

MUSIC IN UGANDA

Excerpts from a report on the first course in African Music organized by the African Studies Programme, Makerere University College, Kampala, Uganda. The aim of the course was to crystallize a growing concern for the study of music in Uganda, to bring together the many talented Ugandans and expatriates who share an interest in studying Ugandan music, to impart certain principles of methodology and suggest a more systematic approach to investigation in the different culture areas of Uganda.

by

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1. *The vitality of Uganda's national music.*

I visited many parts of Uganda, with the exception of West Nile, and almost everywhere I was struck by the vitality of musical traditions. Even the music played on Western instruments was usually African in idiom.

I met several teachers who for many years have been collecting traditional songs and teaching them to their students, but I found that these talented men have not always received the encouragement that they deserve, nor the opportunities and financial support necessary to prepare their work for publication. In some cases, such men have unfortunately become junior collaborators in work which they could easily manage alone.

During my first week at Makerere, I was given the impression that Uganda's national music was in decline, and that its future depended on the energy and enthusiasm of a few music organizers. My field experience soon showed me that proselytism of this kind, worthy though it may be, is entirely irrelevant in the present situation.

Uganda's traditional music is very much alive, and needs no propagation. It does, however, need to be transcribed so that it may be used as a part of music curricula in schools; and its structure must be analysed, so that it may, serve as a basis for the production of new "art" music by Ugandan composers.

The dissemination of African music in schools and colleges is being ably undertaken by Mr. Mbabi-Katana and others.

There is, however, an urgent need to co-ordinate *research* into Ugandan music; to ensure that efficient methods and high standards of scholarship are maintained; to centralize research materials, so that they are readily available to students; and above all to utilize to the full the talents and enthusiasm of the many Ugandans who have already begun to investigate their own music.

To my mind, the obvious centre for such a programme is Makerere University College, especially as the practical and educational aspects are already being developed by Mr. Mbabi-Katana on the university campus at the Institute of Education.

2. *The co-ordination of research.*

We may accept that musical traditions in Uganda vary according to the linguistic and cultural divisions of the country, and that no musical style can be fully understood except in relation to its cultural background. Superficially similar sounds may arise coincidentally from the application of different concepts of sound production; and in the first stages of comparative analysis it would be wrong to assume that two Ugandan musical styles are necessarily closely related because they *sound* similar.

It is therefore imperative that the music of each Ugandan culture area be studied as a unified system related to the patterns of its associated culture.

Until such a programme is well under way, the sporadic collection of music from different areas, especially by students who know little or nothing of the local languages and cultures, should be discouraged.

Studies of the music of each culture area should be undertaken primarily by those Ugandans who have an intimate knowledge of their cultures and some musical ability. A suitably qualified student from another country could also do effective research, provided he or she first learnt the language and studied the culture of the people whose music they wished to study. It would also be possible for musically trained non-Ugandans to produce useful studies of the techniques of, and music played on, Ugandan instruments: such analyses need not do more than demonstrate the relationship of the music played to the potentialities and limitations of the instruments and to the melodies of the songs on which they are based. The structures of the song melodies can only be analysed properly by the scholars who investigate their cultural background in depth.

The findings of Ugandan research workers should be published as a uniform series. Initially, there is no need for analyses: what are wanted are books of annotated transcriptions of the songs, song-texts and instrumental music of different culture-areas, classified according to the categories observed in each culture. Such books may then be used as teaching materials or as a basis for comparative musicological research.

It is essential that transcriptions should be accurate. Thus whoever finances publication of the music should insist that authentic tape-recordings of the songs be submitted with the manuscripts, so that the transcriptions may be checked by experienced ethnomusicologists before they go to press.

3. *Research training and methods.*

This initial stage of research into Ugandan music does not require trained ethnomusicologists. The necessary qualifications are a knowledge of the language and culture; system and efficiency in making recordings; and adequate experience in the techniques of transcribing the music.

