

# MICHIGAN STATE UNIVERSITY

The African e-Journals Project has digitized full text of articles of eleven social science and humanities journals. This item is from the digital archive maintained by Michigan State University Library. Find more at:

<http://digital.lib.msu.edu/projects/africanjournals/>

Available through a partnership with



*Scroll down to read the article.*

## MUSIC AND RITUAL IN SANDILE NDLOVU'S FAITH MISSION

YOLISA NOMPULA

*Music Department, University of Transkei*

### Abstract

*This article analyses the musical forms and structure of songs and accompanying dance in a healing church in Natal Province of South Africa. The article traces both Western and Nguni influences in such ritual performance. There are also innovations by leaders, sometimes coming from revelations in dreams. The article also considers the function of music in the rituals, relating it to the enhanced experiences and perceptions of devotees. The article concludes that there is a marked continuity with traditional religious practice.*

### INTRODUCTION

IN THIS ARTICLE I have used the term 'Nguni' and 'African' in a fairly flexible manner, for there are layers of meaning attached to these words. In this article the words are used to describe 'traditional' ways as they have been explained to me by the group where I conducted my research, and from my own Nguni experience. I am not presuming to speak for all groups and individuals who identify themselves by these terms.

The article is based on the fieldwork conducted between January 1990 and September 1991. The research was on a religious group under Sandile Ndlovu's Faith Mission (SNFM). Sandile Ndlovu is a faith healer and prophet often called *Umthandazi*, a Zulu/Xhosa word meaning 'the one who prays for others'. Sandile's services are conducted at his home kwaNodalana location which is near Ezingolweni, close to Port Shepstone in Natal. I was initially introduced to this group by a friend.

I was particularly interested in the incorporation into the rituals of this church of elements from traditional practices and music of diviners. SNFM is one of the independent churches characterised by prophecy worship and healing that emerged in Southern Africa as an indigenous response to shortcomings in the manner in which Christianity was introduced to, and spread amongst, Africans by some of the European Christian missionaries. The leader of SNFM, Sandile Ndlovu, has about four prophetesses who assist in his rituals of prophecy, worship and healing, for example during the blessing of the water. Services involving prophecy, worship and healing are held daily except on Thursdays and Sundays. The prophecy and healing services are held in one of the huts in Sandile's homestead. There are two healing services a day which involve

music and dance by prophets and Sandile's followers. The first service is from five in the morning to about 11:30 and the second service is from 12 noon to about four in the afternoon. During my fieldwork, I visited this religious group almost every weekend and attended their services. To ensure the success of the project, I had strictly to adhere to all the regulations and customs of the group. For example, women wearing trousers, having more than one boyfriend, falling in love with a married person are not allowed to attend the prophecy and healing service. Members of the congregation first cleanse themselves by confessing to any of the available prophets before they are allowed to attend the service.

In the service, following Nguni practice, the men occupy the right hand side of the hut and the women occupy the left. Sandile stands next to the door on the right hand side of the hut. The water containers which people have brought for blessing are placed at the centre of the hut around the hearth which, according to traditional diviners, is viewed as a venerated place for ancestors (see also Berglund, 1976, 102). According to the prophets this kind of arrangement allows for the worship to carry its full meaning and dignity.

In this article, I focus on the analysis of musical form and structure in the songs of the ritual of the SNFM, and the role of the music during the blessing of the water, which seems to be the most elaborate ritual event of the whole service. During this event the prophetesses occupy the *iziko* (hearth) which is surrounded by the water containers. The Sunday School children and devotees occupy the front rows around the water containers.

