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ANDREW TRACEY'S CONTRIBUTIONS TO AFRICAN MUSIC PEDAGOGY (1959-2024): A TRIBUTE.

Vuyelwa O'Lacy Moyo, PhD
Music and Musicology Department
Rhodes University
South Africa
E-mail: moyovue@gmail.com

&

Boudina McConnachie
Music and Musicology Department
Rhodes University
South Africa

Abstract

This article offers a tribute to Andrew Tracey's contributions to African music pedagogy, examining how his scholarship and teaching reshaped the understanding and transmission of African musical knowledge. Drawing on Tracey's work with mbira and other African musical traditions, the article situates his contributions within African musical epistemologies that privilege embodiment, participation, and relational aesthetics. It highlights his emphasis on learning through observation, performance, mentorship, and apprenticeship, as well as the International Library of African Music (ILAM) 's role in sustaining these pedagogical approaches. The article further considers Tracey's analytical writings on African harmonic and rhythmic systems, arguing that they offer valuable resources for music theory education and challenge the marginalisation of African music within formal curricula. Positioned within applied ethnomusicology, this tribute affirms Tracey's enduring legacy in advancing culturally grounded, pedagogically viable, and intellectually rigorous approaches to African music education.

Keywords: African music pedagogy, Andrew Tracey, mbira, marimba, music curriculum

Introduction

Despite Andrew Tracey's contribution to the field of African music pedagogy, there has been limited research on his scholarly output (Moyo, 2022; Thram et al., 2015; Lucia, 2006; Gumboreshumba, 2009). While current articles on African musical transcription and pedagogical approaches may not acknowledge these contributions, his influence on the African music academy at Rhodes University has significantly impacted music departments across South Africa.

In African societies, knowledge acquisition is a lifelong occupation based on learning, observation, active participation, and oral tradition, involving the transmission of knowledge from one generation to the next through word of mouth (Nketia 1986: 116). Music is often considered an essential part of people's lives, both socially and for knowledge dissemination. Traditionally, indigenous musical forms have been taught and learned in informal spaces, acquired from parents and grandparents, and embodied in social contexts (Nketia 1986). As society has changed, this approach is no longer the only way music is passed on. We are now confronted with different needs, including that of teaching African music at different levels of education, including universities (McConnachie, 2016; Nonnyonga-Tamusuza, 2012; Nketia, 1986, 1998). This article aims to address the lack of serious scrutiny of existing pedagogical approaches to African music at universities across South Africa by highlighting the work of Andrew Tracey. It hopes to provide evidence that he has left behind pedagogical resources that teachers/scholars can use to develop their skills and apply when teaching the musical arts of Africa. Beginning with a historical account of the state of African musical arts education in South Africa, followed by a brief biography of Andrew Tracey, we examine his extensive publications to consider his contributions to marimba and mbira pedagogy.

Historical Contextualisation of African Music Education in South Africa

Much of South Africa's music education was in the hands of missionaries who developed a system in which informal musical involvement was the norm outside schools, and tonic sol-fa music literacy was the norm (McConnachie, 2016). As a result, many African students auditioning for admission to university music departments were strong in tonic sol-fa literacy but deficient in staff notation literacy (Petersen, 2009). At the time, African musical practices

were not regarded as real music, and academics believed they did not deserve inclusion in school or university curricula (McConnachie, 2016; Petersen, 2009). The South African education system was constrained, with a curriculum that only favoured white students and was not accommodating to African students' cultures until the first democratic elections in 1994. This has been the case for many years, and only recently has there been a shift in attitudes toward African traditional and indigenous musical arts in academic spaces (McConnachie, 2021). The University of South Africa (UNISA) attempted to design a generic African music syllabus for South African institutions, but the effort failed, and this situation remains problematic, as there is no such syllabus at the time of writing (McConnachie, 2016). Universities around the country continue to teach what they can, unsupported, because no formal structure exists. Mngoma (1990) believes that a method of education should be devised that teaches both Western and African music simultaneously from an early age. Ethnomusicologists like Bruno Nettl, Anthony Seeger, and Patricia Shehan Campbell recommend introducing children to a variety of musical practices as early as possible to familiarise them with sounds not found in their own culture's music, thereby providing them with a new perspective (Campbell, 1966).