Many Ugandans, by virtue of their birth and upbringing, have the first qualification, and my experience with students of the African music course at Makerere showed that the second qualification can be learnt within a week.

The transcription of African music is, however, a major stumbling block, even for those who can perform the music satisfactorily. Most of the trouble seems to be caused by partial training in Western music, which makes the transcriber feel that he *ought* to force songs into regularly barred sections, with standard key- and time-signatures and other such thoroughly un-African features. Staff notation is adequate for accurate transcriptions of African music, but special imaginative adaptations of it often have to be made.

Thus, apart from exercises in the use of staff notation and ear-training, most of the courses in music offered overseas are almost entirely useless for a Ugandan who wishes to transcribe his own music. Besides, they are sometimes run by people with little or no experience of African music and spread out over an unnecessarily long period of time, so that a programme to train, say, ten Ugandans for this work would be prohibitively expensive.

On the other hand, there are a few scholars who have had special experience in transcribing African music (such as Professor J. H. Nketia of the University of Ghana, Dr. K. Wachsmann of U.C.L.A., Prof. Alan Merriam of the University of Indiana, Bloomington; Dr. the Rev. A. M. Jones and David Rycroft of London University; Gerhard Kubik, Andrew Tracey and myself; and I am sure that a person with the calibre and ability of the men whom I met in Uganda, could learn from any one of these scholars certain tricks of the trade quickly and cheaply in a short "crash" course.

4. *The need for centralized storage of research materials.*

There is a great need to establish a central archive for recordings and films of Ugandan music and dancing. The library of Makerere University College would be an admirable centre for such a collection, as it would be near the two nuclei of activity in African

music, the courses for students of the African Studies Programme, and for teachers at the Institute of Education.

Furthermore, research workers of the East African Institute of Social Research, or in fact anyone who has collected useful material in the field, should be encouraged to leave copies of their films or recordings, for which they would be refunded the cost of materials, in the central archive.

Film companies often collect vast quantities of ethnographic background material, most of which is ultimately rejected, but all of which may be valuable to students of African music. In Nairobi, I saw some remarkable shots of African cultural activities in a film made for Caltex by Mr. Kingston Davies in 1954. Many of these activities have since changed or become obsolete, and so I urged Mr. Davies to put together all the spare material and make sure that it is carefully copied and stored.

Copies of all music recorded by Radio Uganda should also be kept in the central archive, and these again should be adequately documented. The system of classification devised by the International Library of African Music is a very good one, and their research cards are also admirable both for collecting background information about recordings on the spot, and for filing this information at "base".

There should be facilities for students to listen to and study recordings of films and African music and dancing. Quite apart from its value to teachers and ethnomusicologists, this would be a stimulus to those involved in the development of music or choreography for enterprises such as *Heartbeat of Africa*. Study could be carried out at the central archive, or for a fee copies could be made for home study.

The copyright of all material should be vested in the collector and the performers, and there should be some arrangement to ensure that if material is to be used commercially, they should be paid a proper fee.

5. *The function of a course in African music at Makerere University College.*

The propagation of African music in schools, the musical training of teachers and the teaching of African instruments are amply covered by the courses of instruction at the Institute of Education.

What is needed at Makerere University College is a course with a *musicological*, rather than musical, bias, which would serve a number of purposes.

Music plays an enormously important role in African cultures, and its forms are also abstract expressions of the patterns of cultures. Thus some knowledge of the theory and forms of African music is an obvious requirement for any student who wishes to have more than a surface knowledge of African culture and creativity.

Attendance at such a course would be of great value to any Ugandan who plans to collect or study his own national music: it is necessary to have some idea of the scientific study of music (i.e. musicology) as well as its practice.

The permanent existence of a course in African music both gives the subject some status, and ensures continuity, which will make it easier to plan and execute systematic programmes of research.

