

**SOME ASPECTS OF AFRICAN MUSIC SOUTH OF  
THE SAHARA**

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**JUNE PAGE OLDHAM**

SOME ASPECTS OF AFRICAN MUSIC

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An Abstract

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the Graduate Council of

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In Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree

Master of Music Education

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by

June Page Oldham

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## ABSTRACT

Africa is divided by the Sahara desert region into two distinct linguistic and cultural styles. The Arabic, characterized by Islamic music and dance, and the Negro or Bantu, the latter of which refers to the general language form south of the Sahara.

Language is the factor most common to all Bantu peoples. There are several dialects spoken by many different tribes which belong to one language family.

The language is tonal in nature and the relationship between speech and the language of music is very important. Speech melody is not only a means of communication, but is also used in the formation of vocabulary and grammar. In some tribes arbitrary signals are used to symbolize words and concepts, but more frequently a system is tied to the pitch structure of a language. Many African languages are tonal in that each syllable of a word has prescribed tone or pitch. If this were not done, the meaning of the word either would be changed or would be rendered meaningless. Bantu languages are agglutinating. The nearly two hundred languages are characterized by inflection of prefixes, the genitive following the governing nouns and verbs with many derivatives. Even though improvisation and spontaneity are very important aspects of African



music, it is highly organized and is limited by a set of rules. (When Dr. Hugh Tracey, the South African musicologist, was trying to notate African scales, he had fifty-four different tuning forks made within the twelve tones of the Western scales to accommodate the intervals in the different African tribal scales.)

Several forms of Bantu music exist side by side: the original folk music, music in decay, and music in reconstruction. This situation shows the state of continual change of the social structure of the African society.

Music in Africa is regarded as a community experience. It is very much a part of everyday life and a vital aspect of significant occasions. Although some African music is primarily recreational, the majority of it can be best understood in terms of its religious, social, economic and political meanings. Social events, the occasion for recreation, the celebration of festivals, the performance of rites and ceremonies, provide outlets for all of the performing arts in African communities.

African music is practical, dedicated to the living. It is similar to a newspaper because it is the chief means through which public opinion is shaped. The music is not always meant to serve a beautiful or aesthetic purpose. It is a significant part of the life cycle of the people from birth to marriage to death. Africans participate to a greater extent than their Western counterparts in the



musical life of their community through singing, dancing, and playing.

The African's conception of art is generally expressed in abstract terms; Western art is not. Intuitive judgment has had full expression in the arts in Africa. Subsequently, in recent years, students have begun to analyze music as a guide to human behavior.

African music is demonstrative and is based upon the use of folk literature. It is almost completely visual and oral. Its dependence upon folk literature shows that music is not set aside for just a few participants, but that it exists for all members of the society. Since most of the tribes have no written language, it is an expression of the history of the people which has been orally transmitted. As a result, Africans learn much about their approach to life through music. Music functions as a historical device, as a means through which events are recounted, and as an educational vehicle. A child learns much of the history and moral code of his people through songs sung to him by his mother. Songs acquaint him with the great people, places, and events of his tribe in particular and his nation in general. He learns about his family and clan members and about the ways of life that they have determined to be right and wrong. The beauty of the music is in the relationship between an artist and the audience. There exists a reciprocal effect between the two.

There is much originality in the music of Africa, but there is also a tendency among literate Africans to destroy their music and to replace it with less indigenous, more foreign influenced forms. The paradox in African music is that the unschooled, non-literate African is generally more "cultured" than his educated brother.

Symbolism is probably the most important aspect of African music. Because of it certain attitudes are formed, and subsequently interpreted.

Psychologically the examination of African music involves the study of mental processes and social value assessments. There is a close relationship between sense perception and aesthetics, little that belongs to one sense alone. Therefore, some authorities say that the exclusion of the conception of the tactile sense has caused the difference between African societies and the West to exist. Fine and performing arts in Africa must be seen in relationship to their broad cultural context, since music, dance, sculpture, and folklore do not exist as separate entities. They are so interwoven into the African's work that it is difficult to isolate any phase from its total role in the life of the people.

