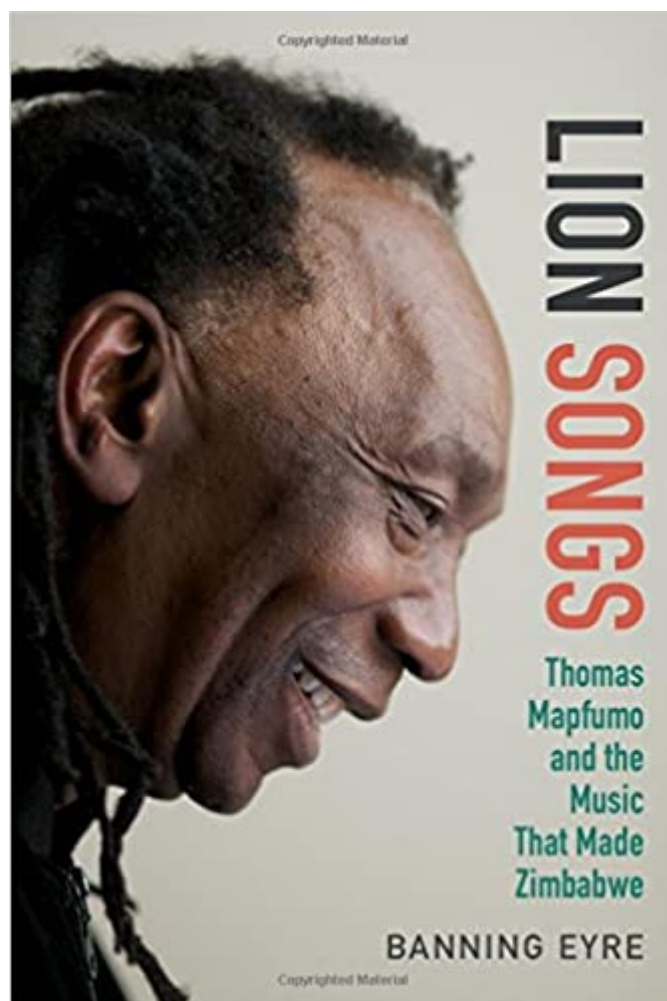


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# Lion Songs: Thomas Mapfumo And The Music That Made Zimbabwe



## Synopsis

Like Fela Kuti and Bob Marley, singer, composer, and bandleader Thomas Mapfumo and his music came to represent his native country's anticolonial struggle and cultural identity. Mapfumo was born in 1945 in what was then the British colony of Rhodesia (now Zimbabwe). The trajectory of his career—from early performances of rock & roll tunes to later creating a new genre based on traditional Zimbabwean music, including the sacred mbira, and African and Western pop—is a metaphor for Zimbabwe's evolution from colony to independent nation. *Lion Songs* is an authoritative biography of Mapfumo that narrates the life and career of this creative, complex, and iconic figure. Banning Eyre ties the arc of Mapfumo's career to the history of Zimbabwe. The genre Mapfumo created in the 1970s called chimurenga, or "struggle" music, challenged the Rhodesian government—which banned his music and jailed him—and became important to Zimbabwe achieving independence in 1980. In the 1980s and 1990s Mapfumo's international profile grew along with his opposition to Robert Mugabe's dictatorship. Mugabe had been a hero of the revolution, but Mapfumo's criticism of his regime led authorities and loyalists to turn on the singer with threats and intimidation. Beginning in 2000, Mapfumo and key band and family members left Zimbabwe. Many of them, including Mapfumo, now reside in Eugene, Oregon. A labor of love, *Lion Songs* is the product of a twenty-five-year friendship and professional relationship between Eyre and Mapfumo that demonstrates Mapfumo's musical and political importance to his nation, its freedom struggle, and its culture.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

