu ndi ambaho nae. It is characterized by the use of the verbal suffix –ho in the verbal relative construction (Mathivha, 1996: 5).

Luphani: Other languages have least influenced this dialect. Originally spoken in the Tshivhase area only, it has since been, through missionary influence, traditionally recognised as the standard dialect of Tshivenda language. It was in the Tshivhase area that the first mission station of the Berlin Missionary Society, the Beuster Mission Station, was established in 1872 and, as a result, the dialect of the surrounding community of the area became the first to be used as a written language form (Poulos, 1990: 8). It is, therefore, through the latter dialect that this research briefly explores the linguistic analysis of Tshivenda.

Reverend Gottschling, to whose research style in Tshivenda (the Venda language) I am greatly indebted, has given some examples of the differences between the Venda language and that of the neighbouring Sepedi dialect of Sesotho sa Leboa language group (Gottschling, 1905: 384-385).

In an attempt to clarify the distinction even further, it was necessary to add more examples by using one more language (Xitsonga):

Examples (see next page):

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Venda word</th>
<th>Phonetic symbol</th>
<th>Tsonga word</th>
<th>Phonetic symbol</th>
<th>Pedi word</th>
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<td>noka</td>
<td></td>
<td>River</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
These examples reveal that most words in Tshivenda mean something very different or quite the opposite when used in other languages. The word ‘madi” means, “water” in Tshivenda, but the same “madi’ means, “blood” in Sepedi, Setswana and Sesotho.

Tshivenda also has syllables that are unique, and some of them are:

- vh as in vhathu which sounds like batho in Sepedi
- fh (as in tshifhinga and malofha), which does not exist in the other South African indigenous languages.

Granted that Vhavenda are a distinctive language group that speaks a language that is not mutually communicative with any other African languages in South Africa, they nonetheless share “some common linguistic features” with those of the other language groups (Poulos, 1990: 2). It is therefore very common to find words that are similar in form amongst Tshivenda and the other African languages of South African, for example:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Tshivenda</th>
<th>Zulu</th>
<th>Tsonga</th>
<th>Pedi</th>
<th>English</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Muthu</td>
<td>Umuntu</td>
<td>Munhu</td>
<td>Motho</td>
<td>Person</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Tshivenda also makes use of very fine distinctions in its sound system, such as the use of tone. Each syllable is associated with some or other tone, be it high (  )
or low ( ), falling ( ) or rising ( ). Hence, two identical words can be distinguished by their differing tone patterns, example:
thoho (ape) and thoho (head)
thovho (mat) and thovho (sandals)
mulindi (hole) and mulindi (guard)
murambo (an invitation) and murambo (sweet potato) (Mathivha, 1966: 5 and Poulos, 1990: 6).

These sets of nouns have identical spellings but different meanings because of the different semantic tones applied when spoken. The syntax of these identical words (their functions in sentence) is most readily understood amongst Vhavenda, but for other language groups to understand them properly and use them in their context, it is significant to represent them orthographically, hence the application of the toneme patterns.

The use of toneme patterns is not applicable to nouns only, for example:
U sevha (to use as relish in food)
U sevha (to gossip)

The same applies to a word that can serve as either a noun or a verb, for example:
Mala (intestines)
Mala (marry) and
U mala (to marry)
Again, a word with the same spelling and the same semantic tone can produce two or more different meanings, example:
U fula (to pluck fruit from a fruit tree or remove a pot from the fire)
U fula (to bewitchingly inject with poison).
Tshivenda also has falling and rising tone patterns or tonemes; example:
Ndo da (I have come)
Ndo da? (Did I come?)
Ndi fhano (when I am here)
Ndi fhano? (Am I here?)
Ndi fhano (I am here)

Our South African indigenous languages are tone languages. Each word has an individual tone and, consequently, its melodic shape. Since the relative levels of the syllables help to determine meaning, compositions have to respect the intonation of words and sentence-tone in order to communicate the correct meaning of words “A composer who disregards this fact runs the risk of rendering the lyrics meaningless” \(^2\) (Detterbeck, 2003: 300).

Tshivenda is, therefore, a tone language. The melodic inflections of Tshivenda words have semantic significance. Since this has tremendous implications for any vocal compositions, it is significant for this research to explore, trace and analyse whether the composers in question have taken this into account or not in their compositions and, if not, why not.

\(^2\)Mzilikazi Khumalo and other contemporary Venda composers such as Fhatuwani Sumbana (Sumbana, 2002: Interview) hold the same view and have always argued for that.
Our selected composers wrote on a vast variety of subjects; history, society, culture, customs, nature, events and everyday happenings. The next chapters set out to examine (analyse) the scores of the selected compositions of the identified composers.

Secondly, the project aims to study the song texts in these composers’ music, with the hope that these will bring to light the riches and meaning of Tshivenda (the Venda language), and how the composers use it in their own different ways to express their feelings and views about nature, Venda history, culture, traditions, norms and values. These texts will be examined against the music set thereto.

Previous research in South African choral music usually opted for “Periodisation” of the stylistic development of South African ‘African’ eclectic\(^3\) compositions (Detterbeck, 2003:306) this study has arranged the selected compositions chronologically in accordance with the composers’ age and date of each composition. It should be stated though that the chronological arrangement of the compositions is not absolute, for some compositions do transcend categorisation according to age. Some of the earlier composers’ compositions are very recent.

Undoubtedly, the diversified themes and texts chosen by the composers reveal their diversified thoughts and philosophy (ies) behind their compositions. Although some of the stylistic features of the compositions may not have pronounced differences, the composers’ intentions and idiosyncrasies make the one different from the other.

---

\(^3\)Eclectic Compositions: those works that integrate elements of the African and Western traditions (Detterbeck, 2003: 297)
The study also provided literal translations of these texts into English, as well as brief explanations of the composers’ intentions for each song. The crucial questions behind these examinations are: do these compositions represent Tshivenda tone language? Since these composers used tonic sol-fa only in their compositions, which is the only system easily readable by both the composers and most African choral music enthusiasts generally, has the tonic sol-fa fairly represented the traditional Venda speech-tone patterns of their texts both rhythmically and melodically? Furthermore, given the limiting tonic sol-fa system they were exclusively working with, could these composers really manage to realize and utilize their potentials fully in their attempt to evoke the subtle tonal nuances characteristic of the Venda music in their works?

I see this project as a preliminary study and not as absolute, hoping that my methodologies of the analysis of the selected compositions might stimulate future debates and further studies on this theme or other related subjects.
CHAPTER ONE

Stephen Maimela Dzivhani

1.1. Biography of the Composer

It has not been possible to ascertain or establish the exact date of Dzivhani’s birth. Whereas records say Stephen Dzivhani was born in 1888 (Huskisson, 1969: 35), his daughter-in-law Naomi Matsheiso Dzivhani, a Pre-School Educator at Christ the King School in Makwarela, refutes this. She contends that her father-in-law in fact first went to Johannesburg to work for some time before he came back to start school. By the time, he started attending school he was already a grown-up young man. Due to his naturally frail body the Beuster Mission School just estimated his age and recorded her father-in-law’s birth year as 1884 (Naomi Dzivhani, Interview: 2004). According to Naomi Dzivhani, then, both 1884 and 1888 are not true representations of Dzivhani’s date of birth. This was very common during the time of Dzivhani. Not only the missionaries, but also almost all bureaucratic officials, particularly those semi-educated white officials, would simply take a guess on a person’s age and make it an official record. Many people of Dzivhani’s age, including my father, have unverified dates of births. This was very rife particularly in areas where there were no educated Africans, which was the case during the 19th and early 20th centuries in Venda.

The son of a headman at Miluwani (Gammbani) in Venda, and as was the norm during his time; Stephen grew up participating in Venda traditional musical activities. As a young man, he enjoyed playing Venda traditional musical instruments such as Mbila and Tshizambi and keenly took part in Tshikona.

He received his schooling at Beuster Mission Station School (a Lutheran Mission Station at Maungani) in Venda. After baptismal at the mission station, Dzivhani
was taken to Botshabelo Training Institute, a missionary institution of higher learning in Middelburg (Mpumalanga Province), where he stayed for eight (8) years furthering his schooling whilst also being guided for priesthood. It was at Botshabelo that Stephen Dzivhani took violin and organ lessons and learned to read staff notation.

His first teaching post was around Polokwane at a certain Anglican Mission School, and this is where he met his wife Selina Manyakanyaka (Naomi Dzivhani Interview: 2004). Stephen returned home (Venda) in 1914 to begin a “long and distinguished teaching career” (Huskisson, 1969:35). He started teaching at the Lutheran Mission Station School in Beuster, and thereafter moved around Venda establishing a number of schools including Makwarela, Tswinga, Dzingahe, Tshilivho, Lufule, Muraga, Tshamavhudzi, Maniini and Ngudza.

It is significant to note that except for his involvement in traditional Venda musical practices during the earliest stages of his growth, Stephen Maimela Dzivhani’s upbringing during his formative years until he reached adulthood was predominantly influenced by Western Christian missionary tendencies. From the time he started school at Maungani until he completed his teaching and priesthood education, he was taken away from the influences of indigenous Venda cultural heritage: indigenous music, instruments, attire, traditions, norms and values. Hence, his music was based mainly on Western-style hymnody, and a large percentage of his compositions were in religious vein, aimed towards rational disciplined recreation, and not the “wild uncontrolled music-making (Kirkaldy 2000:16) or traditional Venda musicians during work, in the army, in ceremonies and rituals and any other occasions for amusement.
1.2. Dzivhani’s Compositions

Dzivhani helped Dr PE Schwellnuss to write *Nyimbo dza Vhatendi* – a Lutheran Church Hymn Book in Tshivenda. Dr PE Schwellnuss, one of the most influential Berlin Missionary Society priests, was also responsible for translating the Bible into Tshivenda and Sepedi. Nyimbo dza Vhatendi contains 236 hymns, six of which are Dzivhani’s contribution, and these are:

- Hymn number 63: *Vhonani he ndi muthu-de* (See how He looks like).
- Hymn number 156: *Khotsi anga mune wanga* (My Father My Lord).
- Hymn number 180: *Vuwa! Muya wanga* (Wake Up, My soul).
- Hymn number 233: *Ane a kunda.* (The One who conquers).
- Hymn number 216: *Ndo khathutshelwa nga Murena* (I have been redeemed by the Lord) and

Dzivhani not only composed hymns, but also greatly contributed to the Venda choral repertoire with some choral compositions in both religious and secular vein. The religious ones include:

- *Murena Mudzimu shudufhadza Afrika* (Lord God Bless Africa),
- *Takalani Murenani misi yothe* (Rejoice in The Lord at all times),
- *Lentsu ke le monate* (The World is delicious)
- *Thabelo ya Dzata* (Prayer for Dzata) and others.

The secular ones are:

- *Ngomalungundu* (The Venda Drum),
- *Mishumo ndi vhutshilo* (Work is the duty of life),
- *Lufuno a lu fheli* (Love does not die),
Stephen Maimela Dzivhani

According to the daughter-in-law, Naomi, this photograph was taken a week before Stephen Maimela Dzivhani died.
Dzivhani obviously fell under the spell of Christian missionary choralism which, like the 19th century Victorian choralism (Olwage 2003: 26-34) emphasized discipline, equal-note rhythm, and homogeneity. Individuality, which was one prominent feature of indigenous Venda music making, was anathema.

Before peacefully passing away, he had translated all the texts in the Sepedi hymnbook, *Difela tsa Kereke*, into Tshivenda. These were reportedly forwarded to Reverend Patrice Masekela (Nemukovhani, 2004: Interview) with the aim of having them published. Reverend Masekela has since died before honouring the directive. It is now not certain as to what will become of this unpublished treasure by Stephen Maimela Dzivhani.
1.3. Analysis of Selected Compositions

1.3.1. **NYIMBO DZA VHATENDI** (Songs of Christians)
Words and music by SM Dzivhani

**Hymn no: 216. NDO KHATHUTSHELWA NGA MURENA**
(The Lord has redeemed me)  

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>TEXT</th>
<th>TRANSLATION</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ndo khathutshelwa nga Murena</td>
<td>My Lord has pardoned me</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wa vhuthu vhu sa fheliho,</td>
<td>Whose righteousness is eternal.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>O ntanzwa mbilu ya vha tshena,</td>
<td>He washed my heart clean,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A mpha zwi sa vhaliwiho.</td>
<td>And gave me abundance.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Naa a si khathutshelo naa ::</td>
<td>This is goodwill ::</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ho tshidzwa nne tshisiwana ::</td>
<td>The needy have been redeemed :</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ndo vha ndi muvhi ndo no xela,</td>
<td>I was a sinner I was lost,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vhutshilo ndi sa vhu todi.</td>
<td>I no longer sought life.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mutshidzi wanga a ntevhela,</td>
<td>My redeemer looked for me,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A ngwana zwa vha zwavhudi.</td>
<td>And found me.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Naa a si khathutshelo naa ::</td>
<td>This is goodwill ::</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ho tshidzwa nne tshisiwana ::</td>
<td>The needy have been redeemed ::</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ndi do di dovha nda zwi bula,</td>
<td>I will have to testify,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Na vhanwe nga vha divhe-vho</td>
<td>So that others may also know</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Zwa uri Yesu o nthadula,</td>
<td>That Jesus has relieved me,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vha zwi pfe a vha tshidze-vho.</td>
<td>They should know, that they could</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>be redeemed too.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Naa a si khathutshelo naa ::</td>
<td>This is goodwill ::</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ho tshidzwa nne tshisiwana ::</td>
<td>The needy have been redeemed ::</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Ndo khathutshelwa thi nga lovhi; I have been pardoned, I will not perish;
A hu tshee na zwi ntshushaho. Nothing scares me any longer.
O ntanzwa tshikha, thi nga dovhi He has washed me; I will not do it again
Nda pfana na zwi ntshinyaho. Getting involved in sinful deeds.
Naa a si khathutshelo naa ;:.
Ho tshidzwa nne tshisiwana ;:.
Mukhathutsheli, ndi na iwe, Oh my redeemer, when I am with you,
Thi lili musi zwa vhifha I am not alone in bad times
U hone, U do ri fhiwe You are present, I will be provided
U tshila tshothe ndi tshi fa. With everlasting life when I die.
A li nga vhi dakalo naa ;:.
Ho tshidzwa nne tshisiwana ;:.
The needy have been redeemed ;:;

I have been pardoned, I will not perish;
Nothing scares me any longer.
He has washed me; I will not do it again
Getting involved in sinful deeds.
This is goodwill ;:
The needy have been redeemed ;:
Oh my redeemer, when I am with you,
I am not alone in bad times
You are present, I will be provided
With everlasting life when I die.
It will be a joyous celebration ;:
The needy have been redeemed;:
### TEXT

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Zulu Text</th>
<th>English Translation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Mafhungo a ndifhelaho</td>
<td><em>The good news</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ndi di pfa na u pfa;</td>
<td><em>that is pleasant to hear</em>;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A Yesu o ri felaho,</td>
<td><em>of Jesus who died for us,</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>U swika ndi tshi fa.</td>
<td><em>until I also die.</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tshisima hetshi tshavhudi</td>
<td><em>This is goodwill</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ndi tshi elelaho;</td>
<td><em>This is ever flowing</em>;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tshi no nga tshone thi tshi di,</td>
<td><em>I know not any other,</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ndi nwa nda rula-vho.</td>
<td><em>I drink from it satisfactorily.</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ndi mbuvha lwendoni lwanga,</td>
<td><em>This is provision for my journey,</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Manna I fushaho;</td>
<td><em>Manna that satisfies,</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ndi vhuswa ha muya wanga,</td>
<td><em>Food of my breath,</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vhune nda shaya-vho.</td>
<td><em>That I need.</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ndi tsha di vhilaela’ni?</td>
<td><em>What do I still need,</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ndi na Yesu wanga.</td>
<td><em>When I am with Jesus.</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shango li nga nnea mini?</td>
<td><em>Blessed are those</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ndi na mune wanga.</td>
<td><em>Who have also tasted.</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ndi Yesu fhedzi a fhaho</td>
<td><em>There is joy in abundance</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>La vha shumelaho.</td>
<td><em>To those who work</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>U dzhena kha vha sa vhalwi</td>
<td><em>In order to join the multitudes</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vho no orowa-vho.</td>
<td><em>Of those already departed.</em></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
COMMENTARY
The texts of these compositions reveal the impact that the Missionary enterprise had on the lives of those Vhavenda that adopted the Christian religion. “In South Africa the gravitation towards the Christian faith was further intensified by the white minority government which declared the country a Christian state” (Montjane, 1996:64). This was further compounded by the negation of other forms of religion amongst Vhavenda by the superior and more prestigious white missionaries to the position of paganism. This contributed towards the unquestionable acceptance of Christian morals and virtues by most indigenous South Africans. All the composers under scrutiny in this study were brought up under the Christian faith, hence a vast repertoire in this vein among them, as it will be illustrated in the respective profiles. It was partly for reasons of brevity that this project selected only two of Dzivhani’s compositions and the fact that these aptly represent the composer’s overall style.

Stephen Dzivhani’s upbringing during his formative years until he reached adulthood was predominantly influenced by western Christian Missionary tendencies; hence, his compositions were in a religious idiom. Dzivhani helped Dr PE Schwellnuss, one of the missionaries who worked amongst Vhavenda and who was responsible for translating the Bible into Tshivenda and Sepedi, to write “Nyimbo dza Vhatendi” – a Lutheran Church Hymn Book in Tshivenda. Nyimbo dza Vhatendi contains 236 hymns, six of which are Stephen Dzivhani’s contributions.

Although he is credited as having contributed six hymns to the hymnbook, only two were truly his; both the music and the text. The music of the other four was taken from some German hymns that were brought by the missionary, to which he merely put Venda words. This study will examine the two hymns indicated above, which are his in all respects.

Undoubtedly, Dzivhani’s two hymns show the influence of rudimentary Western compositional techniques that he had learnt and religiously adopted, especially in
its melodies, rhythms and harmony. The short phrases and application of the fermata in the second hymn in particular is reminiscent of church organ music, with the rhythm somewhat predetermined.

Both hymns employ the major key tonality. Whereas the texture in the first hymn is a bit loosened by the addition of non-chord notes (suspensions and retardations), the second one is homophonic.

In both hymns, conventional stepwise motion is predominant, with a narrow range not exceeding an interval of a major sixth. The melodies show no influence of the speech-tone patterns and semantic significance of Tshivenda.

Rhythmically, the music of the second hymn is very close to the speech-rhythm of the sentences of the text. The setting of the music to the text is in a syllabic style, a style that is typically characteristic of the majority of traditional Venda songs.

Despite him not having given due attention to the semantic significance of the essentially tonal Venda language, Dzivhani elicits beautiful music in these two compositions, which display his maturity in the mastery of Western compositional techniques, particularly his craftsmanship in the harmonies, chord progressions and the cadences. Typical of mission-trained South African indigenous choral music converts, Dzivhani’s music shows the four-part homophonic harmonization that he had learnt from the Berlin Missionary hymnody. To succeed in doing so, was a symbol of having achieved what Olwage calls “the arts of civilization” (Olwage, 2003: 34).

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4Nonge, one of the selected composers, is impressed with the artistry of both Dr PE Schwellnuss and Dzivhani in the rhyming technique of the texts in their hymns (Nonge, 2005: Interview).
CHAPTER TWO

Matthew Ramboho Nemakhavhani

2.1. Biography of the Composer

Born at Makanga (Phiphidi) around 1918 of a father who was a practitioner of Indigenous Venda music, Matthew Nemakhavhani was musically very talented. From an early age, he started developing poor vision. This was quickly spotted as early as when he was at Makwarela Primary School. Mr SM Dzivhani (the composer discussed earlier), who was then headmaster of the school, made arrangements for Matthew to continue his schooling at the Athlone School for the Blind in Cape Town. Using Braille, he completed his primary education (Standard 6) at Athlone in 1938.

Whilst at Athlone, Matthew continued to amaze both his teachers and fellow pupils with his musical talents, especially with singing and composing. He would sing a tune, figure out the harmony himself without writing anything down, and teach his friends to sing all the parts of the song at once. It was only after he had returned home to Venda that SM Dzivhani wrote some of the compositions down for him. These were preserved in one exercise book.

Matthew was also being guided for priesthood whilst at Athlone; hence, he went to study as an evangelist at the St Peter’s Theological College (Anglican Church) at Rossettenville in Johannesburg from 1939 to 1940. He graduated as a catechist and, since he also took some theology courses at the same time, he was awarded a Certificate in Theology.

Matthew started working as a catechist at St Andrew’s Anglican Church at Muledane in Venda from 1941 to 1961. After undergoing further theological
studies with Bishop Edward Knapp-Fisher at Jane Furse Mission Station in 1962 and 1963, he was ordained as a deacon in 1964.

From 1964 Matthew Nemakhavhani worked as a priest first at an Anglican Church at Louis Trichardt and thereafter at St Mary’s’ in Tshisahulu (Venda) until his retirement in 1987. Nemakhavhani passed away in early 2006.

A woman who was hired to look after the ailing old man managed to retrieve this photo from some of Nemakhavhani’s not so well looked after personal possessions.
2.2. Nemakhavhani’s Music

Nemakhavhani is credited with having established two choirs, “Mighty Scotch” (at Muledane) and “Morning Star” (at Makwarela), and these two outfits sang most of his compositions under his baton. His compositions were in both sacred and secular vein. Some of these compositions are:

*Muya u a unga, mvula i a na,*
*Venda Song and*
*Shango la hashu.*

Since the composer used to teach his compositions orally to his choirs, some were not notated, except those that were preserved by the late Stephen Maimela Dzivhani. The composer had grown old and could not remember exactly how some of his compositions used to sound. It is a pity that, much as we tried, both the researcher and the composer could not manage to recapture the lost music, including those that were written down for him by his mentor, the late Stephen Maimela Dzivhani. This research could only manage to capture one song, *Venda Song,* which has since been written in dual notation (tonic and staff notation) for the purposes of this research document.
2.3. Analysis of the Composition

2.3.1. **Venda Song**
Words and music by M R Nemakhavhani

*Appendix 3*

Date of composition not established

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>TEXT</th>
<th>TRANSLATION</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Kuvhusele kwa Venda</td>
<td>The governance of Vendaland</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kwo fhambananaho,</td>
<td>Which was not consistent</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kwo ro naniswa nga vhatzinda.</td>
<td>Was made worse by foreigners.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Zwo di thoma na kale</td>
<td>It started a long time ago,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nga Thohoyandou,</td>
<td>With Thohoyandou,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Zwo ro naniswa nga vhatzinda.</td>
<td>And made worse by foreigners.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vho daho na dzipfunzo</td>
<td>They brought education</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dzo fhambananaho.</td>
<td>Which were diverse.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vha sandana nga tshavho,</td>
<td>They criticised each other,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vha funza Vhavenda</td>
<td>And taught Vhavenda</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>U ri Venda li shaye nyandano.</td>
<td>That Venda should be devoid of unity.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Na nyandano i do da lini?</td>
<td>When is unity going to come?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I liliwaho nga Vhavenda.</td>
<td>Vhavenda are yearning for it.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hu vuwa zwa ha Thohoyandou.</td>
<td>The spirit of Thohoyandou arises.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Malombe ndi a Thohoyandou.</td>
<td>Musicians belong to Thohoyandou.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>He! Mbila dza makhulu dzo ro tshinyala,</td>
<td>Hey! My grandfather’s Mbila is damaged,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dzo tshinyala, dzo tshinyala,</td>
<td>Is damaged, damaged,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dze dze dzo u lila ha bva buse.</td>
<td>Only dust comes out when one plays them.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
COMMENTARY

The composer bemoans the death of Venda culture and traditions. He blames this on foreign intervention in the then Vendaland sovereignty. Foreigners arrived and influenced Vhavenda to change their lifestyles (culture, traditions, norms and values). It started with the end of the reign of King Thohoyandou. (Discussed earlier under Venda history in the introduction) First, it was the missionaries and then the white settlers (Voortrekkers) that conquered Vendaland and subsequently subjugated Vhavenda. They thereafter criticised everything that was typical, original or uniquely Venda and, through their education, managed to divide Vhavenda as a nation. Two groups emerged; the pro-western culture against the anti-western culture Vhavenda. Venda unity was destroyed. Even Venda music (for example mbila) was looked down upon and people were discouraged from playing it. Indigenous Venda music, which had helped forge community identity and had become entrenched in the culture and tradition of the Venda communities down the years, was discouraged and destroyed by the new rulers. This has had a negative cultural impact on the generations that followed thereafter. Today’s Vhavenda generation frown upon Venda indigenous cultural heritage. The composer desperately calls upon the spirit of Thohoyandou to rise and help restore Venda pride, but immediately realises that it is too late. Only dust comes out (dza bva buse) of “mbila dza makhulu”.

Nemakhavhani did not provide any tempo and expression marks for this composition, but leaves the interpretation of the song on the understanding and to the discretion of the performer. Those on the score were put by the researcher merely as guidelines for a performance by his own choir. The text from b. 21 to b. 38 “Hu vuwa zwa Thohoyandou Malombe” calls for an entrancing, slow tempo, in the spirit of a majestic (maestoso) entrance by a royal traditional musical ensemble to King Thohoyandou's kraal. The basses lead the mood of this passage.
The composition comprises three sections. The first section is from bb. 1 to 20 with a repeat sign. The second one is at bb. 21 to 38, and the third and last is from b. 39 to the end (b. 62). The repetitive (cyclic) bass-line from b. 21 displays the heroic and energetic dance reflective of a Venda traditional male dance.

