



Remembering Robert Kwami

A compassionate man with a vision: Robert Mawuena Kwami (1954–2004)

Cynthia Tse Kimberlin

Robert Mawuena Kwami's accomplishments and his vision for the future embraced many areas. He worked tirelessly toward his objectives with such energy, engagement and enthusiasm that one could not help but be swept along in his tide. He was in his element doing exactly what he wanted to do: Professor of Music, University of Pretoria, South Africa; Visiting Fellow, University of London Institute of Education; Director of the Centre for Intercultural Music Arts (Cima), London. He was the recipient of multiple degrees: BA (with honours) in Music and PGCE from Reading University; MA in Music Education with distinction; PhD, University of London Institute of Education; MBA in Business Administration, Open University at Milton Keynes, England; and a Licentiate in vocal training, Royal Academy of Music (LRAM). He also served as Director of Technology of the Pan African Society for Music Education (Pasmae) and was a member of the Editorial Board for the *Journal of the Musical Arts in Africa*.

I was privileged to work with Robert in conjunction with the London-based Centre for Intercultural Music Arts (Cima) at the Institute of Education, University of London, founded by Professor Akin Euba in 1988. I knew Kwami as its director, where he organised concerts and recitals in conjunction with symposia and workshops dealing with topics giving greater relevance to music educators and music education. Many of us worked closely with him as he took over the helm as principal editor of the *Intercultural music* book series in 2001 and the *Intercultural Musicology Bulletin* in 2002. His plan for the future of the Centre for Intercultural Music Arts (Cima) for the 21st century involved taking on a more aggressive role in advocating and providing effective implementation of intercultural music arts education in situations where the lack of resources, both physical and human, was problematic. He continually offered teachers recommendations on how to effectively implement intercultural music arts in their teaching.

Under his editorship he set the tenor for the series by laying out a template for the future as explained in his introduction to *Intercultural music*, Volume 5, reading in part:

Intercultural musicality, it is argued, is something that can make human beings more human and humane, as it can help people to learn to understand other, sometimes conflicting, points of view. Intercultural musicality can help us to make sense of a complex world where divergence can coexist with convergence, where those who hold alternative opinions are not stifled or silenced. To this end, CIMA is concerned with promoting international understanding, co-operation and goodwill, and with peaceful coexistence of all the world's

peoples in which music making can play a part. In this, education is seen as playing a key role. (Kwami, 2003:10)

Examples of his educational mandate are found in such essays as ‘Transferring traditional music and dance strategies into educational institutions: towards a model from South Africa’ (Muller 2001:11–22), ‘Netiem: network for promoting intercultural education through music in South Africa’, (Oerhle 2001:23–32), ‘Black classical music in British schools: a preliminary study’ (Kwami 2003:217–246), and ‘Encompassing diversity: an experiment in music course design’ (Boyce-Tillman & Floyd 2003:247–290). The bulletin, beginning with *Intercultural Musicology* 4(1), was put online as an electronic publication to increase its accessibility particularly to those living on the African continent. Kwami sought to strengthen the education component as demonstrated by his provocative article ‘On musical traditions of the world and music education: an impossible quest?’ (2003). Other examples in a similar vein are found in two articles (*Intercultural Musicology* 4(2)) by Jill Scarfe and Elaine Barkin, where Scarfe discusses research carried out among the majority Punjabi Muslim pupils in a primary school in England and Barkin offers insights on her personal transformation as a composer working with Balinese musicians and composers in the USA.

Volume 5 of the bulletin focuses on a central article by Jacqueline Black on ‘Teaching gamelan in general music lessons in a secondary school: an investigation’, where she describes teaching strategies for teaching Gamelan music to secondary school children aged between 12 and 13 in the London Borough of Tower Hamlets in the United Kingdom.

Although Kwami’s academic focus was Africa, he was aware of its complexity and its relationship to the rest of the world as evidenced by his education curricula and publications during his professional career. In his own areas of teaching and composing, Kwami adopted an intercultural rather than a multicultural approach in which he did not simply focus on particular traditions from a mono- or dual bimusical perspective, but makes conscious links to other musical customs and conventions, thus allowing pluralism into curricula and compositional practices. An example of how attuned he was to his surroundings is found in excerpts from his ‘Editorial note’ in *Intercultural Musicology* 4(1) (2003), where he comments on his return to Africa upon taking up his new position at the University of Pretoria:

I have recently returned to Africa after more than 20 years of residing in the UK, and I am struck by the fact that though I am in South Africa, one of the most technologically advanced, and economically and politically stable countries on the continent, there is an enormous gap between those that ‘don’t have’ and those that ‘have’... It is important to attempt to address the needs of teachers at all educational levels particularly those working in taxing situations, where there is a lack of resources and materials. How this can be tackled effectively, it seems to me, should be a particular focus and aim for CIMA. In all areas of the world, it is essential that teachers at all levels are equipped with the knowledge, skills, and understanding to help them cope with diverse musical traditions, styles, and genres as well as culturally sensitive ways

of handling these. It is intended that Intercultural Musicology be used as a forum to deal with this aspect ...

