

THE REVIVAL AND REVITALIZATION  
OF MUSICAL BOW PRACTICE  
IN  
SOUTH AFRICA

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A dissertation submitted to the Faculty of Humanities in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the Degree of Masters of Music by performance and dissertation.

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## DECLARATION

I hereby declare that this thesis, submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the Degree of Master of Music at the University of Cape Town, has not been submitted by me previously for a degree at another University.

SIGNATURE:

DATE: 05/09/2025

University of Cape Town

## DEDICATION

For

Mr. N. R. Mandela, Mrs. G. Machel

And

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## ABSTRACT

This dissertation is a formal study of musical bow revivals in South Africa, based on an assessment of the instruments' historical and current usage, and functions. This study is also the inevitable result of my responses to certain musical experiences during the past three years, and which generated in me a personal commitment to the practice of African cultural music, which I 'discovered' through studies with Dizu Plaatjies and other African music specialists, who also speak through this study. My growing interest drew me to musical bows, which have become my principal instruments for musical compositions, and also personal expression.

The primary focus of the dissertation is current bow practice in the Eastern and Western Cape, and certain areas in KwaZulu Natal, and personal interaction with people who became my main informants and teachers. Their separate individual viewpoints are presented in this study.

The Preface states the research aims and objectives, the research areas and basic methodology;

Chapter 1 provides a narrative account of fieldwork and my interaction with my chief informants, who make and play different types of musical bows;

Chapter 2 and 3 concentrate on these musical bows, each one being treated with some historical depth and contextual practice, and with references to the standard published literature on these instruments.

Chapter 4 is in two Parts:

Part 1 present short profiles of the African musicians who contributed to the research and who have for many years been very active in musical bow revival;

Part 2 describes my own aspirations and efforts as a composer and performer of African music, which I arrange for larger ensembles of African instruments, including musical bows, and also vocalists and dancers, and the contributions of my musical group, Amabal'engwe, in the final collaboration process;

The dissertation concludes with some introspection on the present state of cultural music in South Africa, and offers some personal insights on the way ahead for African music.

Being essentially conservative in musical orientation, I see Africa's largely untouched cultural music as a rich source yet to be fully explored. This is why it became such an inspiration for my own musical ventures. The way ahead seems full of promise.

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“MAY GOD BLESS YOU ALL”

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## PREFACE

In writing this Preface, I found myself constantly pausing to think on events which stimulated my interest in African musical bows. I grew up in a rural area in the Eastern Cape, historical home of the Xhosa-speaking people, and in which so much Xhosa traditional music has always been actively practiced. It seems hard to believe that musical bow performance never came into my social experiences. But this is because there were no active performers around me, or if there were, I was not aware of them, being concerned with the daily routine of growing up and going to school, and attending social events of the community and the church. It was only after I registered in the Honours programme of the College of Music of the University of Cape Town, that I found myself among a handful of individuals who not only play musical bows, but have established reputations locally and abroad as African traditionalist musician, Dizu Plaatjies, his clan relative Madosini Manqineni, acknowledged 'Veteran' Xhosa musician, and professional colleague Mantombi Matotiyane. Through these individuals, and Dizu in particular, I was also introduced to a very wide range of African traditions from inside and beyond South Africa. You cannot imagine my astonishment when I first learned that the **umrhubhe** and **uhadi** bows were Xhosa cultural instruments, of my own musical heritage. I am deeply indebted to Dizu for opening up for me the rich treasury of our classical Xhosa music, but I am certain that even he could not really appreciate the depth of my ignorance of its principal sound instruments, and their socio-cultural meaning and value, just over three years ago. And when I had access to a CD release of Madosini's compositions, and to the amount of literature on Xhosa and other African music, my 'conversion' to African music was finally completed. Today my musical experiences are moving among many African musics, but they are strongly rooted in Xhosa musical culture.

I have been studying musical bow technique since I came to the University of Cape Town, and the musical bow has become for me the major instrument for musical expression and composition. Although the bows I studied vary in their structural details, their techniques are largely circumscribed, and their general usage allows for some experimentation and innovation, especially since technology has opened the way

for creating, using and transmitting 'small' music (such as bow music) so that its essential elements - harmonic partials - can now be heard in a concert hall, when previously these were heard principally by the bow player. This has allowed me to explore a major aspect of my research - what I call 'experimental composition for bows', using several such instruments in ensemble, and even as part of a mixed ensemble. Multiple bow performance (involving 2-3 bow types) has been reported, commonly for braced gourd bows, (among the Zulu), and among the Nguni generally, choral dance songs and musical bow songs shared a common repertoire. Hansen has given a very detailed account of the principles of form and structure underlying all Xhosa music sung, and played on bows, and which are also linked by the same harmonic intervallic relationships (1981:665-683). She has also given an analysis of a performance, in which a personal mouth bow song suddenly acquired another, Beer song, sung along with it, and which was introduced spontaneously into the bow song performance by a group of onlookers,(1981:673). Music technology has also opened up a wealth of possibilities for African music composition, using assorted instruments which were never traditionally combined. In this dissertation, my intension is to provide a survey of current musical bow usage in South Africa, in specific areas, and focusing on certain bow types. I think that this study is a logical and much-needed continuation of all the previous South African bow studies that have gone before.

Musical bows have been reported in many parts of the world, as H.Balfour's early and comprehensive study has shown (1899). Successive studies of African musical bows made during the twentieth century provide ample evidence that South Africa had the greatest variety of musical bows, used in one or another form. They were either braced or unbraced, and gourd-resonated, and struck (being used for self accompanied song), or unbraced and mouth-resonated and sounded by either plucking or by friction, but in all cases, finger-stopping, and the selective amplification of harmonic partials to create melodies were basic to the bow technique. (The unique **gora** or so-called "wind bow", of the Khoekhoe, and its cognates among the Bantu - speaking people of South Africa, remains unique in this regard, being sounded by breath-control and involving no finger-stopping).

Although bow usage in this country declined as a result of the effects of westernization and education and socio-economic changes, among certain cultural groups in which

women were principal bow players .e.g. the Xhosa, and the South Sotho, bow practice never really died out, as was the case among the Zulu. In 1975 David Rycroft reported that the Zulu Umntwana Constance Magogo kaDinuzulu (dec.1986) appeared to be the only remaining player of the classical unbraced, struck gourd bow, **ugubhu** (1975/6:41). (Ethnomusicologist and Nguni linguist Rycroft was the Princess's biographer, transcriber and analyst of her **ugubhu** bow songs, (See also Rycroft 1966; 1971; 1975 and 1982). However, in 1982, Hansen witnessed two elderly Zulu women playing this bow, and who were well acquainted with the style although they no longer played regularly. They performed at an Ethnomusicology Symposium held at the University in Durban. Principal musicological studies of musical bows in southern Africa have come from P R Kirby ( 1934, 1953, 1965) whose collection of musical instruments housed in the University of Cape Town's College of Music contains specimens of virtually every variety of bow. Hansen (1981), Joseph (1983), and Dargie (1988) have all written quite extensively on Nguni (Xhosa and Zulu) bows, and given insights into the meaning and value of this music in their respective cultures. Other literature on musical bows in Southern Africa has come from England (1967 on Bushman bows), Johnston (1972 on Tsonga bows), Kruger (1988 on Venda bows) and Wells (1990 on South Sotho Bows), while Gerhard Kubik has focused on these chordophones in many different cultural settings e.g. in South-West Angola (1975/6), in Malawi (1987) and in Mozambique (1999). More recently Hansen (1999-2000) conducted a research with a Zulu player of an unbraced 'scraped' notched bow called **isizembe**, a bow type strongly linked with the Tsonga people, (and the Venda), and which has not previously been reported among the Zulu. Its Zulu name suggests a derivation from the name of the Tsonga cognate-**xizambi** ( cf.Venda **tshizambi** ), and it is possible that the Zulu instrument is a borrowing from the Tsonga (**Tembe**) who are situated in north-east KwaZulu, and over the border in Mozambique.

From Hansen's accounts of experiences during her initial, and later field work among the Xhosa-speakers (1969-1973; 1974-79: and 1983 and 1986), there is evidence that Xhosa bow players were still active in the Eastern Cape, but they were largely known only to their immediate communities, and some of them had continued to play bows associated with their single status some time after they had married and taken up the instrument that is appropriate and customary for married women – **uhadi** - the Xhosa equivalent of the Zulu **ugubhu**. Hansen's field stints among the Zulu and also the

Swazi did not produce any bow players, apart from the player of **isizembe**, who is a man of about 37 years of age, and is known for mouth bow playing in the region in which Zulu ceremonial music (song and dance) is very strong, and in which he also excels. This player became one of my teachers and informants. Kruger's field work among the Venda also identified noted bow players, but they were well over forty years of age, and indeed senior citizens. In 1974 a Xhosa female bow player was 'discovered' by a recording unit at her home in the Eastern Cape, and she generously obliged them with performances of bow songs (with-gourd-and-mouth-resonated types), for which she was paid a sum of R1 per song. The songs were later grossly exploited by the music industry, and although this established a deep mistrust of music publishers generally, in the bow player, she later went on to become recognized as the 'Queen of Xhosa Music' and an internationally acclaimed African traditionalist musician. Madosini Manqineni, who along with another exceptional bow player Mantombi Matotiyane (also the subject of an M.Mus thesis), and the Ngqoko ladies of Cacadu district (first 'discovered' by D Dargie) passed their knowledge and expertise in Xhosa bow songs to others, notably Dizu Laatjies, former founder and leader of the group Amampondo, and also an internationally applauded African musician in his own right, who has performed in more than 87 countries. Dizu's position in the realm of Xhosa bow playing is somewhat unusual and interesting; he chose to become proficient on instruments traditionally reserved for females, and because of his position as head of African Music at the University of Cape Town, he has contributed enormously to the revival of bow performance in this country, and especially among the youth. The same may be said for Clement Sithole, a priest in the Catholic Church who has consistently maintained and promoted the Zulu **umakhweyana** tradition. All these people are over 36 years of age and so belong to the mature and experienced class of musicians.

## CHAPTER ONE

### MY FIELD WORK

I commenced field work in July 2003, during the mid-year recess, and, on the advice of my mother, I approached a relative who also lives in my home village Qunu, situated some forty kilometers from Umthatha. She is Nozalela Mandela, who once had a reputation as an exceptional **umrhubhe** mouth bow player. I asked my sister Tandeka to accompany me because I needed someone to videotape my interview(s) (provided that Nozalela Mandela gave me permission to do so). However, on arriving at her home, I found her to be unwell, and suffering from a severe bout of 'flu. She told me that she was unable to grant me an interview, and felt too ill to play her instrument for me but she referred me to another lady in the vicinity - Nobetha Nqambothi by name - who 'knows all that must be known' about musical bows, including the gourd bow **uhadi**, the 'classical' instrument of Xhosa married women. What is more, this lady was also an exponent of the **isitlotolo** (jaw harp), an instrument favoured by most **umrhubhe** players and employing the same basic playing technique of partials amplification via the player's mouth and cheek cavity. Before we left, Nozalela Mandela told me that she would invite some former musical bow players to her home on the following day, when we would be able to talk to them. My sister and I then made our way to Nobetha Nqambothi's home, where we introduced ourselves and made my request for an interview. She was obviously prepared for this visit and she agreed to my request with a stipulation, saying: 'I will do this if you buy me **ikhamba**'

**Ikhamba** is an earthen pot for carrying beer, so this was a way of requesting a quantity of traditional beer – **umqombothi** - (made from stamped maize) - which fills such a pot. I did this willingly (in our culture beer is the common expected form of reward for music, and hospitality, among other things), and once we were seated inside her home, she answered all the questions I put to her. But she declined to play the instrument, saying that she was

'too old' and could not recall exactly how it should be played. From this I concluded that she had not played the musical instrument for some time, and was out of practice. At the end of the visit we thanked her and returned home. On the following day again we visited Nozalela Mandela who, true to her word, had summoned several former bow players, and who were assembled at her house. They were festively dressed in their traditional regalia - eight in number - and shortly after our arrival they launched into a routine of lively performances of different genres of Xhosa music: e. g. singing

- **lingoma zomtshato** (wedding songs)
- **Ingoma yomngqungqo** (the ritual circle dance song of girl's puberty celebrations) (**ukuthombisa**).
- **Ingoma ezombelwa xa abafana bephuma esuthwini** (songs sung when initiated young men come out of the initiation lodge).
- **Ingoma zotywala** -Beer songs, in particular those performed at work parties (**amalima**), which are held after people have completed the community work like hoeing or weeding a field. (As noted by Hansen, this description covers several kinds of 'Beer songs' which are performed at different social events involving the distribution and consumption of beer) (1981:88). Beer songs nowadays often employ a drum to supplement the traditional handclapping, and the vocal style of **ukungqokola** is also freely used. (This is a singing style in which the singer sings as throatily as he/she can (cf. Hansen1982: 127; 128) and is a means of creating timbral variations in vocal music. It is a way of making 'a taste of a song'.
- **Ingoma zentanjane** ('songs of the girl initiate') being choral dance songs which differ significantly from the style of the ritual circle dances cited above.
- **Ingoma zomxhentso zotywala** (dance songs of beer)
- **Ingoma zamagqhirha** ('diviner's [séance] songs')

Having performed the different styles of Xhosa vocal choral music in sessions, some of the women took up an **umrhubhe** bow, and in turn gave performances of songs typically performed with this friction-sounded instrument e.g. **ingoma yomjeko** ('follow-my-

leader' dance song) also called an **imbutho** song i.e. a 'processional' song (that brings people together; collects them), in which the **umrhubhe** player leads a group of girls who sing and dance in file behind her; **Ingoma yentonjane** – a song of the girl initiate, with **umrhubhe** setting and vocal and dancing provided by a participating chorus.

At the end of these performances, I asked whether there was someone who could play a song with the **uhadi** gourd bow, but no-one came forward to do so. I was told that the women who once played this instrument were now deceased, with the exception of Nobetha Nqambothi, who no longer played because of a dislocated shoulder, which constantly troubled her. At the end of this very enjoyable session, I was told that I might learn more about the gourd bow at Emgqumo village, which is located very near my home village Qunu. My sister and I went straight to that village, where I sought out Nosekeni Dyasi. Since our arrival was totally unexpected, we found her in the process of brewing **umqombothi** with a group of women and so she was unable to give time to talk with me but listened to my enquiries about Xhosa musical bows, of which she had seen some specimens, but never really played. She sent me to another lady in the village, MamCirha by name, who showed surprise at my interest in bows, which were 'things no-one cares about anymore' and she also could not help me and sent me back to Nosekeni Dyasi, saying that nowadays she listened to radio, and was not interested in those 'old fashioned things'. Furthermore she said (and I think, with her tongue in her cheek) that she would permit me to videotape her, provided it was sent from herself as a message, to Nelson Mandela requesting him to send her **inkam-nkam** (pension money)! Although one might see this as a sharp rebuff, I think that the lady was really being open about her views on the 'things long ago', and their value in the context of the harsh realities of daily life today, especially for rural-based people. Possibly she felt that my interest in musical bows was a privilege, a luxury that most people cannot afford. We parted on good terms and we returned to Nosekeni's home, where I again provided the customary beer to open our interview. It was then that I realized that Nosekeni's attitude towards my request was that of traditional negotiation, because having graciously accepted the beer; she then admitted that she herself was a player of the musical bow. In the long conversation that followed she gave me her perspective on bow technology, which matched that of

Nobetha Nqambothi, although the exact local material used differed according to availability (e.g. the dried grass for the friction stick, or the beater, and the wood for bow staves). For example, in Qunu area the wood of the **umthathi** tree (sneeze wood, McL.-B; 1963:158), is preferred, while at Emgqumo, the wood came from the **umthole** (**umtholo**) tree (cat- thorn tree) McLaren - Bennie 1963:162; Doke and Vilakazi (Z.) 1972: 709, species of hardwood; mimosa, *Acacia caffra*).

Given the structural layout of **uhadi** and the **umrhubhe**, the playing methods are fixed, but differences are evident in the performance styles of the individual players, and especially their use of vocalization, and other melodic methods. In Qunu there were no **umrhubhe** players who employed whistling, whereas this is virtually a trait in **umrhubhe** songs of the Emgqumo people. Nosekeni could not give me any data on the gourd bow **uhadi**, since she had never played it but she told me that MamCira (who had professed ignorance of the ‘old-fashioned things’) could in fact play the gourd bow, but had chosen to disclaim this for reasons of her own. I can only surmise that she had discontinued to do so, because as has been well documented, traditional instruments have long been stigmatized by people as ‘backward’ and ‘primitive’, along with the people who continue to make and play them. Fortunately, this kind of stigmatization is bound to change, given the current revival of musical bows in this country today.

Although I was unsuccessful in my search for **uhadi** practitioners in the month spent in Qunu and surrounding districts, my association with Madosini Manqineni and Mantombi Matoyiyane in Cape Town, who taught me so much, put me in touch with possible bow players in another part of the Eastern Cape- the vicinity of Misty Mount Village in Libode district, Pondoland (Mpondweni). I traveled to this village in August 2004, and there I attracted the curiosity of a traditional healer Dlamini Sibaya, who saw me in the local supermarket, purchasing some provisions. I had my **uhadi** bow with me and this is what caught his attention. He came up to me and we chatted, and on learning about my research project, he directed me to the home of his mother, who plays the musical bows and also the jaw harp. She is Nomandithini Sibaya, and it was initially very difficult to communicate with her because her hearing is severely impaired, but I was able to converse with her through her granddaughter, who is obviously used to speaking up for

her grandmother, who in turn is able to hear her penetrating voice when she enunciates into her ear. The Mpondo cognates of the Thembu bows involve the same playing techniques, but the use of vocalization differs somewhat. The **umrhubhe** players employ a very deep-throated singing which sounds unlike the **ngqokola** that is widely practiced among the Xhosa.

