

The Bulawayo Music Festival: An Important Educational and Musicological Exhibition for Music Enthusiasts

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Abstract: This article sought to explore the intricacies of the Bulawayo Music Festival, its underlying objectives, themes, approaches, significance and history. The Zimbabwean musical practices have always been diverse from region to region as a result of its multi-cultural society which includes nationalities from across the whole African continent as well as foreign originating races and tribes from the colonial times. The festival, hosted in the centre of Zimbabwe's Matabeleland Province, is unique for providing a platform that exposes the native people to exotic music through live performance demonstrations and educational workshops. The performers and audience alike, benefit immensely from these interactions, the former gaining exposure in the entertainment scenes and the latter gaining knowledge of music trends both local and exotic. Despite the outward appearance of fun and festivities that is apparent to the casual observer during the festival, there is actually more to it than meets the eye. It represents resilience of a people besieged by so many woes from so many angles and how they have all managed to thrive and eventually learning to work towards a common cause despite their differences. The Bulawayo Music Festival, just like any other social activity or trend, has evolved somewhat over the past decade however the underlying essence that prompted its inception still remains that it brings different people together through music. The article explores the essentials of the activities and significance associated with the Bulawayo Music festival both at its inception as well as in its progression over the years.

Index words: Bulawayo music festival, Classic concertos, exotic music, legendary composers, pioneer artists

I. INTRODUCTION

The execution of different music festivals in Zimbabwe is still in progressing fast, however there is one particular music festival that is proving its uniqueness in developments, organization, rational and significance over time to the Zimbabweans. In an attempt to define a festival, different people have diverse definitions of festivals, but generally a festival is an occasion typically performed by a particularly a group of people and focusing on some distinctive features of the peoples culture and interests. Caves (2004) postulates that a festival constitutes typical cases of globalisation as well as the high culture-low culture interrelationship(s). Chris and Connell (2003) in Rudolph (2016:8) assert that music festivals are "events consisting of a variety of bands and musical artists performing shows, on numerous stages, over a period of days

to a large audience in outside and inside venues". I concur with the viewpoints raised by the foregoing authors because in a festival different presentations are made by different people. There are many music festivals which are performed throughout the world, similarly in Zimbabwe there are also different music festivals which are performed. Leender (2010) opines that:

A music festival is defined as an event oriented toward music, where several performers/artists perform live for an audience. Festivals are commonly held outdoors, and most of the time they include other activities and attractions besides the performances, such as food and social activities. Festivals are annual, or repeat at some other interval. Some are organized as for-profit concerts and others are organized for a particular cause.

As observed by the foregoing author, it is true that a music festival allows different performers to expose different types of music and these festivals attracts a lot of people. Music festivals play very important roles in the lives of human beings, different music festivals which are executed throughout the world also have different objectives, beginnings and importance. Most importantly this article essentially focuses on the Bulawayo Music festival, which is one of the prominent and distinctive festivals which are conducted and celebrated in Zimbabwe.

II. ORIGINS AND OBJECTIVES OF THE FESTIVAL

The Bulawayo Music Festival is a unique festival that is conducted in Bulawayo city. Bulawayo is the second largest city in Zimbabwe. In the first ever edition of the Bulawayo¹ music festivals which was launched in Bradfield, Bulawayo almost two decades ago after the independence of the sovereign nation of Zimbabwe by Michael Bullivant² in 1997. Figure 1 below shows the map of Zimbabwe and the position of Bulawayo City.

¹ Bulawayo is the second largest city in Zimbabwe, and the largest city in the country's Matabeleland.