### ANALYSIS OF THE MUSIC

In Sandile's Faith Mission no hymn books are used. Most songs are introduced by, and learnt from, the song leader, Mrs S. Madlala. There is a belief that some of the songs are not composed in the ordinary sense, but that they are received from the non-human world. They are thought to have a supernatural origin, being received through dreams or visions, as Schipkowsky (1977, 422) notes about some of the independent churches. This belief can also be traced to Zulu tradition. In 1991, I interviewed Ms S., the *isangoma sabalozi* of Natal, who felt that her name must not be mentioned. According to her, 'Some of the songs and dances of divination are learnt from dreams and visions.' Ms S. Madlala, the song leader, presented a similar view in an interview in May 1991. She said that some of the songs they sing are brought to her through visions or in a dream known as *isibonakaliso*. Thereafter, she introduces these songs into the service and they are learnt orally. Devotees and members of the congregation quickly learn the melody, and then sing it in parts. The leader and congregation are always at liberty to improvise in performance.

### **Musical structure**

The whole performance in a service depends entirely on the song leader. All the songs are basically strophic, and each strophe is repeated with variations, according to the abilities of the song leader. In the strophe, there are two complementary phrases, that is, solo with congregational response. These phrases may overlap — a striking feature of Nguni traditional songs (see transcription examples, numbers 3, 4 and 5). Rycroft (1967, 101) describes this phenomenon as the 'principle of non-simultaneous entry'. The song leader's phrase re-enters on the last crochet of the responsorial phrase in bar 1. Variation may occur on the song leader's part, depending on the creativity of the leader. The responsorial phrase in this section maintains a constant ostinato. The end of the song is signalled by the song leader or a prophet raising his or her hand.

I should point out that although the call part of the song leader is usually performed as a solo part, in SNFM, this call is often a group call, with members of the congregation joining in her singing either in octaves or parts. Thus, the call and response is not always strictly identified as a solo versus group performance.

### **Harmony**

Some of the songs of the well-known compositions have been notified. For example, *Wakrazuluwa* (example 4) and *Ziyenzekizimanga* (example 1), can be sung in various tempos. They are sometimes sung slowly, without clapping, although they are usually sung faster and with hand-clapping. The entire song texture is homophonic, with the basic chord progression being HV-V-I, a common feature of Western Christian hymns.

I should point out here that the harmonies I have transcribed are those which I have heard, having been trained in a Western musical idiom. Such a training has also had an impact upon the harmonies produced by the SNFM Gospel group, with which I always emphasised Western type chords during our rehearsals. Furthermore, since many of the members of SNFM have belonged to other European controlled churches with European hymnody, they bring to the service a background of Western musical influence. Thus, in my transcriptions I have reduced the musical texture to four parts, even though at times there may have seemed to be more parts.

The singers themselves tend to harmonise a melody in predominantly thirds, fourths, and octaves — harmonies which are also common to Nguni bow music (Rycroft, 1980, 197-202). Such harmonies are believed by Nguni traditionalists to be deeply religious, and result in the invocation of the spirit. These harmonised songs, sung in a slow tempo, are always performed as an introduction to the time of 'free prayer', as well as during the act of 'screening' the congregation, where Sandile, the prophet, checks if there are any remaining sinners using his screening instrument.

There is a special introductory song called 'Hallelujah', which is performed before the blessing of the water (see example 2). This is the only song sung at this time. It is always sung at a slow tempo, with prominent harmonisation, and is believed to invoke the Holy Spirit or *umoya*. Participants' eyes are closed as they sing the 'Hallelujah' and they hold their hands above their heads.

*Musical Example 1*  
"ZIYENZEK' IZIMANGA"

The musical score is presented in two systems, each with four staves. The top staff of each system is the vocal line, the second and third staves are piano accompaniment, and the bottom staff is for claps. The key signature has one sharp (F#) and the time signature is 4/4. The tempo is marked 'Ad lib'.

**System 1:**

- Vocal line: *z'-ye-nze-k'i ma-nga* (twice)
- Piano accompaniment: *zi - ye - nze - ki zi-man'* and *ku - yo-le vangel'*
- Claps: A steady rhythmic pattern of quarter notes.

**System 2:**

- Vocal line: *z' - ye - nze - k'i ma - nga* (twice)
- Piano accompaniment: *ze - nze - ki - zi mang'* and *ku - yo - le - va - ngeli*
- Claps: A steady rhythmic pattern of quarter notes.

