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A Report on the Development of African Performance Awards and Assessments (DAPAMA) Initiative: a collaborative venture between the Faculty of Music at the University of Pretoria (South Africa), London College of Music Examinations, Thames Valley University

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An increasingly mobile and globally employed workforce results in the inter-dependence of systems of educational qualifications and issues relating to equivalences. Increasing correspondence between systems drives a need for accreditations and standards to have international as well as national recognition. At the same time globalisation has led to an increasing awareness of national identities and cultural independence and a tension between the need for equivalences and the need to assert national or local identities and cultures. This paper reports on the Development of African Performance Awards and Assessments (DAPAMA) Initiative which seeks to give recognition to the skills developed (often informally) by African musicians, whilst ensuring that the resulting qualifications and awards are acknowledged as having similar value to those of Western Art Music. The authors describe a process which draws upon the development of awards for Chinese Music and a meeting of African musicians and educators held at the University of Pretoria in March 2010. Concerns with Western-type structuring of non-Western cultural principles are considered, the authors describe an alternative paradigm for assessments and for the structuring of awards in ways that seek to address issues arising from a need for both local and international recognition.

Music
Examinations
Performance
African
Assessment

Context

DAPAMA is a collaborative project between The University of Pretoria, Thames Valley University (UK) and The Talent Centre Ltd (UK). It has its roots in discussions between Professor Caroline van Niekerk (Music Department, Faculty of Humanities, University of Pretoria) and Professor John Howard (Director of the London College of Music Examinations (LCM), Thames Valley University). The starting point of these discussions was a paper entitled 'Whose performance is it anyway? Reflections on examining music, meanings, standards, and reliability in an international context' (authors: Dr. Jonathan H Robbins and Professor John Howard) first presented at the 33rd Annual IAEA Conference, Baku, September 2007 and (in a revised format) at the Pan-African Society of Music Education conference in Malawi, 2008. The development of new Performance Awards in Chinese Music by LCM in Singapore under the direction of Professor John Howard and Dr. Jonathan H Robbins which started in 2006 had by 2010 provided valuable knowledge and understanding about ways of working and the development of assessments in cross-cultural settings. These different strands were brought together at a meeting of African musicians and educators convened by Professor Caroline van Niekerk and held at the University of Pretoria on 29 March 2010. The purpose of this meeting was to explore the issues surrounding a proposal to develop a new set of awards for the recognition of achievement in African Musical Arts. This paper reports on the outcomes of that meeting and the decisions which were made by the participants.

African Musical Arts Performance Awards

The title arose from the initial discussions and is intended to emphasise the focus on African Musical Arts Performance and its inclusivity as well as the possibility of extending the coverage of these awards to include not just Musical Arts but other visual, expressive and performing arts. The purpose of the awards is to recognise levels of mastery and achievement by groups and individuals, to pilot these awards and to subsequently extend the work to other countries in sub-Saharan Africa. The intention is to endorse each type of award with a specific title i.e. African Musical Arts Performance Award (Vocal), the actual form that this type of endorsement will take is to be agreed as the project develops. The development of these awards is based on a Graded Examinations model; these examinations are widely used for music, drama and dance and are usually characterized by a single examination of a performance given by a candidate (or group of candidates) and simultaneously examined by an external examiner. Graded examinations may include supplementary tests of technique, knowledge, and understanding but these are subordinate to the performance of the repertoire. A drawback to this use of a repertoire selected by the examination board is that it promotes a canon of 'approved' music and leads to questions about the underlying assumptions and purposes of these examinations in the context of African Musical Arts. In African Art Music¹ there is no repertoire in the Western sense, so a key aspect of this project is being able to employ methodologies that recognise achievement in the context of the performance given and which lead to internationally recognised standards of assessment. In effect what is being sought is a synthesis or fusion of practices in ways which retain integrity of purpose and outcomes.

