



(LYRCD 7407)

RHYTHMS OF LIFE

Ephant Mujuru

Master Percussionist and Mbira Player from Zimbabwe

Southern Africa is renowned for musical traditions, especially for its rich instrumental and vocal styles, such as Zimbabwe's mbira music. But the region also contains a great number of lesser-known drum and percussion traditions, many of them as complex as those in West Africa. Each area has its own drum rhythms, which have evolved over many generations.

Since his childhood, Master Shona musician, Ephant Mujuru, has been a natural percussionist, playing drums, rock gongs, marimaba, dimbwa (bow), and chipendani (mouthbow), in addition to his principle instrument, the mbira. Ephant recalls nights when children would gather to sing and dance, whether a real instrument, a tin can, or a pair of sticks or wooden clappers. This was a time before radio hits and Western influences, a time in which Ephant absorbed a great deal of ancient music. When Mujuru was seven years old, his grandfather began to teach him the family repertoire of traditional pieces for the mbira. By the age of fourteen Mujuru was performing throughout Zimbabwe, and at nineteen he was the leader of his own mbira ensemble.

This album contains a collection of traditional and contemporary music from Zimbabwe. It begins with a series of Shona drum pieces, arranged and played by Ephant Mujuru. Selections 10 through 15 are traditional solo mbira pieces. Mbira music combines cyclic melodic patterns in a complex polyphonic texture. The melodic patterns for these pieces are learned aurally, and there is no written notation. Each performance of a piece is

unique. The language of the texts is Shona, and examples of vocals can also be heard.

“For Education” Ephat Mujuru

TRACKS

1. Rhythms of Life – this piece comes from dandanda traditional dance music. Though dandanda is normally played with sticks, Ephat chooses to play with his hands, taking advantage of his drum’s special tonal qualities. The hand can produce a wide range of sounds, from the high tones of fingertip slaps to deep full-palm strokes. (4:58)
2. Shiri Yankanaka Unoendepi – this children’s song says, “Beautiful bird, why are going to the sky?” “Because I want to look at the beautiful sky.” Like the bird flying upwards, children dance with flapping arms. The drumming accelerates as the musical feel rises in a flight of its own. (4:18)
3. Butsu Mutandari – A traditional song about shoes. “Look, look, look. Look at those long shoes.” The song comes from a dance called Shangara where the dancing feet become a musical voice, stomping out a rhythmic melody. Here Ephat accompanies himself with the 15-key kamundimu mbira. (3:45)
4. Classical Drumming – A great traditional player must find his own voice within the tradition. This piece, more than any other, represents Ephat’s personal interpretation of classical Shona drumming. (4:05)
5. Muchongova – This music accompanies an acrobatic dance. The player’s calls and shouts encourage the dancers. The inspiration for this dance comes from Manicaland in Eastern Zimbabwe. (5:08)
6. Chimbu Kutira (Parwendro) – This style of drumming, chimhu kutira, means “many rhythms.” The words compare music and life. “Music is a journey. When you are walking on a journey, you need to have courage to continue.” The song mentions the two rivers that border Zimbabwe, the Zambezi to the north and the Limpopo to the south. (4:45)
7. Vanamai – This is Ephat’s own song, a bittersweet recollection of Zimbabwe’s independence struggle. On the one hand, the song says, “Mothers, you should be happy; your children are back from the struggle.” On the other hand, it speaks of the people who are left alone because their relatives have died. (5:26)
8. Ndawa Kuenda – This traditional song celebrates travel. The first voice says, “I am going far, far away.” The second says, “of course you should go: go and see what is there.” (4:26)
9. Rhythms of Life – Reprise (1:00)

10. Chigwaya – “The fish is dancing in the water.” A children’s circle dance. The one in the middle has to dance like a fish, and the others imitate the motion. There are many different kinds of fish and many ways of dancing. Mujuru uses a fifteen-key mbira for this song. (4:01)

11. Dangwiza – An ancient spiritual song. (2:17)

12. Mandare Ndare – The hardships of life are the subject of this song. The end of the song finds a solution to life’s problems. (4:26)

13. Taurewa – “I once said it.” (2:13)

14. Nyamaropa – An ancient song in commemoration of the ancestors. There are many different versions of this piece. (3:01)

15. Mutamba – An important song of Mujuru’s family. This song evokes memories of the past history and ancestral place of the family. (5:48)

Total running time: 64:01

Credits:

Drumming, singing and mbira – Ephant Mujuru

Notes by Banning Eyre with Ephant Mujuru

Notes on selections 10 through 15 by Marlyn Hanna assisted by Ephant Mujuru

Cover photograph: Dai Crisp

Design: Nick Fritsch

Selections 1 through 9 were recored in October, 1988 at Cactus and Clam Studios in Boston, Mass. Selections 10 through 15 were recorded by Kay Norton and produced by the Ethnomusicology Archives, University of Washington.

Sound engineering (1-9) Banning Eyre

Produced by Crystal Sloan and Banning Eyre

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Lyrichord Discs Inc.

PO Box 1977 Old Chelsea Station

New York, NY 10011 Ph: 212 404 8290 Fax: 212 404 8291

email: nick@lyrichord.com Web: www.lyrichord.com

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