



CENTER FOR WORLD MUSIC

AND RELATED ARTS



Forward Kwenda

Forward Kwenda taught and performed Shona mbira music for the Center for World Music in 1997. He was born in the rural Buhera area of Zimbabwe, an area known for its deep respect for traditional Shona culture. As a young boy, he excelled in traditional dance and recitation of ancient poetry, and at the age of 10 began to play drums and gourd rattles (*hosho*) for his mother's rain-making spirit ceremonies (*mapira*).

In 1984 Forward moved to Zimbabwe's capital city, Harare, where he began to play mbira with other musicians and formed his own mbira group. He made records, performed on national radio, and performed for spirit-possession ceremonies. He was particularly well known for the ability of his musical style to summon ancestral spirits to ceremonies.

In 1985 Forward began playing mbira in a unique complex style, much to the amazement of senior mbira players. This style is considered in Shona culture to be more ancient than current styles. His popular recordings led to international acclaim for his virtuosity, soulfulness, and unprecedented range of melodic and rhythmic improvisation. He is in great demand both in Zimbabwe and abroad.

In 1997 Forward toured the United States with Erica Azim and recorded the Shanachie CD *Svikiro: Meditations of an Mbira Master*. In 1999 a “transcendent” field recording of Forward on a Zimbabwean mountaintop at sunset was released. In February 2000, Forward performed at the Kennedy Center in Washington, DC with Erica Azim. They toured North America together during that year, as well as in 2001 and 2002.

In 2019 Forward coauthored the book *Learn to Play Mbira: Traditional Songs and Improvisation* with Andy Fowler. On January 1st of 2020, they launched an mbira video with notation—an archiving project, *mbira.online*, in which Forward served as the tutor and performer. Forward and Andy now work together at Mbira Magic to “promote mbira music and create employment for Zimbabwean musicians.”