

The Socio-Cultural Role Of Musical Dances Among The Vatsonga

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Abstract

This paper attempts to offer a detailed appraisal of Xitsonga musical world – the significance, performances as well as the circumstances under which they take place. The discussion of songs in this study focuses on Xitsonga songs which serve critical and remarkable roles in the life experiences of the Vatsonga. In carrying out the research, interviews and observation were necessary as the researcher had to be present when performances took place. These primary research methods were complemented by information from books and articles on the subject under consideration. It was found that the Vatsonga have a peculiar way of doing things embedded in their cultural traditions. It was also found that these traditions are slowly vanishing since they are, these days, only valued and remembered by the elderly. The fact that music is a powerful asset in invoking emotions and action was also observed by the researcher.

Keywords: Tsonga, Vatsonga, Music, Dance, Song, culture.

Introduction

The performances and recurring participation of humanity in music and dances the world over signifies the fact that musical performances are undeniably one among the most powerful socio-physiological influencing drives in human life. Music has been understood to be a powerful force throughout history, driving both traditional and biblical figures into ecstasy, emotive dances as well as inviting awe-inspiring clairvoyance among religious figures. Music speaks to a person's instincts, emotions and feelings. It teaches, directs, oppresses or reliefs.

It can disempower or empower, summon or dismiss, give hope or dismay, is and importantly critical in keeping listeners on targeted tracks. History has made this clear that through music soldiers have gained prowess, monarchs have been ordered to disintegrate, the bereaved have gained comfort and solace. According to Finnegan (1970: 242)

We sing when we fight, we sing when we work, we sing when we love, we sing when we hate, we sing when a child is born, we sing when death takes a toll.

The representation of anything always implies that it takes place in physical time and space, and thus musical representation and dance take place in front of spectators - they can see and hear everything. Performance is divided into communal and individual performance. When one talks about performance one considers observers, actors, instruments, costumes and the stage. Performance of Xitsonga songs differ according to context and occasion, for example xincayi-ncayi (a male dance), xibelana (a female dance) muchongolo (a male dance) and micheri (a female dance) differ in the way that they are performed and also, evidently, differ in their performers. We shall choose a few examples to explain the differences in performance among various Xitsonga songs.

Songs, Tradition and Society

Different scholars have attempted at a definition of what a song is, and this strife has produced numerous definitions, expressing how the concept of 'singing' appeals to different individuals. Viewed this way, it is therefore imperative to conceptualise songs according to how different authors have defined and/or categorised them. Krappe (1965: 153) defines a folk song as some kind of song or "a lyric poem with melody that originated anonymously" from within non formal education folk in times past, "which has remained in currency for a considerable time." Krappe's understanding of a song, alludes to a 'lyrical melody' that divides into categories, and this probably gains influence from the context and purpose for which the song was composed and expressed. The fact that it is associated with terms like 'folk and anonymity opens light to how such a song descended across generations from times immemorial. It is noteworthy that the definition above hints on how a song can be viewed as one kind of a poem. This is especially clear when the comparison is made in terms of structure – how emotion-purging and exciting words have been put together, in a rather compressed fashion for either choral or recital presentation. Authors (Guma, 1983) speak of African songs or folk songs. The two terms are synonymous as lack of specific authorship binds them. Stringham as quoted by

Rabothata (1992: 4) makes a distinction between a traditional folk song and a composed folk song:

A traditional folk song is, in the truest sense, a product of the national group from which it springs. It is polished by many talents and passed down from one generation to the next until it becomes the essential spirit of the over-all national song and speech. A composed folk song is the product of a single creative personality, allows for wider ranges of subject and technical perfection than does the traditional folk song.

Various scholars (Guma, 1983) adopt various definitions of the terms traditional song, folk song or folk music in order to describe the music as rendered by the African people. All these definitions are used because they are all based on some consensus of culture or tradition and that of oral transmission.

