Changes in performance styles: a case study of Muheme, a musical tradition of the Wagogo of Dodoma, Tanzania

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Abstract

On 13 February 2005, I attended a concert of Wagogo music performed in the Anglican Church in Chamwino village in the Dodoma region of central Tanzania. Twenty music groups participated in this concert with six of these groups performing the popular Wagogo muheme. It was clearly observed that the way this muheme music tradition was performed in the church, was quite different from the muheme performances during Wagogo girls' initiation rituals, which I have had the opportunity to witness at various times in the past.

This realization prompted interest in the transition, and the resultant change of muheme performance styles as a Wagogo tradition, interest that led to the present paper. The basic argument of this paper is that music tradition of muheme is a ‘living tradition’, one that changes due to different influences, some from within the culture, some foreign to the culture, and some brought about by historical events such as the decline of female circumcision practices.

This paper investigates the transition of a ritual music tradition, muheme, through a secular form of the same tradition that has ultimately led to a church-employed usage of the tradition. It will note, specifically, changes in performance styles and the factors that led to the change of the muheme tradition.