Finally, most African societies have been distinguished by the value that they have placed on musical activities. It is to be hoped that Uganda's own university will continue to show its disregard for the antiquated concept of the place of music in society, and assert truly African values by encouraging the scientific study of African music, in which some of the most remarkable flowerings of African creative genius have been displayed.

STUDENTS OF UGANDAN MUSIC

MISS LOIS ANDERSON, of U.C.L.A., is at present doing important research into the xylophone music of Uganda, with special reference to the musicians of the Kabaka of Buganda: she will also investigate the sociological background of musical performances, and the training and life-histories of musicians.

FATHER P. VAN THIEL W.F. is investigating the royal music of Ankole and the music of the Hima and Iru. He is a trained ethnomusicologist and a pupil of Dr. A. M. Jones; Miss Anderson is also trained, and a pupil of Dr. K. Wachsmann.

MR. GEORGE KAKOMA and MR. SOLOMON MBABI-KATANA are unfortunately too busy with their official work in musical education to be able to produce publications analysing aspects of Ganda music and the general pattern of Nyoro music respectively.

MR. JOSEPH KYAGAMBIDWA of Masaka is having great success with his compositions, especially in Germany, where he is at present continuing his musical studies. He has been urged to remain in Uganda and follow up his original study, "Music from the Source of the Nile", with detailed studies of particular aspects of Ganda music.

MR. E. KABIRINDE of Maddox School, Butiiti, has collected the texts of numerous Toro songs, which he teaches to his students, and MR. PETER OKELLO, of the Canon Lawrence School, Lira, is doing the same in the fields of Lango and Acholi music. He also has a remarkable collection of folk-stories.

MR. MOSES SERWADDA of Kampala has an unrivalled knowledge of Ganda drum-rhythms, which he is transcribing into notation, and both as schoolmaster and club-organizer he is doing much for Ugandan music.

THE REV. DR. ALOYSIUS LUGIRA is particularly interested in problems of acculturation. It has been suggested that he should collect copies of all available written compositions by modern Ugandan composers and publish a catalogue of them. After this, a volume of the best songs may be published in staff notation, combined with tonic solfa.

MAJOR AHMED ODUKA, conductor of the Police Band, has made several effective arrangements of traditional tunes for his band. These are very popular at public functions.

MR. COSMO WARUGABA, of the Uganda Broadcasting Corporation, is an accomplished composer who is interested in amalgamating traditional styles with modern techniques.

MR. BENEDICTO MUBANGIZI of Kitabi, who is teaching at Ibanda, has already begun a most promising study of Ankole music, and has published song-texts at his own expense. It has been suggested that he should be released from teaching duties for at least a year in order to continue his researches without interruptions.

MR. OKOT P'BITEK, of Gulu, has written on the social aspects of Acholi music and the meaning of the songs. FATHER OKELLO has formed a band composed of traditional Acholi and modern European instruments, which produces most original and exciting sounds: he is struggling with the problems of transcribing the traditional sounds. MESSRS ANDREW BOGOMIN and SAMSON TOO, also of Gulu, are professional men who are learning traditional *nanga* music and also producing their own compositions, in this medium.

MR. GRACE IGAGA is embarking on a study of Soga music, but will need financial assistance, as well as some specialized training in transcription, if he is to do full justice both to his own talents and the subject of study.

MR. PETER COOK, MRS. JUDITH KLEIN and MRS SUSAN BOWLES are trained musicians with a growing knowledge of African music who, in spite of their lack of knowledge of African languages and cultures, may perform a very useful service by producing detailed studies of instrumental music, which do not require analysis beyond the stage of pointing out the connection between the instrumental melody and its vocal original. Mr. Cook has already embarked on a study of the music of flutes and one-stringed fiddles, and Mrs. Klein on the music for the bow-harp.

MR. KENNETH GOURLAY is working for his doctorate with a study of symbolism, drama and mime among the Karamojong. This cannot be separated from a study of their music.

John Blacking.