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## Sustaining indigenous African choral music identity: A study on Ndwamaṭo George Mugovhani's composition

Sakhiseni Joseph Yende

Department of Performing Arts, Tshwane University of Technology, South Africa

Email: [YendeSJ@tut.ac.za](mailto:YendeSJ@tut.ac.za)

<https://orcid.org/0000-0002-7649-2799>

#### Abstract

Ndwamaṭo George Mugovhani is a distinguished scholar, emeritus professor, composer, and arranger of Venda choral music in South Africa. The researcher's study uses the qualitative research method and the interview method grounded in autobiography theory to collect data about Mugovhani. As yet, Mugovhani's contribution is undocumented. He is a well-recognised academic and NRF-rated professor. Mugovhani is an African music composer who played a significant role in establishing and preserving Venda choral music and African choral music identity in the twenty-first century. This study also provides an autobiography of Mugovhani that discusses his upbringing, schooling, and tertiary education, which shaped his career as a scholar and composer. Mugovhani's notable compositions are *Zwi Do Fhela Ngani*, *Zwi Do Fhela Ngani* and *Rendani Mapholisa*, among many others. This article established that Mugovhani's compositions use modality which is commonly used in African indigenous music. The article reveals that Mugovhani's African compositions were largely influenced by Mzilikazi James Khumalo. The article affirms that Mugovhani's compositions continue to sustain the South African Venda choral music identity. This article concludes by stating that the South African choral music genre has evolved as a unique genre that is rooted in indigenous African culture and identity.

**Keywords:** autobiography, academic work, African music, choral compositions, cultural contribution

### Public Interest Statement

The history of South African composers is comparatively less researched, less archived, and very less published. Over the years, I have come to realise that there are many publications in circulation about the black nations (composers) of South Africa, and these publications attract a wide readership by various scholars nationally and abroad. Professor Ndwamaṭo George Mugovhani is one of the less researched, less archived, and very less published composer and scholar. This study therefore examined how Prof Mugovhani has contributed to the African choral music, especially in the Venda choral music.

### Introduction

Choral music in South Africa was introduced by missionaries who established educational institutions in the villages of the indigenous people around 1850. Since then, choral music has been prominent in community choirs, schools, and churches since the late nineteenth century. The missionaries translated the Bible and hymn books into the indigenous languages (Detterbeck, 2002; Haecker, 2012; Dickie, 2017; Mugovhani, 2018; Nelani, 2021). At the beginning of the 1950s, when black South African patriotism started to thrive, a stronger agenda for Africanising choral work developed (Mugovhani and Oluranti, 2016).

This Africanisation is evidenced by the works of early composers such as Enoch Sotonga, Tiyo Soga, and John Knox Bokwe, who were later followed by Polumo Mohapeloa, Tholakele Reuben Caluza, JSP Motuba, Michael Moerane, and Mzilikazi Khumalo (Dickie, 2017; Mugovhani, 2018). In the work of these composers, Ndwamaṭo George Mugovhani Ntshiswinhze (2016) states that “one way of recapturing the Africanness was to follow the actual speech rhythm of their respective languages, mostly remaining close to stylistic traits common to typical African melodies. In sum, their mission was to establish, pioneer and promote indigenous African choral culture”. The progression of choral music after 1994 forced composers to contribute to the growth and further development of choral music by incorporating more neo-traditional indigenous music into their choral compositions (Mugovhani, 2013). Many Venda choral music composers were influenced by the characteristic Western-style hymnody of the Lutheran Church. This influence is attributed to the missionaries’ significant role in establishing choral music in South Africa.

This article outlines a critical analysis and discusses Mugovhani’s academic work and compositions to establish his contributions toward developing Venda choral music in the twenty-first century.