Understanding how African music has been received and is being incorporated into other institutions, and the scarcity of African music pedagogical literature, explains why Tracey's writings are valuable contributions to African music pedagogy and applied ethnomusicology. The establishment of the International Library of African Music (ILAM) helped shift the narrative of African musical arts at the tertiary level in South Africa. It is important to note that Andrew Tracey led ILAM's move to Rhodes University, introduced ethnomusicology programmes, and spearheaded academic conversations around African music, supported by his published articles and documentaries. Tracey was dedicated to the teaching and learning of African music, not only as an African music activist but also to promote it through rigorous research. As a scholar, Tracey's contributions to African music education are evident in his publications, lectures, and workshops.

Brief Biography of Andrew Tracey

Professor Emeritus Andrew Tracey (1936–2024) was the first honorary member of the South African Institute for Research in Music (SASRIM), the former director of ILAM (1977–2005), the editor of African Music, and the former director of African Musical Instruments (AMI) from 1977 to 2021. In addition, Tracey was awarded an honorary Doctorate by the

University of KwaZulu-Natal. He was promoted to Associate Professor by Rhodes University in recognition of his contributions to teaching and the preservation of African Music. He was an ethnomusicologist who focused on primary research, which entailed taking notes for background recordings, gathering information, and recording. He also had a keen interest in observing and cataloguing instruments and the process of their manufacture, assessing their tuning, and recording musical themes, ritual and performance costumes. As Tracey's work focused on primary research on instrument technology and the form and structure of music made with instruments he had learned to build and play himself. He was always involved with information that could be recorded, catalogued, and published with insightful commentary (Thram, Blake & Carver, 2015).

Tracey established ILAM at Rhodes University, secured funding to build the current ILAM building, and digitised recordings collected primarily by his father, Hugh Tracey. He was a lecturer in the University's Music, African Languages, and Anthropology Departments. Tracey also secured a grant that funded a three-year contract for an ethnomusicologist, Diane Thram, from the United States of America, to work at ILAM to develop courses in ethnomusicology at Rhodes University. These courses have since been offered at Rhodes through the Department of Music and Musicology in partnership with ILAM (interview with Tracey, 10/06/21). As a director at ILAM, Tracey preserved, shared, and encouraged other scholars, musicians, students, and the community on the importance of varieties of African music (Thram et al., 2015). Amongst other archives, ILAM is one of the world's largest archives of African music, a feat credited to the Tracey family’s invaluable resources.

Another of Tracey’s academic achievements was the establishment of the Symposia of Ethnomusicology in 1980 and annual sponsorship for it for 25 years. The Symposia laid a foundation for professional southern African ethnomusicologists to deliver research papers on African Music. As the founding editor of the symposia proceedings, he saw the conferences as an extension of the African Music Journal and as a way to bring together like-minded individuals in African music (Gumboreshumba, 2009). Although the first symposium had fewer than 20 attendees, the numbers grew as studies in ethnomusicology and African music increased (Lucia, 2009). Thram et al. (2015) reported that the ethnomusicology symposium papers published by ILAM provide a rich source of information for scholars of African music.

Despite his busy life as the Director of ILAM and as a lecturer at Rhodes University, Tracey had the opportunity to deliver countless presentations at universities and schools, both locally and abroad. He also held workshops where he would invite several African music practitioners. Together, they would teach students and interested parties how to play and make their African traditional instruments (Interview with Tracey, 10/06/21). As a scholar, Tracey's contributions to African music pedagogy and applied ethnomusicology are evident in his publications, lectures, and workshops. Tracey published articles on African music from his field research, mainly in the ILAM journal, African Music, with others in the New Grove Dictionary of Music and Musicians, The Talking Drum and the African e-Journals Project (Gumboreshumba, 2009). Tracey also wrote and produced documentary films with the late Gei Zantzinger. This American filmmaker focused on the Shona *mbira* and Chopi *timbila* xylophone ensembles of Zimbabwe and Mozambique, respectively, in 1973, 1975, 1977, and 1980. Tracey's contribution is notable in many ways, as he devoted his entire life to research, the dissemination of knowledge, and the promotion of African music.

