THE RECONTEXTUALIZATION OF AFRICAN MUSIC IN THE UNITED STATES: A CASE STUDY OF UMOJA AFRICAN ARTS COMPANY

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This dissertation is about the opportunities and challenges posed by the presentation and interpretation of African music performances by African immigrants in Western contexts in general and the United States in particular. The study focuses on the experience of the Umoja African Arts Company, a Pittsburgh based repertory dance ensemble that performs music and dance from various parts of Africa. Although much has been observed on the contribution of Africa to the development of the American music and dance experience, there is a growing interest among African scholars to question the relevance, impact and the analysis of the emerging efforts of new African immigrants in the promotion of African music in changing contexts overseas where creative individuals have to reconfigure new ways of interpreting and presenting cultural resources to diverse audiences.

Therefore, this study on the recontextualization of African music in America investigates not only the rationale and the justification for the creation of African performing groups such as Umoja, but also the choices in performance practice in light of their knowledge and understanding of the norms of African traditions as well as the manner in which they transcend the boundaries of ethnicity in their presentation.

The study recognizes the factors and historical antecedents that make the creation, the maintenance, and the success of professional African performing troupes such as Umoja in the United States possible, in particular the role of colleges and universities in the teaching and

appreciation of African music, the influx over the past decades of Africans from various countries supplying performers capable of forming music and dance repertory groups, and the growing interest of Americans in what is commonly referred to as World Music that engages audiences to experiment with new sounds and aesthetics. Naturally, the creation and development of Umoja was built on a legacy of the Pittsburgh's experience in the promotion of music diversity, the contribution of the African American and other African communities to the cultural life of the city, as well as the financial and administrative support systems provided by the State of Pennsylvania to advance multiculturalism in education and community development.

The strategies adopted by Umoja were inspired not only by the realities of the United States environment or its cultural milieu but also by the previous experience of the founders in Africa itself where performance practice in African cities are shaped by the creative response to the need of diverse audiences and lifestyles. The main difference between the recontextualization of African music in Africa and what takes place outside the continent lies in the frames of reference that are adopted, including the shared understanding of processes and means through which the music making experience remains relevant and acceptable to the vast majority. In America, the audiences of African music are more concerned with the attributes rather than the contexts within which the music was originally created or performed whereas those in Africa may be reminded of its contexts and other associations. However, both Africans and Americans are interested in issues of authority, authenticity and meanings even though contexts are dynamic. They change in light of new events and circumstances that lead creative individuals to make contextual adaptations to their music based on the vision and direction to be pursued.

On the same basis, the study reviews the historical antecedents of Umoja, beginning with the early presence and its transformative role documented by historians of African American music, the movement toward close integration of ancestral African music and dance forms and contemporary forms by leading African American dancers and choreographers such as Katherine Dunham and Pearl Primus, the contribution of African master drummers, choreographers and their dance groups such as Efrom Odok's Calabar Dancers, Momudu Johnson's Dance Company, Asadata Dafora's Shogola Oloba Company, and Babatunde Olatunji's Company.

The study continues with a discussion of Umoja's formative period, when its founders awoke their African cultural awareness in response to the limited knowledge about African culture they found in the city of Pittsburgh. It describes the company from its humble beginning to its establishment as the premiere African music and dance troupe in the city of Pittsburgh. Umoja's repertoire consisting of music and dance pieces from various parts of Africa is discussed with reference to new contexts of creativity. The study also reviews the African aesthetic values of musical instruments and costumes used in pefomances and Umoja's influence on the city of Pittsburgh's artistic scene. The question of authenticity is raised while examining factors that account for the success and consolidation of the company. After reviewing Umoja's achievements, the study deals with Umoja as a model in creating, establishing and maintaining Repertory troupes of African music and dance in the new contexts, not only in the West, especially in the United States, but also in Africa where similar troupes are created.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

PREFACE xii
1. CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION 1
1.1. AIMS AND SCOPE OF STUDY 1
1.1.1. Causative Factors for Recontextualization of Music 4
1.1.2. Historical Precedents 6
1.1.2.1. Precedents in Africa 6
1.1.2.2. Precedents in the United States 9
1.1.2.3. Type of Music 12
1.2. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK 16
1.2.1. Definition of Recontextualization 16
1.3. METHODOLOGY 21
1.4. RELATED LITERATURE 22
2. CHAPTER TWO: HISTORICAL ANTECEDENTS OF UMOJA AFRICAN ARTS COMPANY 33
2.1. THE EARLY PERIOD 33
2.2. THE CONTEMPORARY PERIOD 35
2.3. TOURING PROFESSIONAL AFRICAN DANCE TROUPES 40
2.4. THE FORMATION OF AFRICAN MUSIC AND DANCE TROUPES IN PITTSBURGH 44
3. CHAPTER THREE: UMOJA AFRICAN ARTS COMPANY: FORMATIVE YEARS 56
3.1. GEVAKIN CHOIR 57
3.2. FORMATION OF CONGOLESE COMMUNITY IN PITTSBURGH 63
3.3. BACKGROUND OF THE FOUNDERS OF UMOJA 68
3.3.1. Damien Mandondo Pwono 68
3.3.2. Gaby Lungu Muzela 69
3.3.3. Elie Lunkeba Kihonia 71
3.4. SHARED COMMON CONGOLESE HERITAGE 72
3.5. RECRUITMENT OF PERFORMERS 74
3.5.1. Phase 1: The Early Period 74
3.5.2. Phase 2: The Second Period 83
3.5.3. Phase 3: The Inclusion of the group Kiti Na Mesa 86
3.5.3.1. Brief History 86
4. CHAPTER IV: PERFORMANCE PRACTICE 94
4.1. EARLY INITIATIVES 94
4.2. REPERTOIRE 100
4.2.1. Willy Anku’s Legacy 101
4.2.2. Songs from Gevakin’s Repertoire 112
4.2.3. The Old Mali Empire Connection 152
4.2.4. Repertoire from Kiti Na Mesa 158

4.3. VENUES AND CONTEXTS 172
4.3.1. Umoja in Church Setting 172
4.3.2. Umoja In Schools 176
4.3.3. Umoja in Big Halls and Outside Festivals 181
4.3.4. Performance at Private Parties 186
4.3.5. Audience Participation 187
5. CHAPTER FIVE: MUSICAL INSTRUMENTS AND COSTUMES 193
5.1. MUSICAL INSTRUMENTS 193
5.2. COSTUMES 207
6. CHAPTER SIX: UMOJA'S CONTRIBUTION TO PITTSBURGH'S 217
ARTISTIC SCENE 217
6.1. INFLUENCE ON PERFORMERS 217
6.2. INFLUENCE ON OTHER PERFORMING GROUPS 220
6.3. INFLUENCE ON PATRONAGE 225
6.3.1. Influence on Funding Organizations 227
7. CHAPTER SEVEN: SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION 230
7.1. ACHIEVEMENTS 233
7.2. HOW AFRICAN IS THE MUSIC AND DANCE PERFORMED BY UMOJA 233
7.3. UMOJA AS A MODEL 236
BIBLIOGRAPHY 237

LIST OF TABLES

Table 1: List of Performers 86

LIST OF FIGURES

Figure 1: Members of Umoja African Arts Company. From left to right: Papy Makesi, an unknown guest, Lillian Sogga, Gaby Muzela, Azim Countz, Wendy Santiago Bello, Pamela Bey, Elie Kihonia, and Patricia Opondo. Photo courtesy: Lillian Sogga. 81
Figure 2: Performers of Umoja in action. On drums, Papy Makesi (left), Gaby Muzela (center), and Azim Countz (far right behind dancers); Dancers: Pam Bey (left), Elie Kihonia and Dawn Hinton (standing position), lilian Sogga, and Patricia Opondo. Photo courtesy: Papy Makesi. 82
Figure 3: Members of the touring Kiti Na Mesa. Kneeling position: Marie-Therese Kongo Bosola, Antoinette Basele Ekila, and Marie-Louise Djema Bosawa. Sanding, from left: Mazingi Pepo, Kasa Panzu, Emmanuel Bofenda Ilonga, Jean-Pierre Bofuki Nkoy, and Gerard Limpuku. Photo courtesy: Pepo Mazingi. 90
Figure 4: Members of Umoja performing at a church service. Standing from left to right: Papy Makesi, Elie Kihonia, Patricia Opondo, Wendy Santiago Bello, Joyce Moten, Azim Countz, Pamela Bey, and Lilian Sogga. Seated: Gaby Muzela... 174
Figure 5: Lillian Sogga (left) and Patricia Opondo (right) carrying the offertory plate to the altar 175
Figure 6: Ad for Music Department's Thursday Noon Recital at the University of Pittsburgh. 176
Figure 7: Details of the ad listing Umoja and its performers.. 177
Figure 8: Umoja performing outside the William Pitt Union of the University of Pittsburgh. Standing from left: Gaby Muzela, papy Makesi, and Azim Countz; kneeling from the left: Elie Kihonia, Dawn Hinton, Lilian Sogga, Patricia Opondo, and Wendy Santiago Bello. Photo courtesy of Lilian Sogga... 178
Figure 9: Newspaper clipping from The Pitt News 179
Figure 10: Teaching and learning by imitation. Alisha Pennix, a dancer in Umoja leads a group of students in African dance movements. Photograph by Fred Onovuerswoke (St. Louis African Chorus) 181
Figure 11: Advertisement for Africa Shout 183
Figure 12:Printed program of the National Museum of African Arts advertising Umoja.......... 185
Figure 13: Singer and dancer Djema Bosawa (left) and Kasa Panzu (right) at the climax of *zebola.* In the back, drummers include Leon Mawengo (top left), Zubamunu Mitete (playing the lokolé), the author playing a set of congas, and Bofenda "Bokulaka" Ilonga (top right). Photo by Fred Onovuerswoke (St. Louis African Chorus) 188
Figure 14: Kasa Panzu (left) showing *Mutwashi* dance to members of the audience during a performance at St. Louis Six Flags. Photo courtesy of Fred Onovuerswoke (St. Louis African Chorus) 189
Figure 15: Audience participation at a School performance. Students are amazed to see their professor get down on the dance floor to do African dance movements he learns from

Bokulaka, one of Umoja's Master drummers. Photo courtesy of Fred Onovuerswoke, St. louis African Chorus. 190
Figure 16: Audience participation, two faculty members "getting down" following the lead of Kongo Bosola (right). Photo courtesy of Fred Onovuerswoke (St. Louis African Chorus) 191
Figure 17: Students enjoy participation during performance by Umoja. Photo courtesy of Fred Onovuerswoke (St. Louis African Chorus) 192
Figure 18: Gaby Muzela and Elie Kihonia playing Umoja's first drums at a street performance downtown Pittsburgh. Photo courtesy of Papy Makesi. 195
Figure 19: Elie Kihonia (standing right) plays a pair of bongos held by Papy Makesi (left), and Gaby Muzela (sitting position) plays a ngoma drum. 197
Figure 20: Members of Umoja with African drums. Damien Pwono (center) plays the modified sabar drum, Elie Kihonia and Azim Countz (left) play ngoma and atumpan drums. Patricia Opondo and Lilian Sogga relax on stage. (Photo courtesy of Lilian Sogga) 198
Figure 21: Azim Countz (left), Papy Makesi (center) and Elie Kihonia (right). Congas are clothed with kente fabrics. Photo courtesy of Lilian Sogga 200
Figure 22: Papy Makesi, Gaby Muzela, and Elie Kihonia on *djembes.* Photo courtesy of Lilian Sogga 201
Figure 23: Guest performers from New York performing at the Byham Theater. Photograph unknown, courtesy of Lilian Sogga 202
Figure 24: Members of Umoja at the Byham Theater performing Koukou, led by Youssoufa Lo (left). New recruits are seen behind Kihonia (center) and behind Koblo Kibul (right). Photographer unknown, courtesy of Elie Kihonia. 203
Figure 25: Members of Kiti Na Mesa displaying their musical instruments. Photo by Martin Bernstein. 204
Figure 26: Gerarld Limpuku (left) Jean-Pierre Nkoy and Bofenda Ilonga. Photo by Martin Bernstein 206
Figure 27: Members of Umoja wearing African street outfits. From left to right: Elie Kihonia, Gaby Muzela, Lilian Sogga, Papy Makesi, and Pamela Bey Photograph unknown, courtesy of Papy Makesi 209
Figure 28: Umoja's male performers in their new outfits. From left to right: Gaby Muzela, Elie Kihonia, and Papy Makesi. Photo courtesy of Papy Makesi. 210
Figure 29: Performers of Umoja in street outfits. (From left: Papy Makesi, unknown dancer, Lilian Sogga, Gaby Muzela, Azim Countz, Wendy S. Bello, Pamela Bey, Elie Kihonia, and Patricia Opondo. Photograph courtesy of Lilian Sogga 211
Figure 30: Umoja's Drummers in costumes. From left to right: Gaby Muzela, Elie Kihonia, Papy Makesi, and Azim Countz (Photograph courtesy of Lilian Sogga). 213
Figure 31: Umoja's female dancers including Patricia Opondo, Lilian Sogga, Pamela Bey, and Dawn Hinton in raffia skirts (Photo courtesy of Lilian sogga) 214
Figure 32: Elie Kihonia (left) and Papy Makesi (right) carry Azim Countz in during a piece representing hunters' scene. (Photo courtesy of Papy Makesi) 216
Figure 33: Shona Sharif on stage at the Three Rivers Arts Festival. Photo Courtesy of Oronde Sharif, African Studies Dept, University of Pittsburgh 222
Figure 34: Gaby Muzela and Shona Sharif explaining African music and dance to the audience. Photo courtesy of Oronde Sharif, Africana Studies, University of Pittsburgh 223

PREFACE

This dissertation is a tribute to Gaby Lungu Muzela and Shona Sharif for their efforts, sacrifices, and contribution in establishing a tradition of African music and dance troupes dedicated to educating masses about African culture through performing arts in the city of Pittsburgh. Although I have been interested in performing and researching African music performed in the new contexts for a long time, it was what I observed and experienced in Pittsburgh that gave me the courage to embark on what has become a consuming exploration of the recontextualization processes in African music performed in the United States.

I was aware of Gaby Muzela and Shona Shariff's work long before I moved to Pittsburgh, PA at the end of 1990. In fact, I was priviledged to be Muzela's older brother with whom he shared his performing talents and ideas. While still in Kinshasa, I was able to learn about the impact African music was having on audiences in the United States through the activities of Muzela and his associates including Damien Pwono, Elie Kihonia, and Papy Makesi.

My interest in the study of African traditional music performed in new contexts goes back to my early ethnomusicological work at the Institut National des Arts in Congo. It kept growing the more I became active as a performer and a researcher. My experience in Congo as the artistic director of Gevakin choir gave me the opportunity to explore the use of traditional music of Africa in new contexts of Christian worship and other events. As director, I made decisions in the use of traditional musical instruments that would be appropriate for performances in Christian worship, and the selection of pre-Christian traditional songs to be arranged and added to the repertoire. The successful work, which I considered as my musical performance lab in Kinshasa was enough to convince even skeptic audiences that began to pay

attention to what Gevakin choir was doing. The use of traditional music allowed the choir to go beyond church audiences. The United States tour opened a new door for Gevakin's members who came to discover new environments and opportunities. Those who remained in the United States were able to adapt to the new environments because of the flexibility they practiced in Gevakin. Thus, in a sense, Umoja African Arts Company is an offshoot of Gevakin choir.

During my graduate studies at the University of Pittsburgh, I became somewhat involved with the activities of Umoja African Arts Company, first as an observer, and later as a performer. I was impressed by the impact of African music on various American audiences. Not only that, I found my former choir members transformed into African drummers and dancers. Also, I came to realize the richness of the artistic baggage that came out of the Congolese performers when they displayed their talents in performing traditional musical styles of Africa.

Gaby Muzela introduced me to Shona Sharif, who at many occasions invited me to join her and Muzela in many performances, mostly in schools. Shona Sharif directed the African Drum and Dance Ensemble, a group she founded in 1988 after William Anku, the former director of the African Drumming Ensemble of the University of Pittsburgh from whom she began to learn dances from Africa, left Pittsburgh and went back to Ghana. She also taught dance classes that included African, Caribbean, and African American styles at the University of Pittsburgh's Africana Studies department. After her death the African Drum and Dance Ensemble was renamed the Shona Sharif Drum and Dance Ensemble, and her son Oronde Sharif, who also took over her dance classes, directs it. Shona was such a presence in the Pittsburgh artistic scene when it came to African music and dance ensembles. I had the opportunity to work with her at several occasions as a drummer, a singer, and a teacher of African music and dance. She played a very important role, although indirectly, in the formation of Umoja African Arts

Company. In her continuous search of African identity in the African Drum and Dance Ensemble, she invited African performers who played roles as drummers, singers, and dancers. These performers would teach dance pieces from their countries, and sometimes interact directly with audiences.

By taking both Gaby Muzela and Elie Kihonia to perform with her African Drum and Dance Ensemble, she gave them the opportunity to learn how they should present African music to American audiences while they were establishing Unoja. Although both Umoja and Shona Sharif's ensemble came about at the same period, her ensemble was a training ground for both Gaby and Elie who learned from Shona's experience as a dancer and a teacher. In return, Shona Sharif was able to discover drumming and dance styles of Congo and other Central African countries she could incorporate in her ensemble. The two groups have become established in town, each emphasizing on specific styles of African music. Both groups have endured great loss of their leaders, Gaby Muzela and Shona Sharif.

I was convinced that the music of Africa presented by Umoja African Arts Company, especially in its contexts in the United States, was worthy to be researched by ethnomusicologists, because of the importance given to it in the educational institutions, and how the audiences reacted to it. However, it was not until spring of 1996 that I began to think seriously about it, especially after I took Music and Society class that was taught by Professor Deane Root. While he knew my interest in African contemporary popular music at that time, he asked me one day why shoudn't I investigate the music of Umoja.

After comparing the importance society gives to both traditional and popular music, I realized that popular music of Africa did not have the same kind of institutional support its traditional counterpart enjoys in the United States, although there is an audience for World

Music that includes contemporary African popular music. Dr. Root's encouragement was enough to turn my attention to Umoja, to first distance myself from it as a member, and establish a new relationship with performers, that of researcher-informants. This experience has been challenging and enjoyable at the same time as I spent time as a participant-observer, and also as a performer among performers I was researching. It was challenging when I realized that this was not a typical ethnomusicological study, where one had to select a type of music and culture, do fieldwork, and produce a report. This is is a presentation of an artistic group with a repertoire that includes music and dances from various parts of Africa, and the contexts are the American culture, which is fast moving and changing.

This work could not be completed without the help of the performers of Umoja African Arts Company who allowed me to spend long time among them to share their experience, and provide helpful information for the study. I would like to express my gratitude to all of them, including the founding members Elie Kihonia, Papy Makesi, Patricia Opondo, Pam Bey, Lilian Sogga, Azim Countz, Verna Vaughn, and Koblo Kibul. I am also grateful to former members of the touring group Kiti Na Mesa who joined Umoja African Arts Company for bringing their experience to his study. Mazingi Pepo was very helpful in providing valuable information and insight about Kiti Na Mesa and fresh traditional the material from Congo it brought to Umoja.

I want to thank Damien Pwono, not only because he was one of the founders of Umoja, and the one who provided its vision, but also for all that he has done for me in Pittsburgh and for the completion of my studies at the University of Pittsburgh.

To my professors in the music Department including Dr. Deane Root (the chair of the department), Dr. Eric Moe, Dr. Mary Lewis, Dr. Bell Yung, Dr. Don Franklin, and Dr. David Brodbeck I say thank you, for all they taught me. Special thanks to Professor J. H. Kwabena

for being extremely supportive of this study since its inception, offering his guidance, and accepting to direct it. I also express my gratitude to Dr. Nathan Davis, who has remained a sturdy and nurturing presence throughout in co-directing this dissertation, to Dr. Akin Euba for his support and guidance, and Dr. Matthew Rosenblum for being instrumental in bringing this dissertation to fruition.

I thank my friends and graduate students colleagues, Kenan Foley, Eric Beeko, Sister Marie-Agatha Ozah, Kofi Stephen Gbolonyo, and Oyebade Dosunmu for their support and encouragements.

Last, but not the least, I thank my wife Ruth for her support and patience, and my family for all the sacrifices. I also thank Pastor Richard Lambert and the Christian Assembly in Hollsople, PA, Mbaku Bavuidi, Justin Mindana, Mathieu Matamba, David Kombo, and Nzubamunu Mitete for their support and prayers.

1. CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

1.1. AIMS AND SCOPE OF STUDY

The aim of this dissertation is to analyze the process of recontextualization of African music in the United States with a particular reference to the experience of Umoja African Arts Company, a Pittsburgh-based African music and dance troupe company founded in 1989 by a group of Congolese performers in response to new opportunities for a better representation of African music locally and nationally.

This study looks into questions of resilience of African music traditions and its challenges to creativity, the strengthening of contemporary relevance of African music in new contexts of applications, music entrepreneurship and the sustainability of livelihood, as well as other creative processes that make the music performed by African performers (in the case of Umoja) exciting and meaningful for performers and their audiences. Accordingly, this dissertation attempts to document the reasons why Umoja was created and the factors that led to its rapid growth in Pittsburgh. Therefore, the scope of the study does not limit itself to the investigation of historical factors that led to the creation of Umoja and the role it plays in the changing contexts of America and the world, but it tackles also the compositional procedures and the different types of occasions that require certain repertoires and ways of performing. Moreover, the hybrid nature of Umoja's music calls for the examination of its componential elements, audience responses and the long-term sustainability concerns of the ensemble.

In our contemporary world, African music is alive not only inside Africa, but also outside. The music of Africa reflects the outcome of the major shocks the continent has been through, including the trans-Atlantic slave trade, colonialism, the advance of modern religions such as Christianity and Islam, the independence movement, the years of the Cold War, and the technology revolution. It is in light of this that saxophonist Manu Dibango, one of Africa's popular music stars, asserts that "African music was and remains a music of encounters; in this lies its attractive power."[1] These encounters can be observed throughout history and at many levels, both inside and outside Africa.

In Africa, the conventions of music performances are guided by the contexts within which music is performed. Some of these contexts do exists in America where African music is also performed. However, the similarity of contexts does not necessarily result in a blind transfer of same practices and procedures. New demands and institutional guidelines have forced African musicians to respond to new requirements and resources of relevance to American audiences. For example, African performing groups find themselves divided into two categories in the United States. There are those professional performing groups soly devoted to entertain audiences, and there is another category of a teachers/demonstration type of ensembles that focuses on the educational aspect of their performances. The Umoja African Arts Company falls in this second category and its mission is to educate the public about African music and culture.

The interest in the Umoja's experience goes back to 1990 when I was still in my country (then Zaire), and was making contacts to enroll in the ethnomusicology program at the University of Pittsburgh. Then I received a package containing a cassette tape and photographs sent to me by Damien Pwono, who was my former classmate in Zaire and one of the founders of

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[1] See Gary Stewart, *Rumba on the River: A History of the Popular Music of the Two Congos*, London:Verso, 2000, p. i.

Umoja. At that time he was a graduate student in the ethnomusicology program at the University of Pittsburgh, and director of the African Drumming Ensemble, a class in the Music Department.

My curiosity about the reception of African music performed in the United States increased consistently. The performers on the tape were people I performed with for many years, and I knew exactly what type of music they could play. However, the music on the tape I received was different from what I expected to hear, since for me, the performers were not known as African "traditional" drummers before they left Congo. They were young intellectuals who identified more with contemporary “modern” rather than traditional culture. The drums used in the recording included the *djembe* (which was the solo drum) and the *djun djun* from Senegal, the *atumpan* from Ghana, some of them played with sticks (while most drums in Congo are played with bare hands), accompanying songs in Lingala and Kikongo.

At that stage, the performers, who were from Congo (Central Africa), were still learning to master these drums from West Africa, especially Ghana and Senegal. One of the striking differences was the use of the *djembe*, which has the highest pitch among the drums used in the ensemble, to play the lead part or solo. This is a normal situation in some West African drumming, but not in most Central African countries where the situation is reversed: the lead part is played by the drum with the lowest pitch in the ensemble.

The performers on the tape were very excited about the new group they have formed, and above all, about the reception and the success they were enjoying, because to the audiences, they were just Africans playing African drums. The question of knowing the regional African origin of the performers and the drums they were using was not important, since in general, American audiences have a global view of Africa.

On my arrival in the city of Pittsburgh in December 1990, Umoja was already a very active and accepted performing troupe of African music and dance. It was more and more becoming an integral part of the performing arts of the city of Pittsburgh. My observations of Umoja began in the spring of 1991, when I became the new director of the African Drumming Ensemble at the University of Pittsburgh. I found that I was in a very peculiar situation of being at the same time a researcher, a teacher and a culture bearer. Through Umoja African Arts Company, I was able not only to observe and participate in various musical events of the city where I discovered various music styles from different parts of the world, but also I became familiar with the "African drumming and dancing tradition" in the city of Pittsburgh. The experience with Umoja became a way of life as I became immersed in African drumming and dancing in the city of Pittsburgh and in other places the company took me.

1.1.1. Causative Factors for Recontextualization of Music

There are many factors for music to be created and presented in new contexts. In Africa for example, people from rural areas established themselves in cities with people from other cultures. They had to learn new customs and languages in order to live in the modern environments. Schools and churches were established in order to propagate and impose western culture and values. However, the history of Africa shows that not everybody was converted to Christianity, and schools have not been accessible to everybody. There are people who have continued in their traditional ways of life despite the advance of modern religions and western educational system in Africa. The difference between the rural and the urban areas of African, however, cannot be emphasized here, especially when it comes to performances of traditional music. In many cases, people in urban areas of Africa practice traditional music the same way

they would do in rural areas. However, the recontextualization process becomes more distinct when artists move further in areas where the audiences are foreign to their cultures.

Recent development in communication, transportation and new technology has led to the redistribution of populations around the globe, where people from various areas are relocating, and minority expatriates try to recreate environment suitable to their new needs and aspirations. As a result, expatriate communities are created in many countries, especially in the West, because of the socio-political and economical stability these countries enjoy. In the process, these immigrants carry some of their native habits, including music making to these new places.

New contexts are created in the United States when African artists are confronted with various problems, including that of communication and adaptation to new life style. Money and material needs can also trigger the creation of new contexts in music making. When artists realize the importance of the arts in the Western countries, and that they can earn money and respect by doing what in many cases people have neglected in their countries of origin, they can create new contexts so that they can become providers of these performing arts.

Another factor in creating new contexts is the new wold music view, which makes people more open minded about the music from other cultures. More and more people are willing to learn music and dance from other cultures, and share with others what they know from their culture. Specialty in a certain musical genre is no longer reserved to those who belong to its original culture, because people acquire knowledge of other cutures and make them their own. This kind of feedom to do things in a global world has made many performers break cultural boundaries.

1.1.2. Historical Precedents

The recontextualization of African music in Africa and in the Diaspora is not a new phenomenon. In Africa, people who have migrated to cities from rural areas have performed traditional music of their respective ethnic groups in many ways. The formation of Umoja African Arts Company in Pittsburgh could not be successful without historical precedents both in Africa and in the United States. These precedents have links that have connected people of African descent in the world.

1.1.2.1. Precedents in Africa

The invasion of Africa by western colonial powers and modern religions created occasions for new contexts of music. Early Christian missionaries discouraged African converts to practice their traditional music and culture, and banned the use of traditional musical instruments. Western hymns were translated into African languages for use in churches. With the exceptions on a few hymns that have captured many churchgoers, the result was not good because of the syllabic nature of most African languages that created confusion in the meaning for those tunes. Also, the colonial rulers encouraged African intellectuals to distance themselves from their African cultures and adopt western cultural values. It was shameful for an African intellectual to identify with his traditional culture.

Then came the independence campaign, when politicians made efforts to revive pre-Christian and pre-colonial art forms, especially music and dance. In many countries, efforts were made to gather traditional musicians and dancers from different ethnic groups to form professional African music and dance troupes geared toward stage performances. This trend started after the independence campaign when African intellectuals and leaders such as Kwame

Nkrumah, Sekou Toure and others saught to bring traditional art forms to the forefront of the African culture.

Africans began to value their traditional cultures that were neglected for long time. Governments began to create national dance troupes that were made of traditional performers from various ethnic groups of the country. Guinea was the first country to create such a national dance troupe, Les ballets Africains, which began to tour the world in order to present traditional music and dance of Africa. Many other countries followed the example by creating their own national dance companies that have been touring around the world for more than two decades. Troupes from Sierra Leone, Gambia, Senegal, Mali, Cameroon, Congo, have toured western countries, including the United States.

The formation of national dance troupes in Africa coincided with the Pan-Africanism movement of the early 1960s and the African American Cultural Revolution. With the socio-political atmosphere of the 1960s and 1970s, these national dance troupes have tremendously influenced the whole cultural web of the African continent and the world. Not only were the national dance troupes instrumental in creating new communities of taste in their respective countries, they also have been instrumental in the formation of African music and dance troupes in Europe and in the United States where some of them have toured.

National dance troupes created in the 1960s have been influential in the ways Africans make music, both in Africa and around the world. Today in many African cities, independent music and dance troupes are being created in the image of the national dance companies. While the national dance companies of the 1960s and 1970s consisted of traditional and folk musicians and dancers selected from various ethnic groups of the country, the new independent troupes are usually small in size and limited in their repertoire, depending on the areas and ethnic groups of

concentration. There are also professional music and dance troupes that are small in size but with a repertoire that includes music and dance pieces from different ethnic groups. Younger and educated performers often create these independent troupes, thanks to the new awareness brought by the influence of the tourism industry that includes African Safari, arts and trade fairs, and political animation where politicians have used traditional music and dance to promote their political ideas. All this shows to what extent traditional music of Africa is no longer an area reserved to people who are traditional and uneducated (in the Western sense).

More young and educated people are acquiring knowledge of traditional culture and taking over, as they find out that performing traditional music can offer opportunities, including that of traveling around the world. In fact, for many young people in Africa today, it is easier to travel out of Africa as an artist/performer than as someone who wants to go for studies.

The formation of new music and dance troupes in Africa shows the new value given to traditional music of Africa, which has been gaining more and more ground on stage. New trends in the commercialization of traditional music and dance have increased the ambitions of many performers, who work not only to entertain their respective local audiences, but also to conquer new and unknown ones. This may include performing for expatriate communities through the cultural centers of Western embassies, nationality clubs, trade and other international organizations.

In Kinshasa (Congo) for example, French, American, Belgian, and German cultural centers among others, have played important roles in attracting and promoting local troupes specializing in traditional music of Africa. As part of their activities, these cultural centers organize festivals and public events, some of which result in European and American tours for selected individuals or musical troupes.

Many of the selected troupes have used these "doors" to participate in major festivals in Europe, Asia and America. Traveling to these places has become one of the most important goals for many young educated but unemployed people who possess performing talents, especially when most African countries are experiencing socio-economic crisis. As a result, many young people have become musicians or dancers, not because of their vocation or their talent, although they may possess them, but because of the opportunities traditional music and dance can offer in the global world. While many existing groups continue to entertain their respective local communities in a communal way, new dance troupes are more ambitious in the sense that their primary audience is no longer local.

1.1.2.2. Precedents in the United States

The Middle Passage is considered by many as the starting point for African music performed or experienced in this country. Africans were able to bring their music-making habits to the United States when they were brought as slaves. As Africans endured colonialism in Africa, African Americans endured slavery, racial discrimination, and many other kinds of injustice. Since slave owners made deliberate efforts to break ties between African slaves and their African origins, their music had to transform into something else with new identity.

For many years, African Americans were ashamed of their African heritage. Like Africans in the African continent who were awaken by the independence campaign, African Americans needed a socio-political atmosphere that would create events to help awake their consciousness of African culture. This atmosphere was created by events such as the Harlem Renaissance, Negritude, and the Civil Rights movements. The Black Cultural Revolution was crucial to the acceptance and the success of African performers in the United States. During the

Civil Rights struggle, African drums and outfits became symbols of African identity and pride. The Black Power movement brought many youth in search of self-discovery to the music and dances of Africa. African American became more and more willing to learn African music and dance. Many of them have traveled to African countries in order to learn from African masters. Because of this longing for African identity, many young African Americans posed as Africans in order to put more weight to their statements, be it artistic or political. This increase of curiosity towards African music and dance has made the presence of African immigrants valuable as a local source of African artistic resources.

The rise of troupes such as Umoja African Arts Company in the United States results directly from increasing African population in the last few decades. In the past two or three decades, cities such as New York, Chicago and Washington, D.C. have seen the rise of many distinct communities from Africa. Hailing from Nigeria, Ghana and other areas where English is spoken, these communities have grown significantly. More recently, distinct communities have been established through patterns and connections of trades, as with the arrival of Senegalese in the 1980s in substantial numbers, or as the result of civil unrest at home, such as in Liberia, Sierra Leone, Ethiopia, Rwanda, Burundi, Angola and Congo, to name a few.

The English speaking communities from Ghana, Liberia, and Nigeria settled in North American cities earliest and in the greatest numbers. However, in the past twenty years, increasing numbers of people have arrived from French speaking countries such as Senegal, Guinea, Côte d'Ivoire, Mali, Cameroon, Togo, the Congos, and so forth. In big cities such as New York and Washington, D.C., Africans, especially West Africans, have settled in distinct areas of the cities, formed cultural and trade associations and have established religious communities as diverse as Presbyterian and Reformed Ghanaian congregations in Brooklyn and

Senegalese Muslim Brotherhoods in Harlem. In Washington DC, one can see several African churches including Alliance Church, which is made of Africans from many countries, but with the majority of Congolese.

The population of Africans that migrated into the United States has entered various trades and occupations. While there has been strong representation among street level professions from vending and cab driving to wholesale imports and restaurants, many have come seeking education, and settled into skilled professions, cultural work and the extensive diplomatic community. Thus, the presence of Africans is felt in most American metropolitan areas, including the city of Pittsburgh. For wherever they have settled, they needed to re-create African music and dance in order to satisfy both their own social, spiritual and moral needs, as well as the curiosity of the American people who want to see some aspects of African life.

Expatriate populations in many parts of the world tend to promote self-identity by practicing aspects of their culture not only as a psychological necessity, but also as a way of showcasing their heritage. Africans in the United States have been active in re-creating African artistic atmosphere within the American culture. As African arts are integrated into the life of the community, it is fully expected that many persons have and/or will come to know and practice dance, drumming and other instrumental music, as well as other material crafts of Africa. Also, African music and dance has become a good source of income for those performers who can do it in a favorable environment, thanks to the support from the educational institutions as mentioned in the previous section.

The increase in the African population in the United States has created a pool for potential performers of African music and dance. Africans who create dance troupes such as Umoja very often recruit performers from African communities established in the United States.

However, my observation of Umoja African Arts Company has shown that African communities in America do not constitute the main audience for the type of music discussed in this dissertation. This will be discussed in chapter four, which deals with performance practices.

1.1.2.3. Type of Music

This dissertation deals with music that, because of its intrinsic attributes, would never be classified as American, regardless of how long it can be performed in the United States, and who performs it. Like an old African proverb that says that "a piece of wood never becomes an alligator no matter how long it stays in the river." Traditional forms of African music have been widely accepted in the United States, because of the support from various institutions that include government and non-government agencies and educational institutions. While contemporary popular music of Africa is often performed in the United States, it does not have the same kind of support its traditional counterpart has. Because of the symbolic value attached to traditional music of Africa in the United States, it is very common to see African traditional musicians teaching African music in American schools or conducting workshops in different cultural institutions. Babatunde Olatunji, one of the pioneers of this movement and the most known in the United States, has maintained that President Kwame Nkrumah of Ghana encouraged him in creating an African music and dance troupe in the United States. He also maintains that President Nkrumah supplied him with African drums and other percussion instruments to help establish his troupe. With the exception of very few, contemporary popular musicians who come to this country are limited to performances in nightclubs and other small venues. Most African pop musicians are brought in by private promoters who may be business people from the African communities who promote them among African expatriates willing to see their favorite African stars.

In the past three decades ethnomusicologists have included contemporary popular music of Africa in their study. However, they have been slow in considering new traditional types of music in their new contexts that are even taught at Universities around the country. Both Africans and African Americans who have acquired enough knowledge and techniques have practiced African dance music in the United States. While both groups have their cultural differences, they belong to the new global African world that includes people of African descent both in Africa and in the Diaspora. For this reason, troupes have been created and maintained in this country by both Africans and African Americans since the early 1960s.

The formation of African dance troupes in the United States has been inter-cultural at two levels: the first is the interaction between Africans from different countries, and the second is the interaction between Africans and African Americans. Although they may come from different African countries, African performers very often get together to form music and dance troupes that would present African music not only from a particular ethnic group or region, but from various parts of Africa. In these kinds of collaborations, a drummer from Cameroon can learn the master drum techniques from Guinea and vice-versa. Africans in America tend to have a more pan-African view of Africa than those in Africa, although their repertoires sometimes reflect only specific regions of the African continent.

The category of music chosen for this study is the outcome of such collaboration. It represents a small "subculture" of African music produced and packaged by the Umoja African Arts Company in order to be better understood by audiences in the American context. It is music with Congolese roots with the capacity to attract diverse performers from other African countries such as Botswana, Tanzania, Gabon, Kenya, as well as people of African descent, including African Americans and Puerto Ricans. Its repertoire contains tunes and dance movements from

West, East, and South Africa, a feature which puts it apart from the majority of groups specializing in the drumming and dancing from West Africa, especially the Old Mali Empire. The reputation that Umoja has enjoyed through its numerous performances and workshops within and outside Pennsylvania, as well as the model it has provided for other Africans to emulate that make it particularly worthwhile of a case study.

The formation of Umoja in Pittsburgh and the influence of the educational environment in which it operates are also unique in the sense that they provide an insight into the mechanism and the dynamic involved in the formation and maintenance of an African music and dance group in an American city.

Knowledge of how Umoja was created, maintained and promoted, and how its audiences receive it, will provide a clear idea of the meaning of this music and dance group both to the audiences and to the performers. Also, since the role of individuals in a performing group is very important, it is useful to know why the members of this group were attracted to it and remained committed to it.

As Umoja music and dance activities take place in urban contexts, the problem of its categorization arises when one looks at the labels for offered genres of music recognized in American society. Music and bookstores, for example, are divided into various sections according to different music genres and styles. People buy according to their taste, be it classical, jazz, religious/Christian, rock, folk, etc. Among the various sections, one also finds the "international" and the "ethnic." While the international section deals with mostly contemporary popular music, the ethnic section deals with folk and some forms of traditional music from various cultures of the world. People go to the ethnic section when they want music from Africa, Asia, Latin America, the Caribbean, and even Europe. Other places where people go to listen to

"ethnic" music include free and public events, arts festivals, which are often publicized via newspapers, radio and television.

Closely related to the problem of categorization is how Umoja may be viewed from the perspective ofurban ethnomusicology, for the problems of ethnic music in urban areas have been of interest to ethnomusicologists. Adelaida Reyes Schramm for example was constructing an overview of New York City's musical life, she has was struck by the proliferation of free and public musical events that included music and dance from various parts of the world. [2] In another article, she points out the necessity of examining the music of refugees.[3] Thus, there is much to be done in the area of urban ethnomusicology particularly in identifying and documenting various performing groups such as Umoja.

Although Umoja is based in the city of Pittsburgh, its main performing area, which includes the Tri-States area of Pennsylvania, Ohio, and West Virginia, has been extended to other states, such as North and South Carolinas, New York, Maryland, Virginia, and Missouri. Through a network of arts museums and annual festivals, Umoja has occasionally performed in cities such as Boston, MA, New York, NY, Washington, DC, Baltimore, MD, Richmond Va., and St. Louis, Mo. The appearance at some of the most prestigious places of the country such as the Smithsonian Institution and the National Museum of African Arts has given Umoja a respectable place among troupes specializing in African music and dance.

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[2] Adelaida Reyes Schramm, "Explorations in Urban Ethnomusicology: Hard Lessons from the Spectacularly Ordinary, in *Yearbook for Traditional Music*, edited by Dieter Christensen, 1982, pp. 1-14.
[3] Adelaida Reyes Schramm, "Music and the Refugee Experience," in *The World of Music*, Vol. 32, 3, 1990, pp. 3-21.

1.2. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

1.2.1. Definition of Recontextualization

This dissertation is based on the processes of recontextualization of African music in the new environments. Recontextualization can be defined as the process of presenting music in a new context. In order for music to be recontextualized, it must be in a context. This can be applied to any type and category of music, be it classical, contemporary popular, or traditional.

Through years, music scholars have tried to achieve a balance of richness between considerations of art in its context and in itself.[4] A context, according to Nketia, is "any setting or environment—be it physical, ecological, social, cultural, or intellectual—in which an entity or a unit of experience is viewed in order to define its identity or characteristics as well as its relations in comparison with other entities or units of experience constitutes a context."[5] He defines contextualization as the process of viewing those entities in a context in terms of their internal and external relations and relevance.[6]

When music, like any other art form is taken out of its context, some aspects of these relations in terms of where it is viewed or evaluated may change. For example, an art object with a specific cultural value and meaning in its traditional context may not have the same value when it is displayed on a shelf in a museum. While the *Kisimbi* statue is feared among the Kongo of Congo and Angola for its supernatural power, it becomes a simple art object when displayed in a museum. Visitors at the museum look at it not as the *Kisimbi* fetish with

[4] Joseph Kerman, *Contemplating Music*, Challenges to Musicology, Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1985, p. 180.
[5] J.H. Kwabena Nketia, "Contextual Strategies of Inquiry and Systematization," *Ethnomusicology,* Vol. 34, 1, 1990, p. 81.
[6] J.H. Kwabena Nketia, Ibid.

supernatural power, but as an art object. The same thing can be said about music, which is an integral part of a ritual when it is performed out of its contexts.

