

GREGORY BARZ

# Music in East Africa



EXPERIENCING  
MUSIC,  
EXPRESSING  
CULTURE

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EXPRESSING CULTURE



GREGORY BARZ

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# Foreword



In the past three decades interest in music around the world has surged, as evidenced in the proliferation of courses at the college level, the burgeoning “world music” market in the recording business, and the extent to which musical performance is evoked as a lure in the international tourist industry. This heightened interest has encouraged an explosion in ethnomusicological research and publication, including the production of reference works and textbooks. The original model for the “world music” course—if this is Tuesday, this must be Japan—has grown old, as has the format of textbooks for it, either a series of articles in single multiauthored volumes that subscribe to the idea of “a survey” and have created a canon of cultures for study, or single-authored studies purporting to cover world musics or ethnomusicology. The time has come for a change.

This Global Music Series offers a new paradigm. Instructors can now design their own courses; choosing from a set of case study volumes, they can decide which and how much music they will teach. The series also does something else; rather than uniformly taking a large region and giving superficial examples from several different countries within it, case studies offer two formats—some focused on a specific culture, some on a discrete geographical area. In either case, each volume offers greater depth than the usual survey. Themes significant in each instance guide the choice of music that is discussed. The contemporary musical situation is the point of departure in all the volumes, with historical information and traditions covered as they elucidate the present. In addition, a set of unifying topics such as gender, globalization, and authenticity occur throughout the series. These are addressed in the framing volume, *Thinking Musically* (Wade), which sets the stage for the case studies by introducing those topics and other ways to think about how people make music meaningful and useful in their lives. *Thinking Musically* also presents the basic elements of music as they are practiced

in musical systems around the world so that authors of each case study do not have to spend time explaining them and can delve immediately into the particular music. A second framing volume, *Teaching Music Globally* (Campbell), guides teachers in the use of *Thinking Musically* and the case studies.

The series subtitle, "Experiencing Music, Expressing Culture," also puts in the forefront the people who make music or in some other way experience it and also through it express shared culture. This resonance with global studies in such disciplines as history and anthropology, with their focus on processes and themes that permit cross-study, occasions the title of this Global Music Series.

Bonnie C. Wade  
Patricia Shehan Campbell  
General Editors

# Preface



This is a book about people singing, dancing, and making music in contemporary East African communities. The primary themes of the book are the interaction of East Africans with traditional music and culture and the documentation of ways in which East Africans make music and dance useful and meaningful in their lives. The book has four main goals. The first is to contextualize the lives of individuals and communities by exploring the contexts in which music is made significant and integrated into the everyday experiences of East Africans negotiating the world around them. The second goal is to provide theories, methods, and case studies that enable access to the study of East African music traditions at multiple levels. The language of the theoretical arguments introduced in the volume is intended to invite rather than discourage engagement. The vocabulary and methodological framework is supported by the series' framing volume, *Thinking Musically*, and that volume's glossary supports many of the issues, concepts, and the terminology introduced in *Music in East Africa*. The accompanying CD complements and illustrates the several issues raised in *Music in East Africa*, providing opportunities for reading the more technical details of the text—musical notation, sound transcriptions, and analyses—at deeper levels. The text can, however, be read on different levels, and such technical exercises can either be adopted to the teacher's or students' individual level or disregarded. The third goal has to do with a defining principle by which musical characteristics of performance in East Africa can be distinguished, namely the inseparability and interdependence of drumming (and playing of other musical instruments), singing, dancing, and drama with traditional East African cultures. The tools for approaching this goal are embedded within case studies detailing the lives of individual musicians as specialized members of East African communities. A fourth and final goal is to encourage further research (historical or ethnographic) of East African performance tra-

ditions. The academic discipline of ethnomusicology is introduced in this text and from this exposure to the methodologies and techniques of ethnographic field research readers are encouraged to consider scholarly interpretations of East African materials as both process and product related directly to approaching meaning within performances of expressive culture. An overarching concept that arises throughout this volume's treatment of each of these four themes is "*traditional musical performance*"—three simple words that when grouped together refer at once to musical performance events, social phenomena, historical cultural trajectories, and the expression of individual and collective talent. Indigenous conceptualizations of traditional musical performance may differ among disparate and related peoples of this area of the world, with varying characteristics assigned to different aspects of performances of music, dance, and drama.

