

Abstract

Staying within the culture from without: Arranging African Music for Bands

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African folk music is always rich in its idioms and musical element. Band directors can learn and bring these African aesthetics to non-African band performers. While it is easy to borrow from other cultures and bring the musical nuances into the familiar musical space, the challenge normally lies in staying within the cultural elements as an outsider. This is the case when Western band teachers, trained in European motifs, attempt ethnological arrangements. African music has been known for millennia to be accompanied by dances that reflect the socio-cultural milieu. For example, during the pre-colonial Africa, children learned to count by sitting in lines and counting on their fingers and toes while singing songs. They played games based on pentatonic scales with unending rhythmic and melodic ostinatos. As they counted they also retold stories that would be a source of informal education related to respect, obedience, and truancy. Representing these nuances in the band literature of African music can be daunting. Upon taking on the endeavor to work on a proposed work *Anthology of African Band Music* we first did a study of the African music we selected. A thorough cultural understanding was necessary to render the music in a different medium while trying to maintain the cultural authenticity as much as was practically and aesthetically possible. In this interactive presentation, we intend to share our technique, the way we scored and arrangement and how we balanced the delicate area of staying within pre-colonial Africa motifs from the outside.

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