Xitsonga songs, "Tinsimu", are a collective deposit of the experiences of the Vatsonga people. The songs serve as a vehicle through which one can understand the Vatsonga people and the Vatsonga experience in whatever circumstances it expresses itself. Tracey (1958: 56) elaborates on this idea by saying, about Africans in general, that the quickest way to get to the heart of a person is by being able "to participate in the enjoyment of his music and to have an understanding and sympathy for his social custom". Owomoyela (1979) also points out the importance of songs in African communities by stating that singing accompanies ceremonies marking the progression through important stages in the life of individuals and groups, such as childhood, marriage, death, initiation and other such stages. Guma (1983: 102) expresses a similar identification of the importance of songs when he says that songs are "a description of the joys, sorrows, hopes and aspiration of the individual". The above citations establish the importance of songs to a people. It is this importance which this research wishes to reveal with specific regard to Xitsonga songs. Vatsonga implicitly understand the use and meaning of African songs. In Xitsonga communities, no occasion can be complete without songs and dance. Songs form a cornerstone of the communication of an experience and, in this sense, are able to explore ideas more ably than ordinary language.

CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

The researcher adopted the concept of 'folk music' in developing this paper. According to Gelbart, (2007), folk music, which differs from modern 'art music' in terms of, mainly, origin and traceable compositional copyrights credentials has a solid foundation in the ethnic roots of a given people. Thus

this category of music is founded and owned by the community and ethnic group in which it is believed to have originated. The concept removes the idea of individualistic authorship or ownership, but envisages a communally owned musical asset that can be used to the benefit of all. This idea matches well with the African way of understanding things, that 'I am because you are', commonly summarised as 'Ubuntu/Vumunhu'. This sense of solidarity and commonality has often been interpreted as the major characteristic defining olden African ways of living, and particularly so amongst the Vatsonga before the advent of Western disintegrating civilisation. Viewed thus, the conceptual framework will especially buttress the study and assist in the analysis of how the selected songs can be instruments of expression and reflection of the Vatsonga's cultural experiences.

SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY

The study will add to the body of knowledge and writing done on the subject of songs in general. More specifically, it will be a major contribution to research in the area of folkloric Xitsonga music. The findings of the study will inform readers specifically about Xitsonga songs and give them a glimpse of the culture of the Vatsonga. The research will also be a mechanism in the preservation of the songs that will be gathered. It is also critical to point out that the research will serve as an archive and a reminder of the various functions played by Tsonga songs within the broader socio-cultural gamut of Tsonga ethnicity. Also, by examining how songs are employed among the Vatsonga's daily lives; in the resolution of conflict, for example between men and women to negotiate a better understanding between the sexes, the usefulness of the selected songs will be revealed. Songs are also important in that they enhance performance. People in the workplace, who are involved in a protest action, dance to the accompaniment of songs.

DELIMITATION OF THE FIELD OF STUDY

Geographically the Vatsonga-Machangana are scattered all over Southern Africa, Zimbabwe, Malawi, Mozambique and Zambia. The researcher has decided to focus and conduct his research work in the Limpopo Province (South Africa) for practical convenience because an attempt to cover all the facets of Xitsonga songs will leave the researcher with a field of study so vast that it would hardly be possible for him to research it adequately to render it scientific and useful.

METHODOLOGY

This study adopts the qualitative research paradigm. The songs analysed in this study were collected from the Vatsonga people and recorded for the study. In carrying out the study, interviews were therefore imperative as part of gathering both the songs and pertinent information about them. Consultations with both traditional and academic experts was also a complement designing an important part of the research. These procedures helped to place songs in their context and in this manner, made the songs, their cultural and social significance more understandable. Observation by the researcher was another critical tool employed in gathering relevant information for the paper. The researcher observed performances and singing taking place from the scenes during the gathering of information.

Data Analysis

The collected data was vast and factually mixed up. To make sense out of it, the researcher decided to categorise the songs according to themes in order to allow for an easy screening. The cleansed data was therefore put under refined categorical thematic headings and analysed using the thematic analysis method. This allowed the researcher to render critical and scholarly analysis of songs that were chosen for the study.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Xitsonga traditional songs are an important feature of the life of the community. However, not much has been done by way of formal study to determine or examine the nature of these songs and their significance in society. This is the primary reason for this study. The aim of this section is to review a variety of previous viewpoints on traditional or folk songs. The viewpoints relate to several African languages such as Tshivenda, Sesotho and Northern Sotho. As there is very little research on Xitsonga songs, only one study on Xitsonga will be reviewed. The researchers whose works the study will concentrate on are:

Guma (1983) As far as African languages in South Africa are concerned, it seems that Guma (1983) is one of the first scholars to examine traditional songs in significant detail. In his definition of traditional music, he points out that dance, music and poetry are closely associated. He goes on to say that dance music is accompanied by handclapping, beating of drums and a stamping of feet on the ground. Guma's study focuses on Sesotho songs. He identifies three categories of traditional songs, namely, action songs, ceremonial songs, and "dikoma." According to him action songs are sung at work to accompany action in order to increase pace or to while away

time. Ceremonial songs in the Sesotho culture are sung by women only and are sometimes utilized as prayer to God to bring rain during summer or to bring about peace amongst the Basotho. Lastly, “dikoma” are sung by boys during their initiation ceremony. The teacher starts the song and the initiates sing it after him. In his observations Guma emphasizes that traditional music is also characterized by a strong rhythm, which conveys pleasure to the ear. He also points out that certain songs are sung by certain age groups only, with other people looking on and women ululating in high-pitched voices.

Rabothata (1991) Rabothata’s study focuses on the Tshivenda traditional songs. She gives an outline of how the songs are classified and how they are performed. She reflects on their form and content as well as on their functional significance within society. She points out that the form of the lyric of a traditional song is similar to that of a praise poem, and that these songs and praise poems are composed after a composer has observed something worthy of condemnation. Rabothata explains that the thematic content of folk songs considers mainly the aspirations of the people and their human interrelations. Additionally, some are concerned with protest. She divides the folk songs into traditional folk songs and composed folk songs. Traditional folk songs are folk songs concerned with natural phenomena or the aspirations of the people, whilst composed folk songs predominately examine the aspirations of contemporary people as observed and understood by the singer or composer. These songs are often an expression of general discontent and disapproval.

The aforementioned study also examines a number of functional aspects associated with traditional songs. These songs express the attitudes, the aspirations and the emotions of a society. This is most clearly seen in the response that is inspired by some songs even when the songs theme has a negative or critical tone.

Xitlhabana (1992) Xitlhabana’s work discusses Xitsonga traditional songs. His main observation is that Xitsonga traditional songs are important because they are used in everyday activities. He points out that Xitsonga traditional songs are used to defuse tension between warring parties; to teach; to reprimand; to praise or to condemn. The song below is an example of a song that teaches through the device of a reprimand. The name “N’wachochovelani”, describes a person who goes into different places, good and bad, far and near. In Xitsonga such a person is called a prostitute, a woman who has lost respect and dignity. The function of this song is educational

as it reprimands or teaches people to behave well in life. According to Xitlhabana the following song is used for working:

Hi tirha hi nga holi ka Mulungu...

Hi verengela mugayo eka Mulungu...

(We labour for nothing at the White man's farm)

We labour for a bag of mealie-meal at the White man's farm)

This is a protest song. African employees are protesting against ill-treatment meted out to them by Whites employers. White employers treat their African employees with contempt. In fact, Africans are regarded as inferior when compared to White people. This is borne out by the fact that they are paid with a bag of mealie-meal instead of money. The song shows that the African employees cannot tolerate this exploitation any longer. If the White man does not heed their complaints, they (African people) will stop working for the White people.

Ramatapa (1992) investigated the classification, analysis and meaning of Northern Sotho love songs. The study shows how the songs are used to convey the emotions and feelings associated with love. They are commonly sung by a singer (often accompanied by a dancer before) an audience. The study also shows that Basotho parents are responsible for arranging marriages of their children; hence, the latter are often shy when it comes to love affairs. For instance, even lawfully married couples are in most cases reluctant to be seen together. As a result, when walking, the husband walks in front, maintaining some distance from his wife. The excuse given is that when a man encourages his wife to walk side by side with him, she begins to treat him with disrespect as she is now too used to him.

The songs communicate various messages. Some are ironic and sarcastic, even scornful; others convey a message of encouragement and are didactic in nature in that they are concerned with solving the difficulties one can experience in a relationship. Ramatapa's study offers ample evidence of how love songs carry various messages and warning about relationships. It shows how these songs are primarily used to convey the message that love elicits various reactions from its "heroes" and "victims": ranging from sarcasm and scorn to wholehearted encouragement and these didactic lessons are all conveyed through the medium of love songs.