On finishing this volume I realized that I had tried hard to communicate something of the process I myself have engaged while conducting research in East Africa as I learned about the many roles assumed by music and dance in both historical and contemporary contexts. For me the engagement of this process will certainly be ongoing. I have lived, traveled, taught, and been taught in several areas of East Africa, and I have been fortunate to learn how to perform on many of the instruments introduced in this volume; I have danced many of the traditions discussed, and I have sung with East African vocal groups. As I conceptualized the case studies that form the core of this volume I returned to memories of being taught, memories of engaging and being engaged by my teachers, and memories of learning about and being exposed to East African traditional music.

Several languages are introduced in the text. KiSwahili appears most frequently, however, as it is widely understood and used in Kenya and Tanzania—but not so in Uganda. A largely Bantu-derived language, KiSwahili originated as the coastal East African lingua franca for Arab/Omani trading along the Indian Ocean coast as well as in the interior. When missionaries arrived in East Africa in the mid-nineteenth century, they often relied on KiSwahili rather than European languages for everyday communication. Stress in KiSwahili is almost always on the penultimate syllable (unless the word is of foreign origin). Thus, "*mwelimu*" is pronounced "*mwa-LI-mu*." Vowels are pure and for the most part standardized (a = ah; e = eh; i = ee; o = oh; u = oo).

The case studies that support this volume were written in Nashville, Tennessee, far away from the East African contexts of typical performances of music and dance detailed here, while the final draft was writ-

ten in Kampala, Uganda, far from the context of my American classroom. Writing was an extremely pleasurable (and educational) task as it brought me closer to the valuable opportunities I have had to experience traditional music making, dating back to my initial field research in East Africa in 1993.

When I initially presented these case studies to undergraduate students at Vanderbilt University I came to realize that learning about music-as-cultural process equips students with a toolbox of ideas, concepts, and methodologies with which they in turn can approach many similar musical traditions in East Africa—traditional musical performances, popular music, choir music, dance music, and rap among others—and the rest of the world. An unintended product of the volume might well be, therefore, an opening of doors to curiosity and further learning concerning musics of East Africa as well as those of our own cultures.

### ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I am grateful to my many teachers, particularly Gideon Mdegella (Tanzania) and Centurio Balikoowa (Uganda). Mdegella and Balikoowa have become colleagues and friends; they are the musical experts from whom I have drawn much of my inspiration, and I only hope that I have done their teaching and guidance a degree of justice. Several East Africanist ethnomusicologists—Lois Anderson, Kelly Askew, Peter Cooke, Frank Gunderson, Jean Kidula, Gerhard Kubik, James Makubuya, Jeffrey Summit, and Sylvia Tamusuza, among others—have been eager colleagues and participants in my own education in this part of the world. Colleagues at Vanderbilt University's Blair School of Music—Dale Cockrell, Cynthia Cyrus, Melanie Lowe, Stan Link, Michael Rose, and Mark Wait—supported and encouraged the writing of *Music of East Africa*, and I am sure all will be greatly relieved to see the work published. Dennis Clark and the entire staff of the music library at Vanderbilt were tireless in their aid. Mona Christenson Barz continues to support and encourage my efforts. As spouse and field research assistant she has guided and inspired much in this volume.

This project was shepherded by the caring hands of Bonnie Wade, one of the general editors for the *Global Music Series*. Maribeth Payne, formerly of Oxford, provided initial support and encouragement, while Jan Beatty and Talia Krohn both guided the progress of the volume. Patricia Sheehan Campbell and Bryan Burton contributed insight concerning educational issues of much material in this volume. A wide va-



riety of comments and suggestions from anonymous readers have been incorporated and adopted in this volume; I am grateful for all the time and energy they put into working through the volume's issues. Students at Vanderbilt University participating in World Music, African Music, and Afropop courses will find their comments (and critiques!) laced through the volume's cases studies.

Funding for the field research supporting this volume was provided by two grants from the Vanderbilt University Central Research Scholar Grants Program and a grant from the Fulbright African Regional Research Program.

