

**General Introduction to the**

**Michael Mosoëu Moerane**

**Critical Edition**

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## General Introduction to the Moerane Critical Edition

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### Moerane's Music and This Edition

Moerane's choral music constitutes the bulk of his output. It belongs to a genre whose beginnings have been ascribed to John Knox Bokwe in 1875 (Olwage 2010/2011), building into a choral tradition that now boasts hundreds of composers (Huskisson 1969; Lucia 2008, 11-12). Like his contemporaries, Moerane was inspired by many different kinds of music including traditional, religious and classical (vocal and instrumental), although he was less interested in jazz than some of his contemporaries. Moerane's orchestral work is 'based on thematic material derived from genuine African songs' (Moerane 1941, [2]), and I suspect that there is also more indebtedness to African songs in his choral works than has been acknowledged so far. There is a quotation of 'Nkosi Sikelel' iAfrika' at the end of *Morena Tlake*, for example, and 'Ntisikana's Hymn' at the beginning of *Ngokuba Sizalelwe Umtwana*.

Adventurous harmonies, sudden contrasting textures, lively contrapuntal writing and literary texts are just some of Moerane's distinctive musical features. To illustrate them I begin with an extract from *Mitsa-Mahosi* (A Call To Kings). The text is by Bennett Khaketla, 'arguably the most significant writer from Lesotho after Thomas Mofolo' (Dunton 2020), who wrote scathing critiques of both British colonialism and Leabua Jonathan's post-independence coup (Khaketla 1970). *Mitsa-Mahosi* is a love poem, probably known to Moerane from Khaketla's collection, *Lipshamathe*. Bars 31-33 are shown in Figure 1 and bars 34-37 in Figure 2. Mokale Koapeng transcribed the score and Mpho Ndebele translated the text, which means, 'Hey young man! This poor guy has been struck by love!'

Figure 1 shows the musical score for bars 31-33 of 'Mitsa-Mahosi' by M.M. Moerane. The score is for Soprano, Alto, Tenor, Bass, and Piano reduction. The tempo is marked as quarter note = 96. The key signature is one flat (Bb). The lyrics are: 'N - che - me, N - che - me, Tlha - se ea le - ra - to e' for Soprano; 'N - che - me, N - che - me, Tlha - se ca lc - ra - to c' for Alto; 'N - che - me, N - che - me, Tlha - se ca lc - ra - to c' for Tenor; and 'N - che - me, N - che - me, Tlha - se ca lc - ra - to c' for Bass. The piano reduction provides harmonic support with chords and melodic lines.

Figure 1: Bars 31-33 of 'Mitsa-Mahosi' by M.M. Moerane, used with permission.

34 | d .r :r .r | :l | d :- | d :- | d :- | :- | r .r :r .d | r .r :- .d |

[S.] qo - to - me - tse N - che - me, Tlha-se ea le - ra - to e

| l .l .l :l .l | :f | s1 :- | s1 :- | f1 :m | :- | l .l .l :l .se1 | l .l :- .s1 |

[A.] qo - to - me - tse N - che - me, Nche- me, Tlha-se ea le - ra - to e

| f .f :f .f | :r | m :- | m :- | d :d | :- | d .d :d .d | d .d :- .d |

[T.] qo - to - me - tse N - che - me, Nche- me, Tlha-se ea le - ra - to e

| d .d :d .d | :d | d :- | d :- | l :s1 | :- | f1 .f1 :f1 .f1 | f1 .f1 :- .m1 |

[B.] qo - to - me - tse N - che - me, Nche- me, Tlha-se ea le - ra - to e

[Pno.]

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Figure 2: Bars 34-37 of *'Mitsa-Mahosi* by M.M. Moerane, used with permission.

The word '[Pno.]' denotes the piano reduction, for rehearsal purposes only here: it was not part of Moerane's original score. This does not imply that choirs in Moerane's day never used accompaniment, which probably depended on the availability of an instrument. On the foot of the typescript of *Nonyana tse Ntle* (Beautiful Birds), for instance, Moerane writes:

N.B. Although not obligatory, a very good piano accompaniment is available for this song at 1/6. MM.

