



Autoethnographic Memoirs of Rimba Resonance Vibes Ensemble Festival Performances

Wonder Maguraushe

Midlands State University, Zimbabwe

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Abstract

Marimba music performance practice has emerged globally in hundreds of marimba ensembles since the Kwanongoma marimba was designed in Bulawayo in the 1960s. The purpose of the study is to explore, the situation of marimba performance within Zimbabwe from an emic perspective. The country has a fledgling economy which is a push factor leading to the problem of about eighty-five percent of the population intending to relocate to other countries. This has not spared the marimba music industry as numerous marimba builders, performers and tutors have already, or intend to migrate. In this autoethnography I present perspectives on my marimba music performance experiences at local and regional festivals in Zimbabwe and South Africa. I conduct a qualitative autoethnographic exploration of Rimba Resonance Vibes Ensemble's performances, describe the culture of Zimbabwe marimba music performance practices, and reflect on various permutations of the practice in which the art has been kept alive in Zimbabwe in the wake of a brain drain. The findings show multiple challenges that we face as marimba musicians. There is a glaring need for agency and advocacy to sustain the art of marimba music performance by bands based in Zimbabwe.

Introduction

Marimba performances are Zimbabwe's six-decade-old musical, cultural tradition now practised mostly in learning institutions where young musicians are socialised. Knowledge and skills about marimba song performances require the agency to develop in the community, where there is much less activity. There is limited literature on marimba music performance practices within Zimbabwe (Jones 2006, 2012; Matiure 2008; Maguraushe 2018), despite marimba bands in teachers' colleges, polytechnics, universities, and communities. To play the agency role of an applied ethnomusicologist and bridge that gap, I started the Rimba Resonance Vibes (RRV) Ensemble. This endeavour aimed to promote marimba music performance practice in Zimbabwe and explore marimba artists' experiences. I have been following Zimbabwe marimba performances in the United States of America and Europe with a keen eye. The performers abroad include Zimbabweans. Notably, marimba performances at festivals and camps are thriving in Australia, Britain, Denmark, Germany, Norway, Sweden, and the United States of America, where Zimbabwean music festivals are now common



(Matiure, 2008). In Zimbabwe, marimba performances are rare. A few marimba bands exist in Zimbabwe outside those ensembles based at institutions of learning. These ensembles perform by invitation to entertain audiences at social functions such as weddings, graduation ceremonies, and agricultural shows. They also participate in marimba festivals, camps, and community arts centre activities. With the RRV Ensemble, I intended to uncover the local reasons for the scarce marimba activity. I set out to examine the lived experiences in contemporary marimba performance practices in Zimbabwe and explore the challenges and prospects of the musicking of marimba musicians.

Studies on the performance of Zimbabwean marimba music festivals in Africa are scarce. Music scholars seem to have very little interest in what is happening in marimba music performances, even though there are active ensembles. This area still needs to be subjected to further scholarly scrutiny using critical African cultural studies to unpack the underlying facts and realities. As a scholar-musician, I formed the RRV Ensemble in January 2015, intending to fill this niche. I am the director of this ensemble, which aims to engage youths in fruitful musical performances to occupy them and hopefully sway them from criminal activities of the ghetto life. The band aims to market marimba music through performances that have a musical scholarly bearing. The RRV organisation also aims to keep marimba music performance in Zimbabwe alive and vibrant, having realised that most marimba players and bands are bent on making it big in Europe and the United States. Many marimba players have left the country for greener pastures due to the economic crisis Zimbabwe has experienced over the past three decades under the Zimbabwe African National Union-Patriotic Front (ZANU-PF) regime. The band has started serious work in marimba music performance, and we look forward to raising funds to start a marimba construction company in Gweru soon. Currently, the band has no offices or land to run our project. We have since engaged Gweru Town Council on this matter, but nothing tangible has happened.

Against this background of non-documentation and unpopularity locally, this paper aims to play an agency role in conscientising readers about local marimba music performance practice. I begin by presenting the methodology and the band membership. I chronicle the performances in five sections. In the first section, I present the band's winning experiences at the Research and Intellectual Output, Science Education and Technology (RIO-SET) Marimba Music Performance Competition in Bulawayo. The second section details another victory at the Tambarimba Festival in Harare. The last section accounts for our outstanding successes at the International Marimba and Steelpan Festival in 2016 in Boksburg and 2018 in Benoni, South Africa.

