

Prejudices and Irrelevancy: The Dilemma Facing Music Curricula in Many South African Universities

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Abstract

Some of the music curricula at many universities in South Africa do not adequately address the needs of the Music industry and the indigenous people of that country. On the one hand, it does not adequately prepare students to take up various roles in the modern music industry for it mainly focuses on the academic work and instrumental recitals, yet the modern music industry is not only about performing instruments, but there are other important roles to be fulfilled too. The industry needs qualified personnel to operate music recording studios, market and manage musical groups, music archives, and music libraries among many others. On the other hand, the curriculum is also irrelevant to the majority of the Black students. The teaching of music theories and instrumental performance is generally based on the western genres at the expense of the African ones. Most of the curricula focus on the works of Western composers, such as Haydn, Bach, Mozart and others at the expense of such great composers of music from Africa like the late Lucky Dube, Dorothy Masuka, and Miriam Makebha among many others.

The study was carried out on some sampled Universities in South Africa. It was in the qualitative form, with emails, telephone interviews and documentary analysis as the main data collection instruments.

Key words: Curriculum, African music, prejudices, South African Universities

Introduction

Music industry is still a vibrant sector in the global market. It employs quite a large number of people in South Africa and the world. Jobs are available in the fields of music performance, marketing and management, music

technology, broadcasting, music library science; entertainment column writing in newspapers and magazines, music critiquing, research and the least is endless. But do the music curricula at South African Universities help students acquire relevant skills that enable them to fully participate in the ever fast growing and changing music industry? And how many famous African musicians such as Lucky Dube, Miriam Makeba, and Sipho Makabane are products of any one of the South African Universities? Do the curricula meet the needs and expectations of all communities within the country under review?

Universities in South Africa are still playing a major role in designing and implementing music curricula, but this goes with some challenges and dilemmas. Many universities find themselves encountered with issues pertaining to irrelevancy and prejudice as they carry out the above process of designing and implementing music curricula. This paper will give a bird's eye on some of the gloomy circumstances that have confronted the said curricula for the past decades. For the purpose of discussion, I have divided my findings into three categories. The first category consists of curricula that are irrelevant to the music industry and at the same time prejudicing some communities in South Africa. The second category discusses curricula that are relevant to the music industry, yet exclude the music and other important cultural aspects of indigenous people. The final category highlights some positive developments that have taken place over the years in an effort to address the above-mentioned challenges. To achieve this, I have analyzed BMus and BA music curricula of various universities as will be shown in this paper. I have also interviewed some former students and current students of the said universities.

An Overview of Music Curricula in some South African Universities

In my analysis, I observed that the content of the music curricula is not very different across universities. Below is a general overview of music curricula components at some universities in South Africa.

Excerpt 1 (General Overview of Music Curricula Components)

<i>Curricula Components</i>
<i>Music Theory and Analysis</i>
<i>Music Theory (practical)</i>
<i>History of Music</i>
<i>Musicology</i>
<i>Aural Training</i>
<i>Chamber Music</i>
<i>Vocal Ensemble</i>
<i>Practical Score Reading</i>
<i>Practical Music Study (Instrumental and Conducting)</i>
<i>Orchestra Practice</i>
<i>General Music Study (Practical)</i>
<i>Ensemble</i>
<i>Research Methodology and Bibliographical Studies</i>
<i>Basic principles of harmony</i>
<i>Basic principles of structural analysis in music</i>
<i>Introducing music studies</i>
<i>A survey of Western music</i>
<i>Introduction to music bibliography</i>
<i>Instrumental performance, piano, guitar, brass, strings</i>

An analysis of the above curricula components reveals that it does not adequately prepare students to take up various roles in the modern music industry as mentioned above. The above curricula only focus on the academic work and instrumental performances. Yet the modern music industry is not only about performing instruments, but there are other important roles to be fulfilled too. The industry needs qualified personnel to operate music recording studios, market and manage musical groups, music archives, music libraries; and the list is endless.

A further analysis of the music curricula at many universities in South Africa has revealed that the curriculum is biased, often highlighting Western at the expense of African music. Most of the curricula focus on the works of Western composers, such as Haydn, Bach, Mozart and others at the expense of such great composers of music from Africa like the late Lucky Dube, Dorothy Masuka, Miriam Makebha, just to mention a few. In short, African music is excluded. In some instances, it is only taught under Ethnomusicology.

Mapoma (2001:10) postulates that African Music at our educational institutions has been and is always pushed into the background both by Africa and non African educational planners. On the same note, Nzwewi (2001: 18) purports that the music curricula in Africa has irrationally perpetuated Western models in terms of methodology, philosophy, psychology, outcome and content. Consequently, according to Oehrle (2001:102), the exclusivity of the framework of western musical knowledge in South Africa has led to cultural imbalance.