Jenkins, (2008) Jenkins's study explores and broadens the scope of 'folk music' within the gamuts of African-American oral realm as well as politico-cultural circles. The study lays focus on various forms of songs, encompassing rap, sorrow

songs, and or blues. The study views Black folk music as 'both balm and battle cry during periods of social upheaval' in view of its historical emblem in enshrining the elongated African American struggle. Thus the kind of music has become remarkable in presenting Black female performers as appropriators of folk aesthetics in their expression of political nuances as well as a way of keeping ethnic records that serve critical roles in both historical and communal integrity and cohesion.

DISCUSSION AND ANALYSIS OF FINDINGS

Tsonga Music and the New Born Baby

According to Xitsonga custom when a child is born, it is confined within a room or hut until the umbilical wound heals. During this period the child is seen and visited only by elderly female members of the family. When the wound is healed, a coming out party is arranged for the baby where the extended family and anyone interested may attend. At such a party there are special songs for the occasion. For example:

Wa vuya n'wana

Tindi!

Wa vuya n'wana

Tindi!

(The child comes

Tindi

The child comes

Tindi)

Words in the song, form the main text of the performance but for these words to have any significance and relevance as far as Vatsonga are concerned, they need to be completed in a variety of ways that are not all textual. The song is performed by women only in front of the hut room where the newly born lies. A pestle for stamping maize is placed, oriented horizontally, right next to the door to the baby's room. There is also a drum that is beaten to the rhythm of the song. Women cuddle up around the pestle and clap hands as they sing. One of them dances and at regular intervals jumps over the pestle. Additionally, there is a ritual that is performed to make the baby strong when he or she comes against problems when he or she is grown up and enables it to avoid difficulties in life. This is performed solely by women. Moreover, in such situations the women are clad in traditional Vatsonga attire: traditional garments, beads, bracelets and headgear. When

they dance they flaunt their ankle bracelets which harmonizes with the song.

The baby's maternal grandparents are also invited to take part in the celebrations. If the baby is a boy both grandparents become very happy in that an heir who will carry forward the name of the family. But if the baby is a girl the grandparents celebrate their daughter's ability to bear children. The child later comes out of the hut/room for all to see. It is placed in the shade. Relatives and friends sing joyous songs and thereafter present their gifts. This song is mostly sung under such circumstances.

Ma swi vona vambuya
Ku saseka ka swona
Ma swi vona vambuya
Ku saseke ka swona

Thimbyarimbya, thimbyarimbya,
Ku veleka i vukosi
Thimbyarimbya, thimbyarimbya,
Ku veleka i vukosi.

(Can you see
How beautiful it is?
Can you see
How beautiful it is?
Thimbyarimbya, thimbyarimbya
Having children brings wealth
Thimbyarimbya, thimbyarimbya
Having children brings wealth)

When this song is being sung, the elderly begin dancing showing off their "*swibelane*", traditional skirts that move to the rhythm of the song as they dance. All the other people sing, clap hands and/or beat drums as well as ululate to signify their happiness. Both the maternal and paternal grandparents are extremely pleased during this time for the birth of this baby serves to strengthen the ties between them. It therefore is not surprising if one of them starts singing: "Ma swi vona vambuya ku saseka ka swona." Which means: "How good and pleasing it is for relatives to be together." There is then a large amount of feasting and celebrating. During this period songs are performed. People leave only when it is very late.

Tsonga Music and Marriage Ceremonies

When a bridegroom has completed paying Lobola his messengers will then "ask for water" (that is they ask for the

bride to formally go and join her husband's family). Since all the necessary formalities will have been completed, the bride makes preparations to leave her family. When she is ready she is accompanied by her bridal party (consisting of unmarried girls of more or less her age). The bridal party will help her become used to her new role in her new family by helping to collect firewood, draw water, stamp maize and do all the other chores for a limited time.

