

I am seeking, at the end of this Devo/Evo section of Born to Groove, a model or paradigm that brings together knowledge from the disciplines of "music education" and "music therapy" and "ethnomusicology" in a strategy for re-evolving a missing institution that was lost to us humans as we devolved from egalitarian or classless societies to ever more hierarchical and class bound ways of "earning a living" through division of labor.

In Jon-roar Bjorkvold's The Muse Within, *ngoma* is the proto-Bantu term he borrows to describe the way 3, 4 and 5 year olds like to tell a story by singing-dancing-dramatizing the story all-at-once! Instead of celebrating and enhancing this spontaneous arts-integration that little children of all lands love to do, we now teach the arts separately, and much later in life, if at all. I keep thinking that pre-K, Kindergarten, and after school *ngoma* programs might diminish alienation, enhance participation, perhaps heal some spiritual wounds before spiritual scar tissue turns into spiritual armor. Call it prevention or intervention or invention, call it venting/discharging any "hurts" that children may have accumulated, call it a rite of playful passage from overmediated infancy to expressive childhood, call it a post-Wagnerian *gesamtkunstspiel* (totalizing-art-play), call it what you want to, children in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century may need this to grow up healthy and happy.

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## Ngoma

Across Bantu Africa from Nigeria-Cameroons in the West all the way South and East to South Africa and Mozambique, *ngoma* (or a similar one word concept) can mean drum, song, dance, performance, celebration, ceremony, healing process, association. John Janzen's books and articles about *ngoma* are a rich source of lore and practices from many Bantu cultures that define a therapeutic or healing "institution" that seems to have emerged from traditional music-dance-ceremonies and centralized state drums of authority during the colonial period. People marginalized and feeling sick or unlucky (e.g. failed hunters, women with reproductive disorders, migrant mineworkers suffering from tuberculosis) came together as *ngoma* organizations. In the postcolonial era, *ngoma* has continued to evolve as song-dance-healing, often on the margins of society, to articulate the connectedness with the ancestors in a time of rapid change, or to offer a forum and network for the dissemination of moral grounding in HIV/AIDS prevention campaigns.

From a Western point of view, *ngoma*, as an institution, is a different way of configuring parts of our institutions of kinship, religion, music, political-economy, medicine. Part of *ngoma* is to make-our-family-and-relatives-healthy-and-happy; part of *ngoma* is like a Buddhist sanga or a community for transforming- suffering-into-compassion-into-joy; part of *ngoma* is simply keeping-together-in-time (McNeill). Depending on time, place, history, context or circumstances *ngoma* takes different forms, has different "parts" and may surface or manifest in new ways. Could it manifest in after school programs in the USA?

Reviewing just a little of the literature, *Ngoma* is different in every locality, usually some mix of drumming-singing-dancing, and working through a difficulty or problem with a group process that could be labelled "healing ceremony" or "shamanism" or "spiritual practice" or "liturgy" (literally 'people work') or "psychodrama" or "indigenous music therapy."

Henny Blokland's work defines ngoma, in three levels. "Ngoma has various meanings. First, it is one of the most widespread Bantu names for the physical drum (reflections of the proto Bantu reconstruction \*-goma, L9, Meeussen 1980:22). Second, it is also a widely-used term to refer to the music, singing and dancing accompanied by the beats of the drums, the drums in action, the performance. In this sense it can refer also to music in which no drums are used, as well as to dancing. Third, it is used in a more limited number of Bantu languages to refer to the group of performers and, in case they form or are members of an organization, to their organization. It is obviously this third meaning to which Janzen refers as the Ngoma institution. For the sake of clarity, I will refer in the remainder of the article to ngoma in the first sense as 'drum', to ngoma in the second sense as 'ngoma', and to ngoma in the third sense as 'Ngoma' (Blokland 2000:19-20).

Here (in Blokland's second sense) are the most common dimensions of "doing 'ngoma'": "One singer leads with the first phrase of a song, and the others then join together in a response, which may be the same phrase or another refrain. The lead singer then continues to lead in more phrases or the repeat of the opening. Always the others respond. Shortly after the vocal score is opened, the singers begin to dance following the rhythm set by the leader. On about the second or third phrase the first musical instrument joins, then others. Perhaps there are first a drum, then shakers. In due course, this highly social music of the 'ngoma' embodies the classic call and response of most if not all Sub-Saharan African music. Also, it is commonly polyrhythmic, as song, body motion, and instrumentation strike out on parallel, conversing, rhythms connected yet discernibly autonomous from each other. This is 'ngoma' everywhere. It is therapeutic song-dance, it is entertainment, it is powerful. It transports and transforms individuals. It transforms individuals into community." (John Janzen, personal communication).

Carol A. Campbell and Carol M. Eastman in "*Ngoma: Swahili Adult Song Performance in Context*" (September 1984 *Ethnomusicology*) give the following open definition:

"The word ngoma in the Swahili language commonly refers to "drum," but it has an extended meaning that encompasses any event in which music plays a part. An ngoma comes closest to what in recent years has been referred to as a "happening" in English -- a group event in which song, dance, and musical accompaniment commonly take place."

'Happenings' seem to have happened in the West, were "hip" for a while, and I don't think the term has gained much more currency since the 80s, but in the OM spirit of Open Mind, Originating Mystery, Old Mother-nature, ngOMa or *ngoma* is what we can hope will be 'happening' in after school programs and early childhood ensembles around the world because, as Bjorkvald persuades us, children seem to want to do this for themselves in healthy child cultures everywhere, until we talk them out of it.

Jon Roar Bjorkvold uses the word/idea of *ngoma* in his book, *The Muse Within: Creativity and Communication, Song and Play from Childhood through Maturity* "to denote the form of muse-ical play characteristic of child culture. I do this for the sake of both simplicity and precision, and as a sign of muse-ical solidarity among oral folk cultures all over the world. I can find no better word, for we music experts – teachers and researchers alike – have never felt any urgent need to look for one." (p. 53)

*Ngoma* is not an abstract noun like "music" because *ngoma* includes drums, people, events; the instruments plus the people plus the occasion. "Music" suggests sounds-in-your-

head, sheet music or scores, a department where serious people listen seriously, an idea about instrument playing and singing -- inclusive, but abstract, ideas about, *meta-meta* – not conjuring up the drum itself or stomping feet in a ritual dance. “Music” could include drumming and dancing, in theory, but Chris Small has had to insist on the verb “to music” in order to push English speakers back (to earth) and down (from Platonic forms) toward the musicking process and some beginning of an awareness of just how ritualized all music-making actually is.

What *ngoma* does for us as a word/concept/model is to reintegrate the arts in ritual-like-performance and allow us to respect the strong impulse to be whole in children, an impulse that often resurfaces in teenagers. Infants, toddlers, children, teenagers and people of all ages in a healthy society want to *BE* in and of a comprehensive performance process or drama – *ngoma*. Because it is a word borrowed from Bantu or Swahili it forces us, at least for a while, to think about all the processes and things this word can synthesize or bring together, starting with us and our children.