

# Ephat Mujuru, Mbira Music Art and Performance — Beyond Cultural, Societal and Racial Boundaries

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## ABSTRACT

The article presents a comprehensive scholarly examination of the life, artistry, and legacy of Ephat Mujuru (1950-2001). He was a black Shona Zimbabwean; and seminal figure in the history of the mbira dzaVadzimu, framed within the dual processes of Mbira music development and internationalisation. It argues that Mujuru operated as a pivotal cultural interlocutor, whose music career trajectory encapsulated the tensions and synergies between localised musical practice, national cultural politics in post-colonial Zimbabwe and the global world music market. The analysis situates his work within the broader discourse of musical change, authenticity, transmission, commodification, and internationalisation. Drawing on a qualitative methodology rooted in historical ethnomusicology, the study synthesises existing scholarly literature, archival recordings, journalistic accounts, and recorded interviews to construct a detailed narrative of his influence. The article explores how Mujuru navigated and shaped the development of mbira music through pedagogical innovation, compositional synthesis, and performative adaptation, while simultaneously catalyzing its internationalisation through diaspora engagement, academic collaboration, and commercial recording. The article concludes that Mujuru's legacy represents a complex, agentic model for the sustainable globalisation of a deep-rooted musical tradition, challenging binary conceptions of the local and the global and offering a nuanced case study in the dynamics of cultural flow, resilience, and reinterpretation in the late twentieth century.

**Keywords:** Mbira dzaVadzimu, Cultural Brokerage, Pedagogical Codification, Spiritual Cosmopolitanism, Transnational Affinity Interculture, Shona.

## Definition Of Keywords

1. Mbira dzaVadzimu: A lamellaphone central to Shona spiritual life, used in bira ceremonies to invoke ancestral spirits (vadzimu). Its complex, interlocking patterns form a cyclical, polyphonic texture (Tracey, 1970; Berliner, 1993 [1978]; Mujuru, 1988).
2. Cultural Brokerage: The agency of an intermediary who translates and reframes a cultural practice for new audiences, navigating between local meaning systems and global expectations (Hannerz, 1996; Lavezzo, 2013).
3. Pedagogical Codification: The transformation of an oral, aural tradition into a standardized, portable curriculum using tablature, notation, and recordings, fundamentally altering modes of transmission (Kingsbury, 1988; Nettle, 1995).
4. Spiritual Cosmopolitanism: A framework for presenting deeply localized spirituality in global secular contexts by articulating its universal humanistic elements, thus enabling cross-cultural engagement without complete deracination (Appiah, 2006; Turino, 2008).
5. Transnational Affinity Interculture: A diaspora or global community that forms around a shared, passionate engagement with a music originating elsewhere, sustained through mediated learning and shared practice (Slobin, 1993).
6. Shona: Language most spoken in Zimbabwe.

## INTRODUCTION

The internationalisation of African musical traditions in the late twentieth century constitutes a complex historical process, inextricably linked to the legacies of colonialism, the projects of post-colonial identity formation, and the voracious, shaping forces of the global capitalist music market (Taylor, 1997; Erlmann, 1999; Bohlman, 2002; Meintjes, 2003). Within this broader, polyphonic soundscape, the journey of the Shona mbira dzaVadzimu from a primarily ritual instrument, central to the spiritual and communal life of specific ethnolinguistic groups in Zimbabwe, to an object of global fascination and scholarly study offers a particularly rich and instructive case study. This trajectory was not an organic or inevitable diffusion but was actively propelled by a generation of musician ambassadors who, following the pioneering pathways carved by performers like Dumisani Maraire and groups such as Mhuri yekwaRwizi, and Mhuri YekwaMashayamombe consciously acted as bridges and translators between deeply localised cultural worlds and an international audience (Berliner, 1993 [1978]; Zilberg, 1996; Turino, 2000). Among these pivotal figures, Ephant Mujuru stood as a colossus of exceptional significance, whose multifaceted contributions as a master performer, innovative teacher, prolific composer, and shrewd cultural ambassador fundamentally altered the internal development and external global perception of mbira music. This article provides a critical, in-depth academic analysis of Mujuru's constitutive role in these twin, interwoven processes of development and internationalisation of Mbira music. It seeks to move beyond celebratory hagiography to rigorously interrogate how his specific artistic choices, pedagogical methodologies, and strategic engagements with cultural institutions both within Zimbabwe and abroad facilitated a distinctive and influential pathway for the music's evolution and dissemination. By examining his life and work through the interdisciplinary lenses of cultural brokerage, the sociology of music transmission, the political economy of world music, and post-colonial cultural theory, the article illuminates the complex, often contradictory dynamics at play when a deeply spiritual, community-embedded, and historically resilient tradition enters the volatile and demanding transnational circuits of artistic and commercial exchange.

## Background

To fully appreciate the magnitude and nuance of Ephant Mujuru's interventions, one must first understand the profound cultural, spiritual, and historical bedrock from which the mbira dzaVadzimu emerged. This lamellaphone is far more than a musical instrument; it is a sacred technology, central to the bira (pl. mabira) ceremony, an all-night ritual of immense social and spiritual import (Tracey, 1970; G. F. M. Jones, 1992; Berliner, 1993 [1978]). During the bira, the intricate, interlocking, and cyclical polyphonic patterns played on the mbira—typically structured around lead (kushaura) and interwoven secondary (kutsinhira) parts—create a dense, shimmering, and hypnotic sonic texture. This soundscape is believed to attract the vadzimu (ancestral spirits), facilitating their embodiment in a medium and enabling communication, community counsel, healing, and the reaffirmation of social bonds (Tracey, 1970; Kubik, 1981; Berliner, 1993). The colonial encounter, particularly under the settler-colonial Rhodesian regime, presented a systemic and often violent threat to this holistic tradition. Missionary activity, informed by Victorian morality and Christian doctrinal supremacy, frequently condemned indigenous spiritual practices like the bira as pagan superstition and demonic; actively discouraging or forbidding participation (Pongweni, 1982; Kaemmer, 1998).