(Moerane [n.d.]; the '1/6' helps to roughly date the work: it must have been written before the South African currency change in 1961)

Moerane's dramatisation in *'Mitsa-Mahosi* of the poor guy struck down by love - sudden change of key from F major to B-flat major, pitch jumping up an octave, dynamics jumping from *piano* to *forte*, new rhythmic figure introduced in bar 33, a catchy tune in bars 33-35 - these aspects exemplify his essentially mimetic way of setting words to music. African choral music is a genre in which the text is paramount - it often contains or strongly implies a message or a moral lesson - and musical realisation of its meaning is paramount. In this example, Moerane writes for the choir syllabically, as if they were one voice, declaiming the onset of love.

Compare it to the next extract, from the song, *Alina* for Soprano, Alto, Tenor, Bass (SATB), shown in Figure 2 in piano reduction only. Here the build-up of sequential phrasing is almost instrumental in conception - where do the singers breath in these long lines? It is indebted to a late 19th-century European style of harmony with which Moerane was clearly familiar. Confirmation that Moerane knew a great deal of western instrumental and vocal music comes from several sources but one in particular is worth mentioning. In an article on Moerane published in the *Mail and Guardian* in December 1988, the journalist Carmel Rickard quotes from an interview that she had with Moerane's son, Thabo, where he told her

that ‘his father was influenced in form by Mozart and in the harmonies of the symphonic poem by Wagner’ (Rickard 1988). If Moerane knew Wagner’s music then he probably knew Bruckner’s, and Bruckner’s penchant for sequences seem to be echoed in *Alina*, an extract from which is shown in Figure 3. The setting of this song is rural Lesotho, the family are searching for a teenage girl who has been out all day, evening is drawing in and they are getting worried. The music’s anxious meandering mirrors the words, which at this point are (in Mpho Ndebele’s English translation), ‘Down by the streams, at the rapids, across the valleys. For so long, Oh! For long, for long, O! Alina, sister, Alina! Where on earth were you, Alina? Alina, come on, sis! We know things can be tough ...’ (see Figure 3).

Figure 3: Bars 9-23 of *Alina* by M.M. Moerane (ACE piano reduction), used with permission.

*Alina* also illustrates Moerane’s fondness for chromatic notes, another feature for which he is well known, not to say notorious among choirs used to the diatonicism implicit in tonic solfa notation. Chromatic notes were part of what was taught in black mission schools, but only at an elementary level in most cases (Olwage 2003 chapter 1), for Moerane writes a note at the foot of the score of *Nobody Knows The Trouble I’ve Seen*, ‘N.B. The “de” may be sung as a “d” by inexperienced choirs’ (Moerane [n.d.1938], [2]). This is one of only two chromatic notes in the piece, the other being the sharpened fah - ‘fe’. Sometimes written ‘ba’ in old tonic solfa scores, this note was clearly more common in 1938 than a sharpened doh, and needed no comment.

Chromatic harmony occurs throughout Moerane’s longest and most ambitious work, *Faiše la Heso (My Country)*, a symphonic poem for full orchestra of strings, brass, woodwinds, harp, piano and percussion, written in 1941 (Moerane 1941). It represents everything that he learnt in a B.Mus. course during the 1930s and particularly during 1941 when he studied with

Rhodes Professor of Music Friedrich Hartmann. Hartmann was an Austrian composer and theorist with a keen interest in late tonal chromaticism (van der Linde 1972; Brukman 2007), and there is little doubt that he encouraged Moerane to make daring chromatic moves in this work. Before he met Hartmann, however, Moerane had covered ‘Dominant and Chromatic 7th and Augmented 6th’ chords in the first year of his B.Mus. degree (1930); ‘Advanced Harmony, using Open Score, for String Quartet or Voices and with contrapuntal treatment of the harmonisation of Melodies’ in second year (1931); and ‘Advanced Harmony’, ‘Form and Analysis’, ‘Orchestration and Instrumentation’ and ‘Double Counterpoint and Fugue’ in the third-year course (1933; *Rhodes University Calendar 1930*, 144; 1931, 148; 1933, 93; Universiteit van Suid-Africa/University of South Africa 1962).