Recontextualization is therefore the process of transferring something from its original context into a new context or transforming or giving it new form of meaning in adifferent context. Because of the rapid social changes that have taken place in Africa as a result of colonialism, trade and the impact of "foreign" religions, two categories of art forms corresponding to two categories of contexts have emerged, the traditional and the contemporary or modern. According to Nketia,

> The traditional arts are cultivated in contexts in which behavior is guided by ethnicity, kinship and a common indigenous language, religion and culture, while contemporary arts are cultivated in contexts in which linkages beyond those of ethnicity form the basis of social life. Such linkages are established through membership in educational institutions, churches, industrial institutions, new social, political and economic associations, such as trade unions and market unions, and recreational associations such as soccer and sports clubs.[7]

The difference between arts cultivated in traditional contexts and those practiced in contemporary contexts resides in the ways their products are presented and used. In the traditional settings, villagers express their talent in a spontaneous manner, while the professional troupes arrange their music and choreograph their dance. Here the professional troupes are recontextualizing traditional arts for stage performance and commercialization. This recontextualized music and dance is what people want to export or "sell," since the idea behind it is that things to be sold must be arranged in a certain way or must look better than the original, thus, "raw' materials had to be "processed" for a better consumption.

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[7] J.H. Kwabena Nketia, "The Arts of Africa," n.d., p. 1.

Thus, both traditional and contemporary music go through recontextualization process when they are performed out of their contexts. Since scholars in many disciplines including ethnomusicology, anthropology, and sociology, for many years have tried to make sense of something in context, they have agreed to the idea that culture is something that is always been constructed and reconstructed. Recontextualization should be defined from the point of view of the African performers on one hand, and that of the western audiences on the other, since the definition of musical appreciation in the minds of Africans is different from the definition in the West.[8]

The presentation of African music in the new contexts does not only deal with change of physical venues. It goes deeper in the concept of representing Africa in the United States. African music is being recontextualized and reinterpreted in the United States by various performing troupes and individuals from both Africa and the United States. As Nketia has pointed out,

> Music assumed to be entirely meaningless outside its sociocultural context is broadcast—seemingly by misguided producers—on the radio, performed on television, and the sports stadium, in the dance theater, at the anniversary of independence, in a variety of other contemporary settings—in their countries of origin as well as in concert halls and theaters around the world to audiences that primarily hear it as music rather than as "reflections of social structures," no matter what the program notes say about the event. The musical and aesthetic problems raised in such encounters as well as the learning experience involved in the acquisition of new habits of listening and modes of recognition of the textual and the contextual deserve the attention of ethnomusicologists. [9]

[8] Hugh Tracey, "Musical Appreciation in Central and Southern Africa," *African Music Society Journal*, p. 48.
[9] J. H. Kwabena Nketia, "The Juncture of the Social and the Musical: The Methodology of Cultural Analysis," *The World of Music* Vol. 3, 2 (1981), p. 27.

Music is the only thing that can link people in many occasions. Many are acquainting themselves with African culture just for enjoyment. Audiences give new meanings to certain music performed in new contexts. Audiences in the new contexts may not have the adequate cultural background. Yet, they might be interested in the music only because of the musical form or selected features that make the experience enjoyable. While people may not understand songs in African languages, they may be fascinated by the sounds of the words of songs in those languages even when no explanation is given to the texts.

Things are different than they were before World War II, because the landscape of population in modern cities is continuously changing and becoming more complex. Many people have been relocated around the world, and many are still relocating outside of their countries of origin. In every country there are communities of expatriates that include refugees, diplomats, students, and other professionals. Artists and performers are the most remarkable among these categories of people since they seem not to remain quiet wherever they are located. It is in these communities that we find people trying to show the expression of new consciousness for their culture in response to the changing situations in which they live. Through music and dance, people want to define their cultural relation and their religious beliefs.

The situation of Umoja is different from that of the performers in refugee communities. Umoja was not created in order to entertain people of the African communities, but it was created by the deliberate will of its founders who decided they wanted to do it to showcase African performing arts to American audiences. Founders of Umoja African Arts Company were driven by the desire to feature diverse musical styles and experiences from different African countries to American audiences. This vision reflected both the process of intercultural dependency that enabled the founders invest in their cultural heritage and the need for a cultural

engineering approach to new demands for African music knowledge by Pittsburgh schools and cultural institutions. When writing on the processes of differentiation and interdependency in African music, J. H. Kwabena Nketia pointed out the problems raised by intercultural dependency in music. One of them was described in these terms:

> There is the current process of intercultural dependency being created in Africa today by national governments within the framework of their programs for national integration and national unity which aim at establishing consciousness of a new national cultural identity based on the heritage of the ethnic groups within their national boundaries.[10]

Africans from different countries can get together to form an African performing group that would present African music on a global level. Together they do not represent only one African culture, but the whole African continent. This has been true with performers of Umoja who came from various countries and engineered a new way of presenting African music in new contexts. Their approach to cultural engineering was not limited questions of how their African identity relates to the use and the reception of African music in its new contexts, but also the need to create a vehicle for an effective promotion of African music in the United States.

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[10] J. H. Kwabena Nketia, "Processes of Differentiantion and Interdependency in African Music: The Case of Asante and Her Neighbours," in *The World of Music*, Vol. 28, 2 (1986), p.41.

1.3. METHODOLOGY

The methodology used in this study includes participation, observation, and interviews with prominent figures in Umoja African Arts Company on their personal history and experience with the company as well as other matters related to the formative stages of Umoja to its years of maturity. Bibliographical and oral data on the historical antecedents of Umoja from the earliest time to the emergence of pioneer African music and dance companies in the United States were sought from various sources.

These sources and data from my own interviews provide useful information about 1) how the founders of Umoja caught the vision at the right time and used it appropriately, 2) how its members struggled in their efforts to establish the company in the city of Pittsburgh, and 3) how Umoja has grown to become an important African music and dance troupe, almost indispensable in every major Africa-related event in the city of Pittsburgh.

African esthetics influenced creative processes in Umoja, and particular issues that arose during my research, such as the role of individuals in creating, performing and promoting African music in the United States; the training of musicians and dancers; how group sentiments are transformed and crystallized into music to be performed for American audiences; how venues and contexts affect creative processes in the new environment; the use and significance of specific musical instruments to emphasize African esthetics; and special features that become evident in trascription and analysis of the songs as well as orchestrations, compositional and performing techniques of performers who assume leadership role.

The dynamic interplay between the audience and the performing group was documented to see how it shapes the performance structure and content. I also looked at the level of

professionalism in Umoja, since performance of African music must fit into the overall professional expectationi of performers in American life.

1.4. RELATED LITERATURE

Since Africans and African Americans share a common heritage, one cannot discuss the music of Africa in the United States without examining writings about African American culture, and vice-versa. Although a considerable number of books and articles on African American music and culture are found in the scholarly literature, few of them provide helpful information about the survival and the preservation of the music that came with African slaves. Much of the writings are about the history of black music in the United States examined through the lives of African American musicians. With very few exceptions, those whites (slaves owners, tourists, ministers) who left any written records (such as diaries, journals, memoirs, etc.) were unable to find in the music anything more than weird and barbarous noise, generally used to accompany what seemed indecent, even lascivious dances. Such accounts (which were based on personal perceptions and prejudices) are mainly from the Antilles, where the blacks were in the majority and more African ways were retained than on the North American mainland. We cannot however altogether dismiss these early accounts because they give some indication of what was happening at the time. They constitute crucial pieces of evidence of the existence of African music and dance in the United States during the slavery period. Without them, it would be quite impossible to know more about the survival of African music and dance styles such as the *Calenda, chica, bamboula, juba,* among others during the slavery period and after.

Slave owners wrote many early accounts, while wealthy travelers were responsible for much of the rest. The fact that the majority of authors describing the music and dance of the blacks were neither musicians (let alone musicologists), nor dancers or music and dance enthusiasts, proved a further limitation. The descriptions of the music and dance recorded by these writers lacked both clarity and detail. Missionaries such as Samuel Davies and others were more interested in the psalm singing of the slaves, although relatively few slaves were allowed to attend religious services.[11]

It is not surprising that even the colonial newspapers, which provided much valuable information about contemporary society, mentioned as "talented" in their "Slave Advertisements" sections only those slaves who were able to play European musical instruments such as violins, flutes, and French horns. The advertisements revealed the instruments most commonly played by slaves; how well the slaves had developed their musical skills; and occasionally, how the slaves learned to play instruments.[12] One could not expect seeing in those advertisements how well a slave could play African musical instruments. However, written records on slaves holidays and festivals during the colonial period reveal the uses of African musical instruments.[13]

It was not until the twentieth century that significant writings and studies about African and black culture began to come out. One of the early studies aimed at recording and documenting African culture in the United States was Newbell Puckett's book, *Folk Beliefs of the*

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[11] *Letters from the Rev. Samuel Davies, and Others; Shewing the State of Religion in Virginia, S.C., etc. Particularly Among the Negroes*, (London, 1755), cited by Eileen Southern, ed., *Readings in Black American Music*, Second Edition, New York: Norton, 1983, p. 27.
[12] See Lester Cappon and Stella Duff, *The Virginia Gazette. Index, 1736-1780* (Williamsburg, 1950); Hennig Cohen, *The South Carolina Gazette, 1732-1775* (Columbia, S.C., 1953), and "Eighteenth-Century Slaves as Advertised by their Masters," *Journal of Negro History I* (1916), pp. 163-216.
[13] See Alice Morse Earle, *Colonial Days in Old New York* (New York, 1896), p. 195; Eileen Southern, *The Music of Black Americans, Second Edition,* (New York, 1983), p. 54.

Southern Negro.[14] It was the first anthropological study to examine African carryovers found in southern society. After presenting many folk beliefs of southern blacks, showing their origin when possible, and indicating some general principles governing the transmission and content of folklore in general, Puckett discussed the preservation of African traits in African American burial customs, folk beliefs, and religious philosophy, including belief in ghosts, witchcraft, and conjuration. None of these customs and practices, if they were African, could exist without music and dance.

Other early scholars who examined African carryovers in American society include Carter G. Woodson and W.E.B. Du Bois. In his book, Woodson listed several major African survivals--technical skills, arts, folklore, spirituality, attitudes toward authority, a tradition of generosity--and called attention to African influences in religion, music, dance, drama, poetry, etc.[15] Du Bois presented the results of a similar study in his book.[16]

There are excellent books telling who did what, where and when in the history of African American music. Others, such as LeRoi Jones's *Blues People* and Ben Sidran's *Black Talk,* look into the cultural *why* of black American music. In his study Sidran for example, considers black culture in America as an oral culture, and treats black music as part and perpetrator of that orality. He investigates the social function of black music in America and maps the progress of a black, oral culture in America, how it interacted with white America, how white America reacted to it, and the nature of the relationship itself.

Alain Locke sees Black music in the United States as "the closest approach America has to a folk music, and so Negro music is almost as important for the musical culture of America as

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[14] Newbell Niles Puckett, *Folk Beliefs of the Southern Negro,* New York: Dover, 1926.
[15] Carter G. Woodson, *The African Background Outlined,* New York: New York University Press, 1968 (reprint of 1936 edition).
[16] W.E.B. Du Bois, *Black Folk, Then and Now,* New York: Holt, 1939.

it is for the spiritual life of the Negro."[17] After analysis, Locke came to a conclusion that America was not a musical nation before the emergence of African American music. He argues that early colonial America was tuneful only in church, and then in a way that was neither spontaneous nor original. This was not due to the hardships of the colonial settlers and pioneers, for the people who had the most hardships in America--the Negroes--turned out to be the songsters of the western world. The explanation according to Locke is as follows:

> Early America was mostly Anglo-Saxon (more so even than present-day America)--and that meant a weak musical heritage, a very plain musical taste, and a puritan bias against music as a child of sin and the devil, dangerous to work, seriousness and moral restraint. So, early America could only open its throat in church in praise of God; in the daily routine of life, she hummed or whistled simple ditties or chewed and kept silent. There was open and obvious joy in music only where the French or Spanish influence touched American life as in Louisiana and Southern California, or later where German immigrants with their traditional background of music settled in considerable numbers.[18]

Because of the wealth of information they provide, Southern's book, *The Music of Black Americans: A History* and Epstein's *Sinful Tunes and Spirituals* have become classics in African American music studies. Epstein for example found for the first time that "it was possible to demonstrate from the contemporary documents the introduction of African music in the New World, its survival for generations in some areas, and its transformation into something different--Afro-American or Creole music."[19]

There are books and articles that deal with the African roots of jazz, and in which the authors have expressed a need for research to be carried out on the African continent. In their

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[17] Alain LeRoi Locke, *The Negro and His Music*, Washington, DC.: The Associates in Negro Folk Education, 1936, p. 1.
[18] Alain LeRoi Locke, Op. cit, pp. 1-2.
[19] Dena Epstein, Op.cit, p. xvii.

book *The African Roots of Jazz,* Fredrick Kaufman and John Guckin point out the relevance of African music, as they looked at the transplantation of its musical elements to the New World, in particular, to the New Orleans area. At that time, they found that there was a need for books to be written on African music on the African continent itself.

In the same book, they quote Akin Euba,[20] who made a plea for books to be written on traditional music of Africa, for the recordings of its sounds, the photographing of its instruments, and for the taping and analysis of the music and dance before they all fade into obscurity.[21] It should be noted that the 1970s were fruitful in gathering valuable information on African music, especially through the involvement of Africans themselves. Although the whole African continent is still far from being covered, one can say that Euba's plea mentioned above by Kaufman and Guckin has been heard.

Considerable writings on Afro-American music suggest the necessity of looking at its African roots. As Kaufman and Guckin point out, "in order to understand and appreciate the intricacies of the heritage of the black American and jazz, a direct intimate association with traditional Africa is essential."[22]

There are writings in related fields such as anthropology and sociology that are valuable in providing new insights, although these writings are not musically related to our study. Topics such as "Africanisms in American culture" are receiving more and more attention in most disciplines of the social sciences. Joseph Holloway points out in his "introduction" the need for a new and comprehensive examination of Africanisms in America and especially the United States from historical, linguistic, religious, and artistic perspectives. He complains that only a

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[20] Akin Euba, "The Dichotomy of African Music, " *Courier Magazine*, UNESCO, Paris, June 1973.
[21] Fredrick Kaufman and John P. Guckin, *The African Roots of Jazz,* New York: Alfred Publishing, 1979, p. vii.
[22] Fredrick Kaufman and John Guckin, Op.cit, p. 1.

few studies have attempted to update the influential findings of Melville J. Herskovits of a half-century ago.[23]

According to Holloway, the study of Africanisms has been a neglected yet controversial area of inquiry in the United States since Herskovits's pioneering study.[24] Studies following in Herskovits's wake focused on Africanisms retained in the Caribbean, Suriname, and Brazil, where an abundance of living African culture is still apparent. In North America, the most direct remnants of African culture are found in a number of isolated communities, mainly in Florida, Georgia, and South Carolina. In many ways, these hemispheric and geographic differences fueled the debate over the survival of African culture in North America.

The Herskovits-Frazier debate is interesting and very important in shaping the whole survivalism and non-survivalism theories of the African culture in the United States. Frazier believed that African Americans lost their African heritage during slavery; thus, he postulated African American culture evolved independently of any African influence. He also argued that slavery was so devastating in America that it destroyed all African elements among African Americans.

Thus, for Frazier, African American culture began without any African antecedents. In his book *The Negro Church in America*[25] Frazier argued that because of the manner in which Africans were captured in Africa and enslaved, they were practically stripped of their social heritage. Slavery in the United States destroyed the African family institution and social structure, he asserted, while at the same time putting black in close contact with whites, from whom they learned new patterns of thoughts and behaviors which they adapted to their own use.

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[23] Joseph E. Holloway, ed., "Introduction" in *Africanisms in American Culture*, Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1991, p. ix.
[24] Melville J. Herkovits, *The Myth of the Negro Past*, Boston: Beacon Press, 1958; originally published in 1941.
[25] E. Franklin Frazier, *The Negro Church in America*, Boston: Schocken Books, 1964

It is important to notice that at the time Frazier wrote, blacks were attempting to blend into mainstream America and were reluctant to identify with anything that emphasized cultural differences.[26]

Herskovits, in his book, illustrated many significant African contributions to American culture. Unlike Frazier, he emphasized the continuity of West African carryovers in African American culture. However, the limitations of the Hertskovits model became evident as more historical and ethnographic data on the African cultural background became available. Moreover, his concept of Africanisms was based on a notion of West African cultural homogeneity that is not supported by more recent scholarship, which suggests a Bantu origin for many facets of African American culture. Nevertheless, Herskovits established a baseline theory of African retention from which other researchers could assess African survivals in the New World and expand into areas he did not take into account. *The Myth of the Negro Past* not only confirmed that African traditions had survived in black cultures in the Americas but also revealed the presence of a distinctive African American culture in the United States. Holloway suggests that the Herskovits-Frazier debate, though an old one, is still central to an understanding of developments in the field of New World Africanisms.[27]

Other writers such as Lorenzo Turner[28] were interested in researching Africanisms in African American culture by studying the speech of black Americans. Turner cited numerous derivations in African American speech from the Niger-Congo and Bantu family of African languages.

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[26] E. Franklin Frazier, *Ibid,* cited by Holloway, Op.cit, p. ix.
[27] Joseph E. Holloway, Op. cit, p. x.
[28] Lorenzo Turner, *Africanisms in the Gullah Dialect*, New York: Arno Press, 1968

Among the new accounts, we find Mark Sunkett's book *Mandiani Drum and Dance,*[29] which is very close to our subject in many ways. The book came from a dissertation of the same title written at the University of Pittsburgh. After presenting a brief history of African music and dance in the United States in the first chapter, Sunkett investigated the *mandiani* in West Africa, describing in the second chapter the singing techniques, the posture and the movements of the dance, as well as the musical instruments and costumes used. He then goes on in his last chapter to describe the *mandiani* in the United States, showing how Mande performance traditions are among the most vibrant found in the African-American community today, and especially how *mandiani* has become one of the most recognizable African dances performed by African-Americans.

Another important writing close to our subject is William Anku's dissertation, "Procedures in African Drumming: A Study of Akan/Ewe Traditions and African Drumming in Pittsburgh."[30] Divided into three main parts, the first is devoted to the Akan and Ewe drumming; the second describes the situation in Pittsburgh; and the third is a summary and conclusion. It is understandable that at the time Anku wrote his dissertation, although there were considerable Ghanaian and Nigerian communities in the city of Pittsburgh, a local African performing group organized by Africans did not exist. Thus, the African Drumming Ensemble, of which he was the director, quickly became an active performing group in and around the city, especially in schools. Anku was also in a peculiar position of being at the same time a teacher, a researcher, and a performer.

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[29] Mark Sunkett, *Mandiani Drum and Dance: Djimbe Performance and Black Aesthetics from Africa to the New World,* Tempe, Arizona: White Cliffs Media, 1995.

[30] William O. Anku, "Procedures in African Drumming; A Study of Akan/Ewe Traditions and African Drumming in Pittsburgh," Ph.D. Dissertation, University of Pittsburgh, PA, 1988.

After he presented aspects of Akan and Ewe drumming traditions, Anku looked at what was considered "African drumming" in the African American community of Pittsburgh. He also investigated the general cultural view of Africa, the period of the Black Cultural Revolution, the period of Dunham Dance, and the rise of performing ensembles. Anku's dissertation is beneficial, both for readers in Africa and in the United States, because the recontextualization of African music is happening in both places. There are books devoted to the learning techniques of African musical instruments, especially drums, through the experiences of the writers. Some of those books are written through the collaboration of African performers and Western researchers.

Yaya Diallo, an African from Mali, for example, collaborated with Mitchell Hall, a Canadian, to write their book *The Healing Drum.*[31] In this book, one finds the personal story of Diallo and his collaboration with Hall to show the spiritual power of music. The book is also an insightful reflection on the difficulty of living between two cultures.

Other writers, such as Sule Greg Wilson[32] have written on drumming techniques from their own experiences both in America and in Africa. Wilson's book addresses the Western audience interested in African drumming.

The study of culture in its "original" settings is no longer the only or most important trend in various disciplines of study. In many cases, groups and individuals evolving outside of their original places receive more attention than the ones in their original settings, because of their exposure to the international media and accessibility to Western researchers. Ethnomusicologists have already embraced the study of music of groups and individuals living

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[31] Yaya Diallo and Mitchell Hall, *The Healing Drum: African Wisdom Teaching*, Rochester, VT.: Destiny Books, 1989.

[32] Sule Greg Wilson, *The Drummer's Path: Moving the Spirit with Ritual and Traditional Drumming,* Rochester, VT.: Destiny Books, 1992.

outside of their communities of origin. However, they have been reluctant to investigate music by repertory groups such as Umoja. The study of African music both in Africa and in the Diaspora is a growing field in ethnomusicology. The impact of research in Africa on the core disciplines is remarkable when one looks at writings in anthropology, sociology, literature, philosophy, religious studies, arts, history, economics, and political science. There is no doubt that the study of Africa has shaped--and will shape--major fields of knowledge.[33] Here and there we find writings about many aspects of African music and dance. Many books and articles deal with the description of music performed by a group of people or by individuals; others deal with the evolution of various genres of African music. With the advance in technology and communications, one does not have to go to Africa in order to listen to, or enjoy African music. One needs only to look in major cities in the world such as New York, Los Angeles, London, Paris, Tokyo, cities far from the African continent in order to find African music and dance performance. .

The growing body of documentary films, videotapes, and archival footage of African music and dance in the United States is an important resource that presents performances in different contexts. Biographical, discographical, textual, and historical information in references, which are needed on African music and dance troupes in the United States will be a rich and welcome resource to the field.

It will be evident from the forgoing review that although the resilience of African music as a formative element in African American culture has received much attention in the literature, its implication for the increasing interest in the recontextualization of traditional African music

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[33]Robert H. Bates, V. Y. Mudimbe, and Jean O'Barr, ed., *Africa and the Disciplines: The Contributions of Research in Africa to the Social Sciences and Humanities*, Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1993, p. xi.

and dance forms for presentation to American audiences have not been fully explored, It is these gaps in our knowledge, that this dissertation seeks to address with particulr reference to Umoja.

2. CHAPTER TWO: HISTORICAL ANTECEDENTS OF UMOJA AFRICAN ARTS COMPANY

This chapter is a review of African music and dance in the United States, and recognition of what others have done in paving the way for companies such as Umoja to emerge and be successful. It is divided into two periods, the first is the period from the antebellum era to the beginning of the twentieth century, and the second is the contemporary period when Africans and African Americans brought the music and dance of Africa to the theater stage.

2.1. THE EARLY PERIOD

African music and dance is a phenomenon in the United States. Since its introduction by African slaves, it has shown its resilience despite the hardship of slavery and post slavery discriminations against African Americans, who have kept forms of African traditions alive in the United States.

African music and dance followed the African captives wherever they went in bondage, because history has it that music and dance was at the very root of African life. Before the beginning of the slave trade and the coming of modern religions, African traditional life, from birth to death, was celebrated with music and dance. There are things that are unique to African cultures in the ways people use performing arts, especially music and dance. For example, the communal aspect that brings young and old people together in spectacular displays of rhythm, motion, and drama.

During the slave trade, music and dance accompanied both the captives and the captors wherever they went in the New World. A complete trip of a shipload of slaves consisted of three distinct parts: 1) the procurement of a full cargo of slaves on the African continent coast, 2) the Middle Passage, or the crossing of the Atlantic Ocean, and 3) the landing and disposal of slaves in the New World.

In many cases, the capturing or the purchase of slaves provided occasions for musical events. Slaving captains, ashore to bargain for slaves, were sometimes entertained by native slave-traders. Music and dance were used, in some cases, to entice the native Africans to board the ships for their long voyage. Most slaves, however, were not enticed on board ship but were bought from slave dealers, captured as prisoners of war, or abducted individually or in pairs by slave-dealers.

Although the Middle Passage was long and hard for the captives who spent most of their time in the dark, chained and abused, it provided special occasions for music and dance. "Dancing the slaves" was a common practice in the trans-Atlantic slave ships in order to keep the slaves in good health and boost their morale.

Early reports of African music and dance in British and French America prove that the music existed and that it came to the New World with the slaves. However, those reports fail to answer important questions such as "how long the music persisted in its new environment" and how it was transformed into African-American musical styles.[34] While I am not very much interested in knowing the answers to the second question, the first question is of interest to me, because of the connection and comparison I want to make between the past and the present.

[34] Dena Epstein, *Sinful Tunes and Spirituals: Black Folk Music to the Civil War,* University of Illinois Press, Urbana, 1977, p. 21.

Because of the unfavorable environments during the slavery period, it was difficult for African music and dance to survive in its original forms. African Americans in this country have made efforts to keep African traditions alive. However, when ties with Africa were severed, they resorted to people of African descent in the Caribbean and Latin America, where traditional African cultures were still strong.

Because of their struggle for recognition as human beings and their desire to enter American mainstream, African Americans produced music and dance that could be acceptable to the white. Although African music was performed in the United States during the slavery period, there is no written record of specific musical troupes that specialized in African music and dance. There is no record of known African music and dance troupes that kept African music and dance alive in the United States. This is because the existence of such troupes could not be permitted and those musicians could not move freely. However, at the turn of the twentieth century when African Americans began to identify more with the African continent, many of them began to pose as Africans, especially in the performing areas in the absence of Africans. This trend has continued for many years, especially in the film industry where African Americans play the role of Africans.

2.2. THE CONTEMPORARY PERIOD

This period is marked by the continuous collaboration between African American performers and Africans who came to this country. At the time when Africa was the "exotic," African Americans played Africans in the absence of Africans. Jazz musicians began to produce "exotic" sounds to depict Africa, or blackness.

The formation of African music and dance troupes in the United States is related to the establishment of permanent communities of Africans in major cities such as New York, Chicago, and Los Angeles. Although the first permanent communities in these cities date from the early seventeenth century,[35] it was in the 1920s and 1930s that new African music and dance troupes began to emerge, created—in the case of New York--by Africans such as Efrom Odok, Asadata Dafora, and Momudu Johnson.

These troupes began to teach African dance and drumming techniques of Nigeria and Sierra Leone. By 1938 there were three known African dance troupes: Efrom Odok's Calabar Dancers, Momudu Johnson's dance group, and Asadata Dafora's Shogola Oloba company.

Dafora's company seems to have been around for quite a long time (from 1933 to 1960), thus, it had a profound influence on the form many African music and dance troupes adopted in the United States, and many important figures in the history of African music and dance in the United States had something to do with it.

Asadata Dafora (1890-1965), who came to the United States from Sierra Leone in 1929, was very instrumental in gathering the first generation of American based neo-African musicians and dancers. After his first dance concert in 1933, Dafora went from success to success as he created several dance operas that were performed on Broadway, at the Carnegie Hall, the Ninety-second Street YM-YWHA, the National Museum of Natural History, the Brooklyn Museum, the Brooklyn Botanical Gardens, and the Bronx Zoo. He also toured the southern and the western United States. Among people he taught, we find famous names such as Ismay Andrew,

[35] See Gilbert Osofsky, *Harlem: The Making of a Ghetto* (New York: Harper & Row, 1971, and Roy Ottley, *Black Odyssey* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1948

Alphonse Cimber, Norman Coker, Jean-Léon Destiné, Alice Dinizulu, Katherine Dunham, Babatunde Olatunji, Josephine Premice, and Pearl Primus.[36]

Dafora is regarded by many as the father of African dance and musical drama in the United States. According to Maureen Needham, his well-received piece *Kykunkor* was "the first opera presented in the United States with authentic African dances and music, performed in an African tongue by mainly African-born cast."[37] *Kykunkor* portrayed the African as a human being, thus amazing many white Americans who had never considered the black as anything but savage and animalistic.[38] It was also the first entirely successful performance by black dancers on the concert stage.[39] Because of *Kykunkor's* success, performances of its type are still enjoyed today, as evidenced by the success in the United States of national companies from Ghana, Guinea, Kenya, Senegal, and many other repertory troupes such as Umoja.

The pioneers of African performing arts in the United States were blessed by the socio-political atmosphere of the time, which brought movements such as the Harlem Renaissance, Négritude, and Black Power of the 1960s.

The Black Power movement brought many African American youth in search of self-discovery to the music and dances of Africa. African music and dance offered the recognition of an ancient, pre-colonial self and was supported as a viable vehicle of Cultural Revolution by leaders of the Black Power movement.

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[36] See Marcia E. Heard and Mansa K. Mussa, "African Dance in New York City," in *Dancing Many Drums: Excavations in African American Dance*, edited by Thomas F. DeFrantz (Madison, Wisconsin: University of Wisconsin Press, 2002), pp. 143-167.
[37] Maureen Needham, "Kykunkor, or the Witch Woman: An African Opera in America, 1934," in *Dancing Many Drums: Excavations in African Dance*, edited by Thomas F. DeFrantz, Madison, Wisconsin: The University of Wisconsin Press, 2002, p. 233
[38] Lynne Fauley Emery, *Black Dance from 1619 to Today*, Second, Revised Edition, Hightston, NJ: Princeton Book Company, p. 250.
[39] Lynne Fauley Emery, *ibid.*

This is to show that the coming to the United States of talented artists such as Asadata Dafora and others opened a new era of African music and dance in the United States. Not only did it bring new African music fresh from the African continent, it also revived the African aesthetic values that were dormant in the African American communities. This was the first time since the slavery period that performing arts of Africa were given proper consideration. At the same time African Americans no longer ashamed of their African heritage.

It was obvious that with this early phenomenon, many African Americans, especially those who wanted to identify with Africa, embraced the new tradition. Ismay Andrews, for example, a former student of Dafora, began to teach dances from East Africa in Harlem; Nana Yao Opare Dinizulu founded his dance company in 1948, based on work of Dafora dancer Alice Dinizulu. Both Africans and African Americans who "graduated" from this early African music and dance school became busy in creating their own troupes, teaching African music and dance, and propagating African culture through music and dance.

Michael Olatunji (later known as Babatunde Olatunji) left Dafora to form his own African dance company, where he reintegrated the dances of Nigeria. Until his death in April of 2003, Olatunji was very active in performing and teaching African drumming at various places in the United States. In fact, he was the most known among African Americans specializing in African traditional music. This is so because he is the first who began recording African drumming in the United States, and thus helped bring African music to the United States in a way that was never used before. His 1959 album "Drums of Passion" was the first album of African drumming recorded in stereo in an American studio. Not only did it introduce a generation of Americans to African music, it also produced believers and American born activists of African music and dance. The recording, which is still in demand today among

African music specialists in the United States, continues to influence musicians in various genres.

Before Olatunji, African drums were mostly in the background for dance or other contemporary popular music. As a musician, he introduced African musical elements to the West, which had an immediate and lasting effect on American jazz. He helped create world beat music, generations before the term had even been conceived.

Olatunji's drumming techniques on various drums infused American black culture with a sense of artistic pride in traditional African music. Although he came to the United States to study at New York University, he formed an African music ensemble that became his full-time occupation. He went on to found the Harlem-based Center for African Culture in the late 1960s, where he taught drummers and other artists, including famous names such as John Coltrane. Although John Coltrane was his most noted student, Olatunji's admirers are legion, at least among musicians. Over the past forty years, he has worked with a long list of improvisational music movers and shakers such as Sonny Rollins, Freddie Hubbard, Max Roach and Yusef Lateef, among others.

Mickey Hart, the drummer for the Grateful Dead band, collaborated with Olatunji and together they founded the musical troupe Planet Drum, which included drummers from Africa, India, Latin America, the Caribbean, and the United States. His latest recording, "Love Drum Talk" on Cheskey Records was nominated for a Grammy award under the World Beat category.

Olatunji's pan-African views helped his image among African-Americans and Africans living in the West. His lifelong quest to teach the world to swing was anointed by no less than Ghana's first president, Kwame Nkrumah, who told him that instead of becoming a political

diplomat—Olatunji's original plan—he should be a cultural ambassador and change anti-African images through those means.

Olatunji reached out to other African performers in order to strengthen his African drumming campaign in the United States. He has helped other well-known African drummers and dancers come to the United States, including Titos Sompa from Congo, and Ladji Camara from Senegal. Olatunji guided them in New York in his Drums of Passion drum and dance troupe before they established themselves as elders in African performing arts at the national level.

Olatunji's connection with African-American political figures during the Civil Rights movement gave him a respectable place in African American culture. He played an important role during the Civil Rights movement of the 1960s as he appeared in rallies with prominent Civil Rights leaders, including Malcolm X, Martin Luther King, Jr., Jesse Jackson, and others.

2.3. TOURING PROFESSIONAL AFRICAN DANCE TROUPES

By the 1950s, professional dance troupes from Africa began to tour Europe and the United States, bringing fresh "authentic" performing arts from the African continent. These troupes performed in many events, including trade shows, international fairs, and arts exhibitions. The first professional African troupe to tour the United States was the National Dance Theatre of Guinea, better known as Les Ballets Africains. Universally recognized as Africa's foremost touring dance company, Les Ballets Africains have visited the four corners of the earth in an illustrious career spanning almost five decades. The forty strong company has received standing ovations from capacity audiences in world's first category venues and festivals, presenting their

blend of traditional dance, music and story-telling, laced with demonstrations of spectacle, acrobatics, comedy and drama.

Since its first appearance, the company has visited the United States many times through the decades, because of the first good impression it gave, and many other African troupes have followed in its footsteps. Because of the success and the warm reception Les Ballets Africains received, one of its drummers, Ladji Camara, decided to stay in New York City after a tour. He is known to have introduced American audiences to the Djembe, and to the dance techniques of the old Mali Empire. Ladji Camara has influenced the drumming techniques of African music and dance troupes in the United States, since the early 1970s, when he decided to stay in New York, to the present.

The hard work of men on a mission such as Asadata, Olatunji, Ladji Camara, Mor Thiam, and the touring African troupes gave birth to a new movement--that of the creation of United States-based African drum and dance troupes. These troupes have been very active, especially in educational institutions, where there has been a steady support in African performing arts. Some of these troupes are well known at the national level, and some are known only at local level, depending on where they are located in the United States.

A good example to start with is Chuck Davis's African American Dance Ensemble, which has been very active since the late 1970s. Chuck Davis remains an icon of African dance in the United States, the most known among African Americans who have specialized in African traditional music and dance. His devotion to African music and dance has made him one of the most important figures in African performing arts in the United States. Through the years since his first visit to Africa in 1977, he has gone back many times in order to learn and collect fresh drumming pieces and dance movements from various cultures in many countries. This has made

him an international figure as well, because he has become a familiar face to many African artistic directors, choreographers, and professional performers of African music and dance.

Chuck Davis has served the state of North Carolina—where he resides—with distinction as the founder and artistic director of the African-American Dance Ensemble and as the Director of the Community Outreach Program of the American Dance Festival since 1980. He has traveled throughout North Carolina, the United States, and the world as an outstanding cultural ambassador of the arts.

Ko-Thi Dance Company is another example of African music and dance troupes known at the national level in the United States. It is based in Milwaukee, Minnesota, and was founded in 1969 by Ferne Yangyeitie Caulker-Bronson, a native of Sierra Leone. Ko-Thi provides traditional African music and dance at its many performances. Like Chuck Davis's African American Dance Company, Ko-Thi has been very active in the educational areas, providing workshops and performances. Although its repertoire includes pieces from the African Diaspora, the emphasis on West African music and dance is remarkable.

The KanKouran West African Dance Company is another important African dance troupe that has gained recognition at the national level. The troupe is based in Washington, DC, and was founded in 1983 by Assana Konte, artistic director, and Abdou Kounta, musical director, both nationals of Senegal, West Africa. The 70-member company consists of dancers and musicians from Africa, the Caribbean, and the United States. Fewer than twenty members go on tour every year. KanKouran has made several appearances at festivals around the country, and many smaller troupes specializing in African music have followed its example in arranging their repertoire.

There are other troupes that have been very active in teaching and performing African music in the United State. Although not known at the national level like Chuck Davis's African American Dance Ensemble and KanKouran, these troupes continue to make a great impact on the educational system in the United States. In this category there are troupes led by individual artists such as Mor Thiam, a well-known Djembe drummer from Senegal, who was attracted to the United States by Katherine Dunham. After many years of activities in St. Louis, Missouri, Mor Thiam moved to Atlanta, Georgia, where he is based now and continues his mission. He has made several travels around the world to perform and teach African drumming techniques.

In California, CK Ladzekpo's Zadonu African music ensemble, in existence since the 1970s, has been very active in teaching and performing African music and dance at UCLA. The West Virginia African Music Ensemble, Azaguno, directed by Paschal Yao, is another good example of new African music troupes in the United States. Not only Azaguno has appeared at various festivals in the United States, it has traveled around the world, including countries in Africa, especially Ghana where Yao conducts a series of master classes and workshops every summer for African music and dance enthusiasts from the United States. Azaguno has appeared at world events such as the Olympics in Seoul, South Korea, and festivals in Hong Kong and Thailand.

There are other African individual performers who have made a great impact at the international level. Mamady Keita of Guinea is a good example. After a successful beginning in Balandugu, his hometown, and in the surrounding region, he was taken to the capital city Conakry, where President Sekou Toure was working with Harry Belafonte to produce the National Ballet of Guinea, Ballet National Djoliba. At fourteen, Mamady was the youngest member of the National Ballet of Guinea, in which he performed until 1986 when he decided to

establish himself as an independent drummer. While in Ivory Coast, he performed next to such African contemporary popular music stars as Touré Kunda of Senegal, and Mory Kante of Guinea. A group of percussionists from Belgium, Zig-Zag, decided to bring him to Europe to teach and perform African drumming techniques. In 1991, Mamady established his own percussion school called *Tam Tam Mandingue* [drums of the Manding]. This school has been extended to include branches is many countries across the globe, including France, Germany, Switzerland, Spain, Belgium, Israel, and the United States. By deciding to relocate in San Diego, California, Mamadi Keita has come to reinforce the tradition of African music in the United States. His performances and master classes are very well attended everywhere he goes.

2.4. THE FORMATION OF AFRICAN MUSIC AND DANCE TROUPES IN PITTSBURGH

It is important to examine the Pittsburgh cultural scene of the recent past in order to see the city's response to the phenomena of the creation and promotion of African dance troupes in the United States. It is important to identify early activities involving African performing arts, the creation, the maintenance and the promotion of African music and dance troupes in the city prior to the formation of Umoja African Arts Company in July 1989.

Pittsburgh has not been a major player as a city when it comes to African music and dance in the United States. It is only recently that this city has developed its own African music troupes. For many years, it depended on cities such as New York, Washington DC, and Chicago, to name just a few, where important African dance troupes have established themselves for a long time, in order to engage African performing artists. This is understandable since New

York, for example, has been considered as the cultural center of the world, and through the years has become the "Mecca" for many African American artists.

New York has played a very important role in the promotion of African culture in the United States. It has been a source of new ideas for anything African, including drumming and dancing. No wonder, the pioneers of the new African music and dance tradition went to New York to learn, practice, and promote African performing arts. Names such as Asadata Dafora, Michael Babatunde Olatunji, Ladji Camara and other African performers who have played major roles in building the new African music tradition in the United States, are strongly associated with the city of New York.

Washington DC and Baltimore have followed suit, at least in the Eastern part of the United States, mostly because of the big international communities that include Africans. Also, big cities such as New York, Washington, Philadelphia, Boston, Los Angeles, and Chicago are known the most outside the United States. People from various disciplines around the world are attracted to these cities because of the big and good image they project, and the many opportunities they offer. Thus, it is easy for most accomplished artists from Africa willing to establish themselves or their businesses in the United States to choose those cities as their Western hometowns.

For these reasons, even today, although Pittsburgh has a few of its own African music and dance troupes, it has not stopped drawing from these cities. In fact, most African dance troupes visiting Pittsburgh for major events or tours still come from these cities.

African music troupes or individual performers in Pittsburgh often invite African performers residing in these cities for collaboration, clinics, or as guest performers. Also, African music enthusiasts do not hesitate to travel from Pittsburgh to New York, Boston,

Chicago, Washington DC, Baltimore, or other cities to attend major African music events whenever they occur, especially at big festivals. However, the landscape of African arts in the United States is changing, as Anku has observed, since many African materials are becoming increasingly abundant, many cities, including Pittsburgh, are developing their own right as centers of African and African American cultures. They are beginning to develop their own cultural lives, through the appropriation and re-interpretation of these abundant resources and styles as a means through which individual and group identity can be expressed.[40]

Despite its location in Southwestern Pennsylvania, the city of Pittsburgh can be described as a city with a great ethnic diversity. Although it did not play a major role in the establishment of the new African music and dance in the United States as New York and other major cities did, Pittsburgh was affected by major events that triggered the emergence of new African art forms in the United States.

The black Cultural Revolution in the mid 1960s for example, was in response to a nationwide civil rights struggle, which sought among other things, better life conditions for African Americans in the United States. This Revolution carried with it a renewed cultural awareness of the African heritage. There was a sudden crave for identity and affinity with African traditions. Many African Americans adopted African names, they identified with certain African sacred cult such as the Orisha, Shango, etc., and the search for African outward appearances in matters of clothing, hairdo, and behavior became fashionable. People held rallies at various places, and the African drum became one of the most important visual and sound symbols of the struggle. Drum circles, or drumming sessions became common around the country, as it became fashionable for people to meet at places such as parks and drum together.

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[40] William Anku, "Procedures in African Drumming: A Study of Akan/Ewe Traditions and African Drumming in Pittsburgh," Ph.D. Dissertation, University of Pittsburgh, 1988, p.168.

Mor Thiam, one of the most important djembe masters in the United States and former member of the National Dance Company of Senegal, has described his experience after his arrival in St. Louis in the 1960s as shocking and scary, as many participants in his drumming sessions showed up with guns in their pockets, because of the "struggle" concept. To use his own words he said:

> My first concert [in the United States] was at Forest Park. When I played, no one had heard this sound before. The sound of the drum must have sent a message to militant leaders like the Black Panthers, Jesse Jackson, Maya Angelou, because not long afterwards everyone started to want to make me part of their events. When they did speeches I would do the drums for them. When they finished we sat out. They used that as a weapon.[41]

This shows how he came at a very crucial time of the history of African music and dance in the United States. African musicians in this country had to negotiate their identity at the same time helping many African Americans find theirs from the African artistic heritage. The transition between being a performer to being a teacher was not always easy. He later continued saying

> …The first class I taught, some students in the class pulled their guns to play the drums. I said, "no! You can't do that." They scared me to death. Eventually they used their hands… Anyway, that was the first class I taught at Southern Illinois University. Can you imagine that?[42]

[41] Mor Thiam, personal interview, St. Louis, Fall 1998.
[42] Mor Thiam, Ibid.

