

Global Perspectives 7

Global Music

We have seen in Global Perspectives 2 (page 81) that European efforts to colonize foreign lands never resulted in the simple substitution of European cultures for native ones, but rather in new, complex mixed cultures. Such is the way of all meetings of distinct cultures and distinct musics.

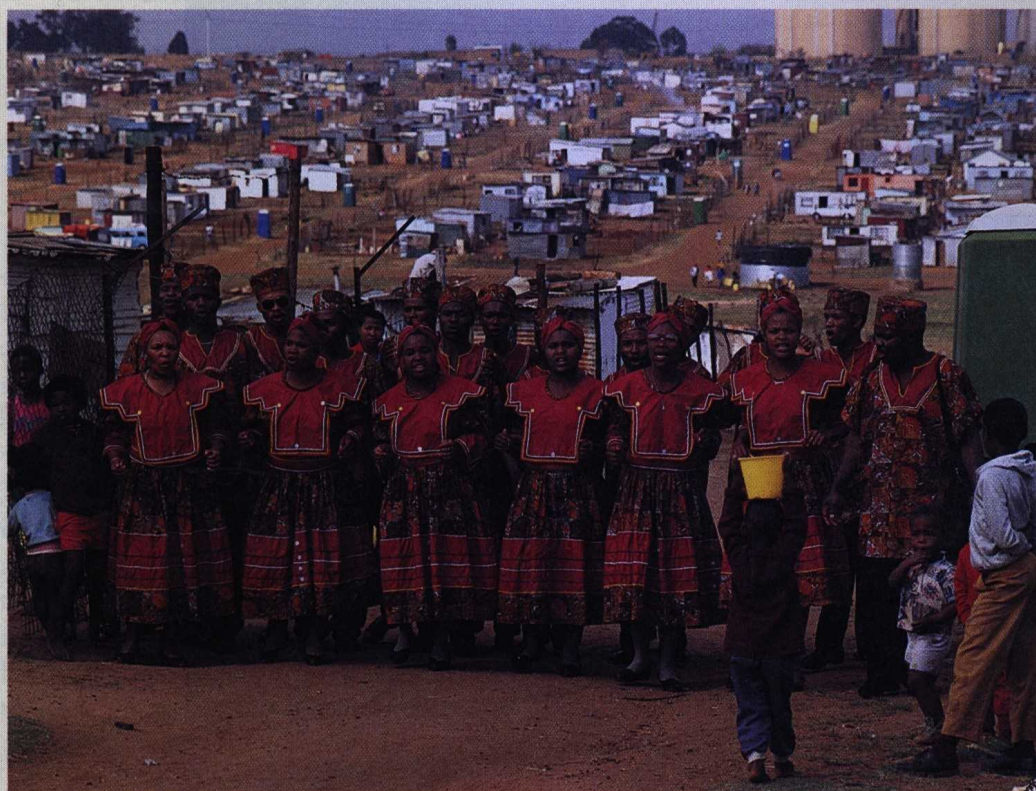
But a funny thing happened to mixed musical cultures on their way through the twentieth century: recorded sound. Around the globe, the impact on music of technologies that store and play back sound has been revolutionary. Combined with radio and TV broadcasts, and with the modern ease of travel and commerce, it has given musicians and listeners from all parts of the world access to a much wider variety of music than ever before.

Complexities of Globalism

Two opposing tendencies have arisen from this situation. The first works toward the worldwide *homogenization* of musics. Huge stretches of the sonic landscape

are now inhabited by styles that are similar in certain basic features: electrified instruments, especially guitars; strong percussive presence; extensive syncopation; and relatively brief song-form presentation.

These features spread out from the American and especially African American pop-music revolution that occurred in the decades after World War II. Since the 1960s the dispersion of styles such as rhythm and blues, rock, soul, and rap has been powerful. Musical currents have, to be sure, flowed in both directions. *Reggae*, to take one example, was formed in the 1960s from a merger of native Jamaican styles with American rhythm and blues and soul, but by the late 1970s it had crossed back over to exert a great influence on American rock itself. The global dispersion has been enabled by a recording industry that has grown increasingly rich, increasingly multinational, and increasingly influential in determining musical tastes. It is enough to make one observer of these developments speak—with some worry—of a “universal pop aesthetic.”

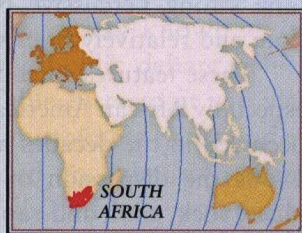


A community choir sings in front of stark Soweto Township, Johannesburg, South Africa, 1995.

