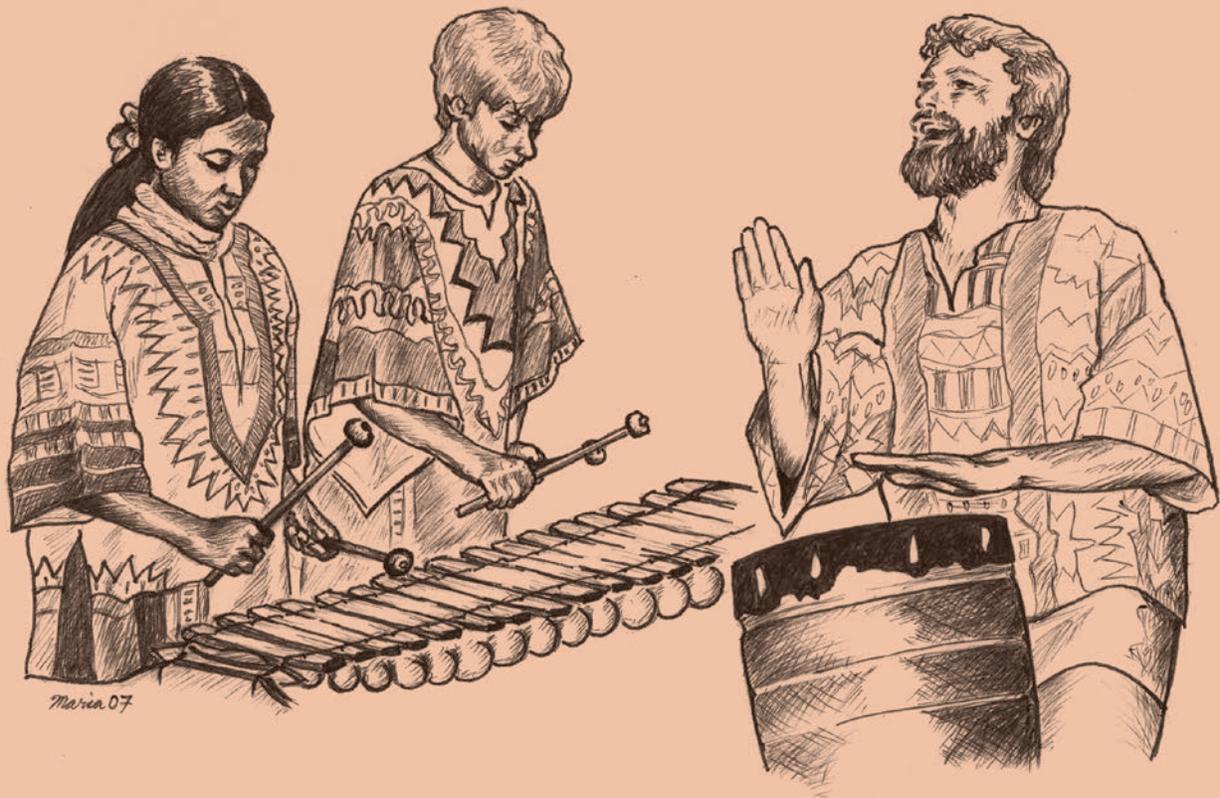




# CHAIYA MARIMBA

## MUSIC BOOK 2

*Maria Minnaar-Bailey*



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## PREFACE



*Maria Minnaar-Bailey*

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I had two compelling reasons for writing this book: a story to tell, and music to share.

The story is about how the Zimbabwean marimba came into existence. Much has been written about the spread of the Zimbabwean marimba tradition in the U.S., especially in the Pacific Northwest, but little is known about how and when the tradition actually began in Zimbabwe.