This kind of experience that Mor Thiam had shows how African artists who come to the United States adapt to the new environment, and what kinds of challenges they may go through. In general, the reception of African music and dance during this period was great, since many people were craving for African art forms, and the search for African American identity was strong. While Cities such as New York, St. Louis, and others were blessed with the presence of African "masters" such as Babatunde Olatunji, Ladji Camara, Mor Thiam, and others, for many African Americans, the general search for African identity was interpreted and expressed within the limited information on drumming available at the time. Since music from Africa was not available in many places, although people were searching for it, African drumming and dance forms from Latin America and the Caribbean that were available through recordings were ready to fill the vacuum. Many considered seeing a performance by authentic African musicians and dancers as a life-changing experience, because that brought them closer to the real thing: Africa.

The African drum as a musical instrument symbolizing African pride during the Civil Rights struggle helped to raise the level of consciousness among African Americans. This was the most important thing, for anyone from Africa and the African Diaspora to see pride in being black; to believe that he must be free, independent; and then rely on the power of the drum to remind everybody that Africa is where he came from. His identity is almost defined by its rhythms.

Other causative factors beside the Civil Rights struggle of the 1960s in the United States included worldwide events such as the pan-African movement that was taking place on the African continent itself. Pan-Africanism, as an idea, stressed that although there is a great diversity in Africa, Africans in Africa and in the Diaspora share a common heritage of exploitation through slavery and colonialism. As a movement, Pan-Africanism stressed the

importance of unity and solidarity of people of African descent in the struggle to end all forms of racism, prejudice and discrimination against people of color and in the work for the liberation of African colonies.

New independent countries of Africa were engaged in the promotion of their African cultures, thus encouraging traditional art forms. African political figures such as Kwame Nkrumah, Leopold Sedar Senghor, Sekou Toure and many others are known for their promotion of traditional African arts in Africa. Other African leaders have used traditional music and dance of their countries as a means to rally their populations for their political gains. However, on the positive side, either way, African traditional arts were given the attention never given before in the western oriented intellectual world. Africans from different strata of the society began to value their traditional art forms, considered "primitive" for a long time. African drums were allowed in schools and churches, these same institutions that played major roles in discouraging people from practicing or attending traditional musical events.

The example of Guinea is very important since this was where the trend of creating African dance troupes at the professional level really began on the African continent. When Guinea was established as an independent socialist state in 1957, its first president, Sekou Touré recognized the strength and richness of its traditional culture, and so gave artists specialized in that tradition, an important place in society. Music and dance formed an integral part of the education system, and local, regional and national competitions became a regular feature.

Les Ballets Africains (the national dance company of Guinea) and other professional companies, which brought together the different cultural traditions of the country on the stage, took up the best artists. In 1959, President Sekou Touré invited a prolific dancer and choreographer named Fodeba to bring Les Ballet Africains back to life in Guinea. Here local

dancers and musicians bringing with them the traditions of their respective regions joined the company. This led to the development of incredibly rich and varied spectacles, which were to tour the world in the 1960s, 1970s, traveling from Cuba to China, from America to Australia, and always greeted with enthusiasm.

The members of Les Ballets Africains have performed in most capital cities of the world, and many have remained in these countries after their initial tours. An example is Alafan Touré, who was one of the main Djembe players of Les Ballets Africains since 1959. He established himself in the Netherlands in the mid 1980s where he performed and taught African drumming, not only in the Netherlands, but also in other European countries. He also performed with well-known western popular musicians such as Peter Gabriel. Alafan was very active in his specialty until his sudden death in May 2003 in his Western hometown, Arnhem, Netherlands. This explains why the Djembe is the most popular African drum in the west.

Dance companies from other African countries such as Senegal, Sierra Leone, Congo, have also toured in the West in the 1960s and after.

The organization in 1966 of the first FESTAC (the Black and African Festival of Arts and Culture) in Dakar, Senegal, is one great example of the African consciousness not only in Africa, but also around the world. It was an attempt by Africans in Africa and the Diaspora to celebrate and foster diverse forms of African cultural and artistic expression.

The Dakar FESTAC was the inauguration of these big celebrations that attracted performers and artists from all over Africa, South America, The Caribbean, North America, and Europe. The magnitude and the sheer success of the Dakar festival gave inspiration to a second FESTAC held in Lagos, Nigeria in 1977.

In the United States, many young African Americans were longing for some authentic African culture. The touring African music and dance troupes such as Les Ballets Africains and the Sierra Leone National Dance Company gave them the fire they needed to really connect with Africa. The Sierra Leone National Dance Company, which also had a big impact during its United States tour in 1964, gave Chuck Davis, another important figure in African American theatrical dance, his fire for Africa. This was a turning point for him, because study in Africa became a goal. The opportunity came in 1977 when he took his troupe, the Chuck Davis Dance Company to participate in FESTAC in Lagos, Nigeria. He has since made several trips to Africa, almost every year, visiting several dance troupes, and learning from African masters of traditional music and dance. Many African American artists have followed Chuck Davis's example of going to Africa, and some have gone many times for inspiration and to confirm their African identity.

FESTAC represented many things to many people. For the first time in 1966, black people from all over the world gathered at one place to celebrate their rich cultures and arts often described by others as primitive. The simple message of FESTAC lies in the fact that Africans had a glorious past and an inspiring future. FESTAC rekindled interest in African cultures as Africans in a manner literally considered unknown celebrated their heritage. Participants in the FESTAC brought the good news to their respective countries, and that added a lot of pride to the traditional artistic communities. Unfortunately, many years have gone by since the second FESTAC in 1977, but the third edition has so far proved elusive. However, smaller festivals are organized every year in Africa and in the West.

With these causative factors in mind, African music and dance rose to a level of respectability in many circles in the United States. Not only that, the educational system of the

country has responded positively to it so that in many schools, students are introduced one way or the other to African music and culture. The development in anthropology and ethnomusicology also has contributed to the propagation and the rise of interest in African music and dance in the academic circles.

The emergence of dance ensembles in the United States in the late 1960s was a big contribution towards organizing drummers and dancers in the city of Pittsburgh, who did not have direct contact with African performers. It was common to see a dance ensemble using recorded African music to present African dance styles. Thus, a performing group in Pittsburgh or another city could work with a recording of African drumming from New York, Washington DC, or even any African city. Later on, this practice was replaced by the use of live drummers to accompany dance movements.

Katherine Dunham, although not a Pittsburgher, has been influential in the formation of African oriented dance troupes in Pittsburgh. The name itself, Katherine Dunham, has become a symbol of African American theatrical dance in the United States. Referred to as "Dunham Dance" or "Dunham Technique," it has become a model for most aspiring African American dancers. By incorporating African "polyrhythmic movements" into the spectrum of jazz and modern dance discipline, and using live African drummers, Katherine Dunham brought African music and dance to the foreground of the American performing arts scene. It is also important to stress that she played a very important role in bringing African drummers such as Ladji Camara and Mor Thiam and others to the United States. This shows how attached to Africa and the African culture she was.

One of her disciples by the name of Kathy Powell was instrumental in the formation of black dance theater companies in Pittsburgh. Powell was so inspired that she followed Katherine

Dunham's dance company in New York, where she trained as a dancer. She also took Katherine Dunham's path when she went to the Caribbean on a study tour. On her return to Pittsburgh, she acquired a space from the University of Pittsburgh through the Oakland Citizens Council and established The Oakland School of Theater Dance at the corner of Oakland and Forbes avenues.

This school trained mostly dancers in the Dunham techniques who also performed in the city. Later, the school changed its name and became The Oakland School of Performing Arts in order to accommodate other activities such as martial arts. After many years of activities, the Oakland School of Performing Arts closed in 1999 when the University of Pittsburgh decided to demolish the building and build a new office building on the location.

Kathy Powell left Pittsburgh in 1980 for a teaching position at Howard University in Washington, DC. However, African music and dance was alive because of people who came in contact with the Oakland School of Performing Arts. Besides Kathy Powell, there was another prolific dancer named Bob Johnson, who also founded the Black Theater Dance Ensemble almost at the same time the Oakland School was created.

Bob Johnson was not primarily of the Dunham school of thought, but of the jazz. However, he adopted the Dunham approach and incorporated it into his productions. The Black Theater Dance Ensemble attracted many young dancers and drummers who have been active for many years, even after the death of Bob Johnson in 1986. In fact, many African American drummers and dancers still active today in Pittsburgh owe their existence as performers in African music and dance to their experience with this ensemble. Bob Johnson has trained many dancers for many years from the mid 1960s to his death in 1986. Darlene Stewart, a schoolteacher who has been very active in African dance in Pittsburgh, started learning from Bob Johnson in 1968. According to her, Johnson was the one who gave Pittsburgh an exposure to

African music and dance, although what he was doing was not "authentic" African music. One of his most popular productions was the *Damballa*, a Haitian sacred dance.

African American drummers and dancers became more aggressive in their search of authenticity in African culture after their experience with the Black Dance Theater.

Another example is Toni Kathleen "Nadiya" Stowers who is a dancer and choreographer of African dance. She describes her first encounter with the Black Dance Theater as "the first African dancing experience," although it was Haitian. She has since specialized in West African, especially Senegalese dance techniques. For her, Bob Johnson was a great mentor for most young black dancers in Pittsburgh. After the Black Dance Theater dissolved, there was a void in the city while people were still left with the thirst for real African music and dance.

Bob Johnson also brought Shona Shariff, who replaced him in teaching African and African American dance classes in the Africana Studies Department of the University of Pittsburgh. Shona Shariff was an experienced dancer in the Dunham techniques, but expanded her horizons with dance techniques from Africa. Like Tony Stowers and many others who embraced African dance, she specialized in West African dance forms, especially the Senegalese. Shona Shariff followed also Chuck Davis's example of wanting to learn and master as many dances of Africa from various masters. She was in constant contact with African performers in town who could share their experiences with her. Shona worked closely with William Anku, Damien Pwono, Gaby Muzela, and many other African performers she could bring from other cities for master classes and workshops.

Other African drum and dance ensembles existed in the city, one of them was the Ilu Laiye Tuntun, founded in the early 1970s by the collaboration of a few drummers led by Temujin Ekunfeo, who is well known today in Pittsburgh as the African storyteller. The group

came about in 1971 as a result of Temujin's quest for true African identity in drumming, dancing and singing. Ilu Laiye Tuntun was active for four years until 1974 when it stopped performing as an ensemble, and when the African "spirit" in the city began to die out. The Black Dance Theater faded out of the scene around 1980-1981, and the Oakland School of Theater Dance shifted from its performance emphasis under the leadership of Brother Martin Davis soon after Kathy Powell left Pittsburgh in 1980.

Looking back, we find that the city of Pittsburgh did have individual performers of African music and dance. The drummers were mostly self-taught, while dancers relied on a few rising leaders from whom they could learn in order to increase their repertoire. Audio-visual materials have played an important role in the learning techniques for many performers of African music and dance.

Also, many interviewed drummers and dancers claim to have had experience with all ensembles mentioned above, because there have not been strong bonds between those groups and individual artists, and most of the activities were not considered professional but as learning experience. Without proper funding, one could not expect long term commitment from individual artists, most of whom had to survive first before going to perform for less or nothing.

3. CHAPTER THREE: UMOJA AFRICAN ARTS COMPANY: FORMATIVE YEARS

Umoja African Arts Company was created in Pittsburgh during the summer of 1989, when three Congolese musicians reunited. The three names associated with Umoja's birth are: Damien Pwono, Gaby Muzela, and Elie Kihonia. The first two knew each other in Kinshasa while Muzela introduced Kihonia to Pwono.

The history of Umoja evolved in three important stages: 1) from 1989 to 1994, 2) from 1994 to 1997, and 3) from 1997 to 2002. While all three stages are important, the first was crucial since it is when the group made major decisions in the orientation as an organization, and transitions in its existence as a performing group. One of those transitions was the move from amateurism to professionalism; another was that of being developed from a performing ensemble to become an established public-funded organization. The second stage is that of freelancing, after the group lost one of its founders, Gaby Muzela, who was the Managing director and the real creative force of the company, both artistically and administratively. It is the period after the company had obtained its administrative status as a public-funded non-profit organization, but relied on freelancing performers for its existence as a viable performing group, because it was rapidly losing most of the beginning members who were crucial during the first stage. The third stage is when Umoja included another professional dance company from Congo, Kiti Na Mesa, that gave a new life and hope to the company.

Umoja came into existence from a convergence of creative ideas and circumstances generated by the reunion between Damien Pwono, Gaby Muzela and Elie Kihonia. It is a

product of good inter-personal and music-making relationship in a fashion that one thing led to another. The most important event in the formation of Umoja is the United States tour of Gevakin choir, which included Gaby Muzela and Elie Kihonia who were the initiators and founders of Umoja. Gevakin was more than a performing group, since its members bonded not only in musical practice, but also in many other life experiences, including the Christian faith.

3.1. GEVAKIN CHOIR

While we are examining what led to the formation of Umoja in Pittsburgh, it is important to look at what brought its progenitors to the United States, and to Pittsburgh in particular. The formation of Umoja depended on the existence of Gevakin as a strong performing ensemble and a social organization. It also depended to a certain extent on Gevakin's return to Kinshasa after the completion of its United States tour. Gevakin is an abbreviation standing for *Groupe évangelique de Kinshasa* [Gospel Group of Kinshasa]. It consists of more than thirty-five members, all male adults, including instrumentalists. Gevakin was created in 1967 in Kinshasa, the capital city, by a group of alumni from Baptist schools in Bandundu province of Congo in order to revive Christian culture learned in missionary schools. It started as a men's choir with no big ambition that sang a cappella in mostly Baptist churches in Kinshasa, and also at private parties of its members and supporters. To become a member, one had to have a good voice and know how to sing. As the group became popular, a good voice and knowing how to sing was not enough. One had to pass an audition.

At the beginning the repertoire consisted of old and new hymns in French, English, and many national languages including Lingala and Kikongo, and ethnic languages such as

Kihungaan, Kimbala, Kiyansi, Kisuku, and others. Through years, when younger and more ambitious members who were not necessarily alumni of Baptist schools from Bandundu province joined it, Gevakin was transformed from an amateur to a professional Christian music organization. The city of Kinshasa being the capital city of Congo, almost every ethnic group of the country is represented. Thus, many performers from provinces other than Bandundu joined Gevakin, and when they did, they brought their artistic contribution.

By the late 1970s Gevakin had a rich repertoire that included songs in new musical styles, and was already using musical instruments such as acoustic guitars, accordion, and hand-drums to accompany its songs. During the 1980s more instruments, including keyboards, electric guitars, and African traditional instruments such as xylophones, drums and other percussion instruments were added for use to accommodate the growing repertoire.

Musically, the group is versatile as it performs tunes and arrangements from various styles, including traditional African, contemporary popular, and Western. Gevakin developed a unique "sound" that made it stand out of the crowd of many church music groups in Kinshasa. It adopted a technique that allowed the use of common and direct language in the lyrics; the use of musical instruments in a way not common to churches at a time most of them allowed just a minimum of new ideas.

The instrumentation was unique in the sense that although guitars and other western musical instruments were used, their roles were not the same. The guitar, for example, did not take the lead part in the orchestration in the way contemporary popular musicians use it, but the lead role was given to other instruments such as the keyboards, or the accordion. The use of traditional music and dance movements in its performances gave Gevakin a new artistic identity, so unique that it became controversial. It opened a debate about the proper musical style

performed by various Christian groups. However, this debate encountered the confusion created by different doctrines and guidelines from various Christian denominations.

While there was a sharp debate between conservatives and liberals within the Baptist church concerning the new musical style adopted by Gevakin, the “Gevakin sound” appealed to a greater audience outside the Baptist church in Kinshasa. As a result, other Christian churches including Pentecostals, Methodists, Presbyterians, and new Charismatic groups opened their doors for Gevakin to perform at their special events. However, on many occasions, the music had to be adjusted in order to fit moral standards from various denominations. Performing in different denominations gave Gevakin the opportunity to vary its repertoire according to the current standards of visited audiences.

Gevakin rehearses three times a week on a normal schedule, and performs at least twice a month beside its regular appearances at church services every Sunday. The combination of good sounds and movements was also Gevakin’s contribution to the development of the new Christian music sound in Kinshasa, which combines western elements with African traditional rhythms. The continuous search for originality and new sounds in its style opened new doors for new performance venues and patronage.

Perceived by many as innovators on the Christian music scene of Kinshasa, Gevakin became popular as it developed a big following, not only among churchgoers and Christian music lovers, but also outside church settings, especially where people celebrated wedding ceremonies, birthdays and funerals. It did not matter whether one belonged to a church or not, but to have Gevakin perform at important events that did not take place in churches, was important.

Because of its appearance in many venues and public events, Gevakin also got the attention of the expatriate communities residing in Kinshasa. In fact, on many occasions in the mid 1980s, Gevakin performed at the French and German cultural centers, where plans for European tours were made but not fulfilled.

Gevakin also became popular, thanks to the Pentecostal and Charismatic revival movements that swept Africa, especially the Democratic Republic of Congo in the 1970s and 1980s. This revival movement has had a big impact on churches, both orthodox and new independent. It also had a great impact on the ordinary people, who became Christians, or moved from orthodox to new syncretic churches, thanks to numerous Christian crusades and revival meetings that were organized at various public places.

While it adopted a very liberal musical style, Gevakin was very conservative in the lifestyle of its members, who had to uphold strong Christian values in their personal lives as a condition to remain in the group. The Christian etiquette included among other things, abstaining from alcohol drinking, smoking, and pre-marital sex. Furthermore, members of the Gevakin choir were not supposed to be part of profane musical or other social groups that would conflict with the Christian values professed in the group; they were not allowed to join any non-Christian religions while still members of Gevakin choir.

The United States tour, called "Musical Bridge," was organized and sponsored by the American Baptist Church (ABC), in order to showcase Christian worship in the African/Congolese style to the American public. A major church-wide choir competition was organized in Kinshasa by the parent church, CBCO *(Communauté Baptiste du Congo Ouest)* [Baptist Community of Western Congo] in order to select the best group, which was to tour the United States.

The competition consisted of two parts, the first being on recording and the second a live performance. Each participating group had to submit an audiotape of its sample repertoire to a panel of judges, and prepare for a live performance in front of a big audience, including judges. The criteria for selecting the best group included good arrangement in the melody, rhythm, harmony; and originality in the presentation, dressing and choreography (if any). Gevakin came out a winner for both parts of the competition, because not only could the members perform their repertoire, but also they strongly believed in what they were doing.

For two months, Gevakin toured twenty-nine American States, performing in churches and schools, mostly Baptists. In Pittsburgh, it performed at Mt. Ararat Baptist Church in East Liberty and at the School for Creative and Performing Arts (CAPA) that was located in the Homewood area (now located in Downtown Pittsburgh). At the end of the tour in June 1989, the group returned to Kinshasa without two of its important leaders. Gaby Muzela decided to remain in the United States, especially in Pittsburgh, where Damien Pwono resided, and Elie Kihonia, who looked up to Gaby Muzela as a role model, also decided to follow him.

Gevakin had to re-adjust on its return to Kinshasa by recruiting new talents who could fill the void left by Muzela and Kihonia. Losing valuable performers in the West during tours has become very familiar for many African professional performing troupes, especially contemporary popular music bands. Many known Congolese bands such as Franco Luambo Makiadi’s OK Jazz, Tabu Ley’s Afrisa International, Papa Wemba’s Viva La Musica, Kofi Olomide’s Quartier Latin, and Zaiko Langa-Langa have lost performers during their many European, Asian, and American tours. Bands with traveling experience know how to re-organize from the setback, but others such as Embowassa, Malo, and Grand Zaiko Wawa have disbanded, because most of the performers, including the leaders have been scattered in the West in search

of new opportunities. This situation is due to the decline of the music industry at home. One has to travel out of the country to find good quality recording facilities. Thus, some musicians have become studio musicians while others have abandoned music to pursue other means of survival in their new countries. Tabu Ley's Afrisa came to this situation after the band's long stay in the United States in the 1990s, during which musicians were scattered around the country, leaving Tabu Ley with the only option of returning home alone. There, it was harder for him to re-organize Afrisa with all new members and maintain his place, especially in a time he has to compete with younger new stars. However, after more than three decades of enjoyed success, Tabu Ley has built a very good reputation, which is keeping him on the musical scene, although without his usual band.

With this situation of relocating in the West, African musicians have in many cases to regroup with others, depending on the availability of good musicians in cities where they establish themselves. Performers of African music and dance have in many cases to resort to some kind of fusion in their repertoire, because of the difficulties in gathering complete performing ensembles capable of performing in the original styles they are used to. Thus, one finds a pattern of "African fusion" bands in many major Western cities. For example, musicians from other African countries, or even from Western countries may join a bandleader from Congo and negotiate on the style the band has to adopt. The experience in the city of Pittsburgh is very typical, because other musicians from other countries, both African and American, joined the founding members of Umoja. At the end, people settle on what they have in terms of musicianship and experience.

3.2. FORMATION OF CONGOLESE COMMUNITY IN PITTSBURGH

Community life is very important in African culture. Wherever they meet in European or American cities, Africans display that sense of community life. However, even in Africa, there is a difference between the concept of community in rural and in urban areas, between simple and complex societies. The community in rural areas is defined both geographically and culturally, in a sense that members of a community live in a limited geographical area, belong to the same ethnic group, speak the same language, and share the same culture.

In the urban settings, the situation is different, since people from various backgrounds inhabit cities. This situation becomes more complex when we address the concept of "African communities" in urban American cities, where the community is understood not only in terms of geographical boundaries. The new African communities in western cities depend on the number of people forming the community, and the activities of members in the said communities. Cities such as Boston, Raleigh, Charlotte, Dallas, and Washington DC, have large Congolese communities where members have established businesses in various areas of the society according to their specialties.

People in large communities have established churches and other social organizations that play a very important role in bringing together members of the community during important events such as funeral, weddings ceremonies, and other country-related events. In cities with small numbers of Congolese, individuals may chose to join mixed African communities that include members from various African countries, or join established communities from other African countries.

The Congolese community in Pittsburgh is small, compared to African communities from other countries such as Ghana, Liberia, and Nigeria, or other Congolese communities from cities mentioned above. However, with new arrivals every year, the Congolese population in

Pittsburgh has increased considerably. In 1989, one could count only two visible Congolese families in the city. This included Damien Pwono's and Stephen Nzita's families. Nzita was a minister and Pastor of a church in the Penn Hills area of Pittsburgh, while Pwono was a graduate student living in East Liberty. Both families, although they met here, became close and developed a good relationship. Together, the two families formed the small Congolese community, which could not exceed ten people, including children. However, this "community" was so fragile because it depended on the status of Congolese individuals forming it. For example, the Nzita family was the only one that was established in Pittsburgh with permanent residency. All the others, including some who came to the city in the 1980s as students, left town after they graduated. They were never considered as Pittsburgh residents.

When Gaby Muzela and Elie Kihonia came to Pittsburgh, Damien Pwono was living with his family in a house located on 615 Mellon Street in the East Liberty area of the city. This residential neighborhood is mixed, because both black and white reside in it. Houses are spacious, although now the neighborhood is showing some degradation due to the declining economic situation of the city, which began with the demise of the steel industry. In fact, East Liberty was known in the 1950s as Pittsburgh's second downtown, and the third largest business district in Pennsylvania. It suffered rapid decline in the 1960s due to the city's changing economy (from being the steel capital of the world and "smoke city" to "high-tech city"), and out-migration.

The house at Mellon Street had three floors and a basement. It contained a dining room, a spacious living room and a kitchen on the first floor; four bedrooms and a bathroom on the second floor; three bedrooms on the third floor. The basement had an office, a storage space, a living space, laundry facilities, and a half bathroom. There were also two nice porches, a front-

yard and a backyard that proved to be very convenient when it came time to organizing private parties. Damien's house accommodated many people, mostly friends and country-mates who visited Pittsburgh from other states. Both Congolese and other Africans who frequently visited it, mostly during house parties, jokingly referred to the house as "Congolese Embassy".

Africans, especially Congolese, are known to extend hospitality to friends and relatives who visit from other parts of the country. Those who have been established in cities very often extend hospitality to friends and relatives coming from the country's interior for a visit, or for relocation in the city. Paying for hotel rooms is not an option for the majority of people in Congo, who prefer staying at a place of an acquaintance, even if this would mean spending nights on the floor. These guests are de facto relatives to the host according to the definition of a family in most African cultures, which includes members of extended families, and friends from the same ethnic group coming from rural areas or other cities of the country. Blood relatives are not the only family members to benefit from this hospitality. As "family" members, they are not required to pay rent to the host, or buy their own food, because in most cases, not only do these guests come to town with nothing in their pockets, but also it is culturally wrong to make them pay. Thus, it is important for the host to have a "good" welcoming reputation, regardless of the situation.

The situation in which Pwono found himself was very similar to that of African city dwellers described above, because he was perceived by custom as the relative of Muzela and Kihonia in Pittsburgh. He gave them the comfort and support they needed at this crucial period of their lives, especially the transition from African ways of life to American. Pwono learned from his own experience, when Manuel Kalandula, from Angola, extended his hospitality to him when he was new in town, and before he could move to his own apartment. Africans, especially

Congolese, are not the only ones who practice this kind of hospitality in the West. Other expatriate communities, including Chinese, Vietnamese, and Mexican are also known to extend the same or similar kind of hospitality to people from their respective countries, who are new to the United States. Exceptions are found, however, where ethnic conflicts at home may affect the practice of hospitality in the West. For instance, a Tutsi may find it very difficult to live with a Hutu, although both may come from the same country (Rwanda or Burundi), because of ethnic conflicts at home.

Practicing hospitality in the United States by those who came first makes the transition to American life smoother for many new immigrants to this country. It also helps build new relationships between country-mates, most of whom did not know each other prior to coming to the United States.

Later, the hospitality of Damien's house was extended to other newcomers from Congo and other African countries. This included Papy Makesi Mukwita and Koblo Kibul, both former members of Gevakin choir. Papy Mukwita came back to Pittsburgh almost a year after Gevakin returned to Kinshasa, while Koblo Kibul, who did not make the Musical Bridge tour, came to the United States and decided to move from Chicago to Pittsburgh. The first reunion of the Congolese founders of Umoja was instrumental in attracting other Congolese to Pittsburgh from other United States cities.

The host, Damien Pwono, at the time a graduate student at the University of Pittsburgh, and in the last stages of completing his doctorate in ethnomusicology, was also in transition from student life to professional life. Pwono moved out of the house at Mellon Street in 1992 when he decided to move to New York after graduating from the University of Pittsburgh. With the "Embassy" gone, Congolese in Pittsburgh did not have a meeting place comparable to 615

Mellon Street. After it became vacant for several months without a buyer, Elie Kihonia, Papy Makesi, and Koblo Kibul decided to become the new tenants and keep the atmosphere. Later on, after Makesi and Kibul moved out, Kihonia became the only tenant, thus making it difficult for him to take care of the big house by himself.

Like Damien Pwono, Elie welcomed members of the performing group Kiti Na Mesa, all seven of them, when they came to town, providing them with the accommodations needed for several months, before they could find their own places to stay. The comfort given by the house to members of the emerging Congolese community made it difficult for those who were tenants to give it up, since they felt at home far from home. Due to the high cost of maintaining the house and other expenses that made it difficult for Kihonia to continue renting it, the house at Mellon Street was recuperated and sold by the bank. However, as the Congolese community grows, home ownership also is growing among members who have decided to settle in Pittsburgh. Umoja played a role of catalyst in bringing to life the sense of community, which did not exist, among Congolese people in Pittsburgh.

Today, even new members of the Congolese community of Pittsburgh recognize the impact of Umoja and its role in reinforcing the sense of community.

3.3. BACKGROUND OF THE FOUNDERS OF UMOJA

3.3.1. Damien Mandondo Pwono

Damien Pwono came to the United States in 1984 to pursue graduate studies in music at the University of Pittsburgh, where he completed his Ph.D. in 1992. Pwono came to the United States with a Bachelor degree in music from the Institut National des Arts (INA), part of the University of Congo (then the National University of Zaire), where he specialized in Music education and ethnomusicology. He lived in Kinshasa, the capital city of the Democratic Republic of Congo. Although he attended music schools that taught Western music theories and techniques, his interest in the traditional music led him to experience diverse music performances of many ethnic groups during the *"Recours à l'authenticité"*[43] years of President Mobutu's regime.

Pwono traveled to the interior of the Democratic Republic of Congo to collect traditional music of various ethnic groups for specific projects related to the National Institute of Arts and its performing arts research center, CEDAR (*Centre d'Etudes et de Diffusion d'Arts*), created in 1980. CEDAR provided an outlet of research for both ethnomusicology faculty and students of INA. It attracted scholars from Congo and the neighboring Central African countries who did research and presented at the National Art Institute. *Maisha,* an experimental music, dance and theater ensemble of the research center, combined traditional musical materials with conventional Western musical instruments and techniques. An internship at the National

[43] In the early 1970s, President Mobutu made a lot of major decrees in the country, that included change of the country's name from Congo to Zaire; the ban on the use of Western/Christian names; the ban on wearing Western style suits and ties; the ban on women's wearing of Western style pants, dress and skirts; the ban on the playing of Western music on the national radio and television stations; promotion of authentic Zairian arts forms, etc. During this time, traditional music from various ethnic groups of the country was used to honor the President, and the national radio and television stations broadcast a lot of it.

Museums in Kinshasa, at the time attached to the office of the President of the Republic, gave Pwono access to valuable early recordings of traditional music of the country by various collectors.

As a participant in the Kinshasa music experience, Pwono could not escape the fact of being exposed to the contemporary popular music of the country, of which he also became a big admirer and later a scholar. In fact, contemporary Congolese popular music is one of the most powerful and most influential in the African continent. Like many people from his generation, he loved dancing to it, and sometimes performed it in school bands. While in Pittsburgh, he continued to reflect on the contemporary popular music of his country and wrote his doctoral dissertation on it. The presence of Gaby Muzela and Elie Kihonia in Pittsburgh enabled Pwono to initiate the idea of Umoja.

Although he could perform African music, Pwono was also known for his organizational skills. Because of his expertise in ethnomusicology and management, Pwono shaped the vision of developed the blueprint and provided the resources for the newly created company. Pwono was the director of the African Drumming Ensemble of the University of Pittsburgh, as part of his Teaching Assistant/Fellow assignment. He succeeded William Anku, another graduate student at the time, who was its first director after he returned to Ghana at the completion of his graduate studies. Pwono left Umoja at the end of 1991 to devote his time to organizing seminars in Cultural Management Development.

3.3.2. Gaby Lungu Muzela

Gaby Muzela (1960-1994) was born in Kikwit in the Bandundu province of Congo. He was raised in a musical environment, since his father and many of his relatives were professional musicians. Like Damien Pwono, he is a graduate of the Institut National des Arts in Kinshasa,

where he studied arts management. This is where both met and developed friendship that continued even after both graduated.

Muzela's performance skills began to develop early in his childhood as he watched his father's rehearsals and performances in Kikwit. His father led a neo-traditional performing ensemble, ADPOK, in which he played accordion and sang. The accordion was the leading and only melodic musical instrument of the group, as other percussion instruments such as drums, rattles and bells accompanied. Thus, as he was growing up, Muzela began performing, singing in school and church choirs, drumming, dancing and later playing guitar in popular bands. Like many talented musicians, he did not need formal training to become a confirmed performing artist. Everywhere he went, he exhibited his many talents, and people could not miss recognizing him as a very gifted and talented person.

He very often emerged as leader and inspirer in many groups he joined. In Milundu for example, where he went to work as a teacher after he finished high school, his presence in COCEM *(Chorale du College Evangelique de Milundu),* the men's choir of the school, helped it to become one of the best school performing groups in Bandundu province.

While attending college in Kinshasa, Gaby Muzela performed in Musicana, a student contemporary popular music band, in which he was the lead singer and figure. Thanks to him, the band became very popular among students in many campuses of the university in Kinshasa. Under his leadership, Musicana reached greater popularity, as it performed for the national television of Congo and at many events around the city of Kinshasa. One of the highlights was Musicana's participation in a big music festival in 1984, in which it won prizes for best performing group. Besides groups from the Democratic Republic of Congo, the festival, FEMAC *(Festival de Musique de L'Afrique Central)*[Music Festival of Central Africa], gathered

performing groups from neighboring Central African countries, including the Republic of Congo, Gabon, Cameroon, Angola, and Central African Republic.

Gaby Muzela's role as composer/arranger along with his performing skills on lead vocals, bass and guitar, made him very important in Gevakin choir, which he joined in 1980. His musical contribution was crucial in developing the unique Gevakin "sound" mentioned above, because he belonged to the new school of thought that brought major changes in the musical style of the group.

Gaby remained a dominant figure in Umoja as a performer, and also as managing director after Damien left the company. He used his arts management expertise, combined with his performance skills to transform Umoja from being an amateur ensemble to a professional performing company. His premature death in July 1994, of cancer at the age of thirty-three has affected Umoja as a performing group and as a social organization.

3.3.3. Elie Lunkeba Kihonia

Elie Kihonia was born in Kinshasa, where he lived until he left with Gevakin's Musical Bridge tour of the United States in 1989. After graduating from high school, he intended to go to the University of Kinshasa to study law. Elie was in his first year when his studies were interrupted by fact that he had to travel oversea as a performer. His musical activities began early in his life, as he sang and played drums in youth groups and choirs of different churches he attended in Kinshasa, both Catholic and Protestant.

Kihonia joined Gevakin choir in 1983 and developed his talent on hand drums, vocals, and later on other musical instruments used in the group, including guitar, accordion, and keyboards. He is grateful to Gevakin because it gave him everything he needed to become an artist musician he is today. By the time Gevakin was preparing for the United States tour, he had

emerged as one of the leading figures of the group, because of his ability to play musical instruments.

In Pittsburgh, Kihonia was the main figure of Umoja from its formation throughout the 1990s as he participated in arranging music and choreographing dance movements. After the passing of Gaby Muzela, everything fell on the shoulders of Kihonia, who became both the Artistic and the Executive Director of the company, a position he held until the end of 2000 when he left the company to create his own new company, Afrika Yetu.

3.4. SHARED COMMON CONGOLESE HERITAGE

Despite their personal backgrounds, their differences in training, and their expertise, the Congolese founders of Umoja had a lot in common. The fact that they all came from the same country puts them in a very special category. A close look at their inter-personal relationships reveals that they are related at many levels: 1) at the national Congolese level, they all share the Congolese cultural heritage. They grew up in Congo, where they shared many life experiences. Being from the same generation, they spent most of their life under President Mobutu's regime, which promoted nationalistic ideas in arts, especially music. They shared the culture of Kinshasa, the capital city; they watched the same and only national television station; listened to the same kinds of music on the national radio stations, and so forth. Most of the new Congolese identity was developed during President Mobutu's regime.[44]

In the 1970s for example, even the western style Boy and Girl Scouts organizations were banned, and replaced by *JMPR (Jeunesse du Mouvement Populaire de la Revolution)*, which was

[44] Mobutu Sese Seko ruled the country for thirty-two years, from 1965 to 1997.

the youth section of the MPR *(Mouvement Populaire de la Revolution*) that was the only political party allowed in the country. Thus, because of the nationalistic ideas developed in the 1970s and 1980s, there is a generation of Congolese that grew up without strong influence from western artistic ideas, and the three founders of Umoja belong to this category.

Every Congolese born and raised in Congo has the Congolese spirit, since every country on earth has its own spirit and identity, recognizable by other people around the world. 2) Those with advanced education background have many things in common, because of the Congolese educational system they grew up with. Besides communicating in Congolese national languages such as Lingala (for those who came from Kinshasa), Kikongo, Swahili, and Tshiluba, they can fluently communicate in French, the official language of the country, a language inherited from the colonial period.

At this intellectual level, Damien Pwono and Gaby Muzela had more in common because both attended the Institut National des Arts in Kinshasa, which had its own culture. 3) Those with performing arts experience, for example people who evolved in Gevakin choir and the National Arts Institute, also have many things in common. They spent a considerable amount of time together during which they developed or absorbed (in the Institut National des Arts case) a common repertoire that became part of their artistic heritage.

These collective experiences and the common cultural heritage are the ingredients from which Umoja African Arts Company was formed. The shared Congolese experiences, which now belong to the past, constitute a very important pool of cultural and artistic materials needed for inspiration in the new environment.

3.5. RECRUITMENT OF PERFORMERS

3.5.1. Phase 1: The Early Period

Professional performing groups usually recruit new members by audition. Since the success of any performing group depends to a large extent on good performing leadership, the recruitment of musicians and dancers is something of prime concern, especially in this case where performances are based on differential participation and role distribution that demand specialization. Nketia has remarked that the problem of recruitment does not arise where a musical band clusters around a musician who initiates it. In other cases however, a musician of a high caliber will have to be encouraged to join the group through the admiration and respect that is shown for his ability, or through the size of his share of gifts that are given to the group.[45]

However, the new company that was being formed was itself in the amateur stage, thus it was difficult to define criteria for recruiting new dancers and drummers. One of the reasons was that none of the three Congolese founders of the group considered himself a "traditional" drummer or dancer according to the African (Congolese) standards. However, for students in the African Drumming Ensemble at the University of Pittsburgh and the African music community, they were viewed as African "masters" of both drumming and dancing. The fact of being from Africa put them in a certain category of people possessing African authenticity. People joined the newly created company voluntarily according to their talents and interest. Auditions to recruit new performers came later when a certain repertoire was in place.

The newly created ensemble attracted people mostly from Damien Pwono's entourage, which consisted of music graduate students at the University of Pittsburgh, members of the

[45] J.H. Kwabena Nketia, *The Music of Africa,* (New York: Norton, 1974), p.56-57.

African Drumming Ensemble, and African friends in Pittsburgh. The first group to join the ensemble included students from the University of Pittsburgh, mostly whites; members of the Latin American community of Pittsburgh, and African music lovers in the city of Pittsburgh. Among them were drummers who wanted to learn African rhythms; dancers who wanted to learn African dance movements; and also other musicians who wanted to broaden their musical horizons by adding African musical techniques to their musicianship. As in a typical new performing group, people came and went, as one does through a revolving door. Those who could not find what they wanted left as quickly as they came while those who discovered something interesting remained for a considerable time.

A small group, including Patrick Norman (a bass player), Jim Donovan (a drum set player) and Jim Di Spirito (Indian tabla player), was inspired by their experience with Gaby Muzela and Elie Kihonia to form a percussion-based fusion band called Rusted Root, which became popular in the mid 1990s, and has released many albums. During this “revolving door” period, the core of the group remained tight, strengthening the early styles of the ensemble.

The newly created performing group also became an outlet for creative impulse, because of the interaction people had with each other. Although the Congolese founders could perform by themselves sometimes, there was still a need for more committed and permanent members to join for the group to be more effective.

Although many joined the group as dancers or drummers, only a very few were motivated enough to continue with the company when it began to aspire to professionalism. Some, because of their academic and career obligations, could not fully commit to the company. Others found in Umoja an opportunity to exercise on a regular basis with the sounds of drums

and songs. Thus, although we cannot name every individual who joined the company, it is important to identify those who played important roles in its history.

Patricia Opondo, a native of Kenya (East Africa), is considered the first female from Africa to join the group as a dancer, because of her commitment and the role she played in the early stage of Umoja African Arts Company. Not only did she bring her talent and musical expertise to the group, she also brought her friends who became very productive members of Umoja. Opondo came to the United States to pursue a degree in music education at Duquesne University before coming to the University of Pittsburgh where she obtained her Ph.D. in ethnomusicology. While she was a graduate student and doctoral candidate in ethnomusicology at the University of Pittsburgh, Opondo found an opportunity in Umoja, for her to be part of what was considered the first authentic African performing group in town.

In Kenya, she studied music since elementary school and was awarded numerous certificates at the Kenya National Music Festival. Her musical experience includes co-directing a high school choir, and being a member of "Taxi Jivers," a high school entertainment ensemble. In joining the newly created ensemble, Opondo not only wanted to add the performance dimension she needed in her ethnomusicological studies, but she also wanted to have more practice in performing traditional music of Africa. Being from Kenya, where contemporary Congolese music—referred to as "Lingala music"--is very popular, she took the opportunity to learn Congolese music and dance techniques from the Congolese performers she met in Pittsburgh. Because of her training in music education, ethnomusicology, and her organizational skills, Opondo played a very important role in the company, where she was the Public Relation coordinator. A Swahili speaker in the group, she suggested the name "Umoja" to the company, to symbolize unity.

Opondo brought to Umoja three of her former schoolmates and friends from Duquesne University: Lillian Bahati Sogga, Wendy Santiago Bello, and Dawn Maria Hinton. Patricia Opondo remained very committed to the company. She was a very dominant female figure in Umoja until the end of her studies at the University of Pittsburgh. She left the United States in 1996 when she accepted a teaching position at the University of Natal, Durban in South Africa.

Lillian Sogga, from Tanzania, East Africa, has lived in Pittsburgh most of her life. She came young to the United States after the death of her father, when her mother decided to move here with the rest of the family. Her friendship with Patricia Opondo and Damien Pwono kept her connected to the African continent, and Umoja reconnected her to African traditional music and culture. Lillian attended Goshen College in Indiana, where she obtained a B.A. in psychology.

Her interest in dancing goes back to her childhood. During her student life, she joined an international music troupe that performed African and Caribbean dances. Umoja gave her greater exposure to the traditional dance of Africa, and the opportunity to be part of a professional dance company. Lillian was very committed to Umoja as dancer and Wardrobe Coordinator. She left Umoja in 1998 to become a full-time mother, and to run her own business, which made it impossible to combine with performing on a regular basis.

Wendy Santiago Bello, born in San Juan, Puerto Rico was a very important player in the first phase of Umoja African Arts Company. She was the fourth person besides Pwono, Muzela and Opondo with a degree in music. Not only did she earn a Master's degree in Music Education from Duquesne University, she was a very talented and active performer. Wendy was introduced to music by her concert pianist mother, and as a child in Puerto Rico, she was exposed to Latin and African rhythms. While still in her youth, her family moved to Spain.

