

Daraja Music Initiative: Bridging Music and Conservation

Katherine Palmer and Hillary Herndon



Participants in the Daraja Strings program enjoying themselves (photo courtesy of Hillary Herndon)

Each summer the Daraja Music Initiative (DMI) provides Tanzanian students with a unique interdisciplinary educational program that fuses music and conservation. This non-profit organization from the United States started in 2010 as Clarinets for Conservation, teaching a single class of twelve clarinet students. Now five years old, the organization has expanded to include additional educational services for the Kilimanjaro community, including coaching sessions for the national Police Academy Band, recorder classes for rural primary-school students, and a brand-new string program called Daraja Strings. By employing place-based education

and community-music approaches, the Daraja Music Initiative aims to utilize the transformative power of music education to encourage creativity and the protection of natural resources.

Why Conservation in Tanzania?

Many instruments are constructed entirely or partly from the African blackwood tree (also known as *grenadilla*, *mpingo*, and *Mozambique ebony*). While these instruments—including clarinets, oboes, piccolos, and some string fingerboards—are popularly recognized

in many cultures, the instruments are virtually unheard of in East Africa. The *mpingo* tree is the national tree of Tanzania, but many Tanzanians are unaware of its important musical significance. Furthermore, this tree is being harvested at an unsustainable rate and is commercially endangered. By showcasing instruments made from *mpingo*, the Daraja Music Initiative educates the local community about the tree's value, musical importance, and environmental benefits. By partnering conservation education with music education, DMI also gives local students an opportunity to participate in an active-learning, hands-on classroom environment.

The Mission

The heart of the Daraja Music Initiative is to utilize music education for positive social change—engaging students and local communities with the power of music, teaching students to play instruments, and empowering them by providing a healthy, creative outlet that improves problem-solving skills that facilitate self-sufficiency. DMI provides an interdisciplinary approach to sustainability through music education, helping Tanzanians to better understand their environment and the issues that plague it. The Daraja Music Initiative fosters creative community collaborations with local organizations and provides non-traditional performance opportunities to build diverse audiences, emphasizing that music is for everyone regardless of socioeconomic status.

Daraja Strings

The summer of 2015 marked the inauguration of the Daraja Strings program. Four string teachers delivered fourteen donated violins, violas, and cellos for the first

string-music education program in the town of Moshi, where students had never seen a string instrument before. For six weeks, participating students received daily group lessons led by volunteer teachers, with focused instruction covering basic instrument maintenance, how to tune their instruments, and how to read music. Beginning in week three, the students met as an ensemble for one hour a day after their group lessons. The students performed as an ensemble five times over the summer, beginning with simple tunes in unison and building up to a finale performance of their national anthem in four-part harmony.

Benefits

The students involved in the Daraja Music Initiative excel in their music studies *and* academic exams—a win-win situation for the organization and the school administrators. With an outlet to express themselves, the music students develop confidence and a sense of self worth. The teachers involved in DMI gain a greater understanding of the power of music education and develop a global perspective on their roles as musicians.



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You can learn more about the Daraja Music Initiative, Daraja Strings, and Clarinets for Conservation at clarinetsforconservation.org. Interested in volunteering or donating instruments? Please contact clarinetsforconservation@gmail.com.

To learn more about other community outreach projects, please visit the AVS's page at: <http://www.americanviolasociety.org/Community/Outreach-Projects.php>

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