Structurally, this composition lends itself to being divided into two distinct sections; bb.1 - 20 as the first, and b.21 to the end as the second. Furthermore, the second section (b. 21 to the end) could be divided into two subsections; bb.21 -32 and bb.33 to 62. The first section is homophonic in texture, with some smooth stepwise motions adhered to melodically, and with simple chord progressions. The rhythm is somewhat predetermined; that is, once the basic metre of the song is established in the first line, the remainder of the passage generally conforms to the given pattern. The starting rhythm influences what follows in the rest of the passage. This first section shows the influence of the church and its hymns in the compositional techniques adopted by the composer, especially in its melodies, rhythms and harmony, which are reminiscent of church organ music.

The second section adopts the call-and-response phenomenon characteristic of traditional African singing, with the bass line calling and the SAT responding. The first subsection is characterised by repetitions of short melodic phrases typical of traditional African a piacere singing, with a rather entertaining rhythm symbolic of a majestic performance of a Venda spiritual song like malombo. The second subsection, whilst it also adopts the call-and-response phenomenon, does not have an African feel in its rhythm and melody, except for the short interpolation from bb.44 -49.1 where the polyrhythmic nature of the African drum-beating is depicted by the tenors and basses, albeit nowhere near the usual sounds associated with typical Venda polyrhythms.

Overall, the speech-tone patterns of the text have been sacrificed entirely for musical considerations in terms of the melodies the composer has employed in
this song. It is perhaps in rhythms where the words and the music might have come to the composer’s mind as one, for there is evidence of some influence of the speech rhythm of the text in the way the music is organized.

Nemakhavhani has employed clearly defined and balanced musical phrases in accordance with the sentences of the text. There is a balanced relationship between the text and the musical phrases.

Mission-trained indigenous South African convets such as Dzivhani and Nemakhavhani were successfully made to believe that their indigenous musical practices were a sign of “heathenism”, paganism, primitiveness and backwardness. A civilized person was to go to church, go to school and sing hymns from the hymnbook, learn tonic sol-fa notation, dressed in European attire and aim for homogeneity in voice-production by blending with other singers: not the wild, uncontrolled singing and individualism permissible in indigenous (Venda) music performances.

Nemakhavhani was aware of the production of this document that features him, and he had hoped to hear people talk about it before he died. Unfortunately, he died early this year in January 2006 before this document was accepted and approved for public exposure. May his blessed soul rest in peace.
CHAPTER THREE

Derrick Victor Nephawe

3.1. Biography of the Composer

He was born on 23 September 1930 at Tshakhuma Mission Station under the Lutheran Church in Venda. He was the third born child of the late Mr Micha Elias Nephawe, with one brother and three sisters. Micha Nephawe spent most part of his early life among the Tsonga people at Valdezia. He was trained as a teacher at Lemana College of Education and started teaching in the early 1920s at Tshakhuma-a school under the Lutheran church. He had a passion for music and was devoted to choral music. Micha Elias Nephawe, who was one of the most distinguished Christian converts of the Lutheran Church at the time, did not give young Nephawe a Venda name. Venda names were regarded as pagan and symbolic of heathenism in those settlements that were under the influence of the Berlin Missionary Society. Hence, our composer is Derrick Victor Nephawe.

Derrick’s father relinquished his teaching post for greener pastures in the commercial sector in 1933. He was employed at the Modderfontein Dynamite Factory as a clerk and translator. Lutherans at nearby Alexandra Township spotted him, and having heard of his teaching abilities, lured him back into the teaching profession in 1937. He soon became an asset to the school and congregation in the field of music. He was entrusted with the school choir as well as the church choir.

Young Derrick attended school in Alexander from 1937, and thereafter trained as a teacher at Botshabelo Training Institution in Middelburg. His first teaching post was at Schoemansville near Hartebeespoort Dam, west of Pretoria in 1952. This
was a combined of lower and higher primary farm school under the Presbyterian Church. Teaching staff consisted of three male teachers and one female. Nephawe was offered to teach Std 1 and 2 classes. Classical music was introduced and he was given charge of the main choir. This blessing in disguise was the opportunity he had been longing for in order to fulfil his ambition of composing songs in the choral vein. His first attempt at composing came about when a fellow teacher was transferred to another school. In preparation for the farewell ceremony, he composed a song entitled *Tsamaya Pela* (Farewell) to grace the occasion. That was the beginning of a long journey of composing choral music.

In January of 1962, he assumed duties at Tshadzume Lower Primary in Venda as an assistant teacher. The school was attached to the predominant Presbyterian Church adjacent to the Donald Frazer Hospital. Influenced by the love of music, he became one of the church choir members under the leadership of the late Mr. Mutshembele. He developed within the choir and eventually took over the leadership. He also trained and conducted the primary school choir. It was during this time at Tshadzume that he launched his first Venda composition titled *Vhembe*. The composition was hailed as a breakthrough in choral music composed in the Venda traditional vein.

Nephawe took up a post at Lwamondo Higher Primary as an assistant teacher in January 1963. His potential as music conductor was becoming known to all and sundry, and he was tasked with the school's senior choir in addition to the normal teaching duties. He composed a song titled *Kha li vuwe la Tshivhase* (Wake up, Tshivhase people), which was sung by his choir at Mukumbani during the installation of King Ramaremisa Tshivhase. He also composed another song *Ndila Tshena* (Bon Voyage), which was sung during the farewell party of his principal, the late Mr J. Mavhusa. Being employed on a temporary basis, he had to leave at the end of the year.
In January 1964, he assumed duties at Phiphidi combined Higher and Lower Primary School as an assistant teacher on a permanent basis. The first Standard 6 class was introduced that year. Despite him being a new staff member, he was given charge of the new class. Under his baton, the Phiphidi School Choir won numerous trophies and became legendary. His own repertoire was also growing, and the song *Mishumo ya Mitsho* (The wonders of dawn) was composed around this time and sung by his choir.

Derrick Nephawe was quite often appointed conductor of mass choirs at several auspicious ceremonies in the presence of Venda government officials. In 1965 at the inauguration of Vhembe Regional Authority, he conducted a combined school choir. At one stage, he had to conduct a combined primary schools, secondary schools and college choir at Makwarela stadium during one of the many Venda government official functions.

In January of 1968, he was posted to Phaswana Higher Primary School at Sibasa as an assistant teacher. He was assigned to teach the Standard 5 class, and as expected, he was given charge of the school senior choir. He was inundated with requests to perform with the choir at many ceremonial events. The inauguration of the Volskas Bank in 1969 at Sibasa was one such event. Again, in 1969, the choir took part in another auspicious occasion. Venda had been granted territorial government status by the South African apartheid government, and all schools were ordered to take part in the planned celebrations as part of a massed choir. Derrick Nephawe was given charge of the choir by the then first speaker of the Legislative Assembly and former inspector of schools, Mr ERB Nesengani. The school choir was again chosen to participate at the inauguration of three Mphaphuli schools. To grace the occasion, the choir presented one of his original compositions, *Zwo Ndina* (I have had enough).

In 1971, he got a post as an assistant teacher in Tshakhuma at the Tshimbuluni Practising School’s senior choir. He took charge of the Standard Five class and as usual, tasked with the school’s senior choir. The choir did well at local
eisteddfods and collected many trophies. Tshimbiluni soon became a household name and was invited to take part at the annual agricultural show. This time he composed a piece that depicted the historical event that took place in America about Apollo's landing on the moon. The composition, titled *Tshiendedzi tsha Apollo* (The Apollo) was prescribed by TUATA for the national schools choir competitions in 1980.

In January 1973, he assumed duties at a newly established primary school in Tshakhuma, Raluthaga Higher Primary School, still as an assistant teacher. Staff members comprised three male teachers and one female teacher. The school building was a shack made up of poles and corrugated iron. The situation was unbearable, especially on rainy days because of the leaking roofs. Teaching and learning had to take place under these circumstances. To address the shortage of classrooms they embarked on a fundraising drive amongst local businesses and farms. At most of these fundraisings occasions, the choir was used. In this way, they managed to improve the school's infrastructure. It was only thereafter that the government contributed with additional classrooms.

Venda was granted independent homeland status in 1979, and Nephawe was tasked with the training of local church choirs in order to perform at the independence celebrations. There were annual celebrations held every September to commemorate Venda’s independence, and on many of these occasions, Nephawe’s compositions featured prominently. These include; *Dipfeni* (Listen to yourself), *Vhaswa* (The youth), *Ndi ya ha Khotsi anga* (The prodigal son

He was also involved in coaching a number of choirs around Venda such as Ramauba Secondary School and Tshiemuemu Secondary School choirs. Tshiemuemu Secondary School represented the then Venda in TUATA Provincial Choir Competitions for two successive years.
The principalship post at Raluthaga was advertised at the end of 1979 and he applied successfully, “only to be denied in the end because of the influence of a local chief who did not like me in spite of my contributions to the school and the entire Tshakhuma community” (Nephawe, 2006: Interview). Subsequently, he was transferred to another school and someone more loyal to the chief became the principal.

Two philosophies governed Nephawe in his compositional career. The first one was influenced by his young life in Johannesburg. In Johannesburg, he came to realize that the other language groups, particularly Zulus, Xhosas and Sothos, generally looked down upon Vhavenda as a language group. Anything that came from Vhavenda was generally frowned upon and dismissed as not good, without it being even tried or tested. Nephawe was hell-bent on dispelling this “Vhavenda cannot do anything” attitude for years by composing good choral music. The second philosophy stemmed from Nephawe’s constant engagements with choirs in auspicious official gatherings and ceremonies. As already stated, he was quite often requested to lead in choral singing at these gatherings. In spite of being told at short notice, Nephawe always insisted on preparing a choral composition that was relevant to the occasion. He would compose a new piece for that occasion. Sometimes Nephawe would compose a piece of work for a specific personality, such as with a particular choir conductor whose conducting style he liked, in mind (Nephawe, 2006: Interview:). Some of these factors contributed towards Nephawe becoming a prolific composer and a household name in choral music circles around Limpopo (then Northern Province).

Nephawe retired from teaching a very bitter man. He strongly feels that he deserved better recognition than the mere verbal acknowledgements for his contribution to the promotion, growth and recognition of Venda choral music.
3.2. Nephawe’s Music

Derrick Nephawe is arguably the most popular and perhaps the best composer Venda has so far produced in choral music. He is undoubtedly the most recognized and well-known Venda composer in South Africa now. He remains the only Venda composer whose choral works have been prescribed several times by recognized choral music organizations like TUATA and Metropolitan Life Music Eisteddfod, and ELCSAMO. In 1976 *Zwo ndinda*, one of his early compositions, was prescribed for senior primary schools by TUATA. The MetLife Music Eisteddfod prescribed the same song for Junior Secondary Schools in 1997. In 1980, TUATA prescribed another of Nephawe’s compositions, *Tshiendedzi tsha Apollo* for secondary schools and *Ndi ya ha Khotsi anga* in 1988 for Senior Primary Schools.

Because Nephawe also composed in a religious vein, the majority of his compositions with religious themes have been sung at church choir competitions, especially ELCSAMO (Evangelical Lutheran Church of SA Music Organization). Some of those compositions are: *Milamboni ya Babiloni* (By the rivers of Babylon), *Ndi nne nthume* (Here am I, send me), *Martin Luther* (Martin Luther), *Ndi ya ha Khotsi anga* (The prodigal son), *Yesu o bebwa Venda* (Jesus was born also for Vhavenda), and *Yehova ndi mulisa wanga* (The Lord is my shepherd) - his latest

His other non-religious works include: *Dipfeni* (Education for the youth) *Nwaha wa vhana* (Year of the Youth), *Vhaswa* (Youth), and *Vhabebi* (Adults).
Derrick Victor Nephawe

This photograph was taken at a function that was organized by PEU (Professional Teachers’ Union), formerly known as TUATA (Transvaal African Teachers’ Association), in honour of Nephawe for his contribution towards the development of choral music.
3.3. Analysis of Selected Compositions

3.3.1. **Zwo ndina** (I have had enough)

Words and music by DV Nephawe

**Appendix 4**

*Composed in 1969*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>TEXT</th>
<th>TRANSLATION</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ndo zwi pfa, a tho ngo pfelwa,</td>
<td><em>I have had enough; I have had it myself,</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shango heli lo nnetisa.</td>
<td><em>I have had enough of this world.</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ndi kale-kale ndo tuvha haya’nga.</td>
<td><em>I have been longing for home for sometime now.</em></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>TEXT</th>
<th>TRANSLATION</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Zwo ndina, ngoho zwo ndina, zwo nnetisa.</td>
<td><em>I have had enough I am really fed up.</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ndo liwa, ngoho ndo liwa,</td>
<td><em>I have been robbed, really robbed,</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ndo liwa shangoni la vhurwa.</td>
<td><em>I have been robbed in the south.</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A thi tshee na tshanga, ‘thi na wanga.</td>
<td><em>I have nothing, I have nobody.</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A thi tshee na na thama, thama dzo nddata.</td>
<td><em>I no longer have friends, they have deserted me.</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ndo zwi wana, zwone zwo nngwana.</td>
<td><em>I got what I wanted, it has got me.</em></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>TEXT</th>
<th>TRANSLATION</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Zwi a mmbavha ndi tshi humbula haya he nda huliswa nga vhabebi vhanga.</td>
<td><em>I feel pain when I think of home,</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ndi pfa mitodzi l tshi tsenga-tsenga.</td>
<td><em>where I was brought up by my parents.</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nda humbula ndi nga ndi a lila.</td>
<td><em>I feel tears coming.</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><em>In remembrance I feel like crying.</em></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>TEXT</th>
<th>TRANSLATION</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Zwo no nndina ndi a tuwa.</td>
<td><em>I have had enough I am going.</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Zwo no nndina ndi do fela ndilani</td>
<td><em>I've had enough I will die on the way</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Zwo nngwana,ndo zwi wana.</td>
<td><em>It has got me, I got what I wanted.</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nnditsheni ndi zwanga, zwo nngwana ndo zwi wana.</td>
<td><em>Leave me alone it is my fault,</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ndi Philiphise ndi tshilonda tsha u ditodela</td>
<td><em>It has got me, I got what I wanted.</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><em>It is a wound of my own fault</em></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Ndo tulutshelwa haya hanga makwarani.  
Zwo ndina, ngoho zwo ndina zwo nnetisa.  
Ndo liwa, ngoho ndo liwa shangoni la vhurwa.  
A thi tshee na tshanga, ‘thi na wanga’.  
a thi tshee na shaka, ‘thi na wanga,  
a thi tshee na thama, thama dzo nndata.  
Ngoho zwo nngwana, ndo zwi wana.

I am longing for my home on the hillside.  
I am fed up, really fed up, I have had enough.  
I have been robbed, really robbed in the south.  
I have nothing, I have nobody.  
I no longer have relatives, I have nobody.  
I no longer have friends, they have deserted me.  
I really have what I wanted.

COMMENTARY

The text of this composition represents a true life-story. Nephawe is describing what actually happened to him. “This is about me” (Nephawe, 2001: Interview). The text describes his life as a young man in the urban areas around the present Gauteng Province. He composed it whilst he was teaching at Phaswana Primary School.

It is a story about the life of a young man who went to work in Gauteng. The shebeen (tavern) queens and the alcoholic concoctions they served him confused him. For a while, he felt like he had reached paradise, and never thought of returning home. Reality struck eventually and he began to realize that he was not making progress financially. This was partly due to the demands of high life with the Gauteng girls. By the time he finally decides to leave Gauteng, he is so broke that he does not even have enough fare to board the train home.

One of the earlier most prolific Zulu choral composers, Reuben Tholakele Caluza, has used the same theme in one of his most popular compositions, Umtakababa. It is therefore significant to note that the life of South African
indigenous migrant labourers in Gauteng was one of the most topical issues for our South African indigenous choral music composers.

Taking the different rhythms displayed here by Nephawe into consideration, this composition, based on one theme, can be divided into sections. Although these sections flow naturally from one to the other, they have quite contrasting characteristics. The first section in bb.1 - 8 can be regarded as a mere introduction or preamble both in terms of text and music. Bb.9 - 24 is the first section of this composition, bb.25 - 35 the second section, bb.35 - 53 the third section, bb.54 - 61 the fourth section, then from the last beat of b.61 to the end is what could be termed the recapitulation, all based on one theme.

The composition is dominated by the dotted rhythm found in the two homophonic passages in bb.9 to 24 and 61 to the end. It is this rhythm that has so far popularized this composition amongst Venda choirs. The rhythms employed in all the sections indicated display ample evidence of the influence of the speech pattern of the text in the mind of the composer.

Nonetheless, there are numerous places in the composition where Nephawe did not take the semantic significance of the words into consideration. Some of the key words that form the gist of the meaning of the composition, which are unfortunately not well represented, are the following: “Ndo zwi pfa, A tho ngo pfelwa”,

“Shango heli lo nnetisa”
“Ndí kalekale ndó tuvha haya’nga”
“Zwo ndina ngaoh, zwo ndina”.

Whereas we do not strictly or always expect a choral composition to sound like ordinary speech, the note D (s) on the last beat of b.8, for example, would have made better sense if the note A (r) substituted it, for the word “zwo” is semantically always a high tone. That would have produced the desirable relationship between the text and the music.
Major key tonality is followed throughout. The composition is in key G major with diatonic chord progressions. The dominant and the dominant seventh chords are constantly used at the end of phrases in bb.7, 16, 18, 26, 34, 44, 53, 60 and 78 to round off in cadences. Conjunct motion dominates the composition throughout.

Of particular interest in this composition by Nephawe is that he sometimes omits the 3rd in the dominant seventh chord and doubles the root note. An example is found in b. 78.3 (zwi wana). Whilst this is universally acceptable, it is interesting to realize that indeed Nephawe has religiously adopted the Western compositional style and made it his own.

Nephawe has utilized some of the elements that characterize traditional African music in this composition, such as the call-and-response as displayed in bb.1 to 3, and antiphony in bb.12, 27, 30, and 54 to 55.

Except for the unnecessary long phrase from b. 74.4 to b. 79, which could easily and justifiably have been broken into smaller phrases ("thina shaka, ngoho zwo ngwana, zwo ngwana, ndo zwi wana"), there is a very balanced relationship between the phrases and the text in the rest of this composition.

Except for the breaks in between the passages, which could mistakenly be construed as indicative of evident sections in the composition, the melodies and the rhythms are so interwoven into a continuous coherent unit. The music is held together and grows in intensity until the eventual return of the main theme “zwo ndina ngoho, zwo ndina zwo nnetisa …”, first in animato (bb 8.4-24) and finally in agitato (.bb. 61.4-79).

Although there are a few glimpses of the composer’s attempt at following the speech tone pattern of the text, even then, this occurs only in a few words in a statement. Any correlation between the words and the music seem purely accidental in as far as melodic conceptions are concerned.
Undoubtedly, Nephawe had put a lot of thinking in the composition of this work. It is a work of inspiration, perhaps because it is a self-portrait. The musical expressions suggested by the composer (animato, agitato, dolente, con spirito, for example) are in accordance with the meaning of the message of the composition. This also shows the composer’s understanding of these concepts. Equally significant is Nephawe’s choice of dynamic guidelines for the performance of the composition. They are so easy to follow and provide the necessary guidelines for the interpretation of the message. They were impeccably well thought out. It is not surprising that this composition has been a firm favourite in the Venda choral repertoire and is one the few Venda choral compositions that have been prescribed for choir competitions.\footnote{It is one of the most popular items in the CD recording by the Bel Canto Chorale under the direction of the researcher. It was prescribed for senior primary schools by TUATA in 1976 and by Metropolitan Life Choral Festival for Junior Secondary School Choirs in 1997.}
3.3.2. **Milamboni ya Babiloni** (By the rivers of Babylon)  
**Appendix 5**  
Words and music by DV Nephawe  
**Composed in 1978**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>TEXT</th>
<th>TRANSLATION</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Milamboni ya Babiloni hone ra dzula ra lila ri tshi humbula Tsioni.</td>
<td>By the rivers of Babylon Where we sat and wept When we remembered Zion.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kha mitu ya hone ra fhahea dzimbila dzashu Henengei vho ri thubaho vho ri kombetshedza u imba. vha ri dzo nu takala ni imbe dza Tsioni.</td>
<td>Leaving our harps hanging on the poplars there. There we were asked by our captors to sing. “Sing”, they said, “same hymns of Zion”</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


How could we sing the song of Zion In a pagan country? Jerusalem, how can I forget you? If I forget you, may my right hand wither? Jerusalem, the greatest of my joy. 

Jehova, U si hangwe vharwa vha Edomo, vhe duvha la zwa Jerusalema, thuthani hu sale mavu fhedzi.  

Jehovah, remember what the sons of Eden did On the day of Jerusalem “Down with her”, they said. “Raze her to the ground”. 

Na iwe nwananyana wa Tsioni, u do phusukanywa.  

And you daughter of Zion, You will be destroyed.
Mashudu ane a do dzhia vhushie hau,  
A vhu pwashekanya kha tombo  
Jerusalema, dakalo langa la vhukumakuma

\[
\text{Blessed is he who will take your babies,} \\
\text{And dash them against the rock.} \\
\text{Jerusalem, the true greatest joy of my life!}
\]

**COMMENTARY**

Nephawwe was also brought up under the Christian faith; hence, part of his repertoire is in the vein. Milamboni ya Babiloni (By the rivers of Babylon) is a well known ballad of the exile of the Israelites from Psalm 137 in the Bible, the text of which many composers put to music in a number of genres, especially African composers of choral and pop musicians. Other notable composers and musicians include; HJM Masiza (Xhosa choral composer of the late 1960’s) with his Ngasemilanjeni yase Babiloni and the Pop Group ABBA that popularized the hit “By the rivers of Babylon” during the 1970s. Nephawe took the text from the Venda edition of the Bible and set it, in its entirety, to a choral composition.

To Nephawe, the struggle of the Israelites symbolized his own struggle. He is a bitter man even now. Nephawe feels that he has not won recognition for his contribution to the promotion of Venda music. Whereas he worked very hard to help heighten the awareness about Vhavenda as people who could produce credible choral compositions, the then Venda Government did not reward him for his efforts. His contemporaries were promoted to high positions in the education field, and “the hypocritical government officials” (Nephawe, 2006: Interview), who would only verbally praise him, did not consider him. He felt that he deserved some promotion too. Instead, he was abused. He remained an assistant teacher throughout until his retirement. Nephawe has used the biblical theme purposefully to grumble. People who were delegated to organize festivals in which Nephawe would feature prominently as both choir conductor and the composer of the prescribed music were the ones who received recognition in the
end. When he was asked to once more compose in 1978, he chose this theme; “How could we sing the song of Zion in a pagan country?” as a way of subtly refusing to accede to the request. The Evangelical Lutheran Church Music Organisation (ELCSAMO) premiered the composition in 1978.

Nephawe’s choice of musical terms such as *largo* and *andante*, particularly *andante* which has been used twice (*b.*10-21; *b.* 38-52), largely determines the mood of this choral composition. The text is religious, and the mood generally melancholic and nostalgic, requiring slow tempi choices in the performance, which is predominantly the case here. I have questioned the choice of *vivace* as an expression mark in (*bb.* 22-37; *b.* 53-61). Whilst I am aware that the text in both passages represents expressions of anger and resentment, perhaps *con fuoco* or *furioso* would have represented the mood of the text better in this particular passage. Even these, though, may still not be the best expression marks for the text, granted that these Italian expression marks may not aptly represent the composer’s intentions. Overall, Nephawe has provided substantial guidelines which are of great assistance in portraying the meaning of the text in the performance of this composition.

Whilst there is coherence in the overall form of this choral composition, particularly dictated by Nephawe’s clearly defined rhythmic sequential patterns (*bb.* 10-18, 25-26, soprano, for example), there are clearly-defined sections.

This composition sacrificed the text almost entirely for musical considerations. Any correlation between the words and the music is simply accidental. In a number of places in this composition, Nephawe’s phrasing of his musical lines is not satisfactorily dictated by how the language of the text is normally spoken. Nephawe could have indicated a break between “Kha mitu ya hone ra fhahea dzimbila dzashu” and the repeat of “dzimbila dzashu” in *b.* 12. The repeat of the statement “a vhu pwashekanya” between *bb.* 64-65 warrants better phrasing for proper interpretation thereof. Here too a break was necessary.
Disregard for these necessary phrasing considerations consequently created very long irregular phrases (example; bb. 9-13, bb. 13-21, and bb. 24-29) that have proved very to be difficult for choirs to execute perfectly as they stand. In b. 17, the phrases are not clearly defined for all the voice parts. Phrasing on b. 36 also needed careful consideration.

The statement “tshanda tshanga” (my hand) in the soprano line b. 36 is very odd when cut into two (“tshanda, tshanga” literally translated “my, hand”). That notwithstanding, the composer has demonstrated his knowledge of the ability to establish neat phrasing relationships between the text and melodies through bb. 13.4 (sopranos and tenors) and 14.1 (altos and basses), and in the rest of the composition.

This composition is interesting in its usage of both the conjunct and disjunct motions in its melodies coupled with the composer’s exploitation of his knowledge of broken chords such as in bb.30 and 32. Above all this, the combinations of primary and secondary chords in the composition’s harmonic progression (example bb.22 - 23, 25 and 26) shows Nephawe’s maturity in his compositional technique in the Western idiom. This idiom could essentially be that of the Methodist hymn-style of Victorian England, or alternatively of nineteenth century German Protestantism. With the background information obtained from interviews with him, one is inclined to think that Nephawe had the benefit of the latter, which was brought by the German missionary enterprise (the Berlin Missionary Society).