There Wendy enrolled in a dance school where she learned *myneira, jota aragonesa* and *flamenco* dances. On her return to Puerto Rico, she became organist and pianist in a high school, and director of the high school choir. During her student years at Duquesne University, Wendy performed with local reggae, salsa, and Latin jazz bands.

Wendy contributed enormously by her presence in Umoja, especially during the first phase of its existence as a performing group. Because of her experience in dance, Wendy helped shape the early choreography in Umoja, from the dance movements provided by Gaby, Elie, and Damien. After graduation from school, she moved to Miami, Florida for other opportunities.

Dawn Hinton, from Paterson, New Jersey, was the first African American who joined Umoja as dancer. Another graduate of Duquesne University, she obtained a B.A. in communication and marketing and worked for TRANSARC Corporation, a local software development company. She also had experience working at local radio stations, including WMYG-FM, and WWSW-FM/AM. Dawn's involvement with Umoja was affected by her busy work schedules that took her in-and-out of the group. However, she loved performing in the company of her friends, Patricia Opondo and Lillian Sogga. She left the company in 1992 when she went to serve in the Peace Corps in Ecuador (Latin America).

The hard work of the founders and the first recruits in the company during the few months of 1989 attracted new members in 1990. This included Pamela Bey, Azim Countz, and Joyce Strothers.

Pamela "Pam" Bey, from Pittsburgh, is considered the first to be recruited from outside the University of Pittsburgh and student/alumni communities. She came straight from the Pittsburgh community of African music lovers. When asked about her debut in music and dance, Pam says that she had danced and sang as long as she could remember. She is a product of the

Black Nationalist movement of the 1960s in the United States, the movement she believes gave her a yearning for knowledge of self, kind, roots, and so forth. African culture has been since then her main concern. Her experience in Umoja, she says, has broadened her knowledge of authentic African culture in the performing arts.

Pam was another main figure in Umoja, both on stage and administratively, since she was also the first secretary and treasurer. After discovering this new African performing "school" that was Umoja, Pam brought her son Azim Countz to join, so that he could have first-hand experience of African culture through music and dance.

Azim Countz, a native of Pittsburgh like his mother Pam, enjoyed the fact of being the youngest drummer in the group. He began to develop his performance skills early in his life, as he played drums and percussion instruments since he was 10. He also attended the Jazz Workshop in Homewood, Pittsburgh, and the School for Creative and Performing Arts. As a teenager, Azim felt that his experience in Umoja would be the first step towards his professional drumming career. Being an active member of Umoja African Arts Company made him dream of becoming a master drummer with opportunities to perform on the African continent some day in his lifetime.

Azim's life has been influenced by his mother's, because of the Africanism displayed by Pam, who wanted all her children to be somehow connected to Africa, and be proud of their African heritage. However, as a young African American living in an American city, Azim was faced with peer pressure, which is common in most African American communities. At a certain time of his life, especially after 1994, he had to make a choice between pursuing African culture or African American culture, especially when the majority of African American youth is attracted to the American contemporary musical genres such as hip-hop. Azim left Umoja in the

summer of 1994, after the passing of Gaby Muzela, whom he considered as his African role model.

Joyce Strothers Moten joined Umoja in the fall of 1990. Like Pamela Bey, she did not come from the University community. She described her family as being rich in the performing arts. At an early age, she grew to love music, dance, and theater. Her mother introduced her to African dance early in her life, and she began her professional career as an "African dancer" at age thirteen. Like Dawn, Joyce had a very busy schedule that kept her out of the company most of the time.

By this time, Papy Makesi Mukwita, a former member of the Gevakin choir who was also part of the Musical Bridge tour, came back to the United States almost a year after returning with Gevakin to Congo. Papy was a valuable member of Umoja as dancer, singer, and percussionist. Since he had many shared cultural and artistic experiences with Gaby and Elie in Gevakin, and with Damien as country-mate, Papy added his talents to the Congolese leading force of the group. Prior to his experience in Gevakin, he sang with Gaby Muzela in COCEM (*Chorale du College Evangélique de Milundu).* In his high school years, he was also a leading figure in the school's soccer team, in which he enjoyed popularity. In Kinshasa he sang in Gevakin choir until summer of 1990 when he left for his second United States trip. Although he was born in a religious family, his father being a Baptist minister and his mother a Sunday school teacher, Papy Makesi enjoys dancing traditional music, especially that of his ethnic group (Bambala). In Kinshasa, he was a regular member and dancer of Gizela, a Bambala performing ensemble based in Kinshasa.

The members listed above constitute the first promotion of Umoja African Arts Company as it evolved. Because of the combination of the ambitious vision of the Congolese founders

with the commitment of the new members, Umoja was growing in size and in the quality of its performances. What began as an experiment was finally making a positive impact in the city, because both Africans and Americans recognized Umoja as an "authentic" African dance troupe armed with a rich repertoire.

Figure 1: Members of Umoja African Arts Company. From left to right: Papy Makesi, an unknown guest, Lillian Sogga, Gaby Muzela, Azim Countz, Wendy Santiago Bello, Pamela Bey, Elie Kihonia, and Patricia Opondo. Photo courtesy: Lillian Sogga.

In November 1993, Koblo Kibul, another Congolese and former member of Gevakin Choir, decided to relocate to Pittsburgh from Chicago after learning about Umoja and its activities. Like Papy Mukwita, Koblo Kibul joined the company as drummer, singer, and dancer.

Figure 2: Performers of Umoja in action. On drums, Papy Makesi (left), Gaby Muzela (center), and Azim Countz (far right behind dancers); Dancers: Pam Bey (left), Elie Kihonia and Dawn Hinton (standing position), lilian Sogga, and Patricia Opondo. Photo courtesy: Papy Makesi.

Umoja continued to attract new members among Africans and African-Americans in Pittsburgh. In 1994, two dancers and a drummer joined the company, Sandrine Souha (from Gabon), Ntakwaona Ntabe (from Lesotho), and Rakee Tyler (from the United States). Both Sandrine Souha and Ntakwaona Ntabe were students at Duquesne University, while Rakee Tyler (the drummer) came from the Pittsburgh African American community.

During this first phase of its development, Umoja attracted dancers and drummers who were not permanent members, but guest performers. Since the Pan-African spirit was encouraged, people from African countries residing in Pittsburgh were encouraged to join Umoja, participating in teaching songs and dance movements from their respective countries to the other members of the company. At one time, many African regions were represented in

Umoja. This included Central Africa, West Africa, East Africa, and South Africa. The repertoire, although dominated by the Congolese, was affected by the contribution of members from other African countries in the group.

Other local performers, mostly African-Americans specializing on West African and African-American dance techniques came to Umoja in order to learn the Congolese dance techniques and add them to their repertoire. Many of these performers maintained a good relationship with Umoja as they performed in it while having their own groups.

3.5.2. Phase 2: The Second Period

The first stage of Umoja ended with the passing of Gaby Muzela in the summer of 1994. It was during the performing season, when Umoja had many contracts to honor. In fact, members of Umoja had to go perform out of town the day of Gaby Muzela's funeral. Since there were only two main drummers who were at the same time lead singers in the group, the absence of one, especially Muzela, made it very difficult.

Performers in Umoja were obligated to adjust to the situation that was forced on them. Elie Kihonia was the only drummer left in the group, and for a long time, there was no replacement for Gaby Muzela for what he was doing. Azim Countz was still in the learning process, and he could only play less complicated supporting parts on the drum. Also, he was not interested in singing and dancing, just drumming.

During this difficult time, the members of Umoja decided to continue the dream by honoring the remaining and future engagements. Members of the African community of Pittsburgh, especially the Congolese, were encouraged to join. Some joined by curiosity, some did because they were told they could make money performing with Umoja. With this situation,

amateurism came back in the group, because many did not have performing skills and experience.

Thus, Elie Kihonia, who emerged as the leader, turned to other professional performers who could play African drums or Congas. However, finding good drummers who could play real African drums was difficult. On the dance side, Umoja needed new energy as well, because some old faces, including Wendy Santiago Bello, Dawn Hinton, and Joyce Moten, were no longer around.

This started a long period of freelancers, who were called for specific performances. Well-known local drummers and percussionists, including George Jones, and Cecil Washington, both jazz percussionists, were invited to perform under the umbrella of Umoja. Dancers included Yetunde Obasola, who is a percussionist, singer and dancer specializing in Yoruba traditional music, Darlene Stewart, Verna “Vee” Vaughn, and Toni “Nadiya” Stoyers, who performed in Umoja during this period of freelancers. All these freelance professional performers were very influential to Umoja, because of the inter-cultural aspect they brought to the company.

The balance of influence shifted because the Congolese were no longer the majority in the group. In fact, at some engagements, Kihonia was the only Congolese in the group. Since on many occasions, there was not enough time to rehearse before the performance, these guest performers brought in their own repertoire, which was very often dominated by the repertoire from West Africa. This strongly influenced Elie Kihonia, who began to specialize in the West African *djembe* drumming techniques on which he has acquired considerable fluency.

Beside local performers, Kihonia reached out to African performers in other cities, especially Philadelphia and New York. After learning about the presence of Congolese

performers in Philadelphia, he contacted Kingambo Mulopo and Kambamba Nyanga, both former members of Ballet Pende and the Congolese National Dance Company, and invited them to come and perform with Umoja. Both performers made several appearances with Umoja at many locations during the mid-1990s. Kambamba and Kingambo brought to Umoja new Congolese dance styles, especially the Pende, not familiar to members of the company.

In New York, Kihonia was able to contact individual performers, especially Guineans and Senegalese. These are independent performers living in New York, not belonging to an established company such as Umoja. The performers included Fode Cissoko (drummer), Lamine Tcham (dancer), Amadou Boli (dancer), Keba Cissoko (Kora player), and Youssoufa Lo (dancer and drummer). These performers from New York made several trips to appear with Umoja in major performances in Pittsburgh and in other cities. One of them, Youssoufa Lo decided to relocate to Pittsburgh and became a full time member of Umoja. During his stay in Pittsburgh, from 1995 to 1997, he taught Senegalese and Guinean drumming and dance, including *Kou-kou, Doundoumba, Mandiani*, and others to the members of Umoja. Youssou Lo was known for his stilts walk and dance at Umoja's performances.

With the increase of people, especially youth who were interested, Youssoufa Lo and Toni "Nadiya" Stoyer created an African dance troupe called Safarace, which specialized in West African dance and other combinations of modern and traditional dances from Africa and the Diaspora. To many Pittsburghers, Safarace was a continuation of Umoja, because both Youssoufa Lo and Toni Stoyers were still active in Umoja. Safarace did well for a while until the two leaders decided to leave Pittsburgh for other opportunities in other cities.

Table 1: List of Performers

Name	Functions	From	Until
Damien M. Pwono	Drummer, dancer, President, (founder)	1989	1991
Gaby L. Muzela	Drummer, singer, dancer, founder, Managing Director	1989	1994
Elie L. Kihonia	Drummer, founder, dancer, singer, Artistic Director	1989	2001
Gaspard Nzita	Singer, dancer, percussionist	1989	1990
Patricia A. Opondo	Dancer, singer, Public Relations Coordinator	1989	1995
Lilian B. Sogga	Dancer, singer, wardrobe coordinator	1989	2000
Wendy S. Bello	Dancer	1989	1991
Dawn Hinton	Dancer	1989	1993
Pamela Bey	Dancer, Singer, secretary, treasurer	1990	1999
Azim Countz	Drummer, percussionist	1990	1998
Joyce S. Moten	Dancer	1990	1992
Papy M. Makesi	Dancer, singer, percussionist	1990	1999
Alisha Pennix	Dancer	1993	2001
Della Muhavi	Dancer	1993	1994
Verna Vaughn	Dancer	1993	1999
Yetunde Obasola	Dancer, percussionist	1993	1998
George Jones	Drummer	1992	1995
Koblo Kibul	Drummer, singer, dancer	1993	2001
Ntakwaona Ntabe	Dancer, singer	1993	1994
Rakee Tyler	Drummer	1994	1995
Youssoufa Lo	Drummer, Dancer	1995	2001
Tony “Nadiya” Stoyers	Dancer	1993	2000

3.5.3. Phase 3: The Inclusion of the group Kiti Na Mesa

Umoja was going through the freelance period when Kiti Na Mesa, a professional troupe specializing in music and dance of the Mongo people of Congo, arrived in the United States.

3.5.3.1. Brief History

Traditionally, Mongo women of the same generation lived in *inongo* (groups). Each *inongo* would choose a queen and take a name, very often a humorous one from some aspects of everyday life. Mongo women born between 1935 and 1940, for example, would chose the name

“Kiti Na Mesa,” meaning “Chair and Table.” Western colonists had influenced the Africans around them to break with the custom of sitting on mats and adopt the European manner of using chairs and tables to eat. For many who embraced Western culture, it was good to abandon old ways of life, especially eating habits.

In most traditional cultures, people share food from the same plate, sitting on traditional *etoko* (mats) or on the floor, and using their hands. Eating at a table while seated on a chair, using fork and spoon, was a sign that differentiated the modern from the traditional. Thus, members of an *inongo* with the name *Kiti Na Mesa* would consider themselves as “evolved” because they could eat the same way Europeans did.

In April 1987 Queen Bakembo-Ba Nsomé created the group Kiti Na Mesa, keeping the name of her *inongo*. Her objective in creating the group was to preserve the traditional music and dance of her culture that was being altered by cultural mixing and abandonment of traditional culture in metropolitan African cities.

Performers carry the audiences back to the ancestral world during their scenic presentation. After a successful debut as a professional dance troupe in Kinshasa, Kiti Na Mesa participated at important festivals and events in Africa (Ivory Coast) and in Europe (Spain, Belgium, France, Germany, and the Netherlands) and has won many national and international prizes and awards both in Congo and in the visited countries.

The group came to the United States on a tour that was supposed to take them to many cities in many states. However, it encountered some difficulties when things did not turn out as planned. One of the problems was that it missed the appearances at the intended festivals, because of travel delays. Abandoned by promoters and organizers, Kiti Na Mesa became stuck in Boston, MA. Also, because of the unrest that had just started back home, especially the war

that resulted in the toppling of President Mobutu in 1997, returning to Congo was not an option at the time.

After a series of performances in Boston, the group could not do more than wait for the next opportunity, and at the same time wait for the improvement of the situation in Congo. Members of the Congolese community in Boston did their best in providing shelter and food to the performers for several months, but there was nothing they could do to support them artistically, except small appearances in Boston. Guy Puati, a member of the Boston Congolese community with relatives in Pittsburgh, made the connection between Kiti Na Mesa and Umoja. Elie Kihonia, the artistic director of Umoja, made the trip to meet members of Kiti Na Mesa in Boston. After the meeting, he invited the group to Pittsburgh in order to collaborate with Umoja during the busy performing season of 1997.

The group has not returned to Boston since, because with Umoja in Pittsburgh, the performers had more chance for performance opportunities.

This collaboration was a good opportunity for both groups to be productive. Umoja was an established African dance troupe in Pittsburgh, with strong administrative and social structures that made it possible to survive as a performing group and a non-profit organization. However, it was in great need of good African performers who could commit to the company for a long time. Kiti Na Mesa, on the other hand, had a very strong team of performers armed with a good repertoire, but was in great need of exposure in the United States.

The collaboration between the two groups quickly developed into an assimilation, which led to the dissolution of the touring Kiti Na Mesa as an independent performing group. Members of Kiti Na Mesa became just part of Umoja African Arts Company. For a while, Kiti na Mesa

replaced independent freelance performers, both local and from out of town that performed under the umbrella of Umoja.

The new life Kiti Na Mesa brought to Umoja was spectacular, since the company did get the attention needed from the local media and the public. The artistic contribution of Kiti Na Mesa brought a certain confirmation for Umoja to be considered as the sole authentic African arts company in town. This confirmation caused local and major funding organizations to look favorably on Umoja as one of the favorite beneficiaries among arts organizations in the city of Pittsburgh. Regular audiences, especially those who followed Umoja for a while were taken by surprise, because of the sudden change in the look, the sounds, the repertoire and the movements they saw in Umoja.

Figure 3: Members of the touring Kiti Na Mesa. Kneeling position: Marie-Therese Kongo Bosola, Antoinette Basele Ekila, and Marie-Louise Djema Bosawa. Sanding, from left: Mazingi Pepo, Kasa Panzu, Emmanuel Bofenda Ilonga, Jean-Pierre Bofuki Nkoy, and Gerard Limpuku. Photo courtesy: Pepo Mazingi.

The touring troupe of Kiti Na Mesa had a total of seven performers and an artistic Director: Jean-Pierre Bofuki Nkoy (lead drummer), Emmanuel Bofenda Ilonga (drummer, Lokolé player), Kasa Panzu (drummer) Gerard Limpuku (dancer), Antoinette Basele Ekila (dancer), Marie-Louise Djema Bosawa (dancer), and Marie-Therese Kongo Bosola (dancer). Pepo Mazingi, a professional in theater, was the artistic director of the group.

At the end of 1998, Roger Tshiko Isako, another professional drummer, decided to join Umoja. For many years he lived in Europe, especially in Brussels since he traveled there with a performing troupe in 1985. Isako came to the United States on a contract with Disney World in Orlando, Florida. He joined Umoja after the expiration of the contract. Like the members of Kiti Na Mesa, Isako is a Mongo and a professional drummer with experience from various professional dance troupes in Congo, including Ballet Kaké, and Maitre Nono's Percussion Elima. Not only was he familiar with the Mongo repertoire of Kiti Na Mesa, he also brought to Umoja drum and dance pieces from his long experience as a professional Congolese drummer in Congo and in Europe. Although his life as a performer of African music in Europe and his work in Orlando, Florida prepared him for American audiences, he did not speak English, thus putting him in the same category with the performers from Kiti Na Mesa.

While the outside image of Umoja African Arts Company did improve tremendously by the contribution of Kiti Na Mesa and Roger Isako, the inside of the company suffered. It was during this time that Umoja lost most of its valuable members, especially those who put their efforts and talents to build it through its formative years. First, on the technical side, the old members of Umoja (the founding members who remained) found themselves behind when the repertoire from Kiti Na Mesa was used more and more, and they could not join easily.

Learning the Mongo repertoire at this time was difficult because it required a lot of rehearsal time, even more than they were already spending, but performance in Umoja was only one among other activities in their lives. Also, the level of professionalism in African music and dance was very different between artists from the two groups. Performers from Kiti Na Mesa devoted their time and energy to performance, since they did not have other obligations like the

performers of Umoja they found in Pittsburgh who had other occupations that took precedence over performance.

The repertoire of Kiti Na Mesa was so advanced that even experienced performers needed enough time to learn and assimilate it. Secondly, when it came time to perform, Kiti Na Mesa was a complete entity with no need for drummers, singers, or dancers. Efforts made by the then Artistic Director in combining performers from both groups did not always work. Third, since money was involved, the old members of Umoja, who felt they were being left out and all priority was given to performers from Kiti Na Mesa, became discouraged and most of them abandoned the company, and many have retired from performing in general.

As a result, Kiti Na Mesa became master of the situation in a sense that the old Umoja repertoire and image was simply replaced. Later, members of the new Umoja began to lose motivation, since members of Kiti Na Mesa became familiar with the American system, and some of them improved their communication skills in English.

Umoja as a company could not provide full financial support to performers, and since some of them saw no promising future in the company, they resorted to freelancing wherever Umoja opened doors for them. This situation, combined with personal conflicts in the company, led to the explosion of Umoja. To many performers, the company became unviable for its failure to provide long-term comforts to its members after a considerable success. Some performers decided to obtain what the company could not give them by breaking away from the company and obtaining smaller engagements in the market that was already open. Using Umoja's contacts, individual performers began to have bookings for themselves and for small groups, bypassing the company, both in Pittsburgh and in Eastern Pennsylvania.

Thus, original Umoja, under these circumstances, had to dissolve. However, individual performers from Kiti Na Mesa continued to survive while Umoja failed to do so it its original format. Kiti na mesa has contributed enormously to the success of Umoja African Arts Company in Pittsburgh. It changed the whole image of Umoja, and has left footprints everywhere Umoja has gone. Umoja attained a higher standard among performing groups that provide ethnic music and dance in the city of Pittsburgh and many other American cities.

4. CHAPTER IV: PERFORMANCE PRACTICE

4.1. EARLY INITIATIVES

The founders and leaders of Umoja did not start from nowhere. As we have stated in the previous chapter, all of them had a rich background in African performing arts. All three had experience as professional musicians in Africa before starting Umoja African Arts Company in Pittsburgh. Both Gaby Muzela and Elie Kihonia had to draw from the legacy of Gevakin Choir, which gave them all the tools needed to survive as artists performing in a strange land.

After the return of Gevakin choir to Kinshasa at the end of the Musical Bridge tour, Gaby Muzela and Elie Kihonia realized that they had to join their efforts with their talents in order to survive as professional musicians in the United States. They no longer had the artistic and spiritual comfort Gevakin provided them with. Although they were good singers and instruments players, they were not in a position to compete with many musicians they found in their new environment, because they were not performers of American music. Their limited exposure to American music prior to their Musical Bridge tour prevented them from exploring the possibilities of joining local musical groups.

Both Gaby Muzela and Elie Kihonia were going through the trauma of cultural disengagement, caused by the return of Gevakin Choir back to Africa. Being strangers to the American culture, they could not join any local band to play guitar or keyboard, let alone sing in English, except a few tunes from Gevakin's repertoire. They were no longer part of a thirty-

member performing group that Gevakin was, in which musical roles were distributed according to the advantage in human resources, and the repertoire that was already there.

It was impossible for them to reproduce music in the style of Gevakin choir, music they knew best so far. However, they had in them everything they learned and absorbed during their years in Gevakin. The choir gave them a strong background on which they could develop in any direction they wanted. They had to adapt to the new conditions of life in their new environment, the city of Pittsburgh.

It was during this time, when nothing seemed to work, and both Muzela and Kihonia had no place to go but sit around, that new inspirations emerged. They resorted to music for their own comfort. When they became bored and homesick, they would go to the basement at 615 Mellon Street, or to one of the bedrooms and begin to sing some songs from Gevakin's repertoire, accompanying themselves with guitar and keyboards.

Since they no longer felt limited to Gevakin's repertoire, they also sang songs remembered from many other contemporary popular and traditional groups of Congo, which they were missing already. This brought a lot of memories and emotions, as Kihonia recalls, "playing music for our own enjoyment was the only way to boost our morale, especially when we were down… Even watching TV wasn't helpful, because everything was in English. Playing music together made us forget the situation we were in. We could cry one minute and laugh the next."[46]

Sometimes, Kihonia would play a drum from Pwono's collection of musical instruments; sometimes they would play African traditional instruments such as the *likembe (sanza),* xylophone, or the *langung* (musical bow). There were a lot of informal sessions that caught the

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[46] Elie Kihonia, Personal Interview, Oct. 1998.

attention of Pwono's family and people who visited them. On many occasions Damien joined Gaby and Elie in playing drums, or keyboards. It did not take long before they decided to go out with the music they were playing.

It was not because the music was great, and they were satisfied with their new product, but because whatever they did was perceived as "authentic African" and new to Pittsburgh public, which was eager to discover it. The first idea was that of performing in churches in order to re-create the atmosphere they had during Gevakin's Musical Bridge tour. Technically, this idea was not very difficult to accomplish, because Gevakin's repertoire was available. Muzela and Kihonia had to re-arrange songs that were composed for a large group and set them for small groups such as duets and trios.

Pwono's willingness to help and promote the effort, arranged for performances in various churches, where they performed in duet or trio. They performed as "African musicians" or "Zairian singers" because at this point they did not have a name for the group, and they could no longer use the name of Gevakin choir, although they could identify themselves as former members of Gevakin. Every church they visited wanted the newly created group to remain permanently at that specific church, because this was something special and new in town.

Singing in churches caught the attention of Gaspard Nzita, another Congolese who resided in Pittsburgh at the time, and he was the younger brother of Stephen Nzita. He joined the newly formed group and added his voice to the performances in the churches they visited, including the church where Stephen Nzita was a pastor. At this point, they performed under the name "African Voices."

Because of his background, which was different from people coming from Kinshasa, and the influence of Stephen, his big brother, Gaspard was comfortable singing in churches. He

abandoned the group when it began performing non-Christian music outside the church setting. This shows how strong the separation between “sacred” and “secular” is for many music makers, both in Africa and in the West.

Being limited to performing in churches was not what Muzela and Kihonia wanted. They wanted to expand their repertoire to include non-religious music in order to reach a wider audience that was not essentially Christian. They wanted to be known as artists regardless of the music genre they performed. Since they were no longer bound to the strict guidelines of Gevakin choir, they felt free to embrace “world” music without fear of being disciplined, or even excommunicated. This freedom of artistic movement they enjoyed gave them the opportunity to explore other venues outside the churches.

Pwono opened another door for the group when he decided to introduce the two new African performers in town, Muzela and Kihonia, to his circle of musician friends and graduate students by inviting them to the African Drumming Ensemble of the University of Pittsburgh as guest artists from Congo. This door was the University of Pittsburgh and through it the academic community. The reception was very warm to the surprise of the two guests, who saw new potentials and new horizons in what they were doing.

The African Drumming Ensemble of the University of Pittsburgh was going through a transition period caused by the departure of William Anku, who taught the ensemble before Damien Pwono took over. Pwono inherited the ensemble with the repertoire left by Anku. Because of Anku’s origin and background, the repertoire at that time was mostly West African, especially Ghanaian. While Damien held on to the Ghanaian repertoire he learned from Anku, he also wanted to teach drumming techniques from Central Africa, especially from Congo.

Muzela and Kihonia brought these drumming techniques to the African Drumming Ensemble in a spectacular way.

When they were allowed, they took time to perform their own repertoire for the ensemble, and teach the Congolese techniques of drumming. Students in the ensemble were very interested in learning new styles of African drumming, especially the Congolese, after they watched Gaby and Elie perform. This was a big motivation for them, especially when they knew they were not yet at the level of being considered "master drummers" by African standards. They had to master drumming techniques and reach the level of professionals they knew back home. While Muzela and Kihonia were mastering their Congolese drumming and dancing techniques, they were exposed to various drumming techniques from West Africa during their experience in the African Drumming Ensemble. The interest generated by this experience inspired Damien, Gaby and Elie to create a professional African music and dance ensemble that would provide a pan-African repertoire of both traditional and contemporary popular music.

After they had proved their talents and abilities to perform new forms of African music in Pittsburgh, it did not take long before the new ensemble developed a following and recruited performers, as described in the previous chapter. The arrival of new recruits, especially dancers, brought new inspiration and energy to the group.

As described above, Pwono's house served as both the birthplace and the first rehearsal space for Umoja. It is known that many rehearsals, both formal and informal, were held at 615 Mellon Street, but what is unknown is the exact number of meetings and rehearsals at this location, because they were not documented. With the expansion of membership, a more neutral, spacious, and professional environment for practice was needed. Various classrooms at

the University of Pittsburgh and Duquesne University were used for rehearsals, thanks to members of Umoja who were students in these educational institutions.

In 1991, Umoja was allowed to use the Bellefield Hall auditorium of the University of Pittsburgh, located on 315 S. Bellefield Avenue, on a regular basis. The authorization to use the Bellefield Hall auditorium was on a yearly basis and renewable. The performers met twice a week, Monday and Thursday, to rehearse. A third day rehearsal was usually added in case there was an important performance engagement.

Rehearsing on a real stage for a considerable amount of time gave Umoja its professional attitude, since performers knew how to use performance space and manage time. It gave the company the opportunity to arrange its music, choreography, and preparation for various performing engagements. Compared to the rehearsals at 615 Mellon Street, the rehearsals on the real stage were more professional, because they became more structured and organized. Also, the location of the Bellefield Hall auditorium in the middle of the University of Pittsburgh campus, gave Umoja exposure to more intellectual audiences.

A typical rehearsal session lasted between two and a half to three hours. This included warm-up time, learning of new dance pieces, and practicing old pieces. The warm-up consisted of a series of aerobic exercises and stretches with the accompaniment of drums by Muzela and Kihonia. This technique was introduced by Wendy Santiago Bello, because of her prior experience with professional dance companies. Shona Sharif's group, which specialized in African and African American dance techniques, also used this warm-up technique. After the warm-up and stretch, Muzela would take over in teaching new songs and movements to the dancers.

In the absence of Muzela, Kihonia played the role of directing the rehearsals. Although they taught everything, from the songs to the dance movements, both Muzela and Kihonia welcomed suggestions from the performers in order to make the choreography better. Members of the group were encouraged to bring whatever they knew from their background. Africans from countries other than Congo could teach songs and dance movements to the other members. Patricia Opondo taught "Muana Mberi" and other songs from Kenya; Sandrine Souha brought songs from Gabon, and Father Felix taught songs and dance movements from Nigeria. Thus, each performer felt important in Umoja, because not only could they learn new songs and dance movements from Africa, but they also participated in the advancement of the troupe by bringing their constructive ideas.

4.2. REPERTOIRE

Umoja has developed a repertoire that reflected the background of its founders and the road it took to become an accomplished performing group in the city of Pittsburgh. Singing and dancing dominated this repertoire, and it included 1) songs and drumming pieces from Willy Anku's legacy, 2) Songs from Gevakin's Repertoire, 3) Pieces from the Old Mali Empire; 4) Dance pieces from other Central, East, West, and South African that were brought in by other members of Umoja. The singing and drumming styles in Umoja were typical African. They were chosen because they were easy to learn and to teach. The selected pieces are representative of Umoja's mission in various educational institutions that have opened its doors to African music and dance.

4.2.1. Willy Anku's Legacy

The African Drumming Ensemble of the University of Pittsburgh has been a place where African music enthusiasts and others have come to discover and learn African music and dance. Although it is a performing World music class directed to students and members of the university community, the ensemble very often open its doors to members of the Pittsburgh community willing to learn and experience African music. African graduate students with knowledge of African drumming techniques have directed the ensemble through Teaching Assistant assignments.

William Anku was the first director of the ensemble. He is the one who helped the Music Department of the University of Pittsburgh in acquiring the first set of traditional African drums from Ghana, and designed a class meant to introduce African music to American students. Not only did he teach drumming techniques from Ghana (his home country), but also songs and dances from other West African countries such as Liberia, Sierra Leone, and Nigeria. Former members of the African Drumming Ensemble described Anku as a gifted musician and a good teacher, who made even the most inexperienced member comfortable.

One of the songs taught by Anku was *Ajaja,* which is well known Yoruba song among African drumming and dance ensembles around the United States. *Ajaja* has been popular in the United States for many years, because Babatunde Olatunji performed and recorded it on his well-known *Drums of Passion* album. In fact, most people who performed *Ajaja* in Pittsburgh did not learn it formally, but by listening to the recording. This technique is still in use today, as it was in the 1960s during the Civil Rights campaign and the awakening of black consciousness when drummers learned African drumming techniques through various records.

The African Drumming Ensemble class provided a place where these African music enthusiasts and curious could come and experience live music of Africa that was being taught by an African. It is possible that Anku did not learn Ajaja in Ghana, but while he was already in the United States by listening to Olatunji's recording of the piece. However, people saw him first as an African performer rather than a performer from Africa.

Ajaja is known as a warrior's dance song of the Yoruba people. Shona Sharif, a dancer who specialized in the Katherine Dunham techniques and jazz, choreographed dances for the University of Pittsburgh African Drumming Ensemble while Anku concentrated on drumming. Since Muzela and Kihonia did not interact with Anku directly, because he had already left Pittsburgh after his studies, they learned *Ajaja* from people who already knew it in Pittsburgh, and also by listening to the *Drums of Passion* record. In fact when they came to town, Shona Sharif had already created her own group, which both Muzela and Kihonia frequently visited as guest performers. They learned many songs from Ghana indirectly through people who learned them from Anku.

As they built their repertoire, they included many other songs and drumming pieces from various West African countries, including Ghana, Liberia, Nigeria, and Senegal.
The following are transcriptions and a discussion of some of the pieces from Anku's repertoire. These music transcriptions are meant to show what type of music African music teachers use to present to their students.

Example 1

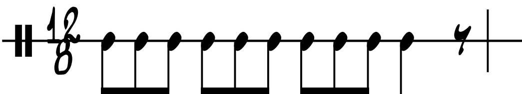
The introduction consists of singing the same melody a cappella with a sense of some freedom in the rhythm. This emphasizes the call-and-response technique of African music. Then, at the break, after the leader calls with the word *ashe*, the drum ensemble enters and builds

the intensity that will invite dancers. Throughout the piece, the song is repeated many times, but without the solo variation (bars 8-12) and the ending (bar 15), which comes at the very end when the ensemble is ready to end the piece.

The drum ensemble consists of two *djembe*, a *djun-djun*, a bell, and *shekere* or shakers. Although Umoja used *djembes*, many of these roles were played on the congas and *ngoma* drums of Congo. This technique of instrumentation is common in the United States, where it is not easy to acquire complete sets of musical instruments in a way they are supposed to be played in their original African contexts. Babatunde Olatunji, in his ensemble, used various African drums to accompany songs from Nigeria. Thus, it is common to find an African drum ensemble containing congas, *djembes*, and other percussion, playing specific Ghanaian pieces that are supposed to be performed with specific drums.

In a small ensemble, roles are well defined and distributed among available instruments. In the context of the African Drumming ensemble of the University of Pittsburgh and other school drumming ensembles, the same parts are doubled, or tripled if necessary in order to accommodate all the players in the group. Some schools, such as the University of West Virginia, have made efforts to acquire complete sets of drums from specific places and cultures. Back to our first example, *Ajaja*, the ensemble is brought in by the following signal from the lead drum:

Example 2



The ensemble responds with the following parts that accompany the singing and dancing throughout the piece:

Example 3

Dancers enter the stage in one or two lines, depending on the number of performers. Holding long sticks representing spears or other weapons in their hands, they mark the beats with their feet. The dance can have two or three variations, the main dance consisting of stepping with one foot for each complete bar before switching to the other, while moving other body parts, including the chest and the pelvic area. After the entrance, dancers put down their "weapons" in order to have more freedom on hands and show other movements that would be restricted when holding something.

The first variation in the dance consists of moving a little faster than the main dance movement, in stepping with one foot in one half of the measure and the other foot the other half. While the music does not change for these two movements, the second variation, which is brought by the lead singer saying *"Ashe,"* changes everything, including the music. At this point there is no singing, and all drummers accentuate the dance beats in the following manner:

Example 4

Dancers stump their feet in concordance with the drum ensemble, which accentuates the specific steps and jumps. The “Ashe” beat feels much more in 4/4, and dancers follow the pattern right-left-right-left-right-jump and turn-land on both feet. After this second variation, the ensemble returns to the main dance movement and the first variation that include singing. The process is repeated until the leader decides it is time to stop. The ending may be either on the *ashe* part, or a return to the introduction part, consisting of the call and response accompanied this time with drums, but in the ad lib format.

Ajaja was one of the favorites in the repertoire of Umoja, especially during workshops in schools, because the song and the dance movements are easy to learn and to remember. Although Umoja did not use *Ajaja* a lot in its formal performances, it was used the most during workshops at various elementary and high schools.

Pieces from Ghana included *Gota*, which at that time did not include singing. This youth courtship piece was often used for audience participation in dancing and singing. Drumming for Gota consisted of the following:

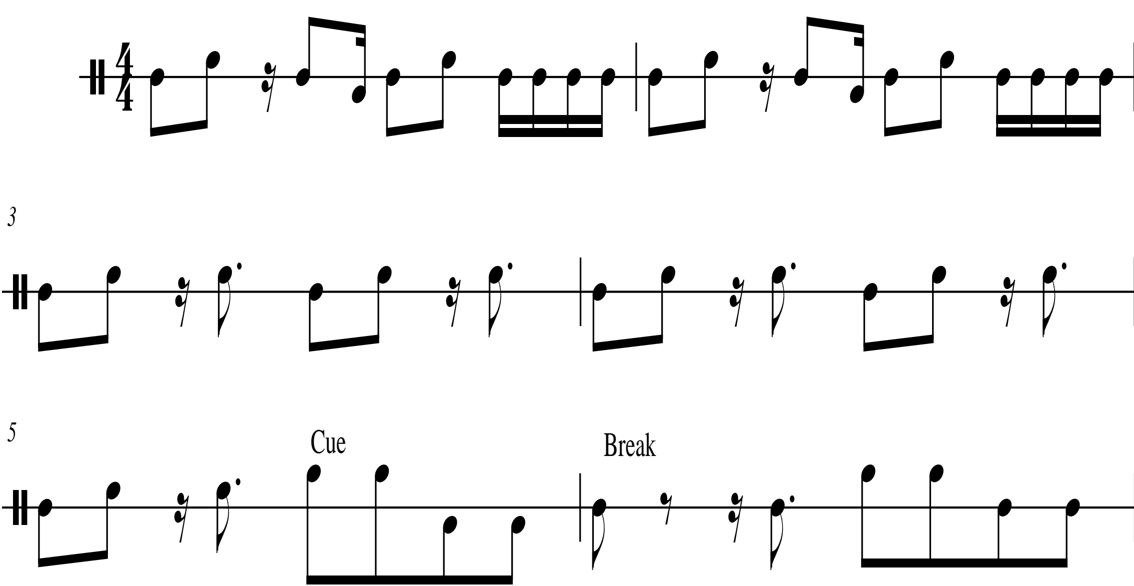
Example 5

Drumming for *gota* is not complex, because it does not have many parts. A small ensemble performs, with the supporting drum part (Drum1) played on two drums, one high tone and one low tone, by one drummer. However, in large ensembles, two drummers may play this part. Two drummers with two drums each may play the same part, or the two notes may be divided between two drummers, so that one plays the high note while the other plays the low note. Drum ensembles are flexible when it comes to the ways they utilize the *djun-djun*, some preferring a single drum and others preferring sets of two or three drums.

In the case described above, there is only one drum. The high note of the *djun-djun* represents the muted sound, while the low note represents the regular open sound of the drum. The lead drummer plays on the top of these parts while interacting with dancers and the drum ensemble, cueing the performers for all the short breaks for changes on the dance floor. Depending on the event, dancers come on the dance floor (or stage) in line and form either a circle or a semi-circle.

In another setting, girls are separated from boys as they come out and for two lines facing each other. During the dance, male dancers pick their female partners as they move towards the center to do the solo. Only one couple does the solo at a time while all the other dancers dance the basic dance movement with no exaggeration in the circle of semi-circle. In larger groups, two or three couples may do the solo at one time. The role of the lead drummer is crucial in *gota*, because all depends on him, in terms of how long a couple has to remain in the middle, doing its solo. The lead drummer's solo patterns include the following:

Example 6



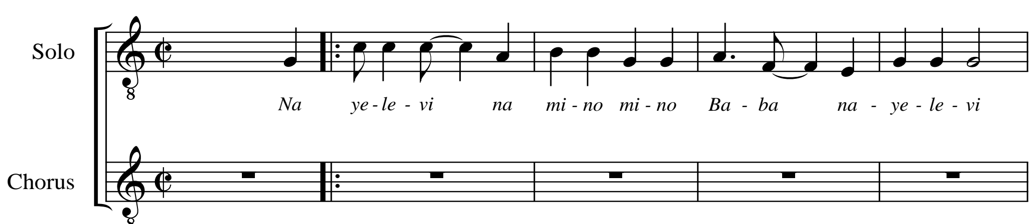
As the lead drummer may repeat one or two patterns above with variations while dancers do their solos, the whole ensemble waits for the cue (second half of the fifth measure) and the short break (first beat of the sixth measure). The ensemble plays underneath these drum patterns until the break, where it plays only the first beat of the sixth measure while the lead drum continues the rest of the measure. Dancers freeze for the rest of the sixth measure, and they resume dancing when the ensemble comes back in the next section. The couple having finished the solo returns to the circle, and another replaces it in the middle, and so on.

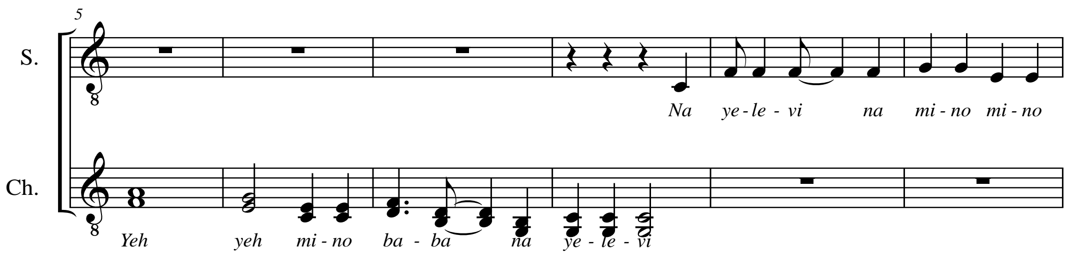
The rest of the sixth measure is another cue that brings back the whole ensemble from the beginning. While the solo patterns may vary, the cue in and cue out (second part of bar five and bar six) do not change, because of their role for both drummers and dancers.

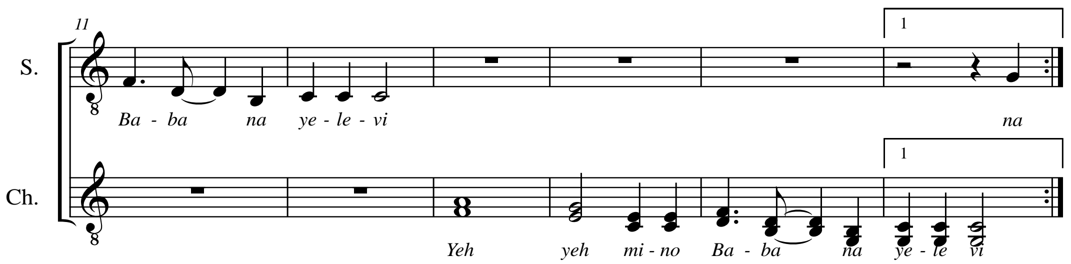
Nayelevi was another song taught by Anku and heard in Pittsburgh during African music performances, both by Umoja and Shona Sharif's group.

