



Forward Kwenda, *mbira*

Forward Kwenda was born 5 April 1963 in the rural Buhera area of Zimbabwe, an area known for its fierce resistance to colonial rulers and respect for Shona tradition. As a young boy, Forward excelled in traditional dance and recitation of ancient poetry. At the age of 10, he began to play ngoma (drums) and hosho (gourd rattles) for his mother's gombwe (rain-making) spirit. He was given the name "Forward" because of his curiosity about many subjects, enthusiastic involvement in many activities and his singing for liberation war freedom fighters.

By 1985, Forward was playing in a unusually complex style – much to the amazement of master *mbira* players two and three generations his senior. This style was first recorded in 1985 and 1986 by his American friend Glenn Makuna (see *MBIRA* tapes nos. 56, 57, 58, 143), who dubbed Kwenda the "Coltrane of *mbira*."

Asked about his experience of playing *mbira*, Forward responds:

"When I pick up my *mbira*, I don't know what is going to happen. The music just goes by itself, taking me higher and higher until I can end up crying because the music is so much greater than a human being can understand." and "I just have to get out of the way so spirits can make my *mbira* play – it isn't me – I'm just amazed."

In 1997, Kwenda toured the US with Erica Azim, and recorded the Shanachie CD *Svikiro: Meditations of an Mbira Master*. In 1999, Azim's field recording of Kwenda on a Zimbabwean mountaintop at sunset was included on Ellipsis Arts' *Trance 3 CD*. In February 2000, Kwenda performed at the Kennedy Center in Washington, DC with Erica Azim, and they toured North America during 2000, 2001 and 2002.

The *MBIRA* Recordings Library includes several recordings of Kwenda.

Saturday, October 1, 2011

8:00 p.m.

*Brooks-Rogers Recital Hall
Williamstown, Massachusetts*

Upcoming Events:

See music.williams.edu for full details and to sign up for the weekly e-newsletters.

10/8	5pm	Violin Master Class: Jennifer Koh	Brooks-Rogers Recital Hall
10/9	3pm	Visiting Artist: Jennifer Koh, violin	Brooks-Rogers Recital Hall
10/14	8pm	Berkshire Symphony	'62 Center, MainStage *
	7:15pm	<i>Pre-Concert Talk</i>	<i>Greylock Hall</i>
10/15	2pm	Piano Master Class: Frederick Moyer	Brooks-Rogers Recital Hall
10/15	8pm	Visiting Artist: Frederick Moyer, piano	Brooks-Rogers Recital Hall
10/21	4:15pm	Workshop: Anonymous 4	Thompson Memorial Chapel
10/21	8pm	Visiting Artist: Anonymous 4	Thompson Memorial Chapel
10/24	4:15pm	Class of 1960 Lecture with Prof. Louise Meintjes	Room 30, Bernhard
10/26	12:15pm	MIDWEEKMUSIC	Greylock Hall
10/28	8pm	Williams Chamber Players	Brooks-Rogers Recital Hall
10/29	8pm	Williams Jazz Ensemble	'62 Center, MainStage *

*Please turn off or mute cell phones.
No photography or recording is permitted.*

About the *Mbira Dza Vadzimu*

The *mbira dza vadzimu* (the *mbira* of the ancestor spirits) is the most important musical instrument for certain Shona ethnic groups in Zimbabwe. It is played for rain-making ceremonies and other rituals where ancestral or regional spirits are invoked and possess certain human beings who act as intermediaries between the community and the community. Because the *mbira* is used in this way, some call it *nhare* (telephone). In addition to their ritual role, the same *mbira dza vadzimu* songs can be played for general entertainment, as in tonight's performance. In Shona culture, the sacred and the secular are not opposed and are frequently combined.

Mbira songs are often cryptic, and it is very difficult to say exactly what a particular song means. There are often several levels of interpretation, which one can access depending upon the situation and the depth of one's knowledge of Shona culture. In addition, *mbira* songs often include non-lexical sounds (nonsense syllables, such as *wo iye, iye*) that encourage participation and intensify emotion.

Musically, *mbira* music is also subject to multiple interpretations. Two or more *mbira* played together create a rich kaleidoscope of sound in which the listener can hear many different melodies and rhythms. The players are usually divided into two groups, *kushaura* (the starter) players who play the main melody and rhythm that defines a song and *kutsinhira* (the follower) players who play a contrasting part that interlocks with the *kushaura*. Generally speaking, if *kushaura* is in a duple meter, *kutsinhira* is in a triple meter or vice versa. If *kushaura* and *kutsinhira* are in the same meter, then their entrances are staggered so that one is "on the beat" and one is "off the beat." This tension between *kushaura* and *kutsinhira* provides much of the richness of *mbira* music.