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Abstract
This paper explores avenues of music training for aspiring gospel musicians within Black South African Evangelical and Pentecostal church contexts. The research problem addressed is the limited documentation of how gospel musicians acquire and refine skills outside formal conservatories or universities. Interviews were conducted via Microsoft Teams with two formally trained musicians, two semi-retired gospel musicians, and a group of 15 scholars and practitioners with diverse training backgrounds. Transcriptions were analysed using Artificial Intelligence tools, yielding themes that inform the descriptive narrative. Findings reveal that church-based learning thrives on diverse pathways, from formal schooling to self-taught practices, though these generate contradictions and contestations. Competition between schooled and unschooled musicians fosters a healthy environment that motivates skill development, while frequent musical encounters provide consistent opportunities for practice. The study concludes that churches function as informal conservatories, producing numerous skilled musicians. It recommends that universities integrate church-based pedagogies into curricula to bridge academic training with community practice and validate indigenous approaches.

Introduction
The correlation between the exponential growth of the Pentecostal/Evangelical church movement and the emergence of skilled musicians cannot be ignored, as it has firmly placed music at the centre of the Church (Hartje, 2009; Young, 2014). Concepts such as music ministry (Price, 2002) or worship ministry (Randlett, 2019) suggest the maturation of the church music sector, which continues to produce a certain calibre of musicians who go on to stardom in the music industry. Many Soul and R&B singers, including Aretha Franklin, Curtis Mayfield, and Stevie Wonder, cite the church as a site of their formative training and first exposure to music (Reed & Reed, 2005; Werner, 2007). This function has continued to convey musicians from the sacred to the secular. Whitney Houston, Usher, Katy Perry, John Legend, Jamie Foxx, and Snoop Dogg are renowned singers who began singing in church. Today, it is becoming apparent that, in addition to singers, instrumentalists in South Africa owe their musical training to the church.

This study addresses two pivotal questions: Can the church compete with music-teaching institutions in cultivating high-calibre musicians? What elements within Evangelical/Pentecostal churches purportedly enhance the efficacy of music training? We initiated our investigation by examining the church apprenticeship phenomenon through diverse research methodologies to explore these inquiries. As music educators, musicologists, and practitioners observing the development of this

phenomenon from within, we integrated phenomenology with process philosophy, Ordinary African Musicology, and reflexivity (Gabriel, 2015; Lebert, 2019; Mapaya & Mugovhani, 2018). Consequently, we position this integrative approach within an ethnographic qualitative research framework, thereby facilitating the centralisation of investigative and contextual questions that extend beyond the scope of singular methodological approaches (Krueger, 1987).

Literature Review

First, literature on the location of music training within the church was consulted (Laycock, 1962; Mathena & Whaley, 2017; Mochere, 2020; Slaughter, 1964). We discussed with musicians currently rendering music services within mainstream and Evangelical churches. These were represented by Christina Hoffmann, Khathu Mavhina and Itani Madima, respectively For further data collection, three focus group discussions were conducted via Microsoft Teams video conferencing (Chen et al., 2014). As per the Ordinary African Musicology intentions, insights and knowledge shared by Christina Hoffmann, Khathu Mavhina, Itani Madima, Mahlori Chauke, Sifiso Siziba, Mellitus Wanyama, Magalane Phoshoko, Hanedzani Mutele, Alex Odiekila, Thulani Zulu, Mbuti Moloi, Kgaladi Thema, Calling Maroge, Joyce Mochere and Rendani Mashau are hereby acknowledged.

There are many definitions of 'music education'. Amongst many, Folkestad (2007) sees music education as "music training in institutional settings such as schools. And, it is based on the assumption, either implicitly or explicitly, that musical learning results from a sequenced, methodical exposure to music teaching within a formal setting" (p. 279). 'Music education' refers to what occurs in a 'formal' classroom when knowledge and skills are imparted to learners. Cognizant of this definition, this paper intentionally employs the 'music apprenticeship' concept, an all-encompassing term denoting transaction, the transaction of musical skills across various settings. Music apprenticeship may refer to a pedagogical approach within the broader framework of music education. Its advantage, or at least its usability insofar as this paper is concerned, is that it transcends the 'formal' and 'non-formal' and 'informal' divides. Conveniently, 'music education' and 'music appreciation' are used interchangeably here.