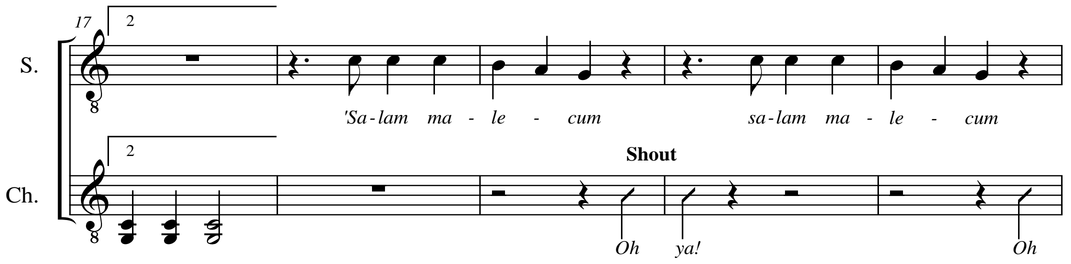
Example 7

Nayelevi









Other pieces included songs such as *fanga alafia, tshe-tshe ku-le,* and other tunes from West Africa that are popular among African Americans who perform African music. However, there were many drumming pieces that did not include singing, because of the lack of people who were willing to provide singing in the ensemble. While performers in Africa are used to do more than one thing (for example drumming and singing, or singing and dancing) at the same time, people who are not used to doing these things find it difficult.

4.2.2. Songs from Gevakin's Repertoire

Umoja did not exploit the Ghanaian repertoire, because of the limitation Muzela and Kihonia had. Although they had many things in common with Ghanaian performers, they lacked the Ghanaian source of inspiration with nobody like Anku in town to provide it. Also, the fact that they did not learn directly from Anku made it difficult, especially when audiences required more than just drumming and dancing.

American audiences are not only interested in listening to the songs and watching African dance movements, they are also interested in their meaning. In many cases, performers are asked to give the meaning of the songs, talk about their African origins and their cultural contexts. Thus, they were obligated to draw from a repertoire they were familiar with.

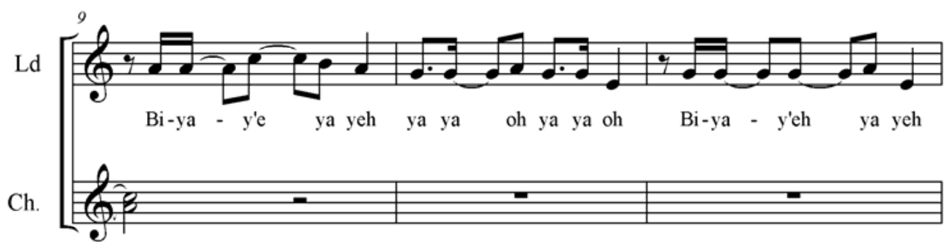
The Congolese repertoire was the strongest point of Umoja for many reasons, one being because Muzela, Kihonia, and other Congolese members of the group knew the songs very well and how to dance them without going through long hours of learning them. The advantage of having more than three performers from the same African cultural area made it easier for them to share their knowledge by using their African language without going through the process of translation in Western languages. The other reason was the fact that these Congolese pieces provided Umoja with a certain originality and African authenticity.

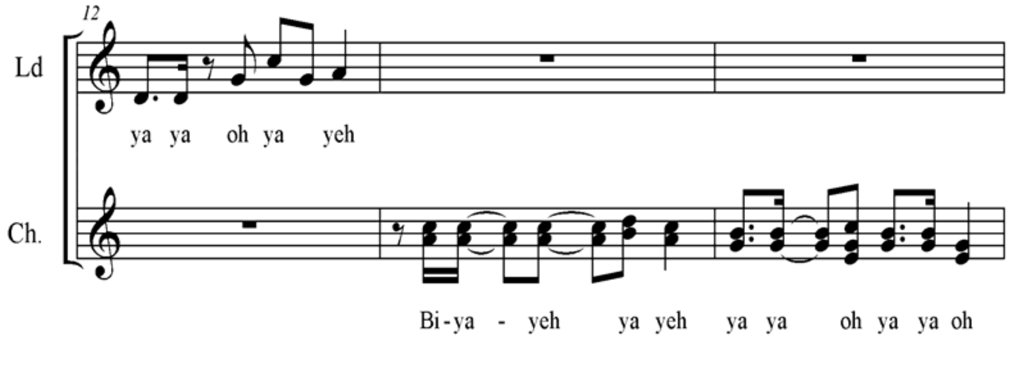
The Congolese culture, from which most of them came, provided them with a large pool of materials to build their repertoire. As mentioned in the previous chapter, the repertoire from Gevakin choir, especially the traditional music part, provided them with songs and drumming pieces that were ready for international audiences. The first example in this section is the song *Biyaya*, which is about tribulations that await unbelievers. During Gevakin's performances, *Biyaya* was used as a strong message to unbelievers, in warning them about the great danger of

hell. It was also used during the American tour to showcase the occurrence of traditional music style in Christian worship.

Example 8

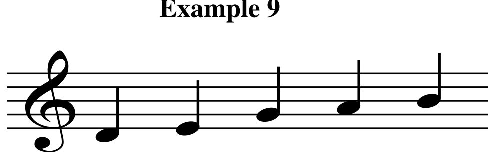
Biyaya





The main melody of Biyaya is within the following pentatonic scale:

Example 9



However, the fact of singing in harmony, in this case adding a third above the main melody, adds two notes (C and D) above B and the F, giving it the feel of full diatonic scale.

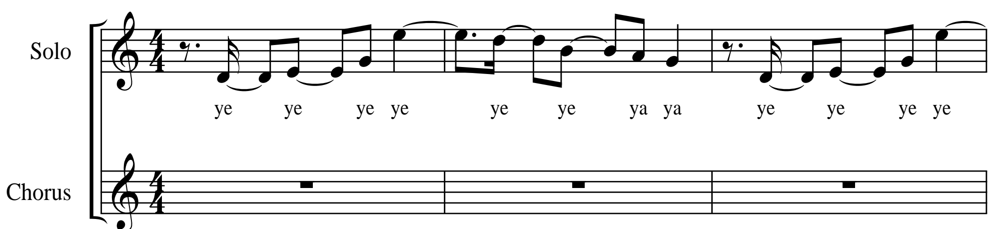
The instrumentation for *Biyaya* included two pairs of *ngoma* drums, sometimes replaced by two pairs of congas, one or two bells, and rattles. The song is introduced a cappella, followed by a call by the lead drummer (measure one). This same drum introduction is also used to cue dancers for changes in the movements.

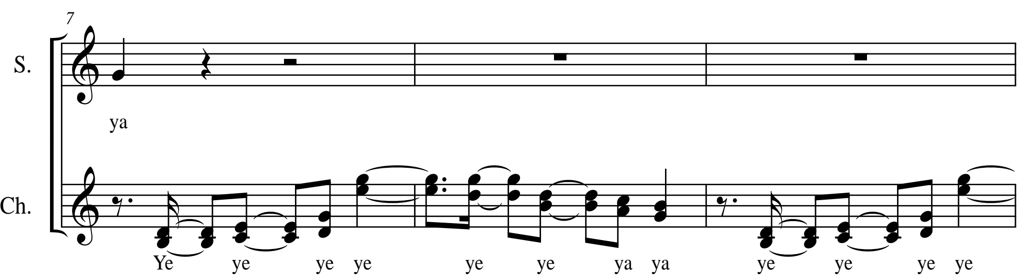
Example 10

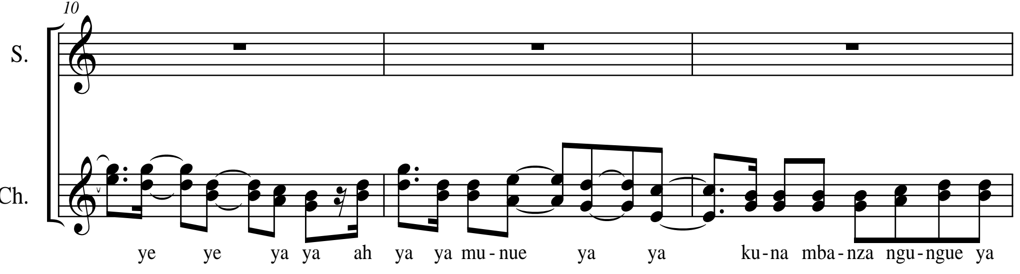
In Congolese music, as in many other African cultures, it is common to have many songs in the same style, especially if they come from the same cultural area. *Biyaya* came from the Bas-Congo province of Congo, where Kikongo language and its dialects are spoken. Another song in the same style is *"Kuna Mbanza Ngungu"* [in English "In Mbanza Ngungu"]. With songs in the same drumming style, it is easy to combine them in a performance. While they share the same drumming patterns, they differ in the melody and dance movements. Umoja very often used this technique in various performances. If not explained, as was the case in many performances, the two songs, instead of being seen as two different pieces, were perceived by the audience as two sections of the same piece.

Example 11

Kuna Mbanza Ngungu







13
S.
Ch.
Ku na Mba-nza Ngu-ngu ya ya ku ka-tu-ki-di mua-na Ku-na Mba-nza Ngu-ngu ya
ya
3
16
ya ku ka-tu-ki-di mua-na ah ya ya mu-nue ah ya ya mu-nue ya ya Ah
19
ya ya mu-nue ya ya ku-na Mba-nza Ngu-ngue ya ya
Ye ye ye ye
22
ye ye ya ya ye ye ye ye ye ye ya ya ah
etc.
25
etc.
ya ya mu-nue ya ya ku-na Mba-nza Ngu-ngue ya ya

The song *Kuna mbanza Ngungu* is built on a pentatonic scale similar to the one used in B*iyaya*. In this case it takes the following form:

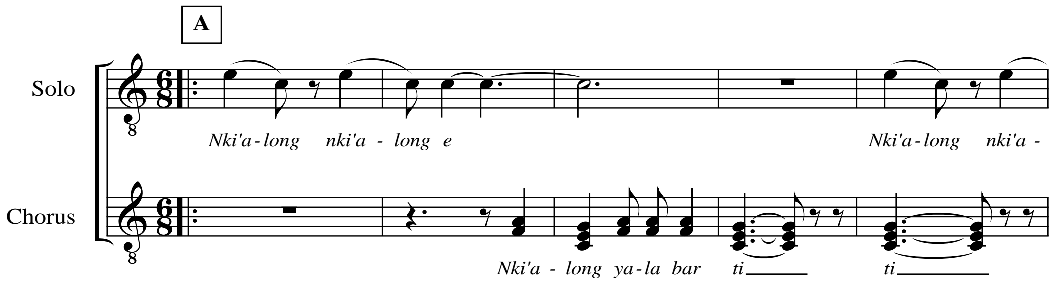
Example 12

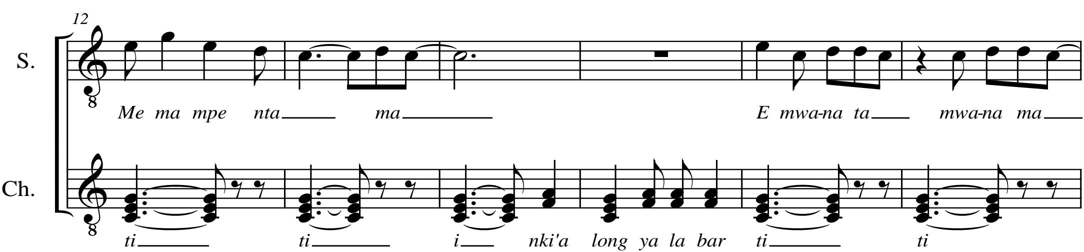
Harmonies provided by vocals added in the chorus sometimes add the note C to the music. Many ethnic groups, especially in Western Congo, use this kind of pentatonic scale. Songs from Bas-Congo and Bandundu provinces are heard very often in Kinshasa (the capital city) since the two provinces are its closest neighbors, and people from these provinces constitute the majority of its population. These songs can be heard at various events, such as funerals weddings, and other private parties. Other songs from Gevakin's repertoire included *"Nki'Along*," *"Ayi Muana," "Dimeme di Kani"* and *"Ma Sala*." All three are from Bandundu province, *Nki Along* in Kiyanzi language, *Ayi Muana* and *Ma Sala* in Kimbala. Like *Biyaya*, these songs played an important role in strengthening the traditional music side of Gevakin's repertoire.

Nki Along? [what are you teaching?] is a song about evangelism, especially when missionaries began their work of spreading Christianity in Congo. Since it was the big sensation at the time, people wondered about the new kind of message missionaries taught that came to change their lives forever. They began to ask questions such as "what are you teaching?" or "what are you talking about?" The song can be sung a cappella, because of the strong percussive nature in the vocals, or be accompanied by a small drum ensemble. *Nki Along* has two sections, the first asking the question "what are you teaching?" and the second is an invitation by someone who is already converted to people to come and hear the good words and teaching from God.

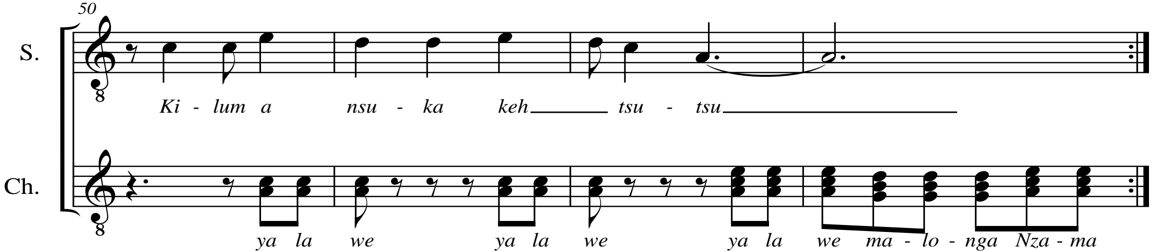
Example 13

Nki Along





24
S.
Ye ye ye ye ye ye oh wo wo wo wo wo wo
Ch.
ti ti i nkia long ya la bar ti ti
30
wo
1 2
B
Ya - la wen
i nkia long ya la bar ti ti
Ya-la wen ya la
36
ya - la wen
Ya la we ya la we
wen ya la we ma - lo - nga Nza - ma ya la we ya la
40
ya la we
Nta - ngu la kwo Oh Mah
we ya la we ma - lo - nga Nza - ma ya la we ya la we ya la
45
Ye - su Ke - na wa fu - rah
we ma - lo - nga Nza - ma ya la we ya la we ya la we ma - lo - nga Nza - ma



Songs such as *Nki Along*, which has strong African traditional music influence, came as a result of the allowance of traditional musical instruments and rhythm in Christian worship. This same song would have a different effect if written and sung in a hymnal style.

Because of the language barrier, Africans could not understand the message taught by missionaries. They wondered about what was going on. They wanted to know what the message was about, and the big excitement around it. On the other hand, missionaries had difficulties in getting their message across. They confronted this situation by training local people who became preachers and teachers, working with them.

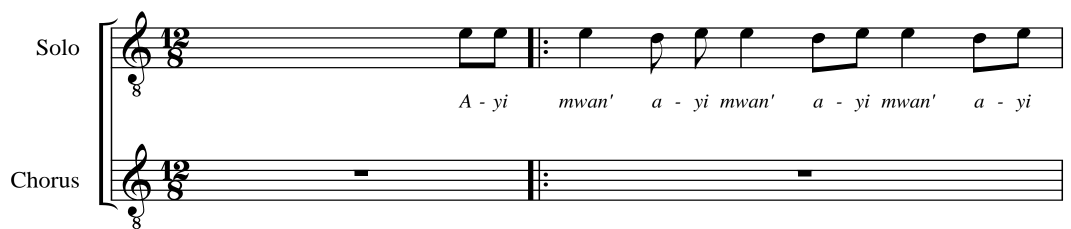
The song has two sections: section A consists of the state of confusion that arose during that time. On one side local people asked the question "what are you teaching?" on the other, the trained African teachers try to calm them, saying: "don't be afraid." In Section B, the question *"Nki Along?"* is replaced by the call *"Ya la wen"* [Come and listen]. The trained local teachers bring the message home to their close relatives. They call them one by one to come hear the Word of God; they bring the message to a personal level, using the language of the ethnic group, in this case Kiyanzi. Phrases such as "come, son of my father," "come, child of my aunt," "listen, son of my uncle" are used in order to bring the gospel close to home. Toward the end, three important phrases are repeated: 1) *"Ntangu la kwo oh ma"* [It is time, my brother (or sister)], 2) *Yesu kena wa fura* [Jesus has resurrected and He is alive], 3) *Kilum' a nsuka ke tsu-tsu* [the last day is near].

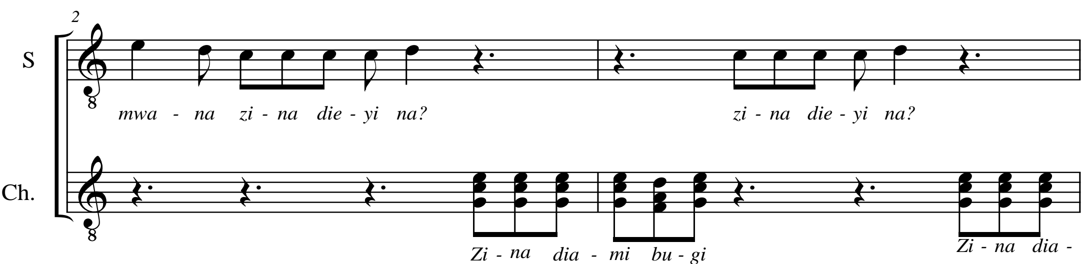
They continue with this urgent message in a move to convert as many of their relatives as possible. *Nki Along* was well received in Congo every time Gevakin performed it. During the Musical Bridge tour, American audiences received it very well, especially when an explanation was given at the beginning. Umoja performed it in churches and at various venues where it was well received.

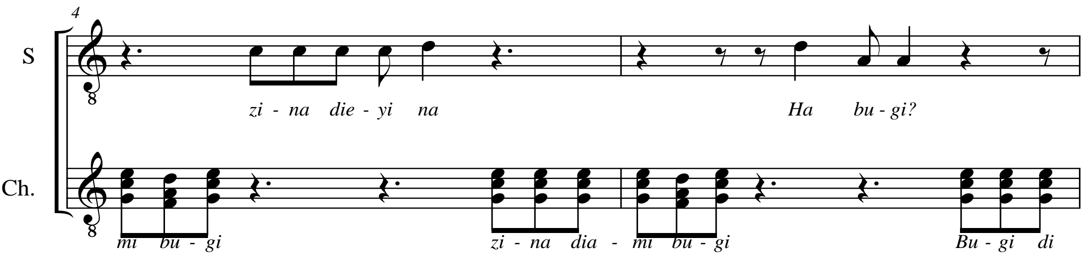
Besides *Nki A long*, which is in Kiyanzi language, there were songs in Kimbala, such as *Ayi Mwana, Dimeme Di Nzambi, Ma Sala*, and *Yilamana*. These songs were already prepared for stage performance in Gevakin choir, thus it was easy for Umoja to put them in its repertoire.

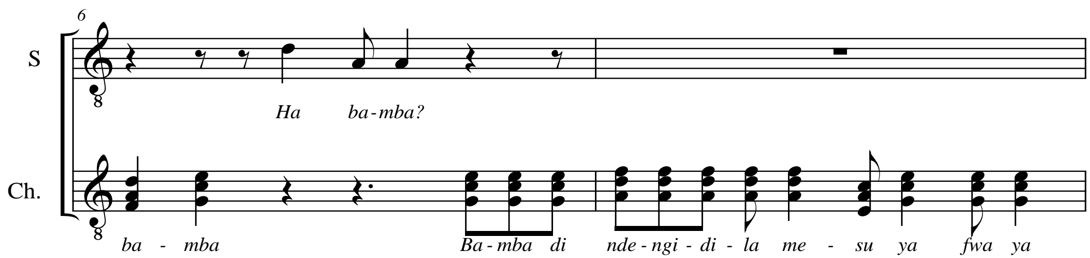
Example 14

Ayi Mwana

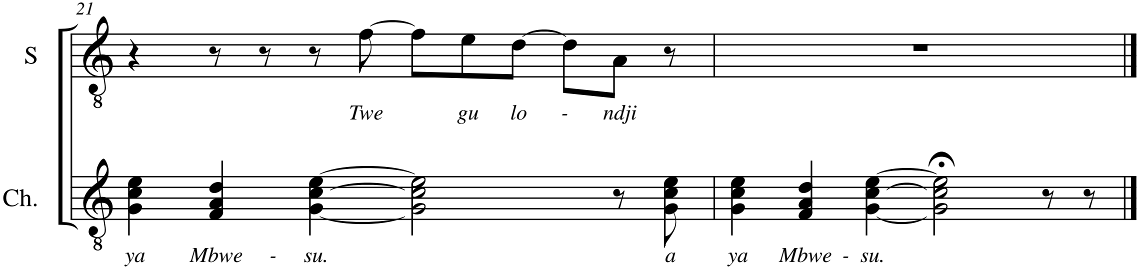








S
Ch.
Ha Mbwe-su? Ha ya-ya?
Mbwe-su mbwe-su ma yu-yue ke-nde nde-di ya ya ya-ya ga
Ha nio-nga? Ha sa-nga?
bu-ga g'a-lo-ngi ga-ba-la gu di nio-nga fwi-la sa-nga sa-nga mi-
Ha mi-ge-mbu?
ge-mbu Mi-ge-mbu mu mbu-ga y'a-fwa'e ha ya A
Ta-ta Lo-ngi
ya Mbwe-su ya Mbwe-su. a ya Mbwe-su. a
Twe gu lo-ndji Ta-ta Lo-ngi
ya Mbwe-su. a ya Mbwe-su. a



Ayi mwana [You, Child, or young person] is a game song of the Mbala people of Congo that Gevakin choir adopted for use in Christian evangelism. It starts with the question *"zina dieyi na?"* [What is your name?], followed by the answer *"zina diami bugi"* [My name is Bugi]. Then the dialog continues with questions and answers generated by this beginning. Singers play with words in a way that the last word of the answer raises another question until both the questioner and the answerer agree on "*a ya Mbwesu*" [Ah brother Mbwesu]. During this section, the chorus repeats *"A ya Mbwesu"* while the soloist calls names or titles, adding short sentences such as "let's go to church" and "time is up," and so forth. The emphasis in *Ayi Mwana* is more on singing rather than dancing.

Ayi Mwana is sung a cappella for the whole first section, and it is accompanied by hand clapping in the second section, where the chorus repeats *"A ya mbwesu."* Here, seated or standing, the singers clap hands marking the four main beats of the measure: two claps horizontally with right and left neighbors, two claps in front with both hands together, thus naturally, the clapping with the neighbors is softer than the one when each singer claps his own hands. This works well since the soft clap accompanies the words *A ya mbwesu*, and the louder clap occurs when there is no word, except the solo.

The song *Dimeme Di Nzambi* [Lamb of God] is another song Umoja took from Gevakin's repertoire. It tells people to look at the Lamb of God that takes away the sins of the world.

Since in many Kimbala, Dimeme means both lamb and sheep, it is also used to encourage Christians to look for the lost sheep of God, and bring them back to the fold.

Example 15

Dimeme Di Nzambi

At one point the soloist sings: "ladies and gentlemen, look at Jesus Christ on the cross, He is bleeding, crying, and suffering for you and me." Another important song from this series is *Ma Sala* [Mother Sarah].

Ma Sala was sung mostly during funeral processions for devoted Christians, especially women. Sarah, being a model woman in the Bible, is an example every woman should follow, because if one lives like Sarah, she will go to heaven when she dies. In *"Ma Sala Musi dibundu"* [Mother Sarah who belongs to the church] Mother Sarah is praised for living a Christian life, and people should watch how beautifully she is ascending to heaven.

Example 16

Ma Sala

Ma Sala is often preceded or followed by *Yilamana* [Get ready]. After people have heard the good example of Mother Sarah who is ascending to Heaven, they are urged to get ready in their lifetime, because it will be too late when they die. The message is "get ready today, because at the time of your death you will not." The song attacks those who live in sin, those who cling to earthly wealth and pleasure and are not interested in God's way. They are told that their earthly treasures will rut on earth, and they will not take them with them when they die.

Example 17

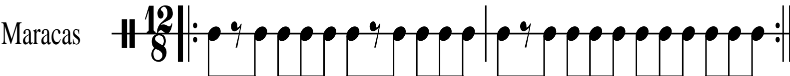
Yilamana

In this version of *Yilamana*, the first section of the song tells every human being to get ready, because he/she will not be able to get ready when death comes. In the chorus part, the soloist attacks the sinner saying: "while people are praying God, you are busy caring for your cattle." The chorus responds "your cattle will be rotten on earth (while you will be dead). It is very sad because trouble is waiting for you (after death)." The last word of the solo part, in this case cattle, can be replaced by other words such as gold, money, women, automobiles, cigarettes, or anything condemned by Christian faith.

All these songs from Gevakin's repertoire, except *Nki Along*, were very often sung as medley, using the same rhythmic accompaniment. Because of the rhythmic complexity in the lyrics, long phrasing, and the language barrier, it was difficult to teach these songs to non-Congolese members of Umoja, especially when not only singing was involved, but also dancing

these songs in a choreographed way. Because of their Christian religious nature, body movements were very limited to avoid dance movements such as waist movements that would be offensive to the conservative Christians, especially Baptists. In many cases, drums are not even used, but shakers or maracas, playing the following pattern:

Example 18



When a drum ensemble is used to accompany these songs, the following pattern provides a very strong rhythmic basis:

Example 19

The bell part is the underlying pattern, present even when there is no bell in the ensemble. It is a part so important that all the performers hear it even if it is silent. In the absence of a bell, as it is the case of many ensembles that do not use it, this part is played with a stick on the side of a drum.

Besides Gevakin's repertoire, Umoja drew from other sources, mostly from what was accessible in the capital city of Congo, Kinshasa. An example is the song *Yaya Weza*, which was heard on the radio, and was performed on Congo national television. This is a praise song in

Kisuku language, spoken in Bandundu province. *Yaya Weza* was sung as praise to President Mobutu during his popular years. Professional youth groups such as *Les Petits Chanteurs et Danseurs de Kenge,* and *Chem-Chem Yetu* were instrumental in popularizing it. Later, other professional troupes such as Ballet Kake and Maitre Nono's Percussions Elima played it with arranged drumming and dancing. This was enough for Muzela, Kihonia, and the other former dwellers of Kinshasa to decide on including *Yaya Weza* [the great has come] in Umoja's repertoire.

In the Pittsburgh context, it was not appropriate to sing praise to President Mobutu, saying *yaya weza* [the great has come]. Instead of singing *Ta Mobutu* [Father Mobutu], *Mwana Mama Yemo* [Son of Mother Yemo] or *Sese Seko*(one of Mobutu's names)[47] *wa lukumu*[the popular one], it was appropriate to sing *"Umoja wa Lukumu"* [Umoja the popular one]. Thus, "the great Umoja has come" was more appropriate, because of the interaction with local audiences. The melody and the rhythmic structure was enough for teachers of Umoja to include pieces such as *yaya weza* that they had to adapt for the new contexts. Words such as "we are singing for him with joy" were simply replaced by the repetition of "(the great) Umoja has come." Like *Yaya Weza*, many other songs suffered similar cuts when it was necessary to perform them for or with audiences in the American culture.

People would not understand the African reality of singing and dancing to honor a King or a President. For other songs, it was not the problem of what the words mean, but the problem of learning songs in African languages. Africans who try to teach African songs in the United States very often simplify them in order to make them easier. There are professional groups that prefer big challenges in learning to sing in foreign languages, and they do it well.

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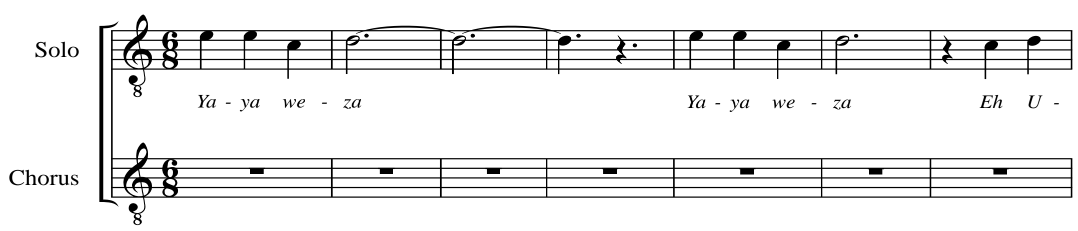
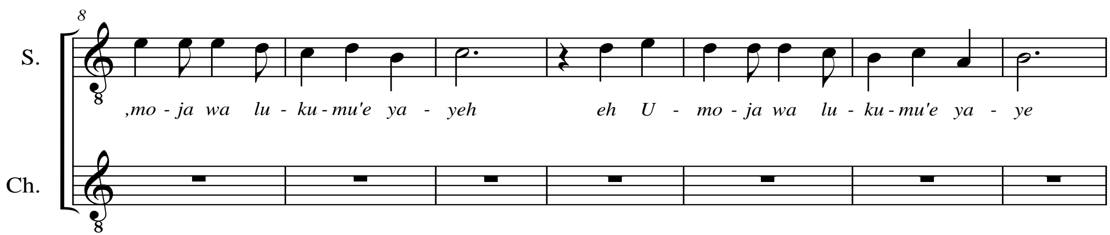
[47] Mobutu changed his name from Joseph Desiré Mobutu to Mobutu Sese Seko Kuku Ngbendu Wa Zabanga.

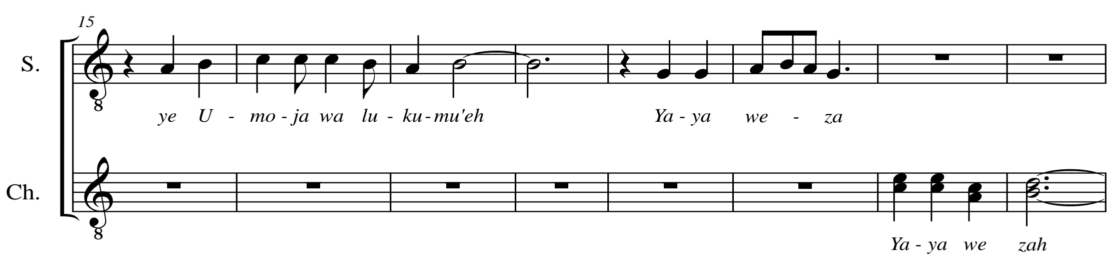
However, these rare groups are likely to be found among professional vocal groups, where the focus is on singing, not on dancing. Church choirs also very often sing African songs, but this is a very limited situation. It is very difficult when the focus is on both singing and dancing, and when time is a big factor.

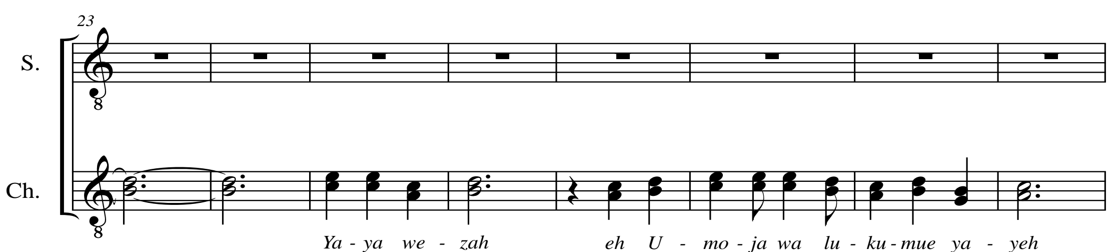
Example 20

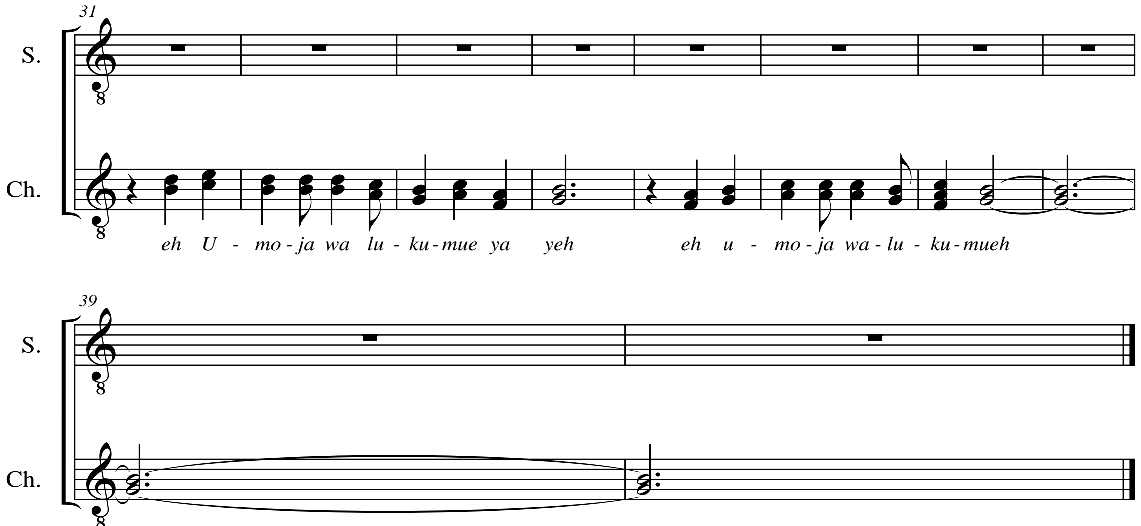
Yaya Weza











Umoja performed *Yaya Weza* mostly at the beginning of shows, and presented it as a welcome song at the beginning of performances. *Yaya Weza* also showed the departure from strictly religious themes to embrace profane themes.

In this part of the repertoire, because of the influence from Gevakin choir, singing played a very important role. Umoja expanded its repertoire by learning and including pieces from other parts of Congo, with remarkable drumming and dance styles from people such as the Luba, Pende, Tshokwe, and so on. However, because of language barriers, many of the pieces from these ethnic groups were limited to drumming and dancing, without singing. The *Mutwashi* dance of the Luba, which is popular in Congo, was performed in Pittsburgh, but without the many songs that accompany it.

Also, of the few songs that Muzela, Kihonia, and Makesi could sing, they did not know what they meant. This posed a problem, especially when people in the audiences or the presenters frequently asked for the meaning. Instead of feeling embarrassed by not being able to explain in details, it was easy to reduce the pieces to drumming and dancing, and provide a brief explanation about where the music style came from, and on what occasion it was performed.

After a year and a half playing these songs, Umoja was in need of upgrading its repertoire in order to avoid monotony. Audiences in Pittsburgh and around Pennsylvania were more and more becoming familiar with the repertoire listed above. It was time to change strategies in the creative processes. Thus, Muzela, Kihonia, Makesi, and the other members of Umoja had to work harder to expand the repertoire, going beyond Gevakin and what they learned in Pittsburgh.

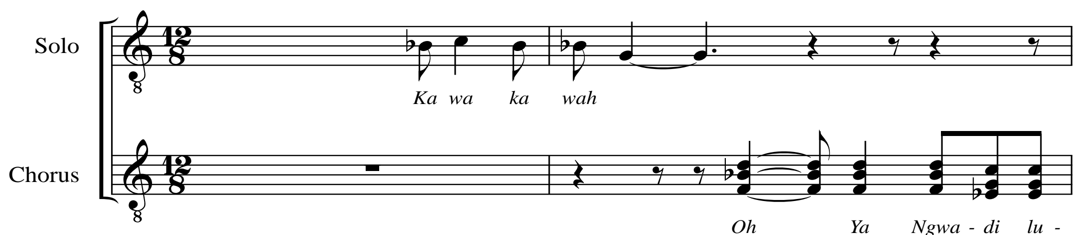
At the end of 1992, Muzela decided that in order to take Umoja to the next level, they should be able to create new African pieces that would be more meaningful to the American audiences. The first choice was for them to look deeper in their Congolese cultural heritage and find more diverse pieces. The problem was that they were now miles away from home, and separated from the culture they grew up in. Also they were in the process of establishing residency in the United States, where their communication skills were improving. This is where their collective memory came to play. One advantage is that Muzela, Makesi, Kihonia, and Kibul, were members of the same ethnic group, the Mbala. Since the focus was now on storytelling and developing epics that would make sense to the American public, they explored the riches of Mbala fable songs, most of which had a story already attached to them.

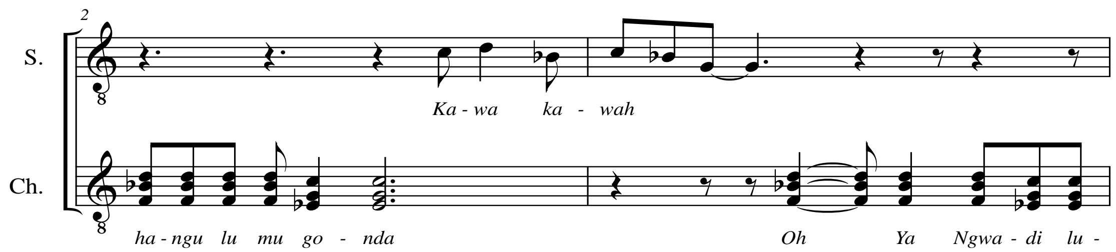
With the exception of Kihonia who was mostly a city boy, and did not make many visits to villages, all of them had experience with traditional life in villages, especially during big events such as funerals, brush fire hunting, weddings, and so forth. A consolation for Kihonia was that some of the traditions are found in Kinshasa in events related to traditional life. Also he was surrounded by people from whom he could learn, who were versed in traditional life. Many songs were recollected from the palavers that took place during funerals. Debates in palavers do not use direct language, but arguments and made by storytelling and proverbs, most of them in form of short songs.

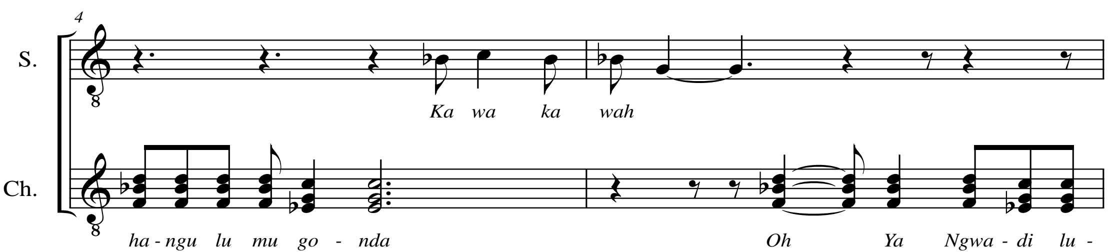
Among the Mbala of Congo, public speakers are expected not only to have knowledge of their culture's vocabulary, but also they must have the mastery of proverbs, storytelling, and songs in order to make their point across effectively. Stories, music and dance are used to capture the attention of the audience, especially people from the younger generation who are supposed to continue the tradition when the older generation is gone. Thus, there was the story of *Ngwadi,* the wild chicken, who lacked wisdom, and *Mbambi*, the antelope, who is good looking and a good runner, but who lacks wisdom. These songs are usually short and easy to remember.

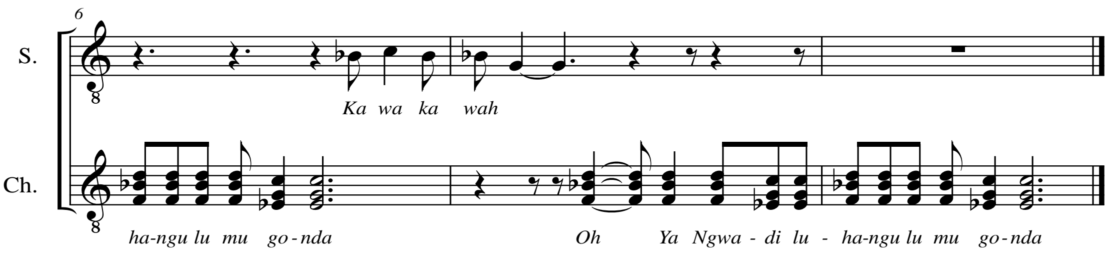
Example 21

Ya Ngwadi



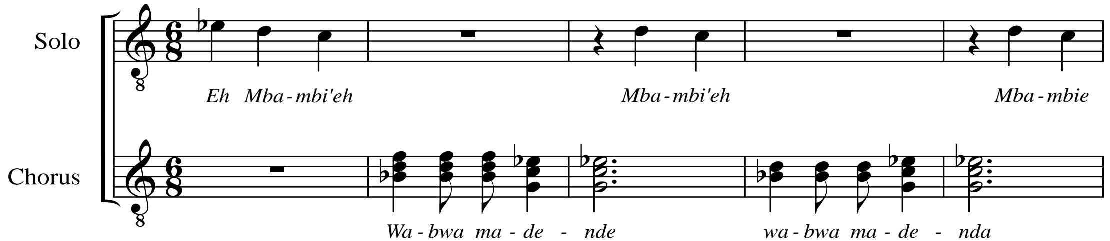


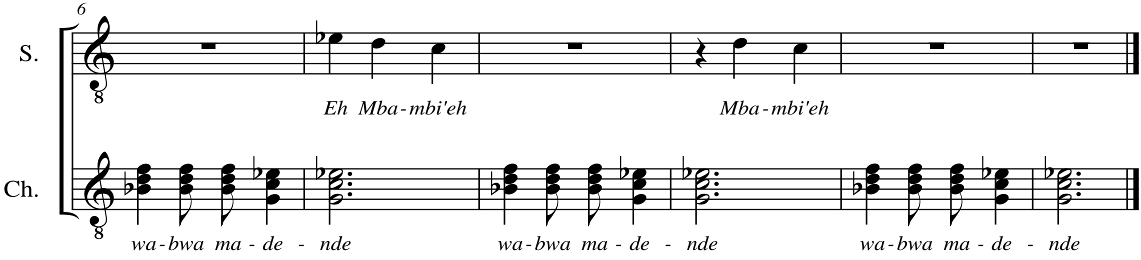




Example 22

Mbambi





Mbambi is performed to depict a hunting scene. The antelope is known to be among the fastest of the wild animals, but when cornered by hunters, he is confused and has nowhere to go. During palavers, *Mbambi* is sung when someone on trial—or his family defending him--is out of arguments to defend him. The *milonga* the, Mbala word for palavers, is not a court trial but a traditional custom of problem solving. This is a very common justice system in African traditional societies.