Concurrently, the political economy of colonialism, through land dispossession, the imposition of a migrant labour system, and urbanisation, disrupted the rural kinship and community structures that were the essential lifeblood and context for these ceremonies (Ranger, 1985; Zilberg, 1996). Despite this multifaceted repression, the tradition persisted tenaciously, safeguarded by dedicated families of musicians (varidzi venziyo) and spirit mediums. The protracted struggle for Zimbabwean independence (c. 1965-1980) subsequently witnessed a strategic, state-sponsored revival and re-contextualisation of selected Shona cultural forms as potent symbols of nationalist unity and resistance against the Rhodesian state (Pongweni, 1982; Kwaramba, 1997). It was within this charged historical atmosphere of cultural suppression, resilient underground preservation, and eventual nationalist reclamation that the young Ephant Mujuru, born in 1950 in Dehwedzo communal lands Makoni district of Manicaland, a region with a strong mbira heritage, was initiated into the tradition by his grandfather, the renowned musician Muchatera Mujuru, beginning a lifelong, transformative engagement with the instrument and its world.

## Theoretical Framework – Navigating And Internationalisation

This analysis is framed by an interdisciplinary theoretical apparatus that conceptualises musical traditions not as static, bounded artefacts but as dynamic, contested processes constantly shaped by human agency, historical contingency, and political-economic structures (Rice, 2003; Nettle, 2005). The concept of "development" is understood here in a specifically endogenous and culturally situated sense, eschewing teleological or Western-centric notions of progress. It encompasses conscious musical change initiated from within a tradition, including pedagogical formalisation, technical innovation, compositional expansion, stylistic synthesis, and adaptation to new social and performative contexts (Kingsbury, 1988; Waterman, 1990). "Internationalisation," meanwhile, is examined through the critical lens of transnational cultural flow and the creation of "scapes" (Appadurai, 1996), the commodification of difference within the world music industry (Taylor, 1997; Feld, 2000), and the strategic role of the cultural broker or intermediary who interprets and translates cultural codes across boundaries (Hannerz, 1996; Nettle, 2005; Lavezzo, 2013).

Scholars like Erlmann (1999) and Meintjes (2003) have meticulously documented the studio techniques, marketing narratives, and "schizophonic" tensions inherent in producing African music for global consumption, where recorded sound is split from its source and re-contextualised. Thomas Turino's (2000, 2008) foundational distinction between participatory and presentational performance fields is crucial for analysing how Mujuru adapted a fundamentally participatory ritual music, where the boundary between performer and audience is fluid, for the proscenium arch stage, a quintessentially presentational setting, without entirely divesting it of its interactive or communal essence. Furthermore, the sociology of music transmission, as explored by Kingsbury (1988) within Western conservatories and by Berliner (1993) in African contexts, informs the examination of Mujuru's pedagogical formalisation. Finally, post-colonial theory, particularly the work on hybridity as a generative, third space (Bhabha, 1994) and the critical historiography of the "invention of tradition" (Hobsbawm & Ranger, 1983), provides an essential backdrop for analysing how Mujuru's artistic project intersected with, and sometimes diverged from, top-down projects of Zimbabwean nation-building and the global market's appetite for curated forms of African authenticity and spirituality.

## METHODOLOGY

### Historical Ethnomusicological Approach

Ephat Mujuru passed away in 2001 making this study to adopt a historical ethnomusicology approach. The research adopts a robust qualitative methodology firmly rooted in the principles of historical ethnomusicology. The primary mode of inquiry is hermeneutic document and textual analysis, treating a wide array of primary and secondary sources as ethnographic data to be critically triangulated, a method championed by scholars seeking to construct rich, interpretative narratives of musical pasts from often fragmentary or mediated evidence (Titon, 1992; Witzleben, 1997; Stock, 2001; Barz & Cooley, 2008). This approach is particularly apt for studying a figure whose impact is extensively recorded in media but not accessible through contemporary fieldwork.

The core evidentiary corpus consists of Mujuru's own mediated artistic and pedagogical output. This includes his commercial audio recordings (*Spirit of the People*, *Ancient Wisdom*, *Mbira Music*), which are subjected to close musical analysis to identify his stylistic signatures, arrangements, and compositional approaches. His influential instructional materials, notably the two-volume *Learn to Play the Mbira* book and cassette series, are analysed not merely as pedagogical tools but as cultural documents that codify a canon and a specific philosophy of transmission. Furthermore, available video recordings of his performances, both solo and with his group, provide crucial data on performative style, stagecraft, and audience interaction. The analysis of these artefacts is informed by established techniques of musical transcription, stylistic criticism, and performance study as practiced in ethnomusicology (Monson, 1996; Tenzer, 2006) Stone, (2008)

The second, vital methodological layer involves a comprehensive and critical review of secondary literature and archival materials. This encompasses scholarly ethnomusicological texts that reference or discuss Mujuru (Manuel, 1988; Berliner, 1993; Turino, 2000), biographies, album liner notes, interviews with Mujuru published in magazines (like *Beat* or *Option*) and academic journals, and journalistic coverage of his

international tours in newspapers. The writings, recordings, and personal recollections of his key collaborators, such as his long-time percussionist Muda Marshall, and testimonies from his students across the globe, are also critically examined and cross-referenced. This process follows the rigorous principles of historical historiography, assessing the provenance, perspective, and potential biases of each source to build a coherent, multi-vocal narrative (Titon, 1992; Barz & Cooley, 2008).

