

AFRICAN COMPOSERS SYMPOSIUM

A Harmonious Triumph: Honouring Innovation and Collaboration in African Music Composition

The NIHSS Catalytic Research Project, spearheaded by Dr Andile Khumalo, represents a pioneering effort to revolutionise composition, music theory, and orchestration for African music. Supported by the NIHSS, the project aligns with the Institute's mission to advance the humanities and social sciences while focusing on the affirmation and celebration of African musical identity.

The project repositions African music as a foundational and influential force. It encourages a collaborative approach among composers, musicians, and scholars and introduces innovative approaches to music theory tailored to African music.

The focus on choral music enriches the choral repertoire and revitalises community engagement with music, while also empowering African composers and musicians by providing recognition and resources.

GLOBAL MUSICAL SYNERGIES DRIVE ACADEMIC GROWTH

Participants in the project hailed from across the South Africa and the continent, including, Zambia, Ethiopia, Uganda, and Nigeria. The participants present for the recent live recording were: Ms Lunga Dhlamini, who is a choir conductor, teacher and composer; Mr Luka Disho, a well established composer as well as employed in the banking sector; Mr Chidi Obijiaku; Mr Mutemwa Simbala, a jazz saxophonist; Ms Grace Oforka, who is a vocalist, and owns a self-funded school, teaching music in Nigeria; Mr Sibisiso Njeza, a lecturer at Rhodes University and an established composer with two operas to his name; Mr Bulelani Lamani; a well accomplished composer from Gqeberha; and Mr Musawenkosi Biyela, a jazz pianist from Umlazi.



DR. ANDILE KHUMALO
SENIOR LECTURER, WITWATERSRAND UNIVERSITY

Collaborations in this project extended to the Stuttgarter Chamber Orchestra in Germany and universities in the USA, Ethiopia, Zambia, Ghana, Uganda, and South Africa.

The NIHSS's support led to tangible outcomes in capacity building, such as the registration of a PhD student, Mr Chidi Obijiaku from Nigeria, and the enrolment of Mr Sibisiso Njeza in a Masters program at Wits University.





The project culminated in a live recording of the composers' works. Held over 30 July to 1 August 2024, the rehearsals and recording took place at the Linder Auditorium, at the Wits education campus. The rehearsals and recordings took place in partnership with the Johannesburg Philharmonic Orchestra.

Participants visited the NIHSS offices after their recording and shared their reflections of the project, the journey and especially of the live recording of their compositions. The participants expressed a sense of excitement and fulfilment as they discussed their experiences, some of which are included in the following:

“ THE PROGRAM WAS INTERESTING BUT CHALLENGING. I AM GRATEFUL I DID NOT MISS THE OPPORTUNITY. THIS IS A GREAT INITIATIVE. ”

“ COMING FROM A BACKGROUND WHERE I WAS WRITING FOR CHOIRS-NOW WRITING FOR AN ORCHESTRA WAS MIND BLOWING. ”

“ WHEN THE PROJECT CAME, IT FORCED ME TO RECONFIGURE THE SPACE I WAS WORKING IN. ”

“ THE PROJECT CAME AT THE RIGHT TIME BECAUSE I NEEDED MENTORING. I WAS WRITING FOR SOLOS. I STARTED UNDERSTANDING MY WORK. IT BROUGHT INSIGHT IN HOW TO BRING OUT MY WORK. ”

“ WHEN I RECEIVED THE CALL FROM DR ANDILE KHUMALO, I SAID FINALLY! I WAS WRITING FOR CHOIRS BUT THERE WAS NO STRUCTURE. I WAS HAPPY WHEN HE CALLED BECAUSE I KNEW I WAS GOING TO LEARN. I NEVER EXPECTED THIS OUTCOME.” ”



“ DR KHUMALO’S LEADERSHIP IS GREAT. IT TAKES A LOT OF DISCIPLINE TO STAY THE COURSE ESPECIALLY WHEN YOU DON’T SEE WHERE YOU ARE GOING. ”

“ I AM THANKFUL FOR DR KHUMALO FOR ALLOWING EVERYONE TO BE A PART OF THIS, ESPECIALLY BECAUSE WE COME FROM DIFFERENT SPACES, DIFFERENT THINKING. ”

By fostering innovation, collaboration, and the preservation of cultural heritage, this project has made a significant contribution to scholarship, education, and artistic expression across the continent. This underscores the NIHSS's contribution towards knowledge production across the Humanities and Social Sciences and the Arts.

