

WORLD MUSIC'S ROLE IN THE CONSTRUCTION OF A
HYPERREALISTIC AFRICA IN DISNEY'S *THE LION KING*

by

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Submitted to the Faculty
Graduate Division
College of Fine Arts
Texas Christian University
in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the degree of

MASTER OF MUSIC

December, 2015

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Chapter One: Hyperreality, Disney, and Africa

Early in the Tony Award-winning musical *The Book of Mormon* (2011), the two main characters, Elders Price and Cunningham, learn that they will be traveling to Uganda. “Oh boy—Like *Lion King!*” Elder Cunningham exclaims, only to find out later that *The Lion King* seems to have taken “a lot of artistic license.”¹ Like many jokes in *The Book of Mormon*, these references to *The Lion King* play on the characters’ naïveté about the world around them. Their exaggerated, childlike ignorance sends *Book of Mormon* audiences into fits of laughter, but in reality the two Mormons’ Disney-based ideas are not so different from how Americans often perceive other cultures—particularly African cultures.

After its June 15, 1994 release, the animated Disney film *The Lion King* proved to be a box-office powerhouse both abroad and in the United States, grossing over \$400,000,000 in the domestic market alone.² The film won accolades during the 1995 awards season, winning three out of four Golden Globe Awards for which it was nominated, including Best Motion Picture, Best Original Score, and Best Original Song (Elton John’s “Can You Feel the Love Tonight”).³ *The Lion King*’s score and soundtrack won recognition from the Academy Awards and the Grammys as well,

¹ Trey Parker, Robert Lopez, Matt Stone, *The Book of Mormon* (New York: Newmarket Press for ITBooks, 2011), 10, 44.

² “The Lion King,” *Box Office Mojo*, accessed June 20, 2015, www.boxofficemojo.com/movies/?id=lionking.htm.

³ *The Lion King*’s other Golden Globes nomination was also in the Best Original Song category, for Elton John’s “Circle of Life.”

earning Oscars for Best Original Song (“Can You Feel the Love Tonight”) and Best Original Score, and Grammys for Best Male Pop Vocal Performance (“Can You Feel the Love Tonight”), Best Musical Album for Children, and Best Instrumental Arrangement with Accompanying Vocals (“Circle of Life”). *The Lion King* has continued to be financially successful and culturally influential since its premiere, spawning two sequels (*The Lion King 2* [1998] and *The Lion King 1½* [2004]), two subsequent theatrical re-releases (in IMAX in 2002 and in 3D in 2011), and a blockbuster Broadway musical that has run since 1997 with over 7,300 performances.⁴

Because *The Lion King* (like Disney movies in general) is so widely popular, it has played a critical role in forming and maintaining Americans’ perceptions of Africa since the 1990s. Edward Bruner has found that the “American image of African culture” that *The Lion King* presents even overtakes actual experiences of African culture for tourists in African countries.⁵ The Swahili phrase *hakuna matata* (“no worries, no problems”), for example, was used in Uganda in the 1970s to combat growing political turmoil throughout the country.⁶ Now, however, *hakuna matata* mainly reminds tourists to Uganda of *The Lion King*’s Americanized version of Africa—a version with which they are both more familiar and more comfortable. *The Lion King*, in short, is one of very few sources—and arguably the most

⁴ “The Lion King,” *Internet Broadway Database*, accessed June 20, 2015, www.ibdb.com/production.php?id=4761.

⁵ Edward Bruner, “The Maasai and the Lion King: Authenticity, Nationalism, and Globalization in African Tourism,” *American Ethnologist* 28, no. 4 (November 2001), 893.

⁶ *Ibid*, 893.

memorable—of exposure to Africa for many Americans. In their attempts to encourage the teaching of accurate information about African countries, for instance, Brenda Randolph and Elizabeth DeMulder found that elementary students and teachers alike were exposed to inaccurate and stereotypical information about Africa through *The Lion King* and other media.⁷ Due to how deeply engrained this example of pop culture is in contemporary American society, *The Lion King's* fictionalized version of Africa (and its music) essentially becomes the “real” and “true” version of Africa for Americans—even more than what actually *is* real and true.

This divide between reality and the perception of reality can be explained by the concept of “hyperreality.” Jean Baudrillard coined the term “hyperreality” in his 1981 treatise *Simulacra and Simulation*, defining it as “a real without origin or reality.”⁸ Simply put, this definition states that an object or idea is hyperreal if it is designed to emulate something that never actually existed. John Tiffin expanded Baudrillard’s definition, suggesting that hyperreality is “a condition in which what is real and what is fiction are seamlessly blended together, so that there is no clear distinction between where one ends and the other begins,” resulting in “the inability to distinguish reality from a simulation of reality.”⁹ Umberto Eco uses the California-based theme park Disneyland, viewed as a microcosm of American life, to discuss

⁷ Brenda Randolph and Elizabeth DeMulder, “I Didn’t Know There Were Cities in Africa!” *Teaching Tolerance* no. 34 (Fall 2008), 36–38.

⁸ Jean Baudrillard, *Simulacra and Simulation*, trans. Sheila Faria Galser (Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 1994), 1.

⁹ John Tiffin, Introduction to *Hyperreality: Paradigm for the Third Millennium*, ed. Nobuyoshi Terashima and John Tiffin (London: Routledge, 2001), 1.

hyperreality; Eco claims that the park “not only produces illusion, but . . . stimulates the desire for it” by proving that the falsified experience of Disneyland “corresponds much more to our daydream demands.”¹⁰ In other words, actual reality will always have its share of flaws and disappointments, but the carefully constructed perfection found throughout the theme park gives audiences a more desirable, more *perfect* version of reality.¹¹

For example, Disneyland’s “Main Street, USA” area, pictured in Figure 1, represents quintessential small-town America in the early twentieth century. Walt Disney himself said of the park:

For those of us who remember the carefree time it recreates, Main Street will bring back happy memories. For younger visitors, it is an adventure in turning back the calendar to the days of grandfather’s youth.¹²

There are certainly many reasons to be nostalgic for this “simpler” time in American history. Yet although Main Street, USA portrays some (more or less) historically accurate positive aspects from this time period, the park conveniently omits any mention of the myriad negative aspects that plagued the first half of the twentieth century, from World Wars and the Great Depression to divisive social issues and yet-to-be-eradicated diseases. By creating a vision of Main Street, USA seen through

¹⁰ Umberto Eco, *Travels in Hyperreality*, trans. William Weaver (San Diego: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1983), 44.

¹¹ Disneyland even goes so far as to exert military-like standards for its employees’ appearance and behavior; for example, employees must adhere to restrictions on hair and fingernail length, and are not allowed to frown or have bad posture while in front of park guests. <http://cp.disneycareers.com/en/about-disney-college-program/disney-look/>

¹² Travis L. Cox, “Turning Back the Calendar: An Analysis of Main Street USA’s use of Nostalgia” (M.A. Thesis, Oregon State University, 2008), 42.

the lens of selective memory, Disneyland's creators produced a sort of alternate reality, which is presented to park guests as entirely and unironically authentic. This new reality, of course, does not quite make historical sense. Without the negative aspects from this time period, the positive aspects would not have developed in the same way, making Main Street, USA's reality impossible. In short, Main Street, USA is based on a reality that does not actually exist, or in Baudrillard's words, "a real without origin or reality."



Figure 1: Main Street, USA at Disneyland

Though most commonly used to discuss visual or material situations, the theory of hyperreality is applicable to the textual and aural aspects of music as well. Aaron Fox, for example, uses the dichotomy of real and hyperreal to examine the lyrics in country music. Fox argues that there is no "authentic' country music text . . .

one which represents the 'real' life of a 'real' community without alienated nostalgia, false consciousness or kitschy commodification."¹³ Here Fox makes the same argument Baudrillard and Eco do with regard to Disneyland; just as Main Street, USA creates an alternate, pristine version of life in twentieth-century, small-town America, country music creates a hyperrealistic version of the stereotypical country lifestyle. This occurs through the process of de- and re-naturalization, in which ideas and subjects lose their original meaning and context, and later acquire new meaning in a different context.¹⁴ In the case of country music lyrics, the de- and re-naturalization process often involves removing commonly used colloquialisms and clichés from their normal, everyday applications and elevating them so that they serve a more poetic and extraordinary function. This argument further implies that all poetry could be interpreted as hyperrealistic. Fox also touches on the idea that the commodification of a lifestyle or culture is, in itself, a form of hyperreality, saying that "the 'authentic' language of emotion is contrasted with the 'false' language of the market, transforming each in the direction of the other."¹⁵

While Fox focuses on the hyperreality of music *texts*, Vytis Puronas focuses on the actual sound itself, using the term "sonic hyperrealism." Puronas in fact argues that *all* recorded sound is hyperreal, because "a recorded sound can be separated from reality, archived and reanimated long after its real counterpart has

¹³ Aaron A. Fox, "The Jukebox of History: Narratives of Loss and Desire in the Discourse of Country Music," *Popular Music* 11 no. 1 (Jan, 1992), 53.