The professional African musician generally has the freedom to comment upon most social situations. If these opinions were stated outside the music sphere, then friction would result. Songs are of

varied topics and all in different ways help to describe the expected behavior in society.

Africa and Asia are examples of continents in which music is practiced as an unbroken tradition. Music is a living force which is integrated with community life. Hungary is a Western country which has also shown the world that its folk music can serve as a basis for the social, cultural, and aesthetic growth of the child. In Africa folk music can serve as the basis for music education and may be used as a framework for the development of the individual.

Perhaps the most widely believed misconception is that Africans are savage and their music is comparable to early stages in the development of Western music. It is the epitome of arrogance for one group to assume that a culture that differs from its own must represent a lesser stage of development. All cultures, musical ones included, are complete under normal conditions; one may differ from, but is still equal to another.

African music may be considered to be "primitive" on the grounds that it is not based upon an organized musical system as is characteristic of the West. But it is not primitive in the sense that it has been distilled and preserved through centuries of oral propagation on a continent which is believed to be the seat of the origin of man.



There is a trend toward the study of more varied cultures. Even though Western music occupies a dominant place in world music, there are other cultures which are deserving and are examined as a cultural phenomena in attempts to relate a music system to a particular culture's social structure.

Because of extensive colonization, war, expansion, trade, and other forms of cultural contact, Africa has given opportunities to the world for the study of change and the subsequent cultural occurrences. There are a number of ethnic groups and cultures on the continent which provide old and traditional forms of music, but there is also new music being created everyday. However, information concerning the socio-cultural aspects of African music is limited.

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SOUTH OF THE SAHARA

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A Thesis  
Presented to  
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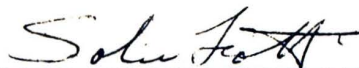
In Partial Fulfillment  
of the Requirements for the Degree  
Master of Music Education

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by  
June Page Oldham  
March 1973

To the Graduate Council:

I am submitting herewith a Thesis written by June Page Oldham entitled "Some Aspects of African Music South of the Sahara." I recommend that it be accepted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Music Education, with a major in Music.



Major Professor

We have read this thesis and  
recommend its acceptance:



Minor Professor

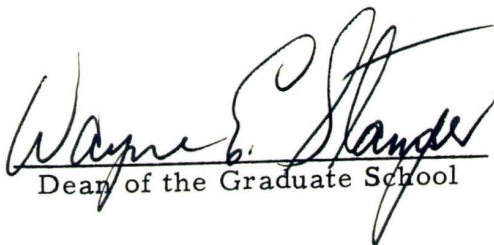
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Second Committee Member



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Accepted for the Council:



Dean of the Graduate School



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Gratefulness is extended to those colleagues in the two areas of discipline which are of great interest to the author: music and social sciences. Involvement in these areas has given the author insight to know that men are basically the same all over the world, but the differences in people are what make it great to be a part of the human race.

Sincerest appreciation is extended to those persons who have caused the author to gain insight into herself and who taught her love.

The author wishes to extend her deepest love to her family for encouragement and confidence in her.

TO

Scorpio, Gemini, Virgo,  
Sagittarius, Leo and Libra.

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## CHAPTER I

### INTRODUCTION

Previous research in African music is somewhat limited. Most of the research done has been concerned with the music of a particular tribe or tribes, or with the music of a given area (Central or West Africa, for example). Both general and specific descriptions are few in number. Descriptions of African music appear in the general literature concerning Africa almost from the earliest publications. Traders, travelers, explorers, colonists, and missionaries all seem to have had at least a passing interest in the ways that Africans express themselves in music and dance. As a result references to these forms of expression can be counted in the thousands. Yet any sort of systematic study has been long in coming, and it was not until approximately the 1920's that detailed investigations of specific form of music and dance, or generalizations that sought to reach the essence of these forms were undertaken. Even of the more scholarly studies, some of them have tended to take precedence over others, and thus systematic study of African music is now only beginning to be realized.

### Statement of the Problem

African musical forms possess a definite relationship to the ethos and values of the society. The purpose of this paper was to examine African music not only for its own sake, but for its practical or functional aspects, that is, its role within the society.

