OMUSANGO gw’ABALERE

“The Flute Player’s Affair”

By

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MILTON WABYONA

Submitted to the graduate degree program in Music Composition and the Graduate Faculty of the University of Kansas in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree Master of Music in composition.

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OMUSANGO gw’ABALERÉ
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Abstract

_Omusango gw’Abalere_, a three-movement piece is a composition based on Ugandan folk music from two ethnic cultures— the Baganda (Central) and Acholi (Northern). The piece explores how music was used to address controversy in the traditional Ugandan society. Using tuneful melodies with usually syncopated and at times confusing rhythms, Ugandans were able to communicate messages that were rather controversial for ordinary speech.

The first movement is based on a Kiganda tune _Omusango gw’Abalere_ which is a complaint by a royal court musician who feels confused and troubled by a situation in the royal courts and demands to be returned to his birthplace.\(^1\) The second movement _Kagutema_ (also from Buganda), is an acknowledgement to an innovative man who is praised for manufacturing a traditional alcoholic brew from bananas. The people praise him and ask he be given “one more for the road” for his great discovery. This movement is dedicated to Prof. George W. Kakoma, the composer of the Ugandan National anthem. The third movement, _Labal ping_, focuses on a wife who turned into a spoiler causing difficulties in the extended family relations. There is expression of regrets by her husband, which brings in the bigger family to offer counseling. This story comes from Northern Uganda among the Acholi.

One prominent element of Ugandan folk music is rhythm. Accented notes on unusually stressed beats are common. Polyrhythms and syncopated rhythms that, at times, obscure the sense of the downbeat are a major characteristic of Ugandan folk music. One example is the fluid movement of individual players back and forth between 6/8 and 3/4 meters. The “african hemiola” is often times the resultant effect and is frequently evident in my work. This creates a challenge for rhythmic notation since on many occasions more than one meter is audible at a time.

This piece is influenced by the several social, economic and political challenges in Uganda today. There is little sense of mutual responsibility for mistakes committed, which has often led to frustration in society.

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Instrumentation

2 Flutes, Piccolo, 2 Oboes, English horn, 2 Clarinets in B flat, Bass Clarinet,
2 Bassoons, Contrabassoon

4 Horns in F, 3 Trumpets in B flat, 2 Tenor Trombones
Bass Trombone, Tuba

3 Namunjoloba (Medium toms), 2 Nyik bull (Bangos), Min bull (Medium tom)
Embuutu (Timpani), Empuunyi (Timpani), 2 Engalabi (Djembe), Ensaasi (maracas),
Cymbals, Gwata (calabash), Wood blocks

Performance notes

This piece is written for a wind ensemble with special consideration for the Police and Military Bands of Uganda. The percussion section includes some Ugandan traditional instruments whose modern substitutes are suggested in parenthesis. Although some of the instruments have been noted on a pitched staff lines, they do not represent exact pitches but rather estimates. Important to note are the (drums) Embuutu and Empuunyi that have their substitutes as Timpani. Embuutu, which is the highest pitched drum in the set, plays the lead role while Empuunyi is primarily used to stress the strong beats. These drums are tuned to an interval of approximately a major third between them.

Percussion notated with a (+) sign are to be muted. The three pitches produced on Engalabi (Djembe) are; open slap - for notes written above the line; closed slap - for notes on the line, and bass - for notes written below the line.

Notating 3/4 rhythms in 6/8 can look awkward and visa versa. In most cases I have chosen 6/8 to be the primary meter (beaming three eight-notes to the beat). When a player moves to 3/4 momentarily I keep the 6/8-meter but use the appropriate 3/4 rhythmic subdivision (beaming two eighth-notes to the beat).
Labal ping
"The Spoiler"

Moderately fast (like a friendly warning) \( \frac{d}{2} = 143 \)

Milton Wabyona