The mandate of South African higher education is to teach and secure a prominent place for South African indigenous composers at the forefront of teaching and learning. The researcher believes that Mugovhani forms part of the new generation of choral South African composers who deserves to be well-placed, especially in African choral music. Mugovhani is certainly one of the most acclaimed twentieth-century scholars and choral music composers in South Africa and has composed choral music in several Venda dialects. Mugovhani is among a string of renowned contemporary black choral music composers, such as the late Mzilikazi Khumalo, Shelati Joseph Khosa, Phelelani Mnomiya, Mfanufikile Chonco, Christian Ncgohe, and Qinisela Sibisi. These composers incorporate indigenous music into choral compositions (Mugovhani, 2018).

This study was motivated by a lack of evidence that Mugovhani has played a significant role in the success of South African Venda choral music. Currently, no existing literature analyses the contribution of Mugovhani to academia and choral music. Mugovhani believes that the only way Venda choral music

can be better valued and preserved for the next generation beyond the boundaries is through infusing African traditional musical concepts to create a uniquely Venda-sensed choral music composition. In this context, the contribution of Mugovhani was deemed essential to be placed amongst indigenous South African choral music.

### Literature Review

#### *Brief background of choral music in South Africa*

The following is a brief discussion of the evolution of indigenous South African choral music in four periods. I highlight the four periods to ensure that the audience has a clear background of the development of indigenous choral music in South Africa.

#### *First generation of South African indigenous choral composers*

Choral music in South Africa started as early as 1850, as brought by Christian missionaries. The Christian missionaries significantly influenced composers such as Enoch Sontonga and John Knox Bokwe between 1850 and 1930 (Mugovhani, 2013; Dickie, 2017; Nelani, 2021). Nelani (2021) points out that “the practice of choral music by indigenous Africans, as a form of art, was established between 1850 and 1930”. The compositions of Sontonga and Bokwe comprise facets of African indigenous culture, although the compositions were centred predominantly on the Western style of hymnody (Mugovhani 2010, 61). This period was the establishment of South African indigenous choral music.

#### *Second generation of South African indigenous choral composers*

The generation that followed included prolific composers such as Alfred ‘Assegai’ Kumalo (1897-1966), Benjamin Tyamzashe (1890-1990), Polumo Joshua Mohapeloa (1908–1981), and Tholakele Reuben Caluza (1895–1969). Like their predecessors Bokwe, Soga and Sontonga, Tyamzashe and Kumalo displayed predominantly Western musical influences in their music. Mohapeloa and Caluza experimented by employing African elements in their works. The themes they chose for their compositions pertained to legend, nature, history, social skits, and communal life – similar to those found in the folk music of their people (Mugovhani, 1998). These composers continued to find ways to incorporate indigenous resources in their choral compositions (Mugovhani, 2018). The culture of writing music and gathering traditional African and Western idioms was commonplace in South African choral music (Dickie, 2017; Nelani, 2021; Mugovhani, 2015). This globalising dimension could be why Western elements are still embraced in contemporary black compositions and arrangements.

#### *Third generation of South African indigenous choral composers*

The era of Mzilikazi Khumalo forms part of the third generation of composers and includes Michael Moerane (1904-1980), JSP Motuba (1920-1982), and Benjamin ‘Big Ben’ Myataza (1912-1986). During this period, some composers’ compositions were predominately Western in style. A typical example of such compositions is Moerane’s *Sylvia*. The composition is in ternary form. The first section (A) has 24 bars. The second section (B) has eight bars. The last section (reprise of A section) has 22 bars, and this comes after a small section which acts as a bridge between the B section and the reprise (Mugovhani, 2010).