Although Tracey's contribution through his publications (1961, 1963, 1961, 1970, 1991, 1992, 2004, 2011, 2013, 2015) forms the bulk of this paper's views, it is necessary to highlight some important aspects of these contributions. He published his research outcomes in ILAM's journal, African Music, beginning in 1961 with an article on the music of Jege A. Tapera, his first *mbira* teacher in Bulawayo, Zimbabwe. His later research resulted in seminal analyses of the technical aspects of the family of *mbira* music. He identified, including articles on the *matepe* (1970) and *mbira dzavadzimu* (1970), "The family of the *mbira*" (1974), the Chopi *nyanga* pan-pipe dance (1971, 1992), and the system of the *mbira* (1989). In addition, his influential booklet, "How to play the *mbira dzavadzimu*" (1970), including an entry, "African Musical Instruments", in the Encyclopaedia of Southern Africa, has made tremendous pedagogical contributions. Research spanning several decades culminated in his publications on how the *Chopi timbila* xylophone is taught (2013). Tracey's expertise in the technology of the instrument he describes is implicit in his articles on the many kinds of *mbira*, pan pipes, and xylophones. His enthusiasm extends to learning how the instruments are made and how to manufacture them himself. In the next section, we discuss Tracey's engagements with musical instruments.

Andrew Tracey's contributions to the knowledge of the marimba

In his publications, he thoroughly evaluated existing approaches to African music education. We discuss his contributions using individual instruments as a framework. Through investigation and vigorous engagement, we have found that Tracey highlights the following areas in many of the articles:

1. History/origins of the instrument
2. Structure of the instrument
3. Learning/playing technique
4. Tuning of the instrument
5. Transcriptions of music
6. Dance steps

Tracey wrote extensively about the following instruments and topics: Marimba, nyanga pan pipes, *timbila* xylophones (Mozambique), *mbira* (Zim), *nyanga/ngorombe* panpipe dance (Malawi), *Sena Valimba* xylophone, Venda music and dance. However, due to the limited space of this article, we only discuss his pedagogical contribution to the teaching and learning of the marimba and the *mbira.*

Tracey has played an important role in researching a deeper understanding of many Southern African instruments, but was vital in developing one, the marimba. His contribution to the further refinement of the *nyunga nyunga* is discussed later in the article. The marimba is a large wooden percussion instrument that, like most others. According to Rager (2008), the name marimba comes from a Bantu language, in which ma is a plural prefix and rimba refers to a flat, projecting item. When the two are merged, the marimba becomes what it is today: a flattish, wooden instrument with several protruding keys that generate beautiful notes when hammered with mallets. The marimba is often considered an indigenous Zimbabwean xylophone; however, this is not the case, as explained later in the article.

Mallets are small sticks with hard-rubber tips of varying firmness; rubber is used for the tips because it allows the soft or hard dynamics of the marimba's keys. The highest marimbas are played with the hardest mallet, while the lower ones are played with the softest. The marimba appears to have been influenced by a variety of Southern African idiophones and Indonesian gamelan in its appearance. The gamelan is a gigantic orchestra-style instrument comprising

various gongs and tuned metal keys, struck with mallets to produce a sound. Many years ago, these devices were encountered along Indian Ocean trade routes and were duplicated by East African instrument manufacturers (McConnachie 2019). These instruments are thought to have travelled from the east to central and southern Africa and are among the significant influences on the modern marimba as it is known today.

Early African idiophones were made with wooden bars, with resonating gourds suspended below. Each gourd was specifically tuned to the main pitch of its corresponding wooden bars. The wood used depended on the area's geography. In southern Africa, the preferred wood for xylophone keys is from the mutondo, or wild mango, tree. Tracey (Interview, 12/01/2022) stated that these trees are found in Mozambique and Zimbabwe and produce a hardwood perfect for the marimba, as it resonates with the sound. The marimba gourds were originally made from calabash, but today, in urban areas, they are usually made from fibreglass. The gourds are individually tuned to their pitch and create the buzzing sound for which marimbas are well known. The instrument was designed to be played in an ensemble, with four marimbas of different sizes making a set, including bass/tenor, piccolo, alto, and soprano (McConnachie 2019).

In his article on the Zimbabwean marimba, Tracey (2004) clarifies that it is not a traditional South African instrument but was developed from ideas taken from indigenous xylophones from the region, including those of the Venda. In his article, Tracey explains that there was no marimba tradition in Zimbabwe except that of the Tonga people, who played a four-note xylophone with loose keys placed on its stretched legs. About the Tonga people, he writes: “They played it in the fields to make the seeds grow... and probably keep birds and baboons away. This instrument only exists now in the memories of old men” (Tracey 2004: 1). Tracey confirms that the marimbas he came across were actually Zambian or Mozambican when musicians brought them into the country. He further states that the few Venda living in southern Zimbabwe played the mbila mutondo, which is popular in the Soutpansberg region of South Africa, where most Venda live. This instrument, however, cannot be traced back to the Venda people’s ancestors; rather, it is most likely linked to the Chopi *timbila* tradition in Mozambique via the neighbouring Pedi culture (Mbande interview, 11/06/2021). There are historical, familial, political, and linguistic ties among these three peoples; in fact, some details of the mbila mutondo are comparable to those found in the Chopi *timbila.*