When the head messenger sees that his/her request has been granted, and that the bride and her party are ready to leave he starts singing this song:

Hi famba nayee!
Nsati wa ka hina
Ha nwi lava, he nwina
Hi famba nayee
Nsati wa ka hina
A ta hi hlantswela miceka/tihembe
A ta hi kandzela mavele
A ta hi sindzela rivala.

(We are taking her along
Our bride
We want her
We are taking her along
Our bride
So that she can do washing for us
So that she can grind mealie-meal
So that she can clean the yard)

This song is performed at the home of the bride. The bridegroom's messengers come clad in their dancing garbs. As the song is sung one or two of them dance while the others clap hands. The bride is then brought to the "stage". Her head and face are covered in a veil. If one wants to see her face one must first give her a present, mostly in the form of money. The dancers perform enthusiastically and everyone present is expected to dance. Some of the observers who seem reluctant to dance may be pushed to the "stage" to perform and they are bound by the occasion to oblige.

As they dance they act out what the song is about. For example, when they perform: "A ta hi tsemela magede" (so that she could chop wood for us) they indicate the chopping movement or the carrying of firewood. They dance in a way that amuses the observers. Most people look extremely happy

at such an occasion. The bride is reminded in some of the songs about her impending duties at her new home. In fact, the dancing indicates to all that it is actions that count, not words. In other words, the bride is forewarned that she will only be regarded as a “real wife” if she works very hard at her new family. A fascinating feature is that there is no programme director for the occasion but each one guest seems to know what to do at the appropriate time. When the messengers run out of beer they say: “Xa mukon’wana a xi omi”, meaning the groom’s cup never runs dry which is an indication that they want more to drink and eat. Partying will go on for a long time until it is late and at this point the groom’s messengers will ask for permission to leave. The bride’s head messenger will inform the family of the request before granting it. The groom’s messengers then leave together with the bride’s party.

Tsonga Music and the ‘Micheri’ Dance

This is a celebration that is held when female initiates “*swikhombana*” “pass out”. It is held in the morning, next to the hut where these initiates underwent their initiation. This is a celebration performed by young mothers (i.e. mothers of one or two young children - who have not yet reached initiation stage). Their costumes are ankle rattles, vests, traditional garments, and beads. They also smear their bodies with ochre. They hold wooden axes in their right hands and docks in their left hands. They walk in a single file when they enter the hut with the initiates. They call this procession a train. They sing as they enter. One of the songs is:

Gogogo!
Ho, pfulani gede
Tanani mi ta vona
Hi vayeni pfulani gede
Tanani mi ta vona
Le ka Xikundu ku na vabvhana va moya
Tanani mi ta vona.

*(knock knock knock!
Oh, open the gate
Come and see
We are visitors open the gate
There are spiritual damsels in Xikundu
Come and see)*

This song emphasizes that this occasion is for young mothers only. The song serves as warning to people to clear the “stage”.

These women are saying that the clearing (stage) where they are going to perform should be theirs only. When they are on “stage” they may sing this song:

Vatsotsee!
A he hi lavaya vatsotse va ta
Vatsotsee!
A he hi lavaya vatsotse va ta.

*(You tsotsis!
Yes, there, they are coming
You tsotsis!
Yes, there, they are coming)*

At this moment they march like soldiers and a drum is beaten to the rhythm of their marching. In this group of women is a clown who dresses like a very old man and she also smears her face with soot. Her antics are very funny and are meant to entertain.

This occasion is popular with young children. Since it is performed mostly on Saturdays, children come in large numbers. The clown pulls faces at the children and dances in a funny way and “menacingly” runs towards the children who are highly appreciative. The clown’s train should not laugh but should remain concentrated on their roles. If any of them starts laughing she will be liable for a heavy fine. As they dance the leader of the train and the last person in the train “meet” thus forming a circle by forming a train, dancers are taught that when people work together as a group, they tend to achieve more success compared to when they work as individuals. This in fact supports the adage, “United we stand, divided we fall.” They then kneel down, bow their heads in greeting and then sing a song while taking up their positions. They then dance to the beat of a drum. The pace with which they move changes according to the rhythm of the drum. The clown then signals the end of the performance. This is done at a time when observers are still enjoying the performance.