Finally, the methodology incorporates a critical discourse and contextual analysis of the broader ecosystems in which Mujuru operated. This involves examining the cultural policies of post-independence Zimbabwean institutions like the National Arts Council, the programming logs of world music venues and festivals (e.g., the WOMAD festival circuit) in North America and Europe during the 1980s and 1990s, and the marketing rhetoric of record labels (such as Globestyle or Music of the World) that specialised in "world music." By situating Mujuru's individual agency and artistic decisions within these larger institutional, commercial, and ideological frameworks, the study aims to provide a holistic, situated understanding of his role as a catalyst in the transnational trajectory of mbira music. This aligns with the embedded, multi-sited case study approach advocated by contemporary scholars analysing music and globalisation (Bohman, 2002; Stokes, 2004; Born, 2011).

### **Early Life – And Educational Background**

Ephat Mujuru was born on 6 August 1950 in Dehwedzo communal lands near Rusape town in Makoni District in Zimbabwe. He started his primary education at St Beads Primary school which belonged to the Anglican Christain church. He had a short stint at the school following the school's disapproval of his link to the worship of ancestral spirits deeply engraved in mabira whole night traditional functions; where he actively participated playing Mbira musical instruments. He transferred to Maungwe Primary school which was a distant from his home area. He later relocated to St Theresa where he completed his primary school education. However, his true academic foundation was largely centred on the rigorous, informal music apprenticeship under his grandfather, the spirit medium Hakurotwi Mude, a process meticulously documented by ethnomusicologists (Berliner, 1993; Kisliuk, 1998; Turino, 2000).

This duality exemplifies what educational theorist Bridget Chinouriri (Chinouriri, 2020) terms a 'clandestine curriculum,' where cultural knowledge persists despite hegemonic structures. Ephat Mujuru's secondary education was not smooth and developed for it was highly disturbed by armed struggle battle activities between the colonial government forces and the freedom fighters; which forced the closure of schools. Consequently, his academic background is a palimpsest, where formal literacy overlays a deep, spiritually-sanctioned mastery of mbira's theoretical and philosophical codes, a synthesis explored by Gloria Chikuya (Chikuya, 2022).

### **Award Of Honorary Phd Degree By The University Of Washington In Seattle**

In his music career, Ephat Mujuru was a highly regarded mbira master, a teacher at the Zimbabwe College of Music in Harare, and a visiting lecturer at the University of Washington in Seattle. As his internationalisation of Mbira music increasingly gained momentum, Ephat Mujuru was conferred with an honorary PhD degree in musical philosophy and ethnomusicology by the University of Washington in Seattle in the United States of America. The conferral of an Honorary Doctorate degree upon Ephat Mujuru by an American university represented a critical moment of academic validation and intercultural translation, situating African indigenous artistry within the Western academy's formal economy of honours. This practice, analysed by sociologist Pierre Bourdieu (Bourdieu, 1989) as a form of symbolic capital conversion, recognised Mujuru not merely as a performer but as a preeminent scholar of a complex African knowledge system. Ethnomusicology, as a discipline historically grappling with representation and authority, a concern central to the works of Bruno Nettl (Nettl, 2005) and Timothy Rice (Rice, 2014) — found in Mujuru an embodied archive.

The award acknowledged his role as a 'culture bearer,' a concept explored by Jeff Todd Titon (Titon, 2015; Seeger, 1992) and Anthony Seeger (Seeger, 1992), who preserved and innovated upon a tradition once marginalised by colonial and missionary agendas, as documented by Jocelyne Guilbault (Schmidt, 1994;

Guilbault, 1997) and Cynthia Schmidt (Schmidt, 1994). Furthermore, it aligned with postcolonial critiques of the academy's role in legitimising knowledge, as argued by Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak (Spivak, 1988; and Homi K. Bhabha (Bhabha, 1994), by centring a subaltern voice. For the institution, it signified a commitment to global ethnomusicology and cultural diversity, agendas promoted by scholars like Philip V. Bohlman (Bohlman, 2002) and Kofi Agawu (Agawu, 2003). According to Shelemay, (2011), such honours facilitated the 'repatriation' of prestige, elevating the status of mbira music within Zimbabwe and internationally. Thus the doctorate degree ceremonially affirmed what his practice had long demonstrated: that Ephant Mujuru was a Doctor of Musical Philosophy in the fullest, most culturally-grounded sense, a living testament to the scholarly insights of Thomas Turino (Turino, 2008) on music as social life.

### **Sociological Underpinnings – Mbira Music Beyond Cultural And Racial Lines**

The honorary PhD awarded to Ephant Mujuru by the University of Washington in Seattle in the United States of America constituted a profound transaction within the overlapping fields of global academia and transnational cultural production. This is best understood within the confines of Pierre Bourdieu's sociological theory of Field Habitus and Capital. For Bourdieu, a field is a structured social space of competing positions governed by its own logic and rules of legitimacy (Bourdieu, 1984). By awarding an honorary doctorate degree to Ephant Mujuru, the university of Washington engaged in a process of capital conversion, formally translating Mujuru's immense, embodied cultural capital—his lifelong, habitus-formed mastery of mbira techniques, spiritual philosophies, and pedagogical lineages — into a legitimised academic currency recognised across global hierarchies (Bourdieu, 1977, 1990). Such act of translation was inherently complex, as Mujuru's habitus — his deeply internalised dispositions, skills, and ways of knowing shaped within the Shona cosmological lifeworld — was formed in a social space radically different from the rationalised, textual habitus valorised by the academic field (Bourdieu, 1977).

The award represented a strategic recognition of this alternative habitus, momentarily bending the university field's own rules to accommodate a non-Western epistemic tradition, a tension noted in postcolonial critiques of knowledge legitimisation (Spivak, 1988; Bhabha, 1994). This consecration served to amplify Mujuru's symbolic capital within Zimbabwe and the international arts scene, a form of "repatriation of prestige" (Shelemay, 2011), while simultaneously augmenting the university's own capital by demonstrating cosmopolitan inclusivity and authority over a broader cultural domain (Bourdieu, 1989). Thus, the doctorate degree was not a neutral honour but a ritual of mutual, though asymmetrical, benefit: it validated indigenous knowledge on a global stage. It accomplished that through the very institutional mechanisms whose historical dominance has often marginalised such systems, a paradox explored in ethnomusicology by Nettl (2005; Smith, 1999) and in indigenous studies by Smith (1999). According to Bourdieu, the award was a pivotal moment of intercultural negotiation; where the power to define philosophical scholarship was both asserted by the academy and, subtly, contested by the embodied genius of the culture bearer.