In the context of music education, Colardyn and Bjornavold (2004) distinguish between the 'formal', 'non-formal', and 'informal' domains. The 'formal' exists under specific rules and customs. Objectives, time, and place structure and systematic agencies, and so forth. An example is music instruction in a regular school setting. The 'non-formal' music apprenticeship spaces refer to contexts outside music where music skills are acquired incidentally. For instance, participating in specific (African) rituals invariably involves some form of music training. Informal refers to contexts that allow individual agencies to operate in fluid circumstances (Colardyn & Bjornavold, 2004). In the informal domain, an individual is responsible for what, when, and where and how to access music training and what to do with it.

In sum, the 'formal' refers to the so-called official settings where people typically pay or receive payment to pursue music learning. The 'non-formal' music apprenticeship refers to situations in which the acquisition of music skills is a by-product of broader activities. The 'informal' music apprenticeship is unstructured and depends on the individual's circumstances.

Theoretical Framework and Methodology

This study is anchored in a comprehensive theoretical framework that integrates phenomenology, process philosophy, and Ordinary African Musicology to elucidate the lived experiences of gospel musicians apprenticed within Black South African church contexts. Drawing on Dura's (2006) phenomenological mapping of musical flow, the analysis focuses on musicians' embodied interactions with music-making, grounding the inquiry in the first-person experience of temporality and physical

engagement. Simultaneously, Szyszkowska (2019) frames musicality not as a static acquisition but as a continuous process of self-development, emphasising the dynamic, evolving nature of musical learning in real time. To ensure these perspectives remain culturally situated, Mapaya (2014) advocates for an Ordinary African Musicology that shifts authority from external observers to indigenous practitioners, thereby prioritising African epistemic traditions and legitimising participants' voices as primary knowledge holders. Reflexivity further enhances this framework by acknowledging the researchers' positionalities as practitioners, musicologists, and insiders to the phenomenon under investigation.

Methodologically, the study employs a qualitative ethnographic design, enriched by one-on-one interviews and focus group discussions conducted via Microsoft Teams. Participants included formally trained musicians, semi-retired gospel musicians, and a collective of scholars and practitioners representing diverse apprenticeship pathways. Following Parker's (2017) model of phenomenological inquiry, interviews were transcribed and analysed using AI-supported thematic coding to ensure the systematic identification of recurrent patterns within lived experience data. This hybrid analytic process revealed how formal, non-formal, and informal learning traditions converge in Evangelical/Pentecostal church spaces, cultivating skilled musicians through iterative practice, communal mentorship, and constant performance opportunities.

Results and Discussion

On Non-Formal Music Training and/or Apprenticeship

Discourse on the non-formal domain of music appreciation addresses two institutions that are crucial for early socialisation and training. The discussion begins with the family and extends to include the church. The family is regarded as having a reasonable degree of adherence to African values. For the church, we deal with the so-called mainline or mainstream church in tandem with its Evangelical/Pentecostal and African Initiated Church versions. Non-formal music training or apprenticeship mainly occurs in Evangelical/Pentecostal and African Initiated Churches. The family is addressed first as a non-formal music appreciation site, followed by Evangelical/Pentecostal and African Independent Churches (AICs). The mainline church is discussed alongside the school in the following section.

Family as a Non-Formal Music Apprenticeship Space

Music apprenticeship at the family level is non-formal; there is no syllabus, curriculum, or structured intervention with trained professionals to impart knowledge. The family is the first institution that sets a child on a lifelong journey of exploration and learning. For the child, this process may include getting to know the family and communal customs and traditions. And music traditions form part of this unfolding cultural universe. In its repertoire of musical skills and apprenticeship tools, the family, including the children, employs various strategies to facilitate the transfer of skills from the older to the younger generation. It notes several family-based music-learning strategies, including immersion, seclusion, imitation, drilling, and coercion. These common strategies span the child's developmental stages. Given that musical socialisation is a common family and communal milestone, it is reasonable to conclude that almost all African children have undergone some form of musical apprenticeship at some point. This explains why almost all community members in African societies can participate meaningfully in several music-making performance settings. Participation in South Africa could take the form of *go phaphatha* (clapping to complementary rhythms), *go dumela* (singing or humming a refrain or musical phrases), *go thekela* (sporadic, decorative dancing), or simply *go letša mphuludi* (by ululating).