Tsonga Music and the ‘Xincayincayi’ Dance

“Xincayincayi” is a dance performed mostly by young males at happy occasions such as the installation of a chief, marriage ceremonies and the “passing out of female initiates. Here the focus will be on performing this dance on the day female initiates “pass out”. The dance is performed where observers will be able to have a nice view of the proceedings. This dance is performed by a combination of drummers, singers, and dancers. Singers are mostly women who put on traditional garments, beads, docks, “swibelana” (traditional skirts) and

ankle bracelets. They also wear makeup. Dancers put on animal hides, ornate headdresses and tassels on their arms and legs. The upper body of the dancers is not covered and their feet are bare. The dance is named mostly after the village in which its dancers reside e.g. *"xincayincayi xa ka Xikundu"*.

"Xincayincayi" dance groups are invited to come and perform on the day the female initiates "pass out." They do not perform for payment, hence any person, of whatever station in life, can invite any group of *"xincayincayi"* dancers as long as at the end of the ceremony there will be sorghum beer for them. Even if a group is not invited it may come to perform. It will be heartily welcomed and treated as if it had been invited because this occasion is treated as a cultural one where everyone should be happy. Every *"xincayincayi"* group has a distinctive sound that separates it from the others. That is, even at a distance, one can readily identify the group by hearing the beating of the drums. Observers stand in a circle and a mat for the initiates to sit upon is placed right in front of this audience. Although the initiates are veiled they are able to watch the dancing. These veils are an indication of respect. When the *"xincayincayi"* group gets on the stage, the drummers come first on stage followed by singers. The following song is performed before the Dancers have appeared on stage:

Mi basopa swihlangi
N'wina vatswari va swona
Swi nga ngheni exikontirini
Va nga ta swi dlaya
N'wina vamaseve.
*(keep your children
You parents
Keep them away from the tar
Lest they kill them
You friends)*

At this moment girls dance shaking their waists. Flaunting their *"swibelana"* (traditional skirts) which are decorated with beads. This song reminds parents to look after their children because they may be run over by cars. In the context of the song, parents are told to clear the way for the since their children are blocking their way. Young female dancers from the troupe are only "clearing the way" for *"xincayincayi"* dancers. These girls dance, raising their breasts to show that they are still virgins. When the males are ready the girls vacate the stage.

The dancers may be young males or adult males. When they move on to the “stage” they use different “entrances.” They wear uniforms and have rattles. When they have come on “stage” they move around checking to see if there are objects that may hurt them while they dance. When they are satisfied the leader blows a whistle and they dance enthusiastically and energetically, jumping around acrobatically. Observers will then come from all directions to watch, attracted by the clapping of hands and ululation. The leader blows a whistle to effect a change in their dancing. Every action is done to amuse the observers. When the dancers jump up and lie on the ground the leader may lead them in a song such as:

Hi kumile papila
Ra ku huma eGiyani
Va ta va ta hi vitana
Xikan’we na marungula ya nomo.

*(We got the letter
From Giyani
To come and call us
Together with the verbal message)*

When the leader says: “Hi teto (there you are), dancers dance very fast in unison, when the leader blows the whistle drumming stops and dancers lie still on the ground. They reserve dancing for when a song is sung, for example,

Vavasate
Vavasati se va kwatile ngopfu
Van’wana se va rhwele na milomo
Onge i nhompfu ya nguluvee!

*(women
Women are now very angry
Others have carried their mouth – idiom.
Like a pig’s nose)*

When the leader again says “Hi teto” dancing resumes energetically when he blows the whistle they lie still on the ground adopting a posture different from the previous one. When they change from a particular dancing style to another, smaller drums are beaten. Here one person is responsible for the beating of up to six drums simultaneously which is a marvel to watch. At this point there is no singing. Each dancer is given a chance to show his skill by being given an opportunity to dance one at a time. The dancers can now be given awards as they perform. “Xincayincayi” is by its nature theatrical. In most cases when the dance is performed there is moral message

that is conveyed to audience. This message may concern warnings about witchcraft, murders, fighting for a lover and other such elements. When they have finished dancing, the beating of the drums is relaxed and the performers then leave the “stage” in a single file. Observers will clap hands and ululate waiting for the next group.