I use participant observation in communal musical activities to tap community funds of knowledge (Genzuk 2003). Fieldwork is "knowing people making music" (Titon 1997, p. 91). Autoethnography is research, writing, story, and method that connect the autobiographical and personal to the cultural, social, and political (Ellis 2004, p. xix). According to Ellingson and Ellis (2008), autoethnography displays multiple layers of consciousness, connecting the personal to the cultural. In autoethnographic texts, the workings of the self are expressed emotionally, physically, and cognitively. These texts feature concrete action, emotion, embodiment, and spirituality. This autoethnography explores the marimba music performance practice culture of which I am a part and is integrated with my relational and inward experiences (Ellingson and Ellis 2008). I incorporate the "I" into research and writing, yet I analyse myself as if studying an "other" (Ellis 2004; Goodall 2000). I present emic perspectives of my experiences in the performances and the views collected from interacting with fellow marimba performers. I use autoethnography "...because of the opportunity it provides for writers, artists, performers and others to reflect critically upon their personal and professional creative experiences"



(Pace 2012, p. 02). I find it suitable to my endeavour to describe my experiences with the RRV Ensemble's exploits over the two years because my involvement with the band makes the narrative both autobiographical and ethnographic. I also conducted informal conversational interviews with band members, festival goers, fans, performers, and organisers as I solicited information.

In the first section, I present my motivation and encounter with marimbas. I will provide a conceptual framework, band membership, and a description of the rehearsals. In the main section I record participant observation at four festivals from 2015 to 2018. Autoethnography helps me fulfil my desire as an artist-researcher to uncover, record, interpret and position the processes I use within the practice context from an emic perspective (Stewart 2003). During these festivals, I observed events and noted them in my diary. I recorded the band's performances with a Sony video camera for later review during data collection for my doctoral thesis.

Conceptual framework

Spradley and McCurdy (2000, p. 411) comment as follows: "Applied ethnomusicology is the approach guided by principles of social responsibility, which extends the usual academic goal of broadening and deepening knowledge and understanding toward solving concrete problems and toward working both inside and beyond typical academic contexts." Harrison (2012) argues that epistemic communities can unite groups of applied ethnomusicologists and applied ethnomusicologists with communities. She proposes such epistemic communities to enhance the coordination of scholars' efforts and to increase critical understanding of applications of ethnomusicology. Ethnomusicological work is also influenced by universities and colleges that encourage teaching pedagogies that stress the application of ethnomusicological knowledge by students. These pedagogies include community-engaged learning, associated with effective learning outcomes and high student retention. The validation of applied approaches to ethnomusicology and the lack thereof has dynamic histories that flow between governmental, industrial, and educational institutions (Harrison, 2012).

The Society for Ethnomusicology (SEM) Applied Ethnomusicology Committee (AEC) joins scholarship with practical pursuits by providing a forum for discussion and exchange of theory, issues, methods and projects among practitioners and serving as the 'public face' of ethnomusicology in the larger community. I am a follower of SEM activities, although I cannot afford the membership fees because when they are converted to Zimbabwe dollars, they are a third of my salary. SEM defines applied ethnomusicology in relation to the academy and ethnomusicological interactions outside the academy. This mission statement has been maintained since the committee became a section of SEM at the end of 2001. Members in the applied ethnomusicology section work to organise panel sessions and displays at SEM conferences that showcase this kind of work, discuss the issues surrounding it, and foster connections between individuals and institutions. The Applied Ethnomusicology Section is devoted to work in ethnomusicology that falls outside typical academic contexts and purposes. The work is known in the discipline as 'Public Sector Ethnomusicology' (Hutchinson, 2003).

The United States has three areas of endeavour and experience in applied ethnomusicology, which yield employer types, as outlined by Tom van Buren (2003). These are the public sector of national, state, and county level arts agencies, museums, and archives; commercial applications, publishing, or music production and promotion; and the research and public programmes of regional independent not-for-profit intercultural arts organisations, often known as folklife centres (Titon and Fenn 2003, p. 61). My work with the RRV Ensemble fits into the arts agency role, the memorialisation archive, and research. Pettan (2008) identifies four directive moves in applied ethnomusicology, which he adapted



from Spradley and McCurdy (2000, p. 1). They are: 1. action ethnomusicology: any use of ethnomusicological knowledge for planned change by the members of a local cultural group; 2. adjustment ethnomusicology: any use of ethnomusicological knowledge that makes social interaction between persons who operate with different cultural codes more predictable; 3. administrative ethnomusicology: any use of ethnomusicological knowledge for planned change by those who are external to a local cultural group; and 4. advocate ethnomusicology: any use of ethnomusicological knowledge by the ethnomusicologist to increase the power of self-determination for a particular cultural group. The RRV Ensemble includes the action and advocacy ethnomusicology directives in Pettan's typography.