The wood used for the bow staves comes from the local trees, either **umbangandlela** (*Heteromorpha arborescens*. Cham. Et Schlecht), a small tree with yellowish flowers, (Kirby 1934, 1965:201) or the **ulizi** tree. (**Uluzi**-Cape fig tree McLaren-Bennie 1963:191). Nomandithini is a former bow player of some repute, but no longer plays because she is frail in health. She finds it very difficult-if not impossible-to hold the **uhadi** in the required vertical upright position, and to apply the finger-playing and-stopping techniques, for any length of time. But she gave me much information and I am grateful to her for the generosity and interest she showed in my work and my performance skills and ambitions. Considering my Eastern Cape fieldwork in retrospect, it was the least stressful and the most enjoyable. Rapport with the people was almost immediate because they all knew of me, and they welcomed me into their communities and their homes, and they spoke out honestly and informatively, and offered me their hospitality very generously. I felt free to come and go whenever and wherever it suited me, and all this was something I remembered during my fieldwork in KwaZulu-Natal, where I moved among strangers and was subject to certain formalities, and where, not surprisingly, I experienced many setbacks in an environment which was often alienating and frightening. From the outset fieldwork in KwaZulu presented me with a dilemma. Since I knew of no one in the area who was likely to be of some assistance, it seemed logical to begin at Sodwana Bay Lodge, according to the advice of my supervisor, Dr D. D. Hansen who had spent some time there working on a musical ethnography of a Zulu bow player who worked at the lodge as a gardener, and was recognized as a Zulu traditionalist musician in the community. Hansen was due to return to the lodge at a later date, but the violent crimes in the area and some unpleasant experiences forced her to discontinue her research. I decided to stay at the Lodge, and have conversations and music lessons from the musician, Dinga Patson Nxumalo, and I phoned to make

arrangements with him, and with the lodge for my accommodation. But given the time of the year, a season when thousands of tourists flock to the bay, (the resort is noted for its deep-sea diving and fishing), I was unable to obtain accommodation, and so had to put my plans on hold for some time. I was at a complete loss as to what to do next and then, one day, there came to my mind a long-forgotten memory of a Zulu man whom I frequently saw on the Natal Technikon Campus. He was in residence at the Durban YMCA (Young Men's Christian Association), and whenever I saw him he was carrying at least one Zulu gourd bow (as it later turned out the braced type). I also recall him inviting me to attend workshops and lectures on Zulu music, and even offering to teach me to play the instruments, but in those days I had no interest in such music. This picture jogged my memory, and his name came to mind, he was Brother Clement Sithole. However, I did not know his present whereabouts and tried to locate him through the YMCA, who put me onto the University of KwaZulu-Natal, where he often gave lectures and workshops. I was eventually successful in making contact with him by 'phone', and he expressed great surprise and pleasure at hearing from me. (Surprised no doubt at my interest in musical bows, for which I had previously shown no interest at all). He is a religious at the Benedict Inkamane Abbey Mission near Vryheid, in Northern KwaZulu-Natal, and we made plans to meet up in the following year. In May 2004 I made the trip to Vryheid, where I found Brother Clement awaiting me, accompanied by another Brother, Richard. Sithole had organized accommodation for me at the mission, which was a big concession because the monastery is out of bounds to the general public, and to women. Since I had some experience of a Christian religious environment in the Durban YMCA, I did not think that the Abbey environment would be daunting, but it was. My quarters were in a large building, myself the sole occupant, and I found this very intimidating and alienating. In fact it became so repressive that I did not stay as long as planned at the Abbey, the isolation was just too much, even though it was broken by my hours of instruction and bow playing. But in one week Brother Sithole taught me so much about the Zulu braced bow (**umakhweyana**) technology and performance practice. What is more, he saw to it that my hours of intensive instruction were relieved by experiences of other Zulu music, performed by young children at Mondlo and such places. The Zulu braced gourd bow is quite complex in its instruction (see later) and its

playing techniques and the knowledge of the musical style demand great concentration and practice. I did not appreciate this until I became a student of the instrument, and I realized the complications of this bow and its usage, and I also came to appreciate its monetary value, which I first thought was too high, and then I came to realize that it was in fact justified! The price of such an instrument is from R450.00 and even this seems low to my mind. One has also to get used to using two string segments, tuned a whole tone part, with the possibility of a third root from stopping the lower segment. There is also the alignment of the vocal phrases against the bow rhythm patterns, which is also basic to **uhadi** and **ugubhu** bow technique, and which is one of the most difficult aspects of bow playing to master. (See later pp. 41-3)

I completed this phase of field work without any research on the Zulu **ugubhu** unbraced gourd bow, cognate of the Xhosa **uhadi**, but I assured Brother Sithole that I would undertake this at a later stage. Having made lots of friend in this part of KwaZulu-Natal, I was happy to return there in August 2004 to undertake research on the **ugubhu** as planned, and if possible, to investigate the state of **umqangala** unbraced mouth bow music among the Zulu. This time I remained in Vryheid, and for a longer period, going to the Abbey for lessons with Brother Sithole, and returning to my accommodation every evening. I did not find **ugubhu** technique radically different from that of the **uhadi**, but the tuning differs, being 100 cents (a semitone between the open and stopped string tones), as opposed to the Xhosa 200 cents tuning (whole-tone tuning). It is again a matter of getting accustomed to the different spacing. Once again, aligning the vocal phrases to the bow patterns, and affecting the vocal entries at the right time in the pattern, presented the greatest difficulty. Pursuing the **umqangala** practices were more problematic. Brother Sithole said he was not so competent on this instrument, (sounded by plucking with a plectrum), and wanted to take me to Ebonjeni Village to meet with some women who could play this instrument very well. But the opportunity never presented itself, because of Brother Sithole's many commitments, which included workshops and lectures at the Universities of Ngoye (Zululand) and Kwazulu-Natal (Durban). But I was not overly concerned about this, since my main interest was **umakhweyana** and **umrhubhe** bows which Zulu girls traditionally played before they married.

In March 2005 I arranged to meet with Patson Nxumalo and to have instructions in the making and playing of the **isizembe** unbraced, notched, friction-sounded ('scraped') bow. Nxumalo is employed at the Sodwana Bay Lodge, situated on the edge of the village of Mbazwane, and where he works as a gardener and a handyman. The Lodge, and the sea side next door to it, is a haven for tourists, particularly those who are keen deep-sea divers and shorklers, and fishermen, and accommodation is difficult to find without advance bookings. However, as it turned out I was able to get accommodation for three days only, but I felt that this was better than nothing since it was essential for me to commence this phase of my bow studies. Since I knew of several people in and around Vryheid, I decided to approach one of them, Innocent Muyanga, to accompany me to Mbazwane, a place which was unknown to me. Although my supervisor had suggested I go to Mbazwane via the N2 road from Durban, I needed someone to accompany me, hence my decision to leave from Vryheid. The only means for me to get to the lodge was by public transport, and so, on the afternoon of March 11<sup>th</sup> (a Friday) the two of us went to the Vryheid taxi depot looking for directions and transport to Mbazwane. The sight of an endless queue of taxis moving sluggishly along for petrol was quite a shock, and because it meant that we were likely to leave in the afternoon, we felt it would be foolhardy to do so traveling an unknown road in the dark, to a destination some 5-6 hours away (at estimate). On the following day at 07h00 in the morning, we turned to the taxi ranks, and had we known what lay ahead of us we would have turned and gone back to our accommodation. The journey-or rather the journeys since we had to hire five taxis in all – to Mbazwane was one of the most grueling I have ever experienced, in fact it was a nightmare. We were both in a constant state of tension, of expecting the worst to happen, and the journey went on seemingly endlessly from Vryheid to Phongolo; from Phongolo to Jozini; from Jozini to Mbazwane, and from there on to the lodge. The trip to Jozini was 'off-course', in that we had to double back on the same road when we left this village, to reach the main highway, but fortunately we were not aware of that. We eventually arrived at Sodwana Bay Lodge at 20h00 in the evening, with our nerves and tempers almost reaching breaking point. At the Lodge we learnt that Patson Nxumalo had waited for us after work but finally gave up and returned to his home. You can imagine the

disappointment, but we were too tired to worry and turned in for the night. Patson arrived the following morning, and from that moment everything seemed to go well. The next three days were very enjoyable and richly informative, and I learned much more from this humble, courteous and extremely talented Zulu musician.

The **isizembe** bow had not been reported among the Zulu before Hansen's field trip in 1999-2000, when she carried out some collaborative research on this instrument with Nxumalo. The construction of this bow is complex and the playing techniques demands subtlety and concentration. In the three days available to me, I absorbed a huge amount of information and technical know-how, and when it was time to leave Mbazwane, I realized that I needed a great deal of time to absorb and put into practice all that I had learnt from Nxumalo about this instrument. He kindly gave me contact numbers so that I would be able to contact him should any problems arise in my bow practice, and demonstrations. I returned to Vryheid with my companion, and two days later I flew back to Cape Town, where I have since been collating and writing up my fieldwork data, and practicing this Zulu friction mouth bow.

## CHAPTER TWO

### MUSICAL BOW TECHNOLOGY AND PERFORMANCE PRACTICE:

(Past and present)

Mouth bows without an attached resonator

The construction, physical layout and playing techniques of the musical bows under scrutiny in this study have been described in detail in a large amount of published and unpublished literature. In this Chapter 2, I will focus on the information provided by my informants, because this study is about the current usage of bows. But I have also included references to the data of previous researchers, which provide useful historical, comparative ethnological and technical information.

In a region which once had the greatest variety of musical bows, the friction sounded bow seems to have been unique, being comparatively few in number. There are only two types that have been documented, the **umrhubhe** type and the **isizembe** type, which differ in their structural details and sounding methods. All the other bow types in Southern Africa were sounded by either plucking or striking, or-in the case of the Khoekhoe **gora** and cognates-by blowing. (Rycroft 1966:85).

Kirby's accounts of the friction bows identified two kinds of **umrhubhe**, (i) one being a monostave instrument and generally known as **umrhubhe** today, but which Kirby knew as **umqunge**, in use among the Mpondo. He also identified a variant form, a bipartite friction bow which went by the name **umrhubhe**, in use among the Swazi and the Zulu, and the main players were men (see Plates 68B and 69 in 1934 (1965)). David Rycroft found the monostave bow being played in the village of Cedarville which straddles Bhaca and Mpondo country (Kirby 1934/65:38) and by Hlubi women. In her earlier fieldwork (1969-1980) Hansen encountered many bow players among the Thembu, Mfengu,

Mpondo, Gcaleka and Bomvana Xhosa-speakers, who were mainly girls, and also several married women who continued to play the instrument some time after marriage. Herd boys also played the instrument when tending livestock. (1981:179-180). Girls of the pre-initiation youth group **umtshotsho** often played the bow in duet at stick fights. (ibid.). My own informants have endorsed this information, and stressed that the **umrhubhe** is an instrument for recreation and also for personal expression. In arranging my selection of musical bows for discussion, I choose to group them according to David Rycroft's classificatory system, because it is so practical and makes comparisons very easy to understand. Rycroft's classification recognizes two broad divisions of bows:-

- (a) Bows without an attached resonator
- (b) Bows having a resonator (with a further division to cover bows with the resonator permanently or temporarily attached).

As Rycroft points out:

'Certain technical details regarding the stave and the string, the presence or absence of the tension noose, and variations in methods of sounding apply across both categories, while other criteria for subdivision need to be applied specifically within (a) or (b)'. (Rycroft 1982:72).

In this survey of current musical bow usage I begin with those instruments belonging to division (a) of the Rycroft classification, these being:

The Xhosa unbraced mouth-resonated friction-sounded (or 'scraped') bow, **umrhubhe**, the Zulu unbraced mouth-resonated plucked bow, **umqangala**; and the Zulu unbraced mouth-resonated, 'scraped', notched bow, **isizembe**.

## 2.1-umrhubhe

All musical bows have a curved stave which acts as a string-bearer (excluding the straight staved 'wind-bow' or **gora** and equivalents), and the length varies considerably, from around 50cm to 2m. (Rycroft 1982:72). Bow staves are mostly mono - form, being made of a single section, but one also finds bi-and tripartite staves as well (see Plates 64 and 68a in Kirby 1934, 1965). The stave is made from any preferred wood, or even a reed. According to my Xhosa informants, trees providing suitable wood bow staves are to be found in the countryside in thickets and forests and on hill slopes. These trees are:

**Isiduli=isiduli sehlathi**, (**isiduli** of the forest), certain species of the Acacia tree, Eugenia, Zephyr, Doke and Vilakazi 1972:172).

**Umthombothi** species of African hardwood, tambookie tree (*Spirostachys Africanus* or *Excaecaria*), whose fragrant bark was used for unguents, the wood for wagon making and other artefacts. (Doke and Vilakazi 1972:800).

**Umthathi** (Sneezewood) *Pteroxylon utile*, (McLaren-Bennie 1963:158; (also **umthathe/umthathe** (Zul.) Doke and Vilakazi 1972:787).

**Umthole** (cat-thorn tree (with long thorns) species of hardwood, mimos, *Acacia Caffra*, (McLaren-Bennie 1963:162; (Zul. =umtholo, Doke and Vilakazi 1972:709).

**Umbangandlela** (*Heteromorpha arborescens* Cham et Schlecht: small tree with yellowish flowers. (Kirby 1934, 1965: 201 in the Rycroft context of **ugubhu** and **uhadi** staves).

**Ulizi** (or **Uluzi** (botanical name not available), the Cape fig, (McLaren-Bennie 1963:191)

**Amabel'entombi** (lit. 'breasts of a girl'); the local name of a tree which I was unable to trace botanically. Its wood has small bumps or mounds in places, hence the descriptive local name.

To make a bow stave, a branch is cut from the tree, while it is still green and pliant so that it can be forced into a curved shape. The branch is stripped of leaves and bark, and

strings or cords are attached at both ends of it and are pulled tight so that the ends turn inwards, and the strings keep the branch in this strained, curved position. The stave is left to dry and harden in this position

The string (the sounding agent)

In order to make an instrument 'cry' (**-khalisa**), a string, is required, and wire was used by both Rycroft and Hansen's bow players, but my Xhosa players insist that a length of wire that has been unraveled from an anklet is essential for **umrhubhe**. The anklet is called **umliza**, or **iswaph'swaph**, being a dress ornament once made of grass or brass (McLaren-Bennie 1963:83).

**Iswaph'swaph** seems to be ideophonic i. e. possibly it is a word made up of the sounds an anklet makes when several are worn and they rub together when one moves or dances, but I cannot be certain about this.

Having unraveled the wire from an anklet, one takes it by both ends and pulls hard on it, in order to straighten out the crinkly string. One then places the length of wire in a fire and allows it to heat up, and this also removes the crinkles in it. Players gauge when the wire has been sufficiently heated, and remove it from the flames and allow it to cool. Thereafter the wire is ready to be strung on the stave.

Since the length of a string, and also its thickness, and tension, are very important for the sound output, it would seem that the use of **umliza** wire, which is a thin wire, has been tried and tested for some time by Xhosa bow players, because my informants prefer to use this kind of bow string. When the string is attached to the bow stave, it is knotted at one end, and then wound in a spiral at the other, and then secured, so that if the wire needs readjusting, one does not have to undo the whole string. In some bows like **isizembe**, you would have to undo the whole string and readjust it, so this is important.

## The friction stick

This is called **umqungu**, being the name of a species of tambookie grass (McLaren-Bennie 1963:141), or **umcinga wodobo** ('stalk of a grass') (**udobo** being a very coarse long grass McLaren-Bennie 1963:32). A length of river reed (**ingcongolo**) is also sometimes used, and called by name. Whichever is used, is cut from the fields and river bank while still green, and set aside and allowed to dry out. The stalk is then scraped with a glass shard, but only in that place where it is to come into contact with the bow string. Most players carry several friction sticks with them and also a piece of glass or pottery (as from a broken cup etc), so that they can scrape their friction sticks from time to time. But each stick has limited use and after some time it is cast aside and a new stick is taken and used.

## Playing position and playing technique

The player holds the stave vertically in the left hand, with the lower end more or less level with her navel (cf.also Rycroft 1966:87). The stave lies between the player's lips a short distance from the top end of the stave, and without touching the teeth. The fingers of the left hand, (leaving one or two to stop the string) support the other end of the stave, which is held with the bow curvature points to the left of the player (Rycroft 1966:88). Kirby noted that players used the third finger to stop the string, while Rycroft's players used thumb stopping, as did Hansen's field informants. My Xhosa informants used the following positions, and finger-stopping action:

1. Fingers 4 and 5 supported the stave, with middle finger on the stave leaving the thumb and index finger free to pinch or stop the string (to stop the string is to touch it at a certain point, which then alters its length, and therefore the tone it yields).
2. Fingers 4 and 5 on the stave, the middle finger free and leaving thumb and index finger also free for string- stopping.
3. The stave rests between the middle finger, and fingers 4 and 5, leaving thumb and

index finger free to pinch the string (and stop it)

4. The 3,4 and 5 fingers on the stave, and the thumb and index finger to pinch and release the string.

In **umrhubhe** performances, the player alternates the open string tone with a second one, obtained by stopping the string (touching it at a certain point, either with the thumb, the thumbnail), or the index finger, or else pinching the string with thumb and index finger. The other fingers hold the stave and support the instrument.

### Bowing the string

Earlier authors have reported that the bowing of the **umrhubhe** string occurred underneath it, but Rycroft also saw players bowing over the string, as did Kirby's Swazi player of the cognate **Utiyane** (plate 69 in 1934, 1965). Bowing underneath was also noted by Hansen as a general method, but I did not see this procedure among my bow players. Kirby noted that **umrhubhe** players rubbed the friction stick with the juice of a leaf before using it, and Hansen reported the same procedure among her informants, and the practice seemed to be quite widespread.

### Tuning and testing procedures

Tuning is never done haphazardly, and when the player wants to check her tuning (and string tension), she does so, as Rycroft aptly put it, by 'trial and ear', (this applies to all bow tunings and testing). This will require a resonator of sorts, and for **umrhubhe** it is the player's mouth (and cheek) cavity which is the resonating agent. Selective resonation of harmonic partials from a fundamental tone is basic to all bow technique, and in **umrhubhe** performance the player places the stave between her slightly stretched lips (as described earlier). The aim of tuning is to check that the required range of partials can be effectively amplified from the string and that the sound quality is satisfactory. When the player plays a series of sounds on the string, each sound carries other sounds which are its 'parts' (partials), and they are so soft that they must be reinforced by the resonating

agent. Viewed in terms of total sound, what the bow player is really producing is a series of chords and not single notes. Another important aspect of all bow playing, and noted by Rycroft and overlooked by other earlier scholars, is that the fundamental (root) from the open string that one hears is in fact the second partial-an octave higher.(1982;3)

To select and reinforce harmonic partials, the player then varies the volume of her mouth (and cheek) cavity by means of tongue movement. While so doing, she parts her lips slightly to one side. This is probably the most crucial aspect of **umrhubhe** technique, and it requires endless practice to achieve the proper results. It is also quite difficult to describe, especially since Xhosa bow players teach it by demonstration and imitation. Here Rycroft's description is particularly accurate and deserves quoting:

'Although the breath necessarily passes in or out of the mouth-normal nasal breathing being continued –the series of tongue positions used for normal vowel-sound production appears to operate. Progressively higher resonant frequencies [partials] are obtained by proceeding gradually through the phonetic cardinal vowel positions, from U ('oo') through to A ('ah') towards I ('ee'), and a suggestion of the quality of these vowels is detectable in the tone colour of the different notes, (1966:88).

As Rycroft also points out, this is what happens when one whistles. Possibly this is why some bow players include whistled phrases in their **umrhubhe** songs, although the technique demands some skill because not all bow players can do it

For anyone who is not familiar with this friction bow, and cultural outsiders especially, its performance techniques and its sounds are quite mystifying, and one might say even bewildering. I have seen this for myself in audiences which have attended my concerts, and relatively 'small' sounds of **umrhubhe** are today greatly increased and also enhanced by modern sound systems. I think it is because people do not expect to hear flutelike sounds from a friction-sounded bow!

Since the jaw-harp (**isitolotolo**) employs similar mouth and tongue movements, it is not surprising that so many **umrhubhe** players also play the instrument. It is a commercial instrument that became available in Africa generally as a trade article. It was and still is available in stores, and Hansen reports that it was a common sight to see youths of the

**umtshotsho** groups wearing beaded necklets with **isitolotolo** hanging from them, as dress ornaments, and made by the girls friends, who were also the main players of the instrument. The jaw-harp-a lamellophone in type-produces one fundamental over which a range of partials can be obtained for melodic purposes. As noted also by Rycroft, the partials compass of jaw-harp tunes is very close to the compass covered in the mouth-bow (1966:93). This explains why **umrhubhe** players often play the same song on both of the instruments. But in **umrhubhe** playing the 3 to 6 partials of the roots are commonly amplified. In the jaw-harp, the root is an octave lower, so it has a high series of partials (6-12), and they can all be amplified i.e. used melodically. Interestingly, Rycroft's Xhosa players restricted their **isitolotolo** songs to their **umrhubhe** songs hexatonicity, which is the tonality of virtually all their classical vocal music. Hansen's analysis of some **isitolotolo** songs with their **umrhubhe** versions also showed this feature. The tonal-harmonic system of a culture asserts itself, even as it has done in much Xhosa music played by Xhosa males on the commercial guitar (Hansen 1981).

According to my Xhosa **umrhubhe** players, girls started to play this bow from an early age, and continued to do so until marriage, after which some chose to continue to play it. The instrument is identified with the conservative Xhosa traditionalists (**amaqaba**). Girls who attended school did not play it, because they were told it would interfere with their schoolwork. It is also likely that the instrument was stigmatized in schools (especially mission-established ones) because of its 'pagan' associations. Even today some Xhosa people speak of such things disparagingly.

**Umrhubhe** played a significant role in the lives of girls growing up. They sang when they went on long journeys to fetch water, wood, or store articles, and the **umrhubhe** was a wonderful way to help pass the time. When girls met at selected venues to talk about issues central to their lives, they sometimes sang about them, and played songs with vocal/choral participation and even dancing. One favourite dance I have already mentioned earlier, (See Fieldwork), is the **umjeko** dance, for which girls wore short wrap-around skirts and beaded waistbands called **Inkinga**. The upper torso was left bare, and sometimes a cloth was arranged as a head-dress. Girls also played **umrhubhe** songs

at **entonjaneni** (Kirby 1934/65:38)-at the girl initiate's place, for example, in the seclusion hut behind a blanket screen. It was customary for girls of the initiate's age-mates to come at night and play and sings for her as she sat in her seclusion. If one had to go to the fields to hoe or weed them, or else tend livestock, **umrhubhe** sounds in the open fields may have been small, but the player heard them clearly, being so close to her head, and so **umrhubhe** music is really a music that not only invites participation from others, it is also a music that can be very personal and satisfying, a music that fills your head with lovely sounds, and makes you very happy.