It would be fascinating to know how Moerane deployed these advanced compositional techniques in ‘Album for the Young’, a set of piano pieces that he entered for the ‘May Esther Bedford Prize for Musical Composition’ at Fort Hare in 1936 (*Leselinyana* 1937, 3). Obviously named after the Schumann work, whose score Moerane possessed (Mofelehetsi Moerane Interviewed by Christine Lucia 14 May 2014), it may have been educational in the same way; but we shall never know, because it was never published and the manuscript is (sadly) lost. Moerane won the prize (£20) against 11 competitors, and was praised by the adjudicator, Mr. S.J. News, for the way in which he had ‘written out, plainly and fairly accurately [in staff notation] what he had in mind, with some idea as to form and musical expression’ (*Leselinyana* Ibid).

In *Mahakoe* (Jewels) (Moerane [n.d.]), shown in Figures 4 and 5, Moerane’s chromatic experiments and chord clusters reveal him at his most experimental. He seemed to have a string quartet in mind while writing this extraordinary work for SATB.

**Larghetto sostenuto ed espress.**

[Piano reduction]

[Pno.]

[Pno.]

[Pno.]

Figure 4: *Mahakoe* (Jewels) by M.M. Moerane in piano reduction, bars 1-21, used with permission.

22 *a tempo*

[Pno.] *f* *dim.*

30 *poco agitato*

[Pno.] *cresc.*

37 *f* *poco dim.*

43 *rall. poco a poco* *D.S. al fine*

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Figure 5: *Mahakoe* by M.M. Moerane in piano reduction, bars 22-49, used with permission.

Almost as remarkable as the music is the poem that Moerane wrote for this song. It is shown below in the format in which his song texts are given for choral works in this new edition: the Sesotho lines on the left, extracted from the score and translated literally, the poetic translation on the right (by Mpho Ndebele in this case).

### Mahakoe

Hoja ke na le gauda,  
If I had also gold,

Mahakoe a benyang, mahakoe,  
Jewels that shining, jewels,

gauda tsa bohlokoa, tse rorishang!  
golds of precious, that are-praiseworthy!

Empa joale ke mohloki  
But now I am-indigent

Kea sitoa, Kea hloka,  
I-am unable, I-am impoverished,

### Jewels

If only I had gold

And other precious metals,

High-quality stones!

But I am destitute,

I am poor, I have no possessions,

|  |   |
|--|---|
| Ke tsietsoe,<br>I in-trouble,  | I am in straightened circumstances,       |
| Ke soabile,<br>I embarrassed,  | I am embarrassed,                         |
| Ke mohloli ea hlohang,<br>I a-destitute who is-needy,                        | A destitute among destitutes,             |
| Mofumanehi ea sitoang,<br>Indigent who lacks,                                | A poor indigent.                          |
| ‘Me ke tla ala maotong a hao<br>And I will spread at-feet of yours           | And so I will lay at your feet            |
| litoro le maloro a moea le pelo<br>dreams and bad-dreams of spirit and heart | all the dreams and nightmares of my soul. |

Moerane taught English literature, among other things, and he must have known the poem by W.B. Yeats to which his own poem is clearly indebted, although his is far darker in tone: ‘Had I the heavens’ embroidered cloths, / Enwrought with golden and silver light, / The blue and the dim and the dark cloths / Of night and light and the half light; / I would spread the cloths under your feet: / But I, being poor, have only my dreams; / I have spread my dreams under your feet; / Tread softly because you tread on my dreams’ (Yeats 1994, 59).

When one translates music from one notation to another for publication, looking at it as closely as this, you get to know every single one of the smallest gestures and foibles the composer committed to paper; and inevitably, you wonder what he was like, as a personality. During interviews with family members, former students and colleagues, I assembled some information, but it only made me realise how much more there was to know. What I did learn, however, made me realise that I am privileged to know aspects of him that are unknown to most people, and so I have written a short biography that is available separately.

