

COMPOSER'S NOTE

A composer can find inspiration in the unlikeliest of settings, and the genesis of *Zimbe!* is as extraordinary as any. The seeds of my affinity with African music and the gospel tradition were sown in the early nineties through a chance encounter on a train en route to London. Sitting opposite me was a woman with a small book of manuscripts tucked under her lap. I asked politely whether she was a musician and she replied that she was – the way in which she spoke of music told a story. She was working on 'African and gospel' music, but although she knew many excellent songs, she was really an artist, not a musician, and was rather lacking in confidence when it came to leading a singing workshop. 'I could help,' I offered gamely, and it all took off from there.

We struck up a working relationship, and she introduced me to songs, tapes, books, and friends with a plethora of songs to share. I immediately fell in love with the music. Together we ran singing groups, in Oxford, London and beyond, and I quickly became immersed in arranging, teaching, sharing and performing African songs.

I later produced a collection of choral arrangements for Faber Music entitled *Songs of a Rainbow Nation*, and it was in response to performing these arrangements that Justin Doyle, conductor of the Dorking Church Society, approached me with a view to commissioning a more substantial piece based on African and gospel themes. This had indeed to call the morning after *The No. 1 Ladies' Detective Agency* had been shown on TV, and I had both watched it, and both had been moved by the use of music in the production, filmed in local townships. One particularly moving moment, depicting a funeral scene, involved a huge number of local Xhosa breaking into an apparently spontaneous performance of a traditional funeral song. It was decided that my piece would aim to reflect some of the manifold ways in which music plays a part in everyday life in Africa – from the rising of the sun to its setting, both literally and figuratively. I wanted to capture the essence of the African spirit through glimpses into the human experience – simple children's playground songs from Ghana and Zimbabwe; a Xhosa lullaby for mothers of the victims of Apartheid; a raucous drinking song; sensuous wedding songs; and some beautiful funeral and worship music – all imbued with the spirit, energy and simplicity that is so typical of the African song tradition.

Zimbe is an Anglicised version of the Swahili word 'Zimbe', meaning 'Sing them': just as others have shared these wonderful songs with me, I wish to pass them on now. Scored for SATB choir, unison women's choir and jazz quintet, with copious percussion, the settings reflect my own musical influences, with the piece weaving references to jazz, pop, the Western choral tradition and, of course, 'world music'. African songs are easy to teach and impossible to forget; that is the very nature of the communal song tradition. The songs I have chosen to arrange are fun, moving and infectiously tuneful – and through them we find ourselves in a wonderfully simple, joyous realm where music imitates life, and life inspires music.

Alexander L'Estrange

February 2009

A Note on the Score

The semi-chorus should be positioned when the choir enters in movement. Tutti is marked. Full chorus and semi-chorus may sing together until the point where it is explicitly stated that the semi-chorus should not sing, in preparation for a specific entry. Chorus and men's chorus excluding the semi-chorus, and Tutti indicates all singers – full chorus, semi-chorus and children's choir.

A Note on Pronunciation

Italics under the lyrics are intended to provide a guide to pronunciation — Xhosa "th", for example, is pronounced with a hard "t". To achieve an authentic sound, it is worth noting that all "a" vowels (whether in Xhosa, Swahili, Akan, Shona or Zulu) should be pronounced with a short, bright sound as in "cat"; this has the added advantage of encouraging good projection and intonation, brightening your choir's tone.

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Not sure where to find a jazz quintet for your performance? The composer will be happy to advise on, or arrange, the services of professional musicians. For information, email choral@fabermusic.com

8. Hamba Lulu

Wedding song from South Africa

TEXT: ZULU

385 Contemplative, unhurried groove $\text{♩} = 92$ Play 3 times

p

389 FULL CHORUS & SEMI-CHORUS
BASSES

p *mm* *et sim.*

393 + TENORS

p *Mm* *mm*

397 ALTOS

p *Mm* *mm*

Banks
Music
Publications

14. Njoooni! Zimbe!

TEXT: SWAHILI

Come, sing the songs of Africa!

Celebratory! ♩ = c.100

796

SEMI-CHORUS

PREVIEW ONLY

Zim - be!

FULL CHORUS

mf cresc.

PREVIEW ONLY

Njoo - ni! Zim - be! Nyim - bo za Af - ri - ka.
(N)joh - ee Zim - be!

Celebratory! ♩ = c.100

mf cresc.

PREVIEW ONLY

(roll/spread *ad lib.*)

800

PREVIEW ONLY

Zim - be!

f cresc.

Njoo - ni! Zim - be!

Nyim - bo za Af - ri - ka.

f cresc.