## 2.2 **isizembe**

The unbraced mouth-resonated notched, friction-sounded bow

The appearance of such a musical bow among the Zulu seems to be as much a riddle today as it was in Kirby's day (1934,1965).He mentions it in connection with his descriptions of the Tsonga cognate, **zambi** (sic), (**Xizambi** current orthography), and says the Zulu instrument was 'unmistakably' like a Bushman cognate called **nxonxoro**. Kirby acquired the Zulu bow from a Zulu from Kwambonambi, on the north coast of Natal, but did not give it a vernacular name, and comments: 'This riddle I shall not attempt to solve' (1934, 1965:235). Today, Patson Dinga Nxumalo seems to be the sole player of this instrument which he calls **isizembe**. When I asked him about the history of his bow among the Zulu, he said that it was played 'at any time, day or night, and by anyone'. The name is also curious, since it seems to derive from **isizembe** (axe, hatchet (Doke and Vikakazi 1972:890). The secondary and tertiary meanings are a disease of the bladder, and stomach, and a medicine for these respectively. Hansen suggests that the name might be a Zulu derivative of the Tsonga bow name, **xizambi**, which is possible, given the presence of Tsonga-speakers in the north-east KwaZulu, (Tembe-Tsonga) who were separated from the rest of their people in Maputo by a political boundary laid down at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. The Tembe-Tsonga were incorporated into what was then Natal and Zululand, and they still maintain the Tsonga language (especially the women, and their music, as Hansen's research among them has shown).

Of the bow type itself, Kirby states that it was 'peculiar', and was found in Angola, and also south of the mouth of the Congo River (1934, 1965:235). The Bushman cognates differed in certain structural details and in playing position from that of the Tsonga and Venda bows (see Kirby Plate 67, showing a Bushman with the bow held in the crook of his arm).

Thomas Johnston (1970) has given detailed description of the **Xizambi**, and its construction and playing techniques and also a musical analysis of the bow songs. Patson Nxumalo's description of making and playing the **isizembe** comes close to that of the Tsonga bow, but there are some differences in detail. His **isizembe** is made from the wood of the **umsanga** which 'grows in the forest' (a species of shrub, *Clausens inaequalis*, Doke and Vilakazi 1972:722). A branch is measured off the shrub 'to match the length of your arm', and then the branch is put up against the mouth as if playing the complete instrument (so as to measure the reach), and to gauge the length of the branch needed for the bow stave. The branch is then cut from the shrub and stripped from its bark using a sharp knife. It is cut when green, and then thinned at both ends with the knife. It is then forced into an arch shape with the ends turning upwards, and held in position by the wire strained from each pointed end. At this stage of constructing the bow Patson states that the player should take a short stick and rub it along the stave to mark out the area of the notches or ribbing to be cut into it. The notches are then carved on the face of the stave with the knife.

According to Kirby, the Tsonga bow stave was first placed in a fire and only afterwards thinned out at the ends (p.236), which were 'bent up' by being pulled towards each other with the string. This was then left to dry out, after which the notches are made along one face. Patson does not do any firing of the stave. It is clear that Patson's bow making methods differs somewhat from Kirby's Tsonga bow player, and come closer to that of the Bushman, whose instrument was not so sharply 'bent up' at the ends, but 'purely-bow shaped'. What is more, on the Tsonga and Venda bows the notches are made in the stave area and not 'confined to one end of the face of the bow (towards one end)' as in the Bushman specimen. The notches are vertical, but are carefully made so that they do

not cut right across the stave. If this were done it would weaken the stave and would soon break with the use (as Patson pointed out to me).

Thomas Johnston also noted the importance of the spacing of the notches on the Tsonga bow, which were the same size as the diameter of the rattle stick scraper. I did not notice Patson making much of such measurement, but I did notice that he was careful about the distance between the notches, and the care to be taken when cutting them. Once this has been done the stave is left to dry out, and the straining string is then removed so that the bow stave settles into its 'stretched' position and is ready for stringing.

Patson uses a length of industrial packing tape for his string, it being stronger and lasting longer than the traditional strip of **ilala** palm leaf. (**Ilala** = fan shaped palm tree, *Hyphanea Crinita* Gaerin, Doke and Vilakazi 1972: 446, the leaves of which are also used for basketry. (See also Cuenod, *Tsonga-English Dict.* 1991: 117; **nala pl.milala**).

(Kirby reports that the Tsonga bow maker used a string of swamp grass also called **nala**, being a flat, broad-leafed grass with a strong middle rib. A strip was cut from one side of the rib to make a string of bow (p.236).

Before attaching the string (the packing tape) to the bow stave, the ends of the string should be rubbed with the soil so that they become gritty and will grip the stave more securely. The string is when wrapped round the stave ends and prevented from slipping loose by the tape ends being tucked under the wrappings. When a strip of **Ilala** palm leaf was used, it had to be allowed to dry before the instrument could be played. It would than have some tension. But exposure to the sun and the atmosphere, and the usage, would have worn out the string, hence the use of the packing tape, which lasts much longer and grips the bow stave ends, but it certainly has a longer life than the **Ilala** string. It also very effectively yields clear harmonic partials when the stave is rubbed across the notches with the rattle-stick scraper.

The Rattle stick scraper: **Uthi Loshaya** ('the plant/tree thing for striking').

This is made from the wood of a local tree that Patson calls **itatalazane**, by which I think he means **umthathazana**, a type of forest shrub, *Alophylus monophyllus*, Doke and Vilakazi 1972:789.

A branch is cut from this shrub and made into a short stick. The bark is removed from one end, only the part that comes into contact with the notches on the bow stave. The stick is held in the hand at the other end with bark still on it. Four small containers are made from plaiting **Ilala** palm strips into these shapes. They are filled with seeds-red and black seeds from the Lucky Bean Tree. The seeds are known as **insinsi** (pl.**izin-**) and the tree as **umsinsana** (*Erythrina Humei*, Doke and Vilakazi 1972:759). The seeds are picked from the trees that grow abundantly in the area, but they are picked when still wet (green). They must be allowed to dry out before they are placed inside the plaited containers. If this is done when they are still green, they will not produce the required crackling rustling sounds as they hit against each other when the bow player uses the rattle-stick scraper. To test whether the Lucky beans are green or not, one runs a needle through them and if the needle will not perforate the seeds, then they are still green and not ready for use.

These plaited seed-containing rattles are called **amafowane**, being the diminutive form of **amafowa**, which are ankle rattles made of similar but larger plaited seed-containers. They are widespread in KwaZulu Natal, and are available at most of the Zulu artefact depots. These ankle rattles, made from a number of containers attached to length of twisted palm leaf, are also worn by the Tembe-Tsonga women in the Kosi Bay/KwaNgwanase areas, in the performance of their choral dance songs (Hansen 1995: 40-48).

Four (smaller) **amafowane** are attached towards the centre of the rattle stick scraper of the **isizembe** bow, and when the player rubs the stick across the stave notches a rustling cracking sound is setup, and which is an essential part of the whole **isizembe** sound-complex. Before using the rattle stick, it is wetted so that it will not slip and loose contact

with the stave notches, when applied to them. The stick must rasp, not slide across the notches, otherwise the sympathetic vibrations coming from the string will be very weak. The rattle stick scraper puts the whole instrument into vibration, and yields the second harmonic partial (an octave above the real, unheard fundamental). As Johnston has pointed out, when playing this instrument, 'This second harmonic sounds continually, even when its frequency level is raised 200-500 cents by finger stopping. The buccal cavity, even though it cannot control the continually sounding second harmonic, adds penetrating 3<sup>rd</sup>, 4<sup>th</sup>, 5<sup>th</sup>, 6<sup>th</sup> or 7<sup>th</sup> harmonics above and simultaneously with it'(1970):82).

#### Playing position and playing technique

The bow is held to the mouth in a horizontal position with the left hand, using the thumb and forefingers to hold the stave. The 3<sup>rd</sup> and the little fingers are used to stop the string. The stave end lies against the player's cheek so that the string passes across the mouth and between the lips, which are stretched open and not touching the string. When holding the rattle stick, the right hand forms a fist and the thumb passes between the forefinger and the 3<sup>rd</sup> finger so that the stick is grasped firmly.

The player rubs the stick from Right to Left, to and fro, in a rhythmical fashion, 'in the manner of a measured tremolo' (Kirby 1934, 1965:237). The right-left movements proceeds in pulsations and may be accented to create double and triple groupings. The rhythmic pulsations can be regular (divisive) or additive, and the sweep of the stick can be larger or smaller. According to Patson, the fingers used for stopping the string (the 3<sup>rd</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup> fingers) are held with the hand in a guitar-playing position, and the little finger (5<sup>th</sup>) can then stretch laterally to obtain a 4<sup>th</sup> root. As noted by Kirby, (ibid.) and as experienced by me when one holds the bow stave and the stick prior to playing, it feels very unstable, but as soon as one applies the stick to the stave and begins the pulsations, it becomes stable-one does not feel as if the instrument is about to fall from one's hand. The player selectively amplifies partials from the string by changing the volume in the buccal cavity and by tongue movement, as is the procedure for playing the **umrhubhe**.

A practice noted by Johnston among the Tsonga and by Hansen in Patson's **isizembe** practice, is the alternate use of two such bows, one being smaller in size than the other (and therefore giving a higher range of partials/ melody notes). This was done in order to perform certain songs with one bow, or with another. A second instrument obviates having to retune the instrument, which would involve unstringing it and then remounting the string. In my experience with Patson, he used only one instrument, and I did not see any other bow in his possession.

### 2.3 **umqangala**

One of the earliest references to this Zulu unbraced, mouth-resonated plucked bow appears in H Balfour's *The National History of the Musical Bow* (1899, being a monostave bow type with distribution in Southern Africa, in Central Africa and India (1899:13). A more detailed and concise account of this bow appeared in Rev. Franz Mayr's "A Short Study of Zulu Music" (1908), in which there is also a photograph of 'Zulu Musicians' playing several kinds of musical bow, and an **igemfe** flute. In Plate XLIV in this study, the central figure is a woman wearing the **isicholo** 'the distinguishing features of the head-dress of a married woman' (Krige 1936, 1965:372).

The **umqangala** bow is made of a 'bent stick or reed' and a string made of ox-tendon' (p.275) and what is interesting is Mayr's statement that these bows 'varied considerably in size' and were sometimes decorated with engravings, as the specimen in Plate XLIV shows. It is also evident that the player is holding one end of the stave between the lips and using her thumb for plucking. The same bow is briefly described by Eileen Krige in her study of the Zulu (1936, 1965) but she also gives alternate names for it, being **uluGibane** (for which there is no dictionary entry in Doke and Vilakazi 1972), and **umhube** (Krige p.337). This is not correct, since **umhube** is the Zulu cognate of the Xhosa **umrhubhe**, being a musical bow sounded by 'bowing with a mealie stalk (see Doke and Vilakazi 1972:346). But Krige is right about the sounding of the instrument by 'twanging' (=plucking) with the thumb, and 'pressing' (=stopping) the string, as well as the varieties of bow size, and the presence of engravings. (1936, 1965:337). The

instrument is referenced in Doke and Vilakazi 1972:688) as an instrument played by women, having a reed stave and a string made from the vegetable fibre, and an alternative name is cited, **umqengele** (pg.693)

The Zulu bow type had many cognates in Southern Africa, as reported by Kirby, being **gabus** (Korana Khoe), **lugube** (Venda), **lelope** (Northern Sotho, South Sotho), **lengope** (Tswana), and the playing techniques involved mouth resonance of partials, and string-stopping, with the exception of the Korana Khoe technique. (Kirby 1934, 1965: 220). The Tsonga have the same kind of bow, also called **mqangala** (sic), and Thomas Johnston has suggested that the presence of this bow among the Tsonga is a borrowing from the Zulu and Swazi, because of the click sound in the name. (1982:400). Johnston found old men playing the instrument, although in his articles published in the African Music journals (1970 and 1971 he analyses the songs of younger Tsonga men as well. Performances involved singing and playing the bow in alternation, a feature that has been noted by other researchers, and continues to this day in mouth bow performance generally.

As further evidence for the Tsonga 'borrowing' of this bow tradition from the Zulu, Johnston cites the Tsonga word for sounding the bow, **-machayele,-** which is a derivative of the Zulu **chaya** (sic) (meaning probably-**shaya**)(1982:400), meaning 'to hit, strike', and he also give Tsonga terms for three positions of finger stopping, which are also the names of the first, second and third fingers which do the stopping: **sasamkambana, mapokonyole, and matiringisi**.(see also 1982: fig 15 for a diagram of the Tsonga **mqangala**).

The actual position of the bow to the player's mouth seems to have varied slightly among the different peoples who played the instrument. Whereas some players placed the bow stave between the lips (and at or near the farther end of the stave), Tsonga players inserted the one end of the stave into the mouth and against the right cheek. This embouchure is also typical of Zulu players today, as it appears to have been among the majority of bow players in Kirby's day. His descriptions of the making and playing of this bow type focus on two examples, one from the Korana Khoe and **!gabus** usage, and the other from the Venda and **lugube** usage. The Khoe player used no strings stopping, merely playing a 'fanfare - like' tune above the open string, using its partials. But the

Venda method of playing, as Kirby put it, serves as a model which is the same for all Bantu tribes (1934, 1965:221)

Kirby's description of the making of the Venda bow is interesting, since one may compare it with the much simpler process used today among the Zulu, and also with a fairly complex process which Malawian players of the cognate instrument (Ngoni mouth bow) use. Vegetable (and animal) material was used to make this instrument, but among the Venda the making of the string was a long process. It involved removing bark fibres from a broken branch, the continuous rolling of the fibres between the palms of the hand until a strong string had been formed (Kirby, p.222), to which more fibres were added until one has a long string, twice as long as required for the bow stave, which is only slightly curved (and made of reed or bamboo). This long string was divided into two sections and these were then twisted together into a thicker cord, which was then fixed to the end of the bow stave. The string was held in place at one end of the stave, and the cord was wound round and round in a series of loops, so that this layering of loops kept the string from touching the bow stave. The Zulu formerly used a string of vegetable fibre or ox sinew, but today more readily available material is used, and the construction process is therefore shorter, and easier. What most cultural specimens have in common was the social uses of such instruments, which was associated with girls and women, and sometimes herd boys. But the actual function(s) of the bow and the music seem to have varied. Apart from self-amusement and recreation, the Venda instrument played a role 'in marriage and also in divorce' (Kruger 1985:8). He reports that the Venda girls took to **lugube** playing to indicate to their parents that they were ready for marriage. He also goes on to say:

'The small, unassuming sound [of **lugube**] could be misleading as it could also mean that the player was about to elope. The sound was particularly ominous (or gladdening) to a married man, because it indicated that his wife was about to leave him' (ibid.).

The same author also reports that a newly-wed young woman could not show too much enthusiasm for **lugube** playing, lest her in-laws accuse her of neglecting her domestic duties. Although this bow tradition apparently became virtually obsolete through gradual neglect, among the Zulu it seems to have continued, although bow music of this kind is

'patchy' in KwaZulu-Natal. It is to be found in some villages, but not in others. The village of Ebonjeni, which I visited during my fieldwork, is such a place that is known for its **umqangala** players. The instrument has also been reported among a group of traditionalist musicians in Maphuthaland (Kosi Bay/KwaNgwanase areas of north –east KwaZulu- Natal), who have given public concerts in the province in which this bow also featured (Communication from Hansen about this in May 2004). From this, one has to conclude that the **umqangala** bow has continued to be played amongst the Zulu although it has missed the attention of most researchers.

I learnt about the **umqangala** tradition through Brother Clement Sithole, and the Ebonjeni villagers. **Umqangala** is essentially a bow of young Zulu maidens (**izintombi**) who play idyllic and nostalgic songs about their personal feelings and love affairs and yearnings for future husbands. I was at first intrigued that the **umqangala** songs share a common song repertoire with the braced gourd bow, **umakhweyana**, a fact that has not been stated in the previous literature on the subject, to my knowledge. But it makes sense since the braced bow is also essentially an instrument of Zulu girls, and plays a significant role in their courtship procedures. This has been well documented (Rycroft 1975/6, 1977; Davies 1994). For the duration of my field work in Vryheid district, I made it a priority to learn to play and to understand how the songs are played on both types of musical bow.

Regarding the performance contexts, the **umqangala** mouth bow was played when the girls went about their daily chores-fetching water from the river, tending crops,-and also generally amusing themselves and whiling away the time. But Zulu young men are also known to have taken up the mouth bow for a time, and in this regard Brother Clement provided answers to my many questions. He told me that there was no specific occasion when young men played the bow, but they usually did so when the opportune moment presented itself, as when they wanted to attract the attention of a specific girl. This is the same reason why Zulu young men sometimes took time to playing the braced bow **umakhweyana**, for a spell-to get a girl's attention and even initiate courtship with her. Whatever the reason for playing these instruments, these young people helped to keep the musical bow traditions active, so that we are able to appreciate and enjoy them. We are indeed indebted to them for doing this.

There were other Zulu instruments associated with young people and the pre-marriage period, and they comprised three instruments types, two aerophones, one of which is totally obsolete, and a highly unusual chordophone with ‘non-indigenous’ structural features, and which is still found in use today. See **APPENDIX 1** for a short account of these. I have included the appendix because the data provides interesting comparative material on certain Zulu sound instruments associated with young people and their affairs, and the recognition and use of harmonic partials to create melodies, as well as the extraordinary cultural significance some of the instruments had in earlier times in Zulu society. The instruments are the **igemfe** flutes, **umtshingo** flute, and the one-string fiddle or bowed lute to which Sithole refers.

The Zulu **umqangala** is made from a river reed called **umhlanga** (*Phragmites communis*, Doke and Vilakazi 1972:319). It has to be cut when the grass is green (as I experienced for myself!) and is still wet (with sap). It is then allowed to dry out so that it takes on a slightly curved shape (naturally, without any enforcement at all). The string is made from **umsinga** (sic), (deriving from **usinga**, sinew or gut used for sewing, Doke and Vilakazi 1972:758), and also the name of a fishing twine that one can buy at local stores selling fishing and other goods in local demand. Alternatively, a guitar string can be used.

The string is attached to the bow stave so that at one end a thick wrapping of string keeps the main part of the string away from the stave. It is secured at the other stave end by a knot. A cut is made at the end of the stave and the string is passed through and secured by a knot.

To sound the instrument, one inserts one end the stave (with the knot) into the mouth so that it rests against the right cheek. The bow is held horizontally and pointing towards the player’s left.

To activate the string the player uses a short piece of river reed as plectrum. This is called **uvava** (possibly from **uvave** (pl.**izim-**; ‘splinter; sharp-pointed tooth’; Doke and Vilakazi 1972:831). It has to be sharpened at one end with a blade or a piece of broken glass, so as

to be able to pluck the string with the projection. (A safety pin has been noted in use among certain such bow players of the South Sotho, whose bow string is usually made from a length of a brass wire).

The stave is held in the left hand at the far end, supported by the middle finger. The first two fingers (1-2) support the stave and the back of the thumb is used to stop the string. The right hand holds the plectrum and plucks the string near its centre. The player plucks in up-and down directions, using accents to vary the rhythmic groupings in a pattern of pulses in duple or triple groupings. (Kirby has used violin playing symbols to denote the up and down-plucking e.g. V □ ).

The player's buccal (mouth and cheek) cavity resonates certain partials to produce melodies. It should be noted that when the stave end is inside the mouth, it rests in the corner of the mouth, and the lips are pushed a little out of shape to the right. The string is to the front of the player and is clear of the teeth. **Umqangala** songs employ two fundamentals, with one stopped string and the intervallic distance between the fundamentals is 200 cents. These are the same root progressions which underline **umakhweyana** songs, which have the same tuning. (See later under **Umakhweyana**). Zulu **umqangala** tuning is biradical (i.e. giving 2 roots), and the same tuning as the Venda **lugube**, but which is triradical. However, this Venda tuning accommodates the heptatonic modality of Venda's most important music (Blacking 1967), and the melodic result of such tuning are a seven-note scale or mode with two semitones.

