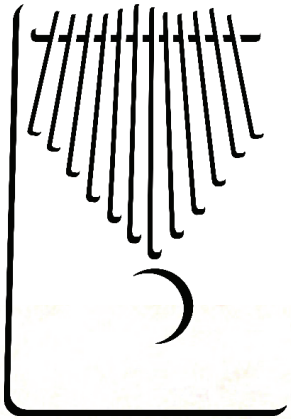


# The Kalimba, its African History, and Black Pride

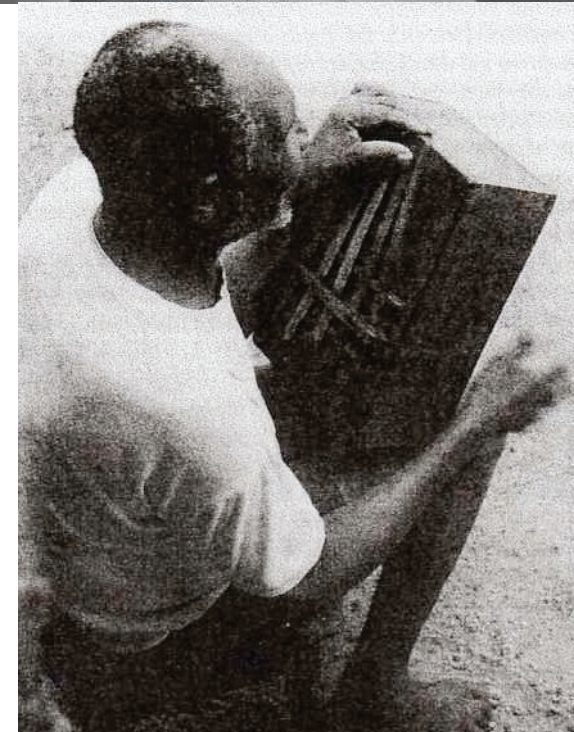
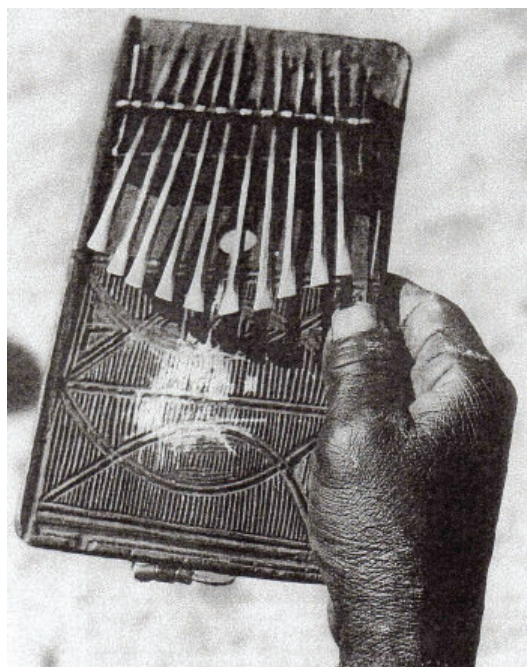
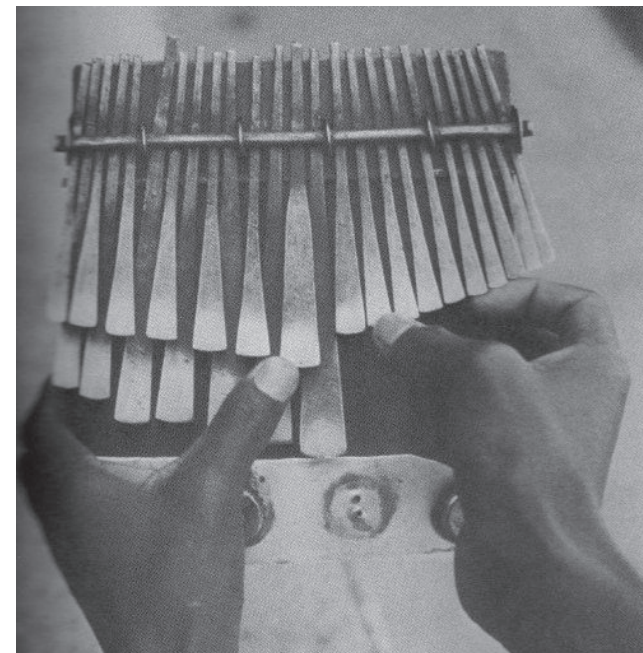
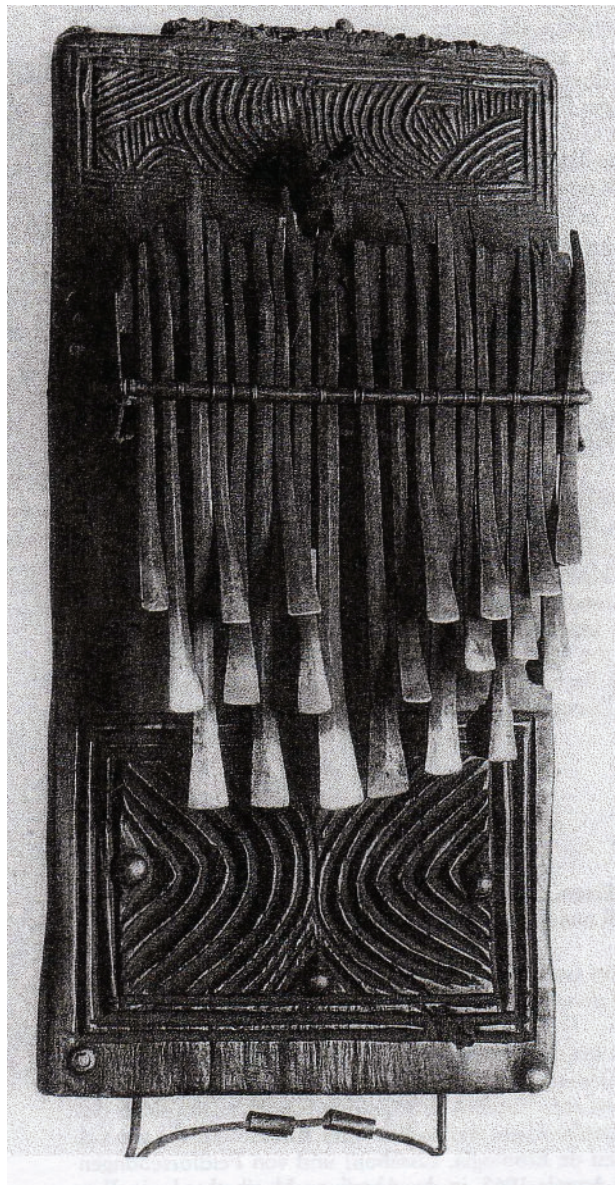
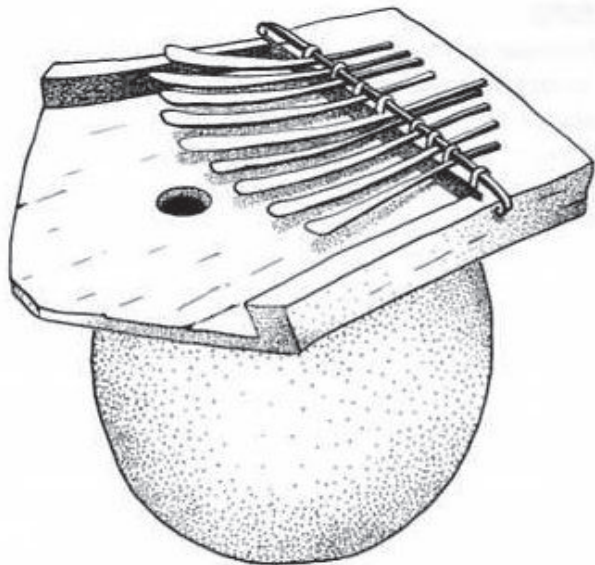
Mark Holdaway  
Kalimba Magic



