Using Music to Promote Understanding
Professor/Performer Makubuya to Speak at Conference

As a child in the African nation of Uganda, James Makubuya was surrounded by the folk music of the Baganda people.

When he was 8 years old, Makubuya learned to play his first instrument: the bowl lyre, a popular string instrument in east Africa. Since then, he has mastered 17 instruments from cultures throughout the world—though he says he only plays seven “really well.”

His expertise has led him to two performances at Carnegie Hall and speaking engagements throughout the world, as well as a teaching position at Wabash College in Indiana.

What Makubuya likes most about music is the need to understand many academic areas in order to study it. “Music is so interdisciplinary,” he says. “It touches a bit of physics, a bit of art, language, social studies. Even a technology background is important.”

The decision to study music wasn’t always in Makubuya’s plans. “When I went to college, my father wanted me to pursue mathematics,” Makubuya says. “But for me it was boring. So I changed my major to music.

“My father told me it was okay as long as I didn’t play the nightclub. I said, ‘No, I want to teach.’”

At Wabash College, Makubuya initiated the school’s world music program and performance ensemble, Wanmidan. Students survey Arabic, East African, Caribbean, American and Latin American folk music. They analyze each style’s musical elements, the instruments that create it, the language that carries the message and the way culture is reflected in the music. As a capstone project, students build an instrument from a culture they have studied or create their own.

Makubuya says that teaching music is “very emotionally satisfying. My students learn to play new instruments, but in the process they pick up so much understanding of another culture.”

Makubuya will discuss music’s role and influence on cultures throughout the world as the keynote speaker at WSU’s 10th Annual Diversity Conference. “Music tells a story,” he says. “It shapes our culture, influences our politics, and teaches children what a society values.”

Music is a perfect medium to teach about a society, according to Makubuya. “Music is entertainment, and the message gets into you, it stays with you,” he says. “It’s a way to communicate, teach and educate.”

Makubuya believes his ultimate goal as a teacher is to help students develop new appreciation for other cultures through the study of music.

“I want my students to leave college with the understanding that cultural differences are just that—differences,” he says. “One is not better or worse than another. It’s just different.

“When you learn about new cultures, you have a greater acceptance; you appreciate the differences, which helps our global society learn to live together without fighting and wars.”

Travis Clemens, University Communications
Performing for a Higher Power

There are more than 10,000 religions worldwide. Some differ in minor details; others have opposite beliefs, practices and forms of deity. But one thread that ties them all together is music.

“I can think of no religious or spiritual tradition in which there is not some form of music,” says the Rev. Adam Linton, former chair of the liturgy and music committee for the Episcopal Diocese of Utah. “Music seems to be a part of the spiritual experience.”

As each religion has a different method of achieving, or even defining, a spiritual experience, so too does each religion have a different method of incorporating music into worship.

Linton says many Western religions are more performance-based. From the richly traditional Mormon Tabernacle Choir, to an energetic gospel group, to a Native American drum circle, performance uses music to connect spiritually with their audience and faith.

“Other times,” Linton says, “we see a more performance mentality that disregards the spiritual capacity of music.” He cites a Bach cantata—music originally commissioned by the Lutheran Church—but now often performed without the context of its spiritual background. Many of the great composers in the Baroque era wrote their masterpieces in commission from the church, Linton says.

Today, however, performance-based worship is growing and becoming more diverse. Religious services feature rock bands, 100-person choirs, and even full-fledged orchestras—all trying to reach out to congregations in dramatic and different ways.

“Other cultures, outside of the West, have maintained a more fully integrated way of worshipping,” Linton says. Buddhist chanting is very stirring in its own way, but it’s not for entertainment. Rather, the chanting has a meditation element. “It has a purpose beyond performance,” Linton says. “It is to address spirituality.”

The early Christian church derived its music from existing Jewish and Byzantine religious chants. This music was monophonic, with only one melody, and no harmonic support or accompaniment.

“The interest and the concerns of religious tradition address not just the academic and cognitive person, but the whole, incarnate person,” Linton says. The ability of music to reach the “incarnate person” makes it a natural combination with religion.

Some of the earliest pieces of physical evidence tying together music and religion come from the Hindu religion. Archaeologists in India and Pakistan, excavating the Indus Valley Civilization (2600-1900 B.C.), discovered several instruments and drums, along with carvings tying together music, dance and religion.

Europe, Asia, Persia, Greece and other regions have detailed stories of how music integrated into their cultures and religions. Throughout history, the combination has surfaced and resurfaced.

The study of religion and music has reached the highest levels, in organizations such as the Yale Institute of Sacred Music. And recognition for the combination is widespread, as shown by the existence of the International Gospel Music Hall of Fame and Museum, founded in 1995 in Detroit.

“It is a very powerful connection,” Linton says. “There’s something about singing, or chanting, or listening to music that embraces in the totality of our being.”

Jonathan McBride, University Communications
"I'm a walking oxymoron, in that I am a deaf person who still doesn't truly know what music sounds like, but it is extraordinarily important to me."

How the Hearing-Impaired Community Experiences ... the Sound of Music

Christopher Flygare loves Fantasia on a Theme by Thomas Tallis by 20th-century composer Ralph Vaughan Williams—so much so that he arranged the piece for Weber State University's percussion ensemble in 1994.

The ensemble featured four percussionists on marimba and orchestral bells. "Arranging this piece was absolutely the musical highlight of my life," Flygare recalls. "The only difficulty was that I couldn't arrange the entire 16-minute piece because it would have been murder on the performers' hands."

Some may find Flygare's love and appreciation for music surprising. After all, he is profoundly deaf.