#### *Fourth generation of South African indigenous choral composers*

Indigenous South African choral music has witnessed the evolution of composers who could produce new stylistic trajectories in indigenous choral music. These composers include Phelelani Mnomiya

(1960-2020), Christian Ncgqobe (1957-), Makhaya Mjana (1953-) Qinisela Sibisi (1963), and Sibusiso Njeza (1982-), among others. Twenty-first-century South African choral music saw the emergence of indigenous choral composers of all races, with many choral compositions representing the South African 'rainbow nation' in terms of demographics and repertoire (Mugovhani, 2018). It is important to note that some of these choral compositions have the extensive indigenous South African choral style of their composers. However, four they have not successfully shed the influence of Western traits in their work. This continued influence of the West is evident in Mugovhani's recent compositions, such as *Zwi Do Fhela Ngani*, *Malo! Zwo Tshinyala* and *Rendani Mapholisa*.

Just like Mzilikazi Khumalo, Mugovhani's compositions combine the two African and Western idioms. According to Huskisson (1994, 37), "this unique combination of two idioms produced music that become popular in South Africa". Contemporary composers push stylistic and structural boundaries to achieve a strong African identity, evolving the South African choral genre as a unique and independent choral product in the global market (Mugovhani, 2018). The contemporary generation of indigenous African choral music composers produces new genres and unique indigenous choral music that embodies the South African music identity.

### Theoretical framework

This article is grounded on the autobiography theory. The researcher adopted autobiography theory because it is a common and distinct theory used in creative literary art when analysing human life and contributions. Autobiography originates from the anthropological aspiration to preserve a person's memory and contributions over time (Pascal, 1960; Olney, 1973; Ngwenya, 1996). Olney (1973) defines 'autobiography' as a critical combination of the three words 'auto', 'bio', and 'graphia', which means the description or art of narration (graphia) of human life (bios) by the individual (auto). In short, various scholars agree that autobiography is a field of creative literary art that extensively deals with the individuals' lives, achievements, and contributions in their academic fields (Ngwenya, 1996). This study argues that autobiography is an essential account of events and various episodes of a person's life. The main aim of the autobiography is to present the individual's personality and context successfully. Therefore, the researcher chose to use the autobiography method to write about the life, achievements, and contributions of Mugovhani.

### Methods

The research methodology adopted in this paper was qualitative research, where the researcher informally interviewed Mugovhani, intending to achieve the set goal of this article. The Mugovhani interview provided in-depth, accurate, and essential information about his life. A non-probability sampling design was adopted using a purposive sampling design. The researcher believes the purposive sampling design is more convenient and essential for both participant and researcher (Ritchie, Lewis & Elam, 2003). Due to the Covid-19 pandemic, the researcher interviewed Mugovhani in a Zoom meeting. During the interview phase, the researcher used audio recordings and made notes on a notepad, which were later transcribed into data. The interview took nearly an hour. The researcher has worked with Mugovhani for more than five years as his research assistant, so some of the research content was previously gathered.

### *Context of the life of Mugovhani*

#### Autobiographical details

This section gives a short autobiography about Mugovhani. He was born in Hamashau in 1953. He is a son of Rakuambo Andries Mugovhani Ntshishwinhze and Aḽidzuli-Munzhedzi (NwaMulaudzi)

Mugovhani Ntshiswinhze. Mugovhani is a well-known prolific scholar and prolific writer. He attended three primary schools: Mashau Primary (1960-1963), Dzaṭa Primary (1964-1967), and Phinimini Primary (1968-1970). He completed his primary education with a first-class pass. Unfortunately, his mother died during primary school, leaving him and his twin brother and sister. Between 1971 and 1973, he attended Lwenzhe Secondary School until Form 3. He completed his junior certificate with overall distinctions pass. He then continued his senior education at Mphephu Senior Secondary School until Form 5 and matriculated in 1975.

Mugovhani has a natural talent for singing and became a musical child prodigy. He was involved early in school choirs at Dzaṭa Primary, Livenzhi Secondary, and Mphephu High School. At Lwenzhe Secondary School, principal PLB Mashige appointed him as the school choir leader. Under Mugovhani's leadership and meticulous training, Lwenzhe Secondary School accomplished high accolades and collected first prize awards in numerous school choir competitions. At Mphephu Senior Secondary School, his musical crafting improved exponentially. He took the responsibility of conducting school choirs. A watershed moment was winning the first prize in the Transvaal United African Teachers Association (TUATA) choir competition as a student among choirs conducted by experienced school teachers in 1974. This prodigious moment astonished the Department of Education and leaders of the TUATA.