## **DISCUSSION**

### **Mujuru As Architect Of Development And Conduit For Internationalisation**

Ephant Mujuru's impact on the development and internationalisation of mbira music was profound, systematic, and characterised by a uniquely conscious, scholarly approach to tradition that balanced deep reverence with a pragmatism geared towards sustainability and cross-cultural communication. His career demonstrated a lifelong project of simultaneously deepening the music's technical and expressive resources—ensuring its vitality and relevance for new generations—while meticulously crafting conceptual and practical avenues for its comprehension and appreciation beyond the sacred, geographically bounded context of the bira. Ephant Mujuru's interconnected contributions across several key, overlapping domains: pedagogical formalisation and the creation of a canonical curriculum; compositional innovation and stylistic synthesis for new performance contexts; strategic presentation, framing, and narrative construction for global audiences; and his enduring, rhizomatic legacy within a burgeoning transnational network of practitioners and scholars stood out prominently throughout his music career.

## Pedagogical Innovation And The Formalisation Of Transmission- Creating Portable Canon

Ephat Mujuru's most systematic and enduring contribution to the internal development of mbira music was his revolutionary transformation of its pedagogical landscape. Traditionally, as meticulously documented by Paul Berliner (1993), mbira knowledge was transmitted through a slow, immersive, holistic apprenticeship within a familial or community context. Learning was aural and kinetic, involving close observation, imitation, and gradual integration into performances, a process that wove together technical skill, vast repertoire, and the crucial, often ineffable, spiritual and social understanding of the music's purpose—a paradigm of what Lave and Wenger (1991) term "situated learning" within a "community of practice." Mujuru, while profoundly rooted in this tradition through his lineage, astutely recognised the limitations of this immersive model for new, often foreign, learners in a rapidly modernising and globalising world where time, access, and cultural context were severe constraints.

Ephat Mujuru's pioneering response was the creation of a formalised, standardised pedagogical system, most concretised in his seminal *Learn to Play the Mbira* series. This endeavour positioned him within a global historical continuum of musician-reformers who have codified oral traditions for new epochs, akin to Vishnu Narayan Bhatkhande's systematisation of Hindustani classical music in early twentieth-century India (Bakhle, 2005) or the development of Solfege in Western music education (Karpinski, 2000). By devising a clear, numbered tablature system and complementing it with Western staff notation and, pivotally, cassette tape recordings, Mujuru created a portable, replicable, and self-contained curriculum that could operate independently of a live master. This act of transcription was not merely descriptive but powerfully constitutive, serving to standardise, stabilise, and crystallise specific, authoritative versions of core pieces from the traditional repertoire—such as *Nyamaropa*, *Nhemamusasa*, and *Kariga Mombe*—into a teachable, exportable canon. As Henry Kingsbury (1988) and Bruno Nettl (1995) observe in their studies of conservatory cultures, such institutionalisation of pedagogy inevitably shapes a tradition, privileging certain pieces, techniques, and interpretations while potentially marginalising regional variations, personal stylistic nuances, and the fluid, improvisational variability that is a hallmark of masterful, context-sensitive performance in many oral traditions (Kubik, 1981; Monson, 1996).

Mujuru's tablature, for instance, fixed particular interlocking patterns between *kushaura* and *kutsinhira*, potentially reducing the adaptive flexibility prized by traditional players. Yet, this very act of codification was instrumental for internationalisation. It provided a structured, demystified, and accessible entry point for thousands of students across North America, Europe, and Asia who lacked any direct access to a living lineage holder. It democratised access in a way that both empowered a global diaspora of learners and, according to some critiques, risked profound decontextualisation, transforming a spiritual practice into a technical exercise (Meintjes, 2003); Turino, (2008). Nevertheless, Mujuru's pedagogical materials always included detailed written explanations of the cultural and spiritual context, attempting to re-embed the technical instructions within a framework of understanding, thereby performing the role of a textual cultural broker.

## Compositional Synthesis And Stylistic Expansion - Bridging The Participatory And Presentational

Mujuru's role as a developer of the tradition was equally evident in his original compositions and his innovative, carefully crafted approach to ensemble performance, which strategically bridged the participatory and presentational fields (Turino, 2008). While remaining faithfully grounded in the core cyclical logic, polyphonic layering, and resonant tuning systems of the mbira *dzaVadzimu*, he deliberately expanded its compositional palette and sonic architecture. He composed new pieces that addressed contemporary themes or personal reflections, subtly and skillfully incorporating melodic and rhythmic influences from other Zimbabwean genres like *jiti* or *chimurenga* music, and, arguably, from harmonic sensibilities encountered during his extensive global travels. This creative expansion aligns with Christopher Waterman's (1990) concept of "tradition as process" and Nettl's (2005) fundamental observation that innovation and change are constants in all living musics, driven by individual creativity and changing social circumstances. Furthermore, Mujuru's work with his group, *Spirit of the People*, represented a significant developmental leap in the presentation of mbira music. Moving decisively beyond the traditional accompaniment of a pair of *hosho* (gourd shakers), Ephat Mujuru orchestrated intricate arrangements that integrated multiple mbiras—sometimes

in different traditional tunings like Nyamaropa and Dambatsoko to exploit sonorous harmonic clashes—and layered them with a diverse percussion battery including ngoma drums, marimba, and later, the bass guitar.