In **umqangala** tuning, the melodic result may be a six-note scale/mode that underlies much Zulu classical music.

The Zulu hexa tonality is compatible with the tuning, (100 cents) and the range of the partials selectively resonated from it, on the **ugubhu** bow, and the melodic results or scale is a six-note scale or mode with 3 semitones (above two fundamentals). In braced gourd bow tuning the two string segments are 200cents while the third fundamental from the stopped second root (being 100 cents higher, and seldom used), yields a six-note scale identical with that of Xhosa music (with only one semitone interval), and also the more chromatic' hexa scale of Zulu classical music.

**Umqangala** players today adjust the string tuning by tightening the string, which is done by undoing it at the knotted end and then redoing it. The player always tests the tuning by activating the string in order to check that certain partials are able to be resonated.

Bow tuning of **Umqangala** in use today:

In any **umqangala** bow song, the singer cannot sing as she uses her mouth to amplify partials. But **umqangala** bow songs carry texts inside them, even though the words are not actually sung. Furthermore, it is common procedure for bow players to instrumentalize well known vocal choral songs, and these of course have texts. But certain songs which seem to be personal songs of the player should not be understood as little 'doodles' or abstract tunes, or the like. They have implicit texts, which are commonly centered around matters of crucial importance in the life of the player, and especially affairs of the heart.

This survey of the current use of **umqangala** bow among the Zulu would not be complete without reference to its significance in a country far away from the Zulu. As mentioned earlier, there is a mouth bow used in Malawi, (at least up to 1987) and which is called **Nkangala**. It has been described in great detail by Gerhard Kubik (1987) who writes that it is 'a nineteenth century cultural introduction' into that country (1987:8). In fact **nkangala** is the descendant of a musical bow that came from South Africa at the time of Shaka's wars of conquest, when some powerful leaders (e.g. Zwangendaba, Soshangane and Umzilikazi among others), fled the battle region with followers. The Zwandendaba faction crossed the Limpopo River and moved into what is now Zimbabwe on the 19<sup>th</sup> November 1835- the date of a sun eclipse- and after plundering people and collecting more en route, eventually settled in what became the northern and southern regions of the country Malawi. They became known as the Ngoni, (from Nguni, being a classification label for the related languages spoken by the Zulu, Swazi, Xhosa and Ndebele, and the Matebele of Zimbabwe).

The name **Nkangala** clearly derives from the older Zulu bow, but the click sounds in the Zulu name became-**nk** in Chichewa, (an official language). Another Zulu tradition brought to Malawi was the **gubo** gourd bow, developed from the Zulu **ugubhu**, which was extinct in Malawi in 1987. Kubik's description of the construction of **nkangala** is interesting, in that the makers and players always avoided the use of bamboo for the stave, because it is too hard and stiff, and therefore undesirable, and furthermore the stave should only be slightly bent.

The string was made from sisal in a long and laborious process of fibre shredding and twisting, and compares with the account given by Kirby and referenced earlier on in this study (on the Venda **lugube**). The **nkangala** of Malawi (of Ngoni cultural background), was an instrument of young girls and women, who played for amusement and for recreation, and for personal expression of very deep and personal feelings. What Kubik said the **nkangala** tradition, which he described as 'contemplative', holds true for Zulu **umqangala** music and indeed for mouth bow music generally. Eminent players of the friction-sounded bow, and also players of **umqangala**, often speak of their bow songs in terms of great intimacy and depth of feelings, and because the partial melodies are heard by the player in the normal situation (without amplification), the music is ideal for the expression of very personal, intimate feelings and thoughts. It is not surprising that these mouth-bow were, and often still are, played in solitude, when the player has much on her mind, and 'brooding' on them with her bow is a means of achieving some kind of relief from all the things that worry her.

Kubik writes of **nkangala** performance:

'It is the inner experience that is most important to the performer. Playing the **nkangala** has a psycho-cathartic or even psycho-therapeutic effect on the performer that is generated by the amplification experience inside the skull. To achieve a self-imposed, psychological effect is probably precisely what motivates the performer to take up her mouth-bow in the first place. In general terms, it helps to remedy the distress and sadness brought about by solitude' (1978:9).

Kubik has also pointed out the significance of the actual music played on the mouth bow, and which he feels has much to do with the therapeutic effect the whole performance may have. The music comprises short cyclic patterns in which the player may arrange and contrast regular and irregular groupings, which 'provides a certain experience, of a contrasting duple movement produced by the plectrum against an internal conception of triplets' (1987:9) From my own experience of playing this type of mouth bow, and also **umrhubhe**, for individual music-making, I can say that there is truth in this statement. The kind of music one produces with mouth bows is often an important part of the whole mental and musical experience. The songs usually have short cycles-from 8-12 pulses-and they are repeated almost endlessly, with some variations. But it is not just varying the groupings inside a pattern. The player may select just a small piece of the pattern-a motive even, and then repeat and develop it to fill a whole cycle, or even stretch it to cover two such cycles. For the player, it is like 'grooving' on the same musical idea and the effect can be very hypnotic, but at the same time it is also a relief, a means of relieving one's body and mind from tensions.

## CHAPTER THREE

### MUSICAL BOW TECHNOLOGY AND PERFORMANCE PRACTICE

(Past and present)

Gourd bows with permanently attached resonator

#### 3.1 **ugubhu**

This musical bow has a very long history among the Zulu, and testimony to this are the reports of the instrument by early 19<sup>th</sup> century observers (e. g., A. F. Gardner 1836), among others.

Franz Mayr also reported this instrument among the Zulu, which he called **ugubu** or **ugumbu**, and it appears with a player in Plate XLIV, showing 'Zulu Musicians', in his 1908 publication which I have referenced earlier in this study (see p. 23). Kirby's descriptions of the instrument and cognates are, to quote Rycroft, outstanding for their thoroughness and clarity (1982:73), but when it came to describing a basic technique of gourd-bows, Kirby was in the words of the same scholar 'less successful' (ibid.). Rycroft states that, as Kirby himself told him in the late 1960s, the importance of the melodic use of partials, 'now clearly demonstrable through refinements in sound-recording', had previously escaped his notice. (1982:73). But Rycroft himself became aware of the importance of gourd-bow harmonics through the late Simon Siphon Ngubane, a former Supervisor of Music in Zulu schools, who pointed out to Rycroft that the partials could not be heard in recordings unless the microphone was placed very near to the opening in the gourd, so that it would catch the partials heard by the player (ibid.)

Because of this Rycroft was able to record and analyse gourd bow music and discover what 'had previously defied investigation'-the selective amplification of partials for melodic purposes (Rycroft 1969:3-18) 1975/76:74-91 and 58-69), with the help, knowledge, musical expertise and repertoire of the late Umntwana (Princess) Constance

Magogo kaDinuzulu. Apart from **ugubhu**, the Princess also played the **umakhweyana** braced gourd bow, and the composite musical bow with a three-part stave **isithontolo**. She also played the European autoharp (Rycroft 1975/76:41; Joseph 1987:91), and provided significant material on what she regarded as the classical instrument of the Zulu **ugubhu**, an instrument that was of Zulu origin, unlike **umakhweyana**, which is probably better known, but is of Tsonga origin.

Equivalent bows reported by Kirby are: **Ligubhu** (Swazi): **uhadi** (Xhosa): **Thomo** (South Sotho): **Segwana** (Tswana). He also names **tshitendje** or **dende** (Tsonga) and **sekgapa** (North Sotho) but these two bows are in fact braced gourd bows. For the Zulu unbraced bow, Kirby provides alternate names, being **igumbu**, **gubu olukhulu**, and **inkohlisa**. Plate 55 in Kirby (1934, (1965), publication shows specimens of all the unbraced gourd bows referred to, one of these being the Xhosa cognate with a Tate and Lyle syrup tin as a resonator. The unbraced gourd bow never reached the Venda, or Tsonga, who played the braced bow type.

Regarding the players of **ugubhu** bow, Kirby states that women were the principal players, (but men made the instrument), and usually stopped playing the instrument after marriage. Kirby did not report the instrument as being 'rare', but Rycroft noted its gradual neglect and near obsolescence by the 1970s, with Princess Magogo being 'the last remaining player'. According to Rycroft (Magogo's biographer) the bow was played by men or women, but somewhere in history men stopped playing it. Rosemary Joseph's informants (in the 1980s) were women, some of whom were acquainted with the **umakhweyana** bow style, while older women said that they had once played the **ugubhu**.

My own informants among the Zulu (2004-2005) stated that the **ugubhu** tradition is very old and that people were playing it in the times of King Shaka. (Princess Magogo's evidence supports this claim: one of her songs recorded by Hugh Tracey is entitled **Helele**, being a song mentioning regiments (**amabutho**) and which the Princess said originally dates from the time of Shaka (Rycroft 1975/76:46). My informants also claim that older Zulu men and women were the main players, but that 'these days anyone who wishes to can make and play the instrument'. Some of them also said that married women

had a limited role in **ugubhu** performances, being permitted to provide a chorus but not to play the instrument. They added that these women were 'past the stage of looking for husbands', but did not explain further on this point. (In this regard, their data does not concur with the data from informants of Rycroft and Joseph). The same informants insisted that older men and women who played the instrument focused on songs which also provided histories of events in their lives, and Zulu history generally. They also drew on the Zulu tradition of Praises (**izibongo**) using the style, and also the contents of established Praises, as material in their songs. As an example of this practice, Brother Clement Sithole took up his **ugubhu** bow and gave a performance in which he sang a song, in which his text referred to: the days of his youth; the times when he had fights (stick fights); the times he as a young man, attended wedding celebrations (**umgcagco pl imi-**) and when he went to the field to engage in **umgangela** (or fencing with sticks in competitive fighting e.g. **Umngcweko**). (Doke and Vilakazi 1972:553).

Regarding the uses and functions of **ugubhu** bow songs generally, my informants categorized the following music which was played with this unbraced bow:

**Amahubo omshado** ('wedding hymns')

**Amahubo esonto** ('church hymns')

**Amahubo empi** ('war hymns')

Of these three categories, only one of them represents a classical genre, being the war hymns. However, the use of the English word 'hymn' here is questionable, because **ihubo** has a special meaning in Zulu culture, being a designation for a very serious and ceremonial music of which there were three principal varieties:

1. **Ihubo lesizwe** ( or merely **ihubo** ), ' a solemn ceremonial anthem pertaining to the nation, to an individual tribe, clan or sib, each of which has their own and hold it in great respect' (Rycroft 1982:316);
2. **Ihubo lempi**. ' a war song or chant';
3. **Ihubo lamabutho**, ' a regimental song, pertaining to a particular regiment' (ibid.)

The ritual significance of **ihubo** cannot be overlooked, and as Rycroft has pointed out, the moving and swaying and gesturing in **ihubo** performance is not conceptualized in any way as 'dancing'. According to Doke and Vilakazi 1972:347, **ihubo** was a ceremonial song of a nation, tribe or regiment. However, the term **ihubo** has also been applied to later categories of music such as hymns, and other ceremonial music. Therefore the categories of 'Wedding' and 'Church' hymns cited above represent later categories of Zulu music showing degrees of influence of western European music. The 'War hymns' represent a classical genre, and the more appropriate translation for **ihubo** pl. **Amahubo** here is 'anthem/anthems.'

Other musical genres which were also played with the **ugubhu** bow, and cited by my informants, are:-

Drinking song (**amagama otywala**)

Lullabies (**imilolozelo**).

Wedding songs (**amahubo omshado**, cited above);

Praise songs (being items of song), are quite distinct from **Izibongo**, or Praises, 'Eulogies; which use a highly stylized form of speaking, and are conceptualized as 'singing'; an example is one entitled **Thulani sinitshela** ('Keep quiet, we will tell you' (Rycroft 1975/76:48-49).

This is an excellent example of a historical song, in which 'the history of a clan is handed down orally from generation to generation' (ibid). Love songs are commonly expressed in the singular and in Zulu as: **igama likabalisa or elokubalisa**, a song of 'brooding', referring to the contents, and the general mood of the song.

This classification has been discussed in great detail in a study of Zulu women's bow songs by Rosemary Joseph (1987), in which she has also given an alternative Zulu classification, **ihubo lothando**= 'love song'. The recordings of Princess Magogo's songs also contain examples of **ihubo lothando**, and from these examples, and from those of Joseph's informants, it is clear that **ugubhu** was a principal instrument for singing personal songs about love (mostly nostalgic, and unrequited), and the trials and tribulations which always beset lovers e.g. separation and rejection.

Some of the Princess's Love songs date from the time of Dinuzulu, but the cultural outsider should be aware that the term 'Love' should not be understood in the narrow sense. For example, in one of her **ihubo lothando**, the matter of love is a contentious one. The song is about this, and about the way in which 'daughters of the Zulu Royal house' are always falling in Love with commoners' (Rycroft 1975/75:57). In another **ihubo lothando**, the Princess sings about the girls who were in love with King Cetshwayo's sons, but the words of the songs mourn the death of Cetshwayo. (ibid).

The composition of **ugubhu** songs with Christian/religious texts is also not unusual, and one such example is to be found in the Tracy recordings (B.5 **Babulala uJesu** ('They killed Jesus'), being a song for Good Friday which was composed by Princess Magogo.

Today, the **ugubhu** continues to be used in the composition of songs which cover virtually any aspect of daily life. Brother Clement Sithole composes his own songs with the **ugubhu** bow, some of which take the cyclic form and antiphonal structure of the older Zulu music, while the hymns are set strophically, i.e. with the same tune being repeated for every verse of the hymn.

Although the **ugubhu** bow tradition underwent a decline during the twentieth century, it is evident that the tradition never actually died out, and that individual makers and players of the musical bow have kept it fairly active, or at least passive, and it is possible that we may still see a full revival of this very rich and varied musical practice.

Bow construction material has undergone some changes since the time of Princess Magogo. In other aspects, not much has changed regarding the technology. The Princess favoured a bow stave made from wattle, for which wood from the following trees was used:-

**Uthathawe** (*Acacia ataxacantha*); (Doke and Vilakazi 1972:787);

**Umbangandlela** (*heteromorpha arborescens*),

**Umbonjeni** (*Acacia Craussiana* (Doke and Vilakazi 1972:44: species of thorny bush whose sticks are used as wattle for building).

Or **iphahla** (pl/**mama**-) *Bracylaena discolor*: a species of strong wooded coastal tree (Doke and Vilakazi 1972:642).

**Ugubhu** makers today continue to use the wood of the **uthathawe** tree to make the bow stave (the leaves and bark are also used to make a concoction to stop nose bleeds). The string, which was traditionally made from cow-tail hairs twisted into a length, has today been replaced by a length of copper, or brass wire, of the kind that is also used to repair broken electric heaters. (Princess Magogo initially made her **ugubhu** bow string from twisted cow-tail hairs, but when Rycroft visited her in 1964, she had also found a good replacement-being a type of thin black plastic string. It looked like horse hair but was purchased from a local trading store. The Princess twisted twelve strands of this to make a string of about 2mm in thickness). Rycroft states that the Princess 'always resisted' the use of wire, although she found this acceptable for the **umakhweyana**, (ibid).

The stave of the **ugubhu** bow is quite long, being one and a half meters. A species of gourd or calabash is used to make the resonator. These plants are very important in African subsistence, and they are used for a number of purposes. There are several varieties of gourd plants (cucurbits) available for eating, but only a few are suitable for making household utensils, like milk containers and ladles. There is for example, **Iselwa** (pl. **ama**-), which is also sometimes made into a hand rattle (Doke and Vilakazi 1972:726). Then there is **uselwa** (pl. **izin**-), which is the plant of the gourd or calabash that is in common use (Legionary Vulgaria, ibid). The contents are cooked and eaten and sometimes also the leaves.

Other kinds of gourd plants are:

1. **Iselwa-lenja** ('dog's gourd'), *cucumia africanus* (species of wild gourd (ibid.), and
2. **Iselwa-lamakhosi** ('chief's gourd'), *Sphaerosicyos sphaorius* (ibid.).

Gourds are used for making household utensils, such as holding milk which is allowed to curdle (**amasi**), but larger gourds are required for fetching and holding water, and the Zulu call this **isigobongo samanzi** = 'the wide mouthed calabash for water'. **Isigobongo** (pl. **izi**-) is a large, wide-mouthed gourd use for water, or beer. It is also the one used for the resonator of the **ugubhu**, so the opening must not be too wide. (Rycroft cites a width of approximately 18cm as being the norm). Commenting on the size of the opening in the

Zulu instrument, Rycroft states that it is smaller, compared with the openings observed on gourd - bows used by non - Nguni people, in Southern, Central and Eastern Africa generally(1975/76, note 155, p.96).

The resonator is attached to the bow stave near the lower end, and it is prevented from rattling against the stave by means of what the Zulu call **inkatha** ('protector'), translated by my informants. This term literally means a grass ring or coil, worn on the head as a pad for carrying a weight, and it was always ring-shaped or coiled (Doke and Vilakazi 1972:383). The **inkatha** of the **ugubhu** is also ring-shaped, being made of soft cloth. Before the gourd is attached to the bow stave, two small holes are made in it, in the centre, and directly opposite to the opening. A strip of cloth is then twisted tightly to make a thin string. This is then passed through the two small holes, so that two lengths of the thin string are allowed to hang from the lower central area. A soft piece of cloth is then made into **inkatha**, and it is placed on the stave near the lower end, where the gourd is to be mounted. The gourd is placed on the **inkatha** (washer or insulating pad), and the two thin strings from it are then wrapped around the bow stave a few times, and then knotted. In this way the **inkatha** is kept firmly in position, as is the gourd resonator.

The beater is made from a piece of **ingca yodobo =dobo** grass (a fine thatching grass, Doke and Vilakazi 1972:550). This grass has many uses among the Zulu, as for making rudimentary sleeping mats on the hut floor. It also has a number of uses in connection with Zulu puberty celebrations, and diviners also put it to special use in the training of their initiates. And of course, the dry grass is a staple food for cattle and sheep. (in winter)

Playing position and playing technique.

The bow stave is held in the right hand (or left if the player is left-handed), near the lower end of the stave, so that the opening in the gourd resonator faces the player's breast. Kirby noticed that Swazi players of **ugubhu** removed clothing to leave the skin bare at this point as did Rycroft (1975/76), but Princess Magogo did not think this essential.

When standing and grasping the bow stave at its lower end, it makes the instrument rather awkward to balance, because the same hand has also to stop the string and vary the fundamental. As I noticed, this stopping was done by pinching the string between the thumb and index finger; at the same time the player did one of the following:

- wrapped fingers 3, 4 and 5 around the stave, leaving thumb and index fingers free to do the pinching.
- held and supported the stave with fingers 3 and 4, allowing the little finger (5) to encircle the stave from behind it, and to permit pinching the string as previously described;
- placed fingers 3,4 as a support underneath the stave end, with the thumb giving additional support on the other side, and the string stopping is done with the thumb nail.

The beater is held in the other hand, and the player strikes the string with a short, staccato action.

(Kirby's description of the striking action: as being 'similar to that used by a side drummer holding his left-hand drumstick' (Kirby 1934, 1965: 198, and 201) is appropriate, as noted, also Rycroft (*ibid.*) (this applies also to my informants technique).

There seems to be no prescriptive method of stopping the string, and again, a player will use the grasp and action most comfortable for him/her. By 'pinching' the string and thereby altering its length and pitch, a second fundamental is obtained, which also carries with it a series of partials which can be reinforced selectively. This is done by gourd movement i.e. by moving the gourd away from, or closer, to the body, and thereby exposing, or closing off, the opening in it, thereby 'altering its resonance frequency'. As also noted by Rycroft, this movement is 'analogous to varying the resonance frequency of the mouth cavity when playing a mouth bow, and the jaw harp' (1975/76:61), an aspect overlooking by Kirby, probably because he was not standing near enough to hear the partials from his players or because he never encountered very good players (*ibid.*). The interval between the tones of the open and stopped string is approximately 100cents( a semitone), and partials 3-5 above the two fundamentals are heard by the player, but not by anyone who is about a meter or more away from the player.

