

Venancio Mbande talking with the trees

A concerto for quartertone marimba (and various wooden instruments) and fifteen instruments.

It was during the 1992 Hague Percussion Festival that I first had the pleasure to meet the great Mozambican timbila player, Venancio Mbande, and to see him play together with the Hague Percussion Group. The sheer amount of sound and vibration generated by the magnificent group of ten buzzing timbilas set me wondering, as so often before, at the magic of producing sound from simple pieces of wood.

And yet in today's environmentally-conscious world, we have become more aware than ever before of the Earth's rapidly vanishing forests, and the morality of felling trees (particularly those precious hardwoods which are so indispensable to the building of musical instruments) is seriously being called into question.

Venancio Mbande's name is used here merely to symbolise the musician who makes music from wood, and whose medium for spiritual communication, with all its sophistication and perfection, is nonetheless dependent on the felling of trees. He offers up his music to the trees in the hope to justify himself by the sheer beauty of the sounds and the excellence of his craft. As he enters into musical dialogue with them it is as though the music itself has become the medium through which the trees themselves can communicate with their own tree-spirits.

In *Venancio Mbande talking with the trees* the solo part (representing Venancio and his timbila) is performed on many different species of wooden instrument - quartertone marimba, woodblocks, bamboo, simantra, wooden-headed tomtoms, wood-chimes and a special tambourine with nut rattles. In contrast to this, the ensemble (representing the trees) is characterized predominantly by metal, skin, wind and stringed instruments.

James Wood 1996