### Purpose of the Study

Within the last few years, ethnomusicologists interested in African studies have begun to realize the broader potentials of their studies and some students are now analyzing music as a guide to human behavior. The student of African humanities is increasingly aware today of a dual responsibility that this field of study impresses upon him. The most pressing problems are those which relate to his own discipline, that is, to the technical description of African music and its relationship to music in other parts of the world; to the human behavior that produced this product; and to the concepts which underlie the behavior. At the same time, he has another responsibility to students of other disciplines, to use his knowledge of the humanities in Africa to shed light on other facets of human behavior, such as the social, political, and economic.

### Previous Investigation

The earliest accounts of African music tended to be simply descriptive, and even contemporary studies have continued largely in



this nature. The literature on music instruments is enormous (though in most cases non-technical from the standpoint of instrument organology) and purely emotional descriptions of music performances abound. Although contemporary studies of music instruments deal in much more direct and technical terms and although generalizations about the content of music style are highly technical and sophisticated, these two areas of study still tend to dominate the literature.

### Limitations of the Study

Of primary interest is Africa, south of the Sahara Desert. The two parts of Africa divided by the desert are characterized by two distinct styles of music and dance. North of the Sahara music and dance are Arabic and this influence seems to have begun at a very early date. In speaking of Africa as a whole two distinct styles must be considered: the Arabic and the Negro or Bantu African. It is the Negro or Bantu African which is our primary interest in this study.

The following areas are given consideration in this paper: instruments, words of songs, native typology and classification of music, role and status of musicians, the function of music in relation to other aspects of the culture, and music as a creative activity. The latter two items received the greatest emphasis.

## Definition of Terms

The stress placed upon musical activity as an integral part of the society is a feature that music shares with other aesthetic aspects of culture in Africa and one which is emphasized in the majority of non-literate societies. In the Western societies there is a tendency to divorce the arts from aspects of everyday life. Thus, we have "pure" art as opposed to "applied" art as well as the "artist" and "commercial artists" or "craftsman" who are also differentiated both in role and function. A further distinction is made in Western society in terms of "artist" and "audience" with the first group tending to be limited in number. Relatively few persons in the West participate in the arts and even fewer are considered to be "accomplished" in music, the dance, graphic arts, etc.

In most non-literate societies distinctions of this type do not prevail. Art is a part of life, not separate from it. This does not mean that specialization is absent, but at the same time relatively large numbers of people within a non-literate society are competent in the arts and aesthetic activities are closely related to the whole culture.

Ethnomusicology has developed a point of view which results from the study of many diverse cultures, but which should also be applied to Western art music. The notion that subject matter should be limited geographically, that is, include only the non-Western world,

has been the object of widespread criticism. In spite of the acceptance by many scholars of the desirability of including Western art music, it is taken for granted that only in studying a culture foreign to himself can a scholar be objective. This latter assumption is probably erroneous.

### Organization of the Remainder of the Thesis

The first chapter of the thesis is a discussion of African music including history, review of the literature, present trends, purpose of the study, limitations and definition of terms. The second chapter of the thesis contains a discussion of the methods and materials used during the research and for the composition of the thesis. The third chapter contains an analysis and comparison of the Euro-American and African attitudes regarding African music. The next chapter describes Bantu African music in its social setting and the underlying social attitudes. This is followed by a section containing examples and analysis of classes of songs from Ghana. The fifth chapter contains a discussion of exemplary musico-social situations among the Bantu. The sixth and final chapter contains a summary and conclusion. It is followed by the bibliography.

## CHAPTER II

### METHODS AND MATERIALS

Description of events and examples mentioned in the paper are based upon inferences made from documented reports by field observers who are interested in this area of African music.

The writers were trained in the fields of anthropology, music, sociology or in areas of interrelated disciplines such as ethnomusicology. The writers are considered to be well trained and experienced in their respective fields. They have spent a considerable amount of time in field work. Several of the writers have lived in various areas mentioned in the paper; some (missionaries, for example) have been in constant contact with different tribes; others have even been allowed to participate in actual musical events (musicologist Alan P. Merriam and the drum-making Bala-Basongye people).