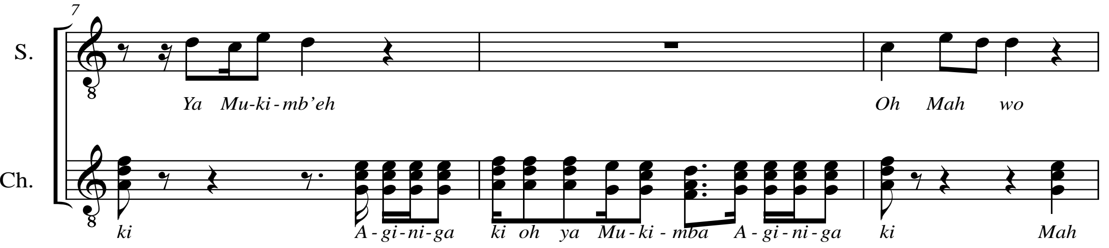
There was also the story of *kapakala*, the bat, who did not have a fixed personality because he belonged to two species. Being part bird and part animal, he claimed membership of both groups. He was a bird among birds because he could fly, and an animal among other animals, but when things got ugly, nobody wanted to associate with him. Birds could say: "he is

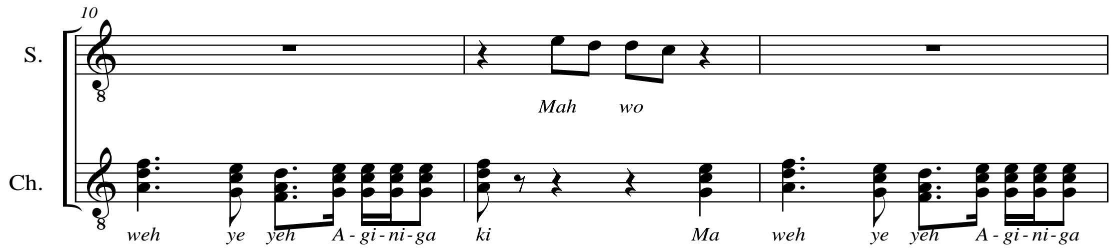
not one of us, but an animal" and animals would say: "he is a bird, not one of us." To make stories more interesting, these birds and animals are given important human titles such as *"Ngwashi"* [Uncle, which is very important in matrilineal societies], and *"Fumu"* or *"Mfumu"* (Chief), *"Yaya"* (Great), etc.

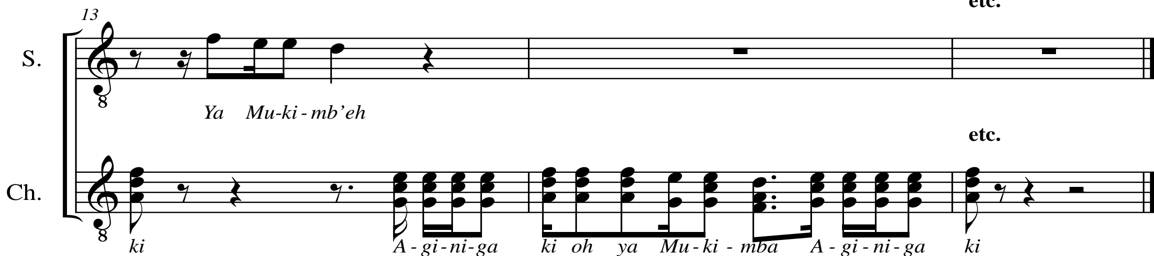
Aginiga Ki Ya Mukimba? [How can he dance, great Mukimba?], is another song for someone who was found guilty of wrongdoing, and who would be too ashamed to dance in the community as he used to. "How will you dance, now that you are so ashamed?" People ask the defendant, who is about to be excluded from the community.

Example 23

Aginiga Ki







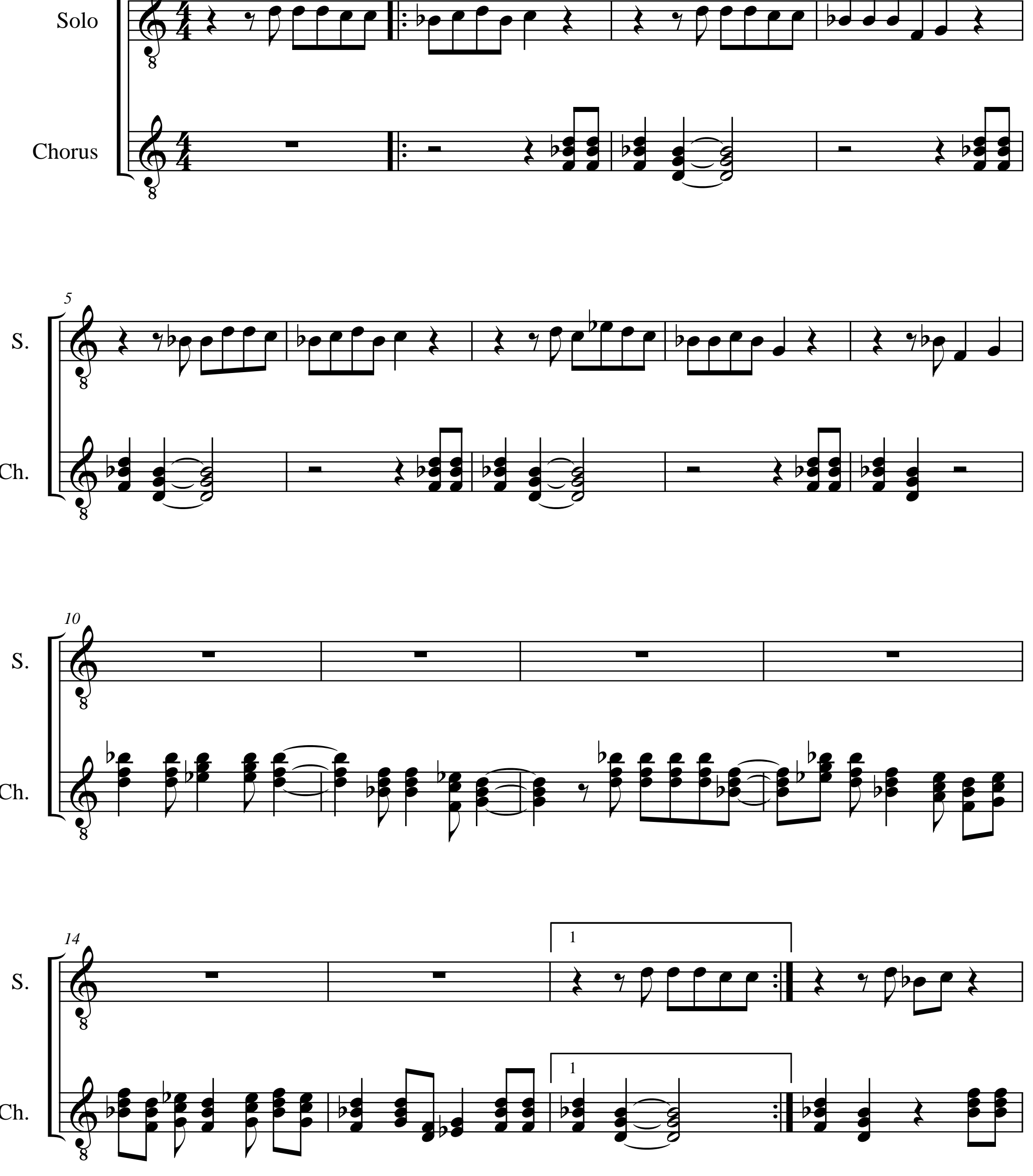
Dance movements for these tunes were easy to choreograph, because they were imitations of the birds and animals mentioned above.

Orienting performances towards storytelling was very good for Umoja. This new kind of performances gave the performers a certain comfort. It provided a direct communication with audiences who could identify and remember stories behind drumming and dancing. Interacting directly with audiences was something Gevakin could not achieve during the Musical Bridge tour, because of the language barrier and the settings in various churches. While Gevakin needed someone to interpret their songs, the performers in Umoja presented their music directly to their audiences without an intermediary.

After exploiting this category of repertoire, Umoja made an effort to include drumming pieces from other major ethnic groups of Congo such as the Luba and Lulua, the Mbunda, and the Pende. The *mutwashi* dance of the Luba, for example, is very popular in Congo, and although people may not speak Ciluba, most have heard it and know how to dance it. Professional groups very often include *mutwashi*, a social celebration dance, in their repertoire. Even Popular bands such as Rochereau Tabu Ley's Afrisa, Dr. Nico Kasanda's African Fiesta Sukisa, Zaiko Langa-langa, Victoria, and Wenge Musica, have performed *Mutwashi*. Tshala Muana, a big star in Congo, is referred to as "Queen of Mutwashi" since she made it her signature music. *Kamulangu*, one of the most popular *mutwashi* songs, has many versions. In fact, people put different texts to the same melody.

Example 24

Kamulangu

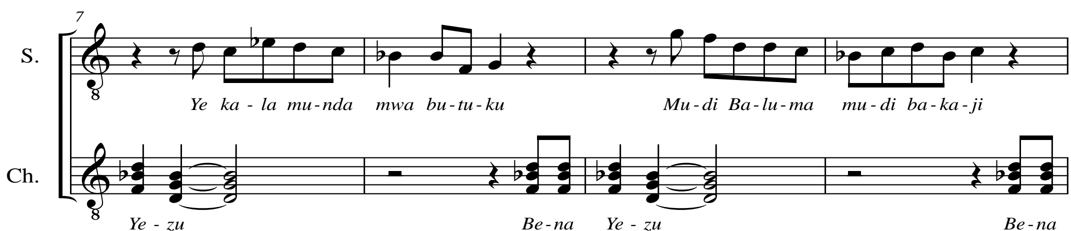


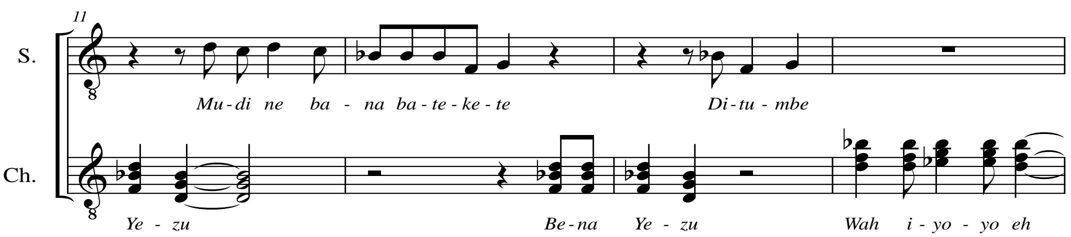
While popular musicians have played this song in the contemporary popular music style, traditional musicians have performed it with various texts. Even church groups sang this melody in order to attract people who like the *Mutwashi* music and dance of the Luba people. Umoja had the opportunity to introduce *Mutwashi* to the Pittsburgh audiences, but again, because none of the members could speak Ciluba, it used the Christian version *"Bena Yezu"* [People of Jesus], which they learned in Gevakin choir.

Bena Yezu is heard in churches in Kinshasa and in the provinces of Kasai of Congo, where there is a strong Luba-Lulwa influence. People of Jesus, or Christians, are called to come and see how great Jesus is. They are invited to celebrate the Kingdom of Jesus. In the second section, which is like a coda, when the leader calls *"Thombe"* worshipers are encouraged to "get down" and dance (the *mutwashi* dance) for Jesus. *Mutwashi* has been very controversial in its use in the Christian environment, because of its infectious beat and the body movements that are concentrated at the waist. Many purists see in it the sexual connotation, which they believe should not be allowed in any Christian event.

Example 25

Bena Yezu

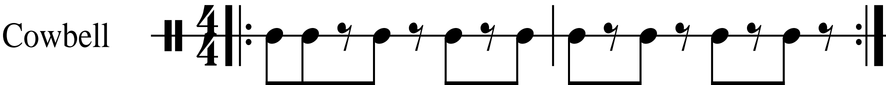




Because of the inviting nature of *mutwashi*, Umoja used it many times as an encore in order to have audience participation.

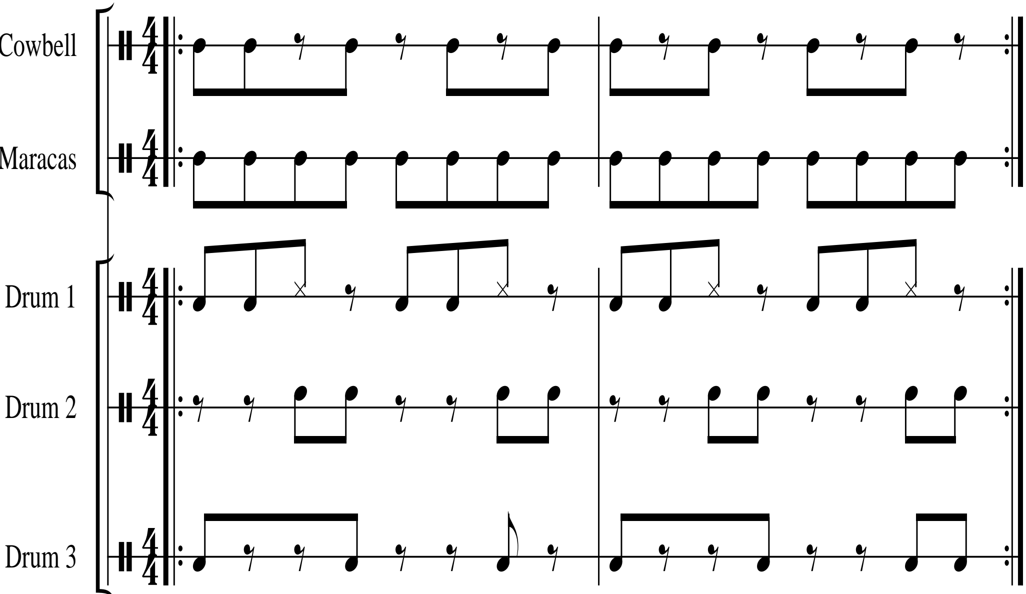
Drumming for *mutwashi* is based on the following timeline provided by the bell, or the side of a drum:

Example 26



Because of its importance, the maracas or rattles may double this pattern. Here is an example of *Mutwashi* drumming

Example 27



The ensemble sometimes includes Luba-lulua xylophones that are tuned in the pentatonic scales suitable for the melody.

With the tunes listed above, Umoja had a strong and unique repertoire, because nobody else in Pittsburgh and the surroundings could play them. Also, it used the contemporary Congolese Christian songs when performing in churches.

4.2.3. The Old Mali Empire Connection

The popularity of drumming and dancing styles from Ghana, Guinea, Senegal, and Mali has influenced many dance troupes that specialize in African music and dance in the United States. People in major American cities have become familiar with specific rhythms and dances from these West African countries because of frequent appearances of dance troupes from those West African countries, the availability of resident drummers from those countries in the United States, and the early adoption of these styles of drumming by a good portion of Americans, both Black and White, that specialize in African music. Because of their popularity in the United States, there is an assumption among certain audiences that believe that these styles are representative of the entire African continent.

It is not surprising to see that some people are surprised when a performing group of African music and dance from Ghana (West Africa) for example cannot perform well known pieces from Senegal or Guinea, both West African countries. The performers of Umoja found themselves in a position of learning this repertoire from West Africa, because they were already involved in presenting and teaching African music to audiences in schools and other venues that were familiar with them.

The decision to learn and be able to perform drums from West Africa was the response Umoja had to the many requests from the audiences. Some people, especially school children could not easily understand why a drummer from Africa could not be able to play a djembe, which for them is representative of African drums. This opened an opportunity for Elie Kihonia,

Gaby Muzela, and other drummers in Umoja to learn and master the techniques of the djembe. The learning process was not very difficult for them because of 1) the availability of djembe players in town who were willing to teach them how to play, and 2) their background in African music and dance. African performers from various parts of Africa have a lot in common when it comes to African rhythm and sensibility, because of similarities found in many African traditional cultures.

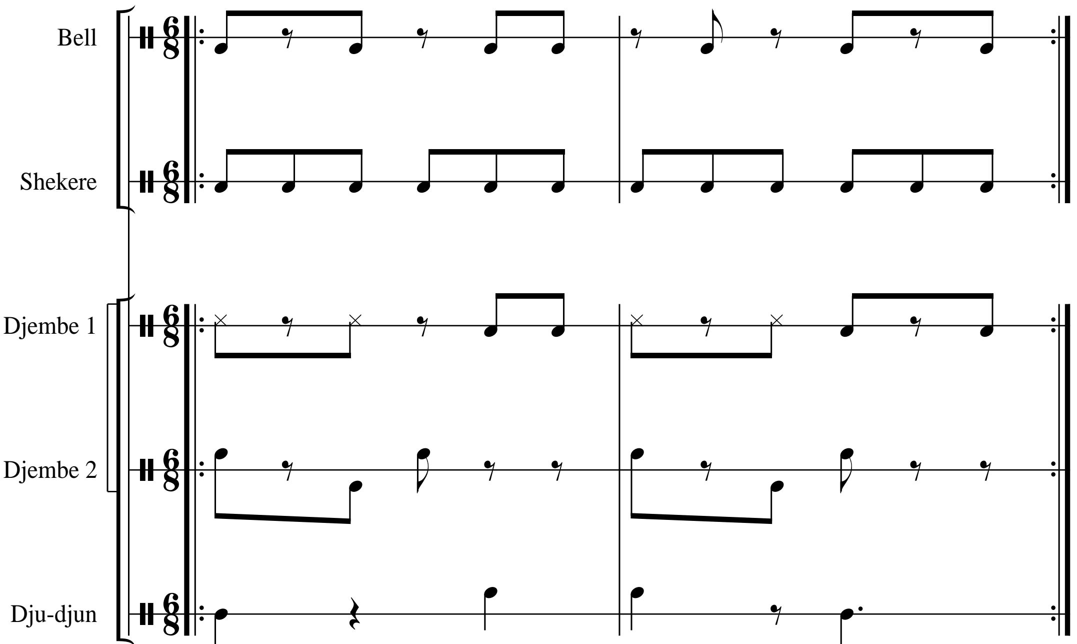
Although they are from Central Africa, they have a lot in common with African musicians from West Africa with whom they shared African drumming techniques. There were times when Umoja was requested, to perform West African rhythms from Guinea, Mali, and Senegal, because they have become the most recognizable African dance pieces performed in the United States. Umoja responded to this demand by including the Djembe pieces such as *Mandiani, Kou-kou, Lamban*, and *Doundoumba* in its repertoire. Because of their popularity in contemporary popular music, some purists do not consider conga drums as "authentic" African drums, although they can play good African beats.

Muzela and Kihonia made the necessary efforts to learn and master *djembe* techniques to the satisfaction of many audiences. The next step was the collaboration with Senegalese and Guinean drummers and dancers from New York, where many of them have established themselves. These professional African performers usually travel to other cities for performances and workshops when opportunities are given to them. When one of these drummers, Youssoufa Lo, who is both a dancer and a drummer, was given an opportunity by Umoja, he decided to relocate from New York to Pittsburgh. He took time to teach Senegalese *djembe* drumming and dance techniques to members of Umoja and to the Pittsburgh community through special workshops and master classes. Although he did not teach singing, he taught

drumming and dancing, because not only was the emphasis put on them, but also a large group of singers was needed to match the loud sounds of the *djembe* ensemble.

Example 28

Mandiani

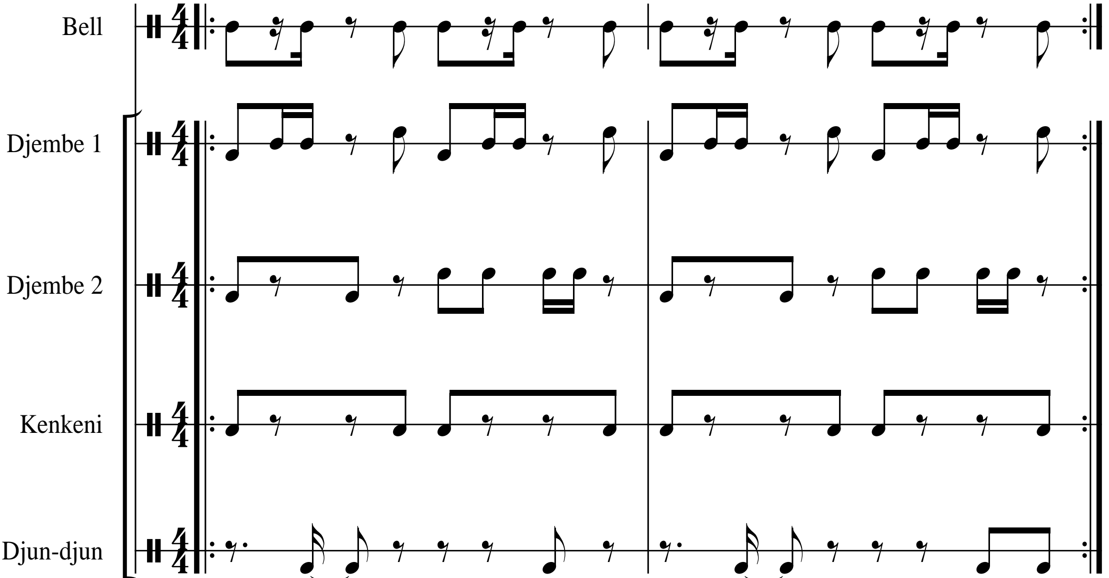


In the Kayes region of Mali, *Mandiani* is performed after a harvest. It is extremely popular in the United States, where many refer to *djembe* drumming and dancing as "the *Mandiani.*"

Kou-kou (also spelled *kuku*) is another popular *djembe* piece in the United States. Like *Mandiani*, the same drumming ensemble accompanies it. However, instead of one *djun-djun* drum, people use a pair or a set of three. In other cases, an ensemble may use two pairs of *djun-djun*.

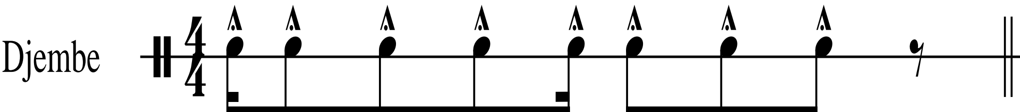
Example 29

Kou-kou



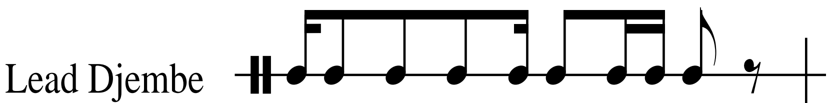
The two *djembe* parts can be doubled, depending on the number of *djembe* players. Four to six *djembe* players can play together, taking turns in solo. One person may play both the *kenkeni* and the *djun-djun* parts. Also, the *kenkeni* very often has a bell attached to it, so that one person can play both the *kenkeni* and the bell parts. The player wears the Kenkeni while *djun-djuns* are set on the floor or on a stand. The lead drummer, who starts with a drum call, and the following pattern, usually introduces the drum ensemble:

Example 30



This pattern serves both as an introduction at the beginning, a cue for dance movement changes, and as a cue for the ending. According to Mamady Keita, these introductory calls are products of modern arrangers and choreographers, both in Africa and in the West. He prefers the following variation:

Example 31



These introductions are very helpful for teaching purposes in the West, where people are used to learn every musical piece by counting "one-two-three-four." Although people use them even in Africa today, Mamady sees them as product of "modern" arrangers and choreographers, because they did not exist in the traditional contexts. In the traditional setting in Guinea or Senegal, drummers come in whenever the singing begins, because everybody in the performance knows the songs.[48] *Kou-kou* is from the Beyla region of Guinea, and it is performed for ceremonies and celebrations.

Another *djembe* piece that has gained popularity in the United States is *doundoumba (*also spelled *dundumba)*, which is referred to as "the dance of strong men." Originally performed

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[48] Mamady Keita, personal interview with author, and presentation at "DrumTalk 2005" in Pittsburgh, February 26, 2005.

by wrestlers, *doundounba* is currently performed by men and women and is regarded by many as the national drumming style and dance style of Guinea. Like *Mandiani*, it has many versions, according to the region of origin.

Example 32

Doundounba

While these drumming styles are shared by Mali, Guinea and Senegal because of their common Old Mali Empire heritage, there are significant regional nuances. This is true not only with respect to countries, but also regions within those countries. A *Doundounba* played in one

region of Guinea may be slightly different from a *Doundounba* played in another region. The *Mandiani* played in Guinea may differ from the one performed in Senegal. As a result, different teachers who visit Pittsburgh may teach one version or another, or even a combination of versions from various regions.

4.2.4. Repertoire from Kiti Na Mesa

As described in the previous chapter, the group Kiti Na Mesa came to the United States as a professional touring troupe, with a strong repertoire. The strength of this repertoire was on its emphasis on traditional music and dance styles of the Mongo people of Congo. The Mongo come from the Equateur Province of Congo, which possesses a rich cultural and linguistic heritage marked with a solid tradition of myth and legend.

The music of the Mongo is rich and varied in style and function, being used for entertainment, combat, reciting legends, and so forth. Also, Pepo Mazingi, a professional in theater, was Kiti Na Mesa's artistic director, choreographer, and promoter. After he had demonstrated his talent as an actor, director, stage manager, dancer, and choreographer in different plays and performances around the country, Pepo Mazingi was invited to direct Kiti Na Mesa. Although he worked with traditional artists with no formal training in performing arts, he provided them with professional guidance drawn from his long experience from the Institut National des Arts and the National Theater of Congo, where he worked for many years.

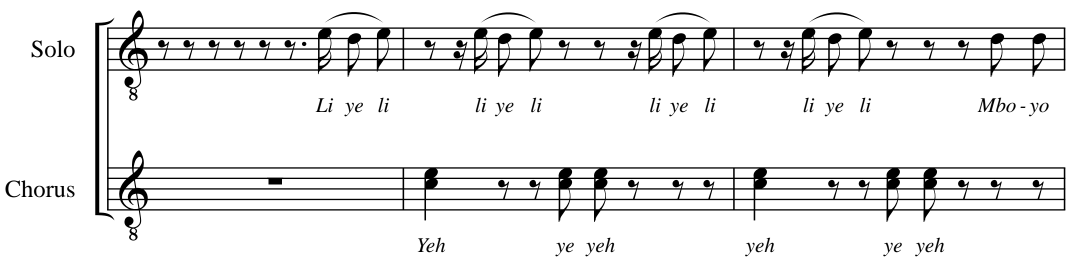
The repertoire was very fresh in many cities Kiti Na Mesa--or Umoja including Kiti Na Mesa--visited, because both the sound and the dance movements were different from any other African drumming and dancing they had seen. This was the first time most of the audiences in these cities saw professional traditional drummers and dancers from Congo, presenting something different than the West African and the other Congolese styles described above. Also,

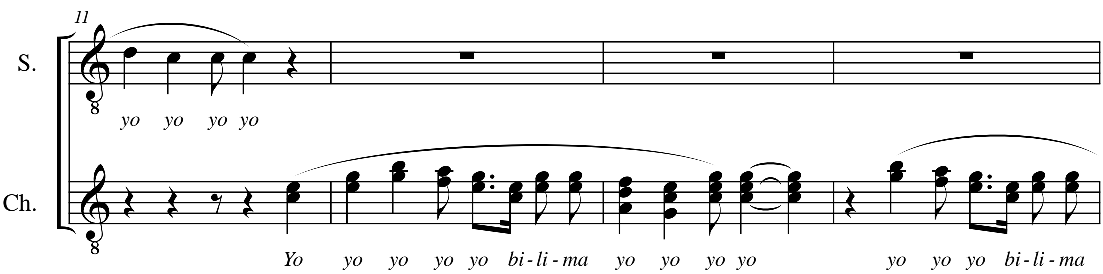
the rendition of these rhythms was not on congas, but on authentic Congolese drums that brought unique sounds.

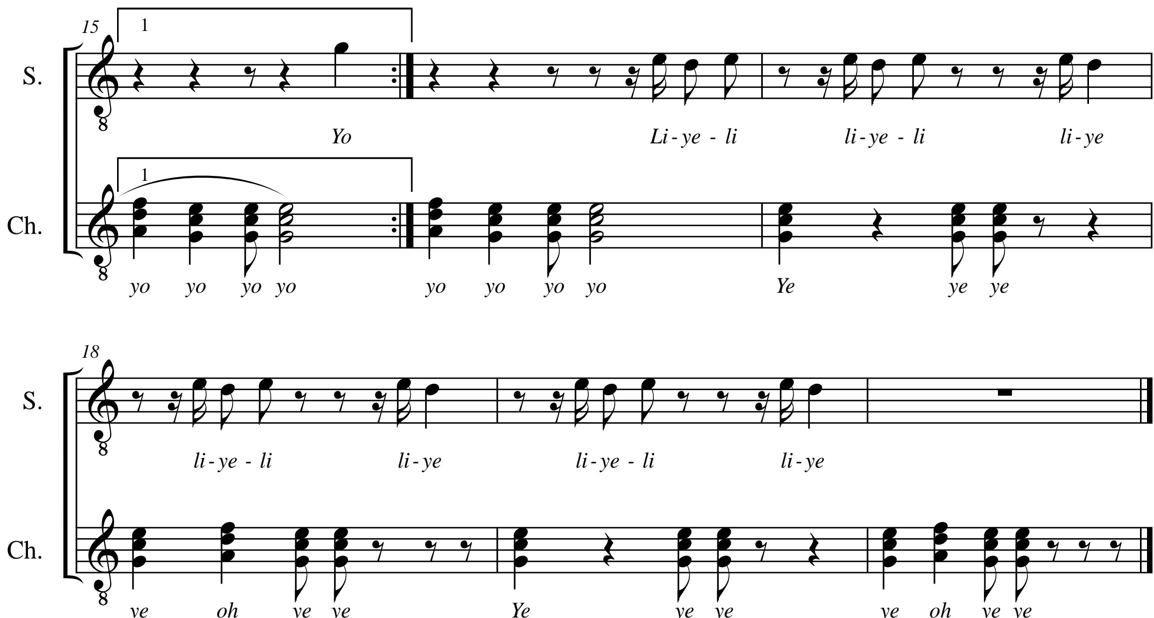
The repertoire included many songs dealing with human life, from birth to death. It also included songs with reference to spirits. One of the pieces is *Mapasa*, a song celebrating the birth of twins. In many African cultures, twins are regarded as "supernatural" children, whose birth is believed to bring either good or bad luck. Twins are given specific names and are treated differently from ordinary children. With their supernatural power, they are believed to be able to bring good or bad luck to ordinary people. Also, they are believed to have the ability to heal sick people, call for the rain, stop the rain, and so forth. Failure to observe the rites related to twins may bring misfortune, not only to their parents, but also to the whole community. The following is one of the songs celebrating the *Mapasa*.

Example 33

Mapasa

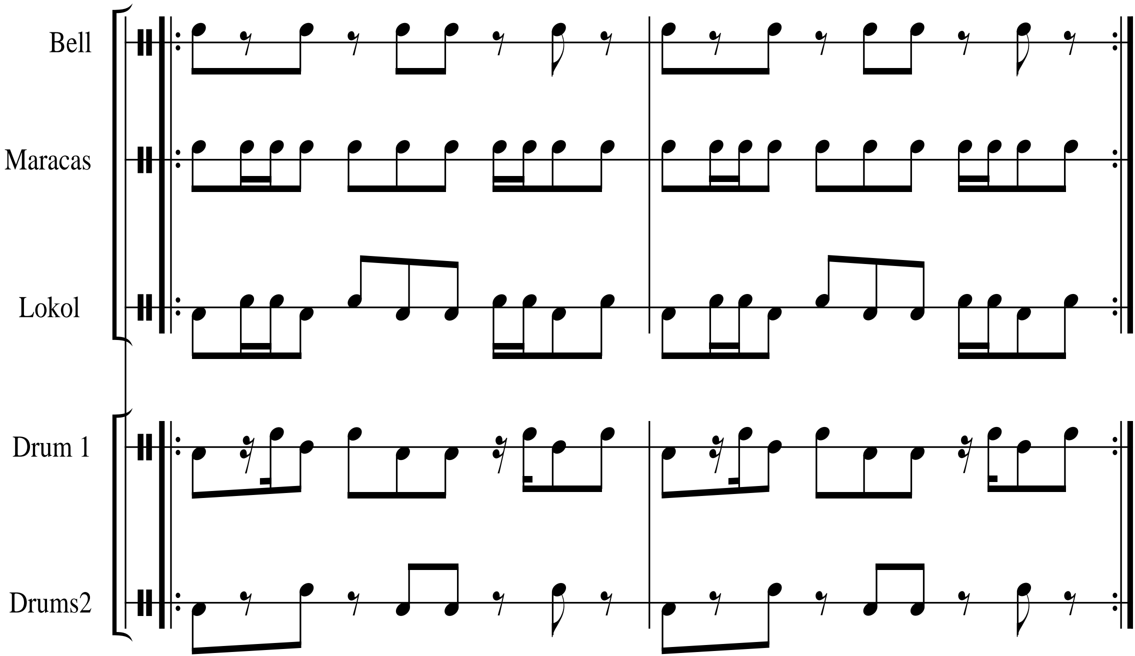






The meter for *Mapasa* is odd. Although it can be written in the time signature of 9/8, it is actually performed as 4/8+5/8, because of the stress on specific beats that would make it difficult to feel it in normal 9/8 time signature. Drumming for *Mapasa* follows the same pattern as in the song. However, the lead drummer usually improvises on top.

Example 34



In its traditional contexts, women sing this song accompanying themselves with rattles, bell and the *lokolé* (the slit log). In the new contexts, especially when professional troupes such as Kiti Na Mesa perform it on stage, both men and women perform it with the accompaniment of a drum ensemble.

The song begins with the sound of joy and praise celebrating the twins. Dance movements show how to handle twin babies with care, and how to share them among women and men, since raising a child is the responsibility of the whole community. In the second section of the song singers invoke the *Bilima* [spirits], because 1) Mboyo and Boketshu are considered as *Bilima*, or supernatural beings; 2) the *Bilima*, the spirits of the ancestors, are invoked for the protection and blessing of the *Mapasa*.

Since every ethnic group has specific names for twins, among the Mongo, twins are named Mboyo and Boketshu, respectively the older and the younger. Although they are born on

the same day, the one who is born first is the older, and the one born last the younger. Among the ethnic groups neighboring the Mongo, twins are named Mbo and Mpia.

In most Congolese cultures, mothers are called by the name of their children, usually the firstborn. For example if the child's name is Sembu, the mother is called *"Mama na Sembu"* or *"Mama Sembu"* (Mother of Sembu). However, when Mama Sembu gives birth to twins, she loses her first title (Mama Sembu) and she is now called by her new title *"Mama Mapasa"* [Mother of Twins] because of how twins are regarded in the society. Among the Luba, the father becomes "Shambuyi", and the mother is called "Mwambuyi", Mbuyi being the older of the twins. Also, specific names are given to children born after twins. This practice is very common among various Congolese ethnic groups. Celebration of twins is still practiced today in many African cultures, even by those who have chosen African urban life, where life is supposed to be "modern" and more Western oriented.

There are many versions of the *mapasa* song. The example 34 above is more contemporary, and it is usually performed by the youth. The language used in the song is Lingala, which is the most spoken in Kinshasa and in the western provinces of Congo. There are older versions performed by older women, using the same rhythmic background. Kiti Na Mesa performed one of those older versions of *mapasa*, sung in Kimongo language with a different melody. The song is about the joy of a mother who gives birth to twins. It starts with a warning to the twins:

Oh Mboyo yaba tino lak'osenge ekila,	Mboyo, watch out, don't go under the bosenge tree
Boketshu yaba tino lak'osenge ekila	Boketshu, watch out, don't go under the

	bosenge tree
Yee Yee onengi yeno yoma	The day that you do, you will die.

In the following example, *Ndo a tela ngoya emengo* [Great joy of having twins], a mother describes her happiness in having twins. The chorus repeats *"Oh yeli yeye, ndo a tela ngoya emengo"* while the soloist describes that joy in detail. Soloist's lyrics include phrases such as "I am so happy I have Mboyo and Boketshu," "Mboyo is sleeping while Boketshu is playing," "Boketshu would cry when Mboyo would smile," etc.

Example 35

Ndo a tela Ngoy Emengo

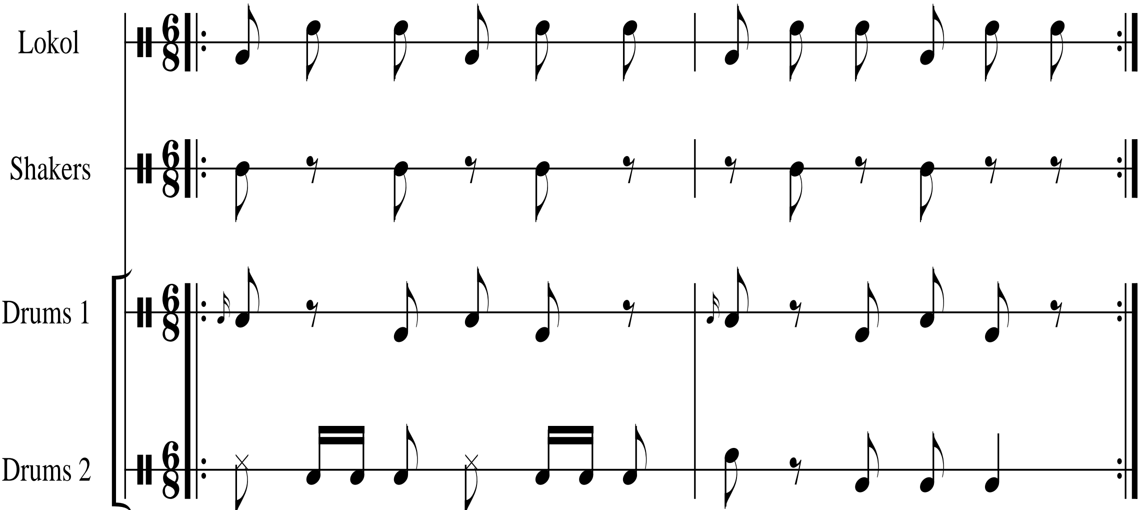
12
C.
Resp.
Mboy' a - le l'O - ke-tshua se - kao ndoa
ye li ye ye o ndo'a nte - la ngoy' e - me-ngo
15
te - la ngoy' e - me-ngo
Bo-ke-tshu'a
Oh ye li ye ye o ndo'a nte - la ngoy' e - me-ngo
18
se - ka Mbo-yo a le-la'o ndo'a te - la ngoy' e - me-ngo
Oh ye li ye ye o ndo'a
21
Mbo-yo ya-mba sa-sa li-ze o ndoa te - la ngoy' e - me-ngo
nte - la ngoy' e - me-ngo
Oh
24
ye li ye ye o ndo'a nte - la ngoy' e - me - ngo

Another important piece in the repertoire brought by Kiti Na Mesa is *Zebola,* which is a tradition of the Mongo, the Ekonda, and most of the Bangala ethnic groups of northeastern Congo. *Zebola* is performed for healing and exorcism rituals. It is a form of treatment for possessed people, especially women, by traditional doctors. When someone in the community is possessed by evil spirits and needs treatment, s/he goes into seclusion where the traditional doctor (who is also called the *zebola*) takes care of him/her. This may take as long a time as needed until the person is healed. At the end of the treatment, there is a big celebration during which the healed patient is welcomed back to the community.

The celebration usually lasts for the whole night and most of the following day when the *zebola* presents the healed patient to the public. *Zebola* is practiced not only for treatment when evil spirits visibly possess someone; it may also be practiced preventively. *Zebola* may be combined with other rituals, for example when a young woman gives birth to her first child. Among the Ekonda she is called *Walé*. She goes into seclusion where she will undergo treatment that includes special diet, sleeping habits, music therapy, and spiritual invocation. During the treatment, she is not supposed to be in contact with anybody, even the baby, who is taken care of by relatives or the *zebola's* staff.

Example 36

Zebola

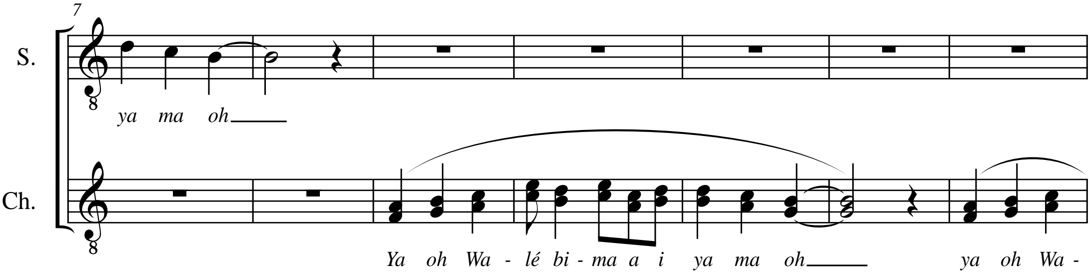


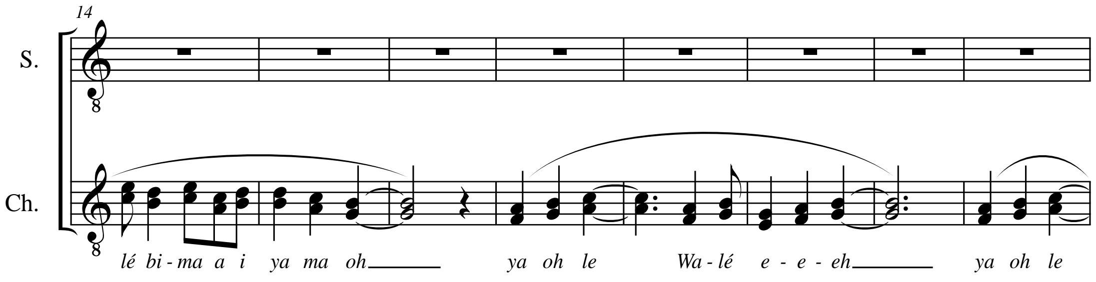
This rhythmic pattern can be played slowly or fast, depending on the type of dance it accompanies. The lead drummer, who listens to the solo singer, provides improvisational response to the vocal, making sure that the lyrics are heard. *Walé Bima* [Come out, Walé] is another piece performed at ceremonies, especially at the final day of the *zebola*, when the treated patients come out from seclusion.