There are so many types of kalimba!



# Where did it all start?



# The Kalimba is an ancient instrument from Africa

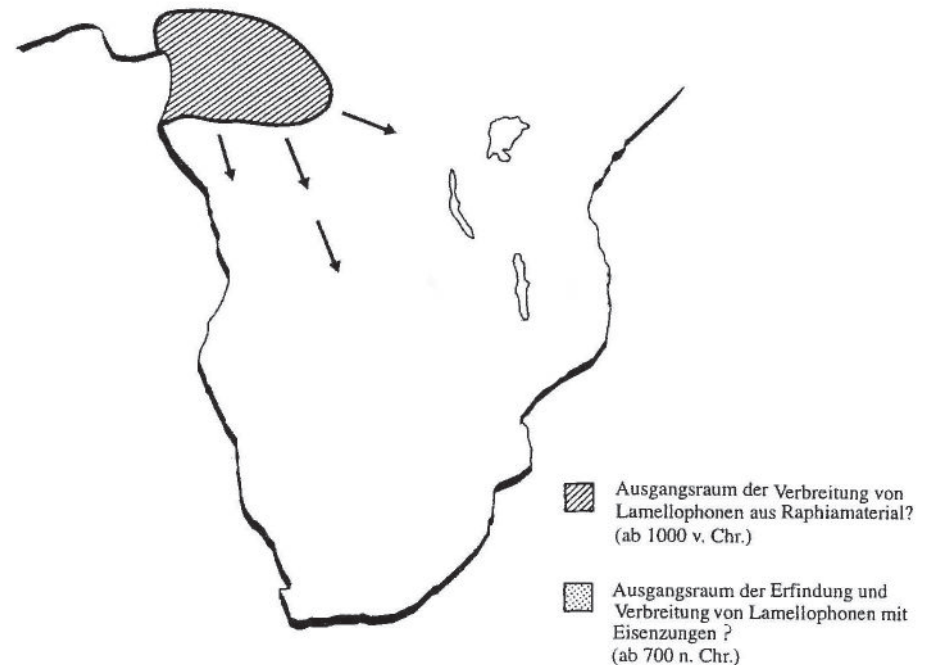
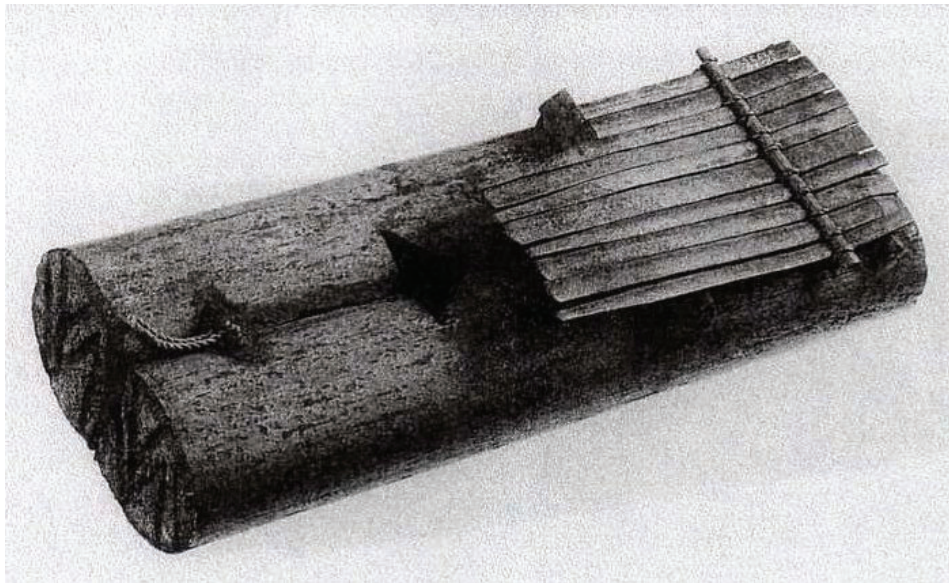
First documented by a European in 1586 when Portuguese missionary Father Dos Santos wrote about a 9-note instrument called the Ambira while traveling in Mozambique: “They strike the keys as lightly as a good player strikes those of a harpsichord... they produce a sweet and gentle harmony of accordant sounds.”