Thanks to sound technology, researchers today are in a position to truly appreciate the intricacies of bow playing, and also to record and analyse bow music, and performers of musical bows can be assured that their selected harmonic partials will be easily heard by their audiences, via high-tech amplification. In earlier recordings, the partials are not always audible, and the listener is unable to appreciate the finesse and expertise of the players when they use the partials to create extra-melodic phrases. Since the usage of partials is restricted on the gourd bows –being commonly 3-5, -the amplified ‘melody’ is usually in the nature of a short repeating melodic motif or phrase that is appearing below the voice part, but of course which the player can easily hear.

### 3.2 **uhadi**

**Uhadi** is the name of the unbraced gourd-resonated struck bow of the Xhosa-speaking people, being the equivalent instrument of the Zulu **ugubhu**, and the South Sotho **thomo**. Kirby found women to be the chief players of the Xhosa bow, although men and youths also occasionally played it. (Kirby 1934, 1965:201). Xhosa-speaking informants of Hansen (1981, 1982) and Dargie (1988) maintained that **uhadi** practice belonged with married women, and this opinion was endorsed by my informants as well.

In construction the **uhadi** is like the Zulu cognate, but the exact nature of the materials used has changed slightly over time. The earlier choice of wood from the tree known as **umbangandlela** (1934, 1965:201) has been replaced today with wood from a tree known locally as **uluzi** (cf,p.12) which is used to make the bow stave.

The stave is called **injikwe** (Kirby loc. cit.). (the name probably derived from **ujiko** = ‘wire’, and also the Xhosa name for a violin bow (McLaren /Bennie 1963:64). It is made from the wood of this tree, which grows in some abundance in the Eastern Cape. It is cut when the wood or tree is green and then stripped of its bark, and measured by the player in relation to her arm length. (to gauge the length of the stave). The branch is then forced into a curved shape by the ends being forced inwards and secured in this position by means of stringing. The string is called **usinga** and was originally made from a length of sinew, or tendon, which is the meaning of this term (Kirby 1934, 1965:201). Nowadays

the string is made from wire, which has been taken from anklets which are made and worn by Xhosa women. (cf. **umliza** under **umrhubhe**, page 13). The anklets are unraveled and the wire is placed in a fire for a time, and when sufficiently heated, the wire is stretched and pulled into a single length. This also removes the kinks in it. Kirby has mentioned the use of brass wire, 'generally taken from an old bracelet, the maker not even troubling to remove the links in the wire', (ibid.).

The resonator is made from **uselwa**, being 'a growing calabash' that is harvested when green and allowed to dry out. (McLaren /Bennie 1963:149). A hole is made on one surface (where the stalk would be) approximately 7-9mm wide, and the seeds are removed, and the inner walls of the gourd are scraped with a stick to remove all residue. The gourd is then left to dry for two more days. Thereafter, two small holes are made in the center of the gourd, in the area directly opposite the opening in it.

To make the insulating pad, a piece of soft cloth is folded into a square shape. Another narrow strip of cloth is twisted into a thin rope or 'string', and this is passed through the two small holes in the gourd, so that the two ends hang loose, and are available for securing the gourd and the insulating pad to the bow stave.

The beater is called **umqungu**, being made from the tambookie grass, or **umfuqa**, the name for a species of grass for which I found no dictionary entries; this grass is not different from **umqungu**, and it is the same grass with another name.

My informants insisted that the beater should never be too light, and the grass stalk is always cut when green and is then put aside to dry out for some two days or more. Kirby referred to this beater as **umcinga**, or 'wheat-straw'. It also means a stalk of grass or anything thin (McLaren/Bennie 1963:23).

**Uhadi** playing position is like that of the Zulu **ugubhu**, the bow being held vertically in one hand (which also has to supply finger-stopping). I was instructed to grasp the stave near the lower end with fingers 3, 4 and 5, leaving the thumb and index finger free to pinch(stop) the string. The player holds the beater in the manner described for **ugubhu**

playing (see page 39) and the string is struck in a staccato fashion, and with varying impact to create rhythmic groupings.

When I was first introduced to the playing of the Xhosa unbraced bow, I had already become proficient on the friction-sounded **umrhubhe**. I found it very difficult-and even awkward-to get used to the totally different playing position and technique of the gourd bow. Apart from having to hold the stave vertically, and steadily, and to apply the string stopping, I had also to activate the string by approaching it differently. Then, having managed to do all this with a certain amount of ease, I had to get used to gourd movement, and listen to the partials which are resonated by 'measured' gourd movement. Finally the providing of varying vocal phrases in the correct temporal and rhythmic relationship to the ostinato bow accompaniment was radically different from the approach taken with the mouth bow, in which there is no vocal melody provided by the bow player. As stated earlier, this aspect of musical bow practice is possibly the most difficult to master. According to my informants, and also reported in the published literature, **uhadi** performances customarily took place in the evening, and even later in the night, and indoors. The player usually adjusts her clothing so that the gourd opening faces, and comes into contact with the bare flesh on or above the breast. This is done to ensure the full resonance of the amplified partials which would otherwise be compromised by clothing. (Kirby noted this procedure in Swazi **ligubhu** performances, but, as mentioned earlier on in my account of the Zulu **ugubhu**, Princess Magogo did not consider it necessary for her **ugubhu** songs).

Nowadays **uhadi** performance practice is comparatively rare, and to my knowledge there are only a few players who are even acquainted with the style. But acclaimed African musicians like Madosini Manqineni and Dizu Plaatjies have made **uhadi** playing an essential aspect of their musical repertoires. Dizu Plaatjies likes to use a simple bath sponge-obtained from the local stores-as an insulating pad for his **uhadi** bow, and it works every effectively, and is light in weight.

From the evidence in the published literature on **uhadi** bow songs, the themes are very diverse. Players compose their own songs, often of a very personal nature, and their

instrumental versions of well known vocal choral dance songs. Hansen has discussed the composition aspects of Xhosa bow songs in some detail (1981, 1982) and pointed out that the vocal communal songs are freely performed on the **uhadi** and **umrhubhe**, but that ritual songs were not instrumentalized, out of 'respect' for their ritual significance (1981:22). Several of Hansen's informants were noted musical bow players in their communities, and found the **uhadi** to be particularly effective for the composition of their most personal songs

Examples are: **Igwijo** (pl. **amagwijo**), these being 'the most emotionally expressive music in the Xhosa musical repertoire' that Hansen apparently encountered (1981:27). In such songs, the players were able to give expression to 'definite thoughts and feelings', and sometimes a player was so overwhelmed by her music and her emotions that she was unable to continue her playing (Hansen 1981:31, 28).

In a detailed discussion of formal and structural parallels between Xhosa bow songs and vocal communal songs, Hansen has shown that the two kinds of music share the same fundamental principles operating in Xhosa classical music, generally. In the bow songs, the player's root progression sequences (of two roots a whole tone apart and their partials 3-5), provide the 'harmonic progression of shifting tonality' which also underlies the vocal music. In the latter, the 'shifting tonality' is to be observed in 'the root progressions of the chords which underlie a harmonized melody. The harmonization is done according to the selection of **izihlobo** (harmonically equivalent tones' (p. 736). As Hansen points out, Xhosa bow tunings-200 cents-being the distance between the open and stopped string (or a whole tone), yield a melodic result of a six-note or hexa scale or mode, with one semitone, and whether a melody employs four, five or six tones, they are all set within this scale or mode. Interestingly enough, this bow tuning also contains within it an oblique augmented fourth interval, which occurs prominently as a melodic interval in Xhosa vocal songs, and also in jaw harp (**isitolotolo**) tunes, and it always occurs as a descending interval, e. g. F sharp to C. (Hansen 1981:699).

Hansen has also commented on the perception of bow songs as being referred to as '**ingoma ezincinci**' or 'small songs', in contrast to the vocal communal songs involving

large groups of people, and which are perceived as ‘**iingoma ezinkhulu**’ (‘big songs’), the distinction being made on the basis of sound volume (1981:688). In theory then, any Xhosa song set in the hexa mode can be instrumentalized. When noted Xhosa bow player Nofinishi Dywili, of Ngqoko village, Cacadu, Eastern Cape included an **uhadi** version of a special song greatly loved by the Xhosa people generally, it may have come as a surprise to cultural outsiders, but certainly not to the Xhosa. The song is a Round Hymn by Ntsikana, an early Xhosa convert to Christianity who was active between 1816 and 1821 (the year of his death). He composed four songs for a fledgling community which he kept alive during interim missionary work, and this Round Hymn has become almost an anthem among the Xhosa. For many years it was transmitted orally down generations, until it was notated in tonic sol-fa and staff notations, by Rev. John Knox Bokwe (1855-1922), a Xhosa clergyman and prolific composer of hymns. But other Xhosa composers have used the Ntsikana Round hymn melody as thematic material for songs e. g. Benjamin Tyamzashe, the Xhosa national composer (Hansen 1968, 1981). In playing Ntsikana’s hymn on her musical bow, Nofinishi Dywili was doing what Xhosa musical bow players have always done-instrumentalized vocal music. (cf. Dargie 1988).

### 3.3 **umakhweyana**

The **Umakhweyana** is the Zulu gourd bow with a divided string, a type which was apparently ‘unknown’ to the South Sotho, Tswana, Xhosa and Khoisan peoples (Kirby 1934/1965:205). Equivalent instruments have been reported for the Venda (**dende**), Tsonga (**nkonka** or **xitende**), Chopi (**tshitendole** (soc), Pedi (**sekgapa**), and Swazi (**makhweyane**), (ibid.). Outside these culture areas the braced gourd bow has been reported for Zambia (**kalumbu**), Central and East Africa, and in Brazil and parts of the New World (Rycroft 1982:73). The South-west Angola cognate, **mbulumbumba**, is a direct ancestor of the Cuban/Central American **mburumbumba**, and **berimbau** (Brazil), and it reached these areas during the 17<sup>th</sup> -18<sup>th</sup> century slave trade, when Angola was ‘an important recruitment area of slaves to Brazil and Cuba’ (Kubik 1975/76:99).

The Zulu braced bow was seen and described by Rev Franz Mayr (1908), who called it **uqwabe** (p.258)

Other names given for the Zulu bow appear in Kirby's book on musical instruments (1934/1964) and are:

**Unkoka** (sic) (being **inkokha** in modern spelling, Doke and Vilakazi (1972:577-8), and synonymous with **inkohliso**, (1972:397). **Isiqwemqwemana** (synonymous with **umakhweyana**, (p.719); **Imvingo** (p.835). **Isiqwemqwemana** should not be confused with **isiqomqomana**, which is synonymous with **isithontolo**, the braced mouth bow with a three-part stave (1972:710). **Inkokha** and **uqwabe** were names for 'larger musical bows' which suggests that others were smaller in size. It seems that **umakhweyana** and **inkokha** were one and the same musical bow. From Balfour's descriptions of the bow, it is clear that some observers confused it with the unbraced gourd bow. Rycroft points out that Balfour's observation that the brace or restraining noose or loop on the instrument (and which also attaches the gourd to the bow stave) was there to vary the TENSION of the string (1899:26), but, as Kirby also noted, this has never been confirmed by anyone else (Rycroft 1975/6).

Braced gourd bows appear in Kirby Plate 56, and Plate 54 shows a Swazi woman with this type of bow. Of all the known bows of this kind, the largest was seen among the Tsonga (Kirby *ibid.*).

According to Princess Magogo kaDinuZulu, the **umakhweyana** was 'not a truly Zulu instrument', having been borrowed from the Tsonga of Mozambique (Rycroft 1975/76:58). This confirms Kirby's claim that the bow 'was adopted in relatively recent times' (1934/1965:207). However, from an illustration in G F Angas' book, published in 1849 (Plate 17), the Zulu had the bow before that date. A Jesuit, Filippo Bonnani by name, saw the bow in Mozambique in the early eighteenth century (1723:175) (cf. Rycroft 1975/76:58).

The Zulu **umakhweyana** has a gourd resonator mounted near the center of the stave. The string is metal, made of wire, and is divided into two sections by means of a wire loop, which is 'anchored' inside the gourd. This loop also goes around the main string. As

noted by both Kirby and Rycroft, the distinctive feature of this Zulu braced bow, compared with other cultural cognates, is the relatively small opening in the gourd resonator (which is like that of the **ugubhu** bow resonator) (See Plate 56 in Kirby 1934/1965). One could argue that the brace could be called a tuning noose because it is possible to move it -and the gourd to which it is attached-up and down the stave, thereby altering the length of a string segment. This was seen to be done by a Venda **dende** player who visited the College of Music of the University of Cape Town in 1985, and adjusted his bow tuning in this manner in order to play a certain beer song. The interval between the tones of the two segments became a 5<sup>th</sup> (700 cents), instead of the more common 200 cents (whole tone) tuning which he used for other songs he played (Personal communication from Hansen, May 2005). This adjustment seems to have been the player's idiosyncrasy because it has not been reported by other observers.

Regarding the exact history of this Zulu bow, Brother Sithole said that it was rather obscure. But he places its dispersal to other cultural groups as well as the Zulu to the time of Shaka's military activities (1816-1828), when there were mass movements of peoples in South Africa and beyond. About the instrument's use and socio-cultural context, Brother Sithole's views agree with those of published authors, who say that the **umakhweyana** was played by young girls ('maidens'), and occasionally also by young men. Joseph writes that this female age-set also played the **ugubhu** bow although other authors do not agree on this. There is no doubt that the **umakhweyana** played a special role in Zulu courtship processes, which involved young girls and young men. When a Zulu girl wanted to attract a young man and initiate courtship with him, she did this choosing (**ukuqoma**) by flying a white flag at the young man's home, and by presenting him with a string of **ucu**-white beads. (Joseph 1987:96-97). During the courtship period the girl would take to playing her bow in order to express her feelings towards her chosen boyfriend. This period continued for a time, but marriage never took place for several years after the courtship period was over. Often during this period the young man went away to the city to look for temporary work, and his absence would make the separation of the lovers even more painful, and the girl would then compose songs about her separation and yearning. Sometimes, in order to get a young girl's attention, a young man

might take up bow playing for a time. From all accounts this bow was closely associated with love songs, idyllic songs and songs of sadness about separation and unrequited love. Performances happened according to the player's whims, but girls also played the instrument for enjoyment and amusement and social recreation. They played it when they went to fetch water, carrying the water on their heads, and walking along, singing and playing the bow. Usually such performances involved chorus participation, and even a second **umakhweyana**, tuned similarly to the other one. But girls also sang when they were not being active, as when watching the crops for scavenging birds, and generally chatting among themselves. En route to a river or stream, the **isigobongo**-big water gourd-would be balanced on an **inkatha** coil on the girl's head, to facilitate balancing the gourd. Likewise when going to fetch firewood, a girl and her age mates would while away the time, singing to the musical bow. It was a very versatile instrument for song: as Joseph observed: 'even a communal song (could) be adapted for functional reasons to make them relevant to a particular person' (1987:101).

According to Brother Sithole, Zulu girls playing **umakhweyana** traditionally wore the dress of their age-set, being **isigege**, a traditional frontal covering which was formed of an oblong patch of beadwork (cf. Doke and Vilakazi 1972:240). Above this the girls wore **unoyila**-which seems to be derivative term from **unoyi** (fr.Afrikaans 'noui'=married woman) (1972:588), and the name given to a length of cloth worn around the waist as a waistband, above **isigege**. When playing the bow, girls usually bared the breast, to check that the required partials could be satisfactorily resonated (Joseph 1987:101.)

When Zulu young men went to look for work in the cities, they remain rooted in their countryside culture to a degree, but they also imitated certain aspects of a western lifestyle. It was these young men who made some interesting innovations in Zulu music. They took to playing the acoustic guitar, and also the concertina and they applied indigenous (Zulu) principles of musical construction onto these instruments. In time the guitar, in their hands came to fulfil the same 'functional role' which had previously been fulfilled by the braced gourd bow, an instrument played mainly by girls. (Rycroft 1977:225). These young men were 'neither traditionalists nor Christian' and Absalom Vilakazi referred to them as a distinct class called **amagxagxa** (or earlier on **abaqhafi**)

(s. **umqhafi**) (1962:76-78) a derogatory name meaning a 'rough, uncouth, person and heavy drinker (Doke and Vilakazi 1972:695), (Rycroft *ibid.*). In time the figure of a strolling guitar player became quite common in the city streets and also in the rural countryside, and this offers another parallel to **umakhweyana** practice; the instrument was also played by girls when out walking and both instruments were used for self-accompanied solo singing. The divided string of the **umakhweyana** yields three roots, two from the open string segments, commonly a whole tone apart (200 cents) and a third root from the stopped lower segment, a semitone above the second root (100 cents). As noted by Rycroft, this third root 'has a duller sound and is not always used' (See Rycroft 1982, Ex. 6:74 showing Swazi and Zulu tunings for the braced gourd bow); (cf. Rycroft 1977, Pl, Figure 3:227), showing **ugubhu** and **umakhweyana** tunings and height of partials commonly used).

During my fieldwork in kwaZulu Natal I received some instructions on making and playing **umakhweyana**. Brother Sithole has introduced an innovation into the traditional structure—a tuning peg, and this tuning peg is brought from the music shops, it is the one used for guitar tuning.

Although a wooden peg has been reported and described for a number of traditional African instruments (the Khoi wind bow and its Sotho-Tswana cognates, and the one stringed fiddle or trough zither to which I have referred earlier (See under **umqangala**, page 24 and Appendix 1), to my knowledge this is the first time a tuning peg is reported for **umakhweyana**. Brother Sithole introduced it for practical reasons and it certainly facilitated the tuning of the instrument.

The bow stave is made from the favourite tree **uthathawe** (*Acacia Ataxacantha*), and branches cut from it when it is green. There must be no evidence of any dryness on the branch. It is then 'smoked' in a fire, made from piles of grass which are set alight. When the maker is satisfied with the smoking process, it is removed and thereafter it is forced into a curved shape, the ends being drawn inwards and secured by means of wiring. The stave is then left to dry out in this position until it hardens and is firm. This takes about

two weeks, after which the branch is trimmed along its length until it has acquired the required thickness of 1, 5 -2 cm.

The string is made from brass or copper wire which has long replaced the traditional string made from twisted ox-tail hairs (**itshoba lenkomo**). Brass and copper wire are readily available at local stores.

The resonator is made from a dried out gourd which is commonly called **isigobongo sikamakhweyana** ('wide-mouthed calabash of **umakhweyana**') or **isigubhu sikamakhweyana** ('the calabash of **umakhweyana**'). The description denotes the calabash used for water and beer (mentioned earlier in the context of **ugubhu**), but in actual fact, a smaller type of gourd is selected for the **umakhweyana** resonator. Brother Sithole spoke of a suitable type of 'pumpkin' (general term **ithanga**), but then specified a gourd from the butternut plant as being suitable. From what he said, it seems that any gourd is used provided it is the correct size, and has a hard shell (to survive boiling) and there are several varieties of gourd to choose from.

The gourd is boiled in water for twenty minutes after which a hole is made in it (where the stalk was) and the contents are scooped out. The inner walls are also scraped to clear any excess pulp. After cleaning and hollowing out the gourd it is put aside to dry, but never in direct sunlight. This will cause the shell to crack. After a day or two, when the gourd is quite dry, it is given another internal scraping, and a 5mm is bored into the center directly opposite the existing opening. Sandpaper is then used to give the inner walls of the gourd yet another rubbing, because the smoother these walls, the better the resonance and sounds of the amplified partials.

The insulating pad-**inkatha**-is fashioned from a soft cloth into a coil or ring, having a diameter of about 50mm.