¹⁴ *Ibid*, 53.

¹⁵ *Ibid*, 58.

disappeared.”¹⁶ Puronas also discusses sonic hyperrealism specifically in the context of film, saying:

A variety of recorded (collected) real sound sources...are combined together in order to simulate a certain situation. This is sound montage. ...These sonic creatures are reshaped, repaired, and relocated into unnatural contexts, whether in synchronicity with a moving image, which gives clues to their meaning, or in complete isolation. The parts that are found unsuitable are replaced or enhanced in order to make them appear more pleasing.¹⁷

Here, Puronas uses another argument that is similar to Baudrillard and Eco’s claims about Disneyland: reality, as it actually is (or in this case, as it actually sounds), is not enough. The original sounds—and the actual reality—are manipulated until they resemble what audiences *expect* reality to sound like. Because the sounds have become more ideal than is realistically possible, however, they have crossed into the realm of hyperreality.

Veit Erlmann argues that the label “world music” represents a similar kind of real without origin or reality—a “proliferation of values without any reference point at all.”¹⁸ In *Musical Exoticism: Images and Reflections*, Ralph Locke traces Western fascination with the musical exotic back for centuries; in the Baroque era, prominent composers like Handel wrote operas and oratorios that featured exotic settings and characters, though the music composed for these “Eastern dramas” was of a

¹⁶ Vytis Puronas, “Sonic Hyperrealism: Illusions of a Non-Existent Aural Reality,” *The New Soundtrack* 4 no. 2 (2014), 183.

¹⁷ *Ibid*, 183.

¹⁸ Veit Erlmann, “The Aesthetics of Global Imagination: Reflections on World Music in the 1990s,” *Public Culture* 8 (1996), 475.

decidedly European character.¹⁹ After 1750, composers began to incorporate exotic elements into their music. Mozart, for example, used a Turkish style in several of his works, including his opera *The Abduction of the Seraglio* and in the “Rondo alla turca” at the end of his Piano Sonata in A Major, K.331.²⁰ Simple forms, harmonies, and keys (i.e. keys which featured very few sharps and flats), and emphasis on percussive instruments, like the bass drum, cymbal, and triangle, often characterized this Turkish style.²¹ While composers like Mozart used these exotic musical elements as a way to add distinctive character to their music, world music also functioned as method of creating public spectacle. The 1889 World’s Fair in Paris, for example, fed off of this fascination with the exotic, and contributed to it as well; music from regions as far-ranging as China, Java, and the Middle East became part of an all-encompassing “exotic spectacle,” which transformed and clashed with “horizons of expectation formed through decades of musical exoticism.”²² Composers like Debussy were inspired by the exotic presentations, and began to incorporate non-Western elements into otherwise European-influenced compositions.²³

Although American and European listeners have been interested in music from exotic locales for centuries, “world music,” as contemporary audiences know it,

¹⁹ Ralph Locke, *Musical Exoticism: Images and Reflections* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 88–89.

²⁰ *Ibid*, 113.

²¹ *Ibid*, 120–121.

²² Annegret Fauser, *Musical Encounters at the 1889 Paris World’s Fair* (Rochester: University of Rochester Press, 2005), 163.

²³ *Ibid*, 205.

did not exist until the late 1980s and early 1990s.²⁴ This category in effect originated with Paul Simon's hugely successful album *Graceland* (1986), which featured South African ensembles Ladysmith Black Mambazo, The Boyoyo Boys, and General M.D. Shirinda and the Gaza Sisters.²⁵ The African styles used in several of *Graceland's* songs, such as "I Know What I Know," "Gumboots," and "Homeless," as well as other world music elements featured in songs by other songwriters, such as Peter Gabriel and Ry Cooder, sparked a newfound interest in international musics, even within mainstream American pop culture.

Within a year, twenty-five representatives from different sectors of the music industry had convened on several occasions to discuss what to call this new musical category, bouncing between labels like "ethnic," "folk, and "international" before finally settling on "world music."²⁶ By May of 1990, the style had secured its own spot in the *Billboard* magazine and charts, and even though it was lumped under the broader heading of "Top Adult Alternative Albums" with several other musical styles, the recognition among the *Billboard* charts remains a symbol of world music's burgeoning popularity.²⁷ Throughout the early 1990s, the term was mainly associated with music from sub-Saharan Africa and the Caribbean, and even when

²⁴ David Brackett, Introduction to "We Are the World?" in *The Pop, Rock, and Soul Reader: Histories and Debates, Third Edition*, ed. David Brackett (New York: Oxford University Press, 2014), 479.

²⁵ *Ibid*, 480.

²⁶ Tim Taylor, *Global Pop: World Music, World Markets* (London: Routledge, 1997), 2.

²⁷ *Ibid*, 5–6.

the term became more inclusive of other musics, African and Caribbean musics remained the most popular.²⁸

The phrase “world music” is of course ambiguous to the point of meaninglessness, and can indicate many different things. Jan Fairley points out that “world music” could include musicians outside of the circle of Anglo-American influence who incorporate Western styles into their work, or Western musicians who appropriate or adopt aspects of global music.²⁹ Many people in the music industry find the term problematic to the point of offensiveness; David Byrne, former singer for Talking Heads, asserts that the label “ghettoizes most of the world’s music” and acts as “a distancing mechanism that often allows for exploitation and racism.”³⁰ Herbert Mattelart, of the online magazine *The Baffler*, complains similarly, claiming that the term “world music” is “markedly insensitive” and “creates separate spheres of Anglic and non-Anglic existence.”³¹ For the purposes of my work, I have chosen to adopt Jocelyne Guilbault’s broad definition: world music is “the blending of modern and traditional musics . . . usually associated

²⁸ Brackett, Introduction to “‘We Are the World’?,” 481. For more information on the representation of different regions in the World Music *Billboard* chart, see Appendix 1 of Taylor’s *Global Pop*.

²⁹ Jan Fairley, “The ‘Local’ and ‘Global’ in Popular Music,” in *The Cambridge Companion to Pop and Rock*, ed. Simon Frith, Will Straw and John Street (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 273.

³⁰ David Byrne, “Crossing Music’s Borders: ‘I Hate World Music,’” *New York Times* (October 3, 1999).

³¹ Herbert Mattelart, “Life as Style: Putting the ‘World’ in the Music,” *Baffler* 5 (1993), accessed June 20, 2015, <http://thebaffler.com/salvos/life-as-style>

with, respectively, the musics of the first and the third worlds.”³² Guilbault goes on, however, to criticize the term “world music” as well, saying that

The label “world music” in and by itself is a reminder of the hierarchy the dominant music industries impose on the music markets they control: by using the indescribable appellation “world music,” they keep at bay any music—and by extension its artists and fans—which falls outside the so-called mainstream.³³

Like Byrne and Mattelart, Guilbault argues that the classification “world music” distances and separates any music, culture, or people that do not fit the conventions of the Anglo-American mainstream.

The Lion King appeared at a time when African culture and social issues were prominent in both American entertainment and news media. Though Jeffrey Katzenberg, Roy E. Disney, and Peter Schneider, the original writers of *The Lion King*'s plot, claim that the idea for an African story just “came up” one day, the concurrent rise in interest in Africa at the time must have had some influence on their creative decisions, whether they were conscious of it or not.³⁴ For one thing, the world watched as political unrest that had been building for decades in South Africa came to a head when Nelson Mandela was elected president on April 27, 1994—a mere month and a half before *The Lion King*'s June 15 premiere.