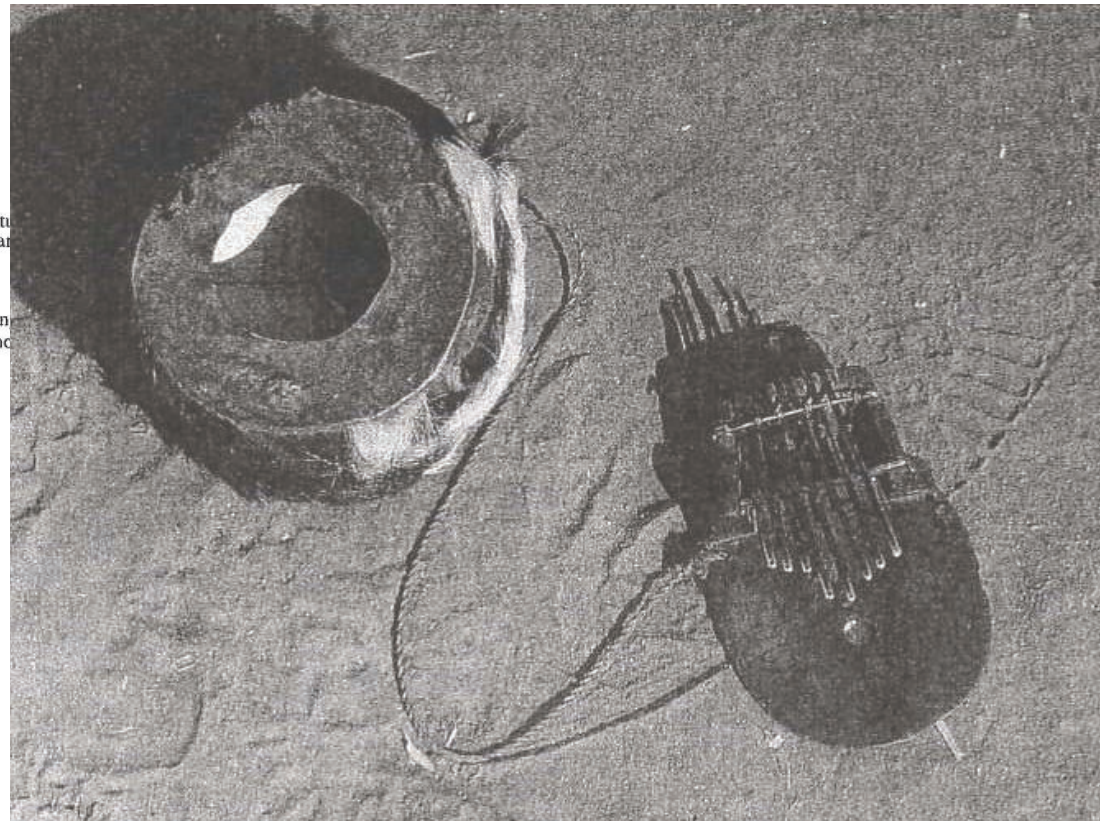
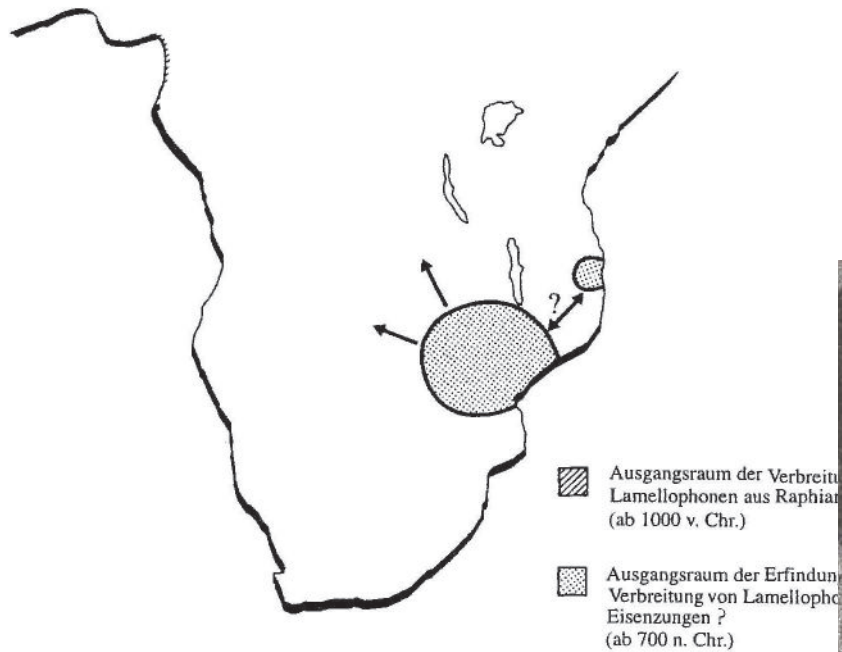
But the kalimba was already an ancient instrument in 1586!

First invented about 3000 years ago...

Bamboo kalimbas!



About 1300 years ago, metal-tined kalimbas were born in southern Africa when the Iron Age arrived.



Hugh Tracey (1903-1977) was a “musical explorer” of Africa, traveling, documenting, and recording music in southern Africa for 50 years.



