

## Kinshasa Symphony Orchestra

**An ode to joy**

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Daughter of Elysium

Sounding Images

**The enduring power of classical music**

ARMAND DIANGIENDA does not have an easy time as a conductor. When he started out, his many violinists took turns playing the five instruments in 20-minute shifts. When the strings broke, they were replaced with brake cables from old bicycles. Once he was forced to fashion a bell from the wheel of a bus.

But he remains undeterred. "Kinshasa Symphony", a documentary by Claus Wischmann and Martin Baer, follows Mr Diangienda and the Orchestre Symphonique Kimbanguiste in Kinshasa as they prepare for a concert of Beethoven's ninth symphony. The players are all amateurs who squeeze their music-making into already crammed lives.

Joseph Masunda, a viola player, is also an electrician and hairdresser. When power cuts plunge rehearsals into darkness, he downs his instrument and snatches up his tools. He is not alone in his devotion to classical music. Albert Matubanza, the orchestra manager, dismantles his double bass to pore over its innards before setting to work on building more to replenish the orchestra's store of instruments.

That they are playing in Congo, a country riven by war, is impossible to forget. There are hints of the horrors beyond. They have few instruments because they were stolen during the fighting. Nathalie Bahati (pictured), a flautist who teeters elegantly on impractical cream heels, lost her father in the fighting.

But the film treats Congo's tragedy with a light touch. Rather, most of the orchestra's problems will be familiar to amateur musicians the world over. Mr Diangienda berates his choir for failing to practise the difficult bits of the symphony, warning them sternly that they will not perform if they are not up to scratch. Trésor Wamba, a tenor, struggles to persuade his teenage friends that the concert won't send them to sleep. Mireille Kinkina, another singer, battles for control of the bedroom where she wants to practise but where her sister wants to relax and watch television.

A scene of Mr Masunda playing his viola at a busy interchange in the swirling Kinshasa dust is a touch contrived. But the verve with which he attacks the music is not. His intonation may be off but his joy, and that of the other players, as they scrape and saw and toot and hoot amid the traffic, is unmistakable. For each, performing is a moment of escape. The music takes you far away, to another world, smiles Ms Kinkina. In Congo it is easy to see why that would appeal.