² Former Deputy Headmaster at Milton High School and the Principal of the Zimbabwe Music Academy (ZMA) in Bulawayo, was awarded the OBE by Queen Elizabeth II in her New Year's Honours 2020 list released yesterday (<https://www.chronicle.co.zw/british-royal-honour-for-bulawayo-man/>)



Figure 1: Map of Zimbabwe showing Bulawayo City. Map extracted from https://www.wikiwand.com/en/Districts_of_Zimbabwe

The Bulawayo Music Festival is conducted annually and its objectives are; to offer the native people exposure and experience exotic music, to socialise and learn new skills from local and international music, to promote Western and local music practices and culture as well as to sharpen musical artistry and skills amongst music enthusiasts. This concept is embraced and reiterated by Bowdin *et al.* (2011) who applauds festivals for their positive impact and role in the development of culture that they generate. Other importance purposes of the Bulawayo Music Festival are to positively influence emotional development of the participants and the audience through the musical performances. Juslin *et al.* (2008) are of the opinion that live musical performances impact positively on the emotional development of all listeners. Last but not list, one other important objective of the Bulawayo Music Festival is to promote cultural tourism development and tourist customer retention in the Bulawayo province. Through observations I have made over the years, this aspect is essential because I have noted that the music that is performed by different artist has the potential for promoting the tourism sector. Bhusal, Equere and Sadequzaman (2015:11) agree that “Music brings a great contribution for the advancement of tourism as an industry. Whenever there has been call for multiculturalism, music has always been a successful mode to unify people and share a common experience among them”. Most importantly, at the inception of the Bulawayo music festival, it was actually a bundled up event that incorporated several celebrations of musical milestones and events. The main three events were; a six decade anniversary of the Bulawayo Philharmonic Orchestra³, a four decade long anniversary of the Performing Arts Bulawayo Music Festival and a two-decade anniversary of the National Symphony Orchestra⁴. To top it all off, the event coincided with the century milestone that marked the coming of the train connection to the city which first wound its way

³ The orchestra was launched in 1937 with the Legendary Dereck Hudson conducting.

⁴ Originally founded in 1931 in Washington, USA.

into Bulawayo in 1897. All these milestones were celebrated with much pomp over a fun filled one week period.



Figure 2: Bulawayo Music Festival Final Act. 19 June 2016. Photo by Terry Kaschula.

The performances on the festival at this time kicked off with live the concerts spreading out over its duration with some of the top performers from within the country and abroad such as Marilyn Smith and the pianist Piers Lane both of whom came all the way from Carshalton, United Kingdom as well as the famous band from South Africa, the Odeion String Quartet which was popular for being the only resident string quartet at a South African university at the time as well as influencing the development of music for symphony orchestra. In my own analysis and observation coupled with the information I gathered, the invitation of international artists to the Bulawayo Music Festival has helped to market and grow the festival as well as improve the standard and quality of music and the performances. Furthermore, it has helped in shaping the festival to being a bigger festival and to attract different people, stimulate the audience socialise and exceed their expectations (having fun and happiness) of the audience as well as transforming their lives and their way of perceiving things. Riotta (2015) concurs with my view, he notes that going to a music festival not only makes you happier, it positively transforms one’s perspective to life.

The Bulawayo Music Festival also included an array of interview sessions with most of the renowned artists and performers in attendance, taking advantage of the opportunity to learn more about the creation of the music and performances being showcased and how they all made it happen so flawlessly. Edward Greenfield, being one of the most notable radio personalities of the time, dedicated the whole week to the festival and broadcasted the festival events as they unravelled. Greenfield had retired as The Manchester Guardian’s chief music critic (1977 – 1993) to join the BBC where he presented the show; The Greenfield collection and this helped in impacting positive growth of the festival as the audience met new friends and the audience experienced golden memories of the festival. Riatta (2015) proffers that:

A good festival experience will consist of meeting people you never normally would, listening to the sweet melodies of music you've never heard before

and making golden memories you can keep with you for the rest of your life.

This is true because a virtuous music festival must bring people together at the same time providing good music presentations which are unforgettable. As the week long festivities came to an end, a final touch concluded the event in a very memorable way. In a bid to celebrate the railway's 100th anniversary in Bulawayo city, Michael Bullivant, the festival founder narrated how a specially designated steam train was used to transport all the performers and the audience all the way from the city to the historic Waterfalls in the nearby town. Here, the audience was treated to another enthralling display of classical music and performances whilst afloat on the mighty Zambezi River. Michael Bullivant (Interview 14 September 2019), who was in attendance at this event throughout the week, narrated that the performance was so riveting that even the floating hippos in the river went still during some of these performances despite being notorious for their playful nature. Indeed, such was the power of the music and melodies on that day on the exclusive water concert particularly by Tasmin Little, the English violinist from London. One can only imagine the deeper levels of emotions here which are not at all far-fetched. Honor Whiteman wrote in an article on 19 November 2015, where he stated in an interview with the Medical News Today, Barbara Else, senior advisor of policy and research at the American Music Therapy Association once reiterated that; "We have such a deep connection to music because it is 'hardwired' in our brains and bodies".