Perhaps because of the continent's prominence in the news, and the increasing globalization that arose concomitantly with the internet, interest in

³² Jocelyne Guilbault, “World Music,” in *The Cambridge Companion to Pop and Rock*, ed. Simon Frith, Will Straw and John Street (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 177.

³³ *Ibid.*, 191.

³⁴ “Bonus Features,” *The Lion King: Diamond Edition*, directed by Roger Allers and Rob Minkoff (1994; Burbank, CA: Disney DVD, 2011), DVD.

African music was at an all-time high in the early 1990s. World music was at its most popular during this time, which encouraged Western musicians to collaborate with international musicians and experiment with global styles. A cursory glance at the earliest Billboard World Music Charts shows that “the largest percentage of records are certainly, in musicological terms, African.”³⁵

The number of African musicians recognized by the Billboard Charts is far higher than the number of musicians from any other non-Western region. The most popular and successful of these African musicians, such as Ladysmith Black Mambazo and Johnny Clegg & Savuka, tended to come from southern Africa, as shown in Table 1. Based on a scene during the *The Lion King's* opening sequence in which Mount Kilimanjaro is featured in the background, seen in Figure 2, the film is ostensibly set in Tanzania, a country on Africa's east coast, just south of the Horn of Africa. Musical elements found in southern African culture, however, are what characterize *The Lion King's* soundtrack, and Western society's idea of “African music” as a whole. These stylistic elements provide the much-needed exoticism to a score primarily composed by two men whose music was normally steeped in Western musical tradition—Hans Zimmer and Sir Elton John.

³⁵ Jan Fairley, “The ‘Local’ and ‘Global’ in Popular Music,” in *The Cambridge Companion to Pop and Rock*, ed. Simon Frith, Will Straw and John Street (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 281.

Artist	Album Title	Debut Date	Weeks on Chart	Region
Miriam Makeba	<i>Welela</i>	5/19/1990	3	Southern Africa
Johnny Clegg & Savuka	<i>Cruel, Crazy, Beautiful World</i>	5/19/1990	43	Southern Africa
Hugh Masekela	<i>Uptownship</i>	5/19/1990	9	Southern Africa
Thomas Mapfumo	<i>Corruption</i>	5/19/1990	3	Southern Africa
various	<i>Passion-Sources</i>	5/19/1990	7	North Africa/Middle East Fusion
Ladysmith Black Mambazo	<i>Two Worlds One Heart</i>	6/16/1990	35	Southern Africa
The Bhundu Boys	<i>Pamberi!</i>	6/16/1990	1	Southern Africa

Table 1: Seven of the first groups to debut on the Billboard World Music Charts



Figure 2: The sun rises over Mt. Kilimanjaro.

Although each African musical culture is unique and distinct from others throughout the continent, there are music elements common to multiple African cultures and regions. Scholars of African musical cultures call such shared elements

“musical Africanisms.” Portia Maultsby maintains that musical Africanisms are part of a “conceptual framework [that] links [African] music traditions to each other,” as well as to African-American music traditions.³⁶ These musical elements include a wide array of complex timbres, call-and-response styles, and polyrhythmic structures.³⁷ The term “African music,” however, may itself be indicative of a stereotyped view of the continent.³⁸ Africa is so large, and is home to so many diverse cultures (and thus, musical traditions), that to group all of these musics underneath one vague description is at best ignorant of the diverse intricacies of the richly varied African cultures, and at worst intentionally misleading or exclusionary towards any African culture that falls outside of the mainstream idea of what the culture “should” be.

One of the most widely held—and inaccurate—stereotypes about African music is that the only important element of the music is rhythm. The general public often considers “the construction of African rhythm [to be] complex, superior, yet ultimately incomprehensible” to anyone who does not belong to this culture.³⁹ This belief is often echoed in literature on African music. In Kwabena Nketia’s influential 1974 book *The Music of Africa*, for example, the author claims that because “African music is predisposed towards percussion and percussive textures, there is an

³⁶ Portia K. Maultsby, “Africanisms in African-American Music” in *Africanisms in American Culture* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1990), 185–6.

³⁷ *Ibid*, 191–3.

³⁸ Of course, “African music” can also be used in a way that is less implicitly stereotypical—for example, in reference to all of the musical traditions that make up the continent.

³⁹ Kofi Agawu, *Representing African Music* (New York: Routledge, 2003), 55.

understandable emphasis on rhythm."⁴⁰ The same idea is equally apparent in less scholarly works, as well; in a judges' guide for an African music festival, cited in Kofi Agawu's book *Representing African Music*, judges were informed that "complexity of rhythm is often a fair guide to the authenticity of an African song."⁴¹ Unfortunately, all too often, such a sweeping generalization about African music gives way to racialized stereotypes of the African people themselves. As early as the eleventh century, scholars from both Western and non-Western cultures have claimed that Africans must have an innate sense of rhythm to be able to create such rhythmically complex music. Eleventh-century Arab scholar Ibn Butlan, for example, wrote, "If a black were to fall from the sky to the earth, he would fall in rhythm."⁴²

Another stereotype about African music comes from an equally racialized belief: that Africans, and people of African descent, have deeper and warmer voices than those of people of European descent. Such timbral stereotypes trace back at least as far as the late nineteenth century, when white teachers and directors often chastised black singers for singing in the chest register, which produced a "thick" and "throaty" sound.⁴³ The belief that the black voice is inherently different from the white voice pervades Western thought; notable products of this belief include Virgil Thompson's insistence on casting African Americans in his opera *Four Saints*

⁴⁰ Kwabena Nketia, *The Music of Africa* (New York: W.W. Norton, 1974), 125.

⁴¹ Agawu, *Representing African Music*, 57.

⁴² *Ibid*, 55.

⁴³ Grant Olwage, "The Class and Colour of Tone: An Essay on the Social History of Vocal Timbre," *Ethnomusicology Forum* 13 no. 2 (November 2004), 215.

in *Three Acts* (1934) and the entirely African American cast of George Gershwin's *Porgy and Bess* (1935).⁴⁴

As soon as animated films and shorts began to feature sound, these cartoons often used music that was associated with black communities and culture. Of the several cartoon producers in the industry at the time, including Warner Brothers Pictures and Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer (MGM), Walt Disney was one of the first to rely “on the minstrelsy tradition for [cartoon] music.”⁴⁵ Other producers, like Amadee Van Beuren, soon followed suit, “using both minstrel songs and jazz to accompany depictions of African American characters.”⁴⁶ This practice became so widespread that, in some cartoons, the only attribute that distinguished characters “from one another ethnically” were “the songs accompanying each character’s scenes.”⁴⁷ Black styles of music were also used in cartoons to imply low moral standards or social class; for example, in the Betty Boop cartoons, “African American music and suggestive content became inextricably linked.”⁴⁸ Jazz specifically came to represent “sleaziness” and “subjects such as drug addiction.”⁴⁹

⁴⁴ For more information about racial issues in these works, see Lisa Barg's “Black Voices/White Sounds: Race and Representation in Virgil Thomson's *Four Saints in Three Acts*,” in *American Music* 18 no. 2 (Summer, 2000): 121–161; and Ray Allen's “An American Folk Opera? Triangulating Folkness, Blackness, and Americanness in Gershwin and Heyward's *Porgy and Bess*,” in *Journal of American Folklore* 117 no. 465 (Summer, 2004): 243–61.

⁴⁵ Christopher P. Lehman, *The Colored Cartoon: Black Representation in American Animated Short Films, 1907–1954* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 2007), 16.

⁴⁶ *Ibid*, 19.

⁴⁷ *Ibid*, 20.

⁴⁸ *Ibid*, 33.

⁴⁹ Barry Keith Grant, “‘Jungle Nights in Harlem’: Jazz, Ideology, and the Animated Cartoon” *Popular Music and Society* 13 no. 4 (1989), 49.

The Lion King was the first Disney movie to incorporate significant amounts of music written in a non-Western style. African musical elements permeate the film's soundtrack with a prominence that has yet to be replicated in Disney's prolific output.⁵⁰ This conspicuous globalization created a new and different musical style for animated movie-musicals. Although *The Lion King* incorporates stylistic aspects, of African musics throughout the film in a seemingly positive light—for example, through the use of traditional instrumental and vocal ensembles—these elements also reinforce (and create) problematically hyperreal audience expectations of “African” music in an effort to build a connection between the listeners and the film's setting.