Kirby also noted the term **inkatha** in the construction of the Zulu **ugubhu** (1934/1965:208-9). **Inkatha** is wedged in place when the gourd resonator is positioned on the stave, and before the **ingona** brace is anchored inside it. The brace-**ingona** is approximately 80mm in length. To measure just how long it should be for the musical bow one is making for oneself, you should hold the stave, and then measure the distance between your index finger (which will stop the lower segment), and the **uthaka** (wire)

that runs from one stave end to the other. From this you can also gauge what the brace tension should be as well as the length of **ingona**, in relation to how it suits your playing position. Once **ingona** has been measured, its two ends are inserted into the small holes in the gourd and firmly fixed inside it by twisting the ends together and then lodging a small piece of wood or a nail into the wires so that the **ingona** cannot be pulled out of the gourd.

The rest of **ingona** encircles (embraces) the string and restrains it.

The beater is called **ubaqa**, being a stalk of tambookie grass, used also as a torch for lighting in the hut, and also for thatching'. (Doke and Vilakazi 1972:125). The Xhosa people also use it for the same purposes. Another name for **ubaqa** is **Uthi lokushaya** = lit. 'The piece of grass for striking' (see also Joseph 1987: 100). The piece of grass is cut when it is green and then left to dry out (usually over two weeks). Its length is at least 300mm.

The peg is measured against the stave and its actual position is marked out with a pencil. It usually protrudes from one side of the stave, so it is often necessary to cut away a section of the stave so that the peg can protrude sufficiently, so that it keeps any part of the string from touching the stave.

The length of the tuning peg is then used to estimate the place where a small hole is bored into the stave (with a 5mm drill), and once this is done the peg is placed in position. The places where the screws have to be inserted – to hold the peg in place – are then marked and holes are bored in these with a 2mm drill bit. After this the peg is fixed into place with its screws. A sharp knife is used to trim the stave at the other end, and to make an incision, into which the **uthaka** is forced, and then wound down the stave in coils, before being knotted.

Playing position and playing technique.

The bow stave is held with fingers 3, 4 and 5 holding the stave and the index finger is free to stop the lower string segment, usually with the knuckle. Playing action involves sharp staccato-like strokes on the string segments, and the hand grasps **ubaqa** in similar fashion to that used for **ugubhu** playing.

The partials are selectively amplified by gourd movement, and I found out from my own experience that the sound of the instrument is enhanced and is more sonorous when the gourd comes into contact with the bare flesh. Clothing seems to muffle and diminish the sonority.

Most **umakhweyana** songs have a relatively fast tempo, and the player holds a striker or beater with a relaxed wrist, so that she can control the striking action. The actual stopping procedures vary with individuals, some players stopping the string by ‘pinching’ it, but I found this technically very difficult, and prefer to use the better known procedure of stopping with the index finger, which has been described by several published authors.

The songs of **umakhweyana** show the same formal and structural features of the **ugubhu** bow, although the tuning differs. The gourd bow pattern provides an ostinato accompaniment to the singer’s vocal phrases, which never commence at the same time as the bow pattern; there is in fact always a kind of ‘introduction’ in which the player usher’s in the song with the bow pattern. But when the solo vocal phrases enter, there is then the same overlapping relationship between solo and chorus phrases which exists in choral dance songs. Rycroft has described in detail the formal and structural parallels between the Zulu bow songs and their vocal choral music, and, from Princess Magogo’s testimony, and from performance practice, it is more than likely that many communal songs began as personal compositions created with the musical bow.

The strong influence of Zulu bow music is also very evident in the contemporary tradition of Zulu guitar music, called (**maskanda**), (fr. Afrikaans’ musikant =musician), a genre typified by a solo male guitar player (**umaskandi**) playing and singing with his commercial guitar. In an article on **Maskanda** music, Noellene Davies has discussed the use of certain scales which underlie **maskanda** music, and which derive directly from bow tunings and bow scales of the Zulu **ugubhu** and **umakhweyana**. Furthermore,

structural features of the older Zulu music-cyclic form, antiphony inside it, overlapping phrases, and even polyphony, are all present in this contemporary Zulu music, which has been active for almost 70 years, and is still as popular as ever today.

Although the electric guitar has been incorporated into the genre, and large ensemble forms have also become a part of it, the acoustic guitar is still the preferred **maskanda** instrument, and the music continues to reflect the influence of older Zulu music, which tends to set it apart from other popular South African instrumental styles (Davies 1994:118).

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## CHAPTER FOUR

### MUSICAL BOW REVIVAL: The contemporary scene-Part 1.

Nowadays it is difficult to find people who play one or other musical bow, and this is largely the result of westernization and its infiltration of western musical styles, especially the popular music from the United States, which has had immense impact on local music. Then there are factors such as migration, new developments in technology and changes in attitudes and in culture generally. But although the usage of musical bows has suffered a decline during the last century, (and many other genres of music have become virtually obsolete), there are a few African classical musicians who are responsible for a revival in the bow traditions, individuals like Madosini Manqineni, Mantombi Matotiyane, and Dizu Plaatjies, all of whom have international reputations. But what of all the unknown musicians who are living in this country, and whose choice to continue to make and play bows reaches the attention of researchers, but not the wider public? I have encountered some of them, and they have contributed to this dissertation, and other researchers and ethnomusicologists have also met such people, and continue to do so. But it seems that these unknown musicians are unable to find a place in the current scene of popular music which threatens to stifle all local talent, if it has not done so already. From my own experiences and those of some other researchers, our traditionalist musicians have been among us for many years, but because they have not attracted wider attention, they have remained largely unknown. Yet they have maintained the practice of rich traditions of African music, and therefore kept them at least passive, and waiting for revival, and we have to thank them for doing so, out of sheer love and respect for their cultural heritage. I also believe that such people should be more prominent in the field of cultural musical education, and be given active roles in the transmitting of our cultural music. There are several of us, of the younger generation of Africans who have had the privilege to learn from these musical experts, but their expertise and knowledge has yet to find the wider reach that it should have. Higher institutions and also schools ought to be

employing such people to teach us about our rich musical traditions, which surely ought to have a place in our modern and developing society. These people are:-

- MADOSINI MANQINENI

She is acknowledged as a 'Veteran' musician and the queen of the Xhosa music. Her skills as a musician and composer, storyteller and general custodian of indigenous music knowledge, have made her an icon amongst the BUNDU speaking people of this country. She was born in the Eastern Cape Province in a small village near the capital, Umthatha, and her parents were non-literate and she herself had minimal schooling. She had begun playing **umrhubhe** and **uhadi** at an early age, being taught by her mother. She herself has said that she went through all the difficulties in acquiring the techniques required for these bows, with subtle playing techniques and complex music, but she practiced daily, and this routine has become part of her lifestyle.

But as she grew older she began to notice that bow playing was perceived as something to be greatly admired, but it certainly did not offer employment opportunities. The one occasion on which her musicality attracted public interest was when a film crew came to her home village and obtained a few songs from her for a pittance. Being ignorant of the ways of the media, she was totally astonished and dismayed to hear, some month later, that her songs were being heard over the radios in the cities. This experience induced in her a long distrust for the media and the recording industry, and this mistrust is understandable. However Madosini's meeting with Dizu Plaatjies provided a boost to her musicianship, and she was also asked to advise on the construction of musical bows, as well as their music. The experience was not without distress-Madosini had to recall and apply all the technical musical know-how she had put aside for a time. The new context of performance was a challenge-the intimate atmosphere of the traditional hut, the best venue for music and storytelling-had to be replaced by the concert platform, and for both day and evening performances. But Madosini, being the great artist she is, took it all in her stride, and one advantage was that she also earned an income from her music. From her meeting with Dizu in Cape Town, she went from strength to strength as a Xhosa traditionalist musician, and she has traveled extensively abroad. Nowadays she also

travels about in parts of the 'global village' entertaining people and also providing many of them with totally new musical experiences. Her creative abilities are as sharp as ever and she also had some of her songs used in films e. g. the film YESTERDAY which has been so successful internationally. She recently appeared in Opera Aqua this year-an African musical drama in which Madosini played her musical bow, and in which I also participated (as a co-bow player, and as a saxophonist).

Madosini is also ambitious, and one of her aims is to compose and stage a play, a dramaturgical event, based on the customs and traditions of African peoples, and using Xhosa musicians, poets and singers to provide the acting and the music, and the general set of the play. She sees this as the means to a revival of the cultural and moral values of our African people, of which so many young people today are ignorant, and of which they badly need to be aware.

She regularly participates in workshops on African music, and instrument-making and playing, and I am privileged to be a participant in these workshops.

- MANTOMBI MATOTIYANE

Mantombi Matotiyane is also of Xhosa cultural origin, and was born in the Eastern Cape Province. When she married she discontinued her traditional bow playing, and when she came to Cape Town, she earned a living making traditional beer, and also performing her traditional music on occasion. On one of these Dizu Plaatjies and his brother Lungile were present, and on hearing her, asked whether she could play the Xhosa musical bows. Her reply was that she played the friction mouth bow, **umrhubhe** and **isitolotolo** jaw harp. From that day onward Dizu introduced her to a wide range of teaching and performing activities, and she also traveled overseas and established a reputation as a Xhosa musician of note. She was also the subject of a Masters thesis by Mary Brown (formerly of Stellenbosch, who moved to New Zealand a few years ago). Mantombi was a regular visiting musician to the African Music classes from 1995-1998, which were arranged by Dizu and the ethnomusicologist who was in the College of Music at that time. She continues to participate in workshops and gives instruction in musical bow playing, and the fact that young people are taking an interest in their cultural music is a

great stimulus to her. She is approached by individuals for information and knowledge concerning Xhosa traditional music and culture.

- DIZU PLAATJIES

He is the most widely known Traditionalist musician from South Africa today, although his reputation abroad is much greater than it is here in South Africa. He was born in the district of Port St. John's in the Eastern Cape; and he grew up in an environment rich in Mpondo and Mpondomise cultural traditions. His father is a traditional healer, and Dizu's early childhood and youth were steeped in music-making and the observance of cultural customs in which song and dance played particularly significant roles. In 1986 he took up musical bow playing, under the tuition of Madosini. Coming to this music as a grown man, and learning to play instruments that were traditionally associated with females, must have seemed strange at first, but in the realm of music, everything is open to all those who want it, and Dizu had already established his reputation as a very versatile and experienced musician of African music from virtually every part of the continent, and also the African Diaspora in America and Central and South America. He has admitted that he found **umrhubhe** playing initially difficult, especially the whistling which the really exceptional musicians include in their performances. In fact, at one stage it seemed as if he would never acquire the skill, and so he put aside **umrhubhe** for a time and concentrated on the **uhadi**. However, he eventually resumed **umrhubhe** practice, being taught by Mantombi Matotiyane, and Madosini Manqineni and he subsequently became proficient on the instrument, which is a regular part of his concert repertory. He has traveled in more than 87 countries, and continues to do so as artist (even giving a performance in the Castle in Prague), and running workshops for people of all ages. He runs a special series of classes in Langa, where he reaches many educationally disadvantaged but musically very gifted children. He is also a lecturer in African music performance at the University of Cape Town, and I learnt to play **umrhubhe** and **uhadi** under his tuition.

In his position as a musician and teacher, Dizu bridges the gap between the people in the communities in and around Cape Town, and the students at the University. His love for

music has always been a driving force in his life, it enriches life, it pleases the ancestors, and it does bring in an income. Wherever he teaches and performs people find him to be an inspiring and knowledgeable person, whose great love of cultural music makes others aware of its real value and importance in our lives today. He sees music as an invaluable tool for transmitting cultural knowledge to future generations, knowledge which will enrich and assist them as they make their ways through life. And music, being a social art is also a carrier of cultural values and wisdom, and is the ideal way to ensure the transmission of that cultural knowledge.

- BROTHER CLEMENT SITHOLE

Brother Clement has been a prominent figure in the field of Zulu music for many years. He established a special rapport with the Zulu **umakhweyana** as long ago as 1980-when the wider academic public became aware of his activities. He was born in 1936 on a small farm near the village of Louwsberg, near Vryheid, the third child in a family of three boys and two girls. At an early age he was left to live with his grandmother Mpahlene, when his mother went to join his father at his place of work. Mpahlene used to sing lullabies to him, as they sat under the shade of a big tree near the house, and later on in the evening she would play the **ugubhu** bow for him. And so his acquaintance with Zulu bow music in particular began when he was very young, and it was a gradual process of exposure to it. When he was seven years of age he began to play **umakhweyana**, watching certain individuals in his family who played the instrument (an aunt, an uncle as well as his grandmother), and imitating their actions and techniques. He told me that he comes from a family in which the Zulu bows had been played for successive generations, and over several centuries. At the age of fifteen Sithole joined the Benedictine Missionaries of Inkamane Abbey in Northern KwaZulu Natal and became a monk there. It was there that he was also able to give time to his beloved **umakhweyana** and **ugubhu** bow playing. He continues to teach these instrumental traditions to children living around the Abbey, and also gives practical lessons at the University of Zululand

(Ngoye) and the University of KwaZulu Natal, in Durban. He has composed many religious songs, and in them he plays with words from different languages, adapting the contents and contexts of the songs, and setting them with African rhythms. Brother Sithole is a true benefactor. He has provided a cottage for abandoned children from different social backgrounds, where he teaches them to play the **umakhweyana**, its traditional repertory (including **igama likabalisa**, or 'brooding' contemplative songs). He also gives instruction in Zulu dance styles. Brother Sithole has plans to introduce formal **umakhweyana** lessons into the school curriculum, and if he is permitted to do this, one is going to see a generation of Zulu bow players in KwaZulu Natal, with a lively interest in their traditional music. He also wants to include classes in Zulu choral dance song styles, because they are also an essential aspect of Zulu musical culture. To this end he uses his workshops as venues for spreading the knowledge of Zulu music. He also performs at local and national events, and also at International festivals.

- PATSON DINGA NXUMALO

He comes from the village called Qongwana, at the place called Kwamhlab'uyalingana, (being flat, in contrast to the other, hilly countryside around it), near the small town of Mbazwane in KwaZulu Natal. He works as a gardener at the Sodwana Bay Lodge. He began to play the friction notched bow, **isizembe**, when he was thirteen years age, being taught by his older brother who, in turn had learnt to play the bow as a herder, and whose interest was initially aroused by the owner of the house in which he resided, as a herder. The owner was a very good **isizembe** player, and Patson became intrigued with the instrument. He began to watch his brother playing, and then was able to acquire the instrument and practice for himself. Of current players of the bow, he says they are comparatively few in number, and that he is the only player from Qongwana village who is still playing the instrument. He maintains that the tradition was very active in earlier times, but has since waned. His own position as a bow player has also drawn some ridicule from people, who ask him why he bothers with an instrument that provides no income. The criticism became so bad that he stopped playing the bow for a time, but then found that he just could not live without it.

Historically, he states that **isizembe** was played for recreation, and for trying to attract the attention of a potential girl friend. In fact other men also experienced this. One often found a young man sitting by the river waiting for his girlfriend, and playing the bow to pass the time in waiting for her. In turn, one would hear the approach of girls, by the sounds of their traditional **umakhweyana** bows, which they always carried with them when they were going to meet their boyfriends. When the young man heard the **umakhweyana** he would respond with his **isizembe**, playing as loudly as possible, and the girls would follow its sound, being attracted to the songs their boyfriends were playing to them. But these days, says Patson, **isizembe** is played for recreation at weddings.

Patson also plays his bow in performances at the lodge, to entertain visitors, and in these performances he includes Zulu traditional dancing involving other adults in the area, and also young children. When off duty he gives instruction in Zulu dancing and in the art of **ukubonga** (Praising), since young Zulu boys are sorely in need of this kind of expertise. However, to date there is no evidence of any boy being a likely successor to Patson's **isizembe** proficiency, but he hopes that time will change this situation. His great wish is to find such a youngster who will become a proficient bow player so that he can continue the tradition after Patson has passed on.

## MUSICAL BOWS: TAKING NEW PATHS WITH OLD RESOURCES-Part 2

The decision to form an orchestra of African instruments, with a core group of musical bows, and a repertoire for the orchestra, was not a sudden one. It gradually moved to the front of my mind in the year of my Honours programme studies at the University of Cape Town, in 2003. Before I came to Cape Town I had no experience at all of a truly 'African-centered' study of African music, nor had I any knowledge of literature on the subject. Although Xhosa cultural music is performed on a regular basis in my home area in Eastern Cape, I experienced it only occasionally and as an observer, and never as part of the musical action. As the student of Dizu Plaatjies, and with western musical training, I suddenly found myself in an exciting and stimulating "circle of learning" in which Dizu, two other African musicians with international reputations, and talented senior

students, introduced me to a world of new musical experiences, in which they were also guides into its past history. Through them I came to know about local traditions of Xhosa music, as well as other African music in and outside South Africa, and larger, mixed instrumental ensembles from central, east and West Africa. But from the very beginning I was fixed on musical bows, and I learnt to play-and also make-them from expert bow players like Mantombi Matotiyane and Madosini Manqineni, and of course Dizu himself. Their shared knowledge of musical bow traditions is extraordinary as is their expertise in other forms of African music. All of them gave me great encouragement and boosted my confidence, and this set in motion ideas about composing bow ensemble music. I realized that these instruments had long disappeared from the forefront of social life, but there have always been the few individuals who have maintained the traditions, and this gave me hope for a recovery or revival of this kind of music.

In 2004 I undertook field work as part of my MMus. programme, in order to learn about bow techniques from other expert players I had identified in different areas. I also wanted to get to know them as individual musicians, and to document their collective knowledge about African music. The results of this fieldwork-which turned into something like a journey of searching-form the basis of this dissertation, the penultimate draft of which I completed in early July 2005. But already in May of last year (2004) I had a 'blue print' for my own compositional process. And I began to experiment with it between stints of fieldwork.

Although the idea and the reality of an orchestra of African instruments (being a large ensemble of indigenous instruments) is not new in Africa, it is a novelty to South Africa. In May 2004, as Guest Artist at the Howick Midlands May Fest, and later in the same role with the Michealhouse Big band which toured the United Kingdom in June-July of that year, I learned through the media that an African 'orchestra' was already in existence, in or around Gauteng. Since there were no recordings of their work available to me, I assumed that the orchestra was an experiment of sorts, and not a sustained plan of action. Putting together an assortment of African instruments requires careful planning, based on a knowledge of each instruments' sound-producing property, and this had then

to be tried and tested in a group work. Having learnt the performance techniques of certain mouth-and gourd-resonated bows, sounded by friction, striking and plucking respectively, I documented in detail all my experiences, and at the same time began to experiment in composing for an ensemble of these bows. It was through the combined activities of writing up my field work data, and composing bow ensemble music, that I also gained insight into the cultural and musical histories of these instruments. This came through the archival research I had to undertake, and there is an impressive amount of publications on these chordophones, dating from as early as 1899. I was also fortunate enough to obtain information on current bow usage from my teachers, who gave their views on the present social situation and their reasons for retaining a musical practice that has been largely neglected.

According to all the historical evidence, musical bows in South Africa had no association with ritual and ceremonial events. In fact, among the Xhosa, it was taboo to instrumentilized a ritual song on a bow, (cfr. Hansen 1981:22-23). But this restriction does not apply in all African cultures. (Among the Kamba people of Kenya, a gourd bow was used in certain rituals, in which a diviner diagnosed or predicted with the aid of the instrument) (Micheal Wood: 1987:23-24, see Plate on p.23).

In Southern Africa, musical bows were an important 'voice' for individuals in daily social life. They were used for individual music-making, and repertoires included songs of a personal nature, love songs, songs of criticism, and social recreational songs. And the compositions were original, or else instrumental settings of larger communal dance songs. According to the testimony of bow players like the late Princess Magogo, and her biographer David Rycroft, the Zulu musical bow (**ugubhu**) was almost certainly used for composing 'solo' song which was then imparted to other people in the community, and eventually, their performances were never 'solo' in the sense of 'alone' or 'solitary'. Audience participation was not only permitted, it was expected. It is true that a bow player often played the instrument while on a journey, or else to while away the time, but these performances were never conceptualized as 'solo' and they almost always attracted people who joined in with singing. And this is what happens today as well. Regarding the use of two or more bows in a performance, it is on record that, for instance, **umrhube**

bows were played in duet by girls at the stick fights of their boyfriends (all being of the pre-initiation youth group called **umtshotsho**). Among the Shangana-Tsonga of Mozambique and the Northwest province, the **xizambi** ‘scraped’ notched bow (cognate of the **isizembe** discussed in this dissertation), was played solo and in pairs, and the instruments were tuned so that their open strong tones were an interval of a 4<sup>th</sup> apart (4ths, 5ths and 8ves being ‘harmonically equivalent’ in this musical system) (Johnston 1970:69-70).