The approach being used is based on the experience of the authors in developing Performance Awards for Chinese Music. This presented similar issues in respect of a lack of repertoire in the sense of the word used by Western Examination Boards. Meetings with Chinese musicians in Singapore in the early part of 2006 led to proposals to adapt traditional graded examinations in Western Music in order to provide awards for Chinese Instrumentalists and Singers. A key requirement was that these new awards should ensure that both amateur and professional musicians were able to gain recognition at an internationally recognised standard, with assessments in Chinese conducted by Chinese musicians trained as assessors. These meetings were mainly conducted in Chinese with translation to and from English as required. The outcome was a framework of eight graded awards with progression to the Diplomas offered by

¹ The term used by the Africans involved in the project

the London College of Music. This framework described the initial expectations of mastery for performance at each award and included assessment constructs agreed by the group together with rubrics for the conduct of assessments.

A significant factor in the successful development of these Performance Awards for Chinese Music has been the control exercised by the Chinese musicians and the sense of ownership that this engendered. This has been further enhanced by the reputations and experience of the group both as musicians and teachers as this provided the credibility necessary for acceptance of these awards within the wider Chinese community.

This fusion of cultural practices has a long history in music and the arts but is rare in the world of assessments and examinations. Western styles of examination are widely used by governments in many countries, American, Australian and British examination boards also market their own examinations directly to schools and individuals in different countries. There may be many benefits from this but it may also be argued that it leads to a form of cultural imperialism which promotes western values as being more important than those which are indigenous to a particular culture or country. At a time when globalization has led to an increasing awareness of national identities and cultural independence as well as a tension between the need for equivalences in the way qualifications are understood and valued; there is a need to find alternative paradigms for assessment that enable national or local identities and cultures to assert themselves and be recognized internationally as valid and valuable.

As work on this project and the associated research has progressed, the need to understand the way examinations have evolved, the assumptions and paradigms that are at work, and the cultural implications that surround them have assumed greater importance. Further research is needed to explore these issues, particularly in relation to the meanings attached to standards, 'portability' of qualifications and the ways we choose to assess performance.

In the simplest of terms this project sets out to create a fusion between the type of western examination practice described below and what the participants who met at the University of Pretoria describe as African Art Music. This paper does not attempt to describe or classify what this term means, rather it confines itself to the general understandings put forward by the group of African musicians and educators involved in the project that:

- there is no repertoire in a Western sense;
- music may be instrumental, vocal and dance on its own or any combination of these;
- music may follow traditional patterns and be made for a range of purposes;
- musical forms and expressions are 'fluid' inasmuch that they evolve through cultural exchanges²;
- making, performing and involvement are integral to the experience of and in the music;
- the notion of the 'performer(s)' and the 'audience' in a Western sense rarely forms part of the sorts of musical arts that this project seeks involvement with.

Staines (2001) in a wide ranging essay on the nature of meaning in music, draws attention to the complex processes that are at work when seeking to understand what is heard when listening to or performing music. Understanding what is heard encapsulates a potentially significant difficulty with assessments of music in general and particularly in the context of this project. This is because of the necessity of ensuring that the judgements made by assessors have sufficient credibility to be meaningful to the community to which the performance belongs. When Mills (1991) expresses the view that a musical performance provides its own context and should be judged as a whole, rather than the sum of its parts, she emphasises the nature of performance as purpose and context, rather than assessment. These two observations 'understanding what is heard' and the view that a musical performance 'provides its own context' provide a starting point for resolving the issue of credibility of assessments and

² Cultural in its broadest sense, i.e. recorded music, broadcasts, regional, local etc

outcomes in relation to this project. Before exploring the issues raised by this it is necessary to describe the examining process that is being used.

Graded Examinations

The examination process being used for this project is similar to that of Graded Examinations. These examinations have their roots in the forms of apprenticeship and training used in the performing arts and are characterized by the demonstration of progressive levels of mastery used to differentiate the novice from more accomplished performers. Differentiation by required mastery seems to be based on a process of norm based judgements mediated by experience similar to that described as Limen Referencing (Christie and Forrest 1980). Examined under schemes set up by the major schools of music, dance and drama, these examinations are widely used both in the U.K. and in other countries. A typical structure is either five or eight levels of mastery or 'Grades', which are used to define increasing competency in the skills, techniques, and knowledge required of a musician. For each grade a published set repertoire, selected as being appropriately demanding in terms of technique, knowledge, aesthetics and other qualities, is taught and practised before a candidate is entered for the examination at that grade. It is unusual for a candidate to be entered for an examination unless the teacher considered that she or he was likely to pass. The actual examination shares many of the characteristics of an audition with the examiner as both the audience and director and the candidate as performer.