Key community members supported Mugovhani's early musical education. Mphephu Senior Secondary School's principal, the late Mathome Matthews Lugisani, was captivated by Mugovhani's excellent academic work and his exceptional flair as a choir conductor. The principal noticed that Mugovhani was underprivileged like many other students. Principal Lugisani and teacher Kgaugelo Jean Lugisani took the role of foster parents, affording Mugovhani an opportunity to further his education at a university. In addition, Mugovhani's uncle Nditsheni Petrus Mulaudzi and aunt Shonisani Alinah Mayayise (NwaMulaudzi) served as pillars throughout his life until he established his own family.

Mugovhani was admitted to the University of the North (Turfloop) to further his education and training. His first choice was to study for a Bachelor of Laws. However, due to a lack of funds, he opted to study for a Bachelor of Arts, since that was the only avenue to give him a study loan through the Venda government. He studied from 1976 to 1977 and then dropped out before the end of the second year. Mugovhani fled from the university due to the student uprising that started on 16 June 1976 and the September 1977 murder of the Black Consciousness Movement leader Steve Bantu Biko. Mugovhani was then obligated to look for a job because he could not afford to return to the university due to a lack of funds.

Without formal teaching training, Mugovhani found a job as a teacher and taught at Vhafamaḡi Secondary School in Hamashau from 1978 until 1979. Between 1980 and 1981, he taught at Mphaphuli Secondary School. At both secondary schools, he taught matriculants English and History, and developed the senior school choirs at both schools.

His musical dexterity reign as a champion in choral music while at Mphaphuli Secondary School inspired the directors at the Department of Education to appoint him as a lecturer of choral music for the student teachers of Tshisimani College of Education in 1982, where he worked until 1984. The Department of Education intended for the student teachers to learn choral music from Mugovhani so that they could teach choral music to learners at their respective schools. At Tshisimani College of Education, Mugovhani demonstrated that he is a significant contributor to choral music in South Africa.

For the next 20 years, Mugovhani garnered several degrees while working for various educational institutions. Towards the end of 1984, Mugovhani was awarded a TUATA bursary to study for a Music degree and Higher Education Diploma at the University of Cape Town. He also received funding from



the then government of Venda for a Bachelor of Music degree. During the same period, he completed a Bachelor of Arts degree at the University of South Africa (Unisa), the same degree he had left incomplete at the University of the North (Turfloop).

In 1991, he lectured at the Venda College of Education for a short period. In the same year, he was recruited by the University of Venda (Univen). He continued to study while he lectured at the Venda College of Education and then at the University of Venda. He spent much of his academic and scholarship career lecturing at the University of Venda. At the university, he was twice appointed as the head of the Department of Music during his long stay. The first term as head of department was between 1995 and 1999, and the second term was between 2007 and 2008. He completed his Master of Music through the University of Witwatersrand (Wits) in 1998 and his doctoral degree through the University of South Africa (Unisa) in 2007. In 2008, he was employed by the Tshwane University of Technology (TUT).

Besides the school choirs led as a teacher, Mugovhani pioneered and founded several adult choral music groups. The first adult choir group was established in Tshakhuma while he was at Tshisimani College of Education. The choir was called Venda Singing Pioneers, and he served as its conductor between 1982 and 1984. At the University of Cape Town, he founded the UCT Choir for Africa and was its conductor between 1987 and 1990. Under Mugovhani's supervision and conductorship, the choirs received accolades. The UCT Choir for Africa won the National Choir Festival in 1989. In addition, in 1990, the UCT Choir for Africa received an invitation from the International Federation of Choral Music to participate in Stockholm in Sweden, Helsinki in Finland, and in Russia. While at the University of Venda, he founded the Bel Canto Chorale, an adult choir.