A further analysis of the music curricula also revealed that teaching on musical instruments performance is generally based on the Western genres of classical music.

Excerpt 3 (University of the Free State, Applied Music Studies)

APPLIED MUSIC STUDIES

4.1 For Applied Music Studies an instrument must be selected from those mentioned below. Registration for an instrument depends on the availability of a staff member to teach it. (The code of each instrument is as given.)

Bassoon	-----	FGT
Cello	-----	TJL
Clarinet	-----	KL R
Double Bass	-----	KNB
Electronic Keyboard	-----	KEY
Flute	-----	FL T
French Horn	-----	FRH
Guitar	-----	GHT
Harp	-----	HAR
Harpichord	-----	KLW
Oboe	-----	HOB
Organ	-----	ORL
Percussion	-----	PEK
Piano	-----	KL V
Recorder	-----	BLF
Saxophone	-----	SFJ
Trombone	-----	TBN
Trumpet	-----	TMP
Tuba	-----	TUB
Viola	-----	ALV
Violin	-----	VIO
Voice	-----	SAN

Obviously the curricula become irrelevant especially to the music industry and to those black students who intend to set up performing groups on indigenous and African popular music genres. They (music students) will have a problem in finding a ready market for their music if they are forced by the curricula to pursue western classical music. According to some students I interviewed at the University of Fort Hare where I was studying towards my Doctorate, most of the African communities from which some (students) come from prefer popular African music such as the *umasganda*, *mbaquanga*, *kwela* and *marabi*, to classical music. Western (classical) music is not familiar to them.

Also, some students grew up listening and playing various African instruments like musical bows, drums and African popular music styles. I have travelled to Noquekwana, about twenty kilometers from Port St Jones and Libode to carry out a research on African indigenous instruments. From the conversations I had with some respondents, I learnt that the main instruments played in the three areas I visited are drums, musical bows and *impembe*. Not even a single Western instrument is taught there. The majority of the teachers I spoke to indicated that most of the western instruments are expensive and schools in the area under review cannot afford to buy them. Worse more, the majority of the teachers deployed to teach in these areas were not comfortable in teaching indigenous instruments because they were not trained to do so. They were trained to teach western musical instruments such as the recorder, piano, the guitar among others. As a result, students in the said areas are deprived of the opportunity to study their own indigenous or any other musical instruments. But Nzewi (2001:18) argues that the learners' contact with music should start with that music which is practiced in their immediate human environment and progressively include extraneous music cultures and practices.

Therefore, not including indigenous music in the curricula is disadvantaging and denying the students the opportunity to fully experience their own traditional music. "Cultural activity is the source of human progress; and

cultural diversity being a treasure of human kind is an essential factor of development,” (Drummond 1998:4). Drummond further explains that one of the chief aims of human development is the social and cultural fulfillment of the individual. Access to and participation in cultural life is a fundamental right of individuals in all communities in accordance with article 27 of Universal Declaration of Human Rights. It is therefore important for the universities to come up with curricula which caters for the needs of the music industry and the different cultural groups found in South Africa

My research also revealed that some disadvantaged African students especially from rural communities fail to get places to study music at most of the universities in South Africa. In most cases, entry requirements inhibit them from enrolling for such programs. Most universities require that students, be in possession of a grade five or even seven theory of music and an instrument of proficiency, which in most cases is the piano, guitar, clarinet and other Western instruments.

Excerpt 4 (Extract of the University of Stellenbosch entry requirements for admission, BMus degree)

At least a standard on the main instrument (or in singing) equivalent to the Unisa Grade VII examination and theoretical knowledge equivalent to the Unisa Grade VI theory examination.

Unfortunately, African instruments cannot qualify African students to enroll for music courses on offer. Consequently, some prospective students cannot be afforded the opportunities to further advance their performing skills on the respective instruments that they already can play. But Nzewi (2001:25) says, “For the purpose of modern music education, (music studies) that derives from African music theory, the xylophone or thumb piano save the same purpose as the piano.” It is therefore imperative that the universities under review come up with a bridging course that would help the disadvantaged students to meet the required university entry qualifications.

However, it is encouraging to note that a few innovative universities like the University of Cape Town have since come up with a bridging course for disadvantaged students who do not meet the entry requirements mentioned above.

Excerpt 5 (University of Cape Town, BACHELOR OF MUSIC (Foundation) [HB034])

This programme is linked to ALL BMus degrees and has been designed primarily for students from educationally disadvantaged backgrounds. It offers students with the potential to succeed in music study the opportunity to gain a degree qualification. The programme is designed so that the BMus degree takes five years, with the first year an intensive programme to prepare candidates for first year courses. No candidate will be allowed to register for any first year course during this year of study. On successful completion of the Foundation programme, students will join the regular BMus programmes. Candidates who qualify for Matriculation Exemption and who demonstrate proficiency in an instrument will be considered for admission to this programme.