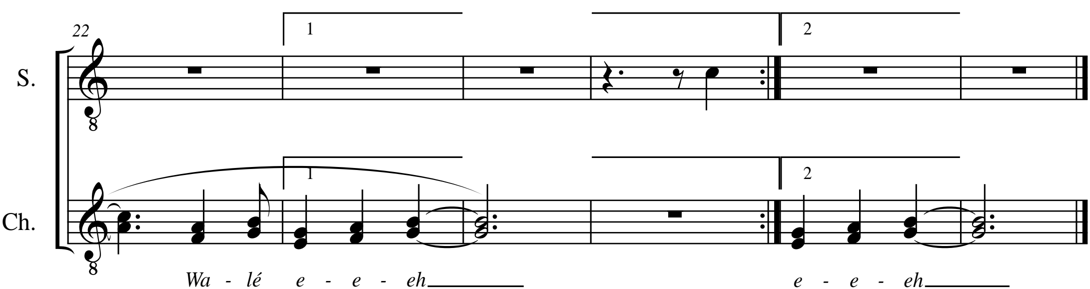
Walé, who has made the transition from being a girl to being a mother, is invited to come out so people may express their gratitude and admiration. She is hailed as a heroine, not only because of overcoming birth pain, but also for having the courage to endure all the *zebola* treatment, which is known to be difficult. As a victorious warrior, *Walé* is said to have overcome evil spirits.

Example 37

Walé Bima







After examining performance practice during the three periods, we find that each period had its strengths and weaknesses. The hardships of the first period, however, cannot be compared to the others, because the founders of Umoja had to bring into existence something that did not exist. From the beginning, the founders of Umoja were faced with the difficulty of teaching almost everything to the non-Congolese members who joined the ensemble at the same time they were adjusting to life in the new environment. Although the Congolese founders dominated in the group, the recruits, to whom they had to teach songs and dance movements of Congo, influenced them. Also, they were in search for a new identity as performers of African traditional music and dance, which were still new to them, since they were not performers of traditional music when they lived in Africa. They became African traditional musicians in Pittsburgh because of the demand they found in the city, and the reception the audiences gave them.

The second period, being that of freelancers, brought other accomplished performers who played specific roles in Umoja. Instead of developing a communal atmosphere in the ensemble, individual performers brought their performing expertise, which they could not totally share.

In the third period we find a sharp contrast to the first, since the group Kiti Na Mesa came to the United States as a strong, complete, and homogenous performing troupe. Performers in this group did not have to learn new techniques of singing, dancing, and playing African musical instruments. The powerful repertoire of Kiti Na Mesa did not need modification or other adaptation as long as the same original performers used it.

However, as people came to know the group through Umoja, they became familiar with its repertoire, which gave an unprecedented originality to the company in the city of Pittsburgh. Thus, the group needed to increase its repertoire to include pieces that audiences were not

familiar with. This was difficult to accomplish since performers did not feel obligated to rehearse in order to increase the repertoire.

Also, when Umoja could not find an administrative position for Pepo Mazingi, who was the artistic director, choreographer, and manager of Kiti Na Mesa, he distanced himself from the company. This left the experienced performers under the total control and supervision of Kihonia, who had yet to learn drumming and dancing techniques of the Mongo people.

The performers, who felt that they had nothing to learn from Kihonia, began to act like freelancers within the group, not willing to share their knowledge because of competition between individuals, and the fear that those who did not belong to Kiti Na Mesa or to the Mongo ethnic group, could "steal" their songs and dance pieces and go make a fortune while leaving them (the owners) behind.

This was so because money was a big issue. The artists became money conscious to the point that they could no longer perform for free. They rehearsed only when there was an important performance that would pay them good money. In many other performances, performers went to perform without rehearsal, because they were confident about their repertoire. With Mazingi not being in the picture anymore, individual performers began to compete for leadership within the group in terms of arranging and choreographing dance pieces they could remember from their culture.

4.3. VENUES AND CONTEXTS

Performance practice in Umoja was very much influenced by various venues and contexts. Performers adjusted their repertoire and attitude according to where they performed, to whom and why they performed.

4.3.1. Umoja in Church Setting

Ethnomusicologists, especially in Africa, have documented the influence of Christian churches on traditional cultures. Churches have played an important role in promoting and imposing Western culture of the cultures of the world. However, after the independence campaign of the 1950s and 1960s, many changes have occurred in the ways churches operate, especially with respect to the acceptance of the indigenous cultures. The allowance of traditional musical instruments such as drums, rattles and other percussion instruments in Christian worship has affected churches, not only in Africa, but also around the world, especially in the West. Christian musical groups from Africa are increasingly touring churches in Europe and in the United States, where they often perform with African musical instruments.

As we have mentioned in the previous chapter, performing in churches was very different from performing at a school assembly, at a private party, or at an event in a nightclub. While at its beginning it was a natural continuation of Gevakin choir's experience in churches, Umoja made several appearances in churches during the 1990s and the early 2000s. In churches, Umoja represented typical African choirs in both Catholic and Protestant Churches; depending on what denomination they visited. The experience of Umoja's founders in Gevakin helped shape the repertoire they had to take to various churches the company visited.

Although Umoja could give full performances on its own when invited by church officials, most of the church engagements were well organized according to the program of the

event. Thus, Umoja's performance would be inserted in the church program, which is in most cases printed and distributed to the attendance.

Performance during a church event such as a Mass in a Catholic Church is limited to two or three pieces that might take place before the reading of the Bible, the sermon, the announcements, or during the offering. However, in a special event, Umoja may be asked to perform for the prelude and at the closing of the event. In Protestant Churches, Umoja appeared as "special guests" who performed according to written program, and in conjunction with the visited church choirs.

The appearance was as important as the performance itself. It was very important to dress appropriately for church service in respect for God and the worship service. While members of Umoja could make "joyful noises" to the Lord, dance movements were restricted to some "respectful" dances such as moving the body to the left and to the right, and clapping or waving hands while singing. The important thing was for people to see and hear an African choir dressed in African outfits and singing like in Africa.

Figure 4: Members of Umoja performing at a church service. Standing from left to right: Papy Makesi, Elie Kihonia, Patricia Opondo, Wendy Santiago Bello, Joyce Moten, Azim Countz, Pamela Bey, and Lilian Sogga. Seated: Gaby Muzela.

In many cases, members of Umoja entered the church with a special song, accompanying themselves with drums, maracas, and cowbells, and marching toward the front where they would face the audience.

During special church events, performers of Umoja were asked to play specific roles in a mass, as seen in the following picture, in which Lillian Sogga (left) and Patricia Opondo (right) had the responsibility of carrying the offertory bowl to the altar during a Saturday mass at St. Thomas More Church in Bethel Park. Rev. Matthew Theuri, from Kenya and a priest at the church, celebrated the mass. *The Pittsburgh Press* described the mass in these terms: "It was a

special kind of Catholic mass—a hand-clapping, arm-waving, dancing-in-the aisle, African-style worship service that showed more than 1,000 congregants a different way to celebrate God."[49]

Figure 5: Lillian Sogga (left) and Patricia Opondo (right) carrying the offertory plate to the altar

Similar services were held in other churches. Another example is the St. Benedict de Moor Catholic Church, which was so influenced by Umoja and has since adopted a more African oriented style in its mass. The relationship went deeper as Umoja performed frequently at this church where several of its members became church members, and Father Carmen D'Amico, the pastor of the church later became an active member and president of the company's board of directors.

[49] The Pittsburgh Press, October 31, 1991

4.3.2. Umoja In Schools

Umoja African Arts Company has been very active in schools from the beginning. Its school performing activities that began at the University of Pittsburgh naturally spilled into the greater school system, which includes many elementary, middle, high schools and colleges. Some of the performances included the frequent "Thursday Noon Recital" at the Music Department, as seen on the following ad.

Figure 6: Ad for Music Department's Thursday Noon Recital at the University of Pittsburgh

The ad included a program of what Umoja performed that Thursday noon at the Music Department of the University of Pittsburgh. The noon recital, which is a tradition of the Music Department to encourage performance by students on various musical instruments and vocals, was a good introduction of Umoja, which was known that time as "Umoja-The African Drum Ensemble," to many other students who did not come to the Music Building in the evening when the Drumming Ensemble met.

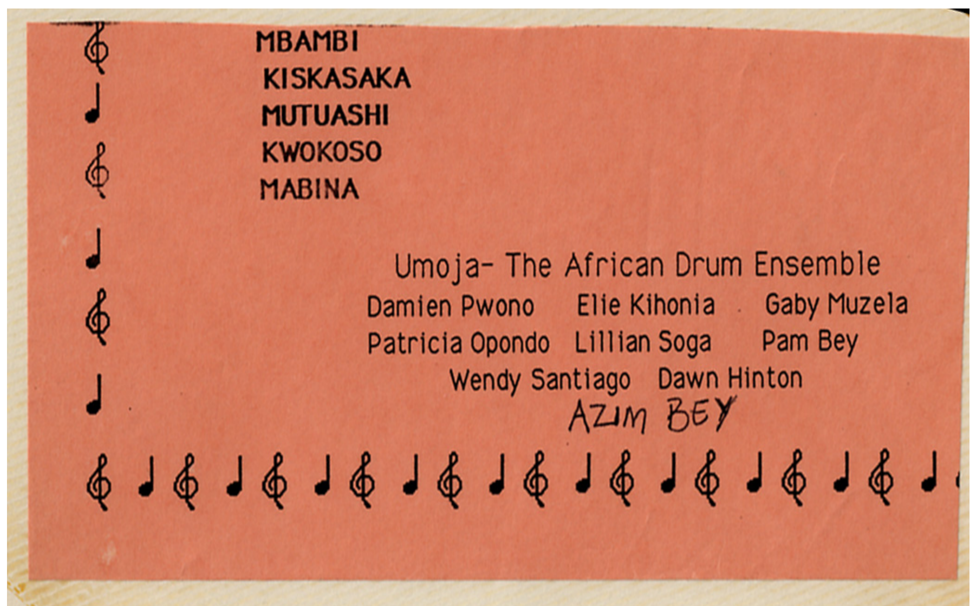


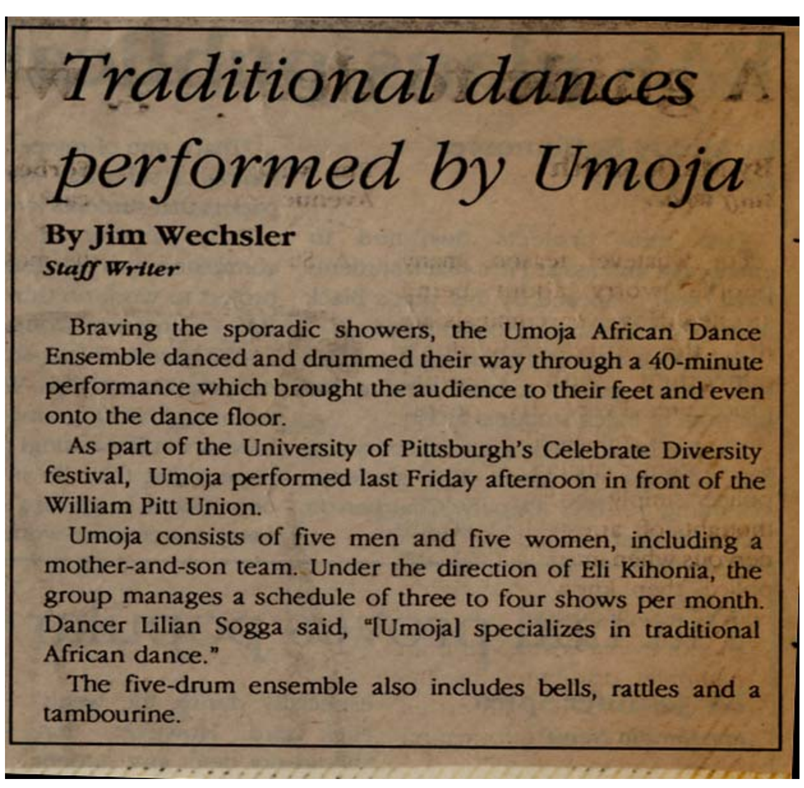
Figure 7: Details of the ad listing Umoja and its performers

The success of performances such as the above Thursday Noon recital emboldened members of Umoja, who were eager to conquer more school audiences. Early in its existence, Umoja performed and conducted workshops at various schools, colleges and universities. Just in 1990 for example, some of the most remarkable performances included Geneva College in New York; International Festivals at the University of Pittsburgh, at Johnstown and Oakland campuses; Duquesne University, and Carnegie Mellon University. Other local colleges including Chattham, La Roche, Point Park, extended their invitation to Umoja.

Umoja did not have any problem performing indoors or outdoors and drawing attention. This kind of flexibility was also developed in Gevakin choir. Outdoors performances were very beneficial to Umoja in building a larger audience on campuses, since there was no limit to who should attend. An example is a performance that took place outside the William Pitt Union of the University of Pittsburgh on Friday, September 14th, 1990, as part of the University of Pittsburgh's Celebrate Diversity festival.

Figure 8: Umoja performing outside the William Pitt Union of the University of Pittsburgh. Standing from left: Gaby Muzela, papy Makesi, and Azim Countz; kneeling from the left: Elie Kihonia, Dawn Hinton, Lilian Sogga, Patricia Opondo, and Wendy Santiago Bello. Photo courtesy of Lilian Sogga.

This performance was well received by the audience. In fact, the *Pitt News*, the University of Pittsburgh's main students newspaper reported about the event on its Tuesday, September 18, 1990 edition.



Traditional dances performed by Umoja

By Jim Wechsler
Staff Writer

Braving the sporadic showers, the Umoja African Dance Ensemble danced and drummed their way through a 40-minute performance which brought the audience to their feet and even onto the dance floor.

As part of the University of Pittsburgh's Celebrate Diversity festival, Umoja performed last Friday afternoon in front of the William Pitt Union.

Umoja consists of five men and five women, including a mother-and-son team. Under the direction of Eli Kihonia, the group manages a schedule of three to four shows per month. Dancer Lilian Sogga said, "[Umoja] specializes in traditional African dance."

The five-drum ensemble also includes bells, rattles and a tambourine.

Figure 9: Newspaper clipping from The Pitt News

Performing at various events at colleges and universities was important, since it helped in building the audience. It also helped in attracting new recruits that came to the company from the students' communities.

Besides performing in schools of higher education, Umoja became very active in elementary, middle, and high schools. The company was asked to conduct special projects with the Pittsburgh Board of Education that took it to many schools. This opened a door for Umoja to visit these schools and others for a long time throughout the 1990s and beyond.

Performing and conducting workshops in schools has been Umoja's main occupation, because of the importance the Pittsburgh's Board of Education and other school districts out of Pittsburgh give to introducing students to cultures of the world, especially African culture.

Typical Umoja's school performance included a forty-five minutes performance by members of Umoja, and about fifteen to twenty minutes of audience participation, during which students and teachers are invited (or drafted) on stage to join members of Umoja in dancing or drumming. This is usually the most electrifying moment of the show, when students would see school authorities such as teachers and principals exhibit some African dance and drumming. Some schools would invite Umoja to conduct clinics and workshops with selected students for a week or two, and present a show at the end, in which trained students would be featured. The whole school usually attends this performance at the assembly. In many schools, students and teachers gather in the gymnasium in order to see and participate in the performance by Umoja.

School engagements have been beneficial in Umoja in a sense that both the performers and the audiences gained. It was during school performances, workshops, and clinics that the performers developed their teaching skills, because they were obligated to constantly communicate with the audiences. Students have the opportunity to learn African drumming techniques and dance movements by oral tradition. They can practice imitation in dance and drumming, which is part of the African aesthetic.

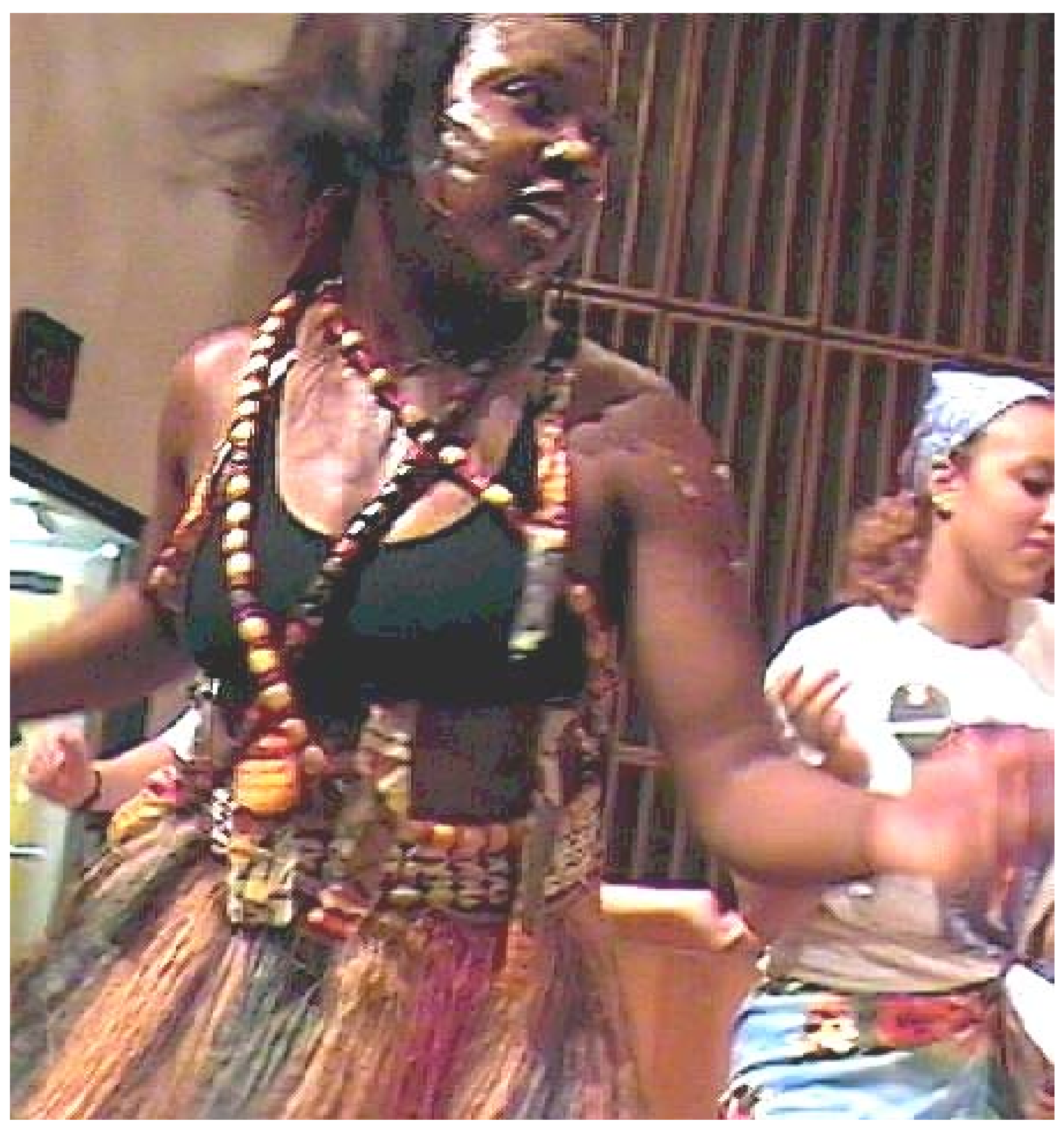


Figure 10: Teaching and learning by imitation. Alisha Pennix, a dancer in Umoja leads a group of students in African dance movements. Photograph by Fred Onovuerswoke (St. Louis African Chorus)

4.3.3. Umoja in Big Halls and Outside Festivals

Outside churches and schools, Umoja has performed in many other venues and contexts, some state-sponsored, some private. The appearance at some prestigious places and events in Pittsburgh helped Umoja strengthen its image to the Pittsburgh community in general as the

premier African dance troupe. An example of such performances is its appearance at the Pittsburgh International Folk Theatre's "World Showcase II" that took place on Friday October 5, 1990 at the Heinz Hall, Downtown Pittsburgh. Multi-culturalism being the goal for the Folk Theatre since its inception, its ambitious mission was to portray the cultural elements of all the people of the world.

Before the show Umoja "drummed the way" from the dinner that was organized at the Westin William Penn Hotel to the Heinz Hall gala. The year before, in a similar event, Scottish bagpipes led the audience from dinner at the Westin William Penn Hotel to the Benedum hall for the performance.

The Pittsburgh Press announced this important event in its October 4, 1990 issue, and a follow-up article on its October 6, 1990 in which Lynne Conner pointed out the importance of Umoja's appearance during the first half of the show in these terms:

> The Pittsburgh International Folk Theatre expanded the range and breadth of its presentation by inviting a varied group of guest artists to perform alongside the troupe at Heinz Hall last evening. In terms of international scope, the program was a great success. The first half featured a charming appearance by Umoja, a Pittsburgh-based African drum and dance ensemble.[50]

Umoja continued to perform in major events that were organized in the city of Pittsburgh and the surroundings. Every year throughout the 1990s, it has appeared in various festivals including the Three Rivers Arts Festival, the Pittsburgh Folk Festival, the Greater Pittsburgh International Renaissance Festival, and the Pittsburgh International Children's Festival. Umoja has become a regular figure in these local festivals so that it has become the local representative of African performing arts in the city.

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[50] *The Pittsburgh Press,* October 6, 1990.

In the mid 1990s, with funding from funding organization, Umoja began to organize its own productions of shows in the city of Pittsburgh. One of the series, started in 1993, was "Africa Shout," a performance presented by Umoja at major performing halls such as the Byham Theater Downtown Pittsburgh, the Manchester Craftsmen Guild in North Side, the Kelly-Straihorn in East Liberty, and The Carnegie Hall.

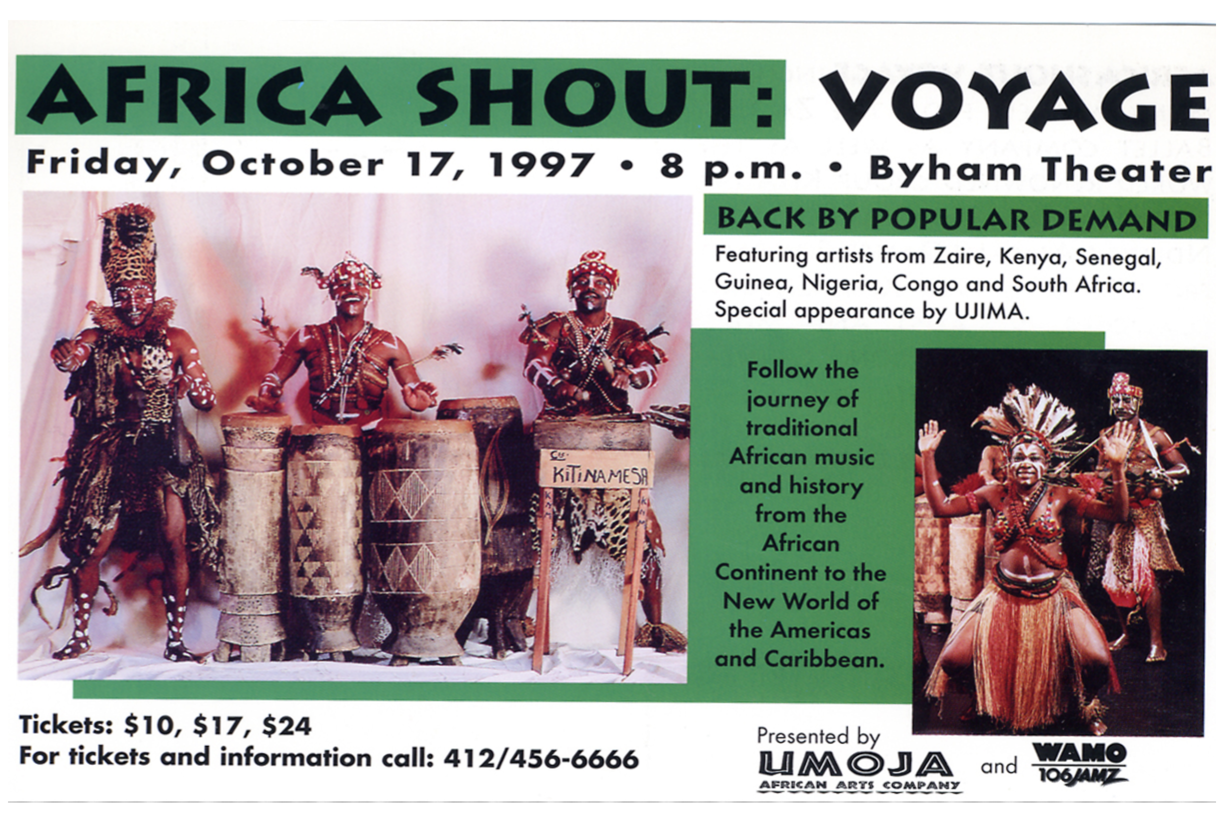

Figure 11: Advertisement for Africa Shout

After improving its image and conquering various audiences mentioned above, including churches, schools, and other big stage performances in Pittsburgh, Umoja was invited to perform at various events out of the city of Pittsburgh. Its appearance at the National Museum of African Arts in Washington DC in the spring of 1993 opened another door for performances at museums around the country.

Umoja's performance at the Smithsonian Institution's National Museum of African Arts in Washington DC inaugurated a series of performances at various museums around the country. According to Kihonia, that performance boosted the company's image at the national level. "It was the first time," he says, "that people began to give us real consideration, since we were the only company that could feature drumming and dance from Central Africa. This was the first time we saw a big difference in our paychecks, and performing African music and dance became fun.[51]

The reception of Umoja by big organizations at the national level was seen as a confirmation for the performers who until then did not take themselves very seriously about being professional of African music and dance. It was more appropriate for example, for museums to have Umoja perform at arts exhibitions of Central and Southern Africa than having Kankouran, Ko-Thi, or the African-American Dance Ensemble that would only play repertoires from Senegal, Guinea and Mali. By trying to match arts exhibitions from specific areas of Africa to their cultures, museums brought performing troupes with a repertoire that would reflect the area of interest. When people went to see the arts of the Kongo, Tshokwe, Pende, Luba-Lulua, and other Central African ethnic groups, Umoja would be the music and dance equivalent. However, the inclusion in its repertoire of pieces from Senegal and Guinea gave Umoja the ability to perform at events that focused on West Africa.

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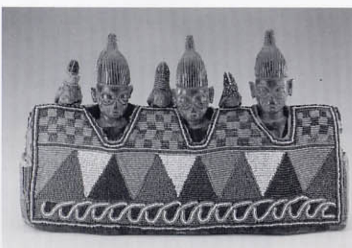
[51] Elie Kihonia, personal interview with the author, July 7, 1999.

National Museum of African Art • Spring 199

CALENDAR

APRIL

3 Storytelling. *Folktales of the Yoruba People.* Saturday, 2 p.m., LH.



Three Standing Female Figures in a Beaded Vest
Yoruba peoples, Nigeria
Museum purchase, 92-3-1a-d
(Photo by Franko Khoury)

17 Workshop for Adults. *A Yoruba Beaded Crown: Beads in Art.* Saturday, 10 a.m.–5 p.m., WS.

Gallery Discussion. *Objects of Power and Identity: Yoruba Art.* Saturday, 2 p.m.–3:30 p.m., LH.

18 Storytelling. *Folktales of the Yoruba People.* Sunday, 2 p.m., LH.

Docent Vivian Henderson
(Photo by Franko Khoury)

24 Storytelling. *Folktales of the Yoruba People.* Saturday, 2 p.m., LH.

26 Exhibition Preview for Educators. Monday, 4 p.m.–6:30 p.m., LH.

MAY

1 Gallery Discussion. *Living Artists: An Afternoon with Renée Stout.* Saturday, 2 p.m., 2nd level gallery.

2 Storytelling. *Folktales from Zaire.* Sunday, 2 p.m., LH.

8 Lecture. *The Art of Renée Stout and Alison Saar.* Saturday, 9 a.m.–4 p.m., RC.

15 Lecture. *Things That Do Things: Objects, Altars, and Sacred Spaces as Artistic Creations.* Saturday, 1 p.m.–4 p.m., LH.

22 Music. *The Umoja African Drum and Dance Company.* Saturday, 1 p.m. and 3 p.m., RC.

Drummer from the Umoja African Drum and Dance Company
(Photo by Eric Good)

23 Storytelling. *Folktales from Zaire.* Sunday, 2 p.m., LH.

29 Storytelling. *Folktales from Zaire.* Saturday, 2 p.m., LH.

JUNE

5 Storytelling. *Folktales from Zaire.* Saturday, 2 p.m., LH.

12 Gallery Discussion. *Sound and Forms in African Art.* Saturday, 2 p.m., ID.

Drum
Baga peoples, Guinea
Purchased with funds provided by the Smithsonian Collections Acquisition Program and gift of Annie Lauri Aitken Charitable Trust, the Frances and Benjamin Beneson Foundation, David D. Driskell, Evelyn A.J. Hall Charitable Trust, Mr. and Mrs. Robert Nooter, Barry and Beverly Pierce, Mr. and Mrs. Edwin Silver, Mr. and Mrs. Michael Sonnenreich, 1991-1-1
(Photo by Franko Khoury)

13 Storytelling. *Folktales from Zaire.* Sunday, 2 p.m., LH.

26 Family Program. *Special Gallery Tour for Children with Artist Renée Stout.* Saturday, 10:30 a.m.–12:30 p.m., LH.

Storytelling. *Folktales from Zaire.* Saturday, 2 p.m., LH.

Location Codes ID: Information Desk, ground level LH: Lecture Hall, second level
RC: S. Dillon Ripley Center Lecture Hall, third level WS: Workshop, second level

Figure 12:Printed program of the National Museum of African Arts advertising Umoja

The museum network took Umoja to many places, including Milwaukee, Baltimore, Detroit, Michigan; St. Louis, Mo.; Kansas City, Mo.; Richmond, Va.; and Charlotte, NC. These performances at state museums were very well attended and well received, some of them even sold out because the style was different from African music and dances people were used to see.

4.3.4. Performance at Private Parties

While Umoja kept its schedule of performing in churches, schools, halls, and other public events, it was also busy performing at events that were organized by individuals. These performances included reception for wedding ceremonies, memorial services, birthday parties and anniversaries, and nightclubs. Members of the African community sometimes invite Umoja to provide live performance of African music to celebrate important events such as the commemoration of Independence Day of a certain African country, graduation party, etc. Private parties vary in size and duration, depending on *who* organizes it, *what* kind of guests attend it, and *how much* money they can spend. Other performance opportunities included centers for senior citizens, prisons, and centers for mentally challenged people.

This wide range of performance venues and contexts gave enough flexibility to the performers of Umoja who had to adjust to various audiences. The venues and contexts had a big impact on the ways performers arranged their music and choreographed their dances. Although they were viewed as teachers of African performing arts, the performers of Umoja were students of the performing arts in general, because they learned from their experience while performing for different audiences. As professional entertainers, they had to tone down their body movements as well as their costumes when performing for young children in schools, or in religious environment. Although they had to perform the same pieces for various audiences, who was in the audience made a big impact on the performers and the performance.

4.3.5. Audience Participation

Audience participation is very important in African teachers/demonstration troupes, and Umoja has been successful in using it at performances. While members of the audiences are encouraged to join during big stage performances, most of audience participation takes place in school engagements, since students usually attend the performances with the expectations of interacting with the performers. Also, student crowds enjoy to be challenged when opportunities are given to them.

A typical performance would start with a drum call, during which drummers would play improvisational patterns, sometime competing or arguing with their drums. After the drummer's warm-up, a rhythmic drum piece would invite dancers on the stage. Usually, the leader of the group explains the piece, saying the title, sometimes asking the audience to repeat the African words after him/her.

Figure 13: Singer and dancer Djema Bosawa (left) and Kasa Panzu (right) at the climax of *zebola.* In the back, drummers include Leon Mawengo (top left), Zubamunu Mitete (playing the lokolé), the author playing a set of congas, and Bofenda "Bokulaka" Ilonga (top right). Photo by Fred Onovuerswoke (St. Louis African Chorus)

He may also talk about the meaning of the piece, where it came from, and in what circumstances it is performed in its original contexts. Another piece, for example *zebola* (the healing and exorcism dance), would start with the solo singer/dancer singing a cappella back stage. Drummers would accompany her softly, and increase the intensity to the climax when other dancers would join the soloist on stage. The next piece would be a fast, energetic dance piece where drummers and dancers would show their strength, drawing cheers and applause from the audience. By this time, the audience is warmed up, and ready to join when asked to. However, if the audience is slow to move, members of Umoja sometimes go to them and dance

with them where they are. By doing that, the other members of the audience would be encouraged to join as seen in the following picture.

Figure 14: Kasa Panzu (left) showing *Mutwashi* dance to members of the audience during a performance at St. Louis Six Flags. Photo courtesy of Fred Onovuerswoke (St. Louis African Chorus)

Figure 15: Audience participation at a School performance. Students are amazed to see their professor get down on the dance floor to do African dance movements he learns from Bokulaka, one of Umoja's Master drummers. Photo courtesy of Fred Onovuerswoke, St. louis African Chorus.

Figure 16: Audience participation, two faculty members "getting down" following the lead of Kongo Bosola (right). Photo courtesy of Fred Onovuerswoke (St. Louis African Chorus)

Students usually get very excited when they see their teachers and staff get on stage and play drums or dance. As seen in the following picture, they are being part of the show. This gives a sense of completeness to the performance, which becomes a community event in which everybody in the audience participates.

Figure 17: Students enjoy participation during performance by Umoja. Photo courtesy of Fred Onovuerswoke (St. Louis African Chorus)

5. CHAPTER FIVE: MUSICAL INSTRUMENTS AND COSTUMES

In this chapter I agree with Mellonnee Burnim who has defined three areas of aesthetic significance in the black music tradition: The delivery style, sound quality, and mechanics of delivery.[52] Musical instruments and costumes are very important in the delivery of African music, especially when it is performed in the new American contexts. Olly Wilson has defined African musical experience as "a multi-media one in which many kinds of collective human output are inextricably linked." A typical traditional African ceremony, he continues, "will include music, dance, the plastic arts (in the form of elaborate masks and/or costumes) and perhaps ritualistic drama."[53] African performers in the United States make efforts to have their music sound good and look good according to the accepted African aesthetic values.

5.1. MUSICAL INSTRUMENTS

Performers of African traditional music in urban African cities take a pragmatic attitude to musical instruments they use. They use homemade or imported instruments as need or affordability determine. Young aspiring popular musicians also use the same techniques in acquiring musical instruments. Homemade guitars and adaptation of other Western musical instruments are common, both in cities and in rural areas of Africa.

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[52] Mellonnee Burnim, "The Black Gospel Musical Tradition: A Complex Ideology, Aesthetic and Behavior," in *More than Dancing*, Irene V. Jackson, ed., Westport, Conn.: Greenwood Press, 1985, p. 154.

[53] Olly Wilson, "Association of Movement and Music as a Manifestation of a Black Conceptual Approach to Music," in Report of the 12th Congress, London, American Musicological Society, 1981, p. 99.

The situation in the early stage of Umoja was similar to that found among young musicians in sub-Saharan urban Africa. However, the new environment in Pittsburgh provided the founders of Umoja with instruments they could identify as “African” because of their use in the new context. The instruments used in Umoja are mostly percussion, although sometimes Muzela and Kihonia could play Western musical instruments such as the guitar, the accordion, and the keyboards as needed in specific events. Drums play a very important role in not only accompanying vocals, but also in providing rhythmic structures to dances. Various types of drums have been used in Umoja, depending on the availability of the instruments and the expertise within the ensemble. Melodic African musical instruments such as *likembe, balafon*, and *langung* (musical bow) were occasionally used. However, their use was kept at the minimum.

When Damien Pwono, Gaby Muzela and Elie Kihonia decided to create a percussion-based African dance company, they began to collect musical instruments that were appropriate for such adventure. Keeping in mind that all the three founders of Umoja did not come from the African traditional culture, but from urban culture, they had to try their hands on various types of drums. Because of the difficulties in acquiring authentic African drums in quantity and quality, they picked musical instruments that were available locally.

Also, having decided to make a big transition from African modernism (which was visible in the style of Gevakin Choir) to African traditionalism, they had no choice but mix the two together, especially in trying to continue performing in local churches. The mixture is obvious as shown in the following picture. The two musicians are experimenting their new equipment consisting of a pair of bongos (played by Kihonia) and a small ngoma drum (played by Muzela). It was not easy to switch from playing guitars, accordion and keyboards to drums.

Since they did not go through formal training in playing these drums, they had to come up with their own techniques.

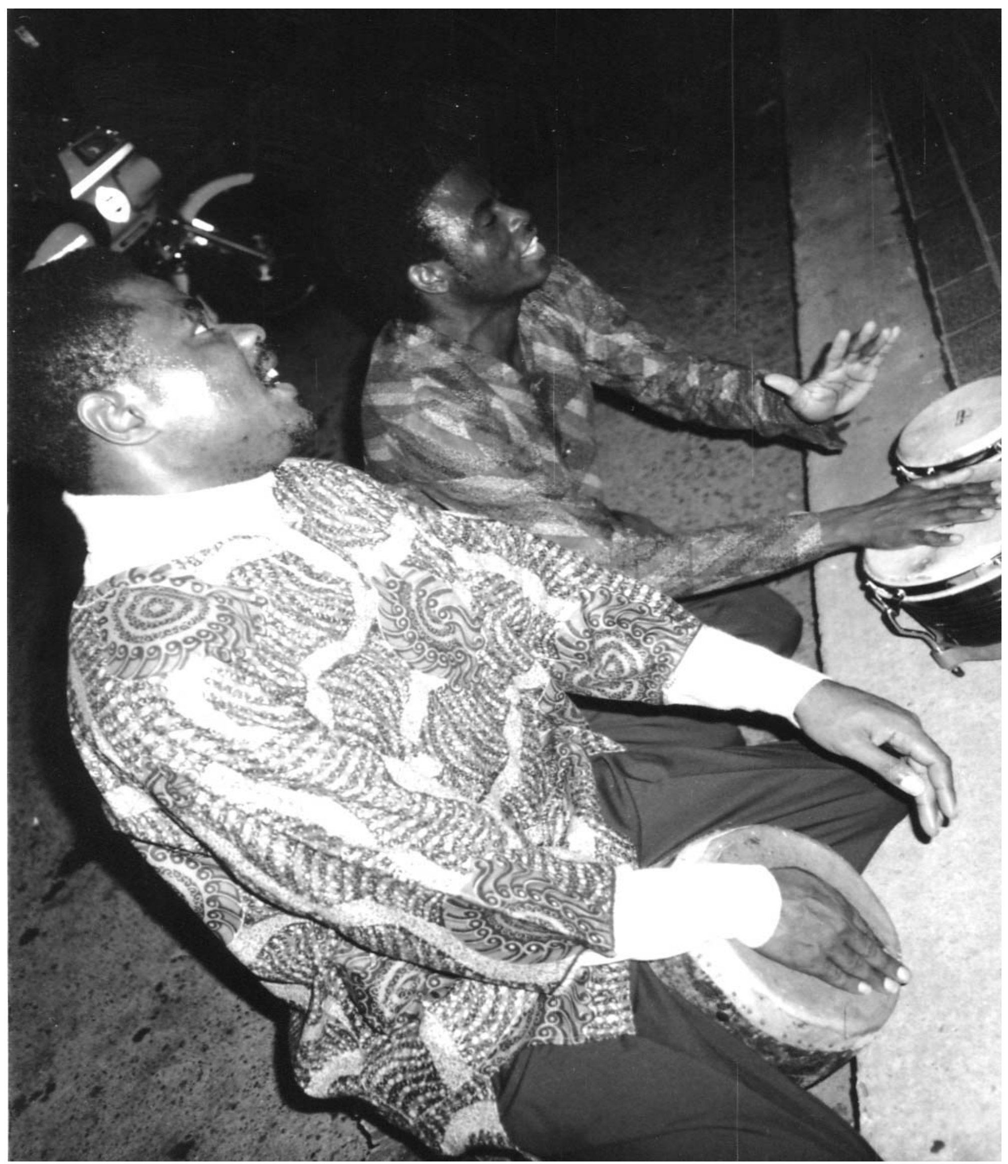

Figure 18: Gaby Muzela and Elie Kihonia playing Umoja's first drums at a street performance downtown Pittsburgh. Photo courtesy of Papy Makesi.

As one can see in the above picture, our performers were in search of the new sound they were developing, and also they were getting familiar with the ways one should play these instruments. The pair of bongos, for example, did not have a proper stand to hold it; neither did

the small ngoma drum. Also, our performers were doing many things at the same time: they were singers, dancers and drummers. Whatever position they could find to play was good, as long as they were producing the sounds they desired.

In their search for the right sounds and positions, they kept trying, as seen in the next picture; Kihonia is playing the pair of bongos on Makesi, who is playing a role of an improvised "stand" while Muzela played the ngoma in the sitting position.

Figure 19: Elie Kihonia (standing right) plays a pair of bongos held by Papy Makesi (left), and Gaby Muzela (sitting position) plays a ngoma drum.

The next move was to borrow instruments from the African Drumming Ensemble of the University of Pittsburgh, since Umoja was already collaborating with it. Pwono took a modified djembe and a couple Ghanaian *atumpan* drums. The modified djembe consisted of a djembe with a thicker synthetic skin—usually fit for the congas--that was put on after the original

goatskin was broken. This sounded a lot more like a conga or a *ngoma*, anything but the ordinary *djembe*.