The RIO-SET Expo 2015 Marimba Music Performance Competition

The RRV's maiden competition was at the annual Research and Intellectual Output, Science and Technology (RIO-SET) Expo Marimba Music Performance Segment held at the National University of Science and Technology in Bulawayo City during the first week of September 2015. At RIO-SET, there were 27 marimba ensembles from the country's teachers' colleges, polytechnics, and universities. Each ensemble fielded 15 marimba players, drummers, *hosho* (shakers), dancers, and singers. Marimba ensembles from teachers' colleges were Belvedere, Bondolfi, Hillside, Madziwa, Marymount, Masvingo, Mkoba, Morgan ZINTEC, Morgenster, Mutare, Nyadire, Seke, and the United College of Education. The marimba ensembles from polytechnic colleges were Bulawayo, Gweru, Harare, Joshua Mqabuko Nkomo, Kwekwe, Masvingo, and Mutare. Those from universities were Africa University (AU); Bindura University of Science Education (BUSE); University of Zimbabwe (UZ); Catholic University (CU); Chinhoyi University of Technology (CUT); Harare Institute of Technology (HIT); Great Zimbabwe University (GZU); Lupane State University (LSU); Midlands State University (MSU); the National University of Science and Technology (NUST); and the Women's University in Africa (WUA). At RIO-SET, I observed that colleges are taking music as a pastime. Students enrolled for other programmes are called to play marimba for the competition as an extra-curricular activity. The competitors presented songs of their own choice, but the genre was *marabi* music. RRV produced a sterling performance and beat all the other marimba ensembles in this competition.

While most bands managed to arrange *marabi* songs, our performance quality on the song "Skokiaan" placed us above the rest. The regalia was also on point since we donned what the *marabi* bands of the 1970s and 1980s used during their time. "Skokiaan" is a popular tune originally written by Zimbabwean musician August Musarurwa with the Bulawayo Sweet Rhythms Band. It refers to an illegal alcoholic beverage typically brewed over one day. As mentioned, the marimba is a uniquely African instrument introduced at Kwanongoma College in Bulawayo as an African instrument for instruction by Robert Sibson in 1961. The marimba set of Kwanongoma College of African Music consisted of soprano, tenor, baritone and note bass. Including F sharp in a diatonic C-scale meant that the tunes could be played in either the key of C major or G major, which made the instrument more versatile, especially as an accompaniment for singing. The repertoire of the Kwanongoma Marimba Band expanded from the driving beat of township jive music to American Big Band tunes that exploited the chromatic marimba set. "Skokiaan" is one of the songs that went viral and was arranged to be played on the Zimbabwe marimba. The song has been recorded many times, initially as part of the wave of world music that swept across the globe in the 1950s.



Figure 2: RRV Ensemble pictured after playing “Skokiaan” at the RIO-SET Expo 2015 in Bulawayo – photograph by author.

The Tambarimba Arts Festival

The atmosphere at Harare Gardens was characterised by a warm mid-morning breeze. The blue sky was clear, and it promised to be another scorcher of a day in the dry, simmering heat of a Zimbabwean spring. Members of the audience jostled to get to their seats in the open-air arena facing the main stage. The competitors gathered in different places on the periphery of the arena for some final polish-up rehearsals. It was 26 September 2015, and the Tambarimba Arts Organisation was hosting its second edition of the Tambarimba Arts Festival. The Harare Gardens festival lasted from morning to evening because numerous bands competed in the three categories. It featured the Primary Schools Section, Secondary Schools Section and the Open Bands Section. The anxious participants were young, talented marimbists hopeful of a bright future in marimba performance practice in Zimbabwe.

The director of ceremonies, Terrence Mapurisana, an arts and culture journalist from the local national Zimbabwe Broadcasting Cooperation Television (ZTV) station, called the crowd to order and introduced the guest artist group for the event. They were a kindergarten marimba band providing the warm-up act. The audience gave a round of applause as the toddlers struggled to mount the huge steps on a staircase designed for adult performers. The sweet young children played three songs, much to the amusement of the marimba music fans who watched eagerly from their seats. Wild cheers



and handclapping punctuated their departure from the stage, and the tone had been set for a day full of expectations, festive curiosity, panic, excitement, and uncertainty for the competitors and attendees alike.