In order that the inferences be valid, a number of varied sources were consulted. The sources were classified as primary or secondary, according to their proximity to examples described in the paper. The primary sources bear a direct relationship to the events that were described. The secondary sources do not bear a direct relationship to the examples in the paper, but they are related through some other basic but less specific process. The secondary



sources in this paper serve as a means of support for the thesis and as a guideline for the general scope of the topic.

The end stage of research involved making assumptions about the human nature of the African people in regards to their music and its place in the social structure.

## CHAPTER III

### DESCRIPTION OF THE AFRICAN AND EURO-AMERICAN ATTITUDES REGARDING AFRICAN MUSIC

#### The Study of African Music: A Humanistic View

The history of African cultures, as opposed to that of Western cultures, is almost completely visual and oral. The people of the Western world have almost always seen fit to record their religious beliefs and matters of social and aesthetic discipline in holy books or in classical studies, but the African has sought to express his relationship with his God and nature chiefly through the music of his culture. African music is an expression of the history of the people which has been passed on orally.

Music shares its place in Africa with other aesthetic aspects of culture. This is true of non-literate societies. In Western cultures, a distinction is made between the "artist" and the "audience," with the first group limited in number. Relatively few persons in the West participate in the arts, and even fewer are considered to be "accomplished" in music or the dance. "It can safely be said that there are no non-literate societies where distinctions of this order prevail.

Art is a part of life, not separated from it."<sup>1</sup> We must therefore approach the aesthetics of African music on the social level if we will ever properly understand it. We must avoid the Western tendency to isolate sound from context.

For a long time many of the differences of the African were interpreted as inferiorities or called racial differences. Now it is realized that, all over the world, there are social institutions which are basically common to all cultures, but which are expressed in different ways from one cultural cluster to another. It is possible for us to gain a different insight into our own culture by examining the modes of practice toward universal objects from other cultures. This object could be marriage; or it could be the legalities regarding inheritance through kinship; in this case it must be music.

### Bantu Africa: A Definition

Bantu Africa, according to several authorities, covers a somewhat indistinct geographic and cultural area. It is difficult to describe exactly what constitutes Bantu Africa or who the Bantu people are.

The majority of authorities agree that the most evident factor common to all Bantu peoples is their language. This is one part of

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<sup>1</sup> Melville J. Herskovits, "Man and His Works," in Continuity and Change in African Cultures, W. R. Bascom and M. J. Herskovits (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1959), p. 49.

Africa in which several dialects spoken by various tribes belong to one great language family. "Bantu Africa is the enormous tract of country which lies south of a line drawn from the mouth of the Niger River on the West coast (lat. 5 deg N) through Nairobi and out to the East coast on the equator."<sup>2</sup> A noticeable amount of research has been going on in the Bantu area and there is no longer any doubt that not only do many of the tribes belong to the same language family, but the hundreds of tribes which live in Bantu Africa have basically the same underlying musical system. Even though the musical system itself has been, to some extent, altered by both Arabic and Western factors, the common foundation of the singing and the rhythmic style remains characteristic of the entire area. North of the Bantu line, discounting Moslem influence, the musical system of the Africans, although they may be classified as belonging to different language families, is the same system characteristic of Central and South Africa. "The Arab style is patently an influence imposed from outside on a musical system which whether within or outside the Bantu line is the same music."<sup>3</sup> Africans are as prone to assimilate Arabic musical practices as they are to absorb American or Western modern music, choral singing and dance.

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<sup>2</sup> A. M. Jones, "East, West, North and South," African Music Society, I (1954-1957), p. 57.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid., p. 58.



Musically, Bantu Africa is an entity with families of tribes which lie outside the Bantu area. For this reason, some tribes which lie outside the described Bantu area will be considered. We cannot restrict the areas of musical practices to the language family areas alone. Even though much of the language dialect changes from area to area, the music remains essentially the same.