Admirably, individuals from families said to be 'called' by the communal deities into sacred functions,

such as the custodianship of music-making rituals, are recognised, much as individuals born into royal families, families responsible for divination and healing, or families that are custodians of rainmaking rituals. Individual talent, or the ability to acquire musical skills effortlessly and efficiently, is identified and typically rationalised or explained away as genetic. Sesotho speakers in South Africa, and this holds for most African societies, would say this child "*o abetše ba gabo*" (has taken after his/her family). Children from musical families are expected to excel in music-making and performance. Notwithstanding the music apprenticeship environment in such families, family-based musical abilities are understood to be genetically transmitted across generations.

Tragically, African family values and customs are continually eroded by colonial institutions such as the church, media and Western-modelled education, including Western musicology. The viability of this method for acquiring music skills has become fragile and unreliable. It can hardly withstand the persistent disruptions and erosion of African institutions. Family-based modes of talent development have thus dwindled to insignificance due to encroachments by the church and schools. Modern culture infested African homes through media such as radio and television, and many other forms have proven devastating to traditional African institutions, including music apprenticeship spaces.

Church as a Non-Formal Music Apprenticeship Space

In Africa, Pentecostal and AIC rely on non-formal music training or apprenticeship strategies to ensure proficiency among church musicians and choristers. This typically involves forming groups and committing to regular rehearsals, with a schooled or experienced musician enlisted to teach music skills, such as singing scales and voice production. And reading tonic solfa. Choir practice and rehearsals aim to ensure an acceptable rendition of hymns and choruses during church services, with the choir expected to lead the congregation in song. Despite the commitment to rehearsals and regular lessons in instrument playing, such as in the Salvation Army, the apprenticeship remains non-formal. This means that training is neither formally structured nor regulated and does not necessarily follow a curriculum. Instead, it is based on practical experience and informal teaching. And learning from others. The emphasis is on acquiring skills through observation and imitation. And practice rather than formal instruction or certification.

Regardless of its association with what Gordon and Hancock (2005) describe as 'big-time evangelism', the study of gospel music in South Africa continues to reflect the non-formal modes of music apprenticeship prevalent in rock and pop. Gospel music is not necessarily taught or learned in these countries through formal academic channels, but rather through informal methods such as learning from experienced musicians, attending performances, or mentorship. For those seeking more advanced gospel music training, the study of jazz, specifically its improvisation and perception of harmony, has served as a reference point.

A considerable proportion of gospel musicians in South Africa and Kenya lack formal training, with only a small number having undergone apprenticeships, received formal music education in higher institutions, or attended private gospel music schools. This observation is consistent with the Nigerian experience captured by Adedeji and Loko (2019). Indeed, the prevalence of non-formal music training in African churches has produced many talented and skilled musicians. It would be unfair to suggest that this approach is inferior to formal music education. The non-formal approach emphasises practical experience and informal teaching. And learning from others, which can be as effective as formal instruction, particularly for music genres that rely heavily on improvisation and oral transmission. The non-formal approach has the advantage of being more accessible and inclusive, as it does not require formal qualifications or prior musical knowledge. It allows individuals passionate about music to develop their skills in a supportive community, learn from others, and contribute to the church's music ministry. Non-formal music education approaches have their strengths and

limitations. This approach to music apprenticeship is a valuable and important tradition in African churches, producing many skilled and passionate musicians who have made significant contributions to their communities and beyond.