Around mid-morning, different primary schools took turns mounting the stage and showcasing their marimba-playing skills. The primary schools competed in two different categories: the traditional African piece and the contemporary piece. In both categories, the ensembles performed songs of their own choice on the marimba. Each of these two categories had an award for being won by the best-performing school. From both categories, the judges choose an overall best-performing ensemble by adding up the marks scored by each judge. The judges were Fidelis Mherembi from Yotinhira Arts, Chris Timbe from Melorhythm Marimba Workshop, and Joan Lithgow from Education Africa, an arts education organisation based in Johannesburg, South Africa.

The different primary schools were mostly passionate about contemporary songs, and most of these schools were from Harare. Some schools presented rhumba, *sungura*, jazz and other music genres on the marimba. A few additional instruments were used, such as the drum set, the hoshu, and the *ngoma*. Most of these primary schools managed to fuse different genres of music and perform them on the marimba. The performances were also quite pleasing in the category of a traditional African piece. All the primary schools presented perfect songs. Judging from the high level at which these primary school children's performances were pegged, it showed they were young, talented children who could become virtuoso marimba players. Competition was tough, but a few groups managed to scoop the top three positions in each category, with one being named the overall best group. Their tailor-made traditional African attire was strikingly appropriate. Most schools showed that they knew traditional and contemporary marimba performance practices. Gokwe St Agnes Primary School won the overall best prize in this age group.

Seventeen secondary school bands from different centres competed around midday. Epworth High, Gateway College, and Mabelreign Girls High were amongst Harare's competitors in this age group and dominated the numbers. This showed that only very few schools can afford to buy marimbas and send their bands to compete at festivals outside the capital. The level of performance by secondary school ensembles was remarkably high, showing that groups took their time to do rehearsals. The secondary schools played traditional and contemporary songs well, even better than the primary schools. Watershed College was outstanding in this age group and won the Best Performer award.

The Open Bands Section was the last act later in the day, with seven groups from different areas, namely Blackspear, Gokwe Rovarimba, Guruve Arts Marimba, Mkoba Teachers College, Pamuzinda, Rimba Resonance Vibes, and Sailors Crew. The eighth open band, Tambarimba Ensemble, only featured as the guest group since they were conflicted by the festival being organised by Tambarimba Arts Organization. The Open Bands Category had very stiff competition as the marimba gurus competed for the Open Bands Trophy. Each band had to perform two songs, one African and one contemporary piece. In the African songs, Zimbabwean traditional songs were performed, and all the ensembles had artistically arranged their acts. Though this section was rather complex, the RRV Ensemble confidently displayed an outstanding performance that left the audience craving more. The band played the song "*Taireva*", originally a *mbira* song adapted to be played on the marimba from the days when the marimba was designed at Kwanongoma College of African Music. The song is sung by someone blaming someone who has had a misfortune and telling them they should have listened to advice to avoid mishaps. Lead singers have shown their artistry over the years by creating many



versions of this song but all their additions hover around the same theme. The text and translation appear below.

Music Example 1

Text	Meaning
<i>Taireva taireva taireva taireva taireva mukoma bvunza iwe</i>	We used to warn that you must ask first
<i>Gore mwana gore mwana gore mwana gore mwana mangwana uchamupeiko?</i>	One child every year, tomorrow what will they eat?
<i>Mwana wenyu kutakura tsotso sedhong'i ratakura huswa mhai</i>	Your child carrying firewood like a donkey carrying grass
<i>Tsotso kutakura tsotso</i>	Transporting firewood

In this category the RRV Ensemble came second of eight bands. They did not give up but pulled up their socks and prepared for the contemporary section.

The contemporary section was also a section where skills, experience and creativity were shown by the participants. In this category, the RRV Ensemble showcased a rendition of Simon “Chopa” Chimbetu’s 2000 *sungura* hit song entitled “Tenda”. The allocation of lead, rhythm, sub-rhythm and bass guitar lines to the marimba was soprano, tenor 1, tenor 2, and bass, respectively, with the second soprano helping to fill in gaps and responding to the lead vocalist. At some point in their arrangement, the lead singer kept quiet as the lead marimba surrogated the lead vocal line “Tenda tenda tenda, tenda gore rapera”. The second soprano, tenors, and bass surrogated the vocal response line “Tenda tenda tenda, tenda wariona”. The marimba players sang the response line as they played it on their instruments. This section clearly defined the song’s identity, and the fans ecstatically sang along with the marimbas. The drummer signalled the beginning, transitions, jerks, and ending. The three vocalists danced the *cell phone*, *dendera* and “hammerkop” / *musoro-musoro* dances that were popularised by Simon Chimbetu and the response was overwhelming, with the fans dancing along on the dance floor.