Many personal documents that must have existed during Moerane’s lifetime, that would have supplemented my interviews, have not survived: a diary, memoir, notes, sketches for pieces, etc. There are only a few surviving professional letters (no personal ones) to people who corresponded with him about his music. I wondered, as I studied his music and especially compositions such as *Mahakoe*, how Moerane’s contemporaries in the choral sector would have viewed his music - not simply him as a musician, but his *music*. Who would he have discussed it with? It is so much more experimental than most music performed in the African choral sector. The person most qualified, I am told, was his son, Thabo, whom, to my great regret I never met, for he died in 2006. I am sure that Thabo would have known whether or not his father discussed his music with other composers; and above all, why he published so little. To the extent that a few Moerane prescribed works for competitions were widely reproduced in foolscap and later A4 books (and now online), this was also a form of ‘publication’; but why did Moerane circulate so few of his works? For the fact that choirs know so little of the 50 choral works published here, implies that he did not.

Moerane had the opportunity, as a teacher, to try new works out at school; and he had the opportunity as an adjudicator and leading figure in the choral community to disseminate them. I can only conclude, in the absence of more information, that the fact that so many of the choral works in this edition are appearing for the first time was that he had some reason for

not making them ‘public’. Whether this was due to perfectionism on his part (a quality mentioned by several interviewees) or to his realisation that choirs with limited music education would have found works such as *Mahakoe* too difficult, I would very much like to know.

This point leads me to another, more general one, about the disappearance of the documented choral legacy, and I hope that this new edition may inspire other editions that in turn will prevent further loss. Perhaps it will also serve to counter the misinformation about Moerane that developed during his lifetime and especially after his death, a topic that I have written about elsewhere (Lucia 2020). My last example in this section of the introduction is *Barali Ba Jerusalema* (Daughters of Jerusalema), which illustrates how we *can* know, through more research, how his music was viewed by his contemporaries, and it also reveals how misinformation about his music has arisen.

Like so many of Moerane’s other choral typescripts, the typescript of *Barali Ba Jerusalema* is undated. Moerane’s former school Principal at Peka High School in Lesotho, Tseliso Makhakhe, recalled, however, during an interview in 2014, that *Barali* was prescribed for a Lesotho school choir competition in 1968 or ’69. The work made a deep impression on Mr. Makhakhe, and his recollection suggests that that the piece was in fact written especially for this competition. In the following extract from my 2014 interview, Mr. Makhakhe first recalls Moerane buying a car while he was teaching at Peka High School in rural Lesotho, then he remembers the song *Matlala* and recounts the social significance of conducting another piece, *Ruri*, before coming to *Barali Ba Jerusalema*:

He was one of the teachers who bought the first car. It was a tiny, tiny little car! I don’t know what it was. It was so small. I had never seen a car that small. The school had a kombi, and then Mr. Moerane bought this toy that was travelling around the country! That was very interesting! And then all of us followed, after that, bought cars. He set an example.

Something else that was peculiar: he was asked by the teachers’ organisation to prescribe a music piece for the competition, I think for three consecutive years. I remember hearing the first piece, *Matlala*. It was amazing. Everybody wanted that song sung many times, outside the set programme. On the third occasion, no on the second occasion - I had moved to another school in Matsieng, the paramount chief, King Moshoeshe, started a school there, he wanted me to move over to that school and help it take off - that year, the set piece for the primary schools was *Ruri*. I think it is his most beautiful. That school in Matsieng, which was totally on the brink of collapse, won the competition with that piece! We had done splendid work on the piece. I myself was personally involved and we won the competition. People in the country were surprised that a school that was expected to collapse, had no future at all, could at the end of the year ...

The following year Mr. Moerane did something that I could never understand. He set a piece, *Barali Ba Jerusalema*. It’s transitions! All the way, it’s transitions! You move one page, it’s a transition; you move from that one, it’s another transition. And then you think, ‘Oh dear me. This is terrible!’ [laughs]. Many schools could not manage, and in that one we got first position with another school. We tied. It was awful, awful piece of music! Mr. Moerane set such a piece! For a competition for schools! I could never understand. I never had time to discuss that with him.