A large, ensemble of bows was reported for the Pedi by Y Huskisson, who wrote about a **leko**pe ensemble ‘that was particular to Sekhukhuneland’ (1982:370). The **leko**pe is a braced mouth bow with a tripartite stave, sounded by plucking, and when the ensemble was witnessed and recorded by Huskisson, she noted that the bows ‘were tuned in unison’ (ibid). (See Fig. 3 on 353, which is a drawing of the **leko**pe mouth bow).

There is no evidence that African ensembles or small ‘orchestras’ are historical to South Africa, as has been reported and documented for other African countries e. g. the former Kingdom of Buganda, whose hereditary ruler, the Kabaka, had a ‘Royal court Music’ comprising a number of different kinds of ensembles: These includes ‘mixed’ ensembles of strings (tube fiddles), as well as ensembles of lyres and a ‘drum chime’ (P. Cooke 1994:147).

Musical bows are ingenious in their construction and playing techniques, and any player should have critical listening abilities in order to play these instruments satisfactorily. The music produced with them can also be very complex, especially rhythmically, and when vocal participation occurs in a performance, the result is a very subtle and effective polyphony, and polyrhythm (in the case of gourd bows). But the volume of the sound in any bow is comparatively ‘small’, and the selectively amplified partials from the string tone(s), which is basic to all bow playing, are even less audible, being heard only by the player, and not by anyone sitting about a metre away from him or her. As mentioned earlier on this dissertation, it was this aspect of bow music that was ‘overlooked’ by Kirby, who said as much to David Rycroft. (Even in several of Hugh Tracey’s recordings

(‘Sounds of Africa series’) partials are audible in some songs but not in others). Writing of Shangana-Tsonga bows, Johnston said:

‘Bows are at their best within a ‘chamber-music’ context, where the subtleties of light fruit shell, rattle-stick rhythms, and safety pin-plus-index-finger rhythms, and of striking-reed-plus-calabash damping (against the chest) rhythms can be heard and appreciated by a small audience (1970:69-70). (The safety pin was used to pluck the **mqangala** mouth bow).

Today we are no longer restricted by the ‘smallness’ of musical bow sounds, and thanks to developments in sound technology, it is now possible for individual musical bows and their levels of music to be heard in a large hall or auditorium. One may manipulate the timbres and volumes of each individual bow and amplify and enhance its sound, even in a mixed ensemble with other instruments with ‘greater’ sound volume.

#### My process of composition

I have established an African orchestral group called Amabal’engwe which comprises 14 members, and for which I composed ‘orchestral’ works, as well as other song and dance routines which are representative of Xhosa, Zulu and Pedi cultural music. (Our professional name, Amabal’engwe, means ‘Colours of the tiger’, and this name is symbolic of our commitment to the conservation of African cultural music. The tiger is a magnificent animal that is endangered, and global efforts are being made to conserve it for future generations. It has a striped pelt of three colours, and these symbolize the three African musical cultures and nations which our music represents: the Xhosa, Zulu and Pedi nations of South Africa). Amabal’engwe has already given performances in and around Cape Town, and we plan to travel abroad with our music, as well as tour nationally in South Africa. We want to wash away the popular notion in the public’s mind that the only instruments worth playing today are the ever present piano, guitars, saxophone and the like, which are so prominent in what is called African ‘fusion’ music, and which draws heavily on North American popular music rather than African music. I want to compose and present music that is African in essence, using instruments and

sounds which are effective symbols of African culture and musical values, and through which people can share a truly African musical experience.

In my compositions I begin with composing parts for the individual musical bows. I use **umakhweyana** as the first instrument in the creative process (because it is easy and comfortable to hold). Before this, each bow tuning is checked against the tuning of the **umrhubhe** open string, and this is all done through listening. The **ugubhu** bow is tuned to 100 cents (a semitone interval between the two roots from the open and stopped string), which makes it incompatible with the tunings of **uhadi** and **umrhubhe** (being 200 cents); this means that the Zulu bow has to be used with its tuning adjusted, its musical pattern keeping only to one tonality, being that which is in agreement with the other bows. But in a self-accompanied song in the Zulu style, the 100 cents tuning is kept, because it is typically Zulu, and has a very different overall sound to the tonality and sound of Xhosa music. Fig 1 (p.69) shows the fundamentals (roots), tunings and range of partials (commonly partials 3-5), on the Xhosa and Zulu gourd-resonated struck bows, and the melodic results (the scale) which each tuning yields, and which are the tonal settings of Xhosa and Zulu music respectively. Both scales are hexatonic, but the intervals inside them are very different, the Zulu scale having three semitone intervals, and the Xhosa scale only one semitone interval. I have never ever measured a string tone against an instrument of fixed pitch like a piano. I tune the **umrhubhe** until I am satisfied that I can amplify the partials I require, from its string tone(s). The pitch of the **umrhubhe** open string is then used for tuning the strings of the other bows, and, in the case of the **umakhweyana**, which has a divided string, the lower string segment must 'tune' with **umrhubhe** as well. The second segment yields a pitch a whole tone above the lower string tone, and this conforms with bow tunings in Xhosa music-being 200 cents or a whole-tone intervallic distance, but when composing for this instrument, in relation to the others, I would like to stress the point that my entire way of composing is done aurally and orally. When my supervisor asked me whether I 'matched' my bow pitches with a western scale pitch, I did not know what to say as this had never entered my mind. African music is 'learned behaviour' that is absorbed by Africans from their earliest years, informally and formally, through social experience, imitation and rote, and regular practice, and this is what makes this music so accessible to so many people. Accuracy is

demanded not in mere action, but also in intonation, and it is this aspect of music that is causing problems among young people today, who simple cannot hear accurately and sing out of tune.

A composition is a very personal process and it begins when a melody comes to mind. It comes at any time, and in any place, when I am going about my daily business, or just walking. It may come when I deliberately invite it by taking up **umakhweyana** and strumming on it, and experiment with tone sequences and the resonation of partials from them. A song comes at anytime, and in any place, and once it comes, I sing it in my head and then start to play it on **umakhweyana**. This is the first step, and once I feel secure with it, I proceed to organize it as a pattern and to produce it on the bow complete with all its musical parts-the bow pattern; partials melody from it, and the voiceless melody which is in my head and is pure musical sound, completely textless. All my melodies come to me without any words or even any association with a particular subject or context. This would seem to be unusual, since there is overwhelming evidence in ethnomusicology that African songs are created with words and melody coming into existence at the same time. This is not so in my case and I am unable to give reasons for this, except to say that I am not a 'words' person, and the lyrics of a composition are handled by other members of Amabal'engwe. Once I am satisfied with the basic melody theme, played on **umakhweyana**, I record it, and this then is the 'blue print' for other musical bow parts. I select a feature of this 'blue print' e. g. the partials melody, or a phrase within it, and use it as a basis for variations, to be played on another bow. Each bow is subjected to this process, and each instrument acquires its own part in the total work. This process of composition is therefore essentially one of 'theme and variation' (i. e. variations on a standard pattern) which is basic to African musical composition generally. Each bow part is recorded, and then re-recorded when played along with the previously composed part. Once I am satisfied with the total result of this procedure of composing 'in layers', and the instruments parts are aligned and their entry points indicated, it is time to introduce certain other group members into the compositional process. A rhythm section is essential to an orchestral work, and for this I approach my youngest sister Linda, whose expertise lies in this area. Once she has contributed her part,

it is performed with all the other (bow) parts, and recorded. I then provide a percussion section to the work which is also tested through performance and recorded as well. After this, Kgaladi Thema, my orchestra manager, uses the previously recorded version to compose parts for marimba, and I arrange appropriate parts to be played by selected horns (**kudu**). At this stage the orchestral work is complete instrumentally, but it lacks a vital component—a text or lyrics. Music sound alone cannot mean anything unless a meaning has been assigned to it, and words are the means to do this. Words appeal to the emotional responsiveness of the listeners, and I think that this is why in African music, all songs have words, or titles which indicate their emotional meaning, even though the words are not actually sung in performance (Hansen 1981:21). It is true that music can express feelings that words cannot, but generally song texts give meaning, even if not directly, and they are also important for the performers of that music, because they stimulate actions in their minds, and assist the creative, variation process. Tenjiwe Simayile and Portia Clock are principal vocalists in Amabal’engwe, and they are also exceptional in composing lyrics. They are well acquainted with the setting of words within the antiphonal structure of a cyclic song, the balancing of overlapping phrases, the shifting points of vocal entry, and the variations expected within the response or chorus phrases. Both are also exceptionally good singers and can execute all the nuances and inflections of the language they sing in, using onomatopoeic sounds and word imagery, and they can also perform special vocal styles like-**ngqokola**, (throaty singing) and -**kikizela** (ululating). Both young women have a family background rich in Xhosa music, and their knowledge and execution of specific dance style is extraordinary.

From this account it is evident that several people are involved in the composition of an orchestral work, but the initial melodic or thematic idea comes from me. Because of the process of composing ‘in layers’ and testing against a prerecording version, the individual performers come to know their parts very well and they do not need any form of notation to hold it in their memory. This method of composing reflects the age old process of song composition in Africa, but earlier scholars on African music misunderstood it. Being heavily influenced by evolution theory in their approach to their studies of so-called ‘simple’ or ‘folk’ societies, and their history and origins, they applied such notions also to the cultural products of such societies, which they labeled ‘folk

music', 'folktales' and the like. They also concluded that song-making in such societies was 'a collective undertaking' and this false stereotype persisted well into the twentieth century. Even today the term 'folk' continues to be used in cultural studies. As Kubik put it (1987:49);

'The myth of an anonymous village crowd singing 'folk songs' is one of the many incorrect African stereotypes, which, partly rooted in evanescent impressions and hastily formed opinions by travelers, has survived'.

He continues:

'The initial spark for a new song always comes from one brain. The composer, sometimes referred to as the 'owner' of a song, begins the process by conveying a basic musical idea or text to his potential helpers, an idea or text that may have perhaps occurred to him in a dream, he then needs the response of others, and invites friends and relatives to learn from him what they should do and how they should respond. These helpers may collaborate passively, or in some cases may develop or modify the original idea further by themselves. Thus, the ideas come from the individuals, while the response is collective'.

I came to read about this aspect of African music making long after I had begun composing my music, and I was surprised, but also very satisfied, to realize that my method of composing has old foundations in Africa.

## CONCLUSION

History has shown us that 'what was done in the past can inform the present', and this is especially true for African cultural music. Musical forms do not have to stay exactly as they were at a given period in their documented history, because they should always reflect social reality. Composers can use these forms to compose, and start from an informed position. In my own compositions I create original music, but I also borrow from other African songs whose melodies I rework and arrange in my own way.

The past three years have been for me a journey of discovery, on which I retraced some steps in the history of my ancestors' cultural knowledge. What is disturbing today is the

general apathy of our educational institutions to the idea of conserving African music through active processes of learning, doing, and archiving. Nowadays we are obsessed with all kinds of 'fashions' of thinking, doing and feeling, promoted by a consumer-hungry music industry, and a multimedia that accepts mediocre music. In this situation African cultural music is surviving only marginally. Yet there are so many unknown, bona fide musicians among us, who are recognized and praised in their immediate communities. A few of them have contributed to this study, and their generosity and love of African music shows their commitment to its continuity.

In earlier times African musical education promoted social education and cultural knowledge, and I believe that what we need today, in a society that is disintegrating culturally and morally, is a new self-awareness of our African identity. Ali Mazrui, a social historian, has made some profound (and also shocking) statements on this issue, and rightly stated that 'African memory needs to find new foundations (1982:78)

I am convinced that a natural revival of our cultural music is urgently needed, because without it, we cannot retain a sense of self-awareness as Africans, and our education lacks the solid cultural foundation it ought to have. We are today part of a big 'global village' so we also have to be sensitive to a wider human community. But we should never forget who we are, and where we come from. Our songs and instrumental sounds, and the language(s) in which they are sung, all remind us of this, and in them are 'archived' our cultural traditions and values.

Although our cultural music has faded in the minds of many people, there are nevertheless signs that this music is slowly regaining its rightful place in our lives. Amabal'engwe performances always make a visible impact on audiences, and we are given standing applause for our efforts. But a revitalization of our cultural music is possible only through commitment and sustained action at all levels of society. We need to promote knowledge, love and appreciation of African cultural music from the earliest years, through active education, training and professional opportunities, and thereby hopefully reverse the tide of 'cultural dis-Africanisation' that threatens to overtake us.

MAYIBUYE I-AFRIKA!

Fig. 1: Tunings, instrumental and vocal notes used in Xhosa uhadi, and Zulu ugubhu bow – songs.

Uhadi: Open and stopped string tones and partials (second partial heard as root).

Vocal scale

The Uhadi notation consists of two staves. The treble staff shows notes on the 5th and 4th lines, with a sharp sign on the 5th line. The bass staff shows notes on the 3rd and 2nd lines, with a sharp sign on the 3rd line. Fingerings 5, 4, 3, 2, 1 are indicated below the notes. The Vocal scale is a single staff with a descending scale of notes: G4, F4, E4, D4, C4, B3, A3, G3.

Ugubhu:

The Ugubhu notation consists of two staves. The treble staff shows notes on the 5th and 4th lines, with a sharp sign on the 5th line. The bass staff shows notes on the 3rd and 2nd lines, with a sharp sign on the 3rd line. Fingerings 5, 4, 3, 2, 1 are indicated below the notes. The notation includes a sharp sign on the 5th line of the treble staff and the 3rd line of the bass staff.

## APPENDIX 1

In our long conversations about Zulu bows and their use by young unmarried girls-and occasionally by young men when courting-Brother Sithole mentioned three other Zulu instruments which were traditionally played by young males. These were **igekre** (sic), **umtshingo**, and **isicelekeshe** (sic).

**Igekre** is probably a variant of the better known name, **igemfe** (pl. **ama-**), which has other variant names: **igerre**; **igenxe** and **igexhle** (Kirby 1934, (1965):122). Its presence among the Zulu was noted as early as 1849 G. Angas (ibid).

As Kirby points out, this instrument has an unusual structural layout. It is made from two sections of bamboo tube, one being much thicker than the other. The thinner tube is inserted into a hole in the thicker tube, and the mouth piece is at the upper end of the thicker tube. It is cut from both sides, so that one side of the mouth piece is wider (deeper), and the player puts the wider end against the lower lips and blows across it. The thinner tube is open at the lower end, and when the player blows the instrument, he opens or closes the lower end, with the index finger, thereby producing (by selection) two tones about a 4<sup>th</sup> -5<sup>th</sup> apart 1934 (1965):121). ( See Plate 42 showing four sets of such flutes). This flute was always played in pairs, with one instrument being smaller than the other, each known as **igemfe**(thicker tube) and **isitukulu** (smaller tube)respectively (ibid.).The pitch distance between the two instruments was approximately 100-200 cents. The players were cattle herders, and they played for amusement and also for the cattle, producing cyclic patterns with antiphonal structures and using interlocking technique (see Kirby's transcribed extracts, page 121). The **igemfe** seems to have been obsolete for many years.

The other aerophone played by Zulu herders was called **umtshingo** or **ivenge** and had cognates among the Swazi, and Mpondo, Bomvana and Xhosa clusters and the South Sotho (1934, (1965):112). The instrument was made either from a reed (**umhlanga**), or from the bark of the Cabbage Tree, **umsenge** (*Cussonia Spicata*), Doke and Vilakazi 1972:727), and was about  $\frac{3}{4}$  of a meter long. It was cut off at a slant at one end (the broader) and below a node, to form an 'elliptical' embouchure. At the other end it was cut off at right angles below a node, and the entire length was then cleared and smoothed

The **umtshingo** tradition of the Xhosa and Mpondo has been revived by musicians like Dizu Plaatjies, who makes and plays an instrument made from a length of PVC piping. He has taught the techniques to many students who have come under his tuition and he has also composed his own music for this instrument, which he also plays in duet with another player. Dizu uses a wide range of partials, and produces some very interesting and beautiful tonal effects from the instrument.

In mentioning the third instrument, Brother Sithole called it **isicelekeshe**, a name which in Zulu has a secondary meaning of 'a Love charm manufactured by young men from the road lark of the same name' (Doke and Vilakazi 1972:105). There is no direct musical meaning for it. In the same dictionary there is an entry for **isikhelekehle** (1972:388), being a 'steep, precipitous place'.

I was puzzled about this name for a time until I came across the 1977 article by David Rycroft on Zulu 'town' music which shows evidence of stylistic continuity. Rycroft discusses **isikhelekehle** in detail, and provides also a photograph of an instrument of Swazi young men, for which Kirby reported cognates among the Zulu (**ubelindlela**), and Venda (**tshidzholo**), Tswana (**sefinjolo, segankura**), and North Sotho (**sekgobokgobo**), among others (see Kirby 1934, (1965):214-219; and 242-3). Rycroft has described and discussed this instrument type in great detail; he calls it a 'one-string fiddle' (in typology it is a bowed lute), and is a single string instrument that is played with a short friction bow. He states also that he found no such instrument among the Zulu in the 1960s, but among the Mpondo he found a form of it (1966:94-8). Then in 1973, Rycroft found a Swazi player of **isikhelekehle** (See Plate 3 in 1977:244). It differed from the Mpondo type seen by Rycroft, which had the resonator at the lower end of the stave, whereas the Swazi resonator is at the top end of the stave. Rycroft also draws attention to some 'unusual features', being untypical of Southern Africa: the presence of a tuning peg, the technique of sounding with a resined friction bow 'which is generally regarded as foreign to the African continent as a whole', (Rycroft 1977:245). But as Rycroft points out, (in evidence of the continuity of certain indigenous traits of making instruments), the tin can resonator is a substitute for the gourds of the musical bows. (ibid.)

Commenting on 'foreign' features like the tuning peg, which holds the string from the neck of the instrument at a certain distance, and a use of a short bow (for which he suggests the word 'whip' would be more appropriate, because it consists of cow tail hairs attached to one end of the little bow, and held by hand at the other end), and also the habit of fixing resin onto the instrument (to be handy for applying to the friction bow), Rycroft notes that all this is 'mindful of tube fiddles (of Asian origin), found along the east coast of Africa'(1977:245). In spite of these features, Rycroft points out that the musical output is 'entirely indigenous', conceptually. When playing, the bow is applied near the peg end of the string with a circular motion, and the string is touched at certain points and with different tensions, and in this way certain partials are resonated. By stopping the string near the tuning peg with the index finger, or the extended thumb, the player may obtain one or two partials.

This instrument might demonstrate many 'non-indigenous' features, but the traditional idea of selective harmonics has been kept and it is achieved by a totally new method, solely through bow technique, instead of opening and closing the resonator (1977:246).

This instrument type has been noted by Hansen on several occasions during the period 1990-1998 in KwaZulu-Natal, in areas as far apart as Mtubatuba, KwaNgwanase, and Durban. The players have all been males of forty years and more, and one of them was for a time a regular player during the December holiday season at the Durban Workshop Mall. All the players called their instrument **udlokwe**. According to Doke and Vilakazi (1972:159), this term denotes 'the name of a hill near the Tugela below the Maphumulo magistracy'.

Possibly the instrument emerged first among Msinga Zulu migrants, but it is difficult to confirm this.

In a Shuter and Shooter (Pietermaritzburg) publication (1978) of Zulu Crafts, by JW Grossert, this instrument is shown in illustration in Plate 24 (c) being described with a plural prefix, (**abadlokwe**) which is, of course, erroneous. However, it features a tuning peg, and has a short friction bow for sounding it, but the resonator in the illustration is a large gourd or calabash.

