

REPORT FOR SEMPRE TRUSTEES

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I have had an immensely interesting, productive and enjoyable four months in Kenya. Through my research project into Kenyan music education, I have been able to meet with teachers, academics, students and musicians from a variety of backgrounds and institutions and have gained a real insight into music education in Kenya and the music scene in general in Nairobi. It was very gratifying to find that every person I approached with regard to the research was immediately helpful and generous with their time and contacts.

I started my time in Kenya with visits to Nairobi secondary schools to meet the Head of Music and view the music department. These ranged from the stunning facilities at Brookhouse School to the fledgling but expanding department at Starehe Girls' School. Sadly I came across a few instances of secondary schools with no music department at all, but this had not stopped those students with an interest in music from picking up the instruments they found lying around and teaching themselves, in one instance even forming their own self-rehearsed school band... Pupils were studying for either the KCSE exam in Music or the British GCSE. The focus of my research was on the use of African approaches as well as Western classical music and I found that the teachers had varying experiences with indigenous music. Those who had attended schools in the country rather than the city, or who had particularly enlightened teachers themselves, had experienced indigenous music in school and the community and introduced it to their own pupils. Sadly, since music as a subject at primary school has been made non-compulsory and is not examined, there is a view amongst some teachers and parents that it is unimportant and unnecessary. I hope that some of the research undertaken globally into the benefits of music to the development of young people in particular will begin to filter through. There are a number of projects that are working to change this perception.

I visited Kenyatta University (KU) on several occasions and was very grateful for the assistance of a number of academics and students from this institution, both through personal meetings and the sharing of their research papers via email. KU students tend to become music teachers primarily. There is no established career route in Kenya for young musicians wanting to become professional performers, particularly in Western classical music, and therefore of

course a lack of role models and acceptance of music performance and/or composition as a suitable profession. I also met a professional obokano (a traditional stringed instrument) player at KU who tutors music students – as part of their curriculum they study an African folk instrument. However I learned from a student that the lessons are not always regular, depending upon the availability of the tutors and their professional commitments.

The problems with performance training were echoed by the Director of Kenya Conservatoire. This institution, 60 years old this year, offers music lessons to individuals and is based in its own premises with around 8 practice room/teaching spaces in the centre of Nairobi. The teachers are a mixture of Kenyans who have studied outside of the country and European music graduates, usually in Nairobi teaching full-time in a school and working at the Conservatoire during the weekend. The Director had some forthright views on the state and status of music education in Kenya. I was able to attend a performance of the Conservatoire's annual Christmas musical, 'One King', which was a fully-staged presentation in a school theatre, with a large chorus (open to anyone to participate) and orchestra made up of Conservatoire students. It was an excellent show performed to a high standard by committed participants and made me feel optimistic about musical activities in Nairobi!

I was able to get involved with the recently-formed National Youth Orchestra of Kenya, meeting with the Director of the Board of Trustees, the Artistic Director and participants and attending auditions and the second NYOK course. It was refreshing to speak to the young musicians about their experiences of music, both Western classical and African. They had a more open-minded and optimistic approach. I was asked by the NYOK organisers to write an independent evaluation report of the pilot course (for their current and future funders), after reviewing feedback forms from the staff and students, video clips, photos and meeting notes. It was interesting to note that nearly all the young musicians suggested incorporating Kenyan music and/or instruments into their repertoire and ensemble, as a way of making the NYOK unique. There was a strong desire to represent their country and their cultures (Kenya has 42 tribes – one of the difficulties facing music teachers wanting to use indigenous music is the sheer number and diversity of tribal traditions).

I also visited a community music project based in Korogocho slum in Nairobi, called Ghetto Classics. This project was set up one year ago, through a collaboration between an organisation called The Art of Music (the organisation behind NYOK, incidentally) and the

Catholic Church in Korogocho. Once a fortnight, around 25 teenagers are loaned brass and percussion instruments from the Conservatoire and receive free group tuition. I attended the celebration of the group's one year anniversary and heard them play hymn and folk tunes. What was really striking was the commitment of the teenagers, the seriousness with which they approached the project and their pride in themselves. There is clear evidence that their school grades have improved, they are calmer, more confident and more optimistic about the future. The next step for this project is the instigation of a 2 year course, based in Korogocho, providing a thorough grounding in all aspects of music performance, history, composition and analysis. The UN is now interested in supporting this project, through its 'Safer Cities' programme and it looks like exciting times ahead.

Finally, I made contact with a number of musicians making their living through gigs in and around Nairobi. In talking to the members of one band about their musical education, it was telling that they had all grown up with church and family music-making but that formal training through school had not been a factor in their choosing music as a career. In fact they had either picked up an instrument and taught themselves, using the internet, CDs and radio and then joining a band to stretch themselves further, or had simply 'fallen' into the profession through an extension of their amateur musical activities. In talking to these musicians about Kenyan music, they raised the point that there is new music springing up across Nairobi, specific not only to the country and the city, but even to various districts in Nairobi itself, for example, South B hip-hop.

Aside from the research activities, I also attended a concert by Nairobi Orchestra, a piano recital at the French Cultural Centre, the Advent Service at All Saints' Cathedral, plenty of gigs with local bands at venues around the city, and was able to visit Mombasa and Lake Nakuru National Park.

I will remain in touch with many of the people I met in Kenya and especially with the NYOK and Ghetto Classics projects. I am working on plans to assist these projects through links with my institution, Birmingham Conservatoire, and our family charity The Martyn Donaldson Music Trust. I will be sending a copy of my research findings to Professor Emily Akuno, who greatly assisted with defining the project in the early stages, and am in touch with the editor of Music Teacher magazine about an article. I have also submitted an article for my University's news magazine.

I would like to thank the Trustees of SEMPRES for enabling me to take unpaid leave and spend time in Kenya. It was a life-changing and life-enhancing experience for me and I am so grateful for your support. The contacts I made and the information gathered will undoubtedly lead to greater connections between organisations here in the UK and fellow musicians and music educators in Kenya. I am sure that my visit was only the beginning of these collaborations and there are interesting times to come. Many thanks once again for this wonderful opportunity.

Stephanie Donaldson

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ghetto classics



SD and David Ralak, violinist with NYOK



Kenya conservatoire



ghetto classics



ghetto classics



Calabash Band perform during a TV recording



obokano player Dominic at Kenyatta University



conservatoire musical



SD at Lake Nakuru National Park