On the Formal Music Training and/or Apprenticeship

Africa is home to several church formations that can be categorised into two types. The oldest of these categories is the so-called mainline church, which originated in Europe. Some form of institutionalised training characterises the music tradition of the mainline church. As early as the 4th century, the Roman Catholic Church established the *Schola Cantorum*, an 8th-century papal choir-training institution for young boys within the Roman Catholic tradition (García & Pérez, 2013). The training ensured that students remained consistently engaged in singing and that the choir and orchestra were prepared to perform appropriate musical selections during special celebrations. In another example, Exeter Cathedral has maintained and educated 14 boy choristers to participate in choral services alongside the canons and vicars (Cox, 2007). Since then, music education has been characterised as a white-supremacist project (Bass, 2023; Gellerstein, 2021). It has become a mainstay of the modern curriculum. Most credible universities offer music education programmes.

It is widely recognised that preschool education encompasses the developmental period from birth to age three. In contrast, kindergarten functions as a preparatory stage preceding formal education. Barbarin et al. (2010) highlight the challenges associated with transitioning from home culture to the school environment, particularly for young children. The priorities of dominant social groups frequently diverge from those of traditional African societies. For example, proponents of indigenous language education express frustration as children are integrated into the English-speaking tradition. Ashley-Cooper et al. (2019) further complicate this issue by introducing the South African historical context, where race and geographic location influence the quality of education a child receives. It can be argued that early childhood education presents a cultural dilemma for African children in South Africa, resulting in miseducation. In musical terms, African nursery rhymes are often overshadowed by Euro-American songs such as "Twinkle Twinkle Little Star" and "Baa Baa Black Sheep." As Chanunkha (2004) asserts, the "primary music syllabus [in Malawi] alienates Africans from their contextual mental thinking in music." Early music education decisively influences school-based music education; to be candid, these Euro-American rationalised music syllabi render African children musically irrelevant.

School-based music education encompasses learning through a standardised curriculum within a classroom setting. The term 'curriculum' can be intricate in its definition. At its most basic level, a 'curriculum' is a strategic policy designed to ensure that the education system aligns with national career objectives for learners; it encompasses the teaching and learning activities and experiences provided by and accessed through schools (National Education Policy Investigation, 1992). A curriculum should be broadly accessible. Alternatively, schools should exhibit flexibility in delivering various disciplines. For instance, in South Africa, a comprehensive approach to music education would involve studying a limited amount of classical music, jazz, and some indigenous African music (Department of Basic Education, 2011). Even within a single study program, one must engage with the history of music, theory, instrumental study, aural training, and related areas. In these contexts, the learner's interest does not serve as the starting point for teaching and learning. Instead, the teacher, equipped with the curriculum, assumes the role of the knowledgeable guide responsible for directing learning. This approach could be (mis)interpreted as inefficient for those whose sole interest is to learn to play their instruments and join a band.

In the historically privileged white section of the South African community, children are exposed to music from lower schooling grades. As they progress, they may choose to continue music as one of

their major subjects. There is a chance that these children will study music at the tertiary level. The background in music education is expected to be sufficiently strong for them to pursue further studies. This approach is efficient, as managing the entry point to the music education programme would ensure a particular level of proficiency in the student. A standard curriculum should ensure that all learners are exposed to the duplicate content in theory and practice.

The flip side is that the formal system stifles originality in favour of rule-based pedagogical outcomes. For those who received this kind of schooling, undoing this straitjacket mentality often takes too long and possibly outgrowing it is difficult. Oftentimes, schooled musicians sound the same (in improvisation) because of the set rules of uniformly drilled curricula (Solomon, 1986). And too few embrace unorthodox approaches to music and instrument playing. In a nutshell, a university-trained musician is one who attended university and studied music; this includes both graduates and dropouts. The defining factor is that the student sat in a classroom, received music tuition, and was aware of the dreaded rules associated with playing music.

The church primarily draws musicians from within its congregation. When the desired calibre of musicians is not available, it may recruit university-trained performers to support its praise and worship groups on a retainer basis. For example, M. Chauke (personal communication, 2022), a university-trained musician, serves the church as a musical director. In this role, they not only lead praise and worship teams but also conduct workshops to develop aspiring musicians within the congregation.