But, it is also possible that those who can not qualify for tuition on western music genres and performance practice can still be afforded an opportunity to play their own indigenous music genres on the very same instruments (piano, guitar, brass and string instruments) used for western music genres. According to Mosupyoe (2004:3), Nzewi's teaching method at the University of Pretoria is based on indigenous African learning approaches. After learning the brass instruments for example, students could be channeled towards the genre of their interest. For example, students can play *umasganda*, *mbaquanga*, *kwela* and *marabi* exclusively on brass instruments.

On the academic side, my research revealed that there are more white music lecturers than blacks. Also, in the seven music conferences I attended in South Africa from 2008 to 2013, I noted that the majority of delegates and presenters

were white. But why has this been so? In trying to answer the question, Bleibinger (2008:4) mentions that the first individuals to found conservatories and establish music departments in South Africa were musicians from European countries. He gave an example of Jannasch, the founder of the conservatory in Stellenbosch who had German origins, his successor Endler, an Austrian, Bell and Chisholm at Cape Town who were British, while at Rhodes, Hartman, Gruber and Mayr were Austrians. Thus Bleibinger (2008:4) justifiably concludes that the foundation of musicology in South Africa is linked with Europe. Consequently, the above mentioned founders of music departments at various institutions had to design curricula that were within their musical experiences.

Unfortunately, the tradition has taken too long to break. Yet African music is now one of the areas that have been extensively researched on, thanks to scholars from all over the world. The International Library of African Music (ILAM), which contains a lot of musical instruments, DVDs, CDs and LPs of recordings from across Africa is evident and speaks volumes of such hard work done by researchers, with special mention to Andrew and Hugh Tracey. Other works include that of Professor Dargie, who researched widely on Xhosa Music. But unfortunately, such rich collections and findings on African music have not effectively made it into the music curricula of some universities in South Africa. Oehrle (2001:105) says, " Why it continues to be difficult for music educators in South Africa to turn to and utilize ingenious thoughts and processes is that we are steeped in Western thoughts and processes: one being the authentic approach." Emphasizing on the same point, Mapoma in Niekerk (2001:5) states that music curriculum in Africa is still influenced by the dominant Western concept where scholars regard Western music as the basis for music studies.

However, it is encouraging to note that a few universities have taken up the initiative to come up with curricula that is relevant and accommodates all cultures. According to Bleibinger (2008:1) professor Dargie shifted the music curriculum from Western to African, putting more emphasis on the musical

instruments of the region, namely, *uhadi*, *umrhube* and *ikatari* when he became Head of Music Department at the University of Fort Hare.

Excerpt 6 (University of Fort Hare, Introduction to the Curriculum at the Music Department)

At the Music Department at Fort Hare, there is a strong emphasis of Xhosa. However learners are also given exposure to elements of western classical music, such as opera symphony and the like as well as elements of Jazz Music.

Excerpt 7 (University of Fort Hare, Content Description of module MUS 321, 2009)

Contents: Music Theory: Harmonic analysis, Xhosa Music Theory, Elements of Indigenous Xhosa Music, Music History: Continuation of basic formal analysis of selected compositions.

At Pretoria University, the arrival of Meki Nzewi in 2000 saw the introduction of an intensified African music curriculum. Mapusopyoe (2004) says, "At the Music department of Pretoria University, modules of African Music are compulsory at the first and second year levels of undergraduate courses." University of KwaZulu-Natal has also introduced African Music and Dance (AMD) program directed by Dr P Opondo. In 2009, I attended the SASRIM Conference held at that University. During that time, I had an opportunity to tour the Music department as well as seeing students from different cultures performing African Music. What I saw convinced me that this university has the strongest program that addresses African Music.

The Program at KwaZulu-Natal included the following in its curriculum.

- Ensembles where students learn to perform dance styles from South Africa such as *sthatamiya*, *ingoma* and Zulu dance.
- Ensembles where students learn to performance music and dance from other African countries

- Playing of African instruments from different African countries, for example, *mbira* from Zimbabwe, *makuyana* musical bow, *timbila*, *maskandi*, traditional drumming and *marimba*
- Music education (Teaching music using Africanist approach)
- Community outreach.

Rhodes and University of Cape Town have also intensified the curriculum on African Music. But still, the battle is far from being won. Many universities are yet to introduce African music in their curricula.

In conclusion, many African governments have advocated for entrepreneurship among its citizens. The music industry is such an area where employment creation is possible. It is important to understand that universities are not the only ones who will employ students and graduates. In consequence, it is apparently important that universities regularly evaluate and update their curricula through modern research and community needs analysis so as to come up with more relevant culturally balanced music curricula abreast with modern trends and the ever-changing demands of our new global world. Above all, it should meet the needs of the student.

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