The festival did not just concentrate on entertaining the crowds through musical performances, rather, the organizers were quick to recognise the learning opportunity that it presented to the local communities music teachers and students. After all, artists from all over the world were available for the first time ever in the country and were unlikely to ever make an appearance again. Some of these like Marilyn and Piers had come from as far off as Britain in a bid to promote the festival, taking cognisance of its meaningful history and the societal achievements that it recognised such as the railroad as a side event to the festival. Many schools in the vicinity such as the Catholic's St Thomas Aquinas Primary School as well as from far off places, like Prince Edward from Harare, were all invited to partake in the commemorations as well as to present their music talents to the attendees. Remarkably, hundreds of students were in attendance to witness the world class performances with the hope that they would learn and get inspiration from these seasoned music experts.

III. ESTABLISHMENT OF THE FESTIVAL

The 1995 festival marked the beginning of something beautiful to say the least; a multi-cultural music festival that brought together people from different nations to enjoy classic music performances. Debate followed shortly after its conclusion as to the need to make it an annual event as a joint commemoration. It was however agreed eventually to hold the

festival once every two years instead of yearly for financial and logistic reasons as this would give the organisers a better opportunity to prepare for the event and ensure its success. The move was supported by many, particularly those who had witnessed for themselves the grandeur of the first music event.

Two years after the maiden festival, the Bulawayo Music Festival graced the city and its residence once again on 24 May 1997. The event this time around was however bigger and better. It attracted hundreds of performers from within the country and across the borders all vying for the stage. Thousands of spectators came from across the country and beyond the borders to witness this important music festival. Most of the audience have had their interests piqued by reports of the initial festival and they had come with their great expectations to witness for themselves the performances of different artists as well as to learn new things and news music from the festival. Amazingly, both the performing artists and the attending crowds surpassed by far the expectations of the organizers such that there was quite a lot of pressure on the facilities available for the event from accommodation, transportation and even food provisions.

Interestingly, all the performing artists at the second Bulawayo Music Festival certainly did not disappoint as the attendees were very impressed by the quality of the music presentations which were made. All the artists presented put up a historical concert that was to be talked about for years to come and that clearly outdid the maiden event. The programme for the festival was pretty much similar to its predecessor except for the scale of course. It included an array of orchestra performances as per the previous programme except this time around, some cuts had to be made for the sake of time. Notable and classic concertos such as the legendary Ludwig Van Beethoven's⁵ works featured the line up together with the likes of Johannes Brahms'⁶ Violin which was performed by the internationally celebrated Australian violinist; Elizabeth Wallfisch who made waves in her home country at only twelve years of age as a concert soloist.

Quite a number of performers from the original festival showed up for the second edition to the surprise of many especially in light of their prominence. This is not to say that these talents were snobbish or selective but rather the Bulawayo Music Festival was considerably still at its infancy stage and was not really expected to repeatedly attract big personas in the music industry just yet. It was however the pleasure of the audience to witness the mesmerising performances of some of these pioneer artists and bands such as the Odeion Quartet. The concert kicked off on a high note to the lively tunes of Madame F. Lott, the popular soprano

⁵ He was a German pianist and composer widely considered to be one of the greatest musical geniuses of all time. ([www.biography.com › musician › ludwig-van-beethoven](http://www.biography.com/musician/ludwig-van-beethoven))

⁶ He was a German composer and pianist of the Romantic period, but he was more a disciple of the Classical tradition. He wrote in many genres, including symphonies, concerti, chamber music, piano works, and choral compositions, many of which reveal the influence of folk music. ([www.britannica.com › ... › Music, Classical](http://www.britannica.com/.../Music,_Classical))

talent from England and the famous pianist, Graham Johnson⁷. The presence of Johnson in the opening act was actually a matter of pride for the residence of the Bulawayo and the whole nation at large since he was a local talent who had been first introduced to the world of music while attending local schools before moving back to Britain and becoming an internationally recognised star.