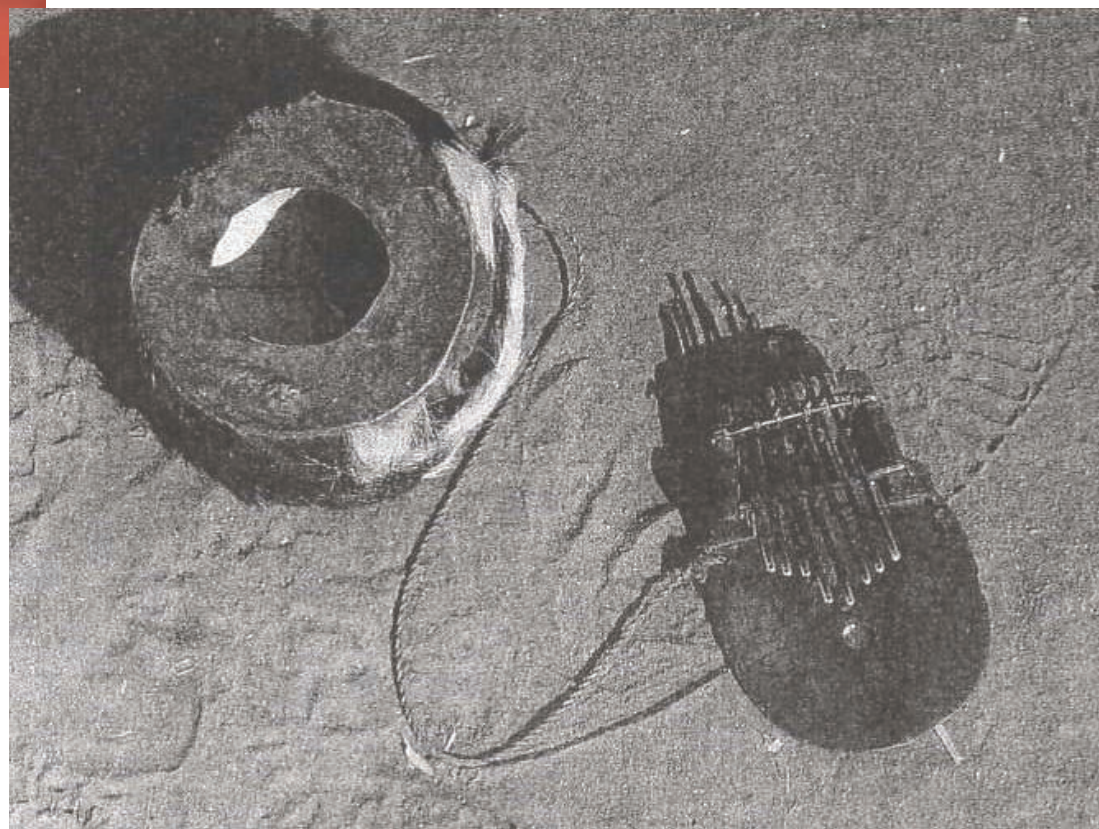
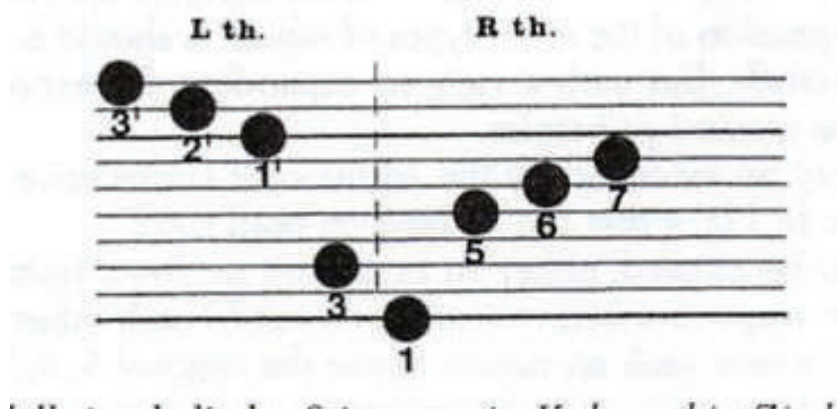
*The recording caravan in the early fifties, with from left to right: HT, Sam Shabalala, unknown, Peggy Tracey, (probably) the recording engineer Cooke, and Danieli Mabuto.*





But Hugh's son  
Andrew Tracey  
comes closer to un-  
locking the secrets of  
the kalimba....

*Andrew Tracey beside a photo of his father Hugh Tracey,*





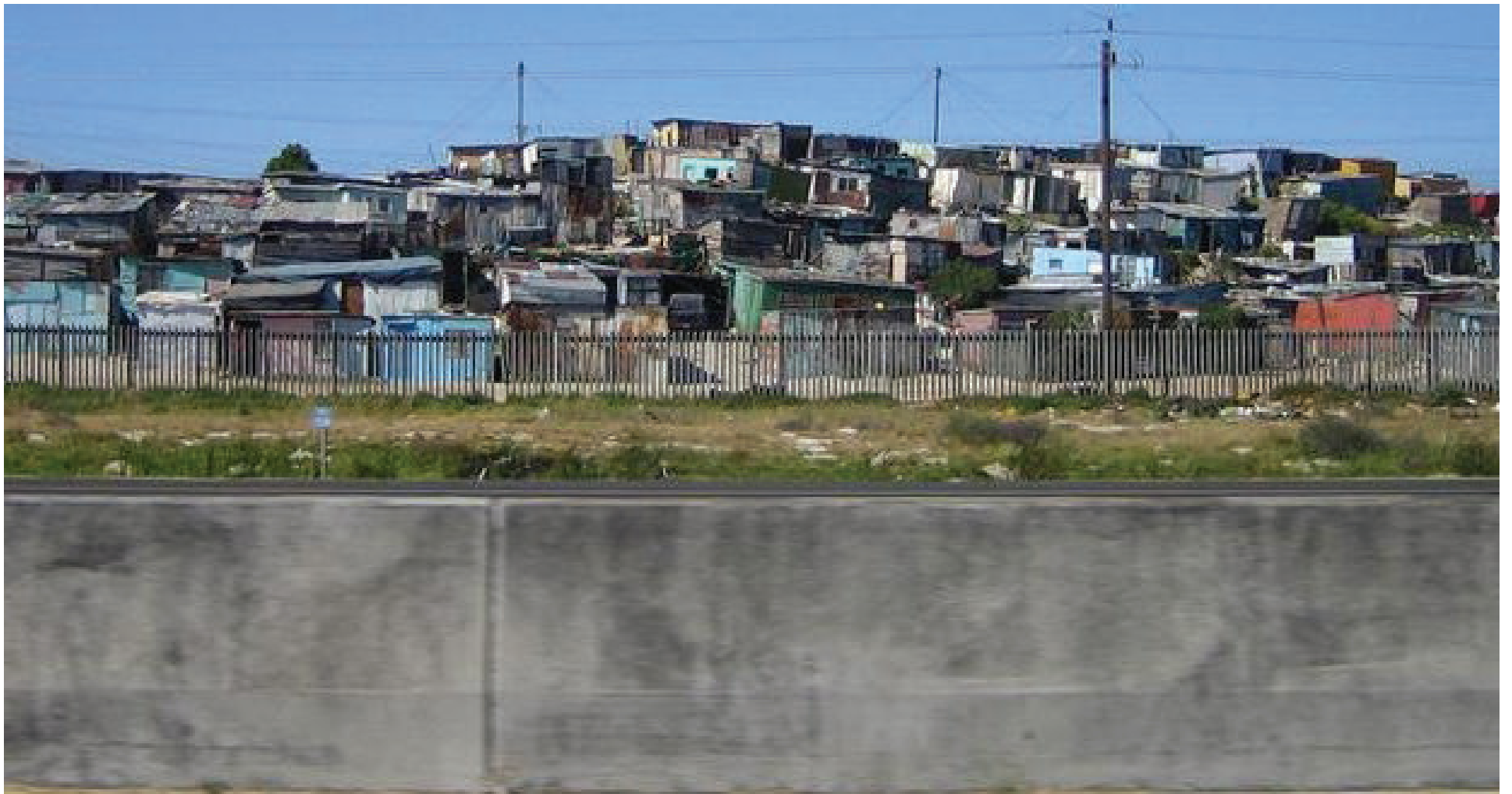
Starting in the late 19th century, imperialistic European colonization in Africa took much land from Africa's peoples.