Mugovhani is a prolific writer and a scholar of the indigenous knowledge systems of South Africans, including Vhenda. Due to his vast knowledge of South African culture, he was one of the cultural music gurus invited to the 1997 Music Village conference in England. The delegation accompanied former President Nelson Mandela during his visit to England as the first president of democratic South Africa. Some of the cultural groups represented in the South African delegation were Mashudu Dima of Tshivenḁa Culture, the Shembe Church of KwaZulu-Natal, the crafts and artists of the Ndebele, a group of Amaxhosa's Ncgokolo from Eastern Cape, music guru Pops Mohammed, and maskandi musical genius Mfiliseni Magubane, among others.

Mugovhani is a researcher and a renowned composer of indigenous people of South Africa's cultural music, dance, customs, traditions, and the emergence of choral music among black people. His research work and papers have been published and studied by scholars and academics worldwide. Mugovhani retired in 2018. However, Tshwane University of Technology requested that he continue as a researcher for as long as he can.

### Compositions

Mugovhani's compositions are full of creativity that strongly follow African identity and cultural style. Mugovhani primarily composes Venda choral music, as he is motivated by the environment of his upbringing. His compositions are inspired by the early Venda composers such as Stephen Maimela Dzivhani, Matthew Ramboho Nemakhavhani, Derrick Victor Nephawe, and Joseph Khorombi Nonge, among others. From when Mugovhani was young, he composed several Venda pieces, and most of his early compositions were performed by the school choirs he attended. Unfortunately, he does not have copies of his early choral compositions. Recently, Mugovhani composed many indigenous choral music pieces, including *Zwi do fhela ngani*, *Pembelani*, *Idani ri tambe*, *Thompho*, *Thulamela*, and *Rendani Mapholisa*, among others.

**Brief synopsis of Mughovani's compositions:**

- 1) *Zwi Do Fhela Ngani* (1992) by Bel Canto Chorale premiered in 1993 at the Roodepoort International Eisteddfod. The composition received positive critical acclaim from the international panel of adjudicators. In 1994, it was prescribed as the African competition song for the Adult Mixed section of the Phalaborwa Choral Festival. In 2006, the Gauteng Choral Music Association (GACMA) prescribed the song for its annual competition. The first movement begins with a Western polyphonic compositional style and is influenced by the composer's undergraduate studies in Western music at the University of Cape Town. The second movement combines pentatonic and hexatonic modality and an interplay of voice parts in call-and-response pattern. The music is a choral adaptation of the Venda Malende dance movement. In African indigenous music, modality is a common musical device used by South African composers such as Khumalo (Nketia, 1974; Dargie, 1988).
- 2) *Pembelani* (1995) was recorded by the SABC in 1997. It has already been prescribed for four competitions. In 1995, it was prescribed at the African Competition Song for High School Choirs during the annual Let the People Sing Choral Festival. In 1999, it was prescribed for the annual Khindlimuka Choral Festival in Durban, and during the same year was prescribed as the African Song for High Schools at the Metropolitan Lebowa Choral Festival. In 1997, it was chosen for high schools at the annual PEU Cho Adult Prescribed African Song at the Eisteddfod and again in 2004 for choirs at the annual PEU Choral Eisteddfod.
- 3) *Thompho* (1998) was recorded by the SABC in 1999. In 1999, it was performed for the first time by the Univen Chorale during the University of Venda May graduation and the SATICA Choral Festival in Durban. In 2002, the composition was prescribed for the Adult Choir section of the Phalaphala FM Choral Competition.
- 4) *Univen* (1999) was composed for the University of Venda. In 2000, it was sung during UNIVEN academic ceremonies and was premiered by the Univen Choir during the official opening of the academic year.
- 5) *Idani ri tambe* (2004) is a choral adaptation of a traditional Venda folktale and song. The composition was performed during the annual Nation Building Choir Festival at the Standard Bank Arena in Johannesburg. The adaptation also appears on CDs and cassettes. The composition was published by the South African Music Rights Organisation (SAMRO). For this choral arrangement, Mughovani is highly indebted to Mzilikazi Khumalo, who challenged him to produce a Venda choral piece with a typical characteristic of Venda indigenous or traditional song and dance. It is a choral adaptation from two Venda folksongs performed by various choirs.
- 6) *Beware* (2004) was performed was composed on commission by the Devhula Parish of the Catholic Church to make the youth aware of the danger of drugs and unprotected sexual activities. The composition was performed in the Catholic Church Choral Music Repertory.
- 7) *Ri a losha* (2005) was recorded at the Downtown Studios and produced by GTP Productions. The composition was first performed at the Convention Centre in Durban and is presently on cassettes and CDs.
- 8) *Malo! Zwo Tshinyala* (2006) was prescribed by the Telkom/Old Mutual National Choir Festival. Also prescribed by the Police Music Association of South Africa (POLMUSCA) in one of the exciting passages in this piece is the Venda call-and-response section in the hexatonic mode in double chorus texture.
- 9) *Thulamela* (2008) was commissioned by the Thulamela Municipality of Limpopo Province.
- 10) *Rendani Mapholisa* (2021) was commissioned by the Police Music Association of South Africa (POLMUSCA) management in 2019, and Mughovani completed it in 2020. Unfortunately, due to