On the Informal Music Training and/or Apprenticeship

Informal music study is the self-driven and self-directed study of music or musical instruments. Concepts such as 'self-taught musician', 'the bandstand', 'learning on the road' and 'online lessons' form components of informal music learning. Self-study, closely linked to informal music study, is often practised due to the inability to enrol in 'formal' education. As a pedagogy, informal self-study places the aspirant musician at the centre of learning; they determine what to learn, when, with whom, and by what means. Thus, the aspiring musician determines the learning path, pace, and content appropriate to their career goals.

In the informal self-study domain, resources such as the 55-year-old *Guitar Player* Magazine *Creem*, *Rolling Stone*, *Go-Set*, *RAM* and *Juke Magazine*. And music newspaper articles found in *Melody Maker* and *New Musical Express* have become indispensable (Watson, 2016). Instructional videos and DVDs have made music lessons portable. Fast-forward to the internet era, and online lessons are even more readily available, often providing previously inaccessible insights into the life and times of their preferred iconic master musician. And this is not restricted to time and space. An iconic music instructor can video-stream a lesson to many students. One-to-one lessons are still possible. And the feedback can be immediate and personalised. Instead of following a specific curriculum, students may only choose what interests them. Most importantly, the student learns by observing how the master musician navigates their instrument. Most of these digital platforms have built-in slow-down, loop, and zoom features, making them ideal for instrument study.

The online environment not only supported but also facilitated self-directed learning. Mediated learning innovations, such as distant learning, have also benefited from the onset of the "Internet of Things". Allen and Seaman (2013) define online tuition as "A course where most or all of the content is delivered online. Typically, you have no face-to-face meetings." They see the online platform as an extension or offshoot of distance learning. They still imagine a trained teacher disseminating study content from a 'formal' institution, such as a university or college, purely online. Students receive study materials. And at a prescribed time, they write and submit their assignments. The distance

learning mode remains teacher-driven, with specific attention to the needs of a secondary student. The teacher directs what students need to learn. This is not always possible or ideal for instrument study, where the teacher and the student may need to be in the same room for effective teaching and learning.

This paradigm is shifting. Most effective music instructors are not teachers by profession; they are less interested in the curriculum directives. Instead, they teach from their personal experience, which initially attracted students to them. Online instructors can provide highly personalised lessons (Grey, 2017; Johnson & Hawley, 2017). The internet also facilitates the self-teaching musician's access to materials. Listening to music, transcribing. In the African context, playing by ear is the most efficient approach to acquiring the 'music language' (Lilliestam, 1996). The advent of the internet has made these resources easily accessible to the growing number of aspiring musicians.

While joining a touring band is an acknowledgement of potential or talent, it is also an opportunity to put what has thus far been learned into practice. Most importantly, touring with a band exposes aspiring musicians to the intricacies and challenges of the music industry. Most importantly, it also teaches how to handle the pressure of being a working musician. Besides being a place where music apprenticeship occurred, the bandstand was also a musical 'laboratory' where constellations of musical ideas and experiments crystallised. A case in point is the jam sessions at the Minton's Playhouse and clubs along 52nd Street in New York, featuring young, start-up musicians. And promising musicians. The comfort of being free to challenge the conventions of the swing era in the presence of *cognoscenti* audiences gave rise to bebop jazz (Stump, 1998). Musicians can express themselves musically, politically, and socially at jam sessions. For example, the attitude that accompanied the birth of bebop was seen as radical at the time, only to become a defining feature of jazz later on (Brackett & DeVeaux, 1998). Another way of viewing the jam session was as a musical conference in which innovations could be tested. In the same breath, musicians used jam sessions to test their instrumental proficiencies against the assumed ideal standard of the time. As Lebert (2019) learned, jam sessions are a rite of passage for jazz musicians. One must master the 'standard' repertoire to be acknowledged as a peer in the hierarchy of jazz performance.

Learning on the bandstand entails an aspiring musician joining an amateur band comprising peers at roughly the same level of expertise. By chance, this experience may lead the novice to join a more established band comprising experienced players. Often, novices are accepted into a band based on their apparent talent and potential. By studying the band's repertoire, observing how more established musicians navigate musical and social situations, and continuing to practise and maintain their instrumental and musical proficiency, the novice acquires the 'musical language' that is tantamount to ineffable knowledge. Arguably, the bandstand is the ultimate learning environment for contemporary musicians. John recounts jazz pianist Hal Galper uttering, "School is on the bandstand", and supposedly not in the classroom (Barron, 2007).