Durban, South Africa, circa 1925.

Cities developed and in the 1920's and 30's poor Africans moved to cities for jobs and a new and different life from their traditional, rural roots.

Blacks were not allowed to own land or live in cities. If they wanted to work, black migrants were forced to live in shantytowns, or townships, that sprang up around the cities.



Europeans had almost no regard at all for traditional African music, and from long before colonial days in Africa, Christian missionaries had been preaching and teaching hymns. By 1960 much of the old traditional music was being threatened by western influences such as church music and radio music.

*Katharine Hepburn trying to lead a hymn with the indigenous population in The African Queen.*



People who moved to the cities became less and less connected to their old culture and music. This was understood clearly by Hugh Tracey who loved that music and felt it was a tremendous loss.

In the 1950's the Bulawayo, Rhodesia (now Zimbabwe) city electrical department was headed up by the European Robert Sibson. He had done very well for himself, and he wanted to do something to give back to Africa. A musician himself, Sibson knew Hugh Tracey and basically agreed with his strong opinions about the ongoing loss of traditional music and culture.



Deciding that preserving and continuing traditional African culture was the best thing he could do, Sibson founded the Kwanongoma College of African Music in 1960, dedicated to teaching and conserving traditional African music. Hugh Tracey hired on as a consultant, and brought his son Andrew along as well.



Hugh Tracey was convinced that there were master musicians living in the townships - people who had learned the old songs when they were younger and living in the rural areas. He asked Andrew to go and find these people. Andrew found a man named Jege Tapera who masterfully played a 13-Note karimba.



The two became friends, and Tapera was a star teacher at the Kwanongoma College of Music until his death in 1970.

*A kalimba player of unknown name, sitting in for Jege Tapera, of whom we have no photograph.*

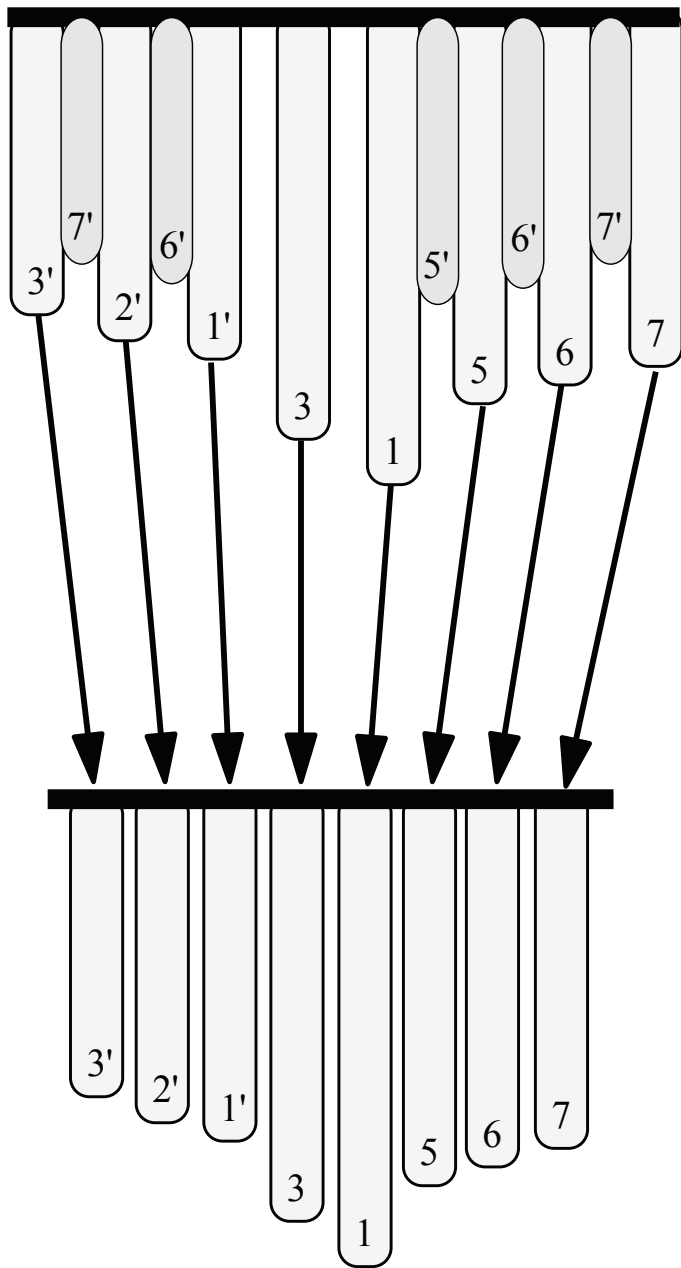
Jege Tapera's 13-note karimba had two rows of tines - a row of longer tines and then a row of interleaved shorter tines that were bent upwards to facilitate playing.

All Jege's traditional songs started on the lower notes, and it was Andrew's understanding that the notes on the longer row were also the more "ancient" notes, the short row less so.



*15-Note Kwanongoma College  
of Music Style Karimba  
in Andrew Tracey's hands.*

## Jege Tapera 13-Note Karimba Layout ?



The notes on the upper row were tuned either an octave or a 5th higher than the adjacent lower row notes, suggesting the lower row sets the pattern the upper row notes follow.

Andrew hypothesized that centuries ago, people played karimbas consisting of these eight notes on the lower row.

The Ancient Karimba Note Layout



Andrew Tracey noticed that those same eight notes are at the core of every traditional kalimba in southern Africa.

