

Simon Chimbetu: a sonic biography

Charles Pfukwa

Abstract

This paper presents the view that Dendera or Sungura music can be a powerful form of cultural and historical narratives in Zimbabwe. It draws theory from scholars of autobiography such as Olney, Berryman and Javangwe and it defines the music genre as a narrative form. The paper argues that Simon Chimbetu's work is not only entertaining but also carries historical representations of human experience and his music becomes a cultural metaphor around which a story can be built. Through a tapestry of sonic narratives developing from his short lyrical content, the paper traces nodes of the artiste's life and how he performs his deepest feelings on stage. In the process he unwittingly writes the story of his own life on a very unusual template: on stage through performance. This study of Chimbetu is in essence part of an effort by African scholarship to be actively involved in the interrogation and redefinition of the various images of Zimbabwean music not as an alternative voice in cultural narratives but as a centre of cultural discourses in the nation