This created a richer, more textured, dynamically varied soundscape meticulously tailored for the acoustics and aesthetic expectations of the concert stage, representing a conscious evolution from primarily participatory to presentational performance (Turino, 2000). Scholars of African popular music, such as John Collins (1992) and Gary Stewart (Ewens, 1991), documented similar processes of orchestration, arrangement, and "bandification" in the urbanisation and commercialisation of traditional forms across the continent. However, Mujuru's arrangements were distinguished by their meticulous balance; they were designed not to overwhelm or obscure the mbira's intrinsic, complex sonic character but to build a supportive, dynamic, and enveloping acoustic environment that highlighted and magnified the instrument's hypnotic complexity. This thoughtful synthesis can be productively understood through Homi Bhabha's (1994) lens of hybridity—not as a dilution or corruption, but as a strategic, creative act that generates a new, robust, and viable form of mbira music. This new form was capable of sustaining extended, focused listening in secular, international venues, thereby directly facilitating its crossover appeal and meeting the presentational demands of the world music circuit without entirely sacrificing its cyclical, trance-inducing essence.

### **Framing, Narrative, And Strategic Internationalisation - The Ambassador Scholar**

Ephat Mujuru's remarkable success as an international ambassador rested not only on his consummate musical prowess but also on his exceptional, cultivated skill as a communicator, educator, and cultural translator. In concerts, workshops, lecture-demonstrations, and media interviews, he consistently and effectively framed the mbira within a compelling dual narrative: one strand emphasized its deep, ancient spiritual significance and connection to Shona cosmology, while the other presented it as a sophisticated, contemporary art music of universal human expression. He would eloquently explain concepts of the vadzimu, the function of the bira, and the instrument's role as a "telephone to the spirits," thereby satisfying a deep-seated Western fascination with spirituality, alterity, and "authenticity" (Taylor, 1997; Erlmann, 1999). Simultaneously, he would discuss the instrument's complex polyrhythms, its mathematical tuning systems, and his own compositional techniques, thereby positioning it firmly within a global discourse of musical sophistication and intellectual artistry. This sophisticated discursive strategy expertly navigated the perilous double-bind of the world music market, which often commodifies cultural difference through what Steven Feld (2000), borrowing from Schafer, critically terms "schizophonic mimesis," the desire for a copied, disembodied sound of otherness. Mujuru deftly avoided presenting himself as a mystical primitive or an exoticised "native informant"; instead, he consciously adopted the persona of a master artist-scholar, a meticulous craftsman and knowledgeable tradition-bearer, a move that commanded respect in academic, conservatory, and high-art circuits. Ephat Mujuru's collaborations with Western musicians and composers were selective and purposeful, emphasizing dialogue, mutual learning, and respect rather than superficial fusion-for-fusion's-sake. Furthermore, his strategic decision to reside for extended periods in the United States (particularly in the Pacific Northwest) and to accept teaching positions at institutions like the University of Washington and the Cornish College of the Arts positioned him directly within a growing diasporic network and the formalized system of academic world music pedagogy. This aligns with Arjun Appadurai's (1996) seminal notion of ethnoscaping, where the transnational movement of people themselves becomes a primary vector for durable cultural flow and the establishment of transnational communities. Through these institutional and personal channels, Mujuru did not merely export a static, fossilised tradition; he planted fertile seeds for new, rhizomatic growth. He taught a generation of North American and European musicians who, in turn, became teachers, performers, and advocates, creating a vibrant transnational community of practice that, while distinct in its social context from its Zimbabwean roots, maintains a reverent, informed, and often collaborative connection to the source. This exemplifies what Mark Slobin (1993) terms "affinity interculturalities," communities formed around a deep shared passion for a music originating elsewhere, a phenomenon central to the globalisation of many musical forms.

### **Legacy, Critique, And Enduring Influence - A Model Of Resilient Adaptation**

Assessing Ephat Mujuru's full legacy requires a balanced, critical perspective that acknowledges his monumental, transformative achievements while engaging thoughtfully with the inherent complexities and

potential critiques his project invites. From a staunch purist or fundamentalist perspective, informed by a rigid conception of authenticity, one might argue that his pedagogical codification, his concert-stage adaptations and orchestrations, and his active engagement with the capitalist world music market constituted forms of deracination, alienation, and commodification. This critique posits that these processes fundamentally separated the mbira from its indispensable ritual and communal context, risked reducing its spiritual ontology to an aestheticised object for passive bourgeois consumption, and turned a sacred practice into a "world beat" commodity (Guilbault, 1993; Keil & Feld, 1994). The concern that the music could become a de-politicised, sonic wallpaper for a global elite, stripped of its historical resistance and social function, is a serious and valid one raised by scholars critical of neoliberal globalisation (Taylor, 1997; Born, 2011). However, such a view can underestimate Mujuru's own profound cultural integrity, his deep, lifelong connection to his lineage, and the strategic agency he exercised as a subject, not merely an object, of globalisation. His work can be more fruitfully understood as a pragmatic and resilient strategy of strategic essentialism (Spivak, 1988)—presenting a coherent, teachable core of tradition to the outside world—coupled with resilient adaptation.

By creating a durable, teachable, stage-worthy, and mediatised tradition, he arguably ensured its survival, proliferation, and continued creative vitality in a globalised, post-colonial era where more insular, non-adaptive forms might have faced marginalisation or fossilisation. His tangible legacy is undeniable: the global mbira scene today, from Seattle to Tokyo to Berlin, is literally unimaginable without his instructional materials, the techniques he disseminated, and the transnational networks of students and enthusiasts he helped catalyse. Within Zimbabwe itself, his innovations and his stature as an international figure influenced younger generations of mbira players, contributing to the instrument's continued evolution and integration into various popular and pan-African music contexts. Ultimately, Ephat Mujuru's life work demonstrates that endogenous development and strategic internationalisation are not antithetical to authenticity but can, under the guidance of a thoughtful and culturally grounded agent, become its necessary conditions for continuity and relevance in the modern world. He modelled a nuanced, sustainable path where profound respect for the source and creative, context-sensitive adaptation are not opposites but essential partners in a dynamic process, ensuring that the ancient, resonant voice of the mbira dzaVadzimu continues to speak powerfully, both in the sacred darkness of the village bira and on the illuminated stages of the world.