### Pitch

Pitch fluctuates in performance, through the course of a song, usually with an overall rise in pitch content by about a semi-tone. Whilst this is not a conscious rise, it is fairly characteristic of Nguni traditional musical performance. The concept of key is not prevalent in Nguni music.

Musical Example 2  
"HALLELUJAH"

The musical score is presented in two systems, each with a vocal line and a bass line. The key signature has one sharp (F#) and the time signature is 4/4. The first system contains two parts: Part 1 and Part 2. Part 1 lyrics are: 1. Ha lle lu - ya (bo) Ha - lle - . Part 2 lyrics are: 2. No no no no No no. The second system continues the melody with lyrics: lu - ya Ha - lle - lu - ya no no No no No no.

### Rhythm

The only percussion used in song performance is hand-clapping, beating on Bibles and small pads. Most songs start at a moderate tempo, without any rhythmic accompaniment. When the clapping does begin, it usually creates a rhythmic pattern with two claps per beat, with a stress on the first clap. Similarly, in the music of diviners, each whole beat is marked by a single drum beat. Whilst this is also very common in Nguni traditional music, the emphasis of the first clap in SNFM's music to coincide with the first part of the beat, suggests one form of link between the music of SNFM and the diviners. The rhythm of the dance movements is performed by alternately lifting the feet up and releasing them down. The movement of each foot coincides with the beat of the song. One foot comes down on the first accented clap, while the other moves up.

### Dance

The rhythmic pattern in the music performance invites the body to dance. Dancing is known as *ukugida* in Sandile's church. Doke *et al* (1990) define *-gida* as 'dance for pastime or enjoyment; generally of women and children, dance at a wedding'. The same dictionary states that '*-gida* applies more to the upper limbs as opposed to *-sina* which applies to vigorous dancing with foot movement'. The participants of Sandile Ndlovu's service mostly dance in place. The only exception to this is the Sunday School children's

Musical Example 3  
"UNGIKHUMBULE"

The musical score is presented in three systems, each with a vocal line (treble clef) and a piano accompaniment (treble and bass clefs). The key signature has one sharp (F#) and the time signature is 3/4.

**System 1:** The vocal line begins with "Nko-si ya-mi" and continues with "u - ngi - khu mbul'". The piano accompaniment provides harmonic support with chords and a steady bass line.

**System 2:** The vocal line continues with "Nko-si ya-mi" and "yami u - ngi - khu mbu - le Nko - si yami". The piano accompaniment continues with similar harmonic patterns.

**System 3:** The vocal line concludes with "u - ngi khu mbul'" and "Nko - si ya - mi". The piano accompaniment ends with a final chord. Below the piano part, the chord progression is indicated as V7, Ic, V, I.

or prophets' line dance performed when exorcising evil before the blessing of the water. So the dance in SNFM can be construed as being 'movements of the upper limbs'. This may point to the reason why the term *ukugida* rather than *ukusina* is used to designate dance or movement in this context.

The movements of *ukugida* in Sandile's ritual performance are not regimented or rehearsed as they are in one of the other large independent church movements, that of *ibandla lamaNazaretha*, who are the followers

Musical Example 4  
"WAKRAZULWA"

The musical score is written in 3/4 time with a key signature of one sharp (F#). It consists of two systems of music. The first system has three staves: a vocal line, a piano accompaniment line, and a claps line. The vocal line features two parts: '1. Wa - kra - zu - lwa' and '4. A - ndi - na - nto'. The piano accompaniment includes a melodic line and a bass line with a 'sim' (sostenuto) marking. The claps line shows a rhythmic pattern of eighth notes. The second system also has three staves, with the vocal line continuing the '4. A - ndi - na - nto' part and adding 'wa - la - pha - ka - de' and 'ze - ka nye - Nko si'. The piano accompaniment and claps line continue the rhythmic accompaniment.

of Shembe. They rehearse their dances on special Sundays, and have special hymns which accompany the dance (B. Mthethwa, personal communication). There does, however, seem to be some consensus within Sandile's church, as to the appropriate kinds of movement for *ukugida*. Within this consensus, there is some freedom to move in dance as an individual member wishes.