I am particularly familiar with this composition, having conducted it with the Venda Singing Pioneers at the Roodepoort International Eisteddfod of SA in 1983 and a Massed Choir at the Thohoyandou Town Hall in 2003.
Besides the IV-VI-V7-I (bb. 25-26), I-V (b. 44) and IV-V-I combinations most commonly used by Nephawe and other Venda composers, Nephawe’s preparations and resolutions at cadential points are a marvel, with progressions such as:

V2/4 – V16 – V7 – I in b. 20-21,
I – V7 – I6 -II6/4 – IV – VI – V in bb.22-23,
V6 – V16 – V7 – I in bb. 36-37, and

Similar to Zwo Ndina, any correlation between the words and the music seem purely accidental in as far as melodic conception is concerned in Milamboni ya Babiloni. The composer tried, like the others already discussed, to incorporate certain traditional African compositional traits such as the call-and-response and antiphonal devices, particularly in bb.41 – 42, 47 – 48, 50 –51, 53 – 54 and 58 – 59.

The composer has not moved away from the influence of the simplest missionary hymns. Admittedly, if the relationship between the words and the music were to be ignored and concentration put on the music only, the composition is undoubtedly a masterpiece, hence it is very popular amongst a number of church choirs around the country, particularly the Lutheran church choirs. The composition was recently prescribed during the time of this research in 2003 by ELCSAMO (Evangelical Lutheran Church of South Africa Music Organisation) for the Adult Lutheran Church Choirs.

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7The composition was recently prescribed during the time of this research in 2003 by ELCSAMO (Evangelical Lutheran Church of South Africa Music Organisation) for the Adult Lutheran Church Choirs.
3.3.3. **Tanganedzani vhaeni** *(Welcome visitors)*

**Appendix 6**

Words and music by DV Nephawe

**Composed in 1980**

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**TEXT**

Gidimani, gidimani Matamela,
Gidimani ni tanganedze vhaeni.
Tavhanyani, tavhanyani Matamela,
Tavhanyani ni tanganedze vhaeni.

Vhaeni vhashu khevhala vha khou da.
Vha tanganedzeni vhaeni vhashu.
Vhaeni vho neta.
Rulani mihwalo vha dzhene nduni heila ya vhaeni.
Nwana wanga tanganedzani vhaeni vhashu.
Vhaeni vho da na mini?
A ri di’ zwa maramani.
Vhidzani Vho-Nyamasindi
Vha de vha loshe vhaeni.

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**TRANSLATION**

Run, run Matamela,
Run and welcome the visitors.
Hurry, hurry Matamela,
Hurry and welcome the visitors.

There are our visitors coming.
Welcome our visitors.
Take their baggage and lead them to visitors’ cottage.
My child, welcome our visitors.
What have the visitors brought with them?
We do not know.
Call Vho-Nyamasindi
To come and greet our visitors.

Nyawasedza vhidzani vhahura vhashu,
Takusani Vho-Nethavhani,
Ni ri ro kandiwa nga vhaeni
Vho-Nethavhani vha davhidzane na vhaeni vhashu.
Vhaeni vha na ndala,
Farani ya tshikekeya, ni mbo bika ha tshisese,
Ni vha tamberde vhaeni vha na ndala.
Vhaeni vha bva kule,
Vhaeni vho neta

Nyawasedza, call our neighbours,
Inform also Vho-Nethavhani,
And tell him that we have visitors.
Vho-Nethavhani should come and meet our visitors.
Our visitors are hungry,
Get the fattest fowl, and cook the best porridge,
To give our visitors who are hungry.
Our visitors come from far,
Our visitors are tired.
COMMENTARY

This is an appropriate example of texts with topical themes. It is also a typical example of a text with the subject matter that defies categorization. It fits in more than one category. It talks about Venda culture whilst at the same time it has an educational message.

It is customary in traditional Venda culture to welcome visitors, even unexpected ones, with open arms, and to treat them with utmost hospitality. The best food is instantly prepared; the best mealie-meal (tshisese) is used with the fattest fowl (tshikekeya) to this end. Like royalty, the guests are shown the best room or hut, well prepared, for sleeping. This tradition is inculcated from one generation to another amongst Vhavenda. Venda youth are still advised and encouraged to observe and practice this tradition even today.

This composition owes its subject matter from a very small incident that could have been viewed as insignificant had it not happened to Nephawe. Those who came to know Nephawe will attest that the man used to smoke a lot. In fact, the first drafts of almost all his compositions would be found at the back of his packets of cigarettes. He was in class at Raluthaga Primary School when he felt like a cigarette, only to discover that his packet was empty. He then requested a boy called Matamela in that class to go and buy him the cigarettes at the nearby shop. Whilst he was looking through the window of the classroom, he realized that Matamela was dragging his feet. He shouted at him to “hurry” (tavhanyani). Instantly, words, rhythm and melody engulfed him and he moved out of class and began to scribble on the back of his empty cigarette box. After working on the text, he found time to write the music on the chalkboard, and that same day in the afternoon after school, he assembled his school choir and tested the piece. With the help of his school choir, Nephawe completed his composition in one afternoon. It is amazing how this gifted man used the abovementioned incident
and turned it into an educational message about the value of Vhavenda traditions, norms and values and as a theme for valuable and social commentary.

In this composition, Nephawe’s rhythm is busier, with more notes to a syllable through runs and more syncopation. The composition is in key F major, and this major key is adhered to throughout. The dominant and dominant seventh chords are constantly used at the ends of phrases in bb.12, 19, 30, 41, 51, 60, 64 and 68. Once more, just as he did in Zwo Ndina, Nephawe sometimes omits the 3rd in the dominant seventh chord and doubles the root (for example, b. 30). The composer hereby clearly shows his attempt to escape from the extreme limitations of a simplistic missionary hymn style.

This composition is one of the typical examples of a composition with speech-tone patterns of the text sacrificed almost entirely for musical considerations. Whilst the melodies and the rhythms are interesting and exciting, the words are not well represented semantically, example:

“Tavhanyani”, “Nwana wanga”

“Gidimani, ni tanganedze”, (bb. 1 – 12 and b. 21), and

Vhaeni (throughout the composition).

Granted that the majority of the melodies employed in the composition do not reflect the semantic tone pattern of the text, the spoken word is nonetheless not distorted beyond recognition.

Nephawe uses the rallentandi in bb. 19, 30, 40 and 68 to good effect. The singing of the composition is generally pacy and, for rounding off cadences and musical phrases well, such tempo markings are a welcome necessity to the performer and the listener in terms of understanding the text. The objective of the rit. at b. 39 that precedes the rall. at b. 40 is not quite evident, and Nephawe did the same in bb 66-69, but this time with a longer drawn out good allargando effect.
While overall there is a sound relationship between the text and musical phrases employed by Nephawe in this composition, the opening passage (bb.1-12) poses problems. Whereas the musical phrases follow recognizable sequential patterns, the phrases of the text have their separate phraseology. In bb.2-4, for example, the words “gidimani Matamela,” and “gidimani ni tanganedze vhaeni” are complete statements. In spoken Venda language, one does not pause or take breath in the middle of these statements but must break in between them, that is after a coma and/or a full stop. It is in this passage (bb.1-12) that Nephawe explicitly sacrifices the significance of the phrases of the text for musical considerations. It will not be easy, for instance, to attempt not to break between “gidimani” and “ni tanganedze…..” in b.3 and to break between “vhaeni” and “gidimani” in b.4). Nephawe has composed the sequential patterns in this passage brilliantly, , nonetheless.

Much as the composition has one theme and therefore one message, Nephawe's compositional style, particularly his different rhythms, divides the composition into six sections. The first section is from b. 1 to b. 12, the second from bb. 13-20, the third from bb.21-31, the fourth from bb. 32-42.1, the fifth from bb. 42.3-52, and the sixth and last from bb. 53-69. There are similarities between the fifth and the first sections in terms of the rhythmic patterns employed, but the melodies and harmonies are different. The overall form is six sections (A, B, C, D, E and F) in one composition bound by one theme.

The texture is largely homophonic at the beginning until b.12. Thereafter the composition is largely dominated by staggered melodic entries and call-and-response passages as in bb.13 - 14, 21 – 25, 31 - 38 and others, which gives the composition some polyphonic texture.

The composer has combined both smooth and stepwise motions largely and some disjunct motions with intervals such as 5ths and octaves in, for instance, bb.22 – 23 soprano line and bb.52 – 53.
Whilst the basic metre remains the same throughout, the composer employs a number of rhythmic patterns which determine the structure of the composition in bb.1 -12, 13 - 20, 21 31, 32 - 42 and then b.42 to the end. These rhythms are not very different though, except for the slight subtle changes dictated by the text, which in turn make the composition and the singing very interesting and exciting.

Whereas the text talks about a command for Matamela to run (gidimani) and hurry up (tavhanyani) in the preparations to welcome the visitors, the opening tempo requested by the composer is “andante” and, in addition thereto, the performance is required to be in a “cantabile” manner. First, this tempo marking (andante) which is relatively not a fast tempo (generally regarded and understood as a “walking” tempo) may not assist in the portrayal of the meaning of the text. To someone who understands the speech tone pattern of the text and the velocity with which they are generally uttered when someone is being commanded to hurry, the musical terms at the opening, which have to do with tempo and expression in the performance of the song, may create uneasiness, and would require tremendous effort to reconcile the text and these tempo markings. A faster tempo indication would do. The passage between b. 21 and 29, with a somewhat imploring text (“my child, please welcome our visitors”) would suit the Andante tempo well. It is not surprising that the composer wrote “A Tempo” for he was thinking “andante”, which unfortunately, whilst it suits this middle passage, it does not do well for the opening passage, as already indicated. Secondly, it is unnecessary to write down “cantabile” as a requirement in a vocal composition for, whether stated or not, unless stated otherwise, a vocal performance will be cantabile. Like cantabile, espressivo could be regarded as just a mere emphasis on an obvious requirement. On bb.32 to 41 though, it acquires a significant meaning. There is anticipation by the hosts that the visitors have brought some news, hence Vho Nyamasindi should kindly come and greet these visitors in the traditional customary Venda manner (vha de vha loshe).
Dynamics and Expression marks such as mf, mp, p, f and dolce were very appropriately used when viewed in relation to the text and its phrases. How “sweet” it is to be hosted by people who, upon your arrival, they quickly realize that you are hungry and immediately prepare their best meal for you! How sweet (“dolce”).

3.3.4. Yehova ndi Mulisa Wanga (The Lord is my Shepherd)  Appendix 7
Words and music by DV Nephawe
Composed in 2003

TEXT

Jehova ndi mulisa wanga
A thi nga shayi tshithu
U ndadza mafuloni avhudi

U nyisa madini a vhuawelo
U netulusa muya wanga;
U ntshimbidza a nyisa ndilani dzo lugaho
A tshi itela dzina lawe
Naho nda tshimbila govhani la dunzi la lufu
A thi ofhi vhuvhi
Ngauri u na nne
Thonga yau na mbada yau
Ndi zwone zwi mphumudzaho

U mpha zwiliwa maswina anga a tshi zwi vhona;
U ndolisa thoho yango mapfura;

Tshinwelo tshanga tsho dala lwa u dala

TRANSLATION

The Lord is my shepherd
I shall lack nothing
In meadows of green grass He lets me lie
To the waters of repose He leads me
There He revives my soul
He guides me by the path of virtue
For the sake of His name
Though I pass through valley of the shadow of death
I fear no harm
He is beside me
Your rod and your staff are there to comfort me

You prepare a table before me
Under the eyes of my enemies
You anoint my head with oil
My cup runneth over
Zwavhudi na zwivhuya zwi do ntevhela
Nda do dzula nduni ya Yehova
Maduvha a sa fheli
Now goodness and kindness pursues me.
And I will dwell in the house of Jehova
As long as I live.

COMMENTARY

The text comes from the well-known Psalm 23, a song of David. Again, this text was also taken in its entirety from the Venda Bible edition and set to music. Once more Nephawe demonstrates his understanding of Biblical scriptures and his ability to use the power of music to make the text penetrate the hearts and minds of many other people. It is significant to state that Nephawe mentions (Nephawe, 2006: Interview) that he was influenced by the choral piece composed a number of centuries earlier by Franz Schubert on the same theme. He came across Schubert’s composition at one of the annual TUATA Choral Music Competitions, and the theme stole the heart of this troubled man who feels that people around him are not treating him fairly. Nephawe embraced the message. Bible in hand, he drove to one of the quietest resting places around Luvuvhu (a predominantly white farming settlement along the Luvuvhu River) and composed the music to the text, which he completed in one day. “When you are troubled, think about Psalm 23, it will make you feel like a monarch” (Nephawe, 2006: Interview).

It should be stated that although he owes the use of the biblical theme to Schubert, Nephawe’s music does not have any resemblances to Schubert’s music in terms of structure or melodic phrases, and so on. Nephawe says George Frideric Handel’s music influences him more (Nephawe, 2006: Interview). He sang several Handel pieces during his schooling days, and he liked Handel’s use of religious themes.
Nephawe shows more maturity in this composition than in the previous one. The most interesting feature of this composition is modulation, an atypical trait in traditional African music. Apparently, this remains the only composition in Nephawe’s song collection that has this device, and the only one in the entire selected repertoire under scrutiny within the scope of this research. The song begins in E major (bb. 1–21), modulates to the dominant B major (bb. 22–25) and then reverts to the original key of E major (26–29). Thereafter it modulates to D major, a strange modulation and not easy for amateur choral singers to perfect (bb. 30–37). Another difficult transition (modulation) occurs at b.38, with altos having to take serious efforts in order to pitch correctly using a chromatic bridge note (fe). Thereafter the music moves from E major to the subdominant A major (bb. 50–58) and then back to the original key up to the end (bb. 59–92).

Another interesting aspect, and unique in Nephawe’s repertoire, is the prevalence of chromaticism in this composition. This results in chord formations and progressions reminiscent of mid-Nineteenth century Western harmony with chromatics that create secondary dominants and very strange to the ears of people to which this music is intended – the African Choral music enthusiasts. For illustrative purposes, it will suffice to mention bb.8.1, 10.2, and 88.4.

It is not an easy piece to master and perform, particularly by the majority of South African choirs comprising mainly amateur and a few semi-professional singers or choristers. The music sounds Western; it is very closely linked to the whole music theory culture that was propagated during the middle of the nineteenth century.

Syncopation occurs here and there throughout the piece. In this aspect, the composer has tried to follow the actual pattern of the speech rhythm of the text, except where a phrase is repeated, but set to a different rhythm.

The composition has only one dynamic marking (mf), and that is indicated at the beginning. That means the rest of the performance in terms of the loudness
and/or softness of the passages is left to the discretion of the performer. This one mood indication for the entire composition could be interpreted as Nephawe's declaration of an unwavering confidence and faith in the protection of the Lord against any adversity. On the other hand, Schubert’s composition on the same theme (albeit in a different language) has a plethora of dynamic markings and tempo indications (see example fig.), which are also very appropriate in their own way and are of great assistance in the interpretation of the text.

Nephawe has made only one tempo suggestion, an ambiguous one for that matter (moderato). It is one of those rather “dodgy” indications, for this can be approached or interpreted in numerous ways. Nonetheless, a “moderato” is a far-fetched tempo suggestion for the text of this composition. The text and Nephawe’s music yearn for an “espressivo” type of performance, and perhaps slower tempo indications would do justice to the proper portrayal of the mood of the composition.

The relationship between the phrases and the text is impeccable. The phrasing of the musical lines is satisfactorily dictated by the text.

Another interesting aspect, and unique in Nephawe’s repertoire, is the prevalence of chromatics in this composition. Significantly prevalent is the use of fragments “s-fe-s”, “s-fe-f” and “s-fe-r”.

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8 The researcher has had the privilege of performing both versions of the theme. I did Schubert’s “The Lord is my Shepherd” with the University of Venda Choir during the Phalaphala FM/Metropolitan Choir Festival in 1995 (obtained First Position!). I conducted Nephawe’s “Yehova ndi mulisa wanga” at the time of this research in 2003; when the composer was being honoured by the SABC, represented by Thulasizwe Nkabinde, for his contribution to the development of South African indigenous choral music.
These are in bb. 5.4-6.1 (soprano), 9.4-10.1 (soprano), 7.4-8.1 (tenor), 10.4-11.1 (bass), 23.2-25.3 (alto), 26.4-27.1 (tenor), 32.3-4-33.3-4 (soprano), 38.2-3 (soprano), 51.2-3 (alto), 76.2-3 (soprano), 84.2-3 (bass), 86.2-3 (bass) and 87.2-3 (soprano). There is also occasional use of “r-de-r” as in bb. 10 and 88 (alto) and “t-ta-l” by the basses in bar 10. This results in chord formations and progressions reminiscent of Nineteenth century Western chromatic harmony and very strange to the ears of audience to which this music is intended – the African choral music enthusiasts.

Just as there is one tempo indication and one dynamic indication, the overall form of the composition is one through-composed undivided piece, without discernable sections. It is a much unified, compact piece of work.

**Summary**

Nephawe composed his music on a variety of themes. He derived his inspiration for composing on these diverse themes, which originated from events that occurred around him and some of which affected him personally. He chose biblical subjects such as *Milamboni ya Babiloni* (By the rivers of Babylon), and *Yehova ndi mulisa wanga* (The Lord is my shepherd) to describe his plight (a bitter man) and to simultaneously console himself with his faith in God’s righteousness. With *Tanganedzani Vhaeni* and *Zwo Ndina*, Nephawe uses some episodes in his life to give educational messages and to inculcate the values of traditional African culture to the young and old.

Though the semantic significance of Venda sentences in the texts was not particularly given utmost attention, there is generally a balanced relationship between the texts and the music in Nephawe’s compositions. Phrasing of the musical lines was not satisfactorily dictated by how the language is normally spoken, but this is not a significant oversight on the part of Nephawe. After all, this has never been a factor even in indigenous Venda music practices. Although the rhythms were not entirely determined by the texts, there are noticeable
attempts in that direction. Elements that characterize traditional African (Venda) music do manifest themselves in Nephawe’s compositions, such as call-and-response, antiphony and repetitions of short phrases, particularly in *Zwo Ndina*. Nephawe’s compositions are generally through composed but coherent, with not so clearly discernible sections. The musical expressions in Nephawe’s compositions are substantial and very appropriate for giving assistance in portraying the meanings of the texts. The expressions are generally in accordance with the meanings of the messages in the compositions, and they give good guidelines for the performance of the compositions. Although one may argue that Nephawe’s selected compositions do not evoke traditional nuances familiar to indigenous Venda music, there is an evident attempt by the composer, at least consciously, to move away from the bondage of Western hymnody, which his predecessors, Maimela Dzivhani and Ramboho Nemakhavhani, were entangled in for their entire compositional careers.

Just as Beethoven has been regarded as someone standing on the bridge between the end of the Classical and the beginning of the Romantic styles, Nephawe can be justifiably viewed as the Venda composer who ushered in the gradual break-away by Venda composers from the shackles of nineteenth century Victorian choralism and the simplistic hymnal style of the Lutheran church missionary music. His compositions display the composer’s quest towards his attempt to show that it is possible to compose an indigenous choral composition, using elements typically characteristic of indigenous African music such as antiphony, call-and-response and repetition of short phrases. As already indicated, Nephawe shows maturity and equally more ability in his utilization of Western compositional traits such as modulations and harmony with chromatics, an element that elevates him above the earlier composers and even those that came after him, such as Nonge and Ramabannda.

Nephawe admits that there is still a lot to be improved on the compositional styles of a number of Venda composers. These composers need encouragement, he says. “If you don’t help a child who has fallen, the child may
end up a cripple. Pick him/her up and encourage him/her to keep on trying to walk” (Nephawe, Interview: 2006). Composers need encouragement. Their compositions should be sung, and it is only then that problems will be discovered, if there are any, and corrected. Composers also deserve incentives. They should be rewarded for their efforts. “Ramabannda’s enthusiasm should not be ignored. He needs guidance” (Nephawe, Interview: 2006). Nephawe strongly feels that interventions such as these will help in developing and improving Venda choral music compositions.

Another very important observation by Nephawe is that Vhavenda have a tendency to keep a low profile about them. A majority of them do not assert themselves in public. They have even gone to an extent of accepting the perception that they are not good at composing credible choral works. “Some Venda-speaking people would feel more important to display their knowledge of languages other than theirs” (Nephawe, Interview: 2006). I agree with Nephawe. There are choirs around Venda who would prefer to sing compositions in any language other than that which is in their own language. Many of us require a change of mindset. Whilst a few of us have begun to be proud of who we are and what we have, we are still far away from asserting ourselves as people equally important in our own country.

By composing several compositions that were prescribed and enjoyed by many different language groups, “Nephawe dispelled the myth that Vhavenda are not good composers”.

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9It has not been easy for me to convince my choir, Bel Canto Chorale, to sing Venda compositions, unless if that composition was prescribed for a competition in which they want to participate and want to win it. This is still a challenge.

10Words written on Awards Banquet Souvenir Programme at Venda Nursing College, 1996, when Nephawe, together with the researcher, were honoured for their contribution to Venda music.
CHAPTER FOUR

Joseph Khorommbi Nonge

4.1. Biography of the Composer

Joseph Khorommbi Nonge was born in 1937 at Doli, a village in HaMashau in Venda. His father, Nonge Mulaudzi, was the headman of the village, and this village was famous during his time for frequently hosting indigenous Venda music festivals. It was in this musical environment that Joseph grew up.

He also gained his early musical experiences from other members of his family. One major influence during his early stages in his musical life was from his elder brother, Tshinanga (John), who was a well-known and very good mbila player. He was taught how to play indigenous Venda instruments such as dende and tshifhotolio, and that had an influence on his later compositional career. Another major influence on his musical career came from his mother, Nyakhakhu, herself an indigenous Venda traditional music fanatic. Nyakhakhu was a very good traditional Venda music dancer, especially in malende and malombo. It would be interesting to examine whether the indigenous Venda rhythms that came out of the mbila, dende, tshifhotolio, malende, and malombo songs that he grew up with had an influence on his compositional style.

Nonge was educated at Matsila Primary School and later at Tlangelani Primary School where he completed his Standard 6 in 1957. Throughout his schooling career, he sang in school choirs and learnt to read and sing tonic sol-fa notation. He became the leading tenor and baritone solo singer of the school choir. The
principal of the school, Mr JW Mashaba, and his teacher and choirmaster, Mr Robert Mtsetweni, noticed his latent musical talents and decided to nurture and encourage its development. Mr Mtsetweni, who stayed with Joseph at his home, also bought him a guitar. The various melodies that came out of young Joseph’s experimental strumming of his newly acquired guitar formed the basis of most of his choral works.

After completing his Standard 6, he went to train as a teacher at the Vendaland Training Institute where he qualified in 1962. This he did after completing his three-year Junior Certificate at the same institution. It was at this institution where he came under further musical influences from Mrs Junod, who taught him how to read and sing, including rudiments of staff notation. He also trained and conducted the local Lutheran Church Choir during the time. Had it not been for Mrs Junod who encouraged him to train as a teacher because she thought he was going to be a good teacher and choirmaster, he would not have pursued the career, for he did not like it. “This is a decision I would regret had I not followed it” (Nonge, 2001: Interview).

Since 1963, he has been teaching at a number of primary schools around Venda. Using both his formal training in Western (tonic sol-fa and staff notation) music and the influence of the traditional Venda music that he grew up with during his formative years, Joseph started composing a number of Venda choral compositions.

His own school choirs always sang his compositions before being released for performances by other choirs and/or prescribed for competitions by the various choral eisteddfodau.
4.2. Nonge’s Music

He started teaching at Tiyiselani Primary School at Sundani HaDavhana in 1963 and in 1964 at Tshadzume Primary School near Donad Fraser Hospital in Vhufuli. His first composition, Mitselo (fruits), was completed in 1965 whilst he was teaching at Mabila Primary School at Dzimauli as principal. Due to its appealing theme, it has become very popular with Venda schoolchildren and has been prescribed for various choral eisteddfodau since 1965. To compose this piece, Nonge asked his schoolchildren to collect all types of indigenous fruits prevalent around the Mabila area in Dzimauli. Whilst he was asking the children one by one about the name of each fruit, he started composing instantly. Words and music came to him as one. “It was the most thrilling inspiration I have ever felt”. “Composing this piece was so natural and so easy” (Nonge, 2005: Interview) He also composed a two-part piece called Tsimbi ya Tshikolo (The School Bell), with the top line for his small girls and the bottom for the small boys. The words that he recalls from the piece, which he has since irretrievably misplaced, are;

\[
\text{Tsimbi ya tshikolo i a lila,} \\
\text{(The school bell is ringing),} \\
\text{Idani ni swure muthotho wa tseda.} \\
\text{(Come and sip the soup that is not transferable \(^{11}\).)}
\]

\(^{11}\)By “the soup that is non-transferable”, Nonge is referring to education – the qualification that a person acquires in education is non-transferable. “It is yours, and you die with it. Nobody can take it away from you” (Nonge, Interview: 2005).
Since then until 1972, he did not find time to compose. He attributes this to the frequent forced removals from one place (school) to another: Mangondi Primary School as principal in 1967, later in the year transferred to teach at Phaswana Primary School as assistant teacher, and as principal at Sambandou Primary School during 1969 to 1971. It was only after he had finally settled at Matamela Primary School HaDavhana, where he has been principal for a number of years (1977 to 2002) that he resumed composing. Compositions of this period include:

*Muvena* (The Venda person) 1974: This song is about the culture of Vhavenda. The piece will be is discussed fully later in this Chapter.

