

Organising for the Future of Intwatwa and their Creators

Between 3 and 6 October this year, twenty leading Rwandan composers, singers and dancers of intwatwa participated in a workshop held in Kigali to plan for the future of this traditional dance-music genre. The participants to the workshop agreed to engage in a mapping project of the different variants of the intwatwa in the country, to empower intwatwa composers, singers and dancers through future collaborative compositions and productions, and to make this beautiful music-dance genre accessible to younger generations of Rwandans. The African Initiative for Mankind Progress Organisation (AIMPO) was the main organiser of the workshop and will be hosting the future project, while The Swedish Institute (www.si.se) provided the necessary funds to organise and hold the workshop.

During the workshop, past research on intwatwa was revisited. Rwandan researchers, and a few non-Rwandan ones, have argued that intwatwa songs have in common a couple of main characteristics. The text is generally short and the message is definitely multi-layered. This makes the intwatwa's message difficult to understand, especially for younger generations of Rwandans who are less and less exposed to the different genres of the traditional music of Rwanda. The vocals of intwatwa are polyphonic, and the dances are polyrhythmic. This is what keeps the intwatwa alive, as the fusion of different tunes and dances still attract and fascinate Rwandan and international audiences.

The participants to the workshop reaffirmed the above description and went further to revive and share the different techniques used in achieving a successful texture of an intwatwa song. Kayitesi Anastasie, the daughter of late Bernard Rujindiri, Rwanda's Harp Master, told the young participants that the composer of intwatwa songs does not rest until the creative process does justice to the entirety of the universe around them. Bagaragaza Hussein, a long-term member of *Urukerereza*, Rwanda's National Ballet, added that the central techniques of composing intwatwa evolve around a gentle interaction between the composer and a careful process of choosing words, and applying the chosen words to different tunes until the composer feels in perfect harmony with the universe around them. Furthermore, Bagaragaza insists, a successful composer is the one who brings the texts, its vocals, and the intended choreography to fall in place in unified but distinctively diversified piece of art.

However, as the workshop proceeded, it became clear that more research needs to be done to uncover the forgotten or the not yet shared knowledge about the different regional variants of Intwatwa. For example, the dance of Sekidende Wellars, a talented intwatwa

dancer from Nyagatare in the north-eastern part of Rwanda, results in a choreography of elegant intensity, and powerful movements, punctuated with quiet pauses and slow moves, which leaves the impression that the dancer is suspended in the air, unable to move. That is until the dancer decided to recharge and display the same powerful, yet elegant movements again.

Sekidende's dance is a new contrast to the familiar and common dances that are much more familiar in central and southern Rwanda. These are dances that are more in line with the imitations of the slow movements of a cow and its horns. But even these more familiar traditional dances were cast in a new light during the workshop. For example, Ngurube Gregoire and Kayitesi Anastasie, two among the few cultural reservoirs of *intwatwa* still alive, performed these slow dances to accompany the captivating notes of the harp in traditional love songs, known as *imitoma*. This is an important and new development for the larger universe of the *intwatwa text* and its audiences since the harp is traditionally played in an almost motionless environment. The same goes for the explorations to accompany the musical bow songs with dances and other formmusicformances. During the workshop Nsengiyumva Francois, a musical bow player, shared his ongoing practices in taking the musical bow to levels unexplored before by incorporating dances and additional vocals to the original sounds the musical bow produces.

But a more obvious fusion of dancing styles is performed by Mbabazi Chantal who grew up in the southern town of Nyanza but relocated in Musanze in the north of Rwanda a couple of years ago. Mbabazi has gracefully managed to blend the slow dances of southern Rwanda with the powerful and heavy dances of northern Rwanda in a way no other known *intwatwa* dancer does.

All the above is without counting the dances that are typical to the former province of Cyangugu, a region where music and dance interact with Congolese influences. It is without counting the influences of Rwandan *intwatwa* dancers who grew up in the diaspora, such as the south of Uganda, and are now living in Rwanda after the genocide of 1994.

On an equally important aspect of this endeavour, AIMPO thinks that exploring old and new ways of *intwatwa* will empower the historically marginalised people of Rwanda, the original tributaries of this music-dance genre. In doing so, more workshops will be organised where the trained composers and singers will in turn train their peers in aspects such as music intellectual property rights, culture management, and community advocacy. It is also through such workshops that members of the historically marginalised people in the various parts of

the country will network and/or connect with each other to work on other possible projects of mutual interest.