The Lion King's directors, Roger Allers and Rob Minkoff, cite Shakespeare's *Hamlet* and the Biblical stories of Moses and Joseph as sources of influence for the movie's plot.⁵¹ The film's beginning focuses on the deeply rooted rivalry and jealousy between Mufasa, the king of the Pride Lands (the fictional African savanna in which the film is set), and his younger brother, Scar. Bitter that the recent birth of Mufasa's son Simba means he is no longer heir to the throne, Scar and his hyena cohorts lure Simba into a potentially fatal trap. Mufasa rescues his son, but is betrayed and killed by Scar. Scar then manipulates the young Simba into believing

⁵⁰ Other Disney movie musicals released around the same time as *The Lion King*, such as *Aladdin* (1992), *Pocahontas* (1995), *Mulan* (1998) and *Tarzan* (1999), featured world music elements as well, but these elements are not incorporated into the film as thoroughly as in *The Lion King*; the soundtracks to these films are more often stylistically Western. Disney/Pixar's *Brave* (2012) features Celtic music throughout, but as the film is not a musical, the world music elements are not as prominent as they are in *The Lion King*.

⁵¹ “Bonus Features,” *The Lion King: Platinum Edition*, directed by Roger Allers and Rob Minkoff (1994; Burbank, CA: Disney DVD, 2003), DVD.

himself responsible for his father's death; in grief and shame (and at Scar's urging), Simba flees the Pride Lands.

With all obstacles eliminated, Scar declares himself king of the Pride Lands, which under his rule transforms into a barren wasteland. Later, as a full-grown lion living far from the Pride Lands, Simba encounters a hungry lioness, who he discovers is his childhood friend, Nala. She tries to convince Simba to return to the Pride Lands, but he remains unconvinced until visited by the cryptic mandrill, Rafiki, who leads him to Mufasa's spirit. Suitably motivated, Simba returns to the now desolate Pride Lands to confront and ultimately defeat his traitorous uncle. At the film's triumphant conclusion, Simba claims his rightful place as king of the Pride Lands and has a cub of his own, continuing the circle of life.

The Lion King is a useful case study of audiovisual hyperreality for several reasons. From an entertainment perspective, as a Disney product, *The Lion King* creates clear connections between the film and the Disneyland theme park, often cited as a prime example of hyperreality as discussed earlier in the chapter. In my thesis, I explore new ways in which this hyperreality extends to other Disney products, as well. Moreover, from an anthropological standpoint, the film's signification of African landscapes, music, and culture provides a perfect backdrop for hyperreality. By using *The Lion King* as a case study, I can analyze specifically the ways music and sound both affect and reflect society's views, and examine the myriad ways in which *The Lion King's* creators construct a hyperrealistic version of Africa through the film's music. After providing a brief summary of *The Lion King's* plot, I will analyze both the aural and visual aspects of multiple musical numbers

and sections of the soundtrack in detail. In doing so, I will determine how the music creates and contributes to the film's hyperreality and examine what affects this may have on audiences.

Chapter Two: African Musical Elements in Musical Numbers

As a movie musical, *The Lion King* features multiple musical numbers throughout the film. For the purposes of this work, I define a musical number as a scene in which characters break into song and dance, briefly keeping the plot from advancing. There are five musical numbers in *The Lion King*: “Circle of Life,” “I Just Can’t Wait To Be King,” “Be Prepared,” “Hakuna Matata,” and “Can You Feel the Love Tonight.”¹ While the style of each of these songs is characterized by African influences, here I will focus mainly on “Circle of Life” and “Be Prepared,” which offer the most prominent examples of the rhythmic, textural, and instrumental elements that Americans often associate with African musical cultures. Furthermore, these songs, more than the others, emphasize *The Lion King’s* African setting during several of the film’s most integral scenes, either through enhancing the African elements already visible on screen (as in “Circle of Life”), or by compensating musically for a lack of visible African elements (as in “Be Prepared”).

“Circle of Life”

The “Circle of Life” scene, which is described in Table 2, is integral in establishing the setting of *The Lion King*. While obviously containing elements of fantasy, it is by far the most realistically “African” scene in the film; no song comes closer to an “authentic” African ensemble, no scene features animals that appear less

¹ My count does not include “The Morning Report,” which was only added to the Special Edition release in 2003 after the song’s success in the Broadway musical.

anthropomorphized. In addition to introducing several plot themes, the opening scene unmistakably establishes the African savanna as the film’s setting. Because this first scene so effectively solidifies the film’s location, viewers are more easily able to suspend their disbelief in regard to the introduction of Western instruments such as guitar and piano, English dialogue, and a distinct lack of any African accent among most of the characters (not to mention that the animals are talking at all).

Time	Plot	Music
0:00	The sun appears on the horizon	Lebo M sings the opening phrase; call and response
0:27	Various animals begin their mornings	Choir begins chanting in Zulu
0:51	Animals continue to begin their mornings	Main melody enters, sung by Carmen Twillie
1:35	Audience first sees Pride Rock	First chorus
2:23	Audience first sees Simba	Instrumental interlude with flute solo
3:08	Rafiki lifts Simba in front of the other animals	Second chorus

Table 2: Analysis of visual and aural events during “Circle of Life”

“Nants ingonyama bigithi baba”—Zulu for “here comes a lion, father”—is the first thing audiences hear at the beginning of *The Lion King*, and has become the film’s most iconic musical moment.² Sung by South African composer and choral director Lebo M, this phrase accompanies the sun’s appearance over the horizon of the Pride Lands. This brief opening scene introduces the most important themes of the film: the bond between father and child, the significance of nature, and the delicate balance of the African ecosystem. The scene immediately features several

² “‘Circle of Life’ Lyrics,” *The Lion King Unofficial WWW Archive*, accessed December 12, 2015, <http://lionking.org/lyrics/OMPS/CircleOfLife.html>.

elements that Western audiences often consider typical of African music. After Lebo M introduces the first phrase, a choir responds to him, singing “sithi um ingonyama,” or “yes, a lion.”³ This type of call-and-response, which continues throughout the introduction to “Circle of Life,” is a technique often found in music from various African cultures, as seen in the previous chapter. The song’s introduction also includes a distinctly homophonic texture in the choir’s responses, a stylistic element commonly heard in South African music. This homophonic, a cappella musical style has roots in *isicathamiya*, a “body of danced song and sung dance” indigenous to the Zulu, Xhosa, and Swazi peoples of South Africa.⁴ *Isicathamiya* became popular with Western listeners through groups such as Ladysmith Black Mambazo, who focused mainly on a cappella settings of both Western and African melodies.

Only moments into *The Lion King*, viewers are already immersed in Disney’s hyperrealistic version of Africa. This most obvious example of hyperreality emerges from the assumption of cultural homogeneity—the common misconception that the peoples, cultures, and musics found throughout Africa are identical or interchangeable. Rather than a sonic reflection of the wide variety and diversity of music that one would actually experience in Africa, audiences experience an amalgamation of several African and Western musical styles simultaneously.⁵ This stylistic hodgepodge may seem authentic to many Americans, however—its

³ ““Circle of Life,”” *The Lion King Unofficial*, accessed December 12, 2015, <http://lionking.org/lyrics/OMPS/CircleOfLife.html>.

⁴ Veit Erlmann, “How Beautiful is Small? Music, Globalization and the Aesthetics of the Local Author(s),” *Yearbook for Traditional Music* 30 (1998), 14.

⁵ African musical styles, such as *isicathamiya*, are themselves often influenced by Western musical styles, such as vaudeville theatre and black gospel, to begin with, resulting in multiple levels of stylistic mixture in many examples of world music.

hyperreal sound tethered to their own reference points and experiences with African performers, who were connected to Western music themselves.⁶ Because many Western listeners find Disney's version of African music easily accessible, it not only becomes an acceptable version, but the *preferred* version.⁷ This preference towards a falsified version of reality is reminiscent of Umberto Eco's claim that Disney "not only produces illusion, but . . . stimulates the desire for it." Daniel Boorstin explains this phenomenon through a concept he calls "extravagant expectations"—using the word "extravagant" to imply that these expectations are "larger than life," and not actually attainable.⁸ He claims that by holding on to these extravagant expectations, Americans "create the demand for the illusions with which [they] deceive" themselves.⁹ Because these expectations grow increasingly more extravagant, Americans eventually reach a point at which reality simply is not good enough. The only way to fulfill their expectations is through a version of events that is better and more real than reality—a hyperrealistic illusion.