The same Plate 24 shows other Zulu instruments which have also been labeled erroneously e.g. **isigubhu** instead of **ugubhu** (for the unbraced gourd struck bow); while the **igemfe** and **umtshingo** have their names mixed up. The braced gourd bow, better known as **umakhweyana**, has been labeled **imvingo**, which is possibly correct (a regional name) since there is an entry for it in Doke and Vilakazi 1972:235 describing it (somewhat confusedly) as ‘musical instrument consisting of a gourd with a ‘musical bow’ attached above. **Unkonka** is cited as the synonym, and its entry in the same dictionary reads: ‘Large-sized stringed instrument formed of a bow with calabash attached, similar to the **u(lu)gubu**, but having the string tied down to the bow at the middle, played by both men and women’, (1972:578). A further reference is given: **u (lu) qwabe**, which is also the braced gourd bow (1972:718). Since **Qwabe** is also a tribal name, possibly this name derives from them. The use of a tuning peg on stringed instruments is known among other African cultures in the Southern Africa region and not only on ‘one string fiddles’ (even the Bushman and Khoi **gora** ‘wind bow’, and South Sotho cognate, **Lesiba**, acquired one in the course of time), but as this study shows, the idea of tuning peg has also been applied to the construction of an indigenous instrument like the braced gourd bow of the Zulu called **umakhweyana**. A local Cape Town exponent of the unbraced bow, which he equates closely with the central-and South America **berimbau**, has also produced a modern bow with a manufactured string and a tuning peg, acquired from the piano, and performed with this instrument publicly.

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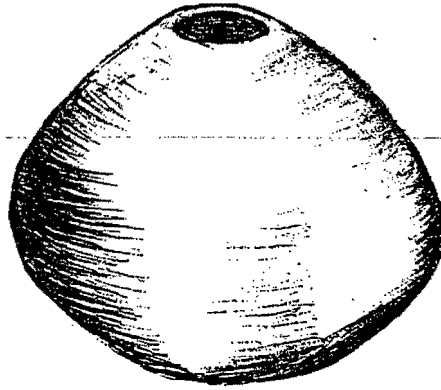
Nabe, H. Dreyer, P. W. and Kekana, G. L. (1976) 1979. Xhosa Dictionary: English-Xhosa-Afrikaans. King William's Town: Educum Publishers Ltd.

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## PLATES

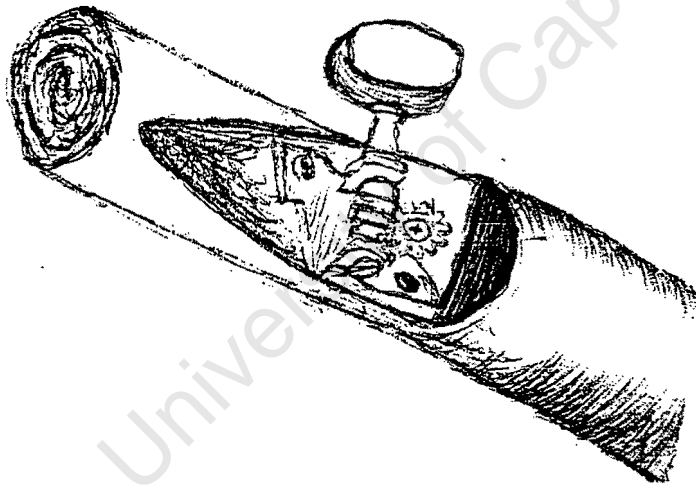
### PLATE 1

*ISIGOBONGO/CALABASH*  
(Used for making uGubhu)



### PLATE 2

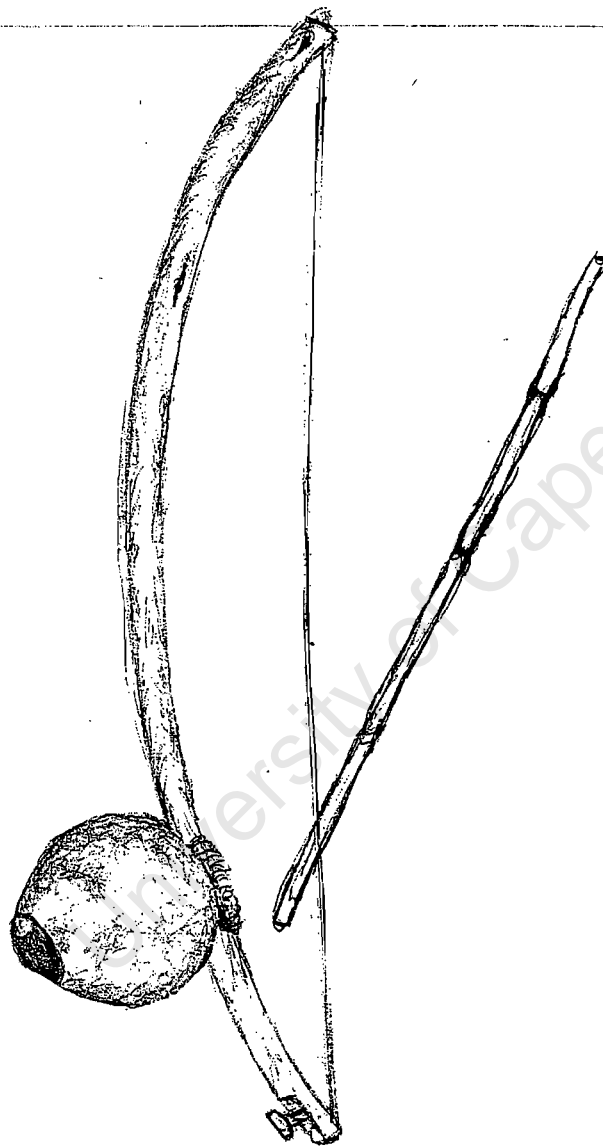
*TUNING PEG*



This is a tuning peg, used for tuning a guitar. It is also used for tuning the bows.

**PLATE 3**

*UGUBHU* (The unbraced gourd-resonated struck bow of the Zulu-speaking people)



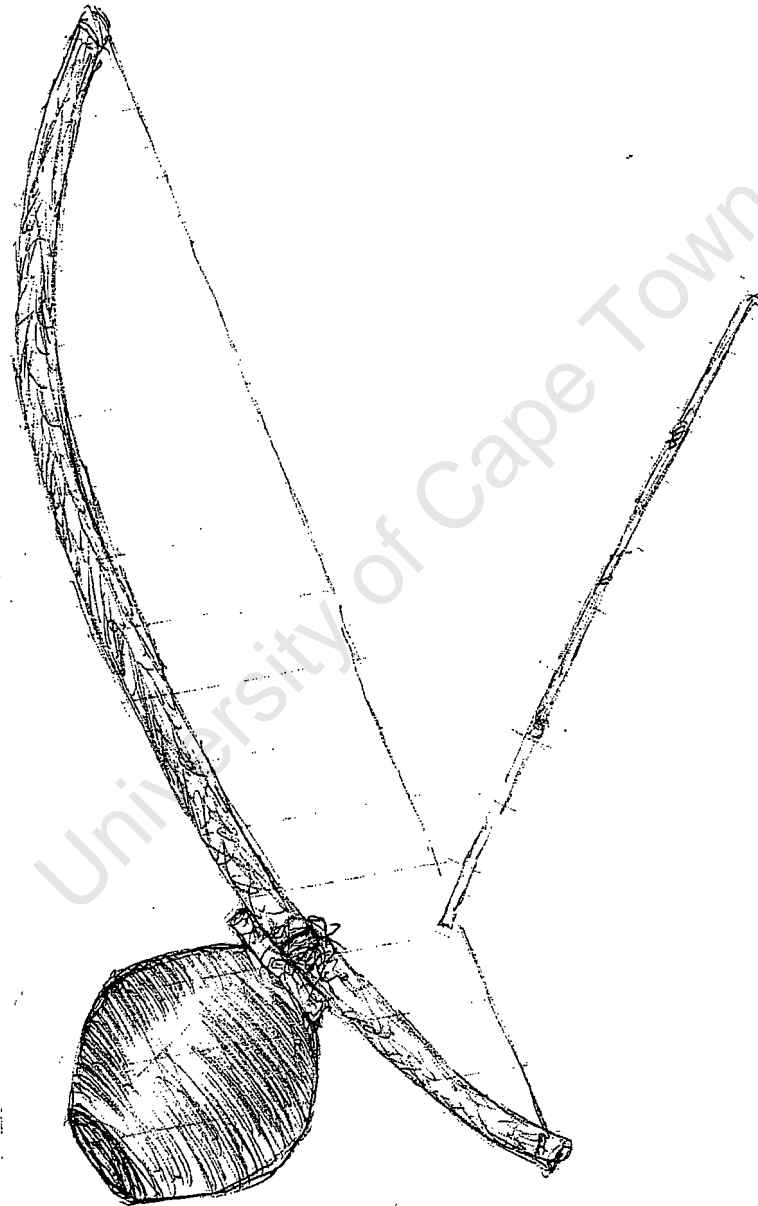
**PLATE 4**

This is typical Zulu attire worn by older women when playing ugubhu – (although it may differ with region around KwaZulu-Natal).



PLATE 5

UHADI (Unbraced gourd – resonated struck bow of the Xhosa-speaking people)



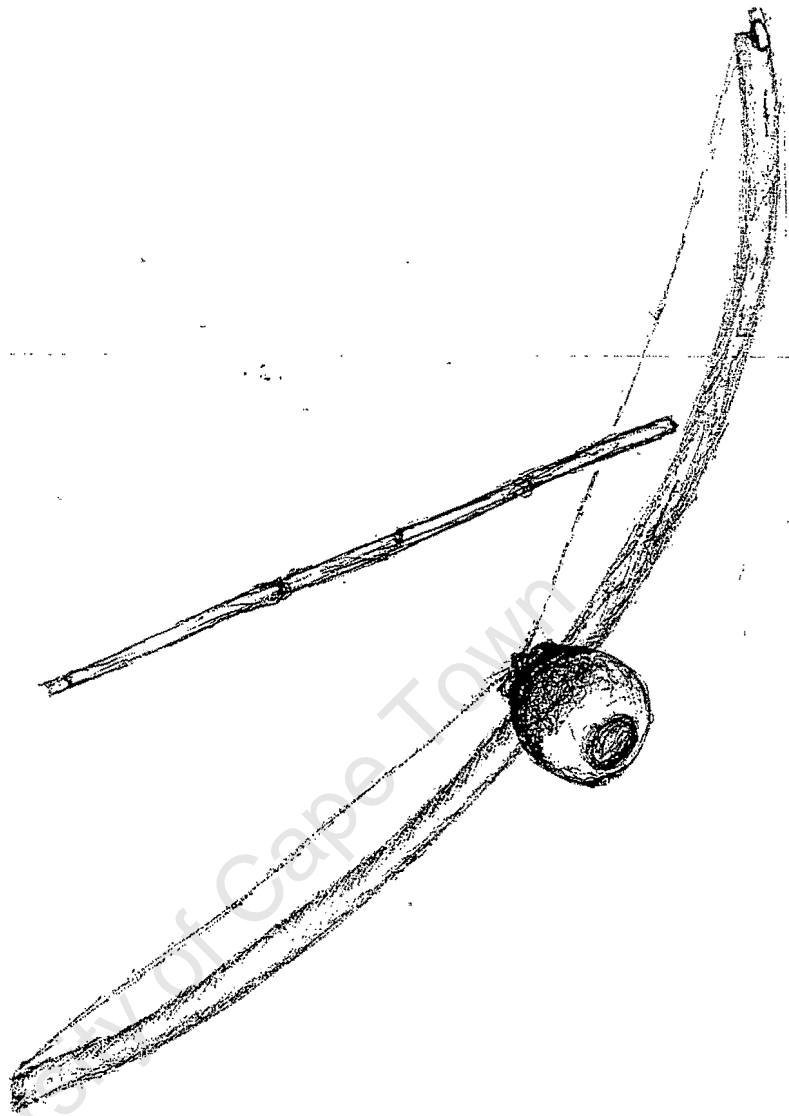
**PLATE 6**

Umbhaco-one-ncebetha– a Xhosa traditional attire worn by married women when playing uhadi, although it is now worn by both young and older women for any traditional occasion.



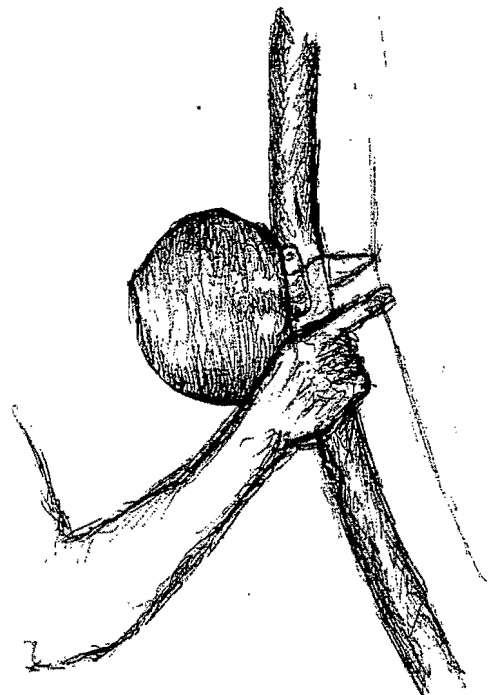
**PLATE 7**

*UMKHWEYANA* (A Zulu gourd bow with a divided string)



**PLATE 8**

How to hold umakhweyana



**PLATE 9**

*IMVUNULO YAMATSHITSHI* – traditional Zulu attire worn by young women, before marriage; varying with regions.



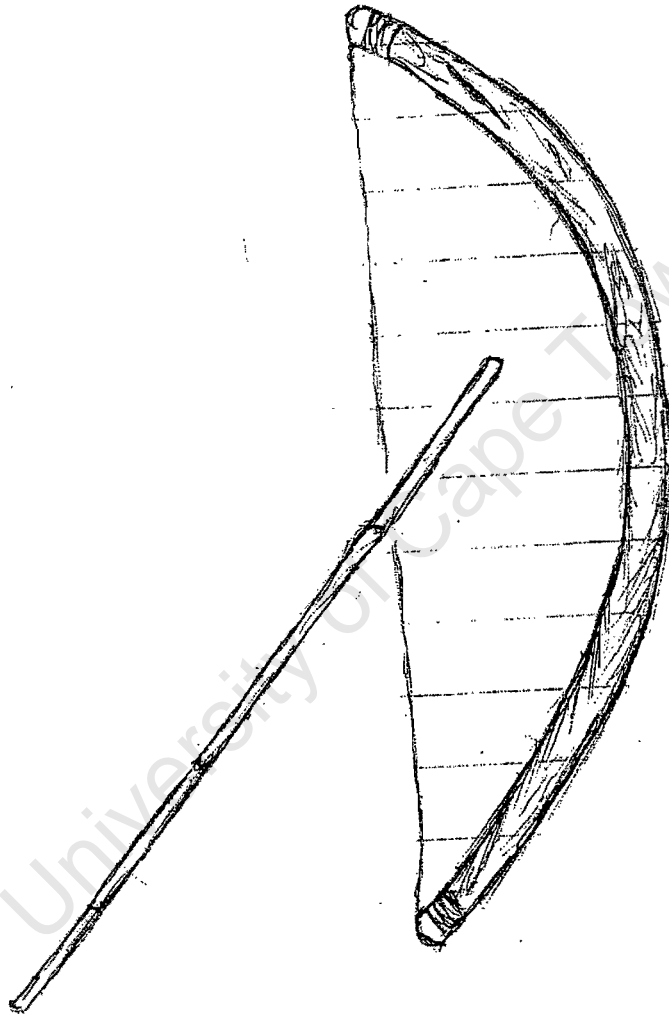
**PLATE 10**

*Imvunulo yamatshitshi*; the beaded attire on the left is called *isigege* which is the front covering and the cotton attire on the right is called *unoyila*, which is worn as a back covering. It is not actual skirt; it only covers the back half way to the front, as in plate 9.



PLATE 11

*UMRHUBHE* (The unbraced mouth – resonated ‘scraped’ musical bow of the Xhosa speaking people)



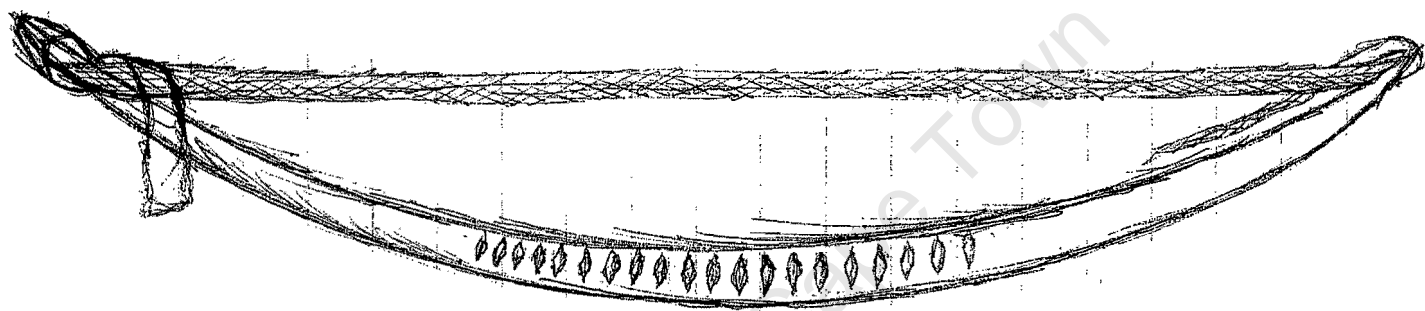
**PLATE 12**

A short wrap-around umbhaco-skirt with beads on the waist called inkinga, traditionally worn by young girls when playing umrhubhe.



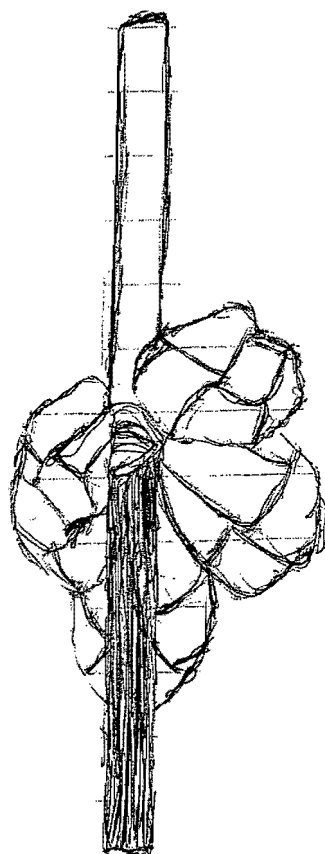
**PLATE 13**

*ISIZEMBE* (The unbraced mouth-resonated notched, friction sounded bow)



**PLATE 14**

Isizembe playing stick



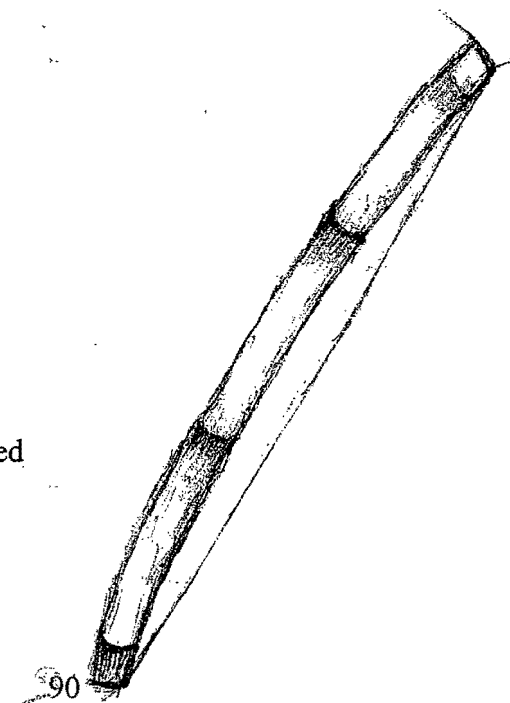
**PLATE 15**

*UMHLANGA* (A river reed which is used for making umqangala)



**PLATE 16**

*UMQANGALA* (A Zulu unbraced, mouth-resonated plucked bow)



**PLATE 17**

Patson Nxumalo, the isizembe player.



**PLATE 18**

Brother Clement Sithole, ugubhu and umakhweyana player.



**PLATE 19**

Madosini Manqineni, umrhubhe, uhadi and isitolotolo player.



**PLATE 20**

Dizu Plaatjies, umrhubhe and uhadi player