Tracey's involvement with these instruments dates back to his childhood, when his father, Hugh Tracey, worked closely with musicians such as Venancio Mbande, a *Chopi* migrant worker and timbila master, in the mid-1940s (Thram et al. 2015). Tracey began working at the Rhodesian Academy of Music in 1959, where he met Robert Sibson, a Bulawayo city electrical engineer and flautist who would later become the academy's director. Tracey became involved in a project to develop a new instrument for schools in Zimbabwe. Sibson was concerned that Zimbabwe's rich indigenous music was not being supported or taught anywhere in the country. He asked Tracey to travel from Johannesburg to the townships of Bulawayo in search of traditional musicians and to produce teachers and teaching materials for the Kwanongoma School of African Music, later known as Kwanongoma College, for which he was the driving force (Tracey 2004).

According to Jones (2012), the Kwanongoma School of African Music was founded as an adjunct to the Rhodesian Academy of Music and was the first of its kind in Africa. The college offered a two-year music specialist course, qualifying students with the equivalent of a Primary Teacher's Higher Certificate. This was a wonderful achievement; however, the construction of a modern African marimba has proven to be one of Kwanongoma College's most significant achievements. This was an achievement because the marimba became an African instrument taught at the college, and the teachers took that knowledge back to their schools, spreading nationwide knowledge, understanding, and appreciation of the marimba.

When Tracey arrived in Bulawayo, they had extended conversations about which instrument should be taught. One suggestion was the marimba, since it could be played by everyone and used to perform both modern and traditional musical genres. Tracey commented that the instrument could also be played in groups in an African communal style and was inexpensive (Tracey, interview, 13/01/2022). It had no ethnic ties that could lead to charges of favouritism, meaning it could belong to everyone in the country equally. Tracey chose the initial tuning system because he believed it was essential to ensure that it produced not a Western but a distinctly African sound. Tracey argued that traditional Zimbabwean scales, such as those found on the mbira, should be adopted when tuning the new instruments (Jones 2012). However, the Western diatonic scale was preffered, and the Kwanongoma marimbas were produced in C major. F#s were added shortly thereafter to allow for playing in the key of G and its related modes. Tracey (2004: 3) states:

> All versions would have African-style membrane buzzers. They would have four-pitch ranges, like an SATB choir, and so on. The inclusion of an extra F# key, in accordance with the other notes, was a crucial decision with which I genuinely disagreed, as someone who already played a heptatonic African marimba. The goal was to allow for the use of two major keys, C and G, as well as various other useful modes, and, of course, to appease the Western musicians' concerns that a simple 7-note scale would be limited.

The marimba was successfully adapted and taught to several students at Kwanongoma College; graduates later helped teach the instrument to future generations. One of these graduates is Dumisani Maraire, whose marimba compositions are known throughout Africa and in the USA. Another graduate is Alport Mhlanga, a marimba teacher in Gaborone, Botswana. Kwanongoma alumni began teaching marimbas and spreading them to other schools, including some in Harare's townships (Jones 2012). Throughout the liberation war in the 1970s, Kwanongoma students and trained teachers continued to perform and teach marimba, drawing the attention of many people outside of Zimbabwe. Tracey (2004) also credits other people who helped him construct the marimba: Olof Axelsson, one of the directors of Kwanongoma; Brother Kurt Huwiler, who also worked there as a producer at the recording studio; and Elliot Ndlovu, who ran the workshop instruction centre.

As the marimba became popular in Zimbabwe, it was imported to South Africa in the early 1980s. Brother Huwiler went to Umtata, South Africa, to establish a marimba factory at Ikhwezi Lokusa Catholic School (Tracey 2004). Father Dave Dargie began introducing the instruments to his congregation. He wrote new liturgical marimba music for Catholic churches and youth organisations, initially in the Cape Province and later throughout the country. He and Tracey first devised an appropriate tuning for Xhosa repertoire based on the dual harmonic series, each a whole tone apart, employed in indigenous Xhosa music (Tracey 2004). Dargie changed the marimba tuning from C to Eb, which he thought was a better general-purpose singing pitch than the C tuning used in Zimbabwe.