*Madodzi* (Matodzi)) 1976: One of the two compositions, the other one being *Mitshelo*, which Nonge composed in three-part writing. The piece will be discussed fully later in this Chapter.

*Mutshutshu* (Deceit) 1987: It is about people who are politically misled. The piece will be is discussed fully later in this Chapter.

These are part of a collection of some of his compositions, written in tonic sol-fa in his own handwriting, and kept in one book, unpublished. He unfortunately lost another collection of his compositions, which was also in a book. Some of the popular compositions in that collection include:

*Yehova wa mavhuthu* (Jehova for all people) 1958: The circumstances surrounding the creation of this composition are interesting. As indicated earlier, Nonge attended Tsonga medium schools for his primary education. It did not occur to him, then, that Venda choral music existed. It was only when he was training as a teacher at the Vendaland Training Institute that he was made aware of Venda choral music (there were Venda hymns already, particularly by Dzivhani). Being in a Christian environment and in charge of a church choir in the institution, he decided to contribute to the choir’s repertoire by composing his own. Due to his self-criticism, the composition, which could have easily been sung by his church choir, was reserved (he thought it was not good enough for
exposure!), and it was only sung much later by Matamela Primary School choir which he was in charge of and where he was the principal.

_Thavha dza Venda_ (The mountains of Vendaland) Year of composition forgotten by the composer (Nonge, 2005: Interview).

He has recently composed _South Africa_ (completed in 2002), which could not be part of this completed project.

Nonge always felt the urge to contribute to the promotion of Venda music. He would have wanted to orchestrate some indigenous Venda traditional music songs that were always ringing in his head, but the realisation of his limitations in notational prowess discouraged and frustrated him. Choral music composition became the only avenue through which he could express his creative talent, which was inborn.
This photograph was taken on his last day at Matamela Primary School where he had been Principal. It was during the day of his retirement party (05 December 2002). The researcher was part of the celebration, and conducted the Bel Canto Chorale, which sang the composer's compositions, including “Muvenda and “Mutshutshu”.
4.3. Analysis of Selected Repertoire

4.3.1. **Muvenda** (the Venda person)  
Words and music by JK Nonge  
**Composed in 1974**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>TEXT</th>
<th>TRANSLATION</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Muvenda ndi Muvenda, U na mvelele yawe. Mvelele ya Muvenda, ndi ine ya mangadza. a i vuwi yo fana na ya dzinwe tshaka. Venda ndi la Vhavenda. Misanda u do pfa dzingoma dzi tshi bvuma, Mirumba, pambamba i tambela tshanda. Muvenda, tundutundundu, du du du, A tshi bvukulula vhuvenda. i a fhata kha vhatali vhe pfumbisa zwa havho. Venda li tshi kha di vha Venda, Iuambo lu sa vangwi nga lunwe. Ndi zwine namusi ra vha lushaka kwalwo, Iuambo na mikhwa na mvelele yalwo. Mvelaphanda yo no dzhena-ha zwino, i a thutha kha matsilu a mbo litsha zwa hao, Kha ri khode muvhuso, wo vhumbaho Berou ya Tshivenda, ine ye' “vhulunga zwau Muvenda.”</td>
<td>Muvenda is Muvenda, He has his own culture. The culture of Muvenda, It is amazing. It will never be similar to those of others. Vendaland is for Vhavenda. In royal settings (dwellings) you hear drums beating. And mirumba rhythms adding to the beat, Muvenda, tundutundundu, du du du Displaying his vhuvenda. It builds the wise, they promote theirs. When Venda was still Venda, With its language untainted. Hence we are a unique nation In language, habits and culture. Modernization has now set in, It destroys fools, they forsake their own, Let us praise the Government Which formed the Venda Bureau Which says, “preserve your own, Muvenda.”</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
COMMENTARY

The text vindicates the earlier discussion on, and definition of Vhavenda as a people and their culture, customs and traditions. The song was composed during the time when there was an independent state known as the Republic of Venda. Despite his dislike of the then ruling National Party government in the self-governing Venda homeland (1979-1990) under President Patrick Ramaano Mphephu, and his resultant support of the opposition, the Venda Independence Party, Nonge nonetheless gave praise where it was due. The government of the time had established a bureau to promote Venda culture and encourage its development. The composer is hereby applauding the initiative by the then Venda government. “The composition is about my pride of being a Muvenda” (Nonge 2001: Interview).

Bizarrely, as music inspector then, Adalbert Mulaudzi felt uneasy with the text. He attached strange political connotations to it, which he could not explain clearly to the composer, and would not promote the composition unless the composer altered the words. Nonge was forced to replace the entire text to satisfy inspector Mulaudzi and the other Venda government officials who felt the same. It was once sung as “Swiswimbadise” during some of the annual Venda Independence Celebrations. I think the always-suspicious and uneasy government of the time (it was imposed upon the not-entirely accepting Venda people) thought that Nonge was mocking it. The government of the time was not capable of viewing praises purely for what they purely are without suspecting some sarcasm in them, especially if such praises are coming from someone like Nonge.

The Lutheran missionary church, which was the predominant church around Venda communities, and to which Mulaudzi and the majority of Venda Independent Government officials belonged, regarded indigenous Venda cultural practices as primitive, pagan, heathen and backward. It was only after 1990 with
the dismantling of the apartheid-created pseudo-independent Venda that Nonge was able to restore the original message (text) to the composition.

To them, the statements “The culture of Muvenda, It is amazing”, and “In royal settings (dwellings) you hear drums beating”, and “Let us praise the Government”, meant that Vhavenda were backward because of their government which promotes primitive cultural activities.

Nonge mentions that he had always abhorred people of other languages who looked down upon his own language group and his culture. As he was walking from his own orchard one day, he felt the urge to express his feelings about how people of other languages frown upon Vhavenda. The composition (words and music) came to his mind at once. According to him, because most Tsonga communities received formal education before Vhavenda, Vatsonga, like Xhosas and Zulus, undermined Vhavenda. This he says he personally witnessed whilst he was at the school where he completed his primary education (Tlangelani), and when he was working as a teacher and interacting with teachers of other language groups (Nonge, 2001: Interview).

It was not easy to understand the relationship between the text and the “marching” direction at the beginning of this composition. There is no indication as to how fast or how slow this marching should be. According to the composer (Nonge, 2005: Interview), this marching tempo was inspired by his daily walk to the school where he was teaching at the time. The same tempo had come to him when he was returning from working in his orchard. The music and the words came to him again whilst he was walking to school, and he sang it until he arrived at the destination and immediately began writing it on the chalkboard. He asked his school choir to sing it whilst he made some few minor adjustments. One is tempted to think that the march would be at a walking (andante) tempo. The slower tempo indication (b.27) was initially not conceived of until he made the adjustments. Nevertheless, the adoption of one tempo marking from b.27 to the end of the song is still questionable, particularly when one analyses the text and
the music carefully. The music is inclined towards a faster tempo from b.31, and could perhaps only agree to slow down at b.43. Nonge did not put any further expression marks, but left the interpretation of the song to the understanding and to the discretion of the performer.

The composition is in binary form, with bb. 1-26 as the first section, and bb. 27-52 the second section. Nonge’s phrasing of the musical lines in this composition is satisfactorily dictated by the text except, perhaps, at b.40 where a break indication on the text (a comma) would further enhance the good phraseology that he has managed to adopt.

The composer has chosen a major key and a diatonic style throughout. Simple chord progressions were maintained throughout the whole composition. Both conjunct and disjunct motions are used alternately in melodies. The texture is both homophonic and polyphonic.

The composer has also experimented with the call-and-response phenomenon characteristic of traditional African singing, with alternate singing by soloist and chorus. This is displayed at the beginning in bb.1 to 8. Repetitions of short melodic phrases also feature at the beginning of the song; another characteristic feature of traditional African singing.

Whilst Nonge has experimented interestingly with syncopation to give his music some African dance rhythmic feel, particularly in bb.23 to 25 and 32 to 39, the musical rhythm adopted was clearly not influenced by the speech rhythm of the text.

As previously stated, most melodies in traditional Venda music are generally influenced by tones of normal speech. In this composition, the melodic lines of the different voices were not dictated by the semantic tone structure of the language or text. Nonge has sacrificed the speech-tone patterns of the text purely for musical considerations.
### 4.3. 2. Matodzi (Matodzi)

**Words and music by JK Nonge**

**Composed in 1976**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>TEXT</th>
<th>TRANSLATION</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Musi kwo no di aluwa, malume vha mbo di hevhedza muduhulu wavho, vha ri: “Pfunzo ndi swina la vhushai iwe muduhulu wanga”.</td>
<td>When he came of age, The uncle whispered (advised) his nephew and said; “Education is the enemy of poverty my nephew”.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nangoho Matodzi a vhulunga zwothe, a dzhena tshikolo u bva mathomoni a tsho, a guda. Mudzimu a penyisa tshedza tshawe, tshone tshedza vhukuma. Tsha mu divhadza uri: “Muthu ha li tsha biko la muvhombo wa munwe, u si wawe.” A futelela pfunzo dzawe, A tshi phasa milingo ine a nwala.</td>
<td>Indeed Matodzi took his uncle’s advice, And went to begin school, and studied. God’s light shone on him, Real light indeed. which said to him; “Do not reap from the sweat of someone’s brow, It is not yours”. He persevered in his education, And did well in his examinations.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Zwino khoyu ngoho, O phasa vhudokotela.</td>
<td>Now here he is, A qualified doctor.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
COMMENTARY

Nonge decided to contribute specifically with three-part choral works that he had noticed were lacking in the Venda choral repertoire. According to him, there was a time when choral organizations, used to merely take a four-part piece, and just eliminate one of the parts (usually the bass) and then prescribe the piece for young children’s sections such as the Intermediate or Infant Sections 12.

“For obvious reasons, the composition did not sound nice with the original part missing” (Nonge, 2005: Interview). Matodzi and Mitshelo were specifically intended for small children.

Typical of a primary school educator, Nonge’s text is a message intended to build the youth of his people. Here he uses a story of a young man orphaned by the death of his parents. The story is not far from the truth, for it is the story of himself (as an uncle) and his niece (his own sister’s daughter). It is a known fact (even to the researcher) that he has a niece who, through his advice, encouragement and his financial support, is presently a medical practitioner. Modest as he always is, he does not go about boasting about it, let alone even mentioning it. It is also interesting to note that he even disguises by using “nephew” instead of niece, and a distant name Matodzi instead of his niece’s actual name.

12 Choral organizations such as TUATA were popular for organising choir competitions for schools in the then Transvaal Province. These competitions were divided into the following categories: Infant Section (for Primary School beginners) Intermediate Section (for the Junior Primary Section: children from Sub-Standard B to Standard 2) Senior Primary Section (for the Senior Primary Section: pupils from Standard 3 to Standard 6) Junior Secondary Section (for the Junior Secondary Section: pupils in Form 1 to Form 3 at Secondary School level) Senior Secondary Section (for the Senior Secondary Section: pupils in Form 3 to Form 5. There were Open Sections too for Boys only and Girls only in both the Primary and Secondary levels.
This composition makes ample use of syncopation, more pronounced in such bars as 15, 17, 26, 53, 54 and 55. Largely the rhythms in Matodzi are influenced by the speech pattern of the text, with a limited amount of syllabic adjustment due to the augmentation of certain notes and the syncopation. The composer has also experimentally incorporated certain African compositional traits such as the call-and-response device in bb.40-41 – 42 and 49 – 51.

There was a considerable attempt by the composer to follow the speech tone pattern of the text of Matodzi. The first phrase, “Matodzi kwana kwa vho Lilani”, and phrases “nge vha wela khomboni” in bb.10-11, “Nangoho Matodzi a vhulunga”, and many others, bear testimony to the composer’s attempt at adopting this crucial element of Venda vocal music compositional style.

Nonge has made minimal use of disjunct motion in Matodzi. Similar to Musthutshu, stepwise motion is predominantly employed, again with a narrow range not exceeding an interval of a perfect fifth. This composition shows signs of Nonge’s development towards liberation from hymnal influences that he had acquired during his schooling days at the mission school and college that he attended. Simple chord progressions were used, with occasional interpolations of chromatic harmony such as in bb.17 and 55.

Some of the expression marks indicated in the score are not convincing, as they do not appear to be related to the text. They do not portray the meaning of the text. The whole text is educational and advisory in the manner of story telling. It is an emotional and touching story.

“kutukana kwo welaho vhusiwanani
(A boy steeped in poverty)
A ku divhi khotsi na mme
(He does not know his parents)
nge vha wela khomboni ya tshiendedzi”;
(They died in a car accident),
would not require a majestic (maestoso) performance. The mood is melancholic.
The text from b.52 to the end calls for excitement, for Matodzi has made a rare achievement under the circumstances narrated and, particularly, during the time in the Venda homeland when there were few qualified indigenous African medical practitioners. For lack of a better expression mark, the vivace has come close to portraying the desirable mood of this passage.

The vivace and the tranquillo in the middle passage (bb. 22-34) are also not convincing as suitable musical expressions for portraying the mood of the text. There is only one dynamic level (mf) required for the whole performance of the composition with all these musical expressions (maestoso, vivace and tranquillo). This somehow shows the composer’s lack of understanding of these concepts. Had Nonge not come across these musical concepts, most probably during his brief peripheral music education at Vendaland Training Institute which made him (like many others) take Western concepts as prestigious and the only ones to be used, he would probably have come up with more appropriate directions using the language of the composition, Tshivenda, which he obviously understands best. Tranquillo, for want of a more suitable musical expression, would perhaps have been suitable for the whole passage as a build-up to the final vivace.

Whilst it is musically understandable that singing the whole passage from bb.4 - 7 would almost be impossible for amateur singers, it is unusual to cut the word “vhusiwanani” from the rest of the sentence “kutukana kwo welaho”. Perhaps, in order to accommodate a suitable relationship between the text and the musical phrase, Nonge should not have extended the musical phrase the way he did. It is also not possible to perform bb.8-14 as one phrase as dictated by the text, equally so with bb.53-57. These phrases are so irregular that the length, at the expense of the distortion of the significance of the text in relation to the music, has to dictate the phrasing in the performance. The singers may have to break between “a ku divhi khotsi na mme” and “nge vha wela khomboni ya tshiendedzi” in b.10. Breaks may be effected between “Zwino khoyu” and “zwino ngoyo” in bar58 before executing “o phasaho vhudokotela”. Barring these few irregular
phrases, Nonge’s phrasing of the rest of his musical lines is satisfactorily dictated by the text.

Whereas there is coherence in the overall form of this choral composition, particularly dictated by Nonge’s clearly defined rhythmic pattern, there are evident sections. The first small section is the opening passage (bb1-3) which, were it not for the fermata, would have smoothly flowed to the next passage. Then follows the longer section (bb4-25) with its maestoso. Another small section is the vivace passage (bb26-33) which is defined by its fermata rounding off. The opening notes of the tranquillo section (b34-52) show a recap of the first section, followed by another small closing section.

Whilst this research recognises that the pitches in this composition are overall dictated by the semantic tone structure of the text, one however still yearns for much more appropriate melodies, perhaps some melodies that could evoke something closer to traditional Venda children’s songs, since this is a choral composition for children.
4.3.3. **Mutshutshu** (Deceit)  
Words and music by JK Nonge  
**Composed in 1987**

**TEXT**

Mutshutshu, Mutshutshu,  
Mutshutshu wo fhedza vhanzhi.  
Mutshutshu ndi mutanda nga u we ri wane makwati, ri ore,  
Mutshutshudzi wa mulandu a si mulifhi wawo.

Zwino vhaswa thanyani-ha,  
Ni vhone vhatshutshudzi,  
Vhane vha ri: “Dzumbamani tshihuni”.  
U tevhela vhatshutshudzi  
Zwi nga ni kundisa zwivhuya  
zwo ni lindelaho phanda;  
Zwivhuya zwa vhudi-vhudi.

**TRANSLATION**

Deceit, Deceit,  
Deceit has destroyed many.  
Deceit is “Let the buck fall  
So we get wood and have fire to sit around,  
The instigator for wrongdoing is not the accused.

Therefore youth be careful,  
Be wary of instigators,  
Who say, “hide behind the bush”.  
To follow instigators,  
Deprives one of rewards  
Rewards that are awaiting you ahead;  
Good rewards.

**COMMENTARY**

Nonge composed this piece whilst he was in jail. It was during the era of Venda homeland politics. Nonge belonged to the Venda Independence Party (then popularly known as the VIP), a political party that was in opposition to the ruling party, the Venda National Party. In order to suppress the opposition, the ruling Venda National Party under Paramount Chief and later President Mphephu used to detain members of the VIP. They were detained indiscriminately without trial for 90 days. It was at the time of his detention in the Vuwani Prison in Venda that Nonge composed and completed this piece.
The composer’s intention here is to advise his people, particularly the youth, to be wary of bad advice or friends with evil intentions, who deliberately lead other people astray. The Venda proverbs he has used here (translated), “let the buck fall so we get wood and have fire to sit around”, and “the instigator for wrong doing is not the accused”, sum up the message of the text. “The song advises people not to be misled by those people with their own political agendas” (Nonge, 2005: Interview).

The rhythm in Mutshutshu is not determined by the text. A significant amount of syllabic adjustment was employed, with several runs that bring about lingering voices in different parts. The rhythm is therefore not predetermined throughout, as evidenced by the difference between bb.1 to 14 and bb.15 to 28. The basic metre remains the same though.

Whilst the composer tried, albeit subconsciously as he intimates (Nonge, 2003: Interview), to conform to the semantic significance of the language with, for example, the soprano line in bb.3 and 6 with the title word Mutshutshu (rrf) and makwati b.8 (rrf), most melodies in Mutshutshu show no evidence of the influence of the text used. The correct semantic tones of the phrase in bb.3 and 4, for example, should be: Mutshutshu wo fhedza vhathu, and the notes could have been rrfrfrt, Words such as Mutshutshudzi (b.11) and zwavhudi (final cadence) were musically sacrificed, resulting in complete loss of their semantic significance. The best effort the composer has made in trying to depict the correct tonal inflections of the language is at bb.20 to 22. The music clearly portrays the meaning of the words.

The compositional style in this composition is symptomatic of the influence of rudimentary Western musical elements on the composer. Although the text is Venda, the music sounds Western. It is hymnal in style, and is essentially predominantly homophonic. Major key tonality is followed throughout and is diatonic. It is in the key of F major, with simple chord progressions reminiscent of
church hymns. The dominant seventh chord is constantly employed at the ends of short phrases as in bb.10, 13, 17, 19 and 28 with a simple perfect cadence II6-V-I ending the composition. On the whole, Nonge employs stepwise or conjunct motion throughout the composition, with a narrow range. The composer has experimented with antiphony as in bb.4 to 5 and 29 to 30, which somewhat helped loosen the predominant homophony in the composition.

The composition is based on one dynamic marking (mf). Whilst this dynamic marking is appropriate for the short message and the general mood of the composition, the composition could still have been interspersed with a few other dynamic markings closer to the mezzo forte, such as perhaps a mezzo piano in bb.15-19. The text of the passage and the music (“zwino vhaswa thanyani-ha ni vhone vhatshutshudzi”) warrant a softer approach in the performance thereof. This passage would also do well with a slower tempo. There are only two tempo indications (andante and accelerando). The accelerando passage beginning at b.20 naturally lands itself (albeit not indicated) to a crescendo. Sometimes composers leave the interpretation of the composition to the ingenuity of the performer, and Nonge could have given the one dynamic marking and only two tempo indications as mere guidelines and decided to leave the rest of the interpretation to the performers (choirs). Overall, there is a fair relationship between the text and the few tempos and expression marks that the composer has made indications of.

There are a few places in the composition where the musical phrases do not reflect the normal phrasing of the text. Nonge, for instance, could have indicated a break between the phrases “vhane vha ri dzumbamani tshihuni” and “u tevhedza vhatshutshudzi” in b.19, which would conform perfectly to the normal rhythm of the spoken Venda language.

Longer compositions with different sections may not be ideal for young amateur singers. Hence, Mutshutshu is a relatively short composition and does not have
clear-cut sections or movements. Nonge attempts to attain coherence in the overall form of his choral compositions, particularly because most of his pieces are meant for the youth.

**Summary**

Choral music “is one of the greatest means of communicating moral and didactic messages of relevance to audiences and to communities” (Montjane, 1996: 69).

Nonge belongs to the category of composers whose compositions focus on the subject matter that deals with aspects of daily life amongst people and, in this instance, the lives of Vhavenda in particular. The texts reflect the attitudes of Vhavenda towards the condition of their society. The themes may be varied; from messages of encouragement, to subject matters of joy or sadness, or just a social commentary on the traditional or contemporary way of life of the people.

These themes are usually highly topical, so much so that they are more appropriate and conversant to those in close touch with the people of the locality, in this case Vhavenda.

It is unfortunate that most of Nonge’s compositions came at a time when freedom of speech and expression were non-existent in “The Republic of Venda”.

This composer’s music generally reveals a conscious and serious attempt by Venda choral musicians to rid themselves from the shackles of the simple hymnal style that they had learned from missionary educational institutions, especially their rhythms. Traditional African stylistic features such as call-and-response, antiphony and short repetition of phrases begin to manifest themselves prominently with Nonge’s music, a continuation of the pioneering work done by Nephawe.
Except for a few passages in his compositions where the musical phrases do not aptly reflect the normal phrasing of text, the musical phrases and the phrases of the text in Nonge’s compositions in general do marry each other admirably.

Despite his limited music knowledge and the limitations of tonic sol-fa, Nonge’s music does evoke some elements of indigenous Venda music, particularly in the melodies of Matodzi and Mutshutshu.

The notion of using conventional (Italian) expression markings by composers who do not fully understand them is quite disturbing. Like other selected Venda composers, such as Ramabannda, Nonge does not show understanding of these concepts and, as I have suggested earlier, he would have done better if he had used his own language to give appropriate directions for the proper performances of his composition. It was primarily due to the sheer feelings and attitudes of inferiority, instilled by missionaries, towards our composers’ own cultural heritage (language, music and anything) that our composers viewed anything Western as a symbol of prestige, sophistication and power. It is regrettable that our composers have yet to escape from this impulse, which has been adversely affecting their freedom of expression and diluting their intentions.

At the same time, it was heartening, at least, to see that already during the 1970s there was a visible movement by both Nephawe and Nonge to break away from the equal-note homophonic rhythm that typified hymnody. Nephawe and Nonge’s melodies were loosened up, which produced the polyphonic and occasional heterophonic textures characteristics of Indigenous Venda music.
5.1. Biography of the Composer

Born in 1950 at Tshivhilwi in Venda, Thinawanga grew up with his aunt at Tshilonwe (a Lutheran Church missionary station). He received his primary education at Masikhwa and later at Takalani in Mukula where he completed his Standard 6 in 1966. He thereafter went to Tondalushaka Secondary School where he completed his Junior Certificate in 1969. Thinawanga was part of the once famous Tondalushaka Secondary School choir, which bossed in the entire Northern Transvaal during the 1960. This was Ramabannda’s first significant encounter with formal choral music, and that had a lasting effect on his later musical life.

Successful as he was at school, poverty prevented Ramabannda from furthering his studies. His aunt could no longer sustain the financial assistance she had been giving him for 9 years. The young Thinawanga had to leave school and search for work. In 1970, he worked for the SABC (Pretoria). Here he met the late Podu Hudson Bright Mamabolo, a former choirmaster and the most successful North-Sotho choral music composer to date. Mamabolo taught Ramabannda how to write music in tonic sol-fa.

After a year at the SABC, Ramabannda had saved enough money to go back to school. During 1971-1972, he went to Vendaland Training Institute and trained as a teacher. Although he was identified as very good in Arts and Craft and was subsequently advised to specialize in it, he did not stop studying music privately.
He also diligently participated in the college choir under Mr Combrink, then Principal.

Ramabannda has been teaching since 1973 at Masikhwa Primary School. He did and completed his Matric through private studies whilst teaching. He has been choirmaster of the school since then. He says he was fortunate to teach under Mr THE Dau as principal of the school, for the latter was a very good choirmaster and supported him. Ramabannda has become associated with this school as choirmaster to date.

The years 1979 to 1989 will be fondly remembered and cherished by all Venda choral music composers that were alive at the time. It was an era of the Government’s vigorous campaign upon the promotion of Venda Arts and Culture. Venda, with the backing of its government’s Department of Education, Arts and Culture, held annual choral music competitions for school choirs. Venda compositions were prescribed for these competitions, and this encouraged many choral music enthusiasts like Ramabannda to try their hand at composing.

5.2. Ramabannda’s Music

Some of his compositions include:

*Makhulu wanga* (My Grandmother) 1979: He composed the song as a tribute to his loving grandmother who taught him many traditional Venda Malombo songs, which he loved so much that he can still sing them to date. Malombo, which is one of indigenous Venda spiritual music, was very special music to Ramabannda’s grandmother’. She was a traditional healer (well known for healing children’s diseases), and she would sing these songs during her healing rituals.

*Ravhuhali na Mukuwe* (Ravhuhali and Mukuwe) 1989: Based on a poem by the late PR Ngwana (former Venda homeland’s inspector of schools and a
recognised poet, this song was prescribed for secondary school choirs during the annual Venda choral music competitions in 1989.