### Bantu Africa: The Language

Since African language is tonal in nature, the relationship between the language of speech and the language of music is a very important factor to consider in the examination of non-literate cultures, and one that goes very deep into human nature. "It is not necessary to debate origins, however, in order to realize that elements of speech can exert a profound influence over music to which words are sung. . . . The musical speech-elements, which in some manner, are deeply involved in such form, may be grouped under the usual classification of rhythm and melodic inflection. There are languages, however, in which speech-melody is not a vehicle of 'affective' expression, but is utilized in the formation of vocabulary and grammar, just as are vowels and consonants. In such languages, speech-melody is part-and-parcel of communication; they cannot be written properly unless the tone-register of each syllable is noted down.. Chinese is one of these languages; others cover a wide territory in Africa; still others

have been found among North American Indian tribes."<sup>4</sup> When we find that great areas of the African continent are expressing their aesthetic sense in forms of music which are unique in the musics of the world, and when we couple this with the fact that all this music is an expression of a homogeneous culture whose variations are based upon a fundamental musical system, we must realize that we are dealing with a remarkably unified culture. "What is sung by the Bantu in South and Central Africa is sung in the same medium right outside their borders."<sup>5</sup> The musical boundary is pushed away from the linguistic one. Therefore, the somewhat limiting boundary of the tribal or geographical family causes consideration not only for the musician, but also for the anthropologist and the historian.

There are nearly two hundred Bantu languages in the closely united Bantu group. The languages of the Bantu are musical in sound and in delivery and pleasant to hear. "They are agglutinating, (formative elements are attached to the roots of words as separable parts) and the dominating factor in their structure is inflection by prefixes, the genitive following the governing nouns and the verb with many derivative forms. The Bantu languages are divided into eleven dialects

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<sup>4</sup>George Herzog, "Speech-Melody and Primitive Music," The Musical Quarterly, XX (October, 1934), pp. 452-53.

<sup>5</sup>Jones, op. cit., p. 61.

which include Swahili, Zulu, Herero, and Congo. Their intricacy combined with regularity of structure is found in very few languages. They have been called Italian in clarity and possess a beauty and harmony of euphonic sound hardly to be equalled."<sup>6</sup>

### Bantu Africa: The Music

In the life of primitive man, music and the dance had greater significance than with the literate man. The word "primitive" has come to be quite a subjective term. It may denote different meanings to different people in varying situations. "Primitiveness" is a relative term as are all other aspects of culture when they are taken from different view points. The Euro-American, in his colonization of Africa, was prone to label the unfamiliar cadences and intonations used by the Africans in their ritual songs and dances as "primitive." This concept should be examined more closely. When we consider that archeological studies hint at the possibility that proto-man could possibly have had his origin on the African continent (such research having been carried on by Dr. Leaky in the Olduvai Gorge),<sup>7</sup> then it will be apparent that the origins of African music and dance could have

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<sup>6</sup> W. E. B. Dubois, Black Folk Then and Now (New York: Henry Holt and Co., 1939), p. 111.

<sup>7</sup> Lerone Bennett, Jr., "The African Past, Before the Mayflower: A History of Black America (Chicago: Johnson Publishing Co., 1969) p. 4.



occurred before the civilization of Western man. What the westerner heard when he reached Africa was not authentically primitive, having been distilled through the eons of human development.

According to Hugh Tracey, there are three facets of Bantu music that exist side by side:<sup>8</sup> the original folk music, which is still the music of the great majority, and is still quite active, possibly more than is realized; music in decay, which is an amalgamation of foreign influence, prejudice, and indigenous gullibility, and finally music in reconstruction, a condition in which the melting pot is bringing about new forms of music, good, bad and indifferent, all of them strongly influenced by intrinsically African characteristics. All of these stages should be taken into consideration when studying Bantu music.

Since the music of the Bantu is closely associated with the tonality of the spoken tongue, it can be said these languages, their dialects, and associated music have become so diverse that tribal musical styles have also become distinguishable. The different tribal styles are somewhat analogous to the various types of folk music styles characteristic of Europe.