Keith Swanwick (Emeritus Professor of Music Education, Institute of Education, University of London) said it best in a personal tribute to Kwami: 'What is quite amazing is his friendship with colleagues and friends that reach around the world. This is truly what a scholar should be, far reaching, tolerant, engaging, and [having] the ability to listen, and his understanding of what others say both intellectually and emotionally' (19 March 2004).

Apparently Kwami's continued affliction with sickle cell anaemia eventually claimed his life and he died on 15 March 2004. My sympathies and prayers are with Robert's wife Alma, his son Faron, and his family. An elegant, compassionate man and dedicated scholar, Robert Mawuena Kwami was truly a joy to work with. Devoted to his family and loyal to his friends and colleagues, he remained grounded and always cognisant of his ancestors' contributions in shaping his persona. His growing international reputation continues to resonate, as exemplified by his influence on colleagues and students and all those he touched.

References

- Barkin, E (2003). 'Afterword', *Intercultural Musicology Bulletin*, 4(2). Online edition <<http://www.music-research-inst.org/html/imb/index.htm>>
- Boyce-Tillman, J & Floyd, M (2003). 'Encompassing diversity: an experiment in music course design.' In R. M. Kwami (ed.), *Intercultural music*, Volume 5. London: Centre for Intercultural Arts, MRI Press (Richmond, California), 247–290.
- Kwami, R. M & Kimberlin, C. T. (ed.) (2003). *Intercultural music*, Volume 5. London: Centre for Intercultural Arts, MRI Press (Richmond, California).
- (2003). 'Black classical music in British schools: a preliminary study.' In R. M. Kwami (ed.), *Intercultural music*, Volume 5. London: Centre for Intercultural Arts, MRI Press (Richmond, California), 217–246.
- (ed.) (2003). *Intercultural Musicology Bulletin*, 4(2). Online edition <<http://www.music-research-inst.org/html/imb/index.htm>>
- (ed.) (2002). *Intercultural Musicology Bulletin*, 4(1). Online edition <<http://www.music-research-inst.org/html/imb/index.htm>>
- (eds) (2001). *Intercultural music*, Volume 4, London: Centre for Intercultural Arts, MRI Press (Richmond, California).
- Muller, C (2001). 'Black classical music in British schools: a preliminary study.' In R. M. Kwami (ed.), *Intercultural music*, Volume 4, London: Centre for Intercultural Arts, MRI Press (Richmond, California), 11–22.
- Oerhle, E (2001). 'Netiem: network for promoting intercultural education through music in South Africa.' In R. M. Kwami (ed.), *Intercultural music*, Volume 4. London: Centre for Intercultural Arts, MRI Press (Richmond, California), 23–32.
- Scarfè, J (2003). 'Educating children born into two musical cultures', *Intercultural Musicology Bulletin*, 4(2). Online edition <<http://www.music-research-inst.org/html/imb/index.htm>>



Re-shaping music education in modern Africa with an imposing human dimension

Robert Mawuena Kwami (1954–2004)

Pascal Zabana Kongo



Professor Robert Kwami represents a challenging milestone as a multicultural African music educator, with a comprehensive Ghanaian and British education ranging across theory, performance, composition, ethnography and history, and music technology: an expertise that he was dazzlingly keen to share with Ghanaian, British, Nigerian and South African educationalists; an expertise that led him to act as Director of Music Technology of the Pan African Society of Musical Arts Education (Pasmae).

For all readers Robert Kwami's insight into Ghanaian and Nigerian history of music education remains a landmark among his numerous other writings, notably on interculturalism.

As a person Robert was unanimously fêted for his constructive partnerships and creative relationships. Even after a full half-century of reliable research into all aspects of music he retained a sense that holding or sharing artistic and technical knowledge was natural, not mechanical. Robert's communication with others was directly rooted in his human and social understanding as well as his tolerance.¹ He would gently convey knowledge without any imposition. He related culture to development on his continent, helping to get things done where technical and even physical impediments might have been expected to slow down movement. This dimension explains why Robert also had time for the children of

1 Editorial comment: It was because of Robert Kwami's living out the true spirit of *ubuntu* that it was decided to portray him in the context of colleague scholars who greatly respected him for his human and academic qualities. This is an excerpt from a photo taken at the researchers' workshop (January 2003) for the writing of the book *Musical arts in Africa: theory, practice and education*, (Unisa Press 2003) to which Robert made a valuable contribution.

Soweto, Soshanguve, Ga-Rankuwa and Atteridgeville as much as for colleagues when he felt that they needed his personal assistance. He conducted several research projects in schools in previous disadvantaged areas in South Africa; his enthusiasm and playful presentations were an inspiration for all involved.

In August 2001, at the Centre for Intercultural Music Conference in Cambridge, a gathering of African composers and those of the diaspora, my personal problem was that I had left in Africa the specific cable supplying power to the projector attached to my laptop for my afternoon presentation. This is where Robert automatically appeared in my life: he offered to miss the morning presentation and take the train to London on my behalf – unfortunately in vain in this instance; but he made the very helpful suggestion that my work be printed on transparencies, which then enabled me to use a slide-projector.

Words in his memory will serve to celebrate a life that represented sincerity and stability in an ever-changing world.