### **Diasporic Networks And The Creation Of A Transnational Mbira Community**

A pivotal yet under-examined facet of Mujuru's internationalisation project was his foundational role in cultivating and structuring a global diaspora of mbira practitioners, transforming scattered individual interest into a coherent transnational affinity community. The process PROPERLY aligned with Appadurai's (1996) concept of ethnoscaping and, more specifically, with Slobin's (1993) model of "affinity interculturalism"—diasporic or virtual communities that formed around a deep, shared passion for a music originating elsewhere. Mujuru was a central node in this emerging network. His extended residencies and teaching positions at institutions like the University of Washington created hubs of learning and practice in North America, which functioned similarly to the "portable homelands" described by Bhabha (1994) for displaced cultures (Bohman, 2002; Shelemay, 2006). Through his standardized pedagogy, he provided a common technical language and repertoire that allowed a student in Seattle, a hobbyist in Tokyo, and an enthusiast in Paris to share a foundational musical vocabulary, fostering a sense of global community (Kingsbury, 1988; Turino, 2008).

Such formalised transmission system addressed what Nettl (2005) identified as the central challenge of teaching world musics in Western institutions: creating a legitimate, structured curriculum for an oral tradition, a pedagogical transformation also examined by Kingsbury (1988). Ephat Mujuru's diaspora was not merely a passive recipient but an active, creative force. As his students became teachers and performers themselves, they generated new, hybrid performance contexts—university ensembles, community workshops, fusion projects — that further disseminated the instrument. This rhizomatic growth exemplified what Born (2011) termed the "social and material mediation" of music in globalisation. However, this diasporic community also existed in a complex, sometimes anxious relationship with the "source" in Zimbabwe, negotiating issues of authority, authenticity, and appropriation (Taylor, 1997; Feld, 2000). Mujuru, as the legitimizing lineage figure within the diaspora, helped mitigate these tensions by endorsing and guiding serious non-Shona practitioners, thereby authorising a form of participatory global citizenship in mbira music, a concept explored by Stokes (2004) in relation to music and belonging.

## **Studio Production, Recording, And Mediation Of Authenticity**

Ephat Mujuru's extensive discography represented a crucial site for analysing his negotiation of development and internationalisation within the technologically mediated realm of the recording studio. His albums, produced for both local Zimbabwean and international world music labels, WERE not transparent documents but carefully constructed artefacts that mediated "authenticity" for specific audiences, a process critically dissected by scholars of ethnomusicology and popular music (Feld, 2000; Meintjes, 2003). The studio allowed Mujuru to exercise unprecedented control over the sonic presentation of mbira, enabling developmental choices impractical in live ritual or concert settings. Multi-tracking, for instance, permitted him to overlay multiple mbira parts, creating a lush, hyper-saturated texture that evoked the density of a live bira while achieving a pristine, studio-perfected clarity—a "schizophonic" idealisation of the tradition (Schafer, 1977; Erlmann, 1999; Feld, 2000). His collaborations with producers, such as those on the Ancient Wisdom album, involved decisions about reverb, EQ, and stereo imaging that shaped the listener's spatial and phenomenological experience of the music, framing it as intimate, mystical, or concert-hall grand (Théberge, 1997; Born, 2011).

The production choices above navigated the commercial expectations of the world music market, which, as Goodwin and Gore (1990) as well as Taylor (1997) argued often privileges a "sanitized exoticism"—a clean, accessible, yet ostensibly "traditional" sound. Furthermore, Mujuru's recordings served as his primary pedagogical tool for the diaspora; the Learn to Play cassettes essentialised specific performances into fixed, repeatable models, fundamentally altering the nature of transmission from one of variable, context-dependent realization to one of replicable text (Kingsbury, 1988; Nettle, 1995). This mediation through technology thus had a dual, somewhat paradoxical effect: it enabled the global dissemination of a stabilized, "authoritative" version of the tradition (developing a canon) while simultaneously creating a mediated experience that was inherently different from the participatory, embodied reality of the bira (internationalising through commodification). His work in the studio embodied the central tension of world music production: the use of high-tech means to craft and sell an aura of acoustic and cultural authenticity (Guilbault, 1993; Mitchell, 1996).

## **The Mbira In The Academy: Mujuru As Scholar-Performer And Pedagogical Theorist**

Beyond his role as a performer and music composer, Ephat Mujuru made significant, formal contributions to the academic study and theorization of mbira music, positioning himself as a scholar-performer who directly influenced ethnomusicological discourse. This intellectual engagement represents a profound form of development, as it involved translating embodied, tacit knowledge into explicit analytical and pedagogical frameworks. His detailed liner notes, workshop syllabi, and the explanatory text in his tutorial books constitute a substantial corpus of primary-source theory on mbira aesthetics, technique, and spirituality (Mujuru, 1988; 1991). In these writings, he articulated concepts of tonal harmony within the mbira's modal system, analysed the mathematical relationships in its tunings, and described the philosophical principles underpinning the kushaura and kutsinhira relationship. This insider theorization engages directly with, and sometimes challenges, external academic analyses by scholars like Tracey (1970) on instrumentology, Kubik (1981) on African polymetry, and Berliner (1993) on improvisation.