_Venda liswa_ (The new Vendaland) 1989: composed about Venda's pseudo-independence and the advantages thereof; economic boost for Vhavenda and other notable developments of the area are mentioned. The song was prescribed for Venda adult choirs in the annual Venda choral music competitions in 1989.

_Dumbu mazwikule_ (Devastating storm) 1999: Villages around Venda such as Tshaulu, Tshikonelo, Gaba and some parts of the Malamulele area experienced the most devastating storm they had ever seen. Affected by what he had seen around these areas, Ramabannda got musically inspired and composed this song.

_Pfunzo dzashu ntswa_ (New Learning skills) 1999: This was composed and immediately prescribed for PEU choir competitions in 1999. It talks about the OBE (outcome-based-education) and its advantages; such as communication skills, computer literacy, and language-proficiency.

_Mvula ya midalo_ (Rain floods) 2001: The composition talks about how the floods at the beginning of that year affected Mozambique and other parts of South Africa.

_Iwe Musidzana_ (Oh! Girl) 2001: With words by NA Milubi, Professor of Tshivenda at the University of the North, the message of this female trio is directed at girls, warning them of the many dangers lurking outside their protected homes and schools.
Thinawanga Israel Ramabannda

Ramabannda is, after Nephawe, one of the most prolific choral songwriters amongst Vhavenda. Easily inspired by events around him, he has not stopped composing. This photo was taken at his home village, TSHIVHILWI.
5.3. Analysis of Selected Repertoire

5.3.1. **Mvula ya Midalo** (Rain floods)  
Words by TI Ramabannda  
*Composed in 2001*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>TEXT</th>
<th>TRANSLATION</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Shangoni Mozambique,</td>
<td><em>In Mozambique, Zimbabwe and South Africa,</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Zimbabwe na South Africa,</td>
<td><em>Our beautiful countries, nice countries,</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mashango ashu o nakaho,</td>
<td><em>Came rain and storms,</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>mashango avhudi,</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ho da mvula na madumbu,</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ho swika mvula i tshusaho.</td>
<td><em>Came frightening rain.</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yo swika na mibvumo, i ngindi!</td>
<td><em>It came with thunder, ngindi!</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yo swika na dziphenyo, vhengenge!</td>
<td><em>It came with lightening, vhengenge!</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yo swika na mimuya,</td>
<td><em>It came with winds,</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mvula ya madumbu,</td>
<td><em>It came with storms,</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mvula ya midalo.</td>
<td><em>Rain floods.</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wo tavhiwa mukosi wa lufu,</td>
<td><em>A cry of death was heard,</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wo tavhiwa mukosi shangoni lothe,</td>
<td><em>A cry was heard throughout the country,</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wa phalalwa nga mashango davha.</td>
<td><em>Foreign countries came to rescue.</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mukosi wonoyo, mukosi wa lufu</td>
<td><em>That cry, the cry of death in the whole country.</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>shangoni lothe.</td>
<td><em>Everything lay bare, everything was destroyed,</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ho fudwa hothe, ho thuthwa zwothe,</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Everything was razed to the ground, all over.
All the beautiful buildings, all the created buildings.
There are cries everywhere.
Look at all roads, and all the bridges,
And the luscious plants.

God will wipe off the tears from the eyes of all,
He will come to all affected,
He will comfort all those who are crying,

All the dead will rise,
And he is going to judge with love.

People’s lives in the world were destroyed,
Because of the rains of destruction,
It is pitiful.
People’s livestock and wildlife died,
Because of the rains of destruction.

All the people were frightened!
The whole world was amazed,
The whole world exclaimed.
At the deeds of rains and storms.

Governments tried hard
to help the nation;
Yo disa zwothe zwi thusaho,
Henefho ya disa zwothe zwi tshidzaho
nga lufuno.

They brought everything helpful,
They brought everything healing,
Everything with love.

Yo swika na mibvumo, i ngindii!
Yo swika na dziphenyo,
vhengenge!
Yo swika na tshifhango,
Mvula ya midalo.

It came with thunder, sounding ngindii!
It came with lightening, sounding
vhengenge!
It arrived with hail
Rain-floods.

COMMENTARY

People usually associate their lives and well-being with nature, and composers being part of the people are no exception. It is, therefore, not surprising to realize that some composers’ repertory is dominated by themes that praise natural resources or express their fondness for their environment. Such composers also derive inspiration out of describing events that they have personally witnessed and, like the society around them, have been affected thereby. One of the contemporary Venda composers, Thinawanga Ramabannya, seems more easily inspired by, and finds aesthetic satisfaction from, describing such events.

This composition describes the frightening winds, storms, thunder and lightning that came with the massive rainfalls of the year 2001, and talks about how the floods affected the lives of people in countries such as Mozambique, Zimbabwe and parts of South Africa. Buildings, bridges and roads were destroyed, and an uncountable number of livestock and wildlife died. By the time foreign countries came to the rescue, many people had lost their lives. In fact, the event captured the attention of the world, particularly with the rescue of a woman who gave birth
on a tree above the flooded plains in Mozambique. As to more detail about the floods, the text is self-explanatory.

This composition is unnecessarily made too long through rather unnecessary repetition signs (markings). It is already reasonably long enough not to warrant any repetition, save for the passage in bars 58 to 65 where the music is repeated with a slightly altered text.

Ramabannda has provided ample directions as to how his composition should be performed. There are several tempo markings such as moderato (bb.1-11), con spirito (bb.12-39 and bb.101 to the end), allegro (bb. 40-57), and prayerfully (b. 58) which, according to the text (Mudzimu U do fhedza mitodzi matoni avho vhothe……………….), is somewhat misplaced, unless if one views it as a declaration of hope or faith but not communication with God. Strangely, there is no indication as to where the prayerful approach to the composition stops except to assume that it could be at the double bar line. There is no tempo indication for a long section until the second con spirito (b. 101 to the end of the composition). Bar 66 could do with another tempo marking before the con spirito.

Ramabannda felt that the dominant dynamic level for the proper and satisfactory performance of his composition should be mf (bb. 1, 12,28,40,79 and 101). There is a mezzo piano and a forte too. There is one ff (b.87).

Ramabannda uses strange note combinations that do not convince as intentionally placed for any purpose such as depiction of mood, emotions, and so on. They do not make sense harmonically, unless viewed as individual melodies. In this composition they are evident in bars 17 (notes F C E C), 29 (Bb Eb F C)), and so on.

---

13 The event made headlines in news bulletins around the world in the year 2001.
The first two musical phrases from bb 1 to 3 would do better with some rhythmic rearrangement. If, for example, the notes on the last beat of bar 2 could be transferred to the first beat of bar 3, the music could elicit a better performance from the choirs, of course not disputing the fact that compositions do not necessarily have to be simple to make them “comfortable” for performers. Nonetheless, the compositional style here does not convince as one that was done on purpose, but primarily due to lack of proper grounding in compositional technique.

This composition has an interchange between homophony and polyphony. Whilst the homophonic passages display traits of hymnal tendencies, the polyphonic passages incorporate certain African traditional traits such as the call-and-response device, particularly in bars 66 -86 bb.

The composition has elements of through- composed music whilst it also has strophic manifestations.

It is quite evident that Ramabannda did not consider speech tone patterns and rhythms of the text whilst composing this piece. The music was not dictated or influenced by the text chosen. Whilst not denying that the composer was inspired by these events that he is describing, which he has personally witnessed, the music set to the text does not convince as having come to the composer’s mind at the same moment. The text sounds imposed on the already-conceived melodies and rhythms, which are ostensibly not Venda but Western in conception. Taken away from the text, the music unfortunately does not evoke the feeling described by the theme of the composition.

Although Ramabannda has tried to obtain some significant relationship between the musical phrases and the text, two passages are problematic. The phrases “Zimbabwe na South Africa mashango ashu o nakaho mashango a vhudi” (bb. 3.4-7.2) and “Vhutshilo ha vhati shangoni ho lovha nga mulandu wa yone
The musical lines in the two statements are not dictated by the text. The text of the first one, for example, is phrased in normal spoken Venda as:

“Shangoni Mozambique, Zimbabwe na South Africa”,
“Mashango ashu o nakaho, mashango avhudi”.

This would be good phrasing for poetry reading, even for a non-Venda speaking person to read or recite it.

### 5.3.2. *Iwe Musidzana* (Oh Girl)

Appendix 12

Words by NA Milubi  
Music by IT Ramabandla  
**Composed in 2001**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>TEXT</th>
<th>TRANSLATION</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><em>Iwe Musidzana</em>&lt;br&gt; Tshiguru hetshi tsho u pinelaho&lt;br&gt; A si lufuno, ndi nyemulo&lt;br&gt; I no tita ya u tanzela kule&lt;br&gt; Sa mukukwe musi mulambo wo dalesa.</td>
<td><em>Oh Girl</em>&lt;br&gt; <em>The monster confronting you</em>&lt;br&gt; <em>Is not love, but lust</em>&lt;br&gt; <em>Which whirls and shall spit you afar</em>&lt;br&gt; <em>Like leaves when the river is in flood.</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Iwe Musidzana</em>&lt;br&gt; U songo difulfhedza wa kholwa&lt;br&gt; Wa takadzwa nga hone u dobedza mbubulu&lt;br&gt; Ngeno wo hangwa mumanelo&lt;br&gt; Wa yone nyemulo ya nama.</td>
<td><em>Oh Girl</em>&lt;br&gt; <em>Do not invest in your own trust</em>&lt;br&gt; <em>And derive joy out of picking fruit</em>&lt;br&gt; <em>While you have forgotten the pinch and constipation</em>&lt;br&gt; <em>Of the lust of flesh.</em></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Iwe Musidzana
Nyemulo ya tita, ya titesa, tshenuwa u talifhe
I sa do u tanzela vhunweni u sa vhu ti
Wa do kanuka matshelo
Vhutungu ho tutuwa
Ha mbo vha u devhekana tshothe
Ha vhusidzana ha mbilu yau.

Oh Girl
When lust whirls more and more, take fright and be wise
Before it spits you into the unknown
Lest you be amazed tomorrow
When pangs of pain have emerged
And the youthfulness of your heart
To be destroyed forever.

COMMENTARY

Professor NA Milubi, who is attached to the Department of Tshivenda at the University of the North as Chair of the department, wrote this poem in order to alert the youth, girls in particular, about the dangers of immature intimate relationships. He warns them of the lust of older men who could lure them with gifts in order to abuse their bodies and thereafter dump them barefoot and pregnant.

This poem is aimed at making people aware of things that can destroy the future of young girls. Girls are hereby advised to take care of their bodies when they are in the presence of immoral or unscrupulous man or boys, for some of these might rob them of their virginity.

As in Mvula ya Midalo, Ramabannda uses very strange note combinations, which result in somewhat interesting chord formations and progressions. Examples are found in bars 3, 7, 13, 14, 16, 24, 25, 29 and 71.

Generally, this composition needs some rhythmic rearrangement in terms of progressions and strong beat placement. One example is found between bar 6 and 7. The composer could have done better by either combining (pairing) the
notes on the first beat of bar 7 with those of the last beat of bar 6 through making them quavers, or eliminate those of the first beat of bar 7 altogether. That would make the music fall into place rhythmically, ending with the last beat of the cadence on a strong beat. One other portion that warrants some such considerable rearrangement is in bars 23 to 27. The notes of b. 27.1 would be better placed on b. 26.4, resolving well into the tonic chord on a strong beat at the beginning of b. 27.b.

His melodic lines, particularly in the soprano voice, are not apt but reasonably close to the speech tone of the text of the language.

The speech rhythm of the text also had some influence in a number of places such as in bars 13, 14, 47, 55, 56 and so on, on the rhythms employed in the composition.

Ramabannda does not provide any direction as to how his composition should begin in terms of tempo and the mood. The first expression he suggests is pleadingly (b. 33), and the only other one is lively (b. 68). The composition has an educational message and the pleading approach suggested by Ramabannda, although strangely later than necessary in the composition, fits in perfectly with the message of the text. The lively is somewhat misplaced, for the statements that come at that point and thereafter until the end would not yield lively feelings.

Whereas the rit. (b.74) and rall. (b. 53) are most appropriate for the rounding off the passages; they could have been placed vice versa, for the rall. would do perfectly well towards the end, whilst the rit. would definitely offer the necessary slowing down to just a temporary break in the middle of the composition.

Ramabannda has commendably provided ample dynamic indications that would assist in the performance of the composition. One still feels that the opening should have been provided with some guideline, because the mezzo piano required at b. 20 relates to a vacuum. It would, therefore, be incumbent upon the
performers’ ingenuity to fathom an appropriate dynamic level to adopt for the opening, in accordance with the mood of the entire composition.

Ramabannda’s phrasing of his musical lines is dictated by the text. The reason is not far-fetched. The text (Milubi’s poem) was prepared for him, unlike with most of the compositions under scrutiny by Ramabannda and others where the composers themselves formulated the text and the music, whichever came first. Except for the odd rhythmic rearrangement in terms of progressions and strong beat placement, that disturbs what would otherwise have been a smooth flowing composition in both the music and the words, Ramabannda tried to obtain some significant relationship between the musical phrases and the text.

Peripherally, the composition appears to be divided into two sections (bb. 1-32, 33-54, and 55- the end. Upon closer analysis, it reveals itself clearly as one unit. First, the music is virtually based on one rhythmic pattern, except for a few modifications here and there. Both the music and the text, for instance, in bb. 47-54 and bb. 70.3-78 are similar, and throughout the entire composition, one notices some manifestations of the same rhythmic pattern appearing.

On the whole, whilst one would acknowledge overlapping of parts as one of the generally acceptable compositional techniques, the contralto in this composition sings notes above the 1st and 2nd sopranos at most times, which could be viewed as a rather exaggerated overlapping, if deliberate; a dubious fact given Ramabannda’s self-confessed limitations in musical training in notational prowess (Ramabannda, 2003: Interview.)

**Summary**

As already stated, composers like Ramabannda thrive in describing natural events that have long-term effects on society or on the lives of people. Many such composers pursue this trend with more enthusiasm, for the inspiration to do so come quite readily. This inspiration is derived from the fact that they may have
personally witnessed the events and, together with the society in which they live, they have been affected thereby, as Ramabannda did with the two events that inspired him to produce two of his compositions, *Mvula ya Midalo* (Rainfloods) and *Dumbu Mazwikule* (Devastating storm). “Taking into consideration the several observations made on Ramabannda’s two selected choral compositions, which I strongly feel should be viewed as positive criticisms, I strongly subscribe to Nephawe’s assertion that “Ramabannda’s enthusiasm should not be ignored. He needs guidance” (Nephawe, 2006: Interview).

I am happy to mention that, in all my, perhaps equally limited choral music composition knowledge, Ramabannda and I have begun to collaborate in order to assist each other with our compositions 14.

Our composers usually grow out of a choral community. They gain experience informally by taking part in choir singing. Composing comes naturally through inspiration. The motivation to compose further thereafter comes from the level of acceptance of your style by the community and the popularity of your compositions. As Nephawe has said, Ramabannda needs guidance.

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14 In my humble effort to contribute to the growth and development of Venda Choral music, I have been composing choral music pieces since 1992, which have been prescribed lately in several choir competitions around the country.
CHAPTER SIX

Fhatuwani Hamilton Sumbana

6.1. Biography of the Composer

Fhatuwani Hamilton Sumbana was born in 1960 at Vhurivhuri in Venda. He received his primary education at Vhurivhuri from 1968 to 1976, and thereafter Tshiemuemu Secondary School in Tshakhuma between 1977 and 1980. He obtained his BA degree and UED at the University of Venda in 1983 and 1984 respectively. Later he obtained a BA Hons. degree at the same institution, majoring in Geography. He holds a Masters degree in Environmental Management from the Rand Afrikaanse Universiteit, and is presently studying for an MBA through distance education with Luton University in England.

Vhurivhuri is a rural village with a typical traditional Venda culture. The youth of this area grew up participating in traditional Venda music, especially tshikona (for males) and tshigombela (for females). Sumbana attributes his ardent love for Venda culture and traditional Venda music to his uncle, Frank Mukhuvhukhuvhu, a shrewd disciplinarian and leader of the local tshikona music. All young males in the area, especially his nephews including Sumbana, had to participate in this music without fail. Sumbana grew up in this musical setting.

Sumbana’s first encounter with formal choral music was at the primary school and the secondary school mentioned earlier, where he was a regular mixed choir member. His mentors in this genre include; Mr JN Nemakhavhani, then Principal at Vhurivhuri, his elder brother Mr RR Sumbana (teacher at the same school), Messrs. EK Mulangaphuma, Moshapo, and L Mulaudzi at Tshiemuemu (these
were well-known choirmasters in the Northern Province), and most significantly Mrs H Bester (a music lecturer at Venda College of Education).

6.2. Sumbana’s Music

Sumbana came into prominence as a choral musician when he became choirmaster of the locally famous Tshiemuemu Secondary School Choir in 1985. His involvement with choirs and with a wide spectrum of African choral repertoire inspired him to try a hand at composing. Instantly, two of his compositions turned into gems! These compositions are:

Vhudzulapo Afrika Tshipembe (Citizenship in South Africa) (1992):
Li do vhuya la mulovha (One day the good old days shall dawn again) (1993):

Fhatuwani Hamilton Sumbana
The composer gave me this picture at his home in Muledane during an interview.
His other compositions include;

*Tshilimandila* (composed in 2000)
The composition is dedicated to the great grand father who was said to have been a great hunter during his time. He was a Mungona descendant; a group of the indigenous people whom Vhavenda conquered using their magic drum, Ngomalungundu. He did not take kindly to being under Vhavenda rule, decided to leave his family, and stayed alone in the bush bordering Mozambique, the area known today as the Kruger National Park.

It praises this man of his bravery and depicts some of the scary things that he did. He would spend some time in the waters of the Mutale, Luvuvhu and Vhembe Rivers hiding away form his enemies and some members of the families. It was difficult to trace him because he used to destroy his traces and sometimes put traps for those who would dare follow him. They nicknamed him Tshilimandila, the one who would put pit traps on the paths that lead to his favourite spots.

*Dandetande* (Composed in 1993)
This composition is about the period when South Africa was at a crucial stage of political negotiations. The main theme of the composition is about leaders fighting a war of words and their supporters killing one another. Different organisations, credible and discredited, came together to try to shape up the new country. The problem was enormous, a miracle was needed to save the country. Sumbana contends, “Solomon’s wisdom is needed to solve the problem”.

*Mukosi wa ndala ya gondo* (Composed in 1998)
Sumbana was inspired by the death of the family member through a road accident. This happened during the festive season when the “Arrive Alive” campaign was at its peak.
The composition calls the nation to listen to the campaign to keep our roads accident free during the festive seasons. The indiscriminate killing of the people in road accidents leaves families exposed to poverty after the departure of the breadwinners.

Part of the text goes as follows, “Listen to the call from above! Do we ever think about the pain we inflict because of negligence? My brother shall not return and his family faces a doomed future. Roads will never get fed-up unless we become fed-up”.

*Daba lo rivhuwa* (composed in 1990 and Completed in 1994)
After the inauguration of the new government of South Africa, it was as if the rock had moved out of its place and the water gushed out for the community to drink.

The composition is a call for the nation to accept that there is a new government that everyone must accept as his or her own and expect the best from it. There is a list of good things that the composer anticipates from the new government; recognition of cultural identity, equality in all respects, and better standards of living.

Everybody is reminded about doing his or her bit to make sure that the clean water running form the new fountain is not spoiled. Sumbana contends, “We should refrain from acting like cows that would use their hoofs to stir the water and make it dirty. Everybody must help create the new democracy”.

*Mbofholowo* (Liberation)
This is his latest.
6.3. Analysis of Selected Compositions

6.3.1. *Vhudzulapo Afrika Tshipembe* (Citizenship in South Africa)  Appendix 13

Words by FH Sumbana
Composed in 1992

**TEXT**

Thetshelesani fhungo la vhudzulapo ha
shango lino.
Zwo thoma misi ila tshaka dzi tshi
balangana.
Vhanwe vho toda vhudzumbamo,
vhane lupfumo,
Vhanwe vha rangisa vhurereli.
Ngwani-wapo u ntangiwakugara o divha
mulalo.
Ndi kale e hone.
Na kale thundu dzi sendelelwa dza
dzula shangoni.
Tshikovha ra nea, mafulo dza
tanganelana.
La vha la maladze shango.

**TRANSLATION**

Listen to the voice of the citizens of this
country.
It started when nations dispersed.
Some looked for refuge, others for
wealth,
Others promoted missionary enterprise.
Ngwani-wapo the indigenous remained
original.
It is long he has been around.
Traditionally refugees would be given
space to stay.
A ploughing field would be provided,
and cattle graze together,
And there would be peace in the
country,
Which refugee?
Which refugee would claim for land?
Which refugee would claim for
headmanship?
Claim for followers in our land?
Headmanship of which followers?
Ho tshinyala’ni-ha!
Vha muno vha tshi vho sundudzelwa kule.
Ho tshinyala’ni ri tshi vho sundudzwa?
Divhani-ha muno ndi kale ri hone.
Ngwani-wapo u ntangiwakugara.

Rine ndi kale ri hone.
Ro wanala ri na vhudzulo. (Ro vha ro dzula)
Ro wanala ri na zwifuwo. (Hu si na mulandu)
Ro wanala ri na mafulo. (Ro waniwa rine)
Ro wanala ri na masimu. (Ra da ra pfuluswa).
Ra pfuluswa ra ya miedzini. (Ri ye matafani)
Uri rine ri tambule.
Ro tshinya’ni?

Ro tshinya’ni-ha?
Ro wanala ri na vhudzulo. (Ro vha ro dzula)
Ro wanala ro takala. (Hu si na mulandu)
Ra da ra fhandwa nga vhukati. (Ra pfi ri sendele)
Ra pfi ri sendele murahu. (Ri ye thavhani)
Uri ri ye u tambula.

What has gone wrong now?
Owners of the land now forcefully removed.
Why are we now pushed away?
Know that we have been here a long time
We are Ngwani-wapo the indigenous.

We had our own fixed place of abode,
We had our own cattle
We had our own grazing land,
We had our own farming fields,
Then you moved us to dongas, marshy places.
In order for us to suffer.
What have we done?
What have we done?

What have we really done?
You found us with our own dwelling place,
You found us happy, with no problem.
You came and divided us,
Some were told to move away,
Others were pushed to the mountains,
In order to make us suffer.
Ro tshinya mini-ha
Ro tshinya’ni-ha?

Tavha mukosi tshilombe,
Tavha mukosi thavhandalila muunga muyani.
Tshilombe musimi mushayamubvumeli,
Mushayamubvumeli vhanwe vha do thetshelesa.
Muno ndi mahandana,
Murahu ha thavha vha do thetshelesa,
Vha do thetshelesa vha bvumela.

What have we done?
What have we really done?

Cry louder musician
Cry until the echo from the mountain is heard.
No one to join in your song,
Eventually they will listen.
However, here it is a joke,
The other side of the mountain will listen;
They will listen and join us.

COMMENTARY

This composition focuses on the era of the forced removals of South African indigenous people during the apartheid government rule in the 1960’s. It is a grim reminder of the sufferings of Vhavenda and Vatsonga when they were forced to separate, and how in the process they lost their property, land and relatives. Sumbana was 8 years old when this event of relocation took place. As he grew up, he could not forget some of his friends, males and females, with whom he grew up playing indigenous games and swimming in the Langwe River. Most of these friends were Vatsonga. It is important to indicate that before the apartheid era, Vatsonga and Vhavenda used to live alongside each other and even together. In areas such as Vhurivhuri, where Sumbana was born and bred, and many other traditional village settings known by the researcher, there was no discrimination based on language or ethnicity. It was during one of the days in the early 1980’s when Sumbana had visited his home village and decided to go to the Langwe River that he remembered and began to reminisce about his old friends and the event of forced removals.
Another scenario that sparked Sumbana to compose this piece was how South African indigenous people in Tshakhuma were forced to vacate their chosen plains and made to relocate to the hills and mountainous areas which were difficult to reach and uncomfortable to live in. This was also forced upon them by the Apartheid regime. The area in Tshakhuma is now known as Good Mabama (Good Hills), a name that was sarcastically coined by the disgruntled people themselves.

The composition is dominated by one recurring painful refrain-like phrase; “Rotshinya’ni?” (What have we done?). It is a choral composition of protest.

In this composition, there are a number of different interesting rhythmic patterns throughout the song. The speech rhythms of the sentences have evidently influenced Sumbana’s musical rhythms; hence, the rhythm of the music of b.32, for example, fully conforms to the speech rhythm of the text. Sumbana has commendably tried to follow the actual pattern of speech rhythm of the text.

Another interesting rhythmic feature of this music is the construction of typical traditional Venda rhythms\(^{15}\) out of the interplay of three basic rhythmic patterns found between bb.59 - 86. These rhythmic patterns are:

\[\text{Typical traditional Venda rhythms are those found in malombo, tshikona, and malende, which are the most recognised as unique indigenous Venda song and dance genres.}\]
Sumbana contends that these rhythms came naturally to him immediately he felt
the urge to compose. They were inherent. They were always in him as he grew
up. Some of these rhythms are those he grew up singing, and others come from
the indigenous music that he had been listening to as he grew up amongst his
people. The composer contends that the theme, the text and the rhythms came
in that sequence in one moment (Sumbana, 2005: Interview).

One of the elements that make this composition very interesting is how Sumbana
utilized some of the typically traditional Venda melodies herein. Moreover, these
melodies are mainly dictated by the syllables, another common characteristic of
traditional Venda songs.