the Covid-19 pandemic, the choirs could not perform it, as they were restricted regarding groupings. *Rendani Mapholisa* (2021) will be performed in annual competitions from 2022. Like *Zwi Do Fhela Ngani*, the first movement begins with a Western polyphonic compositional style. The rhythms used in this composition are very close to the Venda rhythms. The second movement of this piece has various sections reminiscent of a depiction of various musical movements. There is a depiction of a police brass band blowing and marching with military style and gusto. Another section combines pentatonic and hexatonic modality and an interplay of voice parts in call-and-response patterns. The music is a choral adaptation of the Venda Malende dance movement.

Mugovhani should be commended for successfully keeping the African rhythm style in his music, even in passages where the music appears melodically and harmonically Western. His indigenous choral music composition and prescription continue to add value to the success of Venda's indigenous choral music in the twenty-first century (Nketia, 1974; Rycroft, 1991; Mugovhani, 1998; Mugovhani, 2010).

### Contribution to indigenous African choral music and identity

Mugovhani's indigenous choral compositions showcase his love for his culture and African identity by incorporating traditional Tshivenda music elements into his compositions. This love is evident in the composition *Malo Zwo Tshinyala*, where he uses call-and-response, polyphony, syncopated rhythms, and repetition. Mugovhani writes most of his choral music in the Venda vernacular language, intending to preserve his home language and cultural heritage. For example, the compositions that reflect the Venda language and identity are *Malo Zwo Tshinyala*; *Zwi do fhela ngani*; *Idani ri tambe*. These compositions are important to the South African national heritage and the preservation of the African languages for future generations.

Mugovhani's contributions take many forms. His dedication to preserving and sustaining indigenous choral music in South Africa has been noted in the literature. For instance, the text of his compositions speaks about the importance of preserving the African identity of indigenous people. Mugovhani's compositions are his educational voice to address societal issues, especially those concerning society's daily life, such as respect. Mugovhani is invited to share his rich experience and knowledge of indigenous African choral music through workshops. Mugovhani is part of the growing body of indigenous South African choral composers passionate about promoting and preserving African indigenous choral culture.