At its inception in 1997, the Bulawayo Music Festival was organised, facilitated and hosted by a 3 member panel whose dedication to the performing arts had always been unwavering. The panel included Mr D. Hudson, Mr M. Bullivant as well as Miss D. Barron. These three were detrimental in the successful hosting of each festival from the very first one which was no easy feat in light of the increasingly deteriorating economic and political environment from the time of its inception. The trio constantly had to make tough decisions to ensure their festival's success from self-financing the festival up to political defiance.

The 2001 festival

For the year 2001, the Bulawayo Music Festival took a great hit that deflected it from its upward success trajectory. The economic woes being faced in the nation greatly undermined the organisation of the event especially in terms of financing and other necessary resources. The whole event was even called off at one point after the organisers had hit several snags in their preparations. Eventually however, it was decided to proceed with it in light of the significance of the event and the anticipation of so many patrons who had grown quite fond of the festival and had been looking forward to it for the past two years.

Proceeding with the event was however no easy feat. Several compromises and sacrifices had to be made to ensure the success of the festival. Chiefly, the duration of the festival was reduced by almost half of its customary time to only 4 days of musical performances. The artists to perform at the event were also significantly reduced to match the minimal time period available. The reduction in artists was also largely due to the limited finances available to retain, finance and accommodate them. In fact, the majority of the artists who made it to the final listing were mostly performing for free and even utilising their own resources to facilitate the event. Local and international artists alike offered to perform for free and assist where possible. One such popular Zimbabwean violist Nokuthula Ngwenyama in Figure 3 below, who is affectionately known as Thula (shortened form of her name) helped immensely with finances and skills for the success hosting of the festival.



Figure 3: Opening act: Nokuthula Ngwenyama. 15 June 2016. Photo by Tom Emerson.

Despite the organising challenges of the event, the 2001 festival was quite an impressive success. Of course, it was no match for its predecessors in scale however it was such a touching depiction of the willingness of the Bulawayo community and their foreign partners to sacrifice their times and resources just for the sake of ensuring the success of their baby; the festival. The stubborn success of the event was probably living proof that the festival itself had become an important aspect of the musical culture not just in Bulawayo but across the whole nation.

The eclipse festival

After the challenges of the 2001 festival, hope for another one began to waver even amongst the organisers themselves. The general determination that 'the show must go on' still remained however. Sadly, everything else seemed to be working against all this will. For starters, one of the key organisers was battling ill health which barely left him any room to plan the event whilst the other key organiser was preoccupied with her career which also rendered her unavailable. To add on to this, the local currency at the time kept inflating at a ridiculous rate which undermined all the financial funding available for the festival hosting.

Just when it seemed that the festival was doomed to fail at last, the organisers and stakeholders of the festival pulled another shocker by securing unwavering support for the event from the Performing Arts Bulawayo institute. Of course, this support was largely influenced by the presence of one of the organisers on the institute's board. The timing of the event was however shifted almost six months back to December. This was in an effort to create a spectacular scenery at the festival since this was the same period during which the solar eclipse was being anticipated to occur. Despite the efforts of the organising team, quite a number of challenges still surfaced, all of which threatened the success of the festival. For starters, the widespread reports of political instability at the time caused a lot of the performers to pull out of the event. There was a general sentiment that the unrest was mainly affecting the white inhabitants of the country and very few artists were willing to travel to Bulawayo amidst such

⁷ Graham Johnson OBE (born 10 July 1950) is a British classical pianist and Lieder accompanist.
([en.wikipedia.org > wiki > Graham_Johnson_\(musician\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Graham_Johnson_(musician)))

allegations. As if the bad publicity alone wasn't enough, there were quite a number of inexplicable complications for foreign performers who were attempting to secure documentation to travel to Zimbabwe.