During the introduction to "Circle of Life," the only instrument accompanying Lebo M and his choir is a soft, low-pitched drum during the second sung phrase. This instrumentation contributes to the "African" style due to the perception that African music mainly (or exclusively) consists of drums and other rhythmic

⁶ Ladysmith Black Mambazo, for example, originally gained celebrity in the West through their collaboration with Paul Simon.

⁷ For more information about audiences and cultural tourists seeking out inauthentic versions of reality, see Nicola MacLeod's "Cultural Tourism: Aspects of Authenticity and Commodification" in *Cultural Tourism in a Changing World: Politics, Participation and (Re)presentation* (Bristol: Channel View Publications, 2006).

⁸ Daniel Boorstin, *The Image: A Guide to Pseudo-Events in America* (New York: Vintage Books, 1992), 3.

⁹ *Ibid*, 5.

instruments, as discussed in the previous chapter. The language choice for these first few phrases also contributes to the overall “African-ness”—most obviously because the text is in Zulu, one of the many languages spoken in southern Africa. Especially notable, however, is the phrase “siyo nqoba,” “we shall conquer.” In the English transliteration of the Zulu language, the letter “q” (as well as “c” and “x”) represents a click—a phoneme literally foreign to Western ears and therefore easily recognizable as “African.” Western ears often perceive these clicks as primitive; sociolinguist Robert K. Herbert, for example, offers several accounts of early explorers and missionaries to South Africa who described languages with click consonants as “rough,” “wild,” “primitive,” and “wanting.”¹⁰ Such Western perspectives parallel Randolph and DeMulder’s findings in their research on inaccurate information about Africa in schools, as examined in the previous chapter.

As the opening scene develops, the music of “Circle of Life” mirrors the action portrayed on screen: antelope, cheetahs, elephants, and other various animals of the African plains slowly rising to greet the new day. The drumming, previously almost inaudible, becomes increasingly foregrounded. At this point, although the choir is no longer the main focus, it remains an important element, the continuing Zulu chanting providing a constant but subtle reminder of the “African-ness” of the music. Nearly a minute into “Circle of Life” the main melody enters, sung by African-American studio singer Carmen Twillie. Her voice is a deep alto, with a rich, warm timbre, corresponding to racial stereotypes about black voices. Whether Twillie was

¹⁰ Robert K. Herbert, “The Sociohistory of Clicks in Southern Bantu,” *Anthropological Linguistics*, 32 no. 3/4 (Fall–Winter, 1990), 295.

chosen because of her vocal timbre is unclear, but regardless, her voice imparts an added sense of African “Otherness” to the song.

According to several studies collected and analyzed by sociolinguists Erik R. Thomas and Jeffrey Reaser, Americans can easily distinguish between European-American and African-American speaking voices, “even in the absence of diagnostic morphosyntactic and lexical variables”—that is, without the stereotypical slang and pronunciation differences that listeners expect to hear from certain ethnicities.¹¹ Though this study did not specifically address singing voices, this research suggests that listeners are able to determine Twillie’s ethnicity, even though she delivers the text in a standard musical theater style and inflection. Mendi Obadike coined the term “acousmatic blackness” to label this phenomenon of ascribed ethnicity despite no visual evidence thereof.¹² Expanding on this idea, Nina Sun Eidsheim argues that acousmatic blackness is not a matter of what timbre is produced, but rather what timbre is *heard*, emerging “when a given timbre fulfills expectations or ideas about blackness.”¹³ The audience’s recognition of Twillie’s ethnicity plays an important role in establishing the cultural setting of this scene. A perceived European or European-American voice might rip listeners out of the hyperrealistic, ethnically

¹¹ Erik R. Thomas and Jeffrey Reaser, “Delimiting Perceptual Cues Used for the Ethnic Labeling of African American and European American Voices,” *Journal of Sociolinguistics* 8 no. 1 (2004), 54.

¹² Mendi Obadike, “Low Fidelity: Stereotyped Blackness in the Field of Sound” (PhD diss., Duke University, 2005), 135–177.

¹³ Nina Sun Eidsheim, “Marian Anderson and ‘Sonic Blackness’ in American Opera,” *American Quarterly* 63 no. 3 (September, 2011), 664.

homogenous Africa of Americans' imaginations.¹⁴ The implications of this completely homogenous Africa are as problematic as the assumption behind the term "African music," in that it completely skims over the vast diversity found throughout the continent. "Circle of Life" is, interestingly, the only musical number that makes an attempt at an aurally homogenous "African" sound; the other musical numbers include only white singers. The aural homogeneity found here may be due to an attempt to immerse listeners in *The Lion King's* hyperrealistic African setting as quickly as possible.

Approximately halfway through "Circle of Life," there is a short interlude which features a synthesized flute and the choir's accompanimental chanting. The synthesized flute here serves as an example of hyperreality itself, since its distinctive tone owes less to an attempt to use a legitimate African instrument than to a desire to merely sound "African." This interlude accompanies a scene in which the "wise man" character, Rafiki, performs a mysterious ritual with Simba. The flute used in this section of the song has an earthy and "natural" (e.g. coming from nature, rather than manmade) tone. During their studies of student perceptions of Africa, Randolph and DeMulder found similar misconceptions about Africa's supposed "primitivism."¹⁵ Most commonly, students believe that there are no urban centers or actual buildings anywhere in the continent—in essence, American students envision Africa as a continent of tiny villages, dirt roads, and makeshift huts. The flute's

¹⁴ This imagined ethnic homogeneity is displayed in other films as well, such as *Mean Girls* (2004), in which one character asks a new student, "If you're from Africa, why are you white?"

¹⁵ Brenda Randolph and Elizabeth DeMulder, "I Didn't Know There Were Cities in Africa!" *Teaching Tolerance* no. 34 (Fall 2008), 36-38.

“natural” timbre may reinforce Americans’ idea of Africa as primitive and uncivilized; the only instruments, we imagine, are those that can be hastily assembled from whatever materials are available. The flute in connection with the primitive and mysterious ritual strengthens these beliefs, allowing Americans’ hyperrealistic concepts of primitivism to remain unchecked. Had a different instrument, with a more “modern” timbre such as a synth- or electronic-based sound, been used, listeners might hear it as out of place for such a “rugged” and “primitive” setting.

After the flute solo, Twillie, the chorus, and drums repeat the “Circle of Life” refrain. This time, the instruments and voices are louder and more energetic, signaling the growing excitement among the animals as Rafiki hoists Simba aloft to present the new prince to his future subjects, as shown in Figure 3.



Figure 3: Rafiki presents Simba on the top of Pride Rock.

Even though there are a few Western instruments in “Circle of Life,” their presence is hardly noticeable. There are piano and synthesized strings throughout the song, but they often merely double the more prominent vocal parts. As a result, it seems (at least initially) as if the only instruments in the song are “African.” On its own (that is, without the doubling Western instruments) the “African” ensemble would sound soft, yet because these instruments are doubled, audiences are tricked into thinking the ensemble sounds louder and fuller than it normally would.¹⁶ Here, the instrumentation in “Circle of Life” creates a hyperrealistic version of African music, one that seems more exciting and impressive than its real-world counterpart—precisely the kind of embellishment Vytis Puronas refers to when he claims sounds and music “that are found unsuitable are replaced or enhanced in order to make them appear more pleasing.”¹⁷

“Be Prepared”

While the rest of *The Lion King* does not paint quite as realistic a picture (relatively speaking) as the opening scene, the majority of the film is at least visually reminiscent of the east African landscape. One major exception is the scene accompanying the villainous Scar’s song “Be Prepared,” set in an immense cavern—not the most stereotypically “African” locale. Dark, uninviting, and almost totally empty save for the piles of skeletal remains of the hyenas’ past meals, this scene,

¹⁶ Enhanced sound and music are not uncommon in most sound production, as shown in Vytis Puronas’ “Sonic Hyperrealism: Illusions of a Non-Existent Aural Reality.”