The new Xhosa modified marimba sets were first introduced into Catholic youth clubs in Cape Town in the 1980s and have since spread to South African schools, churches, and clubs. Marimba set-ups are increasingly used by many professional bands. In Langa, Cape Town, the first band to gain fame was Amampondo, fronted by Professor Dizu Plaatjies

(McConnachie, 2019; Plaatjies 2021). Many have since followed. In Grahamstown, marimbas were made by Tracey's AMI company in 1999, and they continue to make improved, extended, and diversified versions of the Kwanongoma model. Several individuals across the country also make their own marimba sets. As an instrument-making company, AMI has significantly impacted the growth of marimba playing and pedagogy in South Africa. Not only are the instruments used in schools and universities across the country, but innovations in their construction have made the sets easier to transport and much more versatile (Carver 2023). In addition, it has an extensive range of xylophones, drums, hand-percussion instruments, and many other indigenous African instruments (Shumba 2015). Tracey (2004: 4) writes:

> So, the marimba is not just a musical instrument... It is also a means of self-empowerment and employment in the new South Africa. Tell that to anyone who still says that music is not important!

Thus, we can see that Tracey has played an important role in developing and disseminating marimbas and the new musical genre attached to them. This active approach to teaching and learning aligns with the goals of applied ethnomusicology, such as promoting and preserving African music through archiving.

Andrew Tracey's contribution to the knowledge of the *mbira*

Tracey researched different *mbira* types during his lifetime. These included *mbira dzavadzimu, njari, karimba/mbira Jege Tapera, mbira dzavaNdau, and matepe/hera*, (1961; 1963; 1969; 1970; 1970; 1972; 1974; 1987; 1989, 2015). Here, we analyse Tracey's *mbira* articles, looking at his transcriptions and descriptions of how the *mbira* is constructed, tuned, and taught. Also, drawing on Gumboreshumba's (2009) detailed analysis of Tracey's contributions to the mbira and on interviews with the authors, we are able to map his approach.

Tracey's first *mbira* article, written in 1961, is titled "*Mbira* Music of Jege A. Tapera". Jege Tapera was the first person to introduce Tracey to the *mbira* and became a much-loved teacher and mentor. In this article, Tracey presents Tapera's biography and discusses how they met in Bulawayo. Tracey writes that the type of *mbira* that Tapera played was the *kalimba,* which originally had 13 keys and was fundamentally the same as the *mbira* known

as *sansi* to the Sena people (Tracey 1961: 44). He assisted in modifying Tapera's *mbira* by adding two more keys to it, an important refinement that has significantly changed the way the *kalimba* is played and taught. Tapera's *mbira* is now known as the 15-key *nyunga nyunga mbira*, as named by Dumisani Maraire (Tracey interview, 10/06/2021). This *mbira* is the most ubiquitous of the family of instruments, as it is frequently taught at schools and used as a performance instrument. Interestingly, the *nyunga nyunga* is identified as the classroom *mbira* because other *mbira* types hold spiritual significance and are generally used on more auspicious occasions (ritual or other contextual events). It is not believed to be associated with any ancestral spirits, unlike other types of *mbiras* (Tracey interview, 10/06/2021). According to Gumboreshumba (2009), in the 1990s the teaching of karimba/nyunga nyunga mbira spread to educational institutions across Zimbabwe, including schools and teachers' colleges, where it was received enthusiastically.

Tracey's article is complex in its description of the instrument. He carefully considers its organology, illustrates the construction process and tuning, and suggests approaches to notation that are not usual for indigenous instruments. Tracey (1961: 49) indicates that all the transcribed tunes were taught to him by Tapera, and he confidently vouches for the accuracy of the description of the *mbira* parts because he had played them all under his critical eye many times. In addition, he writes that the voice parts had been transcribed from tape recordings and represent a condensation of what Tapera would sing with each tune, including specific vocables such as falsetto yodelling notes, which are shown by a crossed note. Tracey examines harmonic progressions in the article. He asserts that a unifying factor behind Tapera's music is the harmonic progression that he utilises. It consists of three main chords, 1, 2, and 3, with the inclusion of a 4th passing chord. He further explains:

> By a "chord" here is not meant a triad, but a chord of two notes only. That is to say that when two keys are played in unison, the two always represent, with few exceptions, one of these chords, or their inversions in different octaves (Tracey 1961: 50)