I grew up in Zimbabwe, and was an eyewitness to the unfolding of the marimba tradition in that country. This new musical tradition began with the founding of Kwanongoma College of African Music in 1961, the same year I was born. My father, now deceased, was Director of the College when I was in my early teens. There are still a few people alive today who were present at Kwanongoma from the beginning. What better way to record an accurate history of the Zimbabwean marimba than directly from those who had a hand in shaping it? The full account is in the first section of this book, “The History of Zimbabwean Marimbas”.

The rest of the book is about the music. This music has been a source of joy to me since I was thirteen years old and a member of the newly formed Northlea Marimba Band, one of the first high school marimba bands in Zimbabwe. As a marimba teacher, it has always given me great pleasure to watch my own students’ excitement at learning how to play, because that same excitement has never left me.

All the marimba pieces I ever learned or arranged myself while living in Zimbabwe were passed on from one person to the next. No music was ever written down. However, the problem with this method is that if the source is gone, then so are the songs. Therefore, I make no apologies for using music notation both in this book and the previous one. My goal is to share this music with you, the next generation of teachers, so that you too can give your students the life-changing experience of making Zimbabwean marimba music. With this combination of audio recording, notation and teaching tips, I hope you will find your “tool kit” complete. You should have no problems at all with teaching the music to your students – hands-on, in the Zimbabwean way.

From one marimba teacher to another, I have only three more things to say: Relax. Enjoy. Let your kids astound you!

Maria Minnaar-Bailey  
*October 2007*

# ZIMBABWE AND ITS NEIGHBORS



## SOME OF ZIMBABWE'S WONDERS

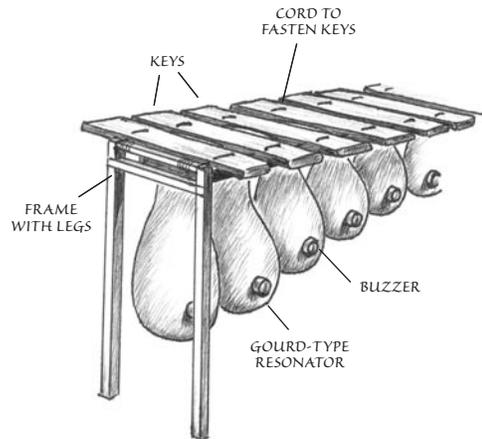
- ① **Victoria Falls** - Rainbows shimmer in the mist above this mile-long waterfall, which is one of the seven wonders of the world.
- ② **Hwange National Park** - Elephants, giraffes, and other wild animals roam free in this enormous wild life sanctuary.
- ③ **Matobo Hills** - Caves with Bushman paintings can be found among the rugged granite kopjes and huge boulders of Matobo.
- ④ **Great Zimbabwe Ruins** - Zimbabwe means "houses of stone". The country was named after this ancient citadel, whose stone walls are still standing.

# HOW A MARIMBA WORKS

Marimbas come in all shapes and sizes, but they all have a few common characteristics. They have tuned keys, which produce a musical sound when struck with a mallet; resonators to amplify the sound; and a framework which holds the instrument together.

## Keys

Marimba keys are made of wood. Different types of wood have different sounds when struck. Some have a musical, resonant sound while others sound flat and dull, like knocking on a door. Marimba builders look for the most resonant woods for their instruments. In southern Africa, *mukwa* or *kiaat* wood (*Pterocarpus angolensis*) is often used to make marimbas. In the U.S., imported West African padauk wood (*Pterocarpus soyauxii*) is commonly used for soprano and alto/tenor marimbas, and cherry or mahogany for baritone and bass.



Larger keys have lower sounds, and smaller keys have higher sounds. To bring out the best sound in a key, an arch is carved underneath its center. When you strike the middle of the key, the ends of it vibrate, and a sound is produced depending on the speed of the vibrations. There are two “dead areas” or nodes on each key, where no vibration occurs. To demonstrate this, scatter salt (or sand) all over the horizontal surface of a marimba key, hit the key repeatedly with a mallet, and watch the salt migrate to the nodes. The nodes are the best places to fasten the keys to the framework. If they are fastened at any other place, the keys will not be able to vibrate freely when struck, and the sound will be muffled.