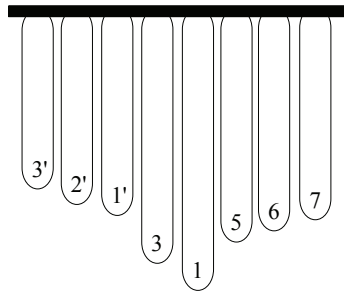


*Mbira dzavadzimu*

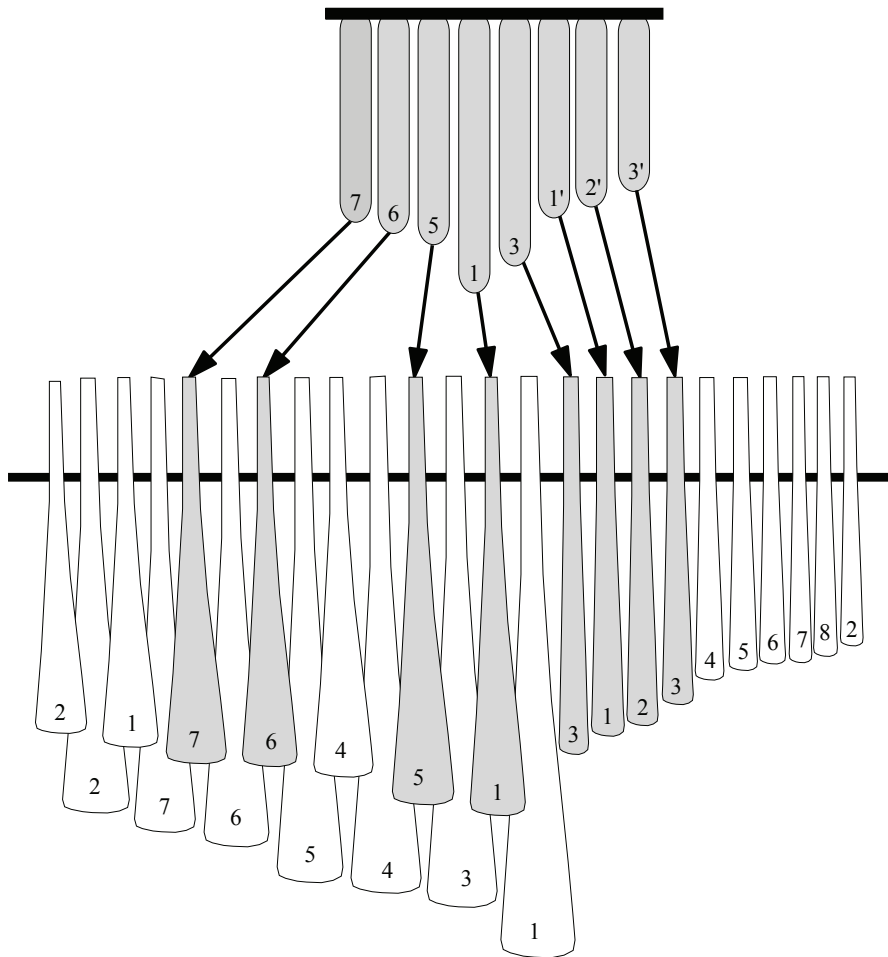


*Karimba (aka mbira  
nyunga nyunga)*

The Ancient Karimba Note Layout

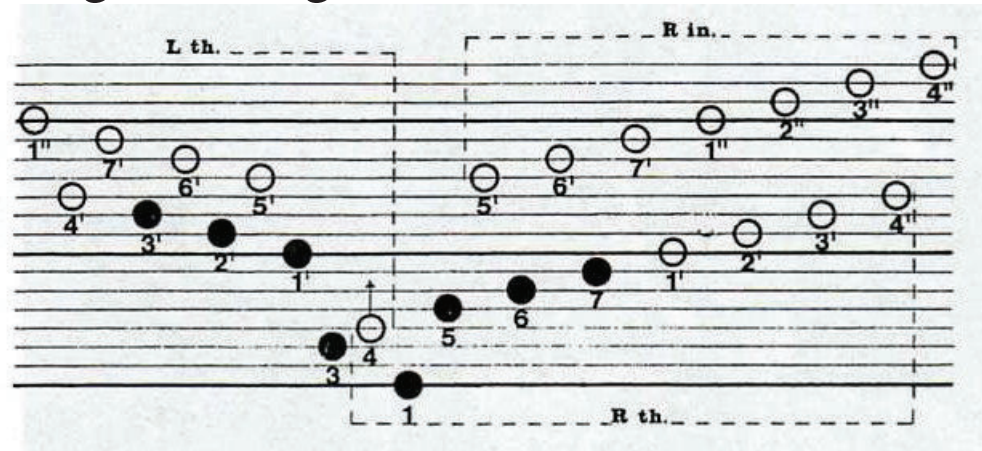


Mirror Image of Karimba Layout

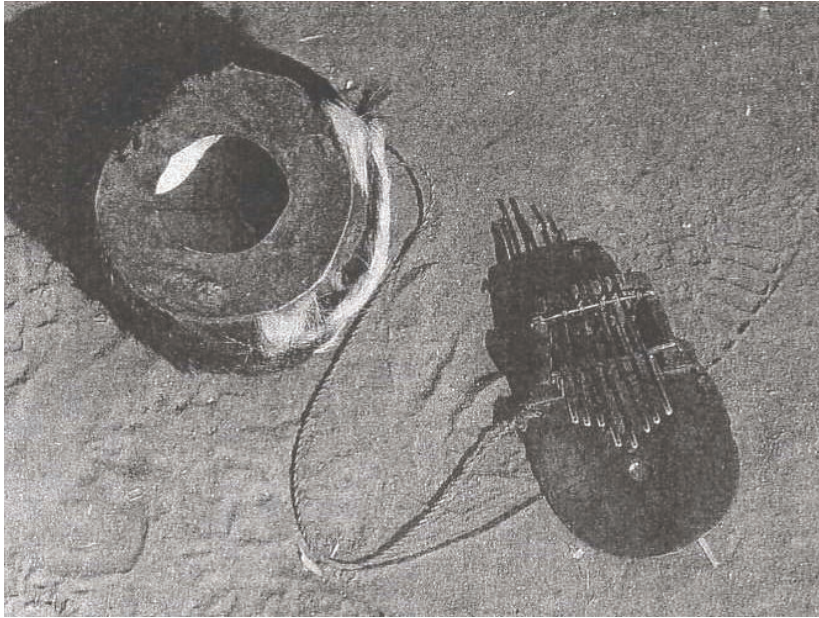


Mbira Tuning - central notes come from the Karimba

Those eight basic notes are at the heart of every Shona kalimba or mbira. (Shona culture and language come from Zimbabwe and neighboring countries.)