*Ruri* was prescribed in 1967. *Barali Ba Jerusalema* I think is probably 1968/69, I can’t quite remember. *Matlala* had gone before. For *Matlala* we took no part. Some other schools competed, but I don’t think Peka High School did. Probably *Matlala* was sung in 1966, and then *Ruri* 67, certainly, and *Barali Ba Jerusalema*, was it 68 or 69? (Tseliso Makhakhe Interviewed by Christine Lucia, Maseru, 20 May 2014).



It is rare to have a first-hand account of the reception of Moerane's choral music by someone so familiar with the genre. 'It's all transitions!' speaks to the way Moerane structured his music along lines that felt new at the time, using the kind of musical language that no previous African choral composer had done. Nevertheless, despite the fact that *Barali Ba Jerusalema* was already known in Lesotho in 1968 or '69, Mzilikazi Khumalo claimed to have 'discovered' it 'in the SAMRO Music Library', in Johannesburg, South Africa some time during the late 1990s (Khumalo in Moerane 1998, 14). Competitions in Lesotho and South Africa are not all that separate as entities as far as choirs are concerned (or was it different in the 1960s?). Aside from this strange anomaly, 'discovered' is an odd word for Khumalo, who was on the SAMRO Board, to use, given that the piece was already in the *SAMRO Catalogue* and there were other Moerane scores in SAMRO's library.

For whatever reason Khumalo says this, he obviously - like Makhakhe - found the work fascinating, so much so that he included it in the first of SAMRO's series of books called 'African choral repertoire in "dual notation"', *South Africa Sings Vol 1* (Moerane 1998). This 'previously unknown' work (Khumalo in Moerane Ibid) was also arranged by white composers - who in some cases received paid commissions - for solo voice and piano, and solo voice and orchestra, and went on to become co-opted as part of a nation-building exercise in the first flush of post-1994 South Africa. All this seems to sit quite heavily against the bare facts that Moerane had been forced out of the old nation of South Africa more than thirty years earlier - in the 1960s - into exile in Lesotho, and had probably never received any form of payment for *Barali Ba Jerusalema*.

This detour about the reception of one song among 50 in the edition illustrates to what extent probing beneath the surface of a single piece of music by Moerane reveals something about his personal life, his times, his involvement in his community, performance practices in his day (and later), and his music's reception - then and now. Further interest in these works as catalysts of history, most especially the larger, multicultural music history of this region of the world, is something this edition hopes to inspire. They are crying out for more research.

This is a 'Scholarly Edition' online and a 'Critical Edition' here. 'Critical' and 'Scholarly' are more or less synonymous. 'Critical' is a more old-fashioned word, coined for the Mohapeloa Edition in 2015, with echoes of 19th-century European music editions. 'Scholarly' is the more current (but still European) conceptual framing for digital online editions (Driscoll and Pierazzo 2016). Whatever you call it, the critical element is what sets the edition apart from a general music publication (or reproduction) in which sources and historical backgrounds are not explained, texts are not translated, and scores are sometimes heavily edited for performance, which is not the case here.

Unlike the Mohapeloa Edition where every work was duplicated - one version in staff notation and another in dual notation - the Moerane Edition presents the scores only in dual notation. In this and so many other ways, I learnt a great deal from working on the music of Moerane's great contemporary.

This edition hopes to follow the precedent of the earlier edition in reaching many people online. Its purpose is to providing new repertoires for performers and scholars and to promote neglected music from southern Africa's past. African choral composition is still 'literary work', as John Knox Bokwe characterised it (Lovedale Archive 1919), redolent with historical and regional inflections, voices and cultural meanings that are not widely known and deserve great scrutiny. The Moerane edition is thus part of a consciously decolonising move to unseat the dominance of Europe's music histories and scores in southern Africa's educational and concert life. Both the Moerane the Mohapeloa Editions make for potentially great teaching material in schools, colleges and universities worldwide, as examples of modern African musical style and as reflections of Africa's racialised past.

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