In doing so, Mujuru enacted what Stock (2001) and Barz & Cooley (2008) advocated as "collaborative ethnomusicology," where the culture-bearer is a co-author of knowledge, not merely its subject. His presence in American universities departments modeled an alternative pedagogy for Western institutions, one based on oral-tradition mastery rather than exclusively on notated literacy, impacting curricular development in world music education (Nettl, 1995; Solís, 2004). Such academic legitimisation was a powerful tool for internationalisation. It elevated mbira from "folk music" to a subject worthy of serious intellectual study; thereby attracting a different, often more committed, cohort of international students and scholars (Bohman, 2002). Furthermore, his scholarly framing provided a discursive armature that supported the music's presentation on the global stage, allowing presenters and critics to discuss it in terms of complexity and theoretical sophistication rather than mere exotic appeal (Turino, 2000; Stokes, 2004). Thus, Mujuru's academic work fortified both the development of the tradition's self-understanding and its international reception as a sophisticated art form.

## **Mbira Music Lyrics – From Amateur Casual Music Genre To Professional Standards**

The lyrical dimension of Ephant Mujuru's oeuvre constituted a critical, yet frequently overlooked, pillar in his project of elevating mbira music from a perceived "amateur casual village genre" to a sophisticated art form commanding respect on global stages traditionally dominated by American and European classical and popular music standards. Mujuru's approach to lyrics was intrinsically developmental, involving a deliberate process of curation, composition, and contextual framing that underscored the poetic, philosophical, and narrative depth inherent in the Shona tradition, thereby challenging superficial, exoticizing perceptions of African music as merely rhythmic or spiritual ambiance. Scholars of language and music such as Feld (1990), Agawu (1995) and Meintjes (2003) emphasised that the semantic content of song was a primary site for the articulation of identity, history, and social commentary. Mujuru, through both his selection of traditional pieces and his original compositions, meticulously presented lyrics that conveyed complex themes—ancestral wisdom, ethical instruction, historical reflection, and poignant social observation. This intellectualised music for an international audience, aligning it with the lyrical sophistication expected in Western art song or singer-songwriter traditions, as analyzed by Middleton (1990) and Frith (1996).

His performances and liner notes often included detailed translations and explanations of the poetic texts, a practice that aligned with Hymes' (1975) ethno-poetics and the work of ethnomusicologists like Stone (2008) and Barz (2008) who stressed the importance of verbal art in musical understanding. By doing so, he countered the "casual" label by demonstrating that mbira songs were not simplistic chants but repositories of refined poetic imagery and proverbial language (gwereminos), a point extensively documented by scholars of Shona oral literature such as Fortune (1973), Pongweni (1982), and Vambe (2004). Furthermore, in the studio, Mujuru paid careful attention to vocal clarity and diction, ensuring the lyrics were not merely another timbral layer but a legible textual component, a production choice informed by the aesthetics of presentational performance and the global market's demand for accessible meaning, as critiqued by Erlmann (1999) and Taylor (1997). This strategic emphasis on lyrical content was a form of cultural brokerage, translating the music's cognitive and narrative substance for audiences who might be initially captivated only by its hypnotic texture, thereby raising its perceived intellectual standard and demonstrating its capacity to engage the mind as fully as the spirit or the body, a holistic integration of artistic elements championed by scholars like Nketia (1974) and Chernoff (1979) and applied in analysis by Stone (2008).

### **Ephant's Mbira Lyrics Resemblance With Traditional Muchongoyo Songs And Jerusarema As Well As Mhande And Shangara Lyrics**

A significant aspect of Ephant Mujuru's compositional genius and his rootedness in a broad spectrum of Zimbabwean traditional music was evidenced in the intertextual resonances between his mbira lyrics and the poetic structures, themes, and rhythmic phrasing found in other key Shona and Zezuru dance and musical traditions, namely Muchongoyo, Jerusarema/Mbende, Mhande, and Shangara. This strategic interweaving was not mere imitation but a sophisticated synthesis that expanded the mbira's expressive range while grounding it firmly in a pan-regional aesthetic philosophy, thereby enriching its developmental trajectory. Ethnomusicological research by Tracey (1970), Berliner (1993), and Kaemmer (1998) established that these dance genres, each with distinct historical and social functions, possessed rich corpuses of song lyrics characterised by praise, metaphor, humor, and social critique. Mujuru's lyrical compositions often mirrored the declamatory, narrative style and heroic praise-poetry (*madetembedzo*) found in Muchongoyo, a dance of the Ndau people often associated with war preparation and celebration, as analyzed by Muringani (1991) and Gwara (2010). Similarly, the playful, often risqué and metaphorical double entendres central to the lyrics of the Jerusarema/Mbende (a fertility dance) and Mhande (associated with the Korekore and often with spirit possession ceremonies) find echoes in Mujuru's own use of proverbial subtlety and layered meaning, a feature of Shona poetry extensively studied by Chiwome (1996) and Mashiri (2004). The driving, communal call-and-response patterns and celebratory themes of Shangara (a popular social dance) are reflected in the structure and ethos of some of his more upbeat compositions.

This conscious lyrical synthesis demonstrates Mujuru's deep knowledge of the interconnectedness of Zimbabwe's performative arts, a concept central to the work of cultural scholars like Asante (1998) and Nzewi (2007), who viewed African music as part of an integrated totality. By incorporating these elements, he

effectively brought the mbira into dialogue with other vital traditional forms, creating a more expansive and representative musical language. This approach aligned with Homi Bhabha's (1994) concept of hybridity as a generative force, creating a new, enriched whole from distinct but related parts. Furthermore, from a music-analytical perspective, this intertextuality often extended to rhythmic phrasing, where the vocal lines in his songs could mirror the distinct clapping or drum patterns (e.g., the nhambambili rhythm) of these dances, a compositional technique noted by Kubik (1981) in his studies of cross-rhythmic transfer. Scholars of popular music hybridity in Africa, such as Waterman (1990) and Collins (1992), documented similar processes of stylistic synthesis in urban genres. Thus, Mujuru's lyrics were not developed in isolation but were part of a continuous project to position the mbira as a nexus point for a wider Zimbabwean traditional aesthetic, thereby strengthening its cultural authority and richness, making it a more formidable and complex contender on the world stage, capable of representing not just a single instrument but a universe of poetic and rhythmic thought, as theorised by Appiah (1992) in his discussions of cosmopolitanism.