More advanced instruments are made by adding notes outward or above the basic eight notes. This has led Andrew Tracey to call these eight notes the *original mbira*.



*Andrew Tracey feels that the “original mbira” is what Father Dos Santos saw in 1586.*

Those same notes are now available on a modern version of this ancient African instrument, known as the *student karimba*.





*Hugh Tracey making music on one of his vast collection of instruments.*

*Andrew Tracey, Hugh's son, who continued his father's work and has done much scholarly work about the origins of kalimbas and other instruments (2008).*



Another important legacy of the Kwanongoma College of Music is the introduction of the marimba as a new instrument that can play African songs, but transcends the boundaries and traditions of any specific tribe or group. Before 1960, only a few isolated tribes in southern Africa had marimba traditions.

Now the marimba is very popular in southern Africa!





*Dumisani Maraire*

Dumisani Maraire studied karimba and marimba under Jege Taperera at Kwanongoma, and in 1968 he brought his music to Seattle, USA. He taught people to play karimba songs on karimbas and marimbas.

Dumi also worked at blending the traditions of the karimba (or *mbira nyunga nyunga* as he called it) with the larger *mbira dzavadzimu*.



*Karimba (aka mbira nyunga nyunga)*

*Mbira dzavadzimu*

The seed of African music Dumi planted in America continues to grow.



Fifty years later, marimba bands in the USA are more popular than ever!

Back to Hugh Tracey - In 1954, he started producing a westernized version of the karimba, which he called the Hugh Tracey Kalimba. This new instrument copied many aspects of different traditional instruments, but was tuned to the western scale. The kalimba was sold around the world!



**Did Hugh Tracey champion traditional African music, or did he exploit traditional African music?**





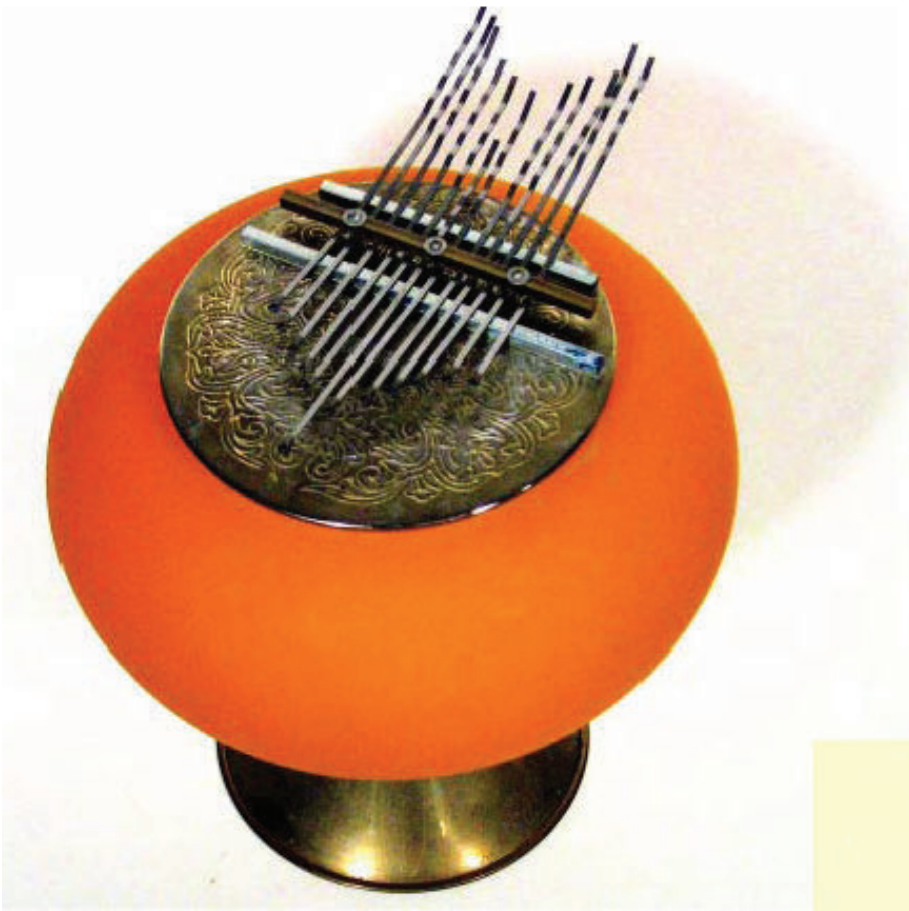
Malcolm X, a prominent black leader in the 1960s, drove home the point that black Americans didn't know their own heritage. They didn't even know their own ancestral names. He changed his last name to X, representing his unknown and lost cultural heritage.