The challenges of the 2002 festival did not just end at ill sentiments or travel difficulties. Some of the financing that was expected to facilitate the event failed to come through at the eleventh hour. The resilience of the performers proved tougher however and quite a number of them proceeded to use their own funds for their expenses just as they had done for the previous festival. At the launch of the festival in the St John's Cathedral, large crowds turned up for the event to the surprise of the hosts who had anticipated lukewarm attendance. The crowds were so huge that a significant portion of the spectators had to witness the opening performance from outside through the windows. The festival was dubbed as The Eclipse Festival due to its deliberate timing with the solar eclipse. This time around, the original duration of the festival (a full week of fun and festivities) was restored despite the economic challenges.

Artists and performers from all over the world managed to grace the occasion regardless of the prevailing tough conditions. Local artists and performers also constituted the line-up. Despite having great talent hailing from as far as Europe, the festival did not attract any popular artist or performer this time around. Most of these had pulled out at the first sign of trouble. The show however did go on in their absence and the performances were just as good. The organisers soon enough had their wish granted with a magnificent solar eclipse that was visible throughout the entire Matabeleland region. At the time, the concert had been positioned at a vantage point at the apex of a kopje which presented a pure and unobstructed view of the morning skyline for the crowd in attendance. To suit the occasion, a stunning performance was conveniently put up consisting of relevant classic tunes such as; 'fear no-more the heat of the sun' as well as 'song to the moon' by Rusalka. This particular festival marked the start of quite a number of significant changes for the festival particularly in its organisation and execution. For starters, additional performances were added to the programme such as African poetry, folklore, storytelling and cultural music exhibitions which are basically taught orally and passed on from one generation to the other. Espie (2014) confirms that traditional musical arts in much of the African continent is passed down orally (or aurally) and is not written. The list of performers also included a significant number of local talent who had managed to make the cut and were presented with an opportunity to showcase their talents. Figure 4 below shows the Marimba Festival Workshop at Milton High School.



Figure 4: Marimba Festival Workshop at Milton High School. December 2002. Photo by Bruce McDonald.

The 2006 festival revival

Conditions in Zimbabwe continued to deteriorate both economically and politically in the years after the eclipse festival. This time around, the interval for the hosting of another festival lapsed without any hope at all of successfully financing and hosting another edition of the Bulawayo Music Festival. In 2005, the Performing Arts Bulawayo institute once again took the initiative of promoting and lobbying for another festival. This time around, the organising team was determined to start all the necessary preparations well ahead of time to avoid the inconveniences and complications of the previous festival. They pegged the event for mid-2006 with the anticipation that all things will be in place by then.

To ensure a flawless programme, all the reservations and line-up compilations were done well ahead of time; more than a year beforehand actually. By the end of 2005, it had been deemed realistically possible to hold another music festival based on the actual confirmations in the possession of the organisers. Sure enough, only three performers bowed out at the last minute with everyone else on the list keeping to their word. Financing for the event still remained an issue however, there was sufficient time and opportunity to run around and garner support for the event. Eventually, barely sufficient funding was secured from various organisations and well-wishers such as the MBCA Bank⁸ which funded the travel and board expenses of several artists all the way from Europe.

The plan for the festival this time around was not just to keep up with the expected recurrence schedule. Rather, the organisers were more concerned with reviving the festival from its dormancy of over three years. It was planned to be bigger in scale than any other festival ever hosted based on both the number of performing artists and the attendance numbers. This was in a bid to restore the legacy of the festival itself as well as to reiterate its underlying essence which was the commemoration of the three music milestones that

⁸ It is a banking company based out of Harare, Harare, Zimbabwe.

prompted the very maiden festival back in 1997. This festival also aimed at further promoting the participation of local talent and showcasing more local musical trends instead of concentrating on the international performers, a move which had been initiated at the eclipse festival a few years back.

