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Musical Practices, Social Exclusion, and Inclusion at Lovedale Mission in South Africa

In the first half of the 18th century Moravian pastors were the first missionaries in the Western Cape region of South Africa. They later founded mission stations where parts of the converted local population lived together with the missionaries. In the 19th century protestant mission societies from Germany and Great Britain took up the missionisation effort in large parts of South Africa, often in parallel with colonisation, and founded many mission stations with associated school and printing press.

This paper addresses aspects of “elitism and exclusion” as well as “ethnic and social affiliation” as experienced on a mission station in South Africa in the late 19th and early 20th century. The mission station not only provided a sense of inside / outside in spatial terms, but also in terms of social and cultural markers, including music. Christianisation, for the missionaries, was inextricably tied to civilisation, and therefore European clothes, language, music and social practices had to be taken up by converts together with their new religion. This idea also guided the education provided on the mission station and the output of the mission press: Both reflect the European cultural values at the mission station. While the language of communication necessarily included the local language isiXhosa, the music that was practised, taught and printed was almost exclusively Western in style. Local composers had to navigate a space between oral and written transmission, with Western notation tools being used for transmission of indigenous music, and new compositions being assessed in a European value system.

The proposed paper takes a specific look at the Lovedale mission station: How, through practice, education and printing, the mission station created a musical space that fostered a sense of inclusion for its inhabitants, and with the same tools excluded people of the surrounding areas. In addition, the paper looks at a composer linked to the Lovedale Mission station: John Knox Bokwe. It investigates the music he composed, discusses how it references the mission space and its surroundings, and explores the difficulties a local composer encounters when navigating the hybrid, in-between space of a mission station.

Prof. Dr. Rebekka Sandmeier completed her Ph.D. on early 20th-century German opera at Trinity College Dublin. Later, she was awarded a Habilitation (professorial dissertation) on a study of John Dunstaple and the contenance angloise at Münster University. After standing in for professorial positions in musicology at the universities of Potsdam and Münster (Germany), she was appointed professor of musicology at the South African College of Music (University of Cape Town). Rebekka has published widely on English music, opera and oratorio as well as music of the 15th, 19th and early 20th century. Her current research interests center on the reception of Handel's oratorios, oratorios in 19th-century Germany, and on the history of Western music and Western music institutions in South Africa. In her spare time Rebekka plays the viola da gamba and enjoys riding her motorbike.