If a key needs re-tuning, a small amount of wood is removed from the central arch to lower the pitch, or from under the two ends of the key to raise the pitch.

## Resonators and buzzers

Most marimbas have resonators under the keys. A resonator is any kind of hollow container with an opening, which is placed underneath a key. Resonators may be tubular or rounded. The main function of a resonator is amplification, making the sound of the key much louder. To achieve this, the pitch of the resonator has to match the pitch of the key. The way to hear the pitch of a resonator is to blow into the opening, or to tap on the bottom of it. Large resonators are used for large keys, smaller ones for smaller keys. The pitch of a resonator can be lowered simply by making its opening smaller.

A second function of a resonator is to make the sound more interesting. The inside shape of the resonator and the material from which it is made contributes to the quality of the sound. Resonators can be made from natural materials such as the gourds and fruit shells used by builders of *timbila* marimbas in Mozambique, or from man-made materials such as plastic, metal or fiberglass.

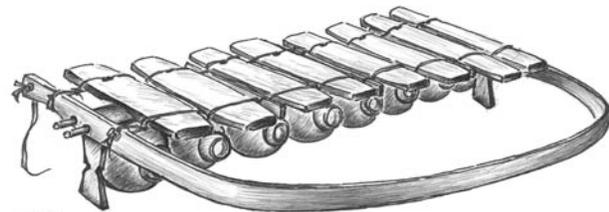
By making a hole in the side of a resonator and covering it with a thin membrane such as crinkly plastic, a pleasant “buzzing” sound effect is added, and the sound is further amplified. A short buzzer tube may be used to hold the membrane in place. The amount of “buzz” can be increased by gently scratching the membrane with a fingernail to slacken it, or decreased by pushing the buzzer inwards to tighten the membrane. The placement of the buzzer on the side of the resonator facing the player allows for easy adjustment of the “buzz”, even during a performance.

Some marimba-type instruments have a large resonating box underneath the keys instead of individual resonators. Although this helps amplify the sound, it does not create as interesting a sound as do individual resonators with buzzers. Examples include Orff instruments and the recently developed South African marimbas.

### *Frame and suspension system*

A wooden or metal frame holds the marimba keys in place, and keeps the resonators suspended underneath the keys. The side supports or legs of the marimba have to be long enough to keep the resonators off the ground. Therefore, marimbas with long tube resonators are generally taller, and are played from a standing position. Marimbas with round resonators are shorter, and can be played while seated.

Marimba keys are usually fastened down onto a wooden frame by means of cords passing through the nodes of each key. The *timbila* marimbas of Mozambique have a unique suspension system where the keys are fastened down onto two tightly



*Chopi Timbila*

stretched cords rather than directly onto a frame. An arched or rectangular wooden bracket keeps tension on these cords, creating a dynamic keyboard with more “give” in it than a rigid keyboard. This suspension system helps to absorb shock, which reduces the incidence of broken or cracked keys and also reduces jarring to the wrists of the players.

### *Sticks (mallets)*

Mallets with rubber heads are used to play marimbas. Larger, softer heads are used for the bass instruments and smaller, harder heads for the sopranos. The head is attached to a dowel stick of at least a half-inch (12-13 mm) diameter for comfortable hand grip. Additional grip can be provided by winding adhesive rubber stripping such as that used for tennis racket handles around the bottom half of the stick.

## Using Zimbabwe-style marimbas with Orff instruments

The music in this book can be used for Orff instruments as well as for Zimbabwe-style marimbas. Parts may be rearranged or transposed as needed. When Orff and marimba instruments are used together in a mixed ensemble, one should take into account that the marimbas will be louder. The tonal ranges of the different marimbas found in a typical Zimbabwe-style ensemble are shown below, along with a description of how they correspond to Orff instruments.