### Discussion

This article discussed Mugovhani's academic work, compositions, and contribution to developing indigenous choral music in the twenty-first century. This article presented Mugovhani's essential choral compositions that developed South African indigenous choral music. This article's findings are consistent with studies that reveal the importance of developing South African indigenous choral music for future generations (Mugovhani, 2017; Nelani, 2021).

Furthermore, this article highlighted that Mugovhani centres on Africanness in his choral compositions and preserves the Venda culture. This Venda choral music flavour is attributed to musical elements he includes, such as syncopated rhythms, polyphonic textures, and form cyclical or repetitive movements known as A-B-A rooted in Tshivenda traditional music style. The findings of this article also demonstrate that Mugovhani's compositions combine pentatonic and hexatonic modality and an interplay of voice parts in call-and-response pattern which is common in African indigenous music. South African indigenous choral music is essential in preserving African cultural traditions and identity. This preservation is evident in Mugovhani's indigenous choral compositions performed by community



choirs at prominent events such as the Old Mutual National Choral Festival (NCF) and Police Music and Cultural Association (POLMUSCA), among others. Mugovhani's choral music has the adaptation of the Venda Malende dance movement.

Autobiography theory underpinned this documentation of Mugovhani's development of indigenous choral music in the twenty-first century through his life, academic work, compositions, and contributions. The framework of analysis was informed by the autobiography theory used to present Mugovhani's musical contribution to society.

This article confirms that South African indigenous choral music composer, Mugovhani, is influenced by his indigenous language and cultural heritage and seeks to preserve his culture through choral music. The article further affirms that Mugovhani's music has proven to be a prominent mechanism by providing an immensely pleasurable and meaningful message to different audiences. This article further indicates the traditional call-and-response African compositional style that largely influences Mugovhani's choral compositions.

### ***Recommendation***

Based on the results and analysis of this article, the following recommendations are made: First, there is a need for South African higher education to promote indigenous choral music composers in their curriculum. Second, scholars have to document and develop South African indigenous choral composers as a canon that will be taught in institutions of higher education. Third, this article recommends that extensive research be undertaken to promote literature on South African indigenous choral composers. The increasing number of South African indigenous choral composers should be promoted in curricula as the composers play a significant role in supporting and preserving cultural and national heritage. Therefore, this article recommends an intervention from South African higher education that would include South African indigenous choral and traditional music in curricula to promote African music. Also, further research should be done on Mugovhani to understand his contribution to African music. Therefore, interviews with Mugovhani are necessary for a deeper understanding of South African indigenous choral music.

### **Conclusion**

The article affirms two key contributors to African culture preservation based on a historical analysis approach. Firstly, the essential role of early missionary settlers in South Africa in establishing African choral music. Secondly, this article commends choral composers that compose using vernacular and African music styles. The findings of this article reveal that the influence of Western culture is still evident in South African indigenous choral composers' music. Nonetheless, contemporary South African indigenous choral composers achieve a strong African identity in their music with a unique style.

This article focused on Mugovhani, a South African indigenous choral music composer and explored his role in preserving African identity, culture, and heritage through his music. This preservation is attributed to his compositions that carry valuable messages and cultural identity, particularly regarding the Venda heritage. In Mugovhani's choral music, there are manifestations of indigenous elements of Venda culture. The melody rooted in Venda culture is an element that makes Mugovhani's compositions unique and interesting. Mugovhani is a composer who found ways to incorporate indigenous culture into his choral compositions. This article also affirmed a collective effort to preserve South African indigenous choral music among academics, policymakers, and universities. This is attributed to the level of creativity demonstrated by the fourth generation of composers who combines the Western and African idioms within an intercultural framework is suggestive. It is clear that the contemporary

South African choral composers are pushing new stylistic and structural boundaries to achieve a strong African culture and identity.

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### Author Bionote

Sakhiseni Joseph Yende is presently affiliated with the Tshwane University of Technology in South Africa as a part-time lecturer in the Department of Performing Arts. He has recently submitted his PhD for external examination with the University of Cape Town.

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