RRV Ensemble hogged the limelight with Mkoba Teachers College as they had identical marks and held a tie in the first position. As the adjudicators wanted only one band to win, the two bands made a retake to reach a final decision. This was a clash of the giants. The RRV Ensemble had to silence everyone with an astonishing performance and was declared the winner, with Mkoba Teachers College in the second position. Overall, the Best Trophy was then taken by RRV as they were the champions of the Open Bands Category. This was an exciting learning experience for the RRV Ensemble. We brought home three trophies: Position 2 Trophy in the African Piece section, Position 1 Trophy in the Contemporary section, and the Overall Best Trophy in the Open Bands category. We competed in these categories against seven marimba ensembles. Again, it is my observation that colleges studying music performed better at this festival than those ensembles based in the community.



The International Marimba and Steelpan Festival

The International Marimba and Steelpan Festival is held in South Africa annually. The festival is organised by Joan Lithgow and James Urdang of the South African non-profit organisation Education Africa. It is funded by several partners. It is open to all countries in the international community, and ensembles from Zimbabwe and South Africa attend the festival every year. The 2016 edition was held in Benoni, near Johannesburg. The festival was a marimba competition featuring different age groups and various genres. It was all about talent and skill, showcasing how to play marimba. This annual festival in South Africa involves primary school, secondary school, and open age groups placed into their categories.

Open Small Bands

Open small bands feature a maximum of ten performers in each ensemble. The RRV Ensemble also participated in this category. Participants in this category are usually school leavers, but they can be allowed one or two participants from high schools or primary schools. The category is also a favourite for private institutions' marimba bands. Also competing in this category from Zimbabwe was the Tambarimba Band from Harare. Other marimba groups who competed in this category included Hillbrow and Friendly Drummers from South Africa. This category was competitive since most ensembles featured several experienced virtuoso marimba players. Amongst these, Tambarimba was the most experienced since they host their marimba festival in Zimbabwe. However, despite competing against some of the best marimba bands from the international scene, the RRV Ensemble took the winners' trophy to Zimbabwe.

Open Large Bands

This category was for large ensembles from different countries, which included the RRV Ensemble and the Tambarimba Ensemble from Zimbabwe. These large ensembles competed in two different categories. The first was the African Traditional category, where they presented a traditional performance on the marimba. Some large ensembles featuring whites and Indians from South African schools and colleges performed Zimbabwean traditional songs very well in this category. What intrigued people most were the Zimbabwean songs, which they played better on the marimba than some of the marimba ensembles from Zimbabwe. The performances were quite pleasing and surprising because nobody expected to hear different songs, and not only Zimbabweans borrowed rhythms performed by most bands. There was very stiff competition amongst the large ensembles. Despite the high level of competition, the two bands from Zimbabwe performed very well and managed to win in this category.

Open In-The-Mix

The second category was Contemporary, where they presented contemporary songs. However, these ensembles also presented their own choices. In the In-The-Mix category, white people's bands managed to win since it was also their preferred genre. People enjoyed these large ensembles' performances because they were challenging, encouraging and pleasing. The RRV Ensemble showcased a rendition of the song "Dudziro" that was originally done by *sungura* star Alick Macheso and the Orchestra Mberikwazvo Band. This ensemble used a full drum set to define the *sungura* beat of the song and also to play the rolls and give signals that mark the song's beginning and ending, to show the beginning and ending of the song's various movements or sections by signalling transitional points, and to master the jerks of the song. The high hats and the snare drum percussed in sympathy with the vibrating wooden bars, whose resonators gave the song a unique African flavour. The first soprano marimba player played the lead guitar line, while the second soprano marimba player



harmonised the lead line and filled in the gaps. The two tenor marimba players played the rhythm and sub-rhythm guitar lines. Alick Macheso's trademark bass line was sounded on the bass marimba, with the baritone marimba player playing some of the notes outside the bass marimba range, creating a rich resultant harmony. Three vocalists harmonized each other's lines. They changed the original lyrics by Macheso and sang, "*Huori hwanyanya, honaiwo hama, garai pasi mutarire, nyika yaparara. Yaparara yaparara yaparara eeh. Mhedzisiro toti zvimwe tinaho hurombo. Isu tichizviurayira tega nyika yedu nehuori*" (Corruption is rife, look people, sit and reflect, the country is finished. We end up thinking that we are poor when we are destroying our economy through corruption).