It is also interesting to note that Sumbana is the only Venda composer thus far
who has employed modality, particularly in this composition. Modality is a
common feature of traditional African music. Sumbana has used the tetratonic
mode. The first section (bb.1 – 32) is predominantly modal, and, in keeping with
the African folk song tradition, the composer has successfully exploited the
overall falling patterns of African melodies in this section. He utilises the motives
derived from this mode to create the unison texture that characterizes indigenous
Frican music.

Unison singing, which is also one of common characteristics of African music,
features prominently in this composition. In most traditional African societies, the
melodies are duplicated in octaves, with men and women singing together. Also
referred to as ‘polarity’, this stylistic feature occurs in abundance in this
composition. It is noticeable at bb.1 -10, 35, and 51 - 53.

Sumbana has confessed that he had serious difficulty in conceptualizing the
rhythms at the beginning of Vhudzulapo Afrika Tshipembe, for it baffled him
when he tried to fit it within the 4- pulse measure, which has always been the
only convenient time signature he had learnt to use. This vindicates the assertion
about the self-confessed limitations in the rather peripheral music training that he received whilst doing his training in music notation during his training as a teacher at Venda College of Education (Sumbana, 2005: Interview).

Sumbana has given only one tempo indication (allegro) and that is right at the beginning of the composition. This tempo is not convincing in as far as portraying the meaning of the text is concerned. The text from bb. 1-32, with statements;

“Thetshelesani fhungo la Vhudzulapo…”

(Listen to the voice of the citizens……..)

and

“Zwo thoma misi ila…………………………………”

(It started when………………………………………)

would not require a quick, lively and bright (allegro) performance. Choirs that have done well with this composition have usually adopted a rather slower narrative approach, which is called “u toolola” in Tshivenda. *

The text from b.51 (Divhani-ha uri muno…..) calls for the allegro, for it is the beginning of the protest, both in terms of the statement and the rhythms employed from there up to the end. Allegro has come close to portraying the desirable mood of this passage up to the end.

The composition has no musical expressions for portraying the mood of the text. The composer has left the interpretation of the performance to the discretion of the performer.

Sumbana has tried, overall, to accommodate a suitable relationship between the text and the musical phrases in Vhudzulapo Afrika Tshipembe. Since it may not be possible to perform bb. 45-51.1 as one phrase, a break may be necessary after the pull in b. 48.3, albeit not dictated by the composition. Equally so it is not possible to master bb.51.4-57 as one phrase without taking breath somewhere before the end. These phrases are very long and irregular. Sumbana’s phrasing of the rest of his musical lines was satisfactorily dictated by the text.
Overall, the piece has two sections, clearly defined by the rhythmic patterns employed. The first section is the opening passage (bb.1-32). Then follows the longer section (bb.33-105). Another smaller section can be deduced, if one may, from (bb.33-51) within the longer second section. This is dictated and informed by the text and the music (particularly the rhythm).

It is interesting to note that this is one of the few compositions amongst the selection where the composer has tried to follow the speech tone. The music in bb.4 - 5, 7 - 9 and 26 - 30 represents the tones of the words exactly, whilst in bb.1 - 3, 14 to 15 and 71 to 73 the inflections of authentic Venda speech were imitated as closely as possible.

Like a number of other composers, Sumbana composed this piece with a particular choir in mind. He was a devout member of an adult choir in Tshakhuma, the Venda Singing Pioneers. The best singers in this choir at the time were in the alto section, and it is evident that Sumbana fully utilized the advantage by giving the most prominent melodies and message to the alto part (bb. 59-69 and 75-80, etc.).

It is significant to state that during the time of this composition (in the 1980’s), it was not easy to write a song of protest in South Africa, let alone in a repressive self-governing homeland such as Venda. People in Venda at the time were detained without trial for several months at the slightest suspicion of their being involved in protest or political activities. Sumbana had to pretend that he was composing the piece not for any other ulterior objective other than just for singing. He had to employ subtle ways of knocking at people’s minds.

The last two stanzas represent the hopes the people had in that they would one day be rescued. Foreign countries (“the other side of the mountain”) indeed listened to the loud cry and gave assistance in the struggle to end the injustice in 1994, which unfortunately has not yet helped in the reversal of the forced settlement scenario.
6.3.2. *Li do vhuya la mulovha* (Yesterday will return)  
Appendix 14

Words by FH Sumbana

**Composed in 1993**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>TEXT</th>
<th>TRANSLATION</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ula musi shango lashu li tshee lo lala,</td>
<td><em>When our country was still at peace,</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ri tshi lima mavhele a vhibva,</td>
<td><em>We used to produce aplenty,</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Muzwala e mufarisi,</td>
<td><em>My cousin was my spouse.</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Zwila ro dzula rothe ro tanganelana,</td>
<td><em>We were settled together and mixed,</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hu si na u sumbana nga minwe,</td>
<td><em>Not even a finger was raised,</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Naho I tsanwa zwayo.</td>
<td><em>There were no conflicts</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Zwila mulovha ri tshee nga tshashu,</td>
<td><em>Yesterday when we were still together,</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ri vhathihi nga shango he laya.</td>
<td><em>Together throughout the whole country.</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ro dinwa nga mulutanyi,</td>
<td><em>Then came the troublemaker,</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mulutanyi wa dzitshaka,</td>
<td><em>The conflict instigator of nations,</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mushaya lufuno.</td>
<td><em>Devoid of love.</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Zwino ro fhandekanywa vhanwe vho ya nalo,</td>
<td><em>Now we are divided, people are scattered,</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ro fhandekanywa nga dzitshaka.</td>
<td><em>Nations are divided.</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No shuma nwananga na ima bembela,</td>
<td><em>Well done my child for your steadfastness,</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ndi musi zwo phethea.</td>
<td><em>Otherwise the goal might have been achieved.</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Namusi sedzani mikano yo guma Nga luhura daledaleni.</td>
<td><em>Today the boundaries have come Close to our houses.</em></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Ndí yone mini yeneyi-ha?
Ro itwa maswina.
Nndwa a i na tshivhuya,
Hu lovha na vha si na mulandu.

What do you call this?
We are made enemies.
War has no benefit,
Innocent lives are lost

Imani nga tshanu ni pfane
Vhuswina vhu fhele, pfanani.
Imani nga tshanu ni pfane
Vhuswina vhu fhele.
Hu vhe na nyandano nga tshanu,
Pfanani!

Stand up together Unite
Stop the animosity
Together you unite
Stop the animosity
Unite!

Li do tsha matshelo la tandamela, la tavha.
Masana ra ora na vhaduhulu,

The sun will rise and set and set, and rise again
We will bask in the sun with our grandchildren,

Makhadzi vha imba luimbo lo lala:
“Tsho’ be, shango ndi matakadza,
Tsho’ be, li do vhuya la mulovha,
Tsho ’be, ra do dzula ro takala,
Tsho’be, vhakegulu vha ana ngano
Tsho’ be, ri tshi imba ra bvumelana,
Tsho’ be! shango ndi matakadza.

In peace my aunt will sing the song:
“Tshobe! In the land of happiness,
“Tshobe! Yesterday will return,
“Tshobe! we will live happily,
“Tshobe! Old ladies will sing folktales,
“Tshobe! We will sing in harmony,
“Tshobe! It is a land of happiness.
Vhathu vha Afrika Tshipembe
tanganani,
ni dzule murunzini muthihi,
ni vhofhe lithihi.
Afrika hu vhe na mulalo.

People of South Africa unite,
Let us live under the same shade,
Let us unite.
For peace in Africa

COMMENTARY

This is a continuation of the previous composition, Vhudzulapo Afrika Tshipembe. Through this composition, Sumbana is urging both Vhavenda and Vatsonga not to accept the division imposed upon them by the minority apartheid government. He is calling upon these two ethnic groups to unite as South Africans and thereby promote peace. There is considerable coherence in the overall form of this choral composition.

Sumbana uses primary chords predominantly, in simple progressions. He employs simple harmonic language. The composition has a very simple missionary-hymn style. The dominant seventh is also in much usage at the end of passages and cadential points. Sumbana, unlike in Vhudzulapo Afrika Tshipembe, has followed the diatonic major tonality throughout this composition.

Contrary to expectations and dissimilar to the previous one, Sumbana did not strive to make his music represents Venda speech-tone patterns of the text in this composition, neither the rhythms thereof; except for the melodies in the passage between bb.61 - 69. Granted, there are incidences of his attempt at following the Venda speech–tone patterns in bb.19 - 20, 24 - 26, 30, 34 and 54, but they are far from convincing. The music does not evoke the traditional Venda musical feeling.
Sumbana's choice of musical terms such as andante, piu mosso, and a tempo assists in the interpretation of the text. Although I have questioned the choice of “seriously” in bb. 24-29) and “ad libitum” (bb. 61.4-69.1), he has provided substantial guidelines that are of great assistance in portraying the meaning of the text in the performance of this composition. The mood is well captured hereby. The “ff” dynamic marking on bb. 56-57 is precisely indicative of the composer’s conviction that “Li do tsha matshelo la tandamela” (The sun will set and rise again), an idiomatic expression that means that things will eventually be better when “Yesterday returns” (Li do vhuya la mulovha). The “f” that follows after offers the desired contrast in the mood. Overall, the dynamic indications provided on this musical piece are very appropriate.

The composition has a few long phrases that have proved difficult to execute perfectly in one breath 16. For example, Sumbana should have indicated a break between “hu si na u sumbana nga minwe” and “naho l tsanwa zwayo” in bb.10-13. Other passages that warranted better phrasings are; “mulutanyi wa dzitshaka” and “mushaya lufuno” in bb. 21-24, “Nndwa a i na tshivhuya” and “hu lovha na vha si na mulandu” bb. 42-45. That notwithstanding, the composer has demonstrated his knowledge of the ability to establish neat phrasing relationships between the text and the melodies in the rest of the composition.

16The researcher performed the composition whilst conducting Bel Canto Chorale at the University of Venda Auditorium in 1996 during the Radio Thohoyandou/Metropolitan Life Choir Festival.
The most interesting passage, which stands out uniquely in the whole composition, is found between the last beat of b.61 and the first beat of b.69. The passage is unmistakably Venda in its melodies and harmonies, though with some “strange” or unusual rhythm from the original traditional well-known Venda composition. This interpolation is derived from one of the traditional songs popularly known and performed by Vhavenda – songs that are sung with individuals taking turns in dancing, with lots of drumming, whilst people are relaxing after a hard day’s work (usually communal work), drinking traditional Venda beer and merrymaking. Vhavenda call this malende dance. Due to the misconception that developed out of the observations of the earlier non-Venda researchers, some scholars like Blacking and Kruger termed this music “beer songs”, a misconception that arose out of the fact that such occasions were usually held with traditional beer-drinking. The most commonly known malende dance rhythm is as follows:

Whilst the descant-like (soprano) melody should be:

The perception that Sumbana may have deliberately changed the rhythm of this interpolation that he, like many of us, knows fully well so that it fits into the rhythmic patterns that dominate the composition, has been disputed by the composer himself (Sumbana, Interview: 2005). Sumbana has conceded that the rhythms he has employed in the section are not the precise rhythms he had wanted to depict. He had actually wanted to depict a tshikona rhythm that he had grown up playing in the years 1973 to 1975 at Vhurivhuri (as outlined in his profile). In fact, according to him (Sumbana, Interview: 2005.) one of the elder
members of the Venda Singing Pioneers (in which Sumbana was a chorister, as mentioned earlier) named Vho Tshiane (himself a traditional Venda music leader) had spotted the notational deficiency of the rhythms when the composition was introduced to the choir. What Sumbana wanted the choir to sing, and what he had written, were two different things. Sumbana accepts that the tonic sol-fa notational education he has so far acquired has revealed some deficiencies when it comes to representing some indigenous Venda musical nuances (Sumbana, Interview: 2005).

When *Li do vhuya la mulovha* was performed by the Soweto Artistic Singers in 1998, the conductor Mr E Rasikhinya, remarked; “the rhythm in this portion (meaning bb 61-69) has not been correctly captured” (Rasikhinya, 1997: Interview). Rasikhinya is a Muvenda who has participated in indigenous Venda traditional musical practices such as tshikona and malende as he grew at Fondwe in Venda. Even during the 1996 Radio Thohoyandou Metropolitan Life Choir Competitions, Rasikhinya and his Soweto Artistic Singers sang according to the example given above, and the predominantly Venda audience responded positively.

What follows the interesting interpolation is a passage with simple chord progressions developing towards the end with a typical preparation and resolution of a perfect cadence (II6/5 – I 6/4 – V7 –I).

Nonetheless, Sumbana has demonstrated through these two compositions that it is possible to infuse some traditional Venda musical elements in contemporary choral music compositions. This helps bring this genre of music to the hearts and feelings of Vhavenda. Hence, Sumbana’s music is more popular and draws larger audiences whenever it is performed around Vhavenda communities. It was due to their popularity that Radio Thohoyandou Metropolitan Life Choir Competition prescribed the two compositions, *Vhudzulapo Afrika Tshipembe* and *Li do vhuya la mulovha* in quick succession for adult choirs at the University of Venda Auditorium in 1996 and 1997.
Summary

Vhavenda, like many other African nations, protest more effectively through singing than in any other way. Protest singing has always transcended any political or social boundaries known to humanity since time immemorial. It is customary for Venda musicians even today to begin a song spontaneously during a beer-drinking session without any cue or request from anyone, sometimes ridiculing or insulting a ruler (king, chief, etc.).

Traditional Venda protest singing is prevalent in mafhuwe (songs sung by women whilst stamping mealies) and malende (sessions of drinking, singing and dancing after completion of a task). Tshigombela has also been used popularly within this context, partly because it was the source of social gossip. Venda women used Tshigombela songs to protest against ill treatment meted out by their husbands, or used the dance to express protest, mockery, praise or encouragement. Vhavenda can, therefore, use song in protesting about anything unbecoming in their societies, whether it is the ruler at fault or anybody. Venda musicians have been fortunate to have this poetic license – freedom of choice of time and place to make music. The themes they chose were not always governed.

Lately any discussion about African protest music that leaves out the impact of songs by South African student resistance movements, particularly the toyi-toyi music of the 1970s and 80s would be inadequate. Toyi-toyi is a Shona word for the war dance popularised by freedom fighters during Zimbabwe’s war of independence. In South Africa, toyi-toyi symbolically became a cultural weapon in the liberation struggle. Ultimately, toyi-toying in the 1980s meant reclaiming the right to occupying public space, and the right to participate in civil society, in a
free and democratic environment. It was the stinging political content of their songs that made them heroes amongst their own people against the then South African minority apartheid government. The students’ toyi-toyi songs have undeniably claimed central place in the annals of African music and culture. Equally so have some of the South African choral compositions as evidenced by the two compositions discussed.

Protest singing using choral music did not come readily to contemporary Vhavenda as it did in their indigenous traditional musical practices. Given the political climate under which they lived for the better part of the Apartheid Period, they would not have ventured into this direction easily, unless if someone had managed, as Nephawe tried with Milamboni ya Babiloni (By the Rivers of Babilon), to use the messages of the text from the Bible in a subtle manner, termed “hidden transcripts” by Parker (Parker, 2000, 12).

The period prior to 1994 in South Africa is well remembered throughout the world as one of serious suppression of freedom and other numerous suppressive measures. The poetic licence that had always been prevalent in traditional rural settings did not exist in choral music. Hence, only two Venda compositions in this categories by Sumbana, or perhaps three if one were to look at Nephawe’s Milamboni ya Babiloni can been seen as transcending those not-so-absolute boundaries of compartmentalization.

Protest singing in indigenous Venda traditional musical practices has been adequately discussed in the section on Traditional Venda Music.
To me, Sumbana represents an artist who advocates for or subscribes to the
notion of creativity as an expression of the inner feeling. It is not easy to express
one's inner feeling well if one is not using one's own idiom. Venda folksongs
definitely mean something to Sumbana and to the researcher than those of any
other language. It is understandable that Sumbana's two compositions;
*Vhudzulapo Afrika Tshipembe* and *Li do vhuya la mulovha* succeeded in instantly
capturing the attention of the choral fraternity. It is precisely because the choice
of words and the music were determined by the events that were experienced by
the composer, including many people around Venda then, in his usual cultural
milieu.
CHAPTER SEVEN

Venda choral music: Towards the establishment of an identity

7.1. The Foundations of Venda Choral Music and its Relationship with identities of class

The foundations of choral music as an art amongst Vhavenda were laid between 1930 and 1960. This was approximately fifty-five years after choral music had taken root as an art form elsewhere in South Africa. The most notable composers who laid the foundations were from the Nguni language groups, and these were Tiyo Soga (1829-1871), Reverend John Knox Bokwe (1855-1922) and the famous composer of Nkosi Sikelel’iAfrika, Enoch Sontonga (1873-1905). Although these composers’ music was based mainly on missionary hymnody, it contained elements of their peoples’ folk music. Inspired by the few opportunities available to them until recent times, these have nonetheless attempted to establish some choral tradition and, in doing so, to incorporate African musical elements into their works. Bokwe’s Vuka, Vuka Debora (1875) was based on European four-part harmony but with music influenced by indigenous Zulu singing styles and including such identifiably African characteristics as language derived pitch-glides and call-and-response textures (Parker, 2000: 8). Stephen Maimela Dzivhani, Venda’s first qualified teacher (Nemukovhani, 1977: 3) and the first choral music composer (Huskisson, 1969: 35) was only born in 1888.

Except for Dzivhani, Nephawe, and Sumbana, most of the notable Venda composers received their secondary and teacher training education at Vendaland Training Institute. Established in 1939 at Tshakhuma by the Berlin Missionary Society (Kirkaldy, 2000: 3), this institution remained the only post-primary institution (catering for both secondary and primary teacher education) until a proper secondary school, Mphaphuli Secondary School, was started in 1951.
(Ralushai 2004, Discussion). Undoubtedly, the composers under discussion were profoundly influenced by the musical activities of the missionary schools they attended, particularly Vendaland Training Institute, an establishment of the Berlin Missionary Society.

For many decades, Venda choral music has been based mainly on the Western-style hymnody characteristic of church music, particularly that of the Lutheran Church. This can be attributed to the fact that the churches and their mission stations were the sole custodians of education in Venda during the time. Most of the composers under scrutiny were brought up under the influence of the Lutheran Church, as explained earlier, whilst in pursuit of their educational and musical careers. It is likely that the musical knowledge of the missionary personnel that were in charge of music at churches and schools at the time was minimal. In particular, they were ‘deaf to the subtleties of Venda traditional music’ (Blacking, 1964: 50). Unfortunately, ignorant Vhavenda regarded them as experts, and whatever the missionaries introduced was accepted unquestionably as correct and regarded as the best. Because these European missionaries were the sole custodians of music education at the time, and their Venda music students became teachers, carrying on their masters’ work, a choral tradition was created and established amongst ‘educated’ Vhavenda that can only be described as unfortunate. It laid the foundations for inappropriate setting of Venda words to European melodies, which inevitably resulted in the evident conflict between speech patterns and melodies in most Venda choral music compositions, and tended to stifle any references to traditional Venda music.

Choral music in Venda at the time was strongly related to identities of class. Choral music composers of the time developed some personal identities. Participation in a choir was a means for a Christianized black person to affirm his or her identity as a member of an educated class with standards that were superior to those they considered as ‘pagan’ or ‘unschooled’ (Mngoma, 1980:14). A distorted sense of identity was consciously instilled into the so-called mission-trained musicians. They were trained composers. Choral music was the supreme
manifestation of their improvement and progress – ‘an assurance of civilized advancement’ (Parker, 2000: 8). The attitudes that were developing brought about a new meaning about choral music for its exponents and the audience. Whilst it was encouraging creative fulfilment, it was fermenting class divisions.

In the then Venda homeland during 1863 to about 1969, the church as the main institution denigrated indigenous Venda music as ‘pagan’ and ‘anti-Christian’. There was generally a negative attitude among indigenous South African intellectuals towards indigenous art, and the indigenous music of indigenous Vhavenda was not considered to merit serious scientific study (Kirkaldy, 2000: 3).

It is not surprising, therefore, that the compositions coming from the pens of those ‘brained-washed’ educated composers, as Khabi Mngoma calls them (Mngoma 1980, 14), showed lack of identifiable indigenous Venda characteristics. Their music was dominated by Western values, albeit with Venda texts. Already during the 1960s John Blacking had noted that most of those ‘European-derived’ Venda choral compositions lacked the incredible musical artistry displayed in traditional Venda rhythmic, melodic and harmonic patterns. Whereas they acquired this rare craftsmanship as part of their cultural heritage with ease, these ‘educated’ Venda musicians unfortunately began to regard their music as inferior and even ‘monotonous’ (Blacking, 1964: 53). Blacking laments this sad situation and attributes it to either lack of musical sensitivity or a tendency to identify European music with prestige and power (Blacking, 1964: 53).

\textsuperscript{18}Music patronage was mainly under the Christian churches during this period. Missionary influence started in Venda with the Dutch Reformed Church from 1863. The Berlin Lutheran Missionary Society followed and established mission stations around Venda such as Beuster (later called Maungani) in 1872, Tshakhuma in 1874 and Georgenholtz (Ha Luvhimbi) in 1877 (Kirkaldy, 2000:3-4). The third group was the Swiss missionaries in 1875, followed by the Presbyterian Church in 1902, then the Seventh Day Adventists in 1918. By 1940, most notable missionaries were almost well established in Venda.
Also noteworthy is that whilst these composers chose themes that related directly to their culture, social settings, legend and general communal life, most of the music they composed to these themes was devoid of typical Venda rhythmic and melodic features.

7.2. African Nationalism in Twentieth Century Choral Music

This process of the assimilation of South African indigenous people into the dominant European culture continued well into the 1950s. Not until the realization had dawned upon them that this assimilation process had made them to belong to neither African nor Western culture could the process of re-thinking their identity begin (Mngoma, 1988: 60). This was encouraged by the upsurge of nationalism among indigenous South African people, especially from 1950 onwards, reinforced by the political philosophy of Black Consciousness of the 1970s, which led to a growing awareness of their African roots set in among indigenous South African people (1988: 60). This emergent ideology around the concept of ‘African-ness’ resulted in the political and social recognition of positive values, by people, of being African, and this had tremendous implications for the people’s social and political identity through music. A conscious effort was started among those who wrote music to include features in their music that were identifiably African (1988: 61). Some of the choral compositions that contributed to the African identity of indigenous South Africans during apartheid\(^\text{19}\), with their subtle messages in the texts, were: Lomhlaba (This World) by Alfred Assegai Kumalo, and Vukani Mawethu (Wake up, My People) by Hamilton John Mathoza Masiza. Derrick Nephawe was recognised as the only one who tried a hand at the compositional style of incorporating what Beverly Parker calls ‘hidden transcripts’ (2000: 12).

\(^{19}\)Apartheid (from “apart”) refers to the concept that was developed around 1923 in South African political history. It has to do with racial segregation or discrimination on the basis of colour. It became government policy of the South African National Party which was in power from 1948 to 1994, which was aimed at curbing the influx of Black people in the cities.
Nephawe used the political connotations of the text *Milamboni ya Babiloni* (By the Rivers of Babylon) to describe his own political oppression and that of the Vhavenda under apartheid, including the period of Venda’s pseudo-independence.\(^\text{20}\)

By the beginning of the twentieth century, African rhythmic structures had begun to feature in indigenous South African choral compositions. A process of identity formation began among indigenous South Africans and composers were increasingly looking for ways to find their own style. The first half of the twentieth century was, therefore, a process of emancipation for African choral music, and this made itself shown in the prominent utilisation of indigenous African rhythmic structures.

By 1930, Zulu, Sotho and Tsonga choral repertoire was already firmly established in the history of indigenous South African choral music. Prolific composers such as Alfred Assegaai Kumalo (1879-1966), Benjamin Tyamzashe (1890-1978), Joshua Pulumo Mohapeloa (1908-1981) and Tholakele Reuben Caluza (1895-1969) were already household names, and most of their compositions were featuring prominently amongst the annual prescriptions for the various South African Black choral eisteddfodau.\(^\text{21}\) They were shortly followed by another group of equally (if not more) prominent composers such as Michael Moerane (1904–1980), Joe SP Motuba (1920-1982), and Benjamin “Big Ben” Myataza (1912-1986). These composers’ choral compositions manifested typical indigenous African rhythmic structures.

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\(^\text{20}\) Pseudo-independence is artificial. It is a mockery. The Venda homeland was declared an ‘independent state’ by the South African Government in 1979. Pseudo-independence because it was recognised by the South African government only and not the international world.