Figure 20: Members of Umoja with African drums. Damien Pwono (center) plays the modified sabar drum, Elie Kihonia and Azim Countz (left) play ngoma and atumpan drums. Patricia Opondo and Lilian Sogga relax on stage. (Photo courtesy of Lilian Sogga)

With these drums, Umoja could go out and perform at various events to the satisfaction of the audiences. The high maintenance of the African drums made it difficult to continue with the same equipment, especially when African drums began to deteriorate. Also, it was not easy to replace African drums, because of the difficulty of acquiring them from Africa, and finding African specialists who could repair them when needed. Thus, it was important to find drums that would be weather proof and not requiring high maintenance. The Latin Percussion conga drums seem to fit in this category.

With money saved from various performances, and the will to improve the quality of its repertoire, Umoja bought the first pair of conga drums. These congas were played alongside other African drums mentioned above. The convenience experienced in using the congas influenced the drummers of the old Umoja to a point that they abandoned other African drums for a while and focused only on congas. By tuning them in a special way, Kihonia and Muzela made those congas sound more like *ngoma* drums.

All this happened fast, so that by the end of 1990, Umoja had at least two pairs of conga drums, each played by Muzela and Kihonia. When Damien Pwono left the group in 1991, Umoja concentrated its drumming efforts on Gaby Muzela and Elie Kihonia. Papy Makesi, who was mostly a dancer, helped sometimes in playing supporting parts on the drums.

Since the conga drums had stands, they provided our drummers with a certain comfort in playing and developing their new sound. While audiences were adjusting to the African conga sounds, purists and critics thought that congas were not "authentic" African instruments, and should not be used as "African" musical instruments. This prompted members of Umoja to cover congas with African fabrics or burlaps, so that congas would be disguised as traditional African drums.

Figure 21: Azim Countz (left), Papy Makesi (center) and Elie Kihonia (right). Congas are clothed with kente fabrics. Photo courtesy of Lilian Sogga

There was an effort to keep "authentic" African drums present and very visible in the group. For a while, the *djembe*, which is the most popular among African drums in the United States, was played alongside congas and the *djun-djun*. There were pieces performed on the congas, and others performed on the djembes. This combination of congas and djembes worked well in providing a diversity of sounds in the repertoire.

With practice, Muzela and Kihonia became good on both congas and djembes. Papy Makesi, who was mainly a dancer, also played supporting drums at some performances.

Figure 22: Papy Makesi, Gaby Muzela, and Elie Kihonia on *djembes.* Photo courtesy of Lilian Sogga.

Other musical instruments included shekeres (seen on the floor in the above picture) and the bell. These instruments, like *djembe*s and congas, are popular and available in the United States.

Learning techniques for the musical instruments used in Umoja were mostly by observation and imitation. Neither Kihonia nor Muzela had a formal training in African drumming and dancing. When they founded Umoja, they were already in the position of being the providers of African music in Pittsburgh. Since there was an audience eager to receive their African music, they had no choice but self-teach and confirm themselves as traditional African performers.

During the second phase of its development, Umoja displayed both congas and traditional African instruments mentioned above, especially the *djembe*, bells and the *shekeres,* instruments that were available in the United States. Guest performers usually brought their instruments to

perform with Umoja. Some of them provided instruments to Umoja when requested. Youssoufa Lo, for example, brought a set of drums that included three *djembes* and four *djun-djuns* to Umoja. These instruments were made and sent to him from Senegal by his father, who has become a supplier of drums from Senegal to groups and individuals performers in the United States and Europe. For this reason, Umoja was able to include many *djembe* pieces in its repertoire.

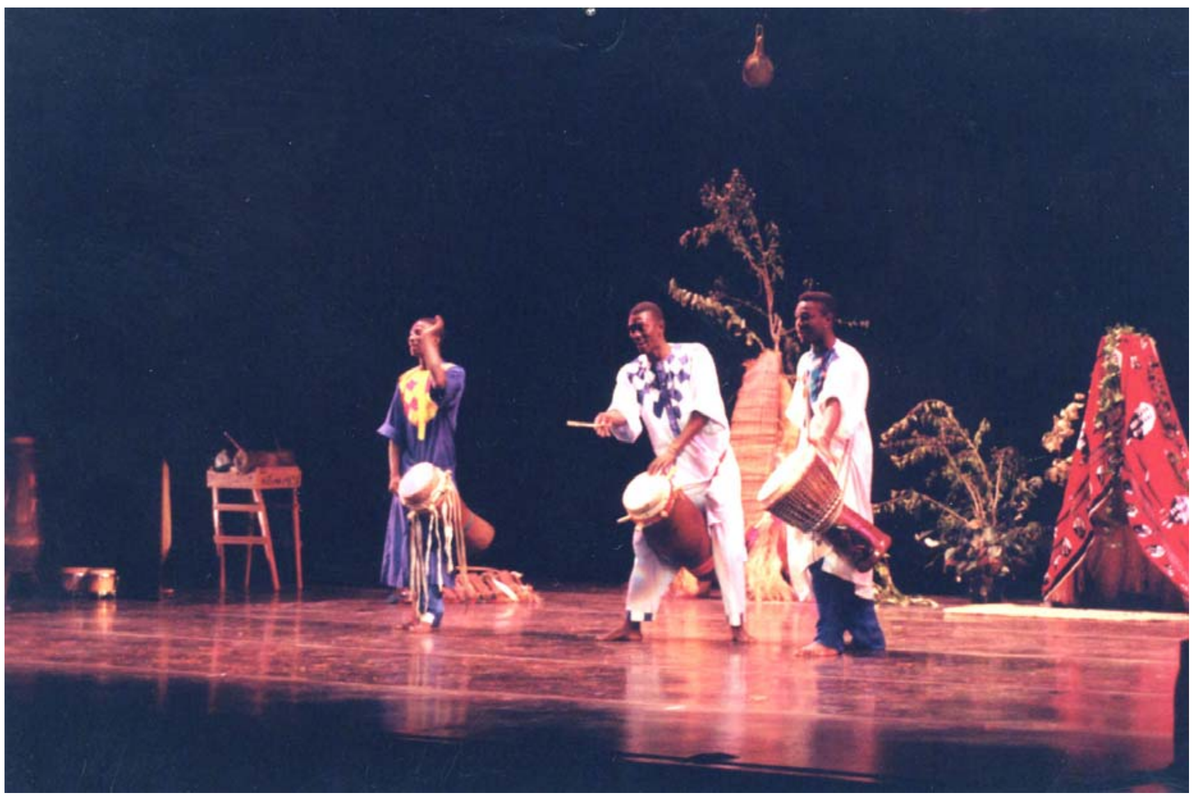

Figure 23: Guest performers from New York performing at the Byham Theater. Photograph unknown, courtesy of Lilian Sogga

As a result, the Old Mali Empire pieces dominated Umoja's repertoire during the second phase of its development. Since this style of African drumming and dancing is the most popular among African Americans who specialize in African music and dance, new recruits with experience joined Umoja, and they appeared in many performances.

Figure 24: Members of Umoja at the Byham Theater performing Koukou, led by Youssoufa Lo (left). New recruits are seen behind Kihonia (center) and behind Koblo Kibul (right). Photographer unknown, courtesy of Elie Kihonia.

Besides the *djembe* ensemble, Umoja featured other musical instruments that reflected the variety of African musical instruments. These instruments including the Senegalese *sabar* drums, the *kora*, and diverse xylophones were brought by guest performers.

As mentioned in the previous chapter, the group Kiti Na Mesa brought a set of traditional musical instruments that were original in sound and in the way they looked. This included several *ngoma* drums, bells, the lokolé (slit log), *madimba* (xylophones), and rattles. These musical instruments were played by performers who had years of experience in their African environment.

Figure 25: Members of Kiti Na Mesa displaying their musical instruments. Photo by Martin Bernstein.

As one can see on the above picture, the instruments are all percussion. The *ngoma* drum is a sculpted, decorated wood drum twelve to twenty inches across and about four feet tall. The cow-skin membrane is struck with bare hands. *Ngoma* drummers usually wear *tsaka-tsaka* wrist rattles in order to get extra maracas sounds in their performance. Although one drummer can play only one *ngoma*, six or seven *ngoma* drums are placed in a row and a good drummer can play up to four of them, thus, ten drums would easily be played by only two drummers.

On many occasions, a drummer would tie a drum to his body using a belt made of rope in order to interact wit dancers on the dance floor. The *lokolé* is made from a hollowed-out tree trunk with two "tongues" of different sizes on which one strikes to get sounds. The instrument is

struck with sticks, giving different sounds depending on where it is hit. One musician will often play two or more *lokolés* of different size.

In the picture above (Figur 25), two *lokolés* are placed on one stand and played by one person. The women have *boyeke* rattles, and strips of leather with grains attached to them in their hair. These strike together, accentuating the rhythm of their dance movements. Other instruments included various bells, including the *elondza* shown on the picture below. It is attached to a long stick and is struck by a metal attached inside the instrument. Another small bell is attached and hung to the neck of the long stick holding the *elondza*, and both sound when the performer shakes, or strikes the long stick to the ground. In the picture one person (center) is playing four *ngoma* drums, and one person (right) is playing two *lokolés*.

Figure 26: Gerarld Limpuku (left) Jean-Pierre Nkoy and Bofenda Ilonga. Photo by Martin Bernstein

The musical instruments from Kiti Na Mesa brought new sounds and new look to Umoja. The drums for example looked old, original because of their carving and decorations. They affirmed

a certain African authenticity to the instrumentation Umoja presented to the public from 1996 to the year 2002. Umoja at various venues, especially in schools, presented the playing techniques of these instruments to students who not only were happy to see the shows, but also wanted to experience them.

5.2. COSTUMES

Live African music and dance performed in the United States and in other parts of the world would be incomplete without proper costumes, because they constitute a very important part in African ceremonies, where music and dance are ever present.

Costumes in the first phase of Umoja reflected the cultural background of its founders, who did not come directly from the African traditional culture but the contemporary modern. The founders of Umoja tried to re-create an African "look" to present to their audiences, thus they brought what they perceived as "African" costumes in their minds, since they did not have the real traditional costumes.

Africans have developed clothing styles as a response to western models. These clothing styles flourished during the 1960s and 1970s when the political environment of the continent promoted African identity in arts. In many countries including Congo, governments took steps to promote national identity in clothing by banning or discouraging western style pants, suit, and dress. President Mobutu, for example, during his *recours à l'authenticité* campaign, preferred the Congo-made *abacost (*from French *"à bàs cost*" meaning "Down with the suit"). As heads of governments like Mobutu, Sekou Toure and others set the example, millions of Africans followed them either by force (like in Congo under President Mobutu's regime) or voluntarily

since this was a well promoted fashion. While many dress styles have remained local, some have transcended boundaries and have become continental, or even pan-African.

The West African *boubou*, for example, can be seen on people all over Africa from Mauritania to Madagascar, and from Ghana to Ethiopia. Africans who travel to the West very often bring their African clothes with them. Moreover, Africans who have established themselves in Western countries have opened businesses such as African hair braiding salons and fashion shops, where people can find African clothes such as *boubous*, *dashikis*, rappers, and others. As a result, African style clothes are available in most American and European cities.

African Contemporary popular musicians have also adopted African style outfits in their performances both in Africa and around the world, although some of them, especially the younger generation, would like to stay in tune with what is happening in major cities of the world such as Paris, London, New York, Tokyo, and Los Angeles. As a natural reaction to their new adventure, the founders of Umoja resorted to contemporary African outfits in order to appear in style to the American public. The reception was warm, since these clothes were different from the mainstream American fashion.

Gevakin choir influenced the founders of Umoja in the way they decided about costumes. One could see the Christian religious influence as both men and women covered their bodies well. Performers wore African street attire in their many early performances since the emphasis was on music that included singing and drumming. Choreographed African dance in the traditional style took time to come, because Umoja's founders needed time to learn, master and be able to teach the other members who did not come from their background.

Figure 27: Members of Umoja wearing African street outfits. From left to right: Elie Kihonia, Gaby Muzela, Lilian Sogga, Papy Makesi, and Pamela Bey Photograph unknown, courtesy of Papy Makesi

The street outfits, as seen on the above picture, were not coordinated in terms of color or style, because they did not come from the same source. One performer could wear a from Côte d'Ivoire, another would wear one from Ghana, another from Congo, and so forth. As a result, Umoja had a collective look of Africa because of the various clothes from many places the performers wore. To the audiences this did not pose any problem as long as the performers represented African arts.

As the group gained more experience in arranging its music and choreographing its dances, its leaders decided to make the group look more professional by having performance outfits that would be uniform and unique. The first attempt was that of dressing the male performers while they were still looking for the best way to dress women.

Figure 28: Umoja's male performers in their new outfits. From left to right: Gaby Muzela, Elie Kihonia, and Papy Makesi. Photo courtesy of Papy Makesi.

In the following picture, men are dressed in the uniform outfits shown above while the women are dressed with African-style close from various parts of Africa.

Figure 29: Performers of Umoja in street outfits. (From left: Papy Makesi, unknown dancer, Lilian Sogga, Gaby Muzela, Azim Countz, Wendy S. Bello, Pamela Bey, Elie Kihonia, and Patricia Opondo. Photograph courtesy of Lilian Sogga.

The problem here, especially with the women's clothing was that these were the typical women dress in Africa. Some of them are very expensive clothes in the African standards, and people wear them to appear at events in public places, or as business attire. The kind of dance that would be appropriate with these outfits would be the general social dance, where people can move freely without extensive efforts required in stage performance. This situation is understandable as long as Umoja was still in its experimental stage.

After trying many outfits in the style of African street clothing, performers of Umoja decided to go traditional by adopting raffia skirts and other clothing that would not look obviously western. This was a difficult move to make for the performers in the early stage of the

formative years of Umoja, because most of them were still outsiders to the real African traditional life. Although they were from Africa, they were not brought up as performers of traditional music and dance, those who are not ashamed of their traditional outfits even when performing in the urban areas of Africa.

Putting raffia skirts to many meant to undress, having many parts of the body, including upper legs and belly exposed, thus humiliating. It was even more difficult to the members of Umoja who were Americans, for whom performing with less clothing brought them closer to/or put them in the same category with exotic dancers in nude bars. For example, in the following picture, Gaby and Elie are playing drums without shirts, and wearing raffia skirts. Papy Makesi agreed to wear raffia skirt, but covered his upper body with another cloth, because he was not ready to perform bare torso. Azim decided to wear his African street outfit that kept him covered from while playing his drum.

Figure 30: Umoja's Drummers in costumes. From left to right: Gaby Muzela, Elie Kihonia, Papy Makesi, and Azim Countz (Photograph courtesy of Lilian Sogga).

In other performances, performers compromised by wearing pants underneath raffia skirts, and tee shirts to cover their torsos. This did not look good to people who were familiar with African cultures. One had to make a decision about what to wear at what kind of performance, and what the meaning would be to the audiences that were eager to learn about African culture. It was important especially for a group of teachers of African culture, who are supposed to believe in what they are teaching.

Figure 31: Umoja's female dancers including Patricia Opondo, Lilian Sogga, Pamela Bey, and Dawn Hinton in raffia skirts (Photo courtesy of Lilian sogga)

Besides raffia, efforts were made to acquire other traditional outfits including animal hide and masks in order to make Umoja look more traditional African. In the absence of real animal hides, imitation fabrics and burlaps were used in performances.

This move did make a big difference, indeed. However, while the general public received it without problem, they were some limitations when Umoja had to perform for children in schools. Some school authorities would request that performers' bodies be covered enough

during performances, workshops, and other visits to their schools. Similar censorship was observed when dancers were asked to tone down dance movements that looked sexual and provocative. Thus, the combination of African clothes between street and purely traditional was very important in order to accommodate audiences at various venues. In the process, performers also learned that certain dance movements could not be made easily with the wrong outfit or accoutrement.

Performers of Umoja used makeup and body painting as part of their costumes. They also accumulated important items such as cowry shells, beads and pearls, small bells, animal horns, bird feathers, etc. The combination of costumes, makeup and other objects was very important in helping Umoja get its message across. For example, when performing mbambi (the antelope), the three performers in the following picture depict a hunting scene. Elie Kihonia and Papy Makesi are hunters while Azim Countz is the antelope that was killed.

Figure 32: Elie Kihonia (left) and Papy Makesi (right) carry Azim Countz in during a piece representing hunters' scene. (Photo courtesy of Papy Makesi)

6. CHAPTER SIX: UMOJA'S CONTRIBUTION TO PITTSBURGH'S ARTISTIC SCENE

This chapter will address the contribution of Umoja to the cultural enrichment of the city of Pittsburgh and its surroundings. It examines the company's influence on a) the performers, b) the audiences, c) Patronage.

6.1. INFLUENCE ON PERFORMERS

Umoja has had a big influence on its performers, not only those who founded it and who have been regulars, but also those who have come in contact with the company as guest performers and students. Umoja provided its founding members with a training ground where these members were able to awaken many dormant talents and necessary skills in performing arts of Africa. It became an association where members spent time to learn from each other, share knowledge about their respective African cultures, and participate in the formation of this unique performing ensemble. This is why we have referred to Umoja as a special "school of performing arts of Africa" in Pittsburgh. This "school" has produced a few "graduates" who have become teachers and advocates of African music and dance in Pittsburgh and in other American cities, especially in schools.

When the founding members of Umoja understood its potential, they took it seriously. Umoja was more than a performing ensemble of African music and dance. It was a good place

for members to socialize, since they spent time together to rehearse, travel to various places to perform, share their joy and sadness, etc. For the African members of the company, Umoja became a "little Africa," a place where they could feel at home although far from home, a place where they could speak their languages, exchange creative ideas, play African music and dance, hear the latest news from Africa, things they could not get through the American radio stations, television, and news papers.

To members who were from the United States and other countries, Umoja was a place to learn more about African culture by interacting with their African colleagues who were willing to share their knowledge with them. The environment created by Umoja prompted its members to become more committed to it.

People who joined Umoja came to find one or more key concepts that Victor Turner[54] has described. The three concepts are: *work*, *leisure*, and *play*. Turner suggests that it is important to distinguish *work* from *leisure*, and *play* from the two. "Placing a different explanatory stress on each or any combination of these" he says, "can influence how we think about symbolic manipulation sets, symbolic genres, in the types of societies we will consider.[55] According to the Oxford English Dictionary, the word *work* means "expenditure of energy, application of effort to some purpose." Webster's definition of the word is "physical or mental effort exerted to do or to make something; purposeful activity; labor; toil, etc." Work means also employment, especially the opportunity of earning money by labor.

Umoja provided a work place that created opportunities for its members to earn money. However, earning money, which came later in the company's development, was not the only reason for work. When analyzing Turner's work, Richard Schechner pointed out his belief that

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[54] Victor Turner, *Process, Performance and Pilgrimage,* New Delhi: Concept Publishing, 1979, p.23.
[55] Victor Turner, Ibid.

"there was a continuous, dynamic process linking performative behavior—art, sports, ritual, play—with social and ethical structure: the way people think about and organize their lives and specify individual and group values."[56]

Umoja became an occupation for many of its performers who gave themselves a discipline of attending rehearsals on a regular basis. Frequent rehearsals and performances were beneficial to performers, because according to Pamela Bey, Lillian Sogga, Darlene Stewart and others, these helped them exercise on a regular basis, thus staying healthy. Umoja provided leisure for performers, especially students who could take breaks from their academic work.

Traditional music and dance of Africa can become a source of income to those who can perform and teach in a good environment. As the interest in African performing arts is increasing in American schools, and the demand for African music specialists becomes high, performers evolving in professional troupes such as Umoja find their market expanding. This was very beneficial for African performers who did not have other major occupation, because they could earn money for the time and energy they spent in performing African dance music. At one point, one had to choose between finding a minimum wage employment and finding performance opportunities. For many, performing African music paid better than working eight hours shift at a minimum wage job. However, while minimum wage jobs provided stability and security, one did not have assurance in performance opportunities because these are seasonal and occasional. Although people consider music and dance to be important in their lives, they do not need African music everyday as they would need food.

Another result from Umoja's impact on its performers is the increase of confidence. Collectively or individually, members of Umoja are proud to go anywhere when invited to

[56] Richard Schechner, "Victor Turner's Last Adventure," in *The Anthropology of Performance*, New York: PAJ Publications, 1986, p. 8.

present African music and dance. Because of their experience in Umoja, they are regarded as "masters" of African music and dance. Some ambitious performers have secured permanent positions as teachers of African drumming and dancing in schools where they had left good impression during their performances with Umoja.

Umoja has had an impact on other performers who were not necessarily its members. Musically, Umoja captured the attention of those who were practitioners of African music and dance in Pittsburgh. The founders of Umoja showed the importance of singing in a dance music ensemble. They highlighted the interaction between related arts such as music, dance, painting, and drama. Umoja has influenced female dancers in many ways, including the fact of learning African dance movements from African female dancers who have experience. It is common to see male specialists of African dance teach dance techniques to women, who sometimes have to imagine how the movements would look if they were done by women. With Umoja, especially with dancers from Kiti Na Mesa, young women could watch experienced women and learn directly from them. Those who have been discouraged by Western models of dancing rediscovered their potential in the performance of African dance, in which people are not discriminated by how heavy or skinny they may be in order to dance.

6.2. INFLUENCE ON OTHER PERFORMING GROUPS

It takes the work of professional African individual performers and troupes such as Umoja to transform lives of aspiring performers and scholars of African music ini the United States. This tradition has been going on for many years as we have found that the work of remarkable figures including Asadata Dafora Horton, Babatunde Olatunji, Ladji Camara, Mor Thiam and many

other African master drummers had influence other people who have become specialists of African music and dance.

These people include bid names, especially in the African American dance theater area, such as Katherine Dunham, Pearl Primus, Chuck Davis, and Doris Green among others. Resident African performers and teachers have been influential in the decision making of many who have decided to specialize in the performing arts of Africa.

In Pittsburgh, Umoja has influenced individual performers on the ways they approached African music and dance. Shona Shariff for example, was so influenced that she included performers of Umoja who provided Congolese drumming, taught songs and dance movements to her ensemble. Both Kihonia and Muzela were her main drummers between 1990 and 1991, when both her troupe and Umoja were in their beginning stages. Before the creation of Umoja, Shona was a student of William Anku, from whom she learned dance movements from various cultures of West Africa.

audiences.

Figure 33: Shona Sharif on stage at the Three Rivers Arts Festival. Photo Courtesy of Oronde Sharif, African Studies Dept, University of Pittsburgh

On many occasions, Shona shared the stage with Gaby Muzela, who interacted with the audiences.

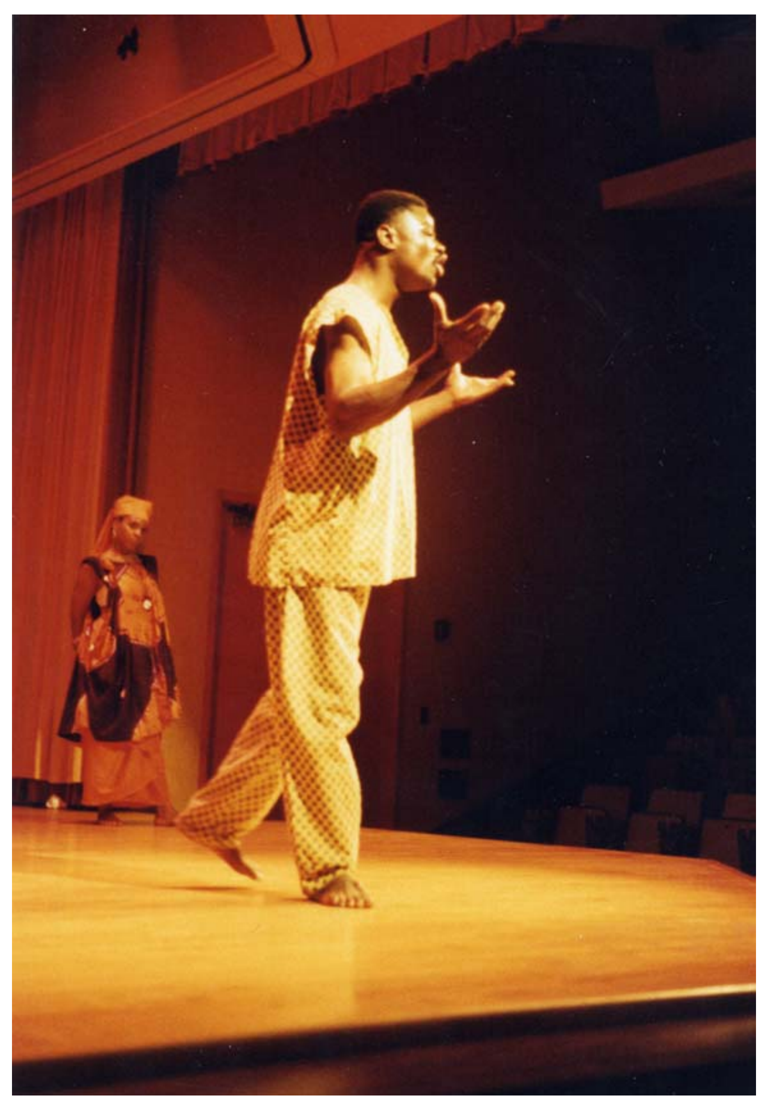

Figure 34: Gaby Muzela and Shona Sharif explaining African music and dance to the audience. Photo courtesy of Oronde Sharif, Africana Studies, University of Pittsburgh

Tony "Nadiya" Stoyers, another important figure in African American dance in Pittsburgh, joined Umoja in order to add dance techniques from Central Africa to her mostly West African repertoire. Although she has performed in solo, or with her own groups, Nadiya Stoyers remained attached to Umoja for many years. She enjoyed the audience participation part of the performance where she played leading roles.

The drummers of Umoja have influenced local drummers including George Jones, Cecil Washington, Thomas Chatman, and many others who interacted with the company. We cannot

ignore many talented young performers who became African music and dance enthusiasts during Umoja's performances and workshops at schools in which they were students. Children who discover the beauty of African performing arts at the early age very often want to go beyond discovery and learn to become performers and experts themselves.

By its presence and activities, Umoja has changed the artistic atmosphere of the city by influencing other organizations that do not concentrate on African performing arts. From the Pittsburgh Symphony to the Pittsburgh Ballet Theater, composers and choreographers have been influenced. Umoja's performers have been invited to collaborate in special projects such as the inclusion of African drumming in Western classical music, jazz, and African dance in Western ballet. The multicultural and intercultural atmosphere of the 1990s was instrumental in this process, because it allowed people from different backgrounds and cultures to come together and share their performing arts experiences. In the popular category, beside the success of Jim Donovan's Rusted Root band that was created with the inspiration from Umoja, there have been many instances where bandleaders would like to have drummers from Umoja to provide African drumming.

In the classical genre, there are many examples of these collaborations, the first being Umoja's participation in Pittsburgh's premiere of David Fanshawe's African Sanctus performed by the Pittsburgh Symphony Orchestra's Pops in 1998. The Mary Miller Dance Company, which specializes in modern dance, has collaborated with Umoja in presenting intercultural dance workshops that included African and Western dance movements.

In another major collaboration, the River City Brass Band included Umoja in its 2001 concert series to perform a piece called *"Mbonda Na Mabina"* [in Lingala meaning "drums and dance"]. David Stokes, the composer of the piece, was moved and inspired by the collaboration

between Umoja and the Pittsburgh Symphony Orchestra's Pops, so that he wrote the piece based on African drums and dance. As Umoja toured with the River City Brass Band, it became the attraction of the audiences. In these kinds of collaborations, the host group would usually perform a set by itself, then after the intermission, Umoja would plays some of its own pieces, and at the end the host group would join for the finale, which is the collaboration piece.

Collaborations like these have impacted audiences that are used not only to a certain type of music, but also to certain behavior, especially when attending classical music concerts. Many are not used to see African drummers and dancers sharing a stage with their beloved classical music orchestras. For many in the audiences, those were only windows of discovery that allowed them to taste performing arts forms from Africa. Performers of Umoja learned new performing techniques as they interacted with performers from the companies mentioned above. For example, when performing collaborative pieces, they had to learn how to perform with a conductor, which is unusual in African traditional music. When performing with modern dancers, they had to limit their improvisations to a minimum in order to keep all the movements intact as rehearsed with the other dancers who are not used to African dance concepts.

6.3. INFLUENCE ON PATRONAGE

The changing role of patronage and music in western society has been a major factor in the establishment of performing troupes such as Umoja. These performing troupes play an important role in affecting the economy of cities or areas in which they have been established. As Joseph Harris has stated, "Diasporas develop and reinforce images and ideas about

themselves and their original homelands, as well as affect the economies, politics, and social dynamics of both the homeland and the host country or area."[57]

By creating Umoja African Arts Company in Pittsburgh, its founders have made African music and culture available to the Pittsburgh community. As we have seen with the performers, the presence of Umoja in town has saved a lot of money to the presenters of its performances. With the growing demand in the music and dance of Africa in many venues and contexts, organizations in cities without established African performing ensembles bring professional groups or individuals from other cities, or even from out of the country, spending a lot of money in transportation, accommodations, and performers' fees.

Organizers of arts festivals, various museums, school districts and other private organizations have found it very convenient to use local performers capable of presenting what audiences desire from Africa. Thousands of dollars could easily be reduced to a few hundreds, thanks to the availability of local African performers who could provide what professional African music troupes usually do.

By bringing Africa to American cities, performing troupes such as Umoja not only help reduce cost for various presenters, but they also keep the African culture alive by the continuous activities of local performers, especially in schools. While touring professional troupes of African music and dance such as Les Ballets Africains, Les Amazones, and individuals such as Mamady Keita and others can fascinate audiences by displaying high quality performing arts of Africa, they cannot provide sustainable techniques to curious members of the audiences that see them only at one performance. However, thanks to the development in technology and the

[57] Joseph E. Harris, "The Dynamics of the Global African Diaspora," in *The African Diaspora*, edited by Alusine Jalloh and Stephen E. Maizlish, Arlington, TX: Texas A&M University Press, 1996.

facility of publishing books and other didactic materials, many people are learning indirectly by listening to audio recordings and watching videos produced by these professional artists.

Also, collaboration between professional touring and locally established artists is helpful in cutting costs to the presenters. For example, a well-known artist such as Mamady Keita may be invited to travel to a city such as Pittsburgh to perform—which he did for the first time in February 2005—but instead of bringing his entire troupe, he would travel alone and perform with local musicians.

6.3.1. Influence on Funding Organizations

It is not enough for a performing group to have good performers and a repertoire in order to survive, especially in a city such as Pittsburgh. One needs funding to survive, especially when operating at the professional level. Because of its many services in the Pittsburgh community, Umoja has improved the level of its patronage. It has also developed a supportive audience, which has interacted with its artists. Nketia has remarked that audience development has become critical in some areas of contemporary performing arts, not because audiences never existed in traditional societies but because new factors have entered into the picture. Listing these factors, he points out:

> Of course, venues with captive audiences exist in contemporary society, such as the clientele of social areas like hotels, night clubs, congregations at church services, or those who go to parties and contemporary life-cycle events—naming ceremonies, weddings, and funerals. New situations have arisen in which the relationship between performers and their audiences is no longer defined solely by events or community ties as we find in traditional society, but by the art form itself and, sometimes, also by the particular exponent of it (i.e., the artist or performer him/herself.[58]

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[58] J.H. Kwabena Nketia, "National Development and the Performing Arts of Africa, Op. Cit., p. 147.

In the modern/western society, one goes to a musical concert, a dance concert, or a theater. However, going to these events can be a luxury to many who cannot afford it. On one hand, performing groups rely on producers, promoters, and managers to bring their music to the public. On the other, audiences rely on the same people in order to connect with the artists. While there are individual producers, owners, and promoters who play an important role in maintaining performing groups, there are institutions, both governmental and private, that have emerged and become indispensable in the promotion of arts organizations in the United States and in other countries.

The survival of a performing troupe specializing in African music and dance in the United States depends not only on the hard work of the performers, but also on how the troupe is funded and managed in order to sustain its work. Without help from funding organizations, great talents are condemned to "die" artistically. In order to survive in today artistic environment, one has to choose between two different roads, one being the commercial and the other being public funding.

The impact of global commercialization of music and cognate arts on the modern world has produced a new crop of owners, managers, and promoters of contemporary popular bands. It has also influenced the music industry as a whole in the ways it does business. Many individual entrepreneurs and companies have engaged into owning and promoting the works of individual artists or performing groups of their choice for profit. While commercial promoters work easily with popular musicians because they could benefit quickly with their product, they are reluctant in promoting traditional music and culture. Performing groups and individual artists that focus on education rely on funding from governmental and non-governmental organizations, whose focus is on facilitating cultural enrichment through performing arts.

Umoja has been fortunate to be one of the beneficiaries of grants from local and national funding organizations including Alcoa Foundation, Allegheny Regional Asset District (ARAD), Program to Aid Citizen Enterprise (PACE), Pennsylvania Council on the Arts (PCA), Multicultural Arts Initiative (MCAI), Pennsylvania Performing Arts on Tour, and the National Endowment for the Arts. Each funding organization has guidelines and requirements that grant seekers must follow in order to qualify for funding. These requirements include filling out grant proposal forms that outline conditions for funding, and financial reports showing how the funds would be used. The requirements also include the establishment of a trusted body such as a board of directors capable of accounting for all the funding, especially the non-for profit organizations. The continuous support from these funding organizations has helped Umoja maintain its status in playing a more active role in public education and outreach activities.

7. CHAPTER SEVEN: SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

The contribution of African music expressions to the development of the American musical heritage has been documented and studied by many scholars. Although most studies on the impact of Africa on the American music experience have focused on its resilience on the African American music practices and the journalistic accounts on touring or resident African pop musicians, less attention is paid to the role of emerging music ensembles in the reshaping of identity and the seeding of new opportunities for musicianship and people's participation in the African music experience in a globalized world.

The recontextualization of African music has been practiced in many ways for long time both in Africa and in the Diaspora. African performers in the United States have been able not only to perform music and dance they could remember from their countries but also to create new pieces based on the material drawn from their cultural baggage. These new creations and adaptations are made with the American audiences in mind, because of the new environment and the new opportunities the field of performing arts of Africa provides.

It was necessary for this study to look into the interconnections of African and pan-African musical experiences in Pittsburgh in order to observe the similarities and differences in the interpretation and promotion of a shared heritage. The involvement of African Americans in the promotion of African music has helped new African immigrants build their cultural confidence in the new world. There are many examples of African professional performers who were encouraged to come to the United States by prominent African American artists. One of

them, Katherine Dunham, is credited to have invited the Senegalese *djembe* player Mor thiam and convinced him to stay. She was also instrumental in helping Ladji Camara, who was the first to introduce *djembe* techniques to the American public.

The work of the African pioneers such as Asadata Dafora, Babatunde Olatunji, and others in establishing a new tradition of African music and dance in the United States is very important as described in Chapter two. These pioneers would not be successful without the support of African American artists and public. By bringing Africa to America through their work, African performers provided opportunities for sharing their creative experience, for participating in music as a form of community experience, and for using music as an avenue for the expression of group sentiment as stated by Nketia.[59]

Both Africans and African Americans share the conceptualization of music making as a participatory group activity, with African Americans willing to acquire fresh cultural material from Africans. African music and dance is increasingly on demand at various American venues, including schools, churches, festivals, museums, and private parties, etc. This increase in demand, which cannot be satisfied by touring professional African performing troupes has made American-based performers of African music and dance busier. This is why performing troupes such as Umoja African Arts Company are successful, not only in big cities such as New York where Dafora and Olatunji began their work, but also in cities such as Pittsburgh. Like many before them, the founders and performers of Umoja African Arts Company have assumed a large ambassadorial task of preserving, performing, and promoting an understanding of African music and cultures in Pittsburgh and in other American cities.

Through the three phases of its development as a professional African music and dance troupe in Pittsburgh, Umoja has shown the importance of individual performers in the success of

[59] J. H. Kwabena Nketia, *The Music of Africa*, Op. cit. p. 22.

such troupe. As Nettl has pointed out, the role of the individual performer is paramount in a study of African conceptualizations of music and dance behavior.[60] Both the founders of Umoja and those who joined them brought their individual characters that were important in shaping the music style and the group's identity. The core group of Congolese founders of Umoja became a mobilizing force that rallied members of the African community and African Americans who joined them in creating and maintaining a performing troupe that became a symbol of African culture in Pittsburgh.

The formative years of Umoja were marked by the sharing of creative ideas among members of the group, and also between members of Umoja and guest performers, some of who were not necessarily from the African continent. Performance practices in the fourth chapter revealed the obstacles the founders of Umoja faced in the choice of musical tunes and drumming styles that would be appealing to the American audiences. Since Umoja was not only a professional performing troupe of African music and dance but also a group that was engaged in presenting and teaching African performing arts to various audiences, its members were obligated to research, learn and master those performing arts in order to play both roles with confidence.

This is why performers of Umoja had to collect proper musical instruments and costumes for a better representation of African music and dance in the United States.

[60] Bruno Nettl, "The Concept of Preservation in Ethnomusicology," *More than Drumming: Essays on African and Afro-Latin American Music*, edited by I. V. Jackson, Westport, Ct.: Greenwood Press, 1985, p.18.

7.1. ACHIEVEMENTS

From its beginnings as a humble performing ensemble, Umoja African Arts Company has grown to become arguably the premiere African music and dance group in Pittsburgh. Several factors have contributed to this fact. Its longevity, the number and quality of its performances recognized by the significant amounts of public funding received as well as their positive reception in the arts community including music and dance critics. Umoja's educational programming is not limited to the fundamentals of music performance, although this is an area of primary concern, the work of the ensemble addresses current issues in educational practices such as multiculturalism and alternative forms of learning as well. Umoja's expertise has been sought out by educators in the secondary school level and at institutions of higher learning. As a result, many people have been introduced to their forms of African traditional and contemporary music.

7.2. HOW AFRICAN IS THE MUSIC AND DANCE PERFORMED BY UMOJA

The recontextualization process raises the question of authenticity to the extent that one can ask about how African is the music of Africa performed in the United States. After examining the three phases of its development as a professional African music and dance troupe, it is important to ask questions such as (1)"is the music and dance presented by Umoja African?" and if the answer to this question is yes, (2)"how African is the music." These are interesting questions that need to be examined in the light of the recontextualization of the music and dance presented in this case study. Answers to these questions will show the importance of this study in the field of ethnomusicology, and open new questions and suggestions for future research on the subject.

Before answering question (1), one needs to ask the following question: "has there been any African music and dance performed in the United States?" The answer to this question is obviously "yes." As we have shown in the introduction and in chapter two, African music has been performed in the United States for many years. It has been a source of many African American musical genres that have become the mainstream of American music. African music has been performed in the United States by professional troupes and individuals from the African continent, and also by United States based performers who have created and established performing troupes of African music and dance. Thus, there has been a tradition of African music and dance in the United States. This tradition has been maintained because of the importance given to African music and dance in the educational system. It has also been maintained because of the attachment of a considerable number of African Americans (who constitute the largest minority group in the United States) to African culture.

The answer to question (2) "how African is the music?" depends to the person who is answering it. One cannot dispute the Africaness of the music performed by Umoja or any other group as being African, since most of African music presented in this country has always been out of its original contexts. When we consider African music on the African continent, we find that very few researchers have recorded music and dance in their contexts. There have been instances where performers were asked to gather at a certain venue and perform a certain type of repertoire at the request of the researcher. Although efforts are made to replicate performances in their original contexts, the recorded material ends up being the de-contextuatized music, most of which is stored in American libraries and museums. Music and dance troupes from Senegal, Guinea, Benin, Sierra Leone, Congo, Cote D'Ivoire, have traveled all over the world to present

various forms of African performing arts. They are often sent abroad to promote international understanding and cooperation through artistic exchange as described by Judith Hanna.[61]

However, in their efforts to make their national troupes more professional, governments sometimes hire professional musicians and choreographers, some of them westerners or western-trained Africans to direct these companies. By doing so, these music directors and choreographers bring their influence, which is mostly western, to the performances. Is the music African? The answer is *yes* because it cannot be European, Asian, or American.

In this study, it was important to differentiate professional African music and dance troupes such as Les Ballets Africains, the National Dance Troupes of Senegal, Mali, and Cote D'Ivoire from American based troupes. African performers based in the United States or Europe do not simply repeat music and dance from their countries, but they are able to create new compositions based on the artistic materials they can remember from those countries. In this study, we have seen this in the works of pioneers such as Assadata Dafora and Babatunde Olatundji, who have composed new pieces fit for American audiences.

African performers from different countries sometimes unite to produce intercultural African pieces, because a nationalistic vision of music and dance can coexist within an international framework and can serve to enhance intercultural relations.[62] The experience of Umoja has shown that performers from Central Africa can perform alongside performers from West, East and South Africa and produce musical and dance pieces with strong African identity. The same collaboration is sometimes extended to other members of the African Diaspora, including African American and Caribbean.

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[61] Judith Lynne Hanna, *The Performer-Audience Connection: Emotion to Metaphor in Dance and Society,* Austin: University of Texas Press, 1983, p.22.
[62] Tracy D. Snipe, "African Dance: Bridges to Humanity," *African Dance: An Artistic, Historical and Philosophical Inquiry*, in Kariamu Welsh Asante, ed., Trenton, NJ: Africa World Press, p.71.

Thus, the music and dance performed by Umoja is African because of the people involved in music making.

7.3. UMOJA AS A MODEL

Umoja African arts Company has been a model for other companies specializing in African music and dance. In facts, former members of Umoja have used the experience in Pittsburgh in creating performing groups that reflect Umoja. As mentioned before, Elie Kihonia formed Afrika Yetu in Pittsburgh, Leon Mawengo formed Lisanga, Bofenda Ilonga formed Eteko Bonyoma in Philadelphia, Kasa Panzu founded the Kasa Panzu Company, and Koblo Kibul founded Fung Africa in Atlanta, GA. Umoja can be a model not only for troupes in the United States, but also in Africa. The experience of Umoja African Arts Company demonstrates how the contemporary relevance of African traditions can be strengthened. The case of Patricia Opondo's experience at the University of Durban in South Africa is very interesting in showing that Umoja's model can be applied on the African continent, especially in the institution of higher education.

Thus it is important that music scholars begin to look into recontextualization of African music, not only in the West, but also in Africa. This research should not be limited to African scholars only, but should be open to a wider scholarship

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