The ensuing festival was definitely a major success and a very significant milestone in the history of the Bulawayo music festival. What made it even more spectacular was that the festival was being hosted amidst a more severe barrage of complications and challenges as compared to some of the festivals that had been hosted before. The success of this particular festival cannot possibly be attributed to any single committee, organisation or individual. It took serious teamwork with various members of society sacrificing time and resources to ensure the success of the festival. In retrospect, the founder and co-organiser, Michael Bullivant, insisted that the success was hinged on the cooperation of different stakeholders who could just as easily have sabotaged the whole event, particularly the local native community. Considering the prevailing political environment at the time, this is not at all far removed from the reality. Writing in *The Zimbabwean Weekender* publication of 05 May, 2008, Sarah Huddleson, international author and festival fan noted how the racial variations in the city have always been a dividing element for the citizens of Bulawayo. An unprecedented string of concerts graced the stage that year with more than twenty different performances in the main act alone.

Almost twenty times as much that number also took part in the following segments of the week-long festival. The festival this time around also included the trade fair that was ongoing at the time and the two events were fused to promote even greater interaction. Figure 5 below shows *The Zambezi Sarabande* performing in one of the series of the Bulawayo Music Festival.



Figure 5: *The Zambezi Sarabande*, at Gifford High, 25 May 2006. Photo by Bruce McDonald.

IV. THE NEW FESTIVAL TRAJECTORY

With the success of the revival in 2006, a new trajectory for the Bulawayo Music Festival was set. The organisers made

strong resolutions that the festival was to be hosted from there onwards without fail every two years as initially intended back in 1997. On the other hand, the operating environment was not improving in the least. In fact, the oncoming election period made everything even more complex with a lot of violent activity being reported and even greater scrutiny by state agents of any gathering. Despite the violence-infused atmosphere and deteriorating economic conditions, the organisers proceeded to adhere to their resolutions. Taking a cue from the previous festival, plans were made well ahead of time and the canvassing of financial support was launched quite early.

Once again, performers from all over the globe showed interest in the festival. As the new normal, quite a large number of local artists also signed up for the festival. To the delight of many in attendance, particularly the consistent ones, the Odeion String Quartet showed up with a reverting performance despite having lost most of its original members who had performed at the very first festival. The politically motivated violence that was rampant at the time especially in Matebelelang however caused quite a number of artists to reconsider and refrain from attending the festivities. The artists and performers in attendance however picked up the extra stage time with extended acts. Several tutorial workshops were also established to cover for the missing acts. These proved to be very successful and helpful in imparting music knowledge and tips from the seasoned artists in attendance to the enthusiastic spectators. Some of the experts in attendance took the time to drum up a 150 people gigantic choir which was mainly composed of local students. An intense training session ensued to coordinate the timid voices into meaningful and harmonious vocals that attempted to emulate the works of legendary composers like Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart⁹. Performers from all over the country showed up for the local segments including independent vocal groups, school choirs and even church choral groups. Quite a large number of school choirs took part in the main events in an enhanced effort to benefit the younger generations from the international exposure that the festival brought. The choir in Figure 5, below was indeed a hearty success and it signified the importance and benefits of collective effort more than anything else. The sounds from the different choristers were original, highly organised and convincingly harmonising and choral timbre revealed the group's pure identity. The choristers presentations reflected Blacking's (1967: 3-13) concept of "music as humanly organized sound and soundingly organized humanity".

⁹ Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart (1756–91) was an Austrian composer. Mozart composed music in several genres, including opera and symphony (Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart (1756–91) was an Austrian composer. Mozart composed music in several genres, including opera and symphony)



Figure 6: The song of the Carnivores, 25 May 2012. Photo by Bruce McDonald.

The next festival came in again like clockwork, entrenching the new trajectory of the festival with a successful 7th edition. At this point, the organisers were focusing more on promoting diversity and inclusivity. The festival became a place where music of no correlation could all be heard and experienced. In one instance, the classical melodies of violins and organs would be playing then, in the next instance, the echoes of the African drums (*ngoma*) and *marimba* (xylophone) (Figure 4 and 5) would take over. Those in attendance had the opportunity to learn *marimba* through memory as Western notation is difficult to use on amateur students. Professor David Dargie (1998) impresses how difficult it is to use Western notation in the teaching of *marimba* to new students. His experiences in trying to teach African *marimba* to students at Old Lumko high school in the Eastern Cape Province of South Africa was a mammoth, he had to use rote method and memory for students to be able to play the *marimba* and acquired the skills. Similarly the rote method has been used during the 7th edition of the Bulawayo Music Festival to teach students to play the *marimba*.