This is of interest, as harmony is taught primarily from a Western perspective in many universities in South Africa, although resources are available to incorporate an African perspective. In light of this fact alone, Tracey's research is invaluable, as it offers resources for developing an African approach to theory and harmony teaching in current institutions. Tracey also writes about an interesting vocal technique used by the Shona people in mbira

music: yodelling. He states that yodelling adds to the notion that this music has a chordal background. Yodelling normally begins on a high note and gradually falls, taking one step up, one step down, following the chords as they change during the act of yodelling. The notes used to pitch the yodel are those relating to the chord played on the *mbira* and tones that correlate with those chords, such as Wo-ye i-ye i-ye. Aside from the description of the music in this article, Tracey also provides a transcription of the songs and vocal phrases he was taught by Tapera. The most significant song is "*Chamtengure*", which is important because it is used most often by teachers from primary schools to universities to introduce students to kalimba/nyunga nyunga mbira, and it offers many variants for exploring contributions to teaching and learning.

This article is thus a valuable resource contributing to teaching and learning the musical arts of Africa because it can act not only as a research document but also as an instructional booklet on the performance practice of the *nyunga nyunga*. The article also thoroughly describes Jege Tapera's *mbira*'s physical properties, including the layout of the keys, pitch relationships, the tuning scale, and its history.

Tracey's transcriptions of mbira music have had a significant impact on African music pedagogy. He developed a pulse notation system and used it for his transcriptions. While he used the five lines of Western notation stave, he did not use Western clefs because they bind the music to a specific pitch. Tracey further claimed that he transcribed the music based on the instrument's tuning and created one if a clef was needed for a particular instrument; for example, he used a timbila clef when transcribing *Chopi timbila* music (Gumboreshumba 2009).

In 1969, Tracey wrote an article titled "The tuning of *mbira* reeds: A contribution to the craft of *mbira* making''. He indicates that this article emerged from his making a number of traditional *mbiras*. One reason he had to learn to make a mbira was that it was difficult to find one to practice on. In manufacturing, he understood the principles involved in making the instrument, which is well-known to *mbira* makers and teachers, generally older men at the time (Tracey 1969: 96). In his article, Tracey explains the process of making the *mbira* reeds (the metal tines that produce a sound when plucked), which he believed to be the most difficult part of the construction, and also provided the following disclaimer stating that "The method I describe is the one I have myself. It would be strange indeed if all the thousands of

mbira makers found to use the same procedures or sequence of manufacture" (Tracey 1969: 96).

Tracey (1969: 97) explained that the tuning of a *mbira* reed is based on three factors: size, length, weight, and flexibility. Each of these factors affects the reed's pitch; for example, a reed is either longer, heavier or more flexible in pitch (*ibid*). Tracey states that when making a traditional *mbira*, there is no room for variation in certain properties of the make-up; the reeds should be of a specific length so that the thumbs can easily reach them when playing, and weight and flexibility are important because the *mbira* reed is metal. He suggested a tentative outline of the relationships between the *kalimba* and its descendants. The *njari huru* and *hera* are placed close to each other to show their physical similarity, which probably developed due to their geography (Tracey 1972: 90).

Based on further experiences with several *mbira* players and makers in Zimbabwe and elsewhere, Tracey further provides illustrations and instructions for building a *mbira* in his publications. He explains and demonstrates the physical mechanics of making and tuning various *mbira* types and, importantly, focuses on the technique for playing each type (Tracey 1961, 1969, 1970a, 1970b). This research has proven invaluable and remains a seminal pedagogical resource for any *mbira* instruction or research.

From a historical perspective, Tracey (1972) contributes significantly to a deeper understanding not only of the development of the kalimba but also of the identification and classification of the *mbira* family. Based on what he had learnt from examining many types of *mbira*, he concluded that the kalimba is the ancestor of all the others. He provided proof by tracing the linkages, demonstrating, and analysing each of the selected *mbira* variants relative to the kalimba. He also provided examples of Zimbabwean *mbira*s (*karimba, mbira dzavadzimu, mbira dzavaNdau, njari huru, and njari matepe*), Mozambican *mbiras* (including *mana embudzi* and *nyonganyonga*), and South African *mbiras* (such as *mbila deza*) (Tracey 1972). In addition, Tracey illustrated the eight notes which form the basic kalimba core, adding that these are found in all *mbira* types in Zimbabwe. He provided illustrations showing the positions and changes to this basic kalimba core across all the other *mbiras.* As demonstrated in the illustrations, LT refers to the left thumb, and RT refers to the right thumb. Tracey also explained in detail the different *mbiras* types to clarify how they are

related to the *kalimba* core. Such information is vital to the teaching and learning of African instruments and remains a core resource for this instrument family.