Thus, performers may give physical expression through simultaneous actions in the form of steps or gestures. Sometimes this dance is performed with the eyes closed. All dancing is accompanied by cyclical and repetitious music, the dance becoming a physical interpretation of the music itself. It is believed that through this repetition in dance a new level of





Talking about dance of the diviners, Berglund (1976, 151) says that if people other than the diviners perform the dance, it (the dancing) will incur mental and physical ailments. This may have a parallel in prophets' dance at SNFM, which may not be performed by anyone other than the prophets.

### Text

Some of the song texts are English hymn texts translated into Zulu or Xhosa. For example *Wakrazulwa ngenxa yami* is a Xhosa translation from the English hymn text 'Rock of Ages' by Johann Cruger (b. 1598, d. 1662), which draws on the Biblical reference of Matthew 27, 33-38. The tune *Wakrazulwa* is not the same as that of the English 'Rock of Ages'. A second hymn *Ungikhumbule*, is an extract from the Biblical reference in Luke 23, 42.

### Text

*Ungikhumbule Nkosi yami*

### Translation

Remember me, my Lord

A third hymn text, entitled *Uluthando* (musical example 5) is a fragment drawn from a Presbyterian hymn by Hugh Wilson (b. 1766, d. 1824 — Mrs Dlala, personal communication). The song simply repeats the word *uluthando*, which means 'love'. The song leader may change the phrase to a series of vocables, such as *maye-maye*. It is worth mentioning here that the *maye-maye* is a commonly occurring non-lexical series of syllables in traditional Zulu music. This shift from words to vocables happens at the moments when the impact of the musical sound becomes ritually meaningful to the participants. In this regard, Rycroft (1958, 225) argues:

there are . . . considerable grounds for suspecting that in earlier times considerable emotional content may have been vested in these particular sounds (i.e. vocables), especially in the context of religious or ritual function.

The example *Ngiphuzis'amanzi* (musical example 6) also draws on the Biblical reference John 4, 7, 'Jesus saith unto her: Give me water to drink.' The text is as follows:

### Text

Section A: Call Phrase

*Wath'u Jesu:*

*Ngiphuzis'amanzi*

Response Phrase

*Awek'emthonjeni*

### Translation

Jesus said:

Give me water to drink

There is no water

## Section B: Call Phrase

*Awek'awekho*

No water, no water

## Response Phrase

*Awek'emthonjeni*

There is no water

*Musical Example 6*  
 "NGIPHUZIS' AMANZI"

Wath'u Je-su ngi-phu-zi s'a- ma nzi a - wek'- em tho - njeni

Call  
a - wek' - a - we - kho

Response  
a wek' - a -

Call  
a - wek' - a - we - kho

Response  
we - kho a - wek' - em - tho - njeni a -

## THE ROLE OF MUSIC IN SANDILE NDLOVU'S FAITH MISSION

When the purification of the congregation is completed, the music gains momentum. The rhythm and singing proceed more quickly driven by the intensity of hand-clapping. This rhythmic music is believed to elevate prophets and devotees to a new spiritual level. They move and dance to this music inside the church. The prophetesses remarked that they do not pay much attention to the singing at this stage. Instead, they experience an uplifting by the music to a 'different world' while in this world: in this different world, they see members of the congregation who are unfit for worship as having a dark shade, *'banethunzi elimnyama'*. These people are then given the opportunity to leave the service and cleanse themselves by

confessing to the prophets. Individual cleansing by confession seems to be vital to the smooth flowing of the healing and blessing of the water.