Artists' attendance remained high and the festival intensified its educational drive especially for school children who still had the opportunity to pursue music as a professional career. A local production titled *Mukamba Tree* was one of the showstoppers that incorporated just about every student in attendance with the help of composer R. Sisson. Interestingly the local students stimulated the festival performances with traditional dances and poetry as a good symbol of the Zimbabwe culture. In support of this act, Muparutsa (2013: 51) narrates that in African performance music typically does not exist as a separate entity "sound and words only", but is rather combined with poetry and dance.

In fact, more and more student acts were incorporated into the opening act to encourage participation. Top notch school in Zimbabwe such as Peterhouse College dominated these appearances however several other non-popular and standard schools also took part in the concerts. Renowned artist T. Lax went on a tour around the nearby schools to conduct more in-depth tutoring and music workshops for the students who had failed to attend the festival for one reason or the other. This methodology implemented by the festival organisers and T. Lax reinforced what was learnt and enabled the continuation

and smooth flow of the leaning process. Burnard (1998:81) affirms that "the music learning process becomes a continuous Interactive process where learners reciprocally and cooperatively participate in music making

adventures". Regrettably, a marked decline in orchestras was experienced owing to the financial difficulties being experienced by organisers.

An upsurge in artist attendance was again experienced in the 8th production of the Bulawayo Music Festival. More performers than ever recorded were in attendance at the event which again came on schedule with ample preparation. This can be attributed to the aftermath calm of elections which put the international performers more at ease about being present at the festival. As usual, en-masse choirs composed mainly of school children took to the stage in the opening acts. The atmosphere at the time was pretty much friendly and the performances proved to be even more diverse than any other in the festival's history. The festival was just the perfect setup for musical knowledge impartation. Different local artists and students had the opportunity to learn different musical skills and songs through the rote method and this method proved that participants memorise the skills and songs easily and quicker. The Memory and Cognition Journal (2013) concurs that learning through listening facilitates verbatim memory in a significant manner.

The festival however suffered a tremendous blow during the 8th session when local authorities arrested Petroc Trelawny, a talented performer who was a beloved favourite for the massive crowds. Unconfirmed rumours suggest that this was a politically motivated move by the ruling party. The official response from the organisers of the festival was however based on the absence of a work permit for Petroc Trelawny which made his actions illegal. Despite this, the festival ended on a high note although there was an almost tangible underlying sense of fear and wariness among the performers and spectators. The actions of the state at this point resulted in the cancellation of the next festival as the organisers sought to clear a legal path for their performers to avoid such embarrassment ever again. As such, the consistent trajectory was once again interrupted and the festival went into a four year long hibernation.

The second come-back

After the organising committee had cleared the arduous legal red tape requirements, a return of the festival for its ninth session was set in motion. Financing was secured from various stakeholders with NMB Bank being one of the top sponsors. The festival this time around was however smaller and restricted. The organisers however deemed it necessary to proceed with it in order to restore confidence in everyone concerned. In fact, the fact that the festival was even back at all was quite impressive on its own given the legal complications that were now involved in organising such an event.

Despite the minimal scale, the festive managed to retain its core aspects of cultural diversity and the exchange of music knowledge and skill with seasoned veterans like Andrew Sherwood¹⁰. Several new artists who had never graced the Zimbabwean borders were in attendance and delivered memorable performances. One local talent who was at the time making it big abroad and had been one of the key artists at the inception of the festival, Nokuthula Ngwenyama made an appearance at the festival to the delight of many patrons. Several other upcoming squads like Note2Eton¹¹ wowed the crowds with their world-class vocals.