Tracey's (1989) article "The system of the *mbira*" presents a theory based on his analysis of *mbira* music. This paper was first presented at the 7th Symposium on Ethnomusicology (Venda University) in 1988, was published by ILAM in Papers presented at the 7th and 8th Symposium of Ethnomusicology (1989) and was reproduced in 2015 due to the worldwide interest in the *mbira* and its system, which has developed in recent years (Tracey 2015). Although Tracey's theory of the system of the *mbira* applies to all *mbira* music, he largely undertook his analysis using the Shona *mbira* types *mbira dzavadzimu, njari, karimba*, and *matepe/hera*. He notes that the system can also be used for other instruments, such as *ngororombe* and *nyanga* pan pipes, the *chipendani* mouth bow, the *valimba* xylophone, and the marimba (Tracey 2005). For Tracey, it was important that it was referred to as a system, he wrote:

> The fact that there exists a sound, a technique, a practice or system which musicians recognise and whose geographic borders can be traced throws the "pure" central area into focus. Clearly this piece of Africa does share a definable music system. It deserves the name "system" because musicians here have an independent, consistent set of organising principles which explains the existing harmonic structure of their music and is also used to generate new music (Tracey 2015: 133).

Tracey derived a sequence of the nature of *mbira* music from his analysis. This applies to most *mbira* songs. The music starts from three distinct points in the cycle. He refers to it as the three most common sequences, which he translates as the C, F, and A standard sequences. It is noteworthy that these sequences can be played on the *mbira* in all seven keys so that a song's sequence could be defined as "A standard in D" or "C standard in F." Tracey concludes that this is a system that is both generative and adaptable aside from the three starting locations, each sequence has its own personality; nonetheless, each sequence can be played in any of the keys.

The above section has demonstrated Tracey's contribution to teaching and learning through his thorough description of making, tuning and playing different types of *mbiras*. Another

highlight for teaching and learning is his sequence of the *mbira* systems, which provides an understanding of the different *mbiras*. This section also highlights his contributions to applied ethnomusicology, understood here as ethnomusicological research that is deliberately oriented toward community benefit, cultural sustainability, and social impact, as his articles actively support communities in preserving their mbira culture for future generations.

African Musical Epistemologies and Aesthetic Practice

Tracey shifted his focus from the intricacies of the mbira to broader questions of music performance in Africa in his 1994 article, "Values in African Music." Drawing on his experiences with mbira, timbila, Nyanga panpipe music, and other traditions, Tracey approached African music not merely as a structural or technical system but as an embodied, relational, and process-oriented mode of knowledge. He defined the aesthetics of African music as possessing a deeper essence that is inseparable from performance itself, arguing that music in African societies functions as a medium through which fundamental human and social principles are expressed. Importantly, this article marked a departure from analyses concerned primarily with the whats and hows of instruments or musical forms, shifting instead toward the whys, that is, why music is organised in particular ways and why it is experienced as meaningful and enjoyable (Tracey 1994).

Within this epistemological framing, African music is understood less as a fixed object and more as a socially enacted practice in which meaning emerges through participation, movement, and collective responsibility. This system is not governed by rigid notions of correctness, as is often emphasised in Western structural paradigms, but by relational accuracy, where musical success is evaluated according to how individual actions sustain the collective whole. In my view, this distinction is crucial, as it highlights African musical practice as an internally coherent epistemological system rather than a deviation from Western norms. Tracey (1994) explains that African children initially learn music informally through observation and participation in performance contexts. By internalising what they hear and see, children gradually develop musical competence. They are permitted to experiment with instruments, sing, and dance alongside peers before receiving formal instruction, a process that simultaneously cultivates cooperation and shared accountability. Music is therefore learned primarily through doing rather than verbal explanation or abstract

analysis, underscoring a fundamental difference between African and Western approaches to music learning (ibid.).