¹⁷ Puronas, “Sonic Hyperrealism,” 183.

described in Table 3, seems more concerned with conveying a negative and evil setting, rather than reminding viewers that the film is set in Africa, as depicted in Figure 4. Moreover, the main character in this scene, Scar, is voiced by Jeremy Irons, whose thick British accent further detracts from the African-ness of the scene.¹⁸

Time	Plot	Music
26:08	Scar talks to the three main hyenas	Timpani, church bell, and low voices enter subtly
26:43	Scar leaps down from his rock	Marimba enters with high rhythmic activity
26:50	Scar walks through foreboding green gas	Main line enters, "sung" by Scar
27:30	Scar struts around the cavern	Scar's highly syncopated line
27:53	Scar describes his plan to kill Mufasa	Instrumental interlude featuring the güiro
28:26	Scene reminiscent of <i>Triumph of the Will</i>	Main line returns, sung by army of hyenas and Scar

Table 3: Analysis of visual and aural events during "Be Prepared"



Figure 4: Scar and one of his minions in his cavernous lair.

¹⁸ Jeremy Irons provides the voice for Scar throughout most of "Be Prepared," but after losing his voice towards the end of the song, he is replaced by Ed Cummings.

It is up to the music, then, to keep audiences immersed in “African-ness.” Yet unlike “Circle of Life,” which contains numerous examples of musical Africanisms, “Be Prepared” has only two distinctly African elements: its instrumentation and rhythmic focus. The most prominent instruments here are rhythmic and melodic idiophones and membranophones. The instruments in the song’s introduction that offer *any* rhythmic interest are timpani and a church bell with a dark timbre that contributes to the ominous atmosphere, and serves as a transition from the complete musical silence of the previous scene to the quick rhythm and high energy of “Be Prepared.” This sudden increase in intensity is mainly due to the use of marimba, which enters directly after the introduction and continues throughout most of the rest of the song.

The marimba is particularly remarkable here because of its ability to suggest two different settings at once. The marimba is inextricably connected with the African musical tradition, and in fact originated in southern Africa.¹⁹ As a melodic idiophone, the marimba’s wooden timbre fits Americans’ (incorrect) ideas about African culture and life: simple, primitive, and third-world—ideas that Randolph and DeMulder studied in their work, as discussed in the previous chapter. Thus, the marimba connects with the overarching African setting of the entire film. It also comments more specifically on the scene at hand; the myriad piles of bones littering Scar’s lair could function as rudimentary sets of marimbas, especially in a setting, like Africa, so often perceived as “primitive.” Towards the end of “Be Prepared,” in

¹⁹ James Blades, *Percussion Instruments and Their History* (Westport, CT: Bold Strummer Ltd, 1992), 78.

fact, there is a hyena playing a large rib cage as a marimba, shown in Figure 5—the only instance in the entire film of a diegetic musical source.²⁰



Figure 5: A hyena plays a large ribcage as if it were a marimba.

Another source of rhythmic interest is the güiro, a gourd-like scraped idiophone typically heard in Afro-Cuban music. The güiro enters during a section of spoken text in the middle of the song, when many other instruments drop out so as not to detract from the dialogue. The use of the güiro here is particularly noteworthy, as it is the only percussive instrument in the entire score that is purely rhythmic; unlike the marimba or the timpani, it is not a pitched instrument. Though the güiro is often heard in music with African influences, the instrument itself originates in indigenous South American cultures—its use here may be due to a lack

²⁰ This scene also recalls the trope of depicting skeletons or bones as musical instruments, first seen in the Disney cartoon *The Skeleton Dance* (1929). For more information, see Daniel Goldmark's *Tunes for 'Toons: Music and the Hollywood Cartoon* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2005).

of understanding of the instrument's actual origins, or perhaps an assumption that all "primitive" percussion instruments are related to African music or culture, due to the inaccurate and stereotypical information that Randolph and DeMulder found presented both in the media and in schools, as discussed in the first chapter.²¹ The use of the güiro here can be thought of as yet another layer of hyperreality; because Western listeners mainly associate African music with rhythmic complexity, to these listeners, an instrument that is only capable of rhythmic activity (like the güiro) may seem like the most "African" instrument of all (regardless of its actual place of origin).

The voices in "Be Prepared"—both from the on-screen characters and from the choir—provide interesting rhythmic variety as well. Many of Scar's musical phrases, for example, sound closer to *Sprechstimme* than melodic lines, inviting listeners to focus on the rhythm of his phrases rather than the pitches.²² In addition, many of the phrases toward the end of the song are highly syncopated; for example, Scar sings "A shining new era / is tip-toeing nearer," with emphases on the first syllables of "era" and "nearer." Both of these syllables fall on the offbeat of the second beat of their respective measures—arguably the weakest part of a 4/4 measure. The choir, which mostly sings neutral syllables (like "ah" and "ee"), is even more rhythmically active than the voices of the on-screen characters. As in "Circle of Life," the choir sings homorhythmically in short, abrupt syllables, emphasizing the

²¹ Blades, *Percussion Instruments*, 41–42.

²² *Sprechstimme* (German for "spoken voice") is a vocal technique requiring the singer to approximate pitches, resulting in a vocal line that sounds like a mix between speaking and singing. The technique was most famously used in Arnold Schönberg's song cycle, *Pierrot Lunaire* (1912).

syncopation featured throughout the song, and evokes the South African musical tradition of *isicathamiya* that audiences have, at this point in the film, become familiar with. Only once in the song are the choral lines decidedly unsyncopated—a change justified contextually because it accompanies the hyenas’ militaristic marching (a scene visually reminiscent of the Nazi propaganda film *Triumph of the Will*).²³

Although the prominent timbres in “Be Prepared” are reminiscent of “African” culture, the score also calls for several Western instruments. For example, short, repeated lines played by a low brass instrument—perhaps a tuba—accompany Scar’s first verse. Though the tuba’s dark, rumbling timbre was most likely chosen to continue the evil atmosphere of Scar’s lair, it also reinforces the African tendency towards creating complex, buzzing sounds—another of the musical Africanisms discussed in the first chapter.²⁴ Synthesized piano and strings are also present throughout the song, but as with their use in “Circle of Life,” they merely double the more “African” instruments. This doubling effect, combined with the increased focus on multiple idiophones from earlier in the song, builds excitement and energy in anticipation of the song’s climactic conclusion. By making this enhanced version of an African ensemble seem “better” and more exciting than

²³ For more information on *Triumph of the Will* and its carefully structured cinematography, see Mary Devereaux’s “Beauty and Evil: The Case of Leni Riefenstahl’s *Triumph of the Will*,” in *Aesthetics and Ethics: Essays at the Intersection*, ed. Jerrold Levinson (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 227–56.

²⁴ Cornelia Fales and Stephen McAdams, “The Fusion and Layering of Noise and Tone: Implications for Timbre in African Instruments,” *Leonardo Music Journal* 4 (1994), 69.

the real thing, “Be Prepared” (and, similarly, “Circle of Life”) is again reminiscent of Eco’s claim that Disney “stimulates the desire” for illusion over reality.

“Circle of Life” and “Be Prepared” are both excellent examples of musical numbers in which world music elements contribute to *The Lion King’s* hyperrealistic version of Africa. Though the other musical numbers also feature musical aspects that audiences have, throughout the film, come to associate with “African” music, these songs are not as fully devoted to creating an aurally exotic setting. “I Just Can’t Wait To Be King” and “Hakuna Matata,” for example, both feature a synthesized electric guitar playing a melodic line that complements the vocal melody. Unlike “Circle of Life” and “Be Prepared,” in which Western-sounding instruments merely double the more traditionally “African” instruments, the Western guitar sound is foregrounded in “I Just Can’t Wait To Be King” and “Hakuna Matata,” which detracts from the African setting. “Hakuna Matata” also features a saxophone, which functions similarly to the synthesized electric guitar, playing a (seemingly improvised) independent melodic line. This song also incorporates musical styles that are not immediately recognizable as native to the African continent; for example, in the section from 1:06 to 1:16 in the version of “Hakuna Matata” on the film’s soundtrack, the music takes on a more soulful gospel feel. Even though gospel music has its origins “in the context, lyrics, music, and dance of African music,” it sounds nothing like the “African” music that audiences have become acquainted with thus far in the film.²⁵

²⁵ Robert Darden, *People Get Ready!: A New History of Black Gospel Music* (New York: Continuum, 2004), 18.