\(^\text{21}\) It was largely through initiatives by teacher organisations such as the Transvaal United African Teachers’ Association (TUATA), Natal African Teachers’ Union (NATU), Cape African Teachers’ Union (CATU), Orange Free State African Teachers’ Association (OFSATA), Peninsula African Teachers’ Association (PENATA) in the 1960s to organize and run choral festivals and competitions, which culminated in the national choral such as African Teachers’ Association of South Africa (ATASA), and the FORD CHOIRS CONTEST (now called The National Choir Festival). By 1980, South African indigenous choral music was well established everywhere except in the then Venda homeland of the then Northern Transvaal.
By the second half of the twentieth century, indigenous South African choral music compositions were beginning to manifest distinct African melodic features, such as *U ea Kae?* (Where are you going?) by Joshua Pulumo Mohapeloa, *Umaconsana* by Reuben Tholakele Caluza and *Uponi* and *Ingoma phezu kodonga lomlambo* by Benjamin “Big Ben” Myataza. *U ea kae?* is in cyclic form and has typical Sotho melodies and rhythms, using the traditional African call-and-response technique, whilst with *Umaconsana*, Caluza explores and exploits the sonorities of male against female singers. The alternation of these two groupings gives the work an antiphonal character similar to the antiphony found in African folk songs. Myataza’s many still popular works such as *Uponi* and *Ingoma phezu kodonga lomlambo* are “highly polished choral adaptations of traditional Xhosa songs” (Huskisson, 1996: 285), albeit with some Western harmonic elements (Mugovhani, 1988: 12). This started to redefine indigenous South African choral music composers’ new identity (Detterbeck, 2003: 324). It is significant, though, to emphasize that these composers never gave up Western elements completely, but rather subconsciously embarked on some negotiation process to marry the two, a process, as mentioned earlier, which had already begun during the nineteenth century with, for example, Bokwe’s *Vuka, Vuka Debora* and *Ntsikana*. Our choral music composers’ compositions have retained the harmonic and melodic structures that are still largely western. The above mentioned compositions, and many others, were extremely popular with independent choral institutions such as the Transvaal United African Teachers’ Association (TUATA), Natal African Teachers’ Union (NATU), Cape African Teachers’ Union (CATU), Orange Free State African Teachers’ Association (OFSATA), and Peninsula African Teachers’ Association (PENATA), as well as those linked to religious institutions through church choir competitions and festivals such as the Evangelical Lutheran Church South African Music Organisation (ELCSAMO). Both the subtle messages of the texts, termed “hidden transcripts” by Parker (Parker, 2000: 12), and the music of these composers and the others that came later, still appeal to the masses. One apt example of a ‘hidden transcript’ is found in *Mangificwa ukufa* (When death catches up with me) by Mzilikazi James.
Khumalo (b.1932), composed in 1960. One of the passages in the text of the compositions reads as follows:

_Akukho mlungu, akukho pasi_ (there is no discrimination, no pass),

_Kulele izinkulungwane zakithi_ (multitudes of our people lay restfully).

_Ziyagiya ziqethuke, ziyagiya zonke_ (Everybody dancing and rejoicing).

It was only by then that the foundations for Venda choral music were beginning to be laid by the only recognizable Venda composer then, Stephen Maimela Dzivhani (b.1888). Dzivhani contributed immensely towards the production of the hymnbook titled _Difela tsa Kereke_ for the Lutheran Church (first published in 1960), which contained hymns written in Tshivenda. Dzivhani also helped Dr PE Schwellnuss to write _Nyimbo dza Vhatendi_ – a Lutheran Church hymn book in Tshivenda (first published in 1967). Dr PE Schwellnuss was also responsible for translating the Bible into Tshivenda and Sepedi. Nyimbo dza Vhatendi contains 236 hymns, six of which are Dzivhani’s contribution, and these are: Hymn number 63: _Vhonani ha ndi muthu-de_, Hymn number 156: _Khotsi anga mune wanga_, Hymn number 180: _Vuwa! Muya wanga_, Hymn number 233: _Ane a kunda_, Hymn number 216: _Ndo khathutshelwa nga Murena_ and Hymn number K16: _Mafhungo a ndifhelaho_. Dzivhani not only composed hymns, but also greatly contributed to Venda choral repertoire with some eclectic choral songs in both religious and secular vein, and these include:_Ngomalungundu, Murena Mudzimu shudufhadza Afrika, Lufuno a lu fheli, Mishumo ndi vhutshilo, Takalani Murenani misi yothe, Lentsu ke le monate, Thabelo ya Dzata_, and others.

Whilst Dzivhani was thus just beginning to do for Vhavenda what Bokwe had done for amaXhosa Christians in the 1880s with Amaculo ase Lovedale, the former’s contemporaries such as Mohapeloa, Moerane, Motuba, Myataza and Assegaaai Kumalo had long embarked on experimenting further with employing African elements in their music. They used folk songs to produce choral works with antiphonal textures. Their melodies and rhythms were greatly influenced by the texts of their respective languages. The themes they chose pertain to legend, nature, history, social skits, and communal life: themes akin to those found in folk
music. Most of their compositions combined two idioms (traditional African and Western), and this unique combination produced music that became very popular in South Africa (Huskisson, 1994: 37). Until quite recently, Venda composers could claim there has been a monopoly on choral music affecting their reception, with Xhosa, Zulu and Sotho choral music repertoire dominating national choral competitions, festivals, and media coverage. This is why Nephawe’s Milamboni ya Babiloni remained unknown to the choral fraternity at large for a long time.

7.3. Venda Choral Tradition: Struggle for Identity and Recognition

A number of Venda composers who came after Dzivhani wrote on a variety of subjects. Whilst some were prompted to write their compositions to reveal the beauty of their country and the traits of their own ethnic group, others composed compositions based on Venda legend. Some derived their inspiration from events and everyday happenings, and a few produce action-type compositions akin to the popular traditional singing and dancing prevalent amongst most African choirs presently. Composers of this period include Wilfred Mathagu (b. 1922), Ephraim Nndwammbi Nephawe (1922–1994), Tshinyadzo Julius Lidovho (b. 1923) and Luvhengo Joseph Rambau (b. 1938). Much as I have tried to locate these composers’ music, with the help of retired Venda music inspector AD Mulaudzi, and other choral music veterans, the task turned out to be futile. Lidovho and Rambau are still alive, but both, for various reasons including the general apathy towards Venda choral music by the South African choral music fraternity, have lost their compositions. These composers used to perform their pieces with their school choirs (they were all school teachers and choir conductors in the schools where they were employed). This is the main reason why they are known as composers around the former Venda homeland. Perhaps some of Lidovho’s pieces could be reconstructed with the help of the South African Broadcasting Corporation (SABC), which recorded a number of his compositions (Lidovho, 2001: Author’s Interview);. Unless someone can try to
remember the music and reconstruct the pieces by singing them, the compositions of Mathagu, Ephraim Nephawe and Rambau’s will prove very difficult to trace for documentation. Between them, these Venda composers have produced about 60 choral compositions. According to records from TUATA (Transvaal United African Teachers Association)\(^{22}\) the only association that used to prescribe choral compositions for competitions for indigenous South African people of the then Transvaal at the time, only Wilfred Mathagu’s Tshiwandalani was once prescribed (in 1965), conveniently so because it was for young Venda children only. For the youth section of the TUATA competitions, each language group could prescribe a composition of its own choice, and obviously, each language group would choose a composition of its own language. It was therefore due to such rare privileges that Venda compositions were prescribed.

The other composer who tried a hand at composing for the youth was Khorommbi Joseph Nonge. His first composition, *Mitshelo* (fruits), was completed in 1965 whilst he was teaching at Mabila Primary School at Dzimauli as principal. Due to its appealing theme, it became very popular with Venda schoolchildren and was also prescribed for the youth section of the TUATA competitions once. Nonge also composed a two-part piece called *Tsimbi ya Tshikolo* (The School Bell), with the top line for his small girls and the bottom for the small boys.

\(^{22}\) It is not a formal document of records per se, but the author is privy to the entire repertoire of the organisation (TUATA)
Nonge decided to contribute specifically with three-part choral works that he had noticed were lacking in the Venda choral repertoire. According to him, there was a time when the TUATA Choral Music Committee used to merely take a four-part piece, and just eliminate one of the parts (usually the bass), and thereafter prescribe the piece for young children’s sections such as the Intermediate or Infant Sections. “For obvious reasons, the composition did not sound as originally conceived, for the original bass part would be missing” (Nonge, 2005: Interview). Mitshelo, Matodzi and Tsimbi ya Tshikolo were intended for small children specifically. Save for Mathagu and Nonge, the rest of the composers did not attempt to compose choral music for the youth, and, unfortunately, their music was belonged to the well-guarded turf then (the most prestigious senior sections). The TUATA Choral Music Committee had no Venda-speaking representative for years since its inception in the 1960s.

The period 1960-80 was dominated by a new generation of composers and arrangers of folk songs that came from Vendaland Training Institute. These were Joseph Khorommbi Nonge (b.1939) and Michael Ndanduleni Nemukovhani (b.1942). Only Derrick Nephawe (b.1930) had trained at Botshabelo. These composers, together with Lidovho of the previous generation, are still alive. It was interesting to note that they have all stopped composing. In the interviews that I had with most of them (Lidovho, Nephawe, and Nonge), the issue of the marginalization of their language again came up strongly as a matter of concern. Nephawe and Nonge in particular are very vociferous about this. “There is just no motivation in composing for a vacuum” (Nephawe and Nonge, Interview: 2001).

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23 Choral organizations such as TUATA were popular for organising choir competitions for schools in the then Transvaal Province. These competitions were divided into the following categories: Infant Section (for Primary School beginners) Intermediate Section (for the Junior Primary Section: children from Sub-Standard B to Standard 2) Senior Primary Section (for the Senior Primary Section: pupils from Standard 3 to Standard 6) Junior Secondary Section (for the Junior Secondary Section: pupils in Form 1 to Form 3 at Secondary School level) Senior Secondary Section (for the Senior Secondary Section: pupils in Form 3 to Form 5. There were Open Sections too for Boys only and Girls only in both the Primary and Secondary levels.
By 1980, South African indigenous choral music was well established everywhere except in the then Vendaland homeland. Except for ELCSAMO (Evangelical Lutheran Church of SA Music Organization), which has prescribed some of Nephawe’s compositions, Venda choral works have quite seldom been considered for annual prescriptions. Today there are even more stimulating opportunities and incentives offered by sponsoring companies such as Caltex, Old Mutual, Telkom and Metropolitan Life, but they have served no purpose for Venda choral musicians. Only TUATA prescribed Nephawe’s *Zwo Ndina* for Primary schools in 1976, *Tshiendedzi tsha Apollo* in 1980 for Junior Secondary School choirs and *Ndī ya ha Khotsi anga* in 1988 for Senior Primary Schools.

Compared to choral music using texts in the other indigenous South African languages, Venda choral music is rarely performed and hardly ever prescribed for choral competitions and festivals in South Africa. This is common knowledge within the choral music fraternity of composers, conductors, choristers, adjudicators and other choral music enthusiasts. As stated earlier, already between 1960 and 1980 there were choral music institutions that ran competitions and festivals. Except for the few compositions mentioned above which were used in some competitions, it was only for the first time in 2003\(^{24}\) that Derrick Nephawe’s *Hosana Murendeni* and *Tshidimela tsha Musina* were prescribed in one of the most prestigious choral festivals in South Africa, the Telkom/ Old Mutual National Choir Festival (formerly known as Ford Choirs in Contest and founded in 1978 by Khabi Mngoma).

\(^{24}\) It was not until then that Venda compositions were considered. This was only after the author, a Venda-speaking person, was appointed in the organisation (The Old Mutual/Telkom National Choir Festival) as an adjudicator and subsequently a member of the Music Selection Panel in 1999.
During the interviews that I conducted about the apparent general apathy towards the Venda choral music repertoire with choral music enthusiasts (conductors, composers, choristers, and some audience members around Venda), a number of interesting views were aired. Some of the veteran choirmasters that I interviewed had interesting views about the low profile of Venda choral music. One is that most of the pieces composed before Nephawe’s were ‘not appealing’ (Mulaudzi 2001, Author’s Interview). Adalbert Mulaudzi (retired choirmaster and former Venda music inspector), Stephen Dzumba (retired choirmaster, former high school principal and inspector of schools), and Derrick Nephawe (the composer), all attest to that. They tried most of the compositions and found that there was always something amiss in almost all of them (Mulaudzi AD, Dzumba SS and Nephawe DV, December: 2001: Interviews and Discussions); either rhythmically or in the choice of pitches for the speech-tone patterns of the texts. They found that the music far less worthwhile than the music they had grown up hearing. ‘It was not easy to own the music and perform it to one’s satisfaction as a Venda composition’ (Mulaudzi AD, Dzumba SS and Nephawe DV, December: 2001, Interviews and Discussions). According to Adalbert Mulaudzi (the first and last Venda Music Inspector from 1979 during Venda pseudo-independence as a Republic), words, melodies and rhythms used in the compositions could not be reconciled as a unit in the ears of both performers and listeners. This view was corroborated by a statement made Mzilikazi Khumalo in 1998, when he claimed that the Venda choral music available was not identifiable with the music of other South African indigenous language groups: “no-one among you Venda people has so far attempted to compose a choral work that has some traditional Venda musical traits in the music” (1998: Author’s Interview).

25 Mzilikazi Khumalo did part of primary education in Venda when his father (Senior Major Khumalo) was an officer of the Salvation Army at Tshidimbini. Hence, he knows and understands Venda music. He also speaks Tshivenda well.
It could very well have been due to this attitude expressed by people such as Khumalo, as well as Adalbert Mulaudzi's opinion about the Venda choral music available then, that when the latter was requested to coordinate the prescriptions of choral pieces for official Venda homeland government ceremonies (from 1979 during Venda pseudo-independence as a Republic), he requested Shalati Joseph Khosa (a Tsonga–speaking composer) to set music to Venda texts that he provide. This may be the reason these compositions were under-publicized, and unknown to the choral music lovers in South African. It could very well, therefore, be that Venda choral repertoire was not only under-prescribed because of the alleged difficulty of the language, but also because of the alleged lack of rhythmic and melodic appeal to those mission-educated choral music lovers like Adalbert Mulaudzi (and possibly some of his friends, contemporaries and advisers) whose taste was the sole determinant of what was good and what was not. Mzilikazi Khumalo also felt that the music did not fit in with the social and political ideology that was developing and was being promoted among indigenous South Africans at the time. Little did he know that by the time of his statement (1998) a Venda composer like Sumbana was already admirably advancing that ideology with vigour.

On the other hand, other people of other language groups, besides Khumalo, that I interviewed on this issue of the low profile of Venda choral music attribute this to the uniqueness, incomprehensibility and ‘difficulty’ of a language, and that it would therefore be difficult for amaXhosa, amaZulu and Sotho language groups to interpret in a performance. It is quite contentious to confidently talk of the uniqueness, incomprehensibility and ‘difficulty’ of a language when actually there are words in the other South African languages that are similar or are very close to Tshivenda either in pronunciation or in some syllables.

Adalbert Mulaudzi, Lutheran Mission mission-educated (Tshakhuma in Venda) was a music inspector in the then Venda homeland. One of his main duties was the selection of choral repertoire for any government-sanctioned function or occasion. It was he (and possibly some of his friends, contemporaries and advisers) whose taste was the sole determinant of what was good and what was not.
Granted that Vhavenda are a distinctive language group that speaks a language that may not be entirely mutually communicative with some of the African languages in South Africa, they nonetheless do share “some common linguistic features” with these other language groups (Poulos, 1990: 2). It is, therefore, very common to find words that are similar in form amongst Tshivenda and the other African languages of South African, as demonstrated by the examples in the earlier section on Tshivenda as a language. An attempt should, however, be made to demystify this uniqueness, incomprehensibility and ‘difficulty’ of the language. The sooner this negative ethnic construct²⁷ is eradicated from the minds of South Africans the better. The exposure and promotion of a vast wealth of Venda choral music, which may eternally not be realized unless there is a serious mindset shift or change of attitude, is long overdue. Music in South Africa is as diverse as its people. Amongst indigenous South African language groups there are about nine streams from which “there abound elements with which we could build a national South African choral musical style or tradition” (Montjane, 1996: 69).

Whilst composers such as Nemakhavhani, Nonge, and Nephawe experimented with call-and-response, antiphony, and repetitions of short melodic phrases, these elements still fell short of evoking Venda music, particularly in their melodies, rhythms, harmony and structural arrangements.

²⁷This negative ethnic construct has been in existence for as early as I can recall in all my born days. I spent part of my youth attending a Venda-medium school in Soweto, Johannesburg. Venda-speaking people were called all sorts of derogatory names by other African language groups. We were looked down upon as people not deserving of equal recognition with Xhosa, Zulu, Sotho or Tswana people. Tsonga, to some extent, were better treated. It was, unfortunately, the case even in choral music organisations. A choral composition with a Venda text was viewed with scant respect. Hence, until quite recently, Venda composers could claim that there has been a monopoly on choral music affecting their reception, with Xhosa, Zulu Tsonga and Sotho choral music repertoire dominating national choral competitions, festivals, and media coverage.
Granted that one may not be expecting these composers to have borrowed already existing traditional Venda melodies, harmonies and so on in their entirety, their own (original) compositions would be more appealing to the listeners, especially those who know traditional Venda music, as it is the trend lately with the choral music audience in South Africa\(^{28}\). Still, the general feeling had been, albeit not common knowledge, that Venda music, unlike Zulu, Xhosa and Sotho compositions, lacked identity. They did not conform to the dominant ideologies of the time: “Black Consciousness”, “Nationalism”, “African-ness”, and identifiable Venda traditional musical traits. The marginalization and the resultant general low standard of national recognition of Venda choral music brought about a negative sense of self-worth on the part of Venda composers. This is perhaps one of the reasons why a lot of Venda choral music has not survived. Of the only four Venda choral compositions that have thus far been prescribed for the now most prestigious Telkom/National National Choir Festival (since it was founded in 1978 as Ford Choirs in contest); *Hosana Murendeni* and *Tshidimela tsha Musina* by Derrick Nephawe in 2003, *Li do vhuya la mulovha* by Fhatuwani Sumbana and *Malo! Zwo Tshinyala* by Ndzwamato Mugovhani in 2006, only the latter were very well-received, ostensibly so because they contained in them typical Venda dance rhythmic features such as malende and tshikona (see Glossary).

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\(^{28}\)Since the 1970s, choral music composers, adjudicators, choristers and conductors at choir festivals and other competitions in the country have typically grouped choral compositions by South African composers into categories: those that have absorbed or utilised indigenous African elements and those that are entirely influenced by western traditions. It is the trend lately with the choral music audience and the music selectors in South Africa to choose the former category over the latter.
7.4. The New Sense of Identity

The years 1979 to 1989 are remembered by all Venda choral composers as an era of improvement, when the then Venda Government embarked on the vigorous promotion of Venda arts and culture. With the backing of the Venda government’s Department of Education, Arts and Culture, annual competitions for school choirs began. Venda compositions were prescribed for these competitions, and these therefore encouraged young musicians such as Ramabannda (b.1950) and Sumbana (b.1960) to try their hand at composition, as well as spurring on older composers such as Nephawe and Nonge. At last there was a platform, even if it was promoted under the apartheid regime’s ‘own affairs’ ideology. Moreover, during this ‘Independent Venda Republic’ period, composing in choral music was one of the vehicles for personal social mobility. A ‘good’ composer or ‘good’ choir conductor at the time, unless there were reservations about the incumbent (either due to suspicious political affiliations, unprofessional conduct or any other reason best known by the government of the time), was guaranteed some social and economic advancement either in terms of promotion or salary increment. Even once-off composers (such as AK Mulangaphuma) emerged at the time and tried a hand at this incentifying occupation. Particular emphasis was put at the relevance of the themes, for example AK Mulangaphuma’s *Dzata Liswa Venda*29 (The new Dzata in Vendaland), which was performed during Venda Independent celebrations.

29 The theme of the composition *Dzata Liswa Venda* (The new Dzata in Vendaland) is; we have found our long-lost capital for our people. Vhavenad were once under the leadership of Thohoyandou as their king. King Thohoyandou established a big empire by managing to subjugate other tribes and eventually established an empire-like structure, called Venda, which reportedly covered the entire area between Limpopo and Lumbelule (Olfants) Rivers (Nemudzivhadi, 1978:2). King Thohoyandou established his capital and named it “Dzata”, “named after his people’s original capital in central Africa” (Jordaan SP and Jordaan A, 19876: 9). Between the years 1979 to 1989, the South African Apartheid Government established a Venda Republic with pseudo-independence under ‘President’ Ramaano Patrick Mphephu (a descendant of King Thohoyandou). The capital of the ‘Republic’ of Venda was named Thohoyandou. The composition by Mulangaphuma is in celebration of the establishment of the new capital, Thohoyandou, which he likens to the legendary “Dzata” capital. The composition was sung by choirs during one of several ‘Independent Venda Republic’ celebration periods (1979 to 1989).
Nephawe, together with Ramabannda and Sumbana are still active, and hence a choral tradition for Vhavenda has been established, with themes relevant to Venda culture. Songs that reflect this are *Muvenda* (A Venda Person) and *Matodzi* (Matodzi) by Nonge, *Tanganedzani Vhaeni* (Welcome the Visitors) by Nephawe, *Venda Song* (Venda Song) by Nemakhavhani, and folksong arrangements by Nemukovhani. This is a tremendous contribution towards collection, documentation, preservation and promotion of Venda folk songs. Besides the financial rewards that came with these endeavours from the then Venda homeland government, this process also generated a sense of collective identity amongst Vhavenda composers, and the initial sense of inferiority to composers in other areas of the country was largely dispelled.

Another laudable initiative that contributed towards the establishment of a Venda choral tradition was the Radio Thohoyandou Metropolitan Life Choral Festival. This rapidly became a popular choral extravaganza, beginning 1991 and ending in 1997 due to the regrettable closure of the so-called ‘Banana Republic’ radio station. It had nevertheless helped Vhavenda as a language group to realize that it was possible not only to establish but also disseminate their own choral identity. New themes emerged in song texts, relevant to the radio’s influence, such as Ramabannda’s *Iwe Musidzana* (Dear Girl) and *Mvula ya Midalo* (Rainfloods). However the Festivals have now resumed under the auspices of SABC Phalaphala FM radio station, with financial support from Kanana Bread.

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30 In his quest to help document and preserve some of Vhavenda cultural heritage, Nemukovhani has written a book titled *Tsingandedede*, a collection of 40 Venda folk songs. It covers a wide range of Venda children’s songs. The name itself, Tsingandedede, is one of the most well-known and popular indigenous Venda folk songs for children. Nemukovhani has so far written only this, a worthy collection in music. Tsingandedede is a folksong that is traditionally sung by Venda children linking hands and dancing in a circle. According to Nemukovhani, it carries two themes. The first one is about the children helping their grandmother who, due to old age and cramps, has resorted to sending the children in such errands as fetching water, collecting firewood and searching for muroho (vegetables) in the veld. The children show delight in singing the folksong as they go about their different delegated chores. The second theme stresses the need for unity as the children encourage each other to hold each other steadfastly so as not to break the circle (Nemukovhani, 1977:3 and 4).
Nonge and Ramabannda contend that Fhatuwani Sumbana has managed, largely, to establish some identity for Venda choral repertory through his latest compositions (2001: Author’s Interview), particularly *Vhudzulapo Afrika Tshipembe* and *Li do vhuya la mulovha*, where he has successfully infused some traditional Venda musical elements, particularly through his melodies, rhythms and the general structures of the two compositions.

### 7.5. Venda Choral Music in Post 1994, and Strife towards National Identity

It is indisputable that the music of the Venda choral music composers is inextricably linked to the environments under which they were born and bred; homes in the rural Venda cultural setting, then at mission schools, thereafter under the South African Government, and thereafter under the apartheid-conceived ‘Republic of Venda’, and now in the post-apartheid era. From Dzivhani to Sumbana, Venda choral music, like any other South African eclectic composition, has experienced ‘shifting identities’; the old tradition or process of assimilation into and imitation of the dominant European culture and now the new tradition of redefining its identity by having features that are identifiably traditional Venda.

Coupled with the limitations in terms of their ability to represent what was exactly on their minds due to lack of adequate music notational knowledge, the composers also found the tonic sol-fa notational system limiting in terms of trying to represent some of the subtle nuances prevalent in the texts of the themes that they had selected. One of the composers, Joseph Nonge, made a very noteworthy remark in this regard. According to him, most young Venda musicians had grown up in a traditional rural environment, playing traditional Venda instruments and singing and dancing traditional music. Later at schools and teacher-training institutions, they were subjected to the Western choral music idiom, using tonic sol-fa. Thereafter, when they wanted to compose they found
themselves in the dualistic confusion of trying to write what they actually felt rhythmically in Tshivenda and how they thought it should be represented in tonic sol-fa notation. According to Mulaudzi, what most of the earlier composers would sing was in most instances not what was represented on their compositions (Mulaudzi, 2001: Interview). Nonge and Ramabannda expressed their regret at being incapable of contributing to the growth and promotion of Venda music through this genre; due to lack of compositional acumen and the limiting effect of the only notational system they knew (tonic sol-fa). One would have expected Ramabannda to come up with some very interesting musical elements that he grew up listening to from his grandmother’s malombo music. Instead, his compositions illustrate the confusion that resulted from the influence of the traditional music that he learnt from home and the tonic sol-fa he learnt at school. He did not manage to properly translate the knowledge that he had grown up with (the malombo music) into his compositions partly due to the limitations imposed by the tonic sol-fa notational system.

