

## **The Enduring Legacy of Women and Their Bow Instruments: Preserving the Umakweyana and Ugubhu**

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Bow instruments such as the umakweyana, ugubhu, and uhadi hold immense cultural, historical, and musical significance in Southern Africa. These instruments, predominantly played by women, have been essential in storytelling, ritualistic practices, and personal expression. Women such as Princess Magogo, Bavikile Ngema, Nomafinishi Dwili, Princess Phumuzile Mpanza (King Solomon's descendant), Mrs. Ziphokuhle Nyandu, Mrs. Uzulu E. Zulu, and the Swati Servite nun Mother Adelia Dlamini have played a crucial role in maintaining and advancing these traditions. Figures such as Madosini and Mantombi Matotiyana have brought global attention to these unique instruments. The works of scholars such as Hugh Tracey and Dave Dargie provide invaluable insight into the preservation and documentation of these traditions. This essay critically examines the significance of women and their bow instruments, arguing for the necessity of their preservation and continued relevance in contemporary society.

### **The Cultural and Historical Significance of Bow Instruments**

Umakweyana and ugubhu(uhadi), are more than just musical instruments; they embody the lived experiences, spiritual beliefs, and historical narratives of African communities. These instruments are traditionally played by women, who use them to accompany self-composed songs that range from personal reflections to social commentaries. Ethnomusicologist Hugh Tracey documented various performances of these instruments, highlighting their integral role in oral traditions and their adaptability to changing times (Tracey, 1970).

Princess Magogo kaDinuzulu (1900–1984), a Zulu princess, was a pioneering figure in this tradition. She mastered the ugubhu and used it to compose and perform songs that have been passed down through generations. Her recordings remain some of the most significant archives of indigenous Zulu music, and her influence persists in modern interpretations of traditional music (Dargie, 2007). Similarly, Bavikile Ngema and Nomafinishi Dwili were crucial in preserving and transmitting the knowledge of umakweyana, ensuring that younger generations had access to this rich heritage.

### **The Role of Women in the Transmission of Musical Heritage**

Women have played an irreplaceable role in the transmission of bow instrument traditions, often serving as both composers and educators. Mrs. Ziphokuhle Nyandu and Mrs. Uzulu E. Zulu have been instrumental in teaching young women these musical practices, ensuring the survival of indigenous knowledge systems. The Swati Servite nun Mother Adelia Dlamini uniquely adapted the makhoyane (a Swati umakweyana bow instrument) for use in church hymns, demonstrating the instrument's ability to transcend cultural boundaries and integrate into contemporary spiritual practices.

Madosini (Latozi Mpahleni) and Mantombi Matotiyana stand as contemporary custodians of traditional bow music. Madosini, in particular, gained international recognition for her mastery of the uhadi and umrhubhe, frequently performing at global festivals and collaborating with contemporary musicians to introduce these instruments to wider audiences. Mantombi Matotiyana has similarly contributed to the survival of traditional bow instruments by incorporating them into modern musical expressions while staying true to their original essence (Dargie, 2018).

## Challenges and the Need for Preservation

Despite their cultural significance, bow instruments face numerous challenges in the modern era. The encroachment of Western musical influences, declining interest among younger generations, and a lack of institutional support pose significant threats to their survival. Additionally, the historical marginalization of indigenous musical practices within formal education systems has further contributed to their decline (Tracey, 1983).

However, efforts to preserve and revitalize these instruments are gaining traction. Initiatives that incorporate traditional music into school curricula, community-based workshops, and digital documentation projects play a critical role in ensuring the longevity of bow instruments. The work of scholars like Dave Dargie, who has extensively researched and documented African musical traditions, provides a valuable foundation for these efforts (Dargie, 1985).

## Conclusion

Women have been central to the survival and evolution of bow instruments such as the umakweyana, ugubhu, uhadi, and makhoyane. Their contributions, from Princess Magogo's pioneering compositions to Mother Adelia Dlamini's spiritual adaptations, highlight the adaptability and resilience of these instruments. Figures like Madosini and Mantombi Matotiyana continue to bring traditional bow music into contemporary spaces, demonstrating its relevance in today's world. To ensure the survival of these instruments, active preservation efforts—including education, performance, and documentation—are essential. The legacy of women and their bow instruments must not only be honored but actively nurtured for future generations.

## References

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