There is another tendency, however, opposing this move toward sameness, a move to *localize* music making. People never simply take on foreign things without in some way making them their own. Even as musicians around the world have felt the influence of American pop styles, they have combined these styles in their local musics to forge new, distinct styles. Reggae is one example of this process.

South African Choral Song: *Isicathamiya*

A South African musical tradition with a difficult name, *isicathamiya* (ees-ee-zah-tah-mée-ah), provides an example reaching back many decades of this mix of local and global ingredients. It has become familiar to listeners worldwide through the recordings of the singing group Ladysmith Black Mambazo. *Isicathamiya* is an all-male, *a cappella* song style that arose among an impoverished class of black, mostly Zulu-speaking migrant laborers. A chief diversion in the laborers' camps



were Saturday-night contests among singing groups, and for the musical styles the performers looked back to earlier, complex international roots.

Standing behind *isicathamiya* are traditions of choral polyphony native to the Zulus and other groups of the region. In the nineteenth century, these traditions merged readily with the four-part harmony of Christian hymn-singing brought to the area by European and American missionaries. Then another ingredient was added to the mix: American vaudeville or minstrel shows, with their syncopated, ragtime songs (see page 383 and the picture on page 396). An enormously influential African American minstrel—not a white minstrel in blackface—named Orpheus McAdoo toured South Africa extensively in the 1890s, to the great acclaim of black audiences.

By the 1930s, these musical influences were put together by the first recording stars of the local Zulu singing scene, Solomon Linda and the Evening Birds. Their greatest hit, “Mbube” or “Lion,” known to most of us today as “The Lion Sleeps Tonight,” was originally recorded about 1939. Then it was re-recorded by pop singers and became a top-40 hit in the 1960s. Most recently it was featured in Disney’s film and musical *The Lion King*.



Isicathamiya praktisa: a rehearsal at the Beatrice St. YMCA, Durban, South Africa, 1996

“Anoku Gonda”

Solomon Linda’s song “Anoku Gonda” (You Must Understand This), from the same period as “Mbube,” combines two distinct styles that are still heard today in isicathamiya. The first is a richly harmonized, homophonic style that recites the text freely and shows no clear or consistent sense of meter—*choral declamation*, we can call it. We hear two phrases of choral declamation, stated and repeated in the pattern **a a b b a a**. Notable here, and frequent in isicathamiya, is the slide in all voices from high to lower pitches.

Then, after about a minute, the music takes on a clear meter. This is the second style common in isicathamiya. It is still organized in repeating phrases, but now the texture departs from the simple homophony of the recitational opening section. It uses call-and-response techniques (see page 381), pitting Linda against the rest of the group at first; later the basses in the chorus sing against the group as a whole. The call-and-response phrases alternate with a falling cadential phrase sung by the whole chorus.



LISTEN



“Anoku Gonda”

0:00	Unmetered choral declamation
0:00	a
0:13	a
0:25	b
0:30	b
0:35	a
0:47	a
0:57	Metrical call and response: Solomon Linda against the full chorus
1:27	Metrical call and response: Basses against the full chorus

6 Conclusion

A few thoughts in conclusion: not so much a conclusion to this chapter, but rather to our total effort in this book as a whole.

In the introduction to Unit I, on page 3, we observed that our basic goal would be to listen better, in order to better understand and appreciate music. Some musical terminology has been introduced that should help clarify listening, and we have led a guided tour through the history of Western music, from Hildegard of Bingen in her convent to Kaija Saariaho in her recording studio, by way of Bach, Mozart, Beethoven, Wagner, and Stravinsky. There have been a number of detours beyond Europe, and a fairly long side trip to popular music—but on all routes, the important thing we’ve done is *listen*: listen with care to numerous individual pieces of music.

Surveys show that many students hang on to the CD sets that come with *Listen*, even while they dispose of the book itself. Anyone who keeps the CDs or downloads certain tracks, we reason, expects or half expects to play them again sometime, and so long as that happens we are more than happy to see the book—which was only there to introduce, explain, and contextualize the music—fall away. Teachers are great hoppers. We hope, though we’ll never know, that sometime in the future readers will find themselves listening again to some of the music they were introduced to by *Listen*.

“[Music] takes us out of the actual and whispers to us dim secrets that startle our wonder as to who we are, and for what, whence and whereto.”

Ralph Waldo Emerson, 1838