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  - 31 "Jo Piny," performed by Kabila Klan, Kisumu, Kenya. Used by permission of Lawrence Oyuga, director.
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# Heating Up!



*Haba na haba, hujaza kibaba*  
*When combined, small things make up big things*  
*[KiSwahili proverb printed on a woman's khangha cloth wrap]*

## EAST AFRICA

East Africa, often referred to as the “cradle of humanity,” is the geographic home to the Great Rift Valley cutting through the center of this area of sub-Saharan Africa. The Rift Valley—the location for the famous archaeological digs at Olduvai Gorge in Tanzania and in areas surrounding Lake Turkana in Kenya by Louis and Mary Leakey—has produced human skulls that, once unearthed and analyzed, contributed to an estimate of life in this area dating back over 2.5 million years. East Africa is home to many peoples, representing all distinct language classificatory types known in Africa, although some are now isolated within a small area within the region. Bantu and Nilotic speakers comprise the majority of Africans in this area, but there are also several small but flourishing pockets of Cushitic speakers.

The countries comprising the area commonly referred to as East Africa include those in the “Horn,” coastal, central, and southern areas—Burundi, Comoros Islands, Djibouti, Eritrea, Ethiopia, Kenya, Rwanda, Seychelles, Somalia, Tanzania, and Uganda, and including areas of Mozambique, Sudan, Zambia, and Malawi. For logistical reasons, this volume cannot provide a cohesive or detailed overview of the musical cultures of all East African countries; the rich diversity of traditions in this part of the world precludes an in-depth or comprehensive study of the entire geographic region. As a compromise, the musical contexts of three historically linked countries will be discussed—Kenya, Tanzania, and Uganda—in an attempt to approach the expressive culture of East Africa in a meaningful and historically logical way.



A highly developed system of trading networks penetrated East Africa historically for centuries, creating a system of cultural influences extending from as far east as the island of Zanzibar, linking across the Indian Ocean to India and beyond, as well as to areas deep within Central Africa. Spices, slaves, gold, and ivory were exported along these trading routes. Elsewhere, hunting, fishing, herding, and farming were historically the main contributors to local economies. In addition, many pastoralist and migratory patterns have occurred in East Africa over time—some voluntary, others forced. Colonial presence in the area began in the late sixteenth century with Portuguese forces that continued until 1720. Omani Arab control influenced coastal East Africa until Germany and Great Britain began their colonial rule in the nineteenth century. German colonial rule of present-day Tanzania ended after World War I when the League of Nations awarded mainland Tanzania—known then as Tanganyika—as a mandate to Britain (which already ruled Kenya and Uganda). The three countries achieved independence in the early 1960s: Tanzania (1961), Uganda (1962), and Kenya (1963). See Figure 1.1 for a map of East Africa.

Contemporary East Africa participates in the increasingly global economy of today's world. Cell phones have become ubiquitous in many cities and towns, and the presence of Internet cafes on many street corners greatly expands the geographic borders of Africa where Celine Dion, the Backstreet Boys, and Britney Spears dominate the airwaves. Traditional music performances throughout this region of the world, however, reflect both the peoples' participation in urban modernity and the maintenance of rural life for many peoples (see Chapter 5 of this volume for a more specific treatment of this idea).

A plurality of music-making styles and traditions exists within Kenya, Tanzania, and Uganda. Along the Indian Ocean mainland coast as well as in the coastal islands, *taarab* music is frequently performed, from the southern tip of Somalia down to the coast of Mozambique. *Taarab* (*Taarabu* in Swahili), a fusion of Arab and Indian melodies with rich, highly nuanced Swahili poetry is performed at weddings, at celebrations of rites of passage, and as an accompaniment for political issues and campaigns. In addition to *taarab*, choirs abound in East Africa. Many churches in East Africa support multiple choirs. Politicians and political parties rely on choirs to get their messages out to the people. Popular choirs entertain youth in multiple contexts. Next door to the churches, in small social clubs and larger hall venues, dance bands perform nightly to both large and small crowds in both rural and urban settings, playing a variety of musics ranging from Central African