Assessments of performance require the exercise of judgements rooted in knowledge and perceptions and in the ability to re-cognise and to re-member qualities in a work that are not only complex but frequently subtle. This act of 're-cognition and re-membling' is literally a re-thinking of the work and a process of assemblage that involves the assessor in the work, its values and meanings through a process of sitting alongside the performer in order to form the necessary judgements. The fact that the term 'assessment' is derived from the Latin *assidere*, meaning to 'sit-alongside' in order to value, underlines the nature of the process and the way it works. As the purposes of assessment become more formalised and applied in contexts with progressively more 'high stakes' outcomes, the valuing process becomes increasingly referenced to external standards and norm-referenced judgements. These standards and norms may be described, exemplified and enculturated in a community of practice but in practice their use still requires interpretation and judgement mediated by the past experience of assessors (Christie and Forrest 1980). So assessments are not examinations, weighings, measurings and countings but a form of valuing that actively involves both that which is assessed and the assessor, even though the assessment may include measurements, evidence and other sources of information such as test results. This is clearly legitimate but given the difficulties of forming assessment judgements it also creates a tension between the need to deal with the complexities of assessment and the need to consider the performance in its own terms which was noted earlier.

Initial Outcomes

The working group considered that 'African Musical Arts' means: Musical Arts originating from African people or in Africa. Some of its key characteristics are:

- its predominate role as a community and cultural activity;
- a blurring of the distinction between performers and audience;
- its participatory nature;
- the incorporation (in varying ways and to various extents) of instruments, voice and movement;
- cyclical and rhythmic combinations linked to an activity and forms of narrative which may have political, ritual, religious, working and community meanings and purposes.

The reasons for adopting the Graded Examinations model are that it provides:

- a clearly defined and differentiated structure of progressive mastery at eight grades;
- established equivalences within European and UK Qualifications Frameworks;

- published accreditations and standards that should enable recognition by other regulators;
- clearly defined pathways into Further and Higher Education;
- well established quality assurance procedures;

Following the experience of working with the Performance Awards for Chinese Music and in order to meet the necessity for assessors who belong to an African Musical Arts community of practice the working group agreed that there should be:

- Three Levels of demand covering a total of eight Grades
- Published expectations describing level of demand for performance, knowledge and understanding at each Grade
- Outcome based assessment by Independent (External) Assessors who belong to or have been inducted into, an African Musical Arts community of practice
- A Declaration of Intent requirement at Grade 5 and above
- Five broadly defined performance domains:
 1. Traditional
 2. Regional
 3. Art Music
 4. Fusion
 5. Contemporary

These performance domains are to provide the structure necessary for comparability and consistency of assessor judgements. The Declaration of Intent requirement is of particular importance as it will form the foundation for assessment judgements. This is to ensure that assessments do not focus on definitions of 'correctness' (i.e. in relation to a specific tradition) but on the realisation of declared intent e.g. To what extent did the performance realise the performers declared intent in the context of the level of mastery required by the grade?

In order to facilitate this, the proposed assessment model consists of five defined and exemplified Assessment Constructs used by Assessors at each Grade and in conjunction with each Grade Description, these are:

1. Technical Accomplishment
2. Musicality
3. Musical Arts Understanding and Knowledge
4. Communication
5. Realisation of Intent

Proposed outcomes

- A set of awards defined as African in a broad geographical and cultural sense with the intention to recognise distinctive regional and national variants.
- An initial focus on sub-Saharan Africa
- Training and formal recognition for Independent Assessors chosen for their knowledge, understanding and capabilities in the African Musical Arts
- Awards made by Thames Valley University London College of Music Examinations in conjunction with the University of Pretoria Faculty of Music and (possibly) subsequently with the involvement of other African universities.
- Single awards made to a group (ensemble) as a whole
- Awards made to individuals as the result of a separate assessment of their performance within the Group

Conclusions

This is just the start of a project that will take several years to be fully realised. Its eventual shape and the outcomes that emerge may well be different to those that are described here. It

will also provide opportunities for further research into the nature of the processes used to facilitate cross-cultural developments in the context of awards and examinations, the training and standardisation of assessors who are recognised as having authority to form judgements and the application of the connoisseurship models of assessment that are the basis for these awards.

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