Flygare began playing percussion instruments in junior high school after his music appreciation teacher recognized a hidden talent. "I had trained myself, with the help of hearing aids, to recognize sounds, instruments, melodies and rhythms," he explains.

When he enrolled at WSU in 1993, Flygare joined the percussion ensemble, the concert band, and even played in the marching band.

Performing arts professor Don Keipp recalls how easy Flygare was to direct. "I didn't really have to make any adjustments, other than to make sure I always spoke clearly, as he read lips," Keipp says. "He was the one who had already made all of the adjustments."

Flygare, who now teaches American Sign Language at Bonneville High School, says that, emotionally, he is able to "get" music like many other hearing people do. "I'm a walking oxymoron, in that I am a deaf person who still doesn't truly know what music sounds like, but music is extraordinarily important to me. Beautiful voices, strings and French horns are just as touching to me as they might be to others."

WSU freshman Amy Williams, who spoke through Services for Students with Disabilities interpreter Amelia Williams, couldn't agree more. Completely deaf in her right ear and mostly deaf in her left, she, too, hears music with the help of hearing aids.

Williams can't always make out the words to songs, but she can make out the beat. She loves listening to Faith Hill's This Kiss because it's "upbeat and fun," and she loves singing karaoke. "People have asked me how I sing karaoke, and my answer is, 'I just follow my heart.' I've been told that when I sing, I have good speech for a deaf woman, and that makes me feel really good."

Good Vibrations

Like Flygare and Williams, Grammy Award-winning classical percussionist Evelyn Glennie is profoundly deaf. Unlike them, she was born with the ability to hear, but by the time Glennie was 12, she had lost nearly all of her hearing. She had not, however, lost her passion for music.

Rather than relying on her ears to hear—she gave up wearing hearing aids because they made music sound different than she remembered—Glennie learned to feel the vibrations of notes and distinguish between them. In fact, in a 1999 interview with PBS's Jeffrey Brown, she explained that she regularly performs barefoot to better "feel" the vibrations through the floor and in her own body.

Glennie believes that someone who is totally deaf can still hear/feel sounds. She explains her theory further in the following excerpt from her celebrated "Hearing Essay":

"If you are standing by the road and a large truck goes by, do you hear or feel the vibration? The answer is both. With very low frequency vibration the ear starts becoming inefficient and the rest of the body's sense of touch starts to take over. For some reason we tend to make a distinction between hearing a sound and feeling a vibration, in reality they are the same thing."

For many deaf people, like Flygare and Williams, the concept of "feeling the music" takes on additional meaning. In describing how important music is in her life, Williams explains: "Music touches people's souls. I don't want to miss out on that."

To continue reading Glennie's essay or to hear samples of her music, visit evelyn.co.uk.

Amy Hendricks, University Communications
The Beat Goes On
Protest Music Finds a Niche in Turbulent Times

As the present now will later be past
The order is rapidly fadin'.
And the first one now will later be last
For the times they are a-changin'.

- Bob Dylan, 1963

In a span of 20 months in the early 1960s, Bob Dylan wrote most of the protest songs that would continue to define his reputation and career during the following decades. Even though Dylan later moved away from politics, and was just one of many musicians who over the years have used their talent to promote social change, that body of work continues to define his career and the concept of “protest music” in the U.S.

“He was an influential voice during a time when major shifts were happening,” says Carl Porter, executive director of WSU’s Academic Support Services and Programs. Porter and associate professor of philosophy Peter Verneze edited the 2005 book Bob Dylan and Philosophy (Popular Culture and Philosophy), and Porter co-teaches a WSU Honors course titled “The Beat Goes On: The History, Literature and Culture of Mid-Century America” with professor and university archivist John Sillito.

The course focuses on the 1960s and ’70s in the U.S., and includes a class trip to San Francisco so students can see where some of the events they study actually happened.

Of course, Porter says, protest music existed long before Dylan arrived on the scene. “Throughout American history—from the Revolution, through the days of slavery, through wars, leading up to Dylan and going forward from there—music has always been part of protest.”

“And while we focus on this country, it is something that exists worldwide,” he says. “It makes sense: As humans, we crave a beat. If you have a message, instead of just lecturing, putting that message to music is more effective.”

Punk, Rap and Beyond

While the ’60s and ’70s may have spawned some of the most recognized protest musicians in American history, such as Pete Seeger, Joan Baez and Marvin Gaye, those decades were not the end of the idea.

Ben Jennings, an Ogden musician who has been playing “everything but classical” with local bands for 20 years, came of age musically during the heyday of punk music.

“There was a message in punk. The subculture was speaking out,” Jennings says, citing bands like NOFX and the Dead Kennedys.

“They were less concerned with their musical skill than with what they had to say.”

“There was a reason for playing loud and screaming. And they weren’t just protesting politics; they were protesting racism, discussing social issues, and telling people to think for themselves. ‘Don’t let society tell you what you think. That was the message.’

And, music with a message continues today, Jennings says. He lists hip-hop artists Mos Def and Kanye West as examples, and the record label Alternative Tentacles, founded by former Dead Kennedys lead singer Jello Biafra, as a source for socially conscious artists and recordings.

Even the musical stars now being produced by television contests may become political, Jennings says. “Musicians tend to be free thinkers. Once they’re established, they have more freedom to express themselves; they can work their way through the American Idol system, but once they have the power to make their views heard, they will.”

And music will continue to be a powerful tool for those artists with a message. “Sound waves are out there for everyone to hear,” Jennings says. “They’re not hidden in a book in a library. As simple as it is for a tune to get stuck in your head, an idea can get stuck in your head.”

Jennifer Phillion, University Communications