Tsonga Music and the ‘Muchongolo’ Dance

“*Muchongolo*” is a dance that is performed by males on any joyous occasion, e.g. the “passing out” of female initiates, the installation of a chief or at a marriage ceremony. The main aim is to entertain and amuse the audience. We shall concentrate on the performance of this dance on the day female initiates “pass out”. “*Muchongolo*”, like “*xincayincayi*”, is performed anywhere as long as the place will enable dancers to perform and allow an audience to watch them but the place should be next to or near the place where initiates are housed. In most cases this dance is performed on Saturdays or Sundays after one o’clock. Performers use the following costumes, karosses, ornate headgears, “*switlapfi*” and “*mitoriyani*”. Singers wear “*swibelana*”, traditional garments, beads and wrist and ankle bracelets. Dancers hold shields and clubs. When “*xincayincayi*” dancers finish performing it is time for “*muchongolo*” dancers. This dance is mostly for elderly men. Performers move onto the “stage” in two single files. The drummer leads, followed by dancers and then female singers. They move onto the “stage” singing a newly composed song. All dancers wield clubs and shields. Their upper bodies are naked and their feet are bare. As they move they raise clubs and shields just as soldiers at war. They all sing and dance to the rhythm of the drum as they come to the stage. One of the songs sung to mark either their entry or exit is:

Hi ya leyo ma yi vona yi fikile
Ya majaha ya moya
Qambhi ya matiko
Tijenerala ta vuyimbeleri
Ti ta kukula ku sala ko lo paa!

*(There he has arrived, behold
For spiritual young man
An international artist
The university general workers
Will sweep until it is clean)*

This song is a song of praise directed at themselves where they proclaim the singing and dancing skills with which they will win the hearts of all the girls. It is not unusual for girls to elope with

good dancers. When the leader blows his whistle, the drummer slows the beat down and the dancers squat on the ground and the leader leads them in this song.

U ala nzilo
Landzani vatsware
N'wa-Maxuvana a nga ala nzilo
Se swi lo yini nwanangoo?

U ala nzilo
Landzani vatsware
N'wa-Maxuvana a ngala ntumbuluko
Se swi lo yini nwanagoo?

*(She refused the mourning clothes
Call the parents
N'wa-Maxuvana refused the mourning clothes
What's wrong my child?)*

*(She refused the mourning clothes
Call the parents
N'wa-Maxuvana defied nature
What's wrong my child?)*

When the leader blows his whistle the dancers stamp their feet twice on the ground with their shields and clubs raised. Skilled dancers are given "awards". This encourages the dancers to give their all. The song above teaches children to abide by customs and traditions. If a person flouts tradition, it is a sign that his parents brought her/ him up badly and that they are the ones to blame. The leader will blow his/her whistle again and a new song is sung:

Rhumelani vafundhisi
Va ya eka Xikwembu
Va ya byela Xikwembu
Tiko ra mbombomela
Vanhu va fisa swa mikhuva
Vanhu va fisa swa masalamusi

*(Send the Pastors
To go to God
To tell God
The country sinks
People die miraculously
People die miraculously)*

Sometimes some dancers swagger around to the audience as they sing. They come back and continue dancing. They are encouraged by ululations from women to dance vigorously. Dancer squat down and the drumbeat is then changed to signal a change to a different dancing style. Then one of the dancers, usually the most gifted, will start dancing to the delight of the audience. When he has finished, the whole group squats again. The lead singer sings another song that is sung while dancers move around the yard in two processions. The leader moves between these single files. The singers will then go to the stage and dance. They sing a song such as:

I ncini xi ku karhataka?
U lava yini la mutini wa mina?
Vukhwenukhwenu vavasati va vanhu
I ncini xi ku vavisaka?
He bava va ku lava ndhuneni
I ncini xi ku karhataka?
*(what's troubling you?
What do you want at my home?
Beckoning to married females
What is causing the pain in you?
You are wanted in the courts
What's troubling you?)*

At this time shields and clubs are placed on the ground. The leader leaves his group squatting and swaggers around. When he resumes dancing, he is joined by the other dancers and they take their shields and clubs. This time they either dance to the rhythm of the drums or of a horn only. The singers are silent. Men and women dance together. The above song means that a man who courts married women will appear before an induna to answer for his deviant behavior. When the dancers finished dancing they vacate the stage leaving the audience very happy.