This whole process is to maintain the desired state of mind for both the prophets and the Sunday School children, while they await the spirit which enables the prophets to bless the water and both groups to exorcise evil. The prophets often demand that the congregation create a 'hot' rhythmic pattern through their hand-clapping. This was confirmed by Mr Sithole in his testimony when he said, 'What I noticed is that in the service, clapping and singing involving the mind is of the essence.'

In an interview I had with Sandile Ndlovu, he said '*umculo uphamba umhilo*', meaning 'the music ignites the fire'. He added that it is a flash of lightning that gives 'heat' to the music in the service. The prophets 'read' the reflections in the water provided by the sufferers, through the aid of the Holy Spirit, which comes when the 'fire' has been 'ignited' and the people's minds and hearts are ready.

In interviewing the prophets about the music, why it is so enjoyed and provides such sustenance, I discovered that though the prophets do not seem to dance when they bless the water, their minds and inner-most feelings are involved in the music and 'dance'. Their interpretation of the music is expressed in their minds. When everybody is involved in the ritual process, singing and dancing with a common spiritual goal, a spiritual unity in the service is achieved.

Through participation by clapping, singing and dancing, one's health can be restored. Mrs E. Cele confirmed this when she said in the service, 'If you sing and clap, you'll get your reply. If you keep quiet, your problems will not be solved.'

Once the prophets have acquired the desired state of mind through the repetition of music and dance, the lead prophet bows down to bless the water followed by all the other prophets. According to the prophets, during this process diagnosis of the sick and prescriptions are reflected in their water.

From the musical performance, one can determine the stage of the ritual performance in Sandile's mission. Specific songs, types of song, or specific ways of singing, mark the worshipper's performance. For example, during the blessing of the water, rhythm is the most predominant musical feature. Sometimes one can hardly discern the melodic line and text of the song. If the rhythm and clapping slow down too much, the song may be changed for another more appropriate one.

#### CONCLUSION

SNFM shows a marked continuity with indigenous religious practices. The conceptualisation of this church is significant in Nguni philosophy. For

example, it has introduced rituals which strongly correspond to traditional ritual ways.

In the ritual itself, I discovered that it is highly syncretic, incorporating elements of Western Christian practice as well as some traditional Nguni practices. In addition, Sandile has included his own innovations. Although in their music Western times and harmonies are important, there is plenty of scope for improvisation and traditional call-and-response format. The music is repetitious and cyclical, and the rhythmic patterns of the music invite the body to dance in a manner consistent with Nguni traditions. It has been shown that in both the practices of divination and those of Sandile's mission, dance is important. It takes the performer to another world — the world of the spirit.

The process of music-making defines the success of the ritual performance. It is therefore the act of worshipping through the vehicle of one's music and his or her cultural ways that links an individual to God. Dwane (1989, 32) remarks that African culture is as valuable as any other human culture and cannot be rejected. He writes:

God, in Christ tells us that we need not be ashamed of ourselves, our blackness or models of thinking, our norms and values and our traditional culture because we are the work of His hands.

### References

- BERGLUND, A. (1976) *Zulu Thought-Patterns and Symbolism* (Cape Town, David Phillip).
- BIKO, S. (1974) 'Quest for a true humanity' in B. Moore (ed.), *The Challenge of Black Theology in South Africa* (London, Hurst).
- BLACKING, J. (1969) 'The value of music in human experience', *Yearbook of the International Folk Music Council*, 1, 33-71.
- DOKE, C. M. et al (1990) *English-Zulu, Zulu-English Dictionary* (Johannesburg, University of Witwatersrand Press).
- DWANE, S. (1989) *Issues in South African Theological Debate* (Johannesburg, Stottaville Publishers).
- MTHETHWA, B. N. (1984) 'Music and Ritual with Reference to Some African-Guided Christian Churches in Africa' (Belfast, Masters thesis, Queens University).
- RYCROFT, D. (1980) 'Nguni music', in S. Sadle (ed.), *The New Grove Dictionary of Music and Musicians* (London, Macmillan), 13, 197-202.