Dr Martin Luther King, Jr. and Malcom X

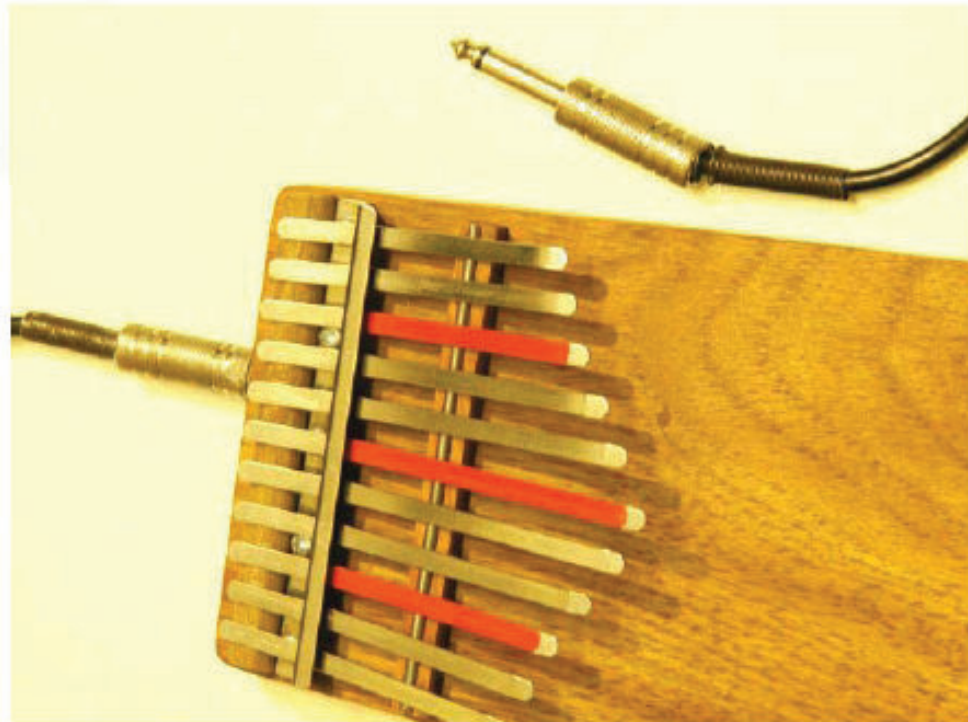
Because Hugh Tracey exported the kalimba from Africa, black musicians around the world discovered the kalimba and felt that the kalimba symbolically connected them with their lost African cultural heritage.

Starting in the early 1970s, Maurice White of the band *Earth Wind and Fire* wrote songs about how the kalimba taught him about his African heritage.

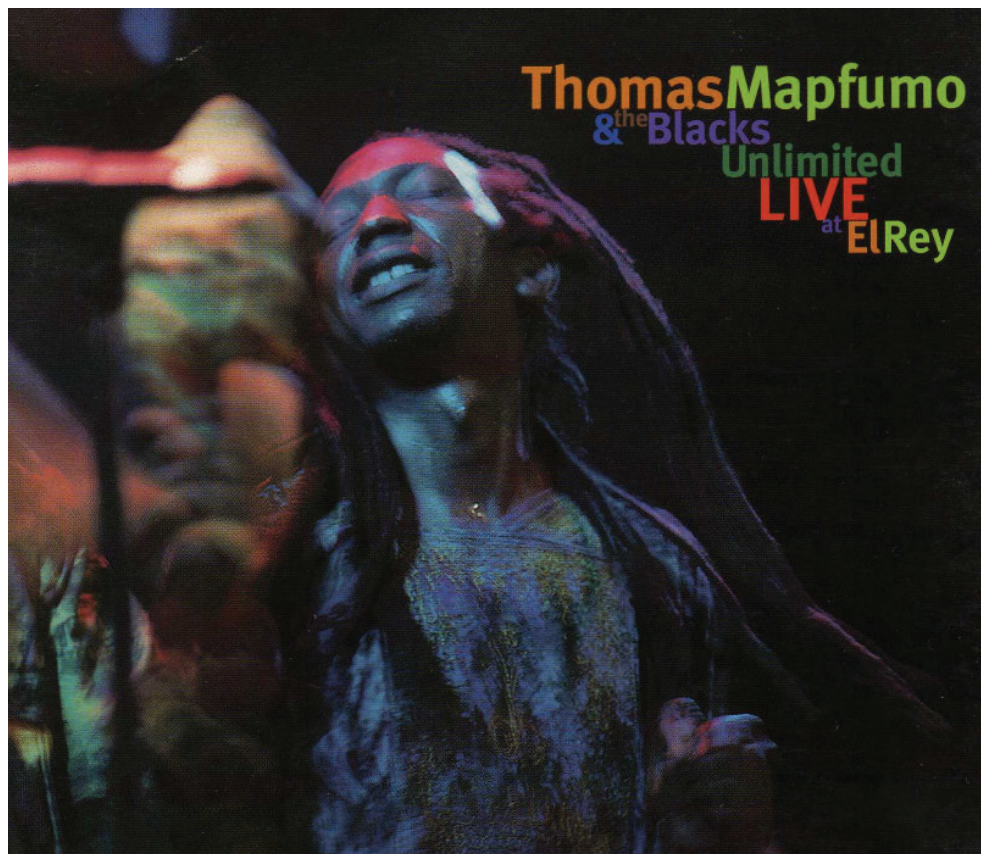




Even though the kalimba is an ancient instrument with roots in Africa, it is alive and well, moving out into the future with modern innovations.



Thomas Mapfumo and Stella Chiweshe are two former Zimbabweans who keep the traditions of the mbira alive by moving them forward into electric music and rock.





I invite you to  
step back in  
time and play  
on what may be  
the same notes  
Africans played  
1300 years ago!

The economical  
*student karimba*  
is a great intro-  
duction to African  
music.

# Questions to Consider

How did music spread around Africa 1000 years ago?

How does music spread around the world today?

How can music be true to its traditions?

How does music evolve and change in our modern times?

What are the responsibilities of people who study traditional music and musical instruments?

How old are kalimbas? What facts support this?

Where were kalimbas first invented?

Where are kalimbas played now?

How can the kalimba help us connect to African culture?

How can we know about what ancient instruments were like?

Learn more at:

Paul F. Berliner's book *The Soul of Mbira*

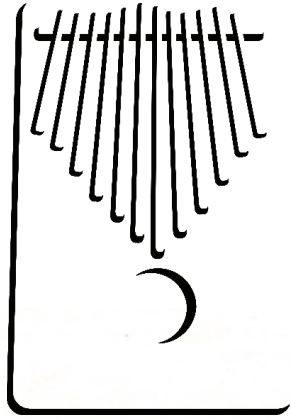
Gerhard Kubik's book *Kalimba, Nsansi, Mbira -  
Lamellophone in Afrika* (in German)

[www.ilam.ru.ac.za](http://www.ilam.ru.ac.za) International Library of African Music

[www.kalimbamagic.com](http://www.kalimbamagic.com) Best kalimba website around

[www.kalimba.co.za](http://www.kalimba.co.za) African Musical Instruments

Wikipedia articles about Hugh Tracey and Andrew Tracey



Mark Holdaway, PhD

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Tucson AZ

[www.KalimbaMagic.com](http://www.KalimbaMagic.com)

If you enjoyed this presentation, you might want to check out some of the information, music, kalimbas and kalimba instructional products we have at:

[www.KalimbaMagic.com](http://www.KalimbaMagic.com)