Although such embodied pedagogies were historically devalued through colonial education systems, they have since been reintroduced at various levels of education in South Africa. Institutions such as the International Library of African Music (ILAM) have employed mentorship- and apprenticeship-based teaching methods since Tracey's directorship, yielding progressive and sustainable outcomes (McConnachie 2021). I argue that these pedagogical approaches should not be understood merely as alternative teaching strategies but as extensions of African musical epistemologies that privilege embodiment, relationality, and experiential knowledge transmission.

Tracey (1994) further emphasises that African music performance is characterised by the generation and maintenance of collective energy, in which accuracy is evaluated relationally in terms of how each performer sustains the ensemble. Any deviation affects the collective whole and is corrected immediately, reinforcing the collaborative nature of performance. Bodily movement is integral to this system, as sound, motion, and social interaction are inseparable; only correct movement allows the music to sound, look, and feel right. Rhythm operates cyclically through repetition and variation, enabling deeper rhythmic relationships to unfold over time. Tracey also highlights the importance of contrast, exemplified in call-and-response structures such as kushaura and kutsinhira in mbira music, where interlocking parts are complementary rather than oppositional. From my perspective, these practices demonstrate that African musical aesthetics are grounded in interdependence rather than individual virtuosity, challenging Western hierarchies that prioritise singular authorship and fixed musical texts.

In later work, Tracey (2015: 133) provides detailed analyses of chordal structures across various African musical traditions, outlining harmonic progressions, pulse patterns, and pitch relationships. Such analyses are particularly valuable for music theory pedagogy, which has historically relied on Western, often European, models. The scarcity of accessible analytical material on African music has contributed to misconceptions that traditions such as Shona mbira music lack variation or complexity (Gumboreshumba 2009). Tracey challenges this view by demonstrating that while mbira songs share a common system, distinctions emerge through subtle harmonic and melodic relationships and the shifting relational interplay

between parts (Tracey 1989: 51). I contend that incorporating such analytical frameworks into formal music education is not only pedagogically necessary but also epistemologically corrective, as it disrupts the marginalisation of African musical knowledge within theoretical discourse.

Overall, Tracey's work positions African music as a mode of embodied knowledge, relational aesthetics, and social reasoning, rather than as a system governed by utilitarian function or rigid structural correctness. My analysis suggests that his scholarship contributes significantly to applied ethnomusicology by demonstrating how African musical epistemologies sustain teaching, learning, cooperation, and cultural continuity, while also offering viable frameworks for decolonising music theory and pedagogy.

Conclusion

Andrew Tracey's contributions to African music pedagogy extend far beyond documentation or technical analysis; they represent a sustained commitment to recognising African musical systems as coherent, embodied, and intellectually rigorous modes of knowledge. Through his scholarship on mbira and other African musical traditions, Tracey foregrounded performance, participation, movement, and relationality as central to musical meaning and learning. His work challenged dominant Western paradigms that privilege abstraction, notation, and individual authorship, instead affirming African musical epistemologies rooted in collective practice and experiential transmission.

Equally significant is Tracey's pedagogical legacy, particularly through his leadership at the International Library of African Music, where mentorship- and apprenticeship-based approaches were institutionalised and sustained. By integrating African harmonic, rhythmic, and structural analyses into educational contexts, Tracey demonstrated that African musical traditions are not only culturally vital but also analytically sophisticated and pedagogically viable. This article has argued that such contributions align closely with applied ethnomusicology, as they actively support cultural continuity, knowledge transmission, and community-centred approaches to music education.

As a tribute, this study recognises Tracey's enduring influence on African music scholarship and pedagogy while underscoring the continued relevance of his work for contemporary debates on decolonising curricula, valuing indigenous knowledge systems, and reimagining music education in Africa and beyond. His legacy remains embedded in the ways African music is taught, learned, and understood, not as an object of study alone, but as a living, relational practice.

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Appendix : Resources for data collection

Texts used for analysis

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Interviews conducted for this research

Interview with Andrew Tracey on the 10th of June 2021

Interview with Andrew Tracey on the 25th of November 2021

Interview with Andrew Tracey on the 12th of January 2022

Interview with Dr Boudina McConnachie on the 8th of November 2021

Interview with Mr Elijah Madiba on the 8th of November 2021

Interview with Zanethemba Mdygolo on the 8th of November 2021

Interview with Albert Ssempeke on the 10th of November 2021

Interview with Asakhe Canstulana on the 10th of November 2021

Interview with Diane Thram on the 9th of November 2021

Interview with Geoffrey Tracey on the 9th of November 2021

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