"Thomas Mapfumo, the musical Lion of Zimbabwe, has been fortunate in finding Banning Eyre, a worthy Boswell to his Johnson." (Peter Godwin, author of *The Fear: Robert Mugabe and the Martyrdom of Zimbabwe*) "Banning Eyre has done it again. *Lion Songs* is not just a fascinating biography of an underappreciated African music icon. It testifies to the way music can unlock the secrets of history, society, and the human spirit. Zimbabwe's story is by turns inspiring and heartbreaking. Mapfumo's life and art, so elegantly told here, lets us both feel and understand it as never before." (Bonnie Raitt) "A deep, detailed biography of a complex African musician and the homeland that has shaped his artistry. . . . An essential book for those who love the artist's music and want to know more. . . ." (Kirkus Reviews) "What emerges from Eyre's account is a multi-faceted look at one musician's life, and the effects that it had on both the people around him and the society of which he was a part. . . . There's an evenness of tone here, and it helps bring together the many aspects of Mapfumo's life into one cohesive narrative. And, as an added bonus, it may well introduce readers to music that remains vital decades after it was first recorded." (Tobias Carroll *Biographile*) "[Eyre] has meticulously researched Mapfumo's story and the musicians who have played with him in *Blacks Unlimited*, and he tells their tale with impressive attention to detail. All this makes *Lion Songs* an essential resource for anyone interested in Mapfumo and Zimbabwean music." (Nigel Williamson *Songlines*) "[A] singularly insightful biography. . . ." (Andrew Gilbert *Berkeleyside*) "For fans of African music, the album is a must-have. For those interested in the role of art in self-determination and the intricate and convoluted history of oppression and colonialism and the fraught aftermath of self-rule, the book is a must-read." (Jay Mazza *The Vinyl District*) "The novelistic text has an appropriately hefty level of historical context, and the attention to detail means that Eyre never gives the tale less than it deserves, ultimately enlightening the reader about the evolution of an entire nation, as well as its most famous musical son. The gripping read is thus highly recommended." (David Katz *Mojo* 2015-10-01) "An essential book for those who love the artist's music and want to know more. . . ." (Fred Zindi *The Herald (Zimbabwe)* 2015-11-23) "[B]ecause Thomas Mapfumo is such an important subject, and because Eyre has spent decades around him, the legacy outweighs the failures. Mapfumo has created a huge body of meaningful work and Eyre has stuck it out as an independent scholar on a university press non-advance to get his story. Graceful sentences, acute observation, heroic amounts of research, self-consciousness about subject position and other contextual issues,

a working musician's aesthetic appreciation of it is all here, and nobody else could have done it." (Eric Weisbard Journal of Popular Music Studies 2015-12-01)"Eyre affirms Mapfumo's enduring stature in the canon of Zimbabwean music. Lion Songs is a fascinating biography not just for its close-up portrayal of Mapfumo, but also its masterly commentary on Zimbabwe's underrated music industry." (Stanley Mushava The Herald (Zimbabwe) 2015-12-21)"[A]n intensely detailed and lucid work. ...Eyre is a musicologist, so when he explains the musical alchemy that went into creating Mapfumo's mbira-inspired chimurenga (revolutionary struggle) music, his descriptions are illuminating and technical. ... He also understands that the significance of his subject - a fixture in Zimbabwe's music and sociopolitical fabric for at least five decades - transcends the music he made." (Kwanele Sosibo The Namibian 2016-03-08)

Banning Eyre is a freelance writer and guitarist and the senior editor and producer of the public radio program Afropop Worldwide. He is the author of In Griot Time: An American Guitarist in Mali, Playing With Fire: Fear and Self-Censorship in Zimbabwean Music, and Guitar Atlas: Africa, and the coauthor of AFROPOP! An Illustrated Guide to Contemporary African Music. Eyre is a contributor to National Public Radio's All Things Considered, and his writing has been published in Billboard, Guitar Player, Salon.com, the Boston Phoenix, CMJ, Option, Folk Roots, Global Rhythm, and other publications. He has also performed and recorded with Thomas Mapfumo.

I am currently teaching a unit on Zimbabwe's history and find - as always - that to unlayer the "truth" of the matter(s) one must look to the music, the literature, the art of a place and its people, both past and present. The magnificent Thomas Mapfumo knows this - knew it as a young musician activist in his homeland- and his life's work, as told here, tells the tale. I read excerpts from these pages aloud to a roomful and then students write, connect, riff on what they hear and write about how inspired they feel. With Mapfumo's story as a point of departure, we've pursued a vertical study of Shona culture, the spiritual resonance implied by mbira music, played thumb pianos, will even soon endeavor to "amplify" a few. And this is a Humanities classroom. Suffice it to say, this book - and Mapfumo's music - anchor us in our learning about Zimbabwe's wrought and beautiful history - at the same time they fill our sails with wind enough to dream new horizons, and off we go.

Compelling read, well researched and written. A must read for fans of Mapfumo and Zimbabwean music, as well as for followers of Zimbabwean history and culture. The story of Mapfumo is nicely

interwoven into the narrative of Zimbabwean history and Shona culture.

Great ethnomusicology about one of the most creative, relentless and inspiring musicians the world has known.

The item was delivered in good condition and met my expectations.

Fascinating book, with great historical detail.

very compelling and well documented and detailed book and so much to learn and to feel and how it just brings you inward and never lets up. a very fascinating book.

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