Joining the band on the road is a privilege reserved for proven, talented young jazz musicians. Suffice it to say that the online music education phenomenon is relatively new, powerful, and effective. And has grown very popular. Lessons are available 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, in the comfort of individuals' homes. Its drawback is that, unlike the bandstand environment, the student cannot observe the master musician at work for additional insight. Unlike in the classroom, students may not be strict in following the challenging path necessary for their development; hence, some fall into the habit of 'noodling' (Claxton, 2006).

Dynamism of the Confluence of Differing Apprenticeships

The church is where informal, non-formal. Formal music apprenticeship traditions uniquely intersect,

bringing together musicians from different training backgrounds: trained and self-taught. And naturally talented novices share the music-making space. Schröeder (2021) accounts for a similar trend in American and German case studies, in which the church serves as the meeting point of music training and apprenticeship traditions. The path to music ministry could be through the study of secular music, which builds on existing music training in formal institutions. The second path is need-based, as exemplified by the development of the *itende* music genre made famous by South African gospel artists such as *Moruti* Shoba and Sipho Makhabane. The third path is based on "musical and pragmatic considerations" (Schröeder, 2021, p. 210). The modern church has praise and worship as cornerstones of sustaining its service and culture. And the mode of operation. Worship and music are closely intertwined, making consideration of music unavoidable. All these musical paths define the church as a melting pot of diverse musical experiences and traditions.

Musical skills-acquisition paths, experiences, or traditions that coexist in the church music-making space often collide, as evidenced by how exponents of these traditions perceive one another. For instance, Hani Mutele cites a hostile atmosphere when he was appointed to the directorship of music at his church. Coming from a university background, he sought to ensure that basic music literacy was in place. To his frustration, communication among the band members was erratic. Due to the absence of a standard musical language and literacy, there was a lack of trust among the many music-acquisition traditions. Sifiso Siziba, also university-trained, observes that self-taught musicians who joined the church band tended to overplay. He observed that these musicians used lessons from social media and practised. And then waited for church rehearsals and/or performances to pour it all out at once. He characterises them as egoistic.

This view accords with Chauke's, who claim that university-trained church musicians have their musicality stifled by the rigidity of rules governing vertical and static chords. He argues that schooled musicians can do themselves a favour by replacing traditional I-IV-V harmonic structures with a movement-oriented playing paradigm, in which harmony is primarily viewed as simultaneous voice movements. He contends that hearing will be significantly enhanced, leading to endless, innovative harmonic movements. In this paradigm, the 'wrongness' or otherwise is determined by the ear, not by some imposed rules. This exposition finds vivid expression in one of the most successful rock guitar players, Eddie Van Halen's "[t]o hell with the rules. If it sounds right, then it is." (Quan, 2009). This manner of perceiving music is liberating for church musicians who, even without formal training, function effectively in praise and worship. Besides these seemingly uncomfortable relations among church musicians, the environment is conducive to the effective transfer of musical skills.

Conclusion

In South Africa, the Black church has emerged as a living conservatory where formal, non-formal, and informal pedagogical domains converge into a continuous experience of music training. The rigidity of the formal domain, which often privileges Western harmonic rules and technical precision, is neither dismissed nor abandoned but reshaped by the resilience of communal traditions and the improvisational freedom of informal practice. The non-formal domain, rooted in family and community, continues to nurture talent despite historical disruptions, while the informal domain has produced generations of musicians whose artistry flourished outside institutional walls.

Within praise and worship, these strands do not remain separate; they fuse into a seamless apprenticeship where novices, seasoned performers, and informally trained musicians learn side by side. This synthesis challenges colonial legacies and affirms African sensibilities as generative forces of innovation. Practically, the study highlights the church's role in sustaining cultural inheritance while cultivating artistry that is both contextually grounded and pedagogically expansive. By weaving together, the strengths of all three domains, the Black church offers a model of music

education that democratises access, resists fragmentation, and ensures gospel music remains a living practice of creativity and continuity.

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