The climax of the performance was punctuated by serious dancing. The ensemble's lead singer emulated Alick Macheso's *museve*¹ (borrowdale) dance. Their backing vocalist also played the role of a chanter, which used to be done by Jonas Kasamba before he left Orchestra Mberikwazvo to co-find the Extra Kwazvose Band. At the climax of the song, the duo performed the popular dances created by Alick Macheso: *razor wire, zorai butter, kochechera and slomo*, much to the amusement of the *sungura* music lovers who ended up joining them in dancing to the music. As the dances were being performed, the drummer played a critical role in sounding the dance steps on the drum set. The way he coordinated with the dancers showed evidence of committed rehearsals and choreography. The bass marimba player articulated a dominant bass-line rhythm typical of Alick Macheso's style, in which he uses the bass guitar to mark the climax of the song by showing his virtuosity on the instrument as he plays a solo line.

¹ A name that Zimbabweans give to fast-paced *sungura* music dance steps.



Figure 4: RRV Ensemble after winning the International Marimba and Steelpan Festival in Johannesburg (Photograph by author).

Conclusion

Marimba performance practices in Zimbabwe include the Tambarimba Arts Festival, held annually in Harare. My experiences there reveal a situation where non-music professionals capitalise on the lack of oligarchy amongst marimba musicians. These predators see a gap and seize the opportunity to organise marimba festivals for schools and community-based open bands. They rake in quite a sum of money from the festival registration fees and corporate sponsorship they source from local companies and organisations that fund the arts in Zimbabwe. Most of this funding does not go to the performers at all. For example, after paying 150 dollars to participate in the 2016 Tambarimba Festival and footing the transport, accommodation and feeding costs, the RRV Ensemble was paid a paltry 100 Rands as prize money for winning in two categories! The number of participating marimba bands from primary and secondary schools and community bands contributed far more than what was paid to the victors!

Zimbabwean marimba musicking is purely a secular musical event. Festival performances in stadia, concert halls, open spaces, gardens, streets, and festival arenas are done purely to entertain festivalgoers and performers. I argue from this discovery that leisure Zimbabwe marimba musicking activities are important because social life is laced with more secular than sacred music. The stereotype that Zimbabwean music is imbued with deep spiritual meaning peddled by some ethnomusicologists (Matiure 2009; Matiure 2011; Lindroth 2018) is not necessarily true.

Another conclusion that I arrived at is that marimba performers, makers, mentors, composers, and arrangers fit in an ecosystem of musicking on the Zimbabwe marimba, where festival funders, organisers, and fans share diverse significant roles that contribute to the growth of the art. While the



marimba performers are immediately visible in the musicking matrix, the festival organisers and funders make the functions possible. Performers learn how to make music from the mentors and marimba instruments from the builders. Composers and arrangers are crucial for the musicking to be of high standard, and the marimba music fans grace the performances. I also noticed that individuals in this ecosystem play more than one role. Some builders are players or mentors, some players are composers or arrangers, and some funders and organisers are marimba music lovers. Each one of them fits in their unique way into marimba musicking in contemporary Zimbabwe (Maguraushe 2018).

In this paper, I have presented an account of the RRV Ensemble's exploits at three marimba festivals in Zimbabwe and South Africa, which I have written from my experience. This comes after a perceived void I encountered because only a few scholars (Jones 2006; Matiure 2008; Maguraushe 2018) have researched local marimba music performance practice. My view is that although the RRV Ensemble and other locally based ensembles face numerous challenges as they ply their trade, stakeholders ought to take marimba performance practice to the next level both in the scholarship and live on the stage. My experiences with the band reveal that the biggest dilemma is the lack of funds in a struggling Zimbabwean economy. Future collaborative research between music scholars, performers and economists is needed to develop solutions crafted locally to overcome this challenge.

In this autoethnography, I used my band, the RRV Ensemble, to investigate socio-cultural interactions and uncover the status quo in marimba music festivals held locally. I began by analysing the RIO-SET marimba music performance segment and the Tambarimba Festival held in Bulawayo and Harare, respectively, in September 2015. The last section examined the International Marimba and Steelpan Festival in Benoni in July 2016. Through analysis of events at these festivals, I explored and described the situation of marimba performance practice in Zimbabwe and South Africa.

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