This academic treatise is not advocating the establishment of a nationalistic (South African) or perhaps Afrocentric view of choral music to the exclusion or in isolation of global trends. Already there are composers in other countries such as those in Eastern Europe that have successfully experimented with this compositional style. Incidentally, it was through his studies of the music of Leos Janaček and Antonin Dvořák (Czech composers) and Bela Bartók (Hungary) that Diliza, Mzilikazi Khumalo’s son, impressed upon his father the need for adopting some nationalistic tendencies in his compositions. Janacek has been credited with formulating a theory of speech-melody, based on the natural rhythms and the rise and fall of the Czech language, and integrating folksong firmly into his music (Sadie, 1988: 371). Dvorak’s works also display the influences of Czech music, particularly his Slavonic Dances, which are based on the rhythms of actual Czech folk dances and Slavonic folk melodies (Bennett, 1983: 29-30). Most of the tunes and rhythms of his compositions carry a strong flavour of the peasant folk tunes of Hungary, Romania and Bulgaria (Griffiths 1978, 59-62). Diliza contended that his father’s compositions would make more sense to his
own people if he could infuse some rhythms and melodies that are reminiscent of traditional Zulu music in them. This marked the turning point in Mzilikazi Khumalo's compositional career. In almost all the compositions he wrote thereafter, there was a section in the work that was unmistakably in traditional Zulu style. Sumbana did likewise with the two Venda choral compositions already discussed. From these seeds, a strong movement towards more indigenous folk-based compositions may be possible. It is up to the new generation, and those that will follow, to pursue this trend even further and, perhaps eventually produce new genres and forms of South African indigenous choral music.
CHAPTER EIGHT

Epilogue

It is interesting to note that the texts of the selected compositions reveal a number of themes that the composers chose to write about, namely, compositions about Venda culture, arrangements on indigenous Venda folk songs, compositions of religious intent, compositions with educational messages, compositions of social commentary, and compositions of protest. It should be noted though, that the categorisation of these themes is not absolute as some compositions transcend the given categorisation and may well fit into more than one category.

8.1. Critical Findings and Interpretations

Whilst the chronological exploration of Venda choralism from Dzivhani to Sumbana reveals some considerable evolution from the missionary-instituted hymnal style of the 19th century to the development of choral music in the African (Venda) idiom, a number of notable critical findings need to be highlighted.

It is fair to assume that one of the objectives of the composers under scrutiny was to create their music with the objective of contributing to the development and growth of Venda choral music, and thereby making a tangible contribution to the growth and development of the national South African choral music repertory. Unfortunately, they find the tonic sol-fa national system the only one they are conversant with, an impediment to their aspirations. Tonic sol-fa notation consists of mere strings of letters that do not communicate directly any idea about the form or shape of the musical line. For example, it gives no graphic idea of the
shape of a melodic line. Our composers are, therefore, unable to notate what they want to depict because they cannot find a system that can represent their music exactly as they conceptualized. What appears in their compositions on paper does not, in most cases, reveal their original intentions precisely. While this is to some extent also true of standard staff notation, tonic sol-fa is even more limiting. Tonic sol-fa notation frequently impedes the representation of complex rhythmic contexts, structures and nuances prevalent in the text. It was partly due to this limiting effect that the composers under consideration have not always been able to represent some of the rhythmic conceptions they intended to convey. As Nonge and Ramabannda intimated, it frustrated them at times. Contemporary composers are experiencing this frustration too. Better notational systems have yet to be introduced. Presently, composers are not able to aptly represent their musical ideas on paper due to the limitations of the two systems in use for notation. It is therefore incumbent upon music academics to research and devise new ways to fill this serious void. It is long overdue. It will definitely be a major breakthrough in South Africa choral music compositional education and development.

Only three composers; Sumbana, and to a lesser extent, Nemakhavhani and Nonge have demonstrated an attempt to follow the actual speech rhythms of their texts. The rhythms of their music were evidently influenced by the Venda speech rhythms. Hence, there are many different interesting rhythmic patterns in their compositions. In addition, the influence of speech tone in their melodies is evident in some of these composers’ pieces. There is, therefore, a recognizable attempt by these composers to consider the semantic significance of Tshivenda language text in their compositions. The other composers such as Nephawe and Ramabannda, at times, sacrificed the speech tone patterns and speech rhythms of their texts entirely for musical considerations. One composer that commendably stood out, as one of those who really made an attempt on this aspect, is Sumbana, with his two compositions *Vhudzulapo Afrika Tshipembe* and *Li do vhuya la mulovha*. Undoubtedly, one of the elements that make these two compositions very interesting and typically African are the melodies, and the
way in which the composer has utilized them. Sumbana also showed with these compositions that it is possible to compose a Venda choral composition in a Venda idiom, using modal melodies.

Except for some passages in a few compositions, Venda choral music written so far has generally not been capable of evoking aspects of indigenous Venda traditional music. The majority of the selected compositions are devoid of any elements peculiar to indigenous Venda traditional music, such as call and response, antiphony, repetitions of phrases, circularity and some typical Venda rhythms and melodic patterns. Nonetheless, the conductors and choristers who have done some of the Venda choral repertoire, particularly those by Nephawe, Nonge and Sumbana such as Gidimani Matamela, Muvenda and Li do vhuya la mulovha, were able to recognize some structural similarities between indigenous Venda music and the compositions of the three composers. It was also quite interesting to observe that all the compositions under scrutiny employ major key tonality, with considerable limited range in the intervals of their melodies. It was not possible for these composers to realize and utilize their potential fully in their attempt to evoke traditional Venda music with their works. This can largely be attributed to the hymnal influence the composers acquired and adopted from the missionary education they received.

Compared to Nonge and Ramabannda, Dzivhani and Nephawe’s compositions display maturity in their mastery of the rudimentary Western compositional techniques. With Yehova ndi mulisa wanga, Nephawe goes even further to add a compositional device uncommon to all the others: modulation. If the significance of the relationship between the texts and the music were to be ignored and more attention be focused on the music only, Dzivhani and Nephawe’s compositions stand out as very musical, particularly their craftsmanship in chord progressions, the preparations and resolutions of cadences as well as the chromatic sonorities. The only blemish is that their melodies have, perhaps subconsciously, ignored the semantic significance of the essentially tonal Venda language. Their music, therefore, does not evoke traditional nuances familiar to Tshivenda music.
As already indicated it was possible for earlier South African indigenous choral music composers such as Mohapeloa, Caluza, Moerane, Myataza and Khumalo to establish some new choral tradition and, in so doing, incorporate African musical elements in their works. Sumbana is so far the only Muvenda composer who has tried to infuse some traditional Venda musical rhythms in two of his compositions. The present generation comprising Sumbana and a few other Nguni language composers like SBP Mnomiya, LMB Chonco, CT Ngqobe and Makhaya Mjana have demonstrated that it is possible to make indigenous South African choral music sound more African through melodies, rhythms, structural and textural arrangements.

Tshivenda is a tone language. The melodic inflections of Tshivenda words have semantic significance, and this has tremendous implications for any vocal composition. Unfortunately the majority of the selected Venda composers failed to take this into account. The majority of the compositions under scrutiny display not even the slightest attempt by composers towards that direction.

This situation is not unique to Venda choral music, as the reader of this study might be led to believe, but universally prevalent in indigenous South African choral music. One of the foremost respected protagonists or advocates of composing choral music in the ‘African idiom’, Mzilikazi Khumalo, bemoans the fact that indigenous South African choral music composers, himself included, lack the necessary skills and instruments to depict exactly what they hear and feel in their music because of lack of the technical acumen. He, like many others, feels that more skills development is urgently necessary to equip the upcoming and future generations to improve on this, and that the existing notational systems (tonic sol-fa and staff notation) need to be improved to able to accommodate the subtle nuances in some indigenous and traditional African music that have tremendous influence in their choral compositions. Since instrumental styles are the markers or repositories of indigenous classical standards, and they are not easily compromised – they are mostly grounded on consistent compositional theory, grammar and idioms over time- recourse has
also to be made to the study of these genres. This will also assist in developing the necessary notational skills that will improve on the existing ones.

IsiZulu has words that require some unique manner of saying or singing them. Khumalo in particular has always found it difficult to notate exactly what and how he wishes choristers or singers to sing his music in the correct isiZulu way. Only Zulu-speaking singers, and not even all of them, are able to effect and depict those subtle nuances in their singing, which presently cannot be aptly represented notationally due to the limiting notation systems known so far. It has always been very difficult for non-Zulu choirs to sing and interpret the melodies of Zulu compositions, particularly those of Khumalo and, of late, some of Mnomiya, as correctly as possible. Equally problematic would be the correct representation of some Venda words in notes (either staff or tonic sol-fa notations), if one were to try to follow the exact tonal inflections of some of the words that require a particular manner of down-gliding scooping when they are traditionally sung or said. In *Zwo Ndina* by Nephawe, for instance, the phrase “Ndo zwi pfa” is morphologically represented as “Ndo zwi pfa”. The word ‘zwi” requires a down-gliding scooping effect in pronunciation. In *Muvenda* by Nonge, the statement “Muvenda ndi Muvenda” requires some intense semantic considerations, for the two “Muvenda” words in the same sentence are not recited in the same way. In the second Muvenda, the syllable ve should bring out a down-gliding scooping effect and, therefore, it would require a particular style or system of notation to bring out its meaning correctly. Already there is a movement towards addressing or improving on these serious limitations by SAMRO Endowment’s Dual Notation Committee, Mzilikazi Khumalo is Chairperson of. This committee has introduced some innovations in an attempt to address the problem of notating some of the “grace notes” found in indigenous South African choral music especially that of the Nguni-speaking language groups such as Zulu, Xhosa, Swati and Ndebele.

Another observation that this research has made is that all the composers employ the 4/4 time signatures indiscriminately in all their compositions. That an entire choral repertory of a particular language group can be represented in one
metre is highly questionable, especially given the diversity found in the indigenous musical practices performed by the different Venda music ensembles mentioned earlier. The only reasonable explanation for this is the composers' self-confessed limitations in terms of how to represent the music they have in their minds correctly. All of them contend that they simply found themselves having adopted the tonic sol-fa system for no better reason than that they were familiar with it. It is not surprising, therefore, to discover that some rhythmic arrangements by Ramabannda in particular are problematic.

Another very important observation in the selected repertoire is the use of Italian (Western) expression marks in their repertoire. Had the selected composers not come across these musical concepts, most probably during their brief peripheral music education at the Botshabelo and Vendaland Training Institutes, which made them (like many other indigenous South African choral music composers) take Western concepts as prestigious and the only ones to be used, they would probably have come up with more appropriate directions using the language of the compositions, Tshivenda, which they obviously understand best. The manner in which they have used these concepts in their compositions generally also shows that our indigenous South African choral music composers often do not fully understand them.

Although some indigenous African music types change tempo (in order to incorporate the philosophical and therapeutical principle of mood form), it is unusual for an indigenous Venda song to vary in tempo, let alone metre. It is unusual for an African dance in a single musical performance to change tempo. Similarly, indigenous Venda songs are usually performed in one tempo and in one metre, albeit with different rhythmic patterns. The six selected Venda composers could afford to defy this traditional trend in their compositions, for they were not meant for traditional Venda dance performances but for the concert stage. Because the compositions under scrutiny are extended compositions they would, in any case, have been monotonous in one tempo and one metre. The
The Venda choral music repertoire under scrutiny is dominated by two textural elements: homophony and polyphony. Either of these two elements is used in alternation in one composition or only one of them is predominantly employed in another. Coupled with the prevalence of such traditional African musical traits as call-and-response and antiphony in these compositions, the music itself defies easy categorization, for both African and Western styles have been utilized. It would have been ideal for some of these composers to try their hand at composing according to the exciting hocket-technique used in Tshikona, one of the most popular song and dance practices unique amongst Vhavenda. Presently there is no single Venda choral composition from all available repertory including those that were not selected for research, which demonstrates this traditional music characteristic that is unique to Vhavenda.

A very large percentage of the compositions and arrangements by these mission-educated composers are in four-part writing. Most of these were not intended, perhaps unconsciously, for the youth. Only Matodzi by Nonge is in two-part writing. It was therefore only Nonge that composed choral works intended for small children and, as indicated, they are in two and three-part writing. Matodzi was composed specifically for primary school children in three-part writing.

It is amazing that the larger repertoire of Venda choral music, as is most of South African eclectic choral music, is dominated by four-part writing. Missionary hymnody, as opposed to unison singing, which is a typical characteristic of indigenous Venda singing style, dominates the compositions under scrutiny. This is another indication of outside influence (European culture) having exerted a formative influence on the shape and development of the nature and culture of the choral tradition.
Venda choral compositions have hardly ever been prescribed or sung. Some of the veteran choirmasters and music enthusiasts were not even aware that there was a Venda choral repertoire. What contributed to low profile of Venda compositions besides the general apathetical attitude from people of other languages, particularly those with powers to expose and promote choral music, was the attitude of the Venda choral musicians (particularly composers) themselves. As already stated, both the choirs around Venda and the composers themselves, except for some of the music by Nephawe and lately Sumbana, undermined Venda choral repertoire. Venda choral music was therefore hardly performed or very little, if at all.

Considering that tertiary education was only brought in as late as the 1930s in Venda, this could also have contributed, in one way or another, to the rather belated exposure of Venda choral repertoire. By then compositions by Assegaaai Kumalo, Tyamzashe, Mohapeloa, Caluza, and many others, were already popular and frequently performed in formally organised choral festivals and choir competitions throughout South Africa.

This research project, therefore, hopes to serve as a wake-up call to the upcoming and future generations of composers to consider embarking upon a vigorous campaign to promote this most appreciated choral tradition further. It is possible to bring indigenous South African choral music closer to the hearts and feelings of the people it is supposed to serve and entertain by making it sound African. This will open up an array of opportunities for aspiring choral music composers, instead of them adding up to the already-congested and muddled-up stack of compositions that belong to a legacy that was started many decades ago and has been found wanting.

Although the Venda choral music compositional style, like any other South African choral music compositional style, are still a combination of African elements with foreign musical influence (textures and harmonies still sound hymn-like), composers like Sumbana and, to some extent, Nemakhavhani and
Nonge, have managed to create a space within which others could assert their identity through melodies, rhythms and arrangement and performance styles.

There is already a growing strong body of composers whose quest for and movement towards more indigenous traditional African approaches to choral compositions is evident. Indigenous South African choral music musicians have become free to redefine their long-sought-after identity. This has been made possible, undoubtedly, by the new political climate in South Africa with the advent of the democracy and its concomitant freedom of expression.

8.2. Recommendations

As already stated, a large number of choral pieces by composers such as Lidovho, Mathagu and Rambau has been lost. Efforts should be made to see how far we could go to try to retrieve some of the collections. One way would be to write the melodies of the music that they still recall, engaging them all the way whilst trying to harmonise the music.

In order to avoid what has happened, new collections (repertoire) from Mphaga, Ramabannda, Sumbana and other emerging (largely thanks to the sponsored competitions and festivals) Venda composers should be collected, documented and preserved. This would be a wealthy body of knowledge for further research on musical styles both by local and international scholars.

Already there are publications of South African choral repertoire such as Melodie Lethallere of JP Mohapeloa as compositions, Izingoma zika-Kumalo, Izingoma Zika-Simelane, and South Africa Sings, Vol.1 under the editorial committee headed by Mzilikazi Khumalo. Recently there is a publication of Nephawe’s compositions (Idani ri imbe) by Kganya ya Thuto Productions, a commendable start for Venda choral repertoire.
Contemporary and future choral music composers should contribute to the growth and further development of our choral music by the incorporation of more neo-traditional indigenous music in their choral compositions. Furthermore, there is no reason why our composers should not start thinking about compositions involving combinations of through-composed choral music and indigenous instruments accompanying the singing.

Today, music education has become equally available to people of all cultures in South Africa. Both “historically White” tertiary institutions and “previously marginalized Black” South African universities teach music to all irrespective of race, colour or creed. Both Western and African music studies are pursued with equal vigour, including research.

A large number of more recent choral works by indigenous South African choral music composers (Mzilikazi Khumalo, Phelelani Mnomiya, Christian Ngqobe and Fhatuwani Sumbana, and others) still draws upon both African as well as European sources. South Africa is heading towards a new choral tradition that may transcend the racial boundaries that were created by Apartheid. A mixture of different idioms and cultures has been syncreticized into one genre-choral music. A new hybrid music culture has begun in all the genres of music in South Africa, which is a rich cultural heritage for further research.

It is not easy, if ever possible, for a culture or even sub-culture to stand-alone and be regarded as an island. Understandably, before the advent of democratic South Africa in 1994 our composers were isolated from the rest of the world. Now contact with international music is increasing with increasing cross-cultural friendships and this is beginning to reflect on the culture of our own music. South Africans of all races, including those that were previously deeply steeped in Western tradition in music have lately begun exploring ways to find or express an affinity with African music. New cross-cultural works are emerging. The scope for our contemporary composers is very wide. This could include the incorporation of
more neo-traditional indigenous music in the choral compositions. The new South Africa could see the emergence of compositions involving combinations of through-composed choral music and indigenous instruments accompanying the singing. Therefore, whilst this study has been yearning for Venda choral music to assert its identity and thereby contribute to a National South African choral music style or tradition, the impact of global music cultures on our music cannot be ignored. There is a wealthy body of knowledge for further research on musical styles, both by local and international scholars. This could be an exciting focal point for future research.
Glossary

**Bepha:** A musical expedition. A music ensemble such as tshikona, tshigombela or Tshikanganga sent by one ruler to another’s territory to entertain or be entertained for a few days.

**Mafhuwe:** A song sung by a Venda woman whilst pounding or grinding mealies. Since the work is done in the middle of the night or in the early hours of the morning, the woman who is usually working alone whilst the rest of the family is asleep, sings a song to keep her going. The rhythm of the song goes hand in glove with the rhythm of the work.

**Malende:** Traditional Venda call-and response singing, with drumming, dancing and clapping. The soloist is usually the leading singer (caller) and dancer, whilst the majority of the musicians offer the response by singing and clapping, with a few on the drums. This usually occurs whenever a number of people are gathered after completion of a task and are drinking beer.

**Malombo:** A combination of drumming, singing and dancing. Whilst the majority of the musicians will be drumming, singing and shaking rattles, a woman soloist (or occasionally a man) who, upon being told that her illness is spiritual, would be the main dancer (usually for a week) until the spirit of her ancestors enters her. The ceremony has other programmes besides the dance.

**Malugwane:** The leader of Tshikona. He leads the group with the various dance patterns.

**Tshigombela:** Traditional amusement song and dance performance done by unmarried Venda girls. Tshigombela musicians would sometimes be sent by one
ruler to the other’s territory to entertain for a few days. It combines drumming, singing and dancing.

**Tshikanganga:** Traditional amusement pipe playing and dance performance done by Venda boys. Tshikanganga musicians and/or Tshigombela girls would sometimes be sent by one ruler to the other’s territory to pay homage or just to entertain for a few days.

**Tshikona:** It is one of the oldest indigenous Venda traditional pipe blowing and dance musical practices. It is very popular and unique amongst Vhavenda. It is usually performed during very important ceremonies and rituals, such as the installation of a new Venda ruler, the commemoration of a ruler’s death, and during the sacrificial rites at the graves of a ruler’s ancestors. It is also a favourite bepha musical practice.
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D. MUSIC SCORES


E. ILLUSTRATIONS

**Figure 1 Ngoma (Drums) picture**, scanned from pictures taken from the International Library of African Music, Grahamstown.

**Figure 2 Tshikona pictures**, scanned from pictures that I have taken during my research on Indigenous Music and Oral History, a project that is being funded by the Depatment of Arts and Culture. These pictures are from two different groups performing during a festival organised by the project under my leadership as Project Manger.

**Figure 3 Tshigombela pictures**, scanned from pictures that I have taken during my research on Indigenous Music and Oral History, a project that is being funded by the Depatment of Arts and Culture. These pictures are of Venda women of HaMashau (author’s home village) in Limpopo.
F. APPENDICES

Appendix 1 : Ndo khathutshelwa nga Murena
Appendix 2 : Mafhungo a ndifhelaho
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Ndo Khathutshelwa Nga Murena

S.M. Dzyvhami

Key: G

Ndo kha-thu-tshe-lwa nga Mure-na wa
O-nta-nzwa.

| s, | l, | t, | d | m | r | d | r | m | r |

Alto

Ndo kha-thu-tshe-lwa nga Mure-na wa
O-nta-nzwa.

| m, | f, | f, | s, | l, | d | r |

Tenor

Ndo kha-thu-tshe-lwa nga Mure-na wa
O-nta-nzwa.

| d | d | r | m | s | s | s | s |

Bass

Ndo kha-thu-tshe-lwa nga Mure-na wa
O-nta-nzwa.

| d, | f, | r, | d, | s, | s, | d, | s, | s |

Vhu mpha zwi sa vha li-wi-ho.

| m | f | s | f | m | r | d |

Vhu mpha zwi sa vha li-wi-ho.

| d | d | d | r | d | t, | s, |

Vhu mpha zwi sa vha li-wi-ho.

| s | s | s | s | f | m | l |
Appendix 2

Mafhungo A Ndifhelaho

S.M. Dzivhani

prano

Alto

Tenor

Bass

Mafhungo a ndifhelaho ndi

Mafhungo a ndifhelaho ndi

Mafhungo a ndifhelaho ndi

Mafhungo a ndifhelaho ndi

di pfa na u pfa. a Yesu orí

di pfa na u pfa. a Yesu orí

di pfa na u pfa. a Yesu orí

di pfa na u pfa. a Yesu orí
2. Tshusima betshu tsha vhudi
   Ndi tshi elelaho;
   Tshi no ngn tshone thi tshi di.
   Ndi nwa nda nula-vho.

3. Ndi mbvha lwendoni lwanga,
   Manna i fushaho;
   Ndi vhuswa ha muya wanga,
   Vhune ndu shaya-vho.

4. Ndi tsha di vhila-chi?
   Ndi na Yesu wanga.
   Shango li nga nea mimi?
   Ndi na Mune wanga.

5. Ndi Yesu fhedzi a fha ho
   Zwithu zwi difha ho;
   Mashu-du-shudu a vha ho
   Kha vho theshela ho.

6. Dakalo ndi li sa bulvi
   La vha shumela ho.
   U dzena kha vhu sa vhalvi
   Vho no orowa ho.
liliwahonga vha-Venda.

slow, entrancing, majestically!

Malombe ndi a Tho-ho-yandou.

E.

Malombe ndi a Tho-ho-yandou.

L. L, L, L, d, l, l, l, l, l, s.

Malombe ndi a Tho-ho-yandou.
ndum ndum. Mbi-la dza ma-khu-la dzo no tshi-nya-la, dzo tshi-nya-la, dzo

| l, l, s, s, l, l, f, f, m, m, r, r : --, d, | d, : d, | s, s, s, s, |
Zwo Ndina Zwo Ndina

Key: G

Ndo zwi-pfa a thongo phe-lwa, sha-ngo he

Ndo zwi-pfa a thongo phe-lwa, sha-ngo he

Ndo zwi-pfa a thongo phe-lwa, sha-ngo he

Ndo zwi-pfa a thongo phe-lwa, he-li sha-

li lom-ti-sa, ndi ka-le-ka-le, ndi ka-le-ka-le

li lom-ti-sa, ndi ka-le-ka-le, ndi ka-le-ka-le

li lom-ti-sa, ndi ka-le-ka-le, ndi ka-le-ka-le

Nga D.V. Nephawe
Appendix 6

Tanganedzani Vhaeni

Nga. D.V. Nephawe

Prano

Key: F

Alto

Tenor

Bass

mf Andante Cantabile
Muvenda

Nga. J.K. Nonge

Marching

Key: F

Una mve-le-le ya-

U - na mve-le-le ya-

l, : - - l, | s, . f ; f . s,

Una mve-le-le ya-

d : d | f . f : m .

Mu - ve nda ndi Mu - ve nda. U - na mve-le-le ya-

d : - - s, | m . d : s , . ta , | l , : - - - - - | f , . f : r , r , | f , : s , |
Iwe Musidzana

Music: I.T. Ramabandana
Lyrics: Prof. N.A. Milubi

Key: A

ho, a si lu-fu-no, ndi nye- mu-lo i no ti-ta

ya u ta-nze-la ku-le, I no-ti-ta ya u

s, d, d, --s, s, s, s, --d, t, t, --t, t, t, t.
wa-ka-nu-ka, nga-ma-tshe-lo, vu-tu-ngu ho tu tu tu
m: f: s | l: f: l s: | f: s: l s m: l: r: d
wa-ka-nu-ka nga-ma-tshe-lo, vu-tu-ngu ho tu tu
wa-ka-nu-ka nga-ma-tshe-lo, vu-tu-ngu ho tu tu
s: s: s: f: s: f: f: m: l: f: m: s: s: f: m:
wa. ha-mbo de-vha, vu-si-dza-na, ha-mbi-
d: r: f: m: m: l: d: r: d: r: f:
wa. ha-mbo de-vha, vu-si-dza-na, ha-mbi-
s: l: r: d: d: s: l: s: l: t: r:
wa. ha-mbo de-vha, vu-si-dza-na, ha-mbi-
|m: l: t: s: s: m: r: f: m: l: t:
lu. l-we mu-si-dza-na, Nye-mu-lo ya
m: l: l: d: r: t: d: m: s: d: r: m
lu. l-we mu-si-dza-na, Nye-mu-lo ya
Vhudzulapo Afrika Tshipembe
Nga. F.H. Sumbana

Allegro

Soprano

The-tsche-le-sa-mi nhu-ngo la
vhudzula-po ha sha-ngo

Key: G

m. m. m. | m. d. d. m
m. r. r. d. | d. l. : = ; 1 m. m. |

Alto

The-tsche-le-sa-mi nhu-ngo la
vhudzula-po ha sha-ngo

m. m. m. | m. d. d. m
m. r. r. d. | d. l. : = ; 1 m. m. |

Tenor

The-tsche-le-sa-mi nhu-ngo la
vhudzula-po ha sha-ngo

m. m. m. | m. d. d. m
m. r. r. d. | d. l. : = ; 1 m. m. |

Bass

The-tsche-le-sa-mi nhu-ngo la
vhudzula-po ha sha-ngo

m. m. m. | m. d. d. m
m. r. r. d. | d. l. : = ; 1 m. m. |