

Contribution of Mission Churches to the Growth and Development of Music Education in Kenya: The Fifty-Year Experience

Abstract

In his study on Swedish mission and music education in South Africa, Stig-Magnus Thorsen (2002) discusses different phases in the history of South African music education. He (ibid.) provides accounts of how music education in South Africa was influenced by Swedish mission. Nettl (1985) records that the first extensive exposure of non-Western societies to western music was through church music. Kathy Primos (2001) cited in Stig-Manus (2002) concurring with the above viewpoints stated that the influence from Christian church on music learning by Africans can not be underestimated. This paper will be guided by the aforementioned frames of thought as it seeks to present a historical overview of how the Kenyan populace has experienced the Mission churches contribution to the growth and development of music education in Kenya during the last 50 years. This study argues that just as is the case with Swedish missions and music education in South Africa, mission churches in Kenya provided the first venues and fora for music education; therefore this study will explore content, methods, material, infrastructure, resources and players that were used to pioneer music education in Kenya, thereby precipitating its growth and development.

1. Introduction: An Historical Overview

This chapter endeavors to discuss the role of mission churches in the music education in the Kenya post national independence and which perhaps could be as explained as ripple effects of their contribution as pioneers of modern music education that starting emerging a few years before independence. In order to most accurately understand the historical context, one must trace briefly the evolution of the musical activities in Kenya that took place before independence, up through the late 19th century. Even more fundamentally, the history of music education in Kenya must include music education not only in a formalized school setting but also in a traditional setting. Many scholars have alluded to the fact that music in the traditional setting has existed for centuries; therefore it is imperative in this chapter that we begin with what constituted music education before the arrival of the missionaries.

In order to proceed with a clear focus and to understand the scope of our discussions, first we would clearly establish our definition of music education as purposeful and systematic development of musicianship skills, establishment of historical context and appreciation, and a certain technical facility with an instrument or with the voice. Such music education may be formal (via a classroom) or informal (situational), as long as it focuses on the acquisition of musical skills. In Kenya, as all over the world, scholarly discourses have ensued in an attempt to give perspectives and assert personal and collective positions on the validity of formal vs. informal music education. On one hand, formal music education could include music teaching, training, learning, and performance in institutional settings; on the other hand, informal music education can encompass the many and varied forms of music learning, training, teaching, and performance that are

practised in informal settings outside school contexts. Despite being a somewhat more expensive venture than its informal counterpart, formalised music education in Kenya or what this chapter would prefer to refer to as modern music education (MME) offers excellent opportunities for success in life, not only as a professional musician but also as a well-rounded human being. This type of education is geared towards the development of dispositional, attitudinal, and behavioural mind sets that are most conducive to academic, social and occupational success. When a student studies music, these mind sets are nurtured, and the student develops creativity, expression, discipline, confidence, self-esteem, efficacy, auto-discovery, time management, an appreciation of other cultures, increased interest in school, and the inculcation of other desirable habits to life success. Music may also be used in schools and in traditional African communities as a way of realising social-emotional development and behavioural modification.

Akuno (2005:12) records that ‘African traditional music education (ATME) entailed one, learning music, a part of societal life, through participation in activities that involved the use of music. This first began with the music learning that the child received beginning at birth and going through adult life.’ This general [or situational] music education aimed at integrating the individuals into their culture, thereby making them active participants in their musical components of life.

Second, the ATME, according to Akuno (ibid.) entailed aspects of professional undertaking for the talented and or selected young musicians. The aim of this second form of ATME was to produce proficient and skilled performers for the communities, including those who acquired musical skills through apprenticeship. Those who specialised in music training included professional instrumentalists, dancers, lead singers and makers of African musical instruments. Soon we will explore the overlap between ATME and MME, but first it is vital to understand certain contributions of Mission churches as a precursor to the continued growth and development of music education in the post independence Kenya.

The broad cultural influence and specifically, for the purposes of this discussion, the musical influence of missionaries in Kenya was multifaceted and varied. Each new wave of missionaries brought with it not only a new wave of energy and drive for evangelism, but also additional social focus, according to what their doctrines emphasized. The earliest part of the story of missionary entry into and activities in Kenya can be traced back to the arrival of the German Lutheran missionaries Ludwig Krapf and Johann Rebman, who arrived to the Kenya coast at Rabai in 1844 and 1846. Their attempt to make inroads into the Kenyan inlands was greatly facilitated by the construction of the national railroad in 1901 that stretched from Mombasa City situated along the shores of Indian Ocean of the Kenyan coast to Kisumu City located next to Lake Victoria.

The next wave of missionaries, the French White Fathers and the Mill Hill Fathers from Great Britain, arrived to the western part of Kenya via Uganda, under the umbrella of the Roman Catholic Church. These early missionaries’ activities revolved around