

In the traditional music of the Shona in Zimbabwe we often encounter a musical instrument called mbira. Throughout the country, it occurs in various forms. Generally speaking, it is a small instrument which consists of number of flat and flared metal strips (lamellae) fastened to a wooden board with a rod secured behind the board with a wire or nuts and bolts. It is held in two hands and played by plucking the reeds by thumbs and index fingers.

The present study primarily aims to introduce the Shona musical tradition and the instrument mbira in both organological and anthropological points of view. In my description, I particularly concentrate on the type mbira dzaVadzimu, which plays an important role in the Shona religious ceremonies. The analytical part of my thesis deals chiefly with the rhythmic-harmonic structure of mbira pieces. In appendix, I show a set of mbira music transcriptions in my own variant of tablature and photo documentation taken during my study stay in South Africa. The basic sources of my information are my own experiences from southern Africa (mainly the personal contact with the Shona mbirists) and the literature listed at the end of the thesis.

The ethnic group now classified as "Shona" originated from Bantu settlement of the high fertile plateau between the Limpopo and Zambezi rivers, bounded in the east by the drop towards the coast and in the west by Kalahari Desert. The majority of the 10,7 million present-day chiShona speakers live in Zimbabwe, where they constitute circa 77 % of the population.

In Zimbabwe, there are many different types of mbira, and each geographical region or tribe or clan has its own peculiar version of this instrument. The five most common mbira types are: mbira dzaVadzimu, matepe, njari, karimba and mbira dzaVaNdau. Besides the physical differences, mbiras can also be differentiated by the sound they are designed to produce and by the function in the society.

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