COMPOSER'S NOTE

A composer can find inspiration in the unlikeliest of settings, and the genesis of *Zimbe!* is as extraordinary as any. The seeds of my affinity with African music and the gospel tradition were sown in the early nineties through a chance encounter on a train en route to London. Sitting opposite me was a woman with a small book of manuscript paper on her lap. I asked politely whether she was a musician and she replied that she was on her way to lead a music group at a prison. She was working on 'African and gospel' music, but, although she knew many excellent songs, she was really an artist, not a musician, and was rather lacking in confidence when it came to leading a singing workshop. 'I could help,' I offered gamely, and it all took off from there.

We struck up a working relationship, and she introduced me to songs, tapes, books, and friends with a plethora of songs to share. I immediately fell in love with the music. Together we ran singing groups, in Oxford, London and beyond, and I quickly became immersed in arranging, teaching, sharing and performing African songs.

I later produced a collection of choral arrangements for Faber Music entitled Songs of a Rainbow Nation, and it was in response to performing these arrangements that Justin Doyle, conductor of the Dorking Choral Society, approached me with a view to commissioning a more substantial piece based on African and gospel themes. Justin happened to call the morning after *The No. 1 Ladies' Detective Agency* had been shown on TV; we had both watched it, and both had been moved by the use of music in the production (filmed on location in Botswana). One particularly moving moment, depicting a funeral scene, involved a huge number of local 'extras' breaking into an apparently spontaneous performance of a traditional funeral song. It was decided that my piece would aim to reflect some of the manifold ways in which music plays a part in everyday life in Africa – from the rising of the sun to its setting, both literally and figuratively. I wanted to capture the essence of the African spirit through glimpses into the human experience – simple children's playground songs from Ghana and Zimbabwe; a Xhosa lullaby for mothers of the victims of Apartheid; a raucous drinking song; sensuous wedding songs; and some beautiful funeral and worship music – all imbued with the spirit, energy and simplicity that is so typical of the African song tradition.

Zimbe is an Anglicised version of the Swahili word 'Ziimbe', meaning 'Sing them': just as others have shared these wonderful songs with me, I wish to pass them on now. Scored for SATB choir, unison children's choir and jazz quintet, with copious percussion, the settings reflect my own musical make-up: within the piece we find references to jazz, pop, the Western choral tradition and, of course, 'world music'. African songs are easy to learn and impossible to forget; that is the very nature of the communal song tradition. The songs I have chosen to arrange are fun, moving and infectiously tuneful – and through them we find ourselves in a wonderfully simple, joyous realm where music imitates life, and life inspires music.

Alexander L'Estrange February 2009

A Note on the Score

The semi-chorus should be positioned within the choir, except in movement 10, as marked. Full chorus and semi-chorus may sing together throughout, except where it is explicitly stated that the semi-chorus should not sing, in preparation for a specific entry. Full chorus only means chorus excluding the semi-chorus, and Tutti indicates all singers – full chorus, semi-chorus and children's choir.

A Note on Pronunciation

Italics under the lyrics are intended to provide a guide to pronunciation — Xhosa "th", for example, is pronounced with a hard "t". To achieve an authentic sound, it is worth noting that all "a" vowels (whether in Xhosa, Swahili, Akan, Shona or Zulu) should be pronounced with a short, bright sound as in "cat"; this has the added advantage of encouraging good projection and intonation, brightening your choir's tone.

Not sure where to find a jazz quintet for your performance? The composer will be happy to advise on, or arrange, the services of professional musicians. For information, email choral@fabermusic.com

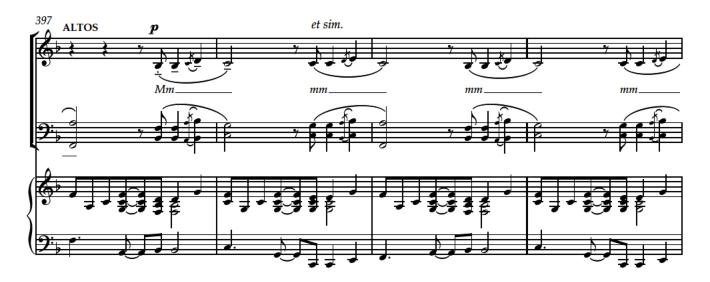
8. Hamba Lulu Wedding song from South Africa

TEXT: ZULU









14. Njooni! Zimbe!

TEXT: SWAHILI