There are several different reasons that may explain why these songs seem less involved in the hyperreality of *The Lion King*. One possibility is that the scenes that accompany these songs may simply not be as structurally important to the film. Unlike the scene accompanying “Circle of Life,” which is burdened with the essential task of quickly and definitively setting the scene for the entire film, or the scene accompanying “Be Prepared,” which describes what is arguably one of the film’s most important plot points, the scenes accompanying “I Just Can’t Wait To Be King” and “Hakuna Matata” are more trivial in nature; had those scenes been deleted, the film’s central narrative would go on, almost completely unaffected. Similarly, these songs might be viewed as less important for the purposes of upholding *The Lion King*’s hyperrealistic version of Africa because they seem to be intended as comic relief. In “I Just Can’t Wait To Be King,” Simba flaunts his royal lineage and pokes fun at Zazu, his father’s trusted (and exceedingly uptight) advisor, while “Hakuna Matata” features the film’s comic relief characters, Timon and Pumbaa, and discusses indecorous subjects like flatulence. Along with providing relief from the film’s more dramatic plot points, these songs offer a break from music that mainly serves to enforce a hyperrealistic version of African musical traditions.

Though the Western styles in “I Just Can’t Wait To Be King” and “Hakuna Matata” are more prominent than in other musical numbers, the “African” styles discussed throughout this chapter are nonetheless present, as they are throughout the entirety of the film’s soundtrack and score. For example, “I Just Can’t Wait To Be King” features the same flute heard in “Circle of Life” and rhythmic activity in the bongos, and “Hakuna Matata” features rhythmic activity through the marimba, as in

“Be Prepared.” As a result, “I Just Can’t Wait To Be King” and “Hakuna Matata” have a well-balanced mixture of Western and “African” musical styles—even more than “Circle of Life” and “Be Prepared.” Ironically, using Jocelyn Guilbault’s definition of “world music” (“the blending of modern and traditional musics . . . usually associated with, respectively, the musics of the first and the third worlds”), this means that the best examples of world music throughout *The Lion King*’s soundtrack are “I Just Can’t Wait To Be King” and “Hakuna Matata”—two songs that are not essential to the film or aurally establishing an African setting.

In their attempts to connect to the increasingly popular world music movement of the early 1990s, Elton John and the music production team seem to have gotten mixed up. By portraying as few Western influences as possible in “Circle of Life” and “Be Prepared,” and instead focusing on making these songs sound as “African” as possible, they completely missed the point of the world music movement: the *blending* of different musical styles, rather than the erasure of one or more. “I Just Can’t Wait To Be King” and “Hakuna Matata” do, however, achieve this blend, and are therefore not hyperrealistic, but instead *realistic* portrayals of world music in their mixture of Western and African musical styles. In comparison, “Circle of Life” and “Be Prepared” become even more hyperrealistic in their seemingly “pure” rendering of African musical styles.

Chapter Three: African Musical Elements in Underscoring

The music in *The Lion King* is responsible for setting the scene as much as the visual elements of the film, providing, in Roy Prendergast's words, "musical color."¹ While most of the musical numbers in *The Lion King* have some recognizable African (or "African") elements, most of the underscoring is closer to the standard Western film-scoring tradition. Because African musical elements are so uncommon in the underscoring, however, they are particularly noticeable when they do appear.

Another important difference between the string sounds in the underscoring and musical numbers is the use of synthesized instruments in the musical numbers, and acoustic string instruments in the underscoring. This difference may be a result of different timbral preferences of Elton John, who composed the *The Lion King's* soundtrack, and Hans Zimmer, who wrote the film's score. These scoring choices may also, however, reflect audience expectations—the more popular and modern synthesized sounds lend themselves more easily to the soundtrack of a movie musical, while the "classical" sounds of real strings are more typical of cinematic underscoring.

The most obviously Africanized underscoring appears in several scenes throughout the movie. Because the lyrics in these scenes are so integral to *The Lion King's* plot, I will refer to this music by its first phrase—"Busa le lizwe bo," a Zulu

¹ Roy M. Prendergast, *Film Music: A Neglected Art* (New York: W.W. Norton, 1992), 213.

phrase which means “rule this land.”² “Busa le lizwe bo” appears in scenes that show Simba accepting his place in the circle of life, as king of the Pride Lands. This section of highly rhythmic music begins with several percussion instruments, including timpani and marimba, accompanying choral homophony, mirroring the African elements found in “Circle of Life” and “Be Prepared.” A string section also doubles the choral parts, again evoking similar uses in earlier musical numbers, and again recalling Vytis Puronas’ arguments about sonic hyperrealism. Because audiences are presented with these stereotypically “African” musical elements and embellished, hyperrealistic sounds throughout both the musical numbers and the underscoring, they remain totally immersed in *The Lion King’s* hyperrealistic sound world for the entirety of the film.

The first time “Busa le lizwe bo” occurs, only a short excerpt of the music is featured (the track itself is under a minute), accompanying the scene in which Simba ultimately decides to return to the Pride Lands, but more of the track plays shortly afterward, during a montage of Simba running across the desert towards his home. This longer version of “Busa le lizwe bo” not only retains all African musical elements heard a few minutes earlier, but features many more. Lebo M reappears as a soloist for the first time since the beginning of the movie, accompanied once again by choral homophony. Lebo M’s return not only draws a connection between this music and “Circle of Life,” but also reminds listeners of the film’s most realistic—and musically hyperrealistic—scene. The flute in many of the musical numbers enters to

² “Busa’ Lyrics,” *The Lion King Unofficial WWW Archive*, accessed December 12, 2015, <http://www.lionking.org/lyrics/ROTPL/Busa.html>.

double a new melody in the choir, with added drums and marimba to heighten the rhythmic intensity of the percussion. This increased rhythmic activity corresponds with, and perpetuates, the common stereotypes of African rhythms, as discussed in the first chapter. As the excitement and energy of the piece grow, several female singers begin to ululate, adding a new, and exotic, effect. Though ululation plays a part in many cultures, Western listeners often regard it as “primitive” and “chaotic”—descriptors that are unfortunately associated with African countries.³

“Busa le lizwe bo” appears once more in the film—in the final scene, when Simba roars from atop Pride Rock to signal his ascension to the throne. This time, the energy and excitement of the music escalate rapidly, reflecting a time-lapse scene of the Pride Lands restored to their former glory under Simba’s rule. This last iteration of “Busa le lizwe bo” blends seamlessly into a reprise of “Circle of Life”—this time, as part of the underscoring. The return of “Circle of Life” brings the film and the score full circle, both neatly tying up the conclusion of the narrative and returning to the most hyperrealistically African-sounding music in the soundtrack. Even after the movie ends, “Busa le lizwe bo” plays during the credits, helping the audience transition from the movie back to real life. The smooth transition established here not only fulfills its presumed intended purpose of providing a more thoroughly immersive experience, but also adds a new layer of hyperreality.

When the credits begin to play, audience members (whether in a movie theater or elsewhere) leave the cinematic world of *The Lion King* and return to their

³ Eugenia Lindiwe Zamandelu Sikhosana, “A Critical Study of the Contemporary Practice of Ululation (Ukukikiza) and its Current Social and Cultural Values Among the Zulus” (PhD Diss, University of Zululand, 2002).

normal lives, as they stand up to leave, check their phone, turn to family or friends to talk, and so on. Because “Busa le lizwe bo” is still playing, however, it is now more than film music; it has become part of the soundtrack to the listeners’ lives. As such, the African musical elements that had once signified the new and exotic now represent the familiar, comfortable, and easily understood.

Other quasi-African elements in the underscoring mainly accompany one character in particular: Rafiki. He is easily the most stereotypically African character: as a mystical figure, most of his screen time involves performing mysterious rituals involving “primitive” materials such as leaves, flowers, and fruit, and imparting bits of spiritual wisdom to Simba.⁴ He is also the only character in the film who speaks with an African-sounding accent (as well as one of the few characters who is voiced by an African-American actor, Robert Guillaume), so audiences already audibly identify him as a highly Africanized character, reflecting Obadike’s phenomenon of acousmatic blackness, in which listeners ascribe ethnicity based on what is heard, rather than seen, as discussed in the first chapter.

