

Music of Africa

History and Regions of Africa

- 20% of Earth's landmass
- Roughly 934 million people

North Africa & the Sahara Desert

- Muslim and Arabic influence

Savannah

- Indigenous culture and some Arabic influence
- Sharing of culture

Rainforest Region

- Little influence from outsiders
- Musically diverse

Congo Basin

- Stylistically simple

East and South Africa

- Cattle area
- Simple music
- Drum of little importance
- Xylophones, harps, lyres

Madagascar

- Southeast Asian influence
- French and Indian influence

Musical Traditions

Learned via oral tradition to students deemed worthy by ancestry

- Traditional music - characteristics of African music prior to European countries, most widespread during 19th century

- Professional musicians called griots played important roles as historians in kingdoms developed in Saharan West Africa

Musical Styles

Highlife

- E.T. Mensah
- Originated in Ghana
- spread from Ghana to English speaking countries
- Jazzy horns, guitars
Zouglou
- Ivory Coast
- Rooted in urban and youth culture
- Performed in social get togethers
Reggae
- Took root after Bob Marley's concert in support of Zimbabwean independence in Harare in 1980
- Mainly South Africa, the Ivory Coast, and Nigeria
Moroccan
- Lama Baba: traditional Arab-Andalusian
- Arab lute (oud)
- Zither (qanun)
East Africa
- Hocket
 - Individual notes sung by different musicians

Instruments

Early

- Human voice, drums, rattles, shakers, musical bow
- Rock engraving of eight string harp found in 18th century BCE south of the Sahara

Modern

- Idiophones: clap-sticks, bells, rattles, struck/shaken gourds, stamping tubes, xylophones, mbiras (thumb pianos, often placed inside a Deze which is a gourd resonator, played by the Shona of Zimbabwe)
 - Produce sounds by vibrating themselves
- Membranophone: various drums
 - Vibrating membrane
 - Some beaten by hand, some beaten by stick or rubbed

- Single or double headed
- Ngoma kettledrums of South Africa
- West African hourglass pressure drum
- Bompil clay pot drums
- Chordophones: musical bow, lute, lyre, harp, zither
 - Vibrating strings that are plucked or struck
- Aerophones: flute, whistle, oboe, trumpet
 - Vibrating columns of air
- Djembe: drum of the Mandinka people of Guinea, dates back to Mali Empire of 12th century
- Very popular drum worldwide

Cultural Elements

- Music and dance are inseparable
- Ancestor reverence; specialists recounting stories of powerful families and important rulers
- Talking drums (pitch changes by squeezing drum) has a social role

Qualities

- Repetition
- Chorus, some solo
- Participation: call-and-response, overlapping, parallel singing
- Rhythm: well-blended, maintained, polyrhythm, polymetric
- Accompanied by body movement such as hand-clapping, dance, and work
- Forceful;
- Little ornamentation
- Pentatonic scales, some hexatonic
- Aesthetic includes buzzing and rattling
- Subject include animal stories, love, dance, relationships
- Songs integrated into storytelling

Role of Dance in Music and Culture

- Dances serve ritual purposes that mark life stages (initiation rites, weddings, funerals, ancestral ceremonies) or trance states
- Dances are social with only veiled ritual purpose, if any

Rhythmic Aspects of the Music

- Always at least two rhythms

- 3:2 relationship is important
- Cross rhythms (conflicting rhythmic patterns & accents)
- Body percussion is important
- Integrally tied to dance in duple or triple time (4/4 or 12/8)
- Polyphony
 - Composition of multiple simultaneously sounding and rhythmically independent parts
 - An example is the Zulu choral music of South Africa
- Hocketing
 - Sharing rhythmic or melodic lines between two or more players
 - Integration is important
- *"Rhythm is to the African as Harmony is to the European"*

Ostinato

- Repeated short music phrases with accompaniment of melodic-rhythmic patterns
- Ex. call-and-response

Musicians

- Nonprofessional, semiprofessional, professional
- Perpetual give and take between performer and public