The attendance was however dismal owing to the continued economic challenges in the country as well as a dwindling interest in the classical melodies. Most of the spectators in attendance were loyalists of the festival who had a greater appreciation of the festival based mainly on its significance rather than just the music. Despite the low attendance, the performances were still hailed as riveting and world class. One music critic, Leslie Howard acknowledged the artistic prowess of the artists in attendance and even went as far as to lobby for a 10th session of the festival. The fate of the festival is solely in the hands of the organisers, currently the Zimbabwe Academy of Music and Performing Arts Bulawayo. The festival's trajectory is now well in place having managed to adhere to its 2 year cycles through successful 2016 and 2018 festivities. Unfortunately due to the Covid -19 pandemic which hit the whole world like storm, the Bulawayo Music Festival could not be conducted in 2020 as large gatherings were banned. However the organising committee of the festival highlighted that the 2021 festival plans are already in motion. They stressed that learning from past experience, preparations have to start earlier so that the festival organisation will come to fruition, therefore the audience can all sit back and await its kick-off. Plans to make the festival more sustainable are also being put into place. Indeed organisers of music festivals should be adequately plan for any festival sustainability. Stettler (2011:18) commends that "Music festival organizers are not alone in confronting the challenge of becoming more aligned with sustainability". I also concur with the ideas on festival organization which were recommended by Brooks, O'Halloran and Magnin (2007) on strategic planning of music festivals through a sustainability framework.

V. SUPREMACY UNDERTONES OF THE FESTIVAL

A closer examination of the origins of the festival raises a few concerns especially for the black Zimbabwean community. While the festivities and performances were not directly racist, they were structured in a manner that effectively side-

¹⁰ Sherwood was actually educated in Zimbabwe in his younger days and often makes appearances at the Academy of music.

¹¹ Note2Eton is a community choir of people who share a passion for music and singing.
(www.facebook.com › ... › Public Figure › Musician/Band)

lined the native majority. Claims of diversity were only really true as far as multi-national participation was concerned. Within the confines of Zimbabwe itself, only a particular calibre of individuals made the cut for participation. For instance, the schools that were readily capable of actually participating in the concerts were the elite ones. These schools were basically composed of a white majority that had the exposure to classical music from early ages.

The festival was also a target of politics due to its boldness at times to dabble in regime issues. At one point, during the presidential re-run period, the performers subliminally participated in political lobbying with one of Beethoven's popular hymn about 'freedom'. The message was of course a positive one that would ideally promote democratic movements however the ruling party at the time would clearly see it as an act of political interference. Later on, a popular performer was arrested during a concert with somewhat ridiculous charges which hinted at political power plays. Of course, none of these lines of thought were ever publicly acknowledged and therefore remain issues of personal opinion. One of the staff members at the School of Music, K. Mlilo (Interview 16 September 2019), spoke on the condition of anonymity and a pseudonym. His interaction with the organisation of the festive dates back to its early days and he narrated the unusually high levels of scrutiny by suspected state agents.



Figure 7: L. Howard and the Amici Quartet, Bulawayo. 24 May 2012. Photo by Bruce McDonald.

VI. CONCLUSIONS

The influence and impact of the Bulawayo Music Festival goes way beyond the entertaining aspects but it is an important educational and musicological podium for different people. An even more intense way of viewing this would be to consider the actual effects of music in general on people. In 2011, Dr. Daniel Levitin, a researcher at McGill University in Canada actually discovered proof of the healing abilities of music¹². Also, in retrospect, all these showcases are just but the lining on top of the major event. The festival hosts the

¹² According to the research, listening to music increases the amount of dopamine produced in the brain - a mood-enhancing chemical, making it a feasible treatment for depression.

most interactive and educational music workshops during its run. These workshops play a greater role in bringing awareness to the festival audience about the whole drive of the festival. After all, impartation of musical artistry and skills being displayed on the stage takes more than just visual demonstrations. The host and organiser of the event plays a key role in promoting this educational initiative that leaves attendees with concrete knowledge and skills that successfully facilitate imitation and adoption of new musical trends.

The festival may have started off with interests that side-lined the interests of the native majority of the nation however it has become an instrumental platform for learning and interaction for Zimbabweans and the world through its evolution, both intentional and unintentional. The inclusivity of the festival is not just about showcasing the various genres of music available locally and abroad. Rather, it is a show of faith in the ability of the community to co-exist with their particular beliefs harmoniously while sharing knowledge and of course having fun.

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