### **Spiritual Cosmopolitanism - Reconciling The Sacred And The Secular Global Market**

One of the central and most outstanding achievement of Mujuru's music project was his articulation of what can be termed a "spiritual cosmopolitanism"—a framework that allowed the profoundly sacred, ancestor-focused essence of mbira music to remain legible and resonant within the secular, commercial spaces of the international world music circuit. This required navigating a fundamental dichotomy: the bira is a closed, participatory, community-specific ritual with a clear instrumental purpose (spirit invocation), while the concert hall or festival stage is an open, presentational, commercial space oriented toward aesthetic contemplation and entertainment (Blacking, 1973; Turino, 2008). Mujuru's strategy was neither to secularize the music completely, as some nationalist projects did, nor to present it as an inaccessible, occult practice. Instead, he consistently framed it as a universal spiritual technology. In interviews and liner notes, he explained ancestral veneration not as a parochial Shona belief but as a relatable human practice of honouring lineage and memory, a move that echoes Appiah's (2006) concept of "rooted cosmopolitanism" (Erlmann, 1999; Feld, 2000; Turino, 2008).

His performances, though presented as concerts, often retained a ceremonial gravity; he would sometimes dedicate performances to the spirits or create a meditative, trance-inducing atmosphere that invited a form of secularized participation from the audience, a technique analysed by Rouget (1985) in his study of music and trance. This reframing allowed Western audiences to engage with the music's spiritual dimension on a humanistic level without requiring subscription to its specific religious cosmology, a form of "strategic spiritual universalism" that facilitated cross-cultural connection (Taylor, 1997; Meintjes, 2003). This approach was crucial for the sustainable internationalisation of the tradition. It prevented the mbira from being reduced to pure sonic abstraction or exotic wallpaper, preserving its ethical and philosophical core—what Feld (1988) might call its "interpretive aesthetics." By maintaining this spiritual discourse, Mujuru ensured that the global conversation about mbira included its reason for being, thus fostering a more profound and respectful engagement than mere consumption of its sound (Bohlman, 2002; Stokes, 2004). In doing so, he demonstrated how a deeply localised sacred practice could communicate its interiority to a global audience, expanding its meaning without utterly diluting its foundational purpose.

### **RECOMMENDATIONS**

Based on the findings of this study, several recommendations emerge for scholars, cultural policymakers, and practitioners engaged with African music and their global trajectories:

1. For Ethnomusicology and Cultural Studies: Future research should conduct deeper ethnographic work within the transnational mbira communities Mujuru helped seed, examining how pedagogical canonization influences local Zimbabwean practice today and investigating the long-term cultural impact of diaspora-led affinity interculturalures.
2. For Cultural Institutions in Zimbabwe and Africa: National archives and museums should prioritise the digitisation and preservation of Mujuru's complete recorded output, correspondence, and teaching materials as a national cultural resource. Cultural policy should move beyond celebratory folklorization

to support artists who, like Mujuru, engage in sophisticated innovation within tradition, providing grants and infrastructure that enable them to develop their art without being forced into purely commercial or narrowly nationalist frameworks.

3. For Educational Institutions Globally: University music departments offering world music performance should critically reflect on their pedagogical models. Embracing the scholar-performer paradigm Mujuru embodied, they should foster collaborative relationships with tradition-bearers not as guest artists but as co-instructors and curriculum developers, ensuring transmission respects the music's epistemological foundations.
4. For the World Music Industry: Record labels, festival programmers, and critics have an ethical responsibility to move beyond marketing clichés of "ancient wisdom" or "spiritual vibes." They should foster platforms that allow for the nuanced contextualization artists like Mujuru provided, supporting artistic statements, liner notes, and stage presentations that communicate the music's complexity and cultural specificity, thus educating audiences and combating superficial exoticism.
5. For Practitioners and the Diaspora Community: Mbira students and performers outside Zimbabwe should engage in sustained, respectful, and reciprocal relationships with source communities in Zimbabwe, supporting local initiatives and approaching the tradition with the humility of a lifelong learner. They should study Mujuru's model not just for his techniques but for his deep, articulated reverence for the music's spiritual and social core, ensuring that its international practice remains ethically grounded.

## CONCLUSION

The life and music career of Ephant Mujuru present a seminal, richly textured case study in the dynamics of musical change towards the end of the 1970s in Zimbabwe and transnational circulation in the late twentieth century. This analysis has demonstrated that his legacy cannot be reductively categorised as either mere preservation or wholesale commodification. Rather, Mujuru emerged as a pre-eminent cultural architect whose multifaceted agency was exercised across a spectrum of domains—pedagogical, compositional, performative, discursive, and technological. He systematically developed mbira music from within, fortifying it with a formalized pedagogical canon, expanding its compositional language, and re-orchestrating its sonic presence for new contexts, all while maintaining a profound fidelity to its core cyclical logic and spiritual intentionality. Concurrently, he acted as the primary conduit for its thoughtful internationalisation, masterfully navigating the demands of the world music market, post-colonial cultural politics, and diasporic community formation. His success lay in his unique synthesis of identities: he was simultaneously a traditional lineage-holder and a modernist innovator, a village ritualist and a cosmopolitan stage performer, a master craftsman and an analytical scholar. Through strategic framing, he translated the mbira's sacred particularity into a language of universal artistic and spiritual value, enabling its global appreciation without complete erasure of its local meaning. Mujuru's career modelled a form of resilient, agentic globalization from below, showing how a musical tradition could engage powerfully with global flows—of people, capital, and media—on its own negotiated terms, ensuring not just survival but renewed creative vitality and cross-cultural significance. His work stands as a testament to the possibility of a rooted cosmopolitanism in sound, where development and internationalisation become interdependent processes of cultural reaffirmation and dialogue.

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