Tsonga Music and the 'Xibelana' Dance

"Xibelana" is a female dance. The name is derived from the attire women wear. "Xibelana" refers to a traditional skirt. When the dancers are performing, this skirt moves to the rhythm of the song. "Xibelana" is performed at any joyous occasion. We shall look at "xibelana" in the context of celebrating the birth of a first born boy. All grandparents come to this celebration because it is a great day since an heir who will carry the family name has been born. Women wear "xibelana", traditional garments, headgear, beads and wrist and ankle bracelets. These articles indicate that her husband

provides well and that she is conscientious with her appearance. The traditional garments have different names: “*ndhayimani*”, “*xihatimani*” or “*n’wamajavula*”. The dance is performed at the home where the child is born. Before the great day comes, women spend a great deal of time cleaning and renovating the surroundings and rondavels. The celebratory dances are performed by adult women only. They come out of a rondavel singing a song such as:

Ma swi vona vana vambuya
Ku saseka ka swona
Ma swi vona vambuya
He ku saseka ka swona.

*(Can you see
How beautiful it is?
Can you see
How beautiful it is?)*

The song is started by elderly women after which other women join in and a drum is beaten. Elderly women dance while others sing and ululate. After singing they go into the rondavel/room where the baby is and then present their gifts. These gifts take various forms: money, clothes for the mother and child, plates, soap and food amongst other appropriate items. Then dancing resumes and a song is sung:

Thimbyarimbya, thimbyarimbya
Ku veleka vukosi,
Thimbyarimbya, thimbyarimbya
Ku veleka vukosi.

*(Thimbyarimbya, thimbyarimbya
Having children brings wealth
Thimbyarimbya, thimbyarimbya
Having children brings wealth)*

The adult women dance in appreciation of the gift of giving birth. After gifts have been presented people celebrate and feast. The stage is now set for anyone to dance. Towards the end of the occasion men come in and perform “*makhwaya*” to register their joy as well.

Tsonga Music and the ‘Makhwaya’ Dance

“*Makhwaya*” is a dance performed by males (young and old) during an occasion where people are happy. Even when people are just drinking without celebrating anything they perform this dance. For this dance to be performed there needs only to be joy and an open space for dancers. Even in

the absence of beer, people dance. Dancers dance to the rhythm of a drum. People may sing songs like:

Tumbetani byala makhelwani
Byala lebyi byi bava ngopfu
Tiko ra ka hina ri kurile ngopfu
Vanhu lava va ta heta byala

Tumbetani byala makhelwani
Byala lebyi byi bava ngopfu
Vanhu lava va tele ngopfu
Vanhu lava va ta heta byala

*(Hide the beer my neighbour
The beer is so good
Our village has many people
These people will drink it all)*

*(hide the beer my neighbour
The beer is so good
Our village has many people
These people will drink it all)*

People clap hands to the rhythm of the song and beat a drum. Then anyone who feels like dancing takes up the challenge. The dancers may then encourage the singers to raise their voices before he starts performing. If there is someone who feels that the song is not to his liking, he may start his own song and then dance. There is no specific attire for this type of dance and neither is there a formal ending to this type of dance.

Conclusion

This paper has attempted to show the importance of musical performance in the context of Xitsonga songs. Performance is how people dance to the theme of songs and use their bodies and actions to communicate their meaning. Performing Xitsonga songs is different from acting dramas because when Xitsonga songs are performed the occasion and context are very important. Although there are similarities between song performance and drama performance there are important differences. Both performances have characters, time, stage and costumes but what is important is that a particular song is only relevant for a particular occasion. For example, a hymn for “*micheri*” cannot be performed for a “*makhwaya*” occasion. Thus, an occasion determines the kind of songs that can be performed. The performance of Xitsonga songs is part of the customs, tradition and culture of Vatsonga and this shows that

Vatsonga are a gregarious people who show their joy and pleasure when they meet together by performing songs. Almost all occasions in Xitsonga have songs associated with them. The songs that have been quoted here all show the deep respect that Vatsonga attach to co-values and morals.

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