The first time African elements appear in the music accompanying Rafiki (aside from his brief appearance in “Circle of Life”) is when he discovers that Simba is still alive, contrary to what Scar has told the inhabitants of the Pride Lands. Rafiki’s most prominent role in *The Lion King’s* plot occurs during the scene in which he convinces Simba to return to the Pride Lands. When Rafiki first captures Simba’s attention, he chants the part-Swahili, part-nonsense phrase “Asante sana, squash

⁴ For more on Western stereotypes about African magic and witchcraft, see Peter Pels’s “The Magic of Africa: Reflections on a Western Commonplace,” *African Studies Review*, 41 no. 3 (December, 1998): 193–209.

banana, wewe nugu mimi hapana,” “Thank you very much, squash banana, you are a baboon and I am not.” Meanwhile, the music in this scene switches from a more typically cinematic orchestral sound to a choir humming homophonically, accompanied by a marimba. As the scene continues, a flute enters, providing accompanimental flourishes, and several more percussion instruments—drums with many different pitches, and a tambourine-like instrument—join the mix. This general ensemble is familiar to the audience, because they have heard it several times before, as in “Circle of Life.” This connection with other highly Africanized scenes throughout the movie reinforces the scene’s—and Rafiki’s—“African-ness.”

After piquing Simba’s interest, Rafiki offers to lead Simba to Mufasa, initiating a frenzied chase through the tangled roots of a tree as Simba attempts to keep up with the agile Rafiki. The music during this scene emphasizes the chaos of the chase with fast, intensely energetic drumming and quick, seemingly improvised shouts and chants from the choir. This hurried music comes to an abrupt end as Simba escapes the disordered maze and finds himself in the serenity of the African plains. Combining Rafiki’s already Africanized character with some of the most African-sounding music in the film’s underscoring makes him seem almost like a caricature of African culture and characteristics. Here, the music is not necessarily hyperrealistic in and of itself, but rather perpetuates stereotypes of Africans as “primitive” and focused primarily on nature and the land, bringing to mind the unfortunate phrase “noble savages.” The music further strengthens Rafiki’s connection to the land in his last scene, when he finally convinces Simba to return to the Pride Lands, and “Busa le lizwe bo” first appears. As previously discussed, this

signaling a return to the original prosperity of the Pride Lands. Throughout the rest of the film, this leitmotif symbolizes Mufasa's wisdom, and the presence of his spirit. For example, it occurs after the wildebeest chase, when Simba realizes that his father has died; when Mufasa's spirit appears to Simba, telling him to return to the Pride Lands; and when Simba's mother, Sarabi, mistakes him for Mufasa when he does return to the Pride Lands. Interestingly, this music's purpose is similar to that of the Africanized music in the underscoring, but it does not sound stereotypically "African" at all. Almost every time it appears it has an orchestral scoring, with violins playing the entirely tonal melody. At times, a choir accompanies the violins; yet even then, the choir sounds more Western than the choral style in the Africanized musical sections.

This unusual use of Western-sounding music may serve as a bridge between the "African"-sounding and Western-sounding musical sections. In this way, even the parts of the score that do not sound African still connect to the overall setting of the movie, resulting in a more cohesive film as a whole. This interesting use of Western music functions as yet another type of hyperreality—perhaps one of the most notable examples in the film. Throughout *The Lion King* (and especially in the musical numbers and underscoring that I have addressed here), African musical elements represent moments and characters that are integral to the central plot; most of the other scenes could be left out without significant change to the storyline (though likely to the detriment of the film's entertainment value). The music is decidedly Western, however, in what are arguably the *most* important scenes: Simba's interactions with his father. *The Lion King's* portrayal of the bond between

father and son is the only theme that could truly be called universal, but the music used to represent that bond is anything but. The argument could be made that the Western style of music is so widespread and well known around the world that it could be seen as universal, but such an assertion would falsely assume that all non-Anglic music traditions should assimilate to the Western style. This is the one instance in the film in which a mix of musical cultures would be an appropriate accompaniment, yet it is one of the few moments characterized exclusively by Western musical styles. The absence of world music styles in the representation of a universal idea here (while most of the film has done the opposite) maintains the hyperrealistic Western view that Western culture and music *is* universal—that it is the most widespread, and ultimately, the superior culture and music. This presumption reflects the concern that many opponents of the label “world music”—such as David Byrne, Herbert Mattelart, and Jocelyne Guilbault—share: that the term only serves to maintain the music industry’s hierarchy, in which the most familiar and mainstream music (which is often Western in origin) rises to the top, achieving massive success, while non-Western music that fails to fit these categories often languishes near the bottom.

Conclusion

As the first Disney film to thoroughly incorporate African music throughout the soundtrack and score, *The Lion King* brought Africa to the attention of a global audience. But while the film occasionally includes accurate representations of African music, for the most part it only perpetuates common, deeply problematic stereotypes of the African people and culture. From assumptions about Africa's total cultural and ethnic homogeneity to the continuation of racialized beliefs about timbre and musical ability, *The Lion King* presents these stereotypes to the young and impressionable audiences who would most likely view Disney films, thus ensuring that the stereotypes transcend generational boundaries. By using these stereotypes, Disney creates hyperrealistic pictures of Africa, which expose Western viewers to a version of Africa that is exotic and exciting, but at the same time familiar and nonthreatening. Because the hyperrealistic version is so comfortable for audiences, it also becomes the version that audiences choose to represent the "real" Africa, reflecting Eco's claim about audiences' preferences for hyperreality.

The Lion King further reaffirms these claims about Disney's use of hyperreality by not just portraying the stereotypes of African music, but actively encouraging them. The clear emphasis on the rhythmic elements throughout "Be Prepared," for example, plays to the widespread and inaccurate stereotype that rhythm is the only important element of African music. Going forward, these listeners might expect other African musics to feature only those "African" characteristics to which they have already been exposed—and when they encounter

different or more accurate depictions of African music, they may dismiss them as inaccurate or inferior because it does not meet their expectations. Western listeners might not recognize, for example, West African *kora* music as “actual” African music, because it does not fit the extremely restrictive stereotypes that are unceasingly pushed on audiences. This generalization again sheds light on the larger issue of Africa’s portrayal as one musically, culturally, and ethnically homogeneous entity, glossing over the thousands of vast regional differences.

In their attempts to simply sound “African,” *The Lion King’s* creators fell short of a realistic presentation of Africa, instead creating a hyperrealistic one. While hyperreality is not intrinsically damaging, a hyperreality based on harmful and deep-seated stereotypes becomes problematic, especially when viewers and listeners confuse it for actual reality. Because the hyperreality found in *The Lion King* is, in fact, based on harmful stereotypes, it is important for audiences to be critical of what they see and hear. While it may not have been intentional, the film’s creators—and, in extension, the Disney company as a whole—perpetuate bigoted views and ideas through the music featured in the film’s score. Because *The Lion King’s* music production team often present the film’s music as completely accurate, audiences may accept it as actual reality instead of hyperreality. When audiences are aware that Disney’s portrayal of Africa is hyperrealistic rather than realistic, inaccurate and harmful stereotypes may spread less quickly and easily.

Expanding the theory of hyperreality from the Disneyland theme park to other Disney products allows us to more precisely locate problematic aspects of these products, as well as to more easily distinguish the boundaries between

inaccurate stereotypes and reality. My research is most easily extended into other Disney films that feature world music, such as *Aladdin* (1992), *Pocahontas* (1995), and *Mulan* (1998), as well as non-Disney films that feature world music, like *The Prince of Egypt* (1998) and *The Road to El Dorado* (2000). Of course, the theory of hyperreality does not necessarily only apply to animated movie-musicals; we could apply this theory to live-action films, staged musicals and operas, and even video games. Using Baudrillard and Eco's theory of hyperreality to examine different types of media outside of these scholars' applications will allow the creators of these media to maintain a more conscientious outlook for their projects, and in the process, limit the spread of harmful stereotypes.

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