### TONAL RANGES OF ZIMBABWE-STYLE MARIMBAS: COMPARISON WITH ORFF INSTRUMENTS

Soprano: Sometimes called Treble. It has the combined range of the Orff Alto Xylophone and the Orff Soprano Xylophone, except that the Orff Soprano has 5 additional notes at the top.

Alto: The Chopi-style Alto has a range of C to G. The corresponding Kwanongoma-style instrument, called Tenor, has two full octaves with a range of C to C. Note the special G-clef which means that these instruments sound an octave lower than written. The Orff Bass Xylophone has the same range.

Tenor: The Chopi-style Tenor is the same instrument as the Kwanongoma-style Baritone. The range of this marimba overlaps the lower range of the Orff Bass and upper range of Orff Contrabass Bars.

Bass: Usually does not have a B. The Orff Contrabass Resonator Bars have a corresponding range.

#### Soprano or Treble Marimba



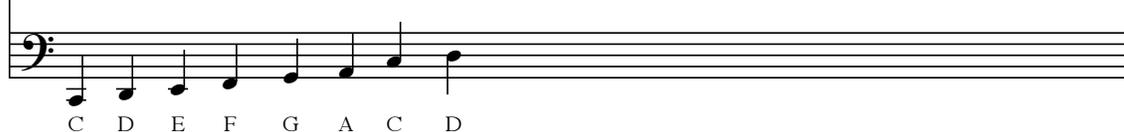
#### Alto Marimba (Kwanongoma-Style "Tenor")



#### Tenor Marimba (Kwanongoma-Style "Baritone")



#### Bass Marimba



## Song 5: Skokiaan



This song, which is named for a home-brewed liquor, is typical of a popular music genre in southern Africa called “township jive”. It was written by saxophone player August Musarurwa in Bulawayo, Zimbabwe in the early 1950’s. It became an international hit a few years later, when Louis Armstrong recorded it as *Happy Africa*. This instrumental piece was one of the earliest tunes to be arranged for marimbas by students at Kwanongoma College in Bulawayo.

*Skokiaan* is in a fast 4/4 time with a driving beat, and has a cyclical chord pattern consisting of C-chord, F(6)-chord, C-chord, G-chord. It has a loose A-B format, with plenty of opportunity for improvisation.

The main skill emphasized in this song is:

- Improvisation, based on the predictable cyclical chord pattern.

### Teaching the marimba parts

The **sopranos** start with a long-held trill on G which can be played either with alternating sticks (RLRLRLRL) or using triplets (RRLRLRL). The second sticking gives “accents” to the trill, similar to the bass pattern. This can be heard on the audio recording. The trill is followed by a descending melody and arpeggio parts with harmonies, played mostly with alternating sticks.

The **altos** can either play chords as shown, or play soprano parts, or improvise.

**Tenor** and **bass** have similar parts, except that the tenor part is busier.

### Putting the song together

First, make everyone aware of the chord pattern and make sure everyone knows which notes make up each chord. Next, have the altos, bass and tenor play their parts together, so they can get into their “groove”. Then have the sopranos try some simple improvising. They can play various rhythms using single notes, while staying within the chord pattern. After marimba practice, the sopranos should be shown their “regular” parts, as notated. They may need some extra time to work on this. At the next practice, try playing the whole song. This can include the improvisations played at the very beginning, the “regular” parts, and any new improvisations. The audio recording features a section of improvisation in the middle of the song. This part is not shown in the notation, since it is included only as an example of what is possible.

Have students practice their parts by singing them together. They may be surprised to find out that they can sing in four- or five-part harmony, and to hear how good it sounds. Adding a pennywhistle or saxophone enhances the “African jazz” flavor of this song, and is perfectly in keeping with its origins.

August Musarurwa c:a 1951  
Arr: Kwanongoma Marimba Band, 1960's

# Skokiaan

(A)

Soprano 1  
Soprano 2  
Alto 1  
Alto 2  
Tenor  
Bass

Soprano 1  
Soprano 2  
Alto 1  
Alto 2  
Tenor  
Bass