All African musics share the attribute of practicality. The music of non-literate people is not always artistic, but it is invariably

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<sup>8</sup>Hugh Tracey, "The State of Folk Music in Bantu Africa," African Music Society, I (1954), p. 17.



practical. Every piece of folk music works for and earns its living. Even though it may be aesthetically pleasing, once its social or religious nature has been consumed and it no longer achieves its purpose, it is abandoned and drifts into oblivion.

The living, rather than the dead in most cases, are the chief concern of the Bantu composers. The creative folk composer serves as an interpreter of life for his less articulate countrymen. If the listeners agree with what the composer expresses, then it becomes their own voice, too. The musicians add or subtract local color to the original theme. Because of the existence of oral propagation, the local repertoire of songs and tales are relentlessly authentic. Everyone is invited to contribute his share of personal opinion; the music is subsequently a reflection of the lives and outlook of a whole district or group of people. Through their music they express beliefs, sense of duty and tribal morality, ambitions, disappointments and triumphs, in fact everything that really matters to them.

For the majority of the people, songs take the place of the correspondence columns of our newspapers and are chief means of shaping public opinion. In their society one may say in song or verse what cannot be said in prose without giving offense. Here the musician plays his essential part in the integration of society. He reflects the opinions of the right thinkers; he is the arbiter of decencies and the opponent of excesses among both royalty and commoner. The music

basically serves to uphold the spirit of continuity and solidarity in tribal and social life. The people who produce it are able to cope with the social impact of the music because they have been allowed to participate in the formation of social policy. "In tribal art there is no problem of communication, such as is typical of the malaise of European art. Such an art is of the people, by the people and for the people. It expresses values, religious and philosophical, which the artist shares not only with his patron but with the whole community."<sup>9</sup> "It is the unity of art and belief which makes understanding and acceptance of the forms of art easy for members of the tribe, but correspondingly difficult for non-members, since they do not share the belief."<sup>10</sup>

African music is not always meant to edify the mind aesthetically. It cannot be regarded as brilliant decoration for festive occasions, or as a means of effectively staging ceremonies. The music relies partially on the psycho-physical conditions. In the dance, body motion is free from effort by repetition. It follows a precise shape and form, and proceeds in accordance with its own laws seemingly by itself. Along with it and as part of the whole movement, speech forms itself rhythmically and tonally. Vitality is heightened

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<sup>9</sup> William Fagg, Tribes and Forms in African Art (New York: Tudor Publishing Co., 1965), p. 11.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid.

above its normal state. The participants are relieved of the constraint which in everyday life binds them to the pursuit of their immediate aim. Music is neither reproduction (of a "piece of music" as an existing object) nor production (of a new object). It is the life of a living spirit working within those who dance and sing. Through such means the people are aware of taking part in the intangible realities which give meaning to all of life, compensate for distress, and also create that sense of well-being without which life at any economic level in any society is not worthwhile.

#### Bantu Music: How to Approach It

We must establish a few guidelines if we are ever to appreciate the African aesthetic. It is most important to realize that even today, in the midst of the twentieth century, some persons of Euro-American heritage still believe that "art" is something special, "a little off to the left of life."<sup>11</sup> They hold that artistic expression is a separate world; that it is done only by special kinds of people who are not considered very practical. An opinion such as this cannot be held by persons who live in a society in which there is no word for "art" and none for "society" or "reality." A number of educated

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<sup>11</sup>Paul Bohannon, Africa and Africans (New York: The Natural History Press, 1964), p. 152.

Africans do not appreciate African art, not only because it is associated with tribalism, considered backward and therefore threatening to their own status quo, but having been indoctrinated by the West and through "intellectualization," they have wound up with some of the same problems that Americans and Europeans have in analyzing it. They do not have (or have lost) the technique for comprehending their native music.

The African's conception of art is always expressed in abstract terms, something some Westerners do not clearly understand, and is possibly one reason we fail to give objective consideration to the creative African intellect. "African art is a field in which intuitive judgement has had full expression. This is another aspect of the subtle directness of tribal art which has been so much admired by modern artists, and it is of course natural enough that non-literate peoples would be free of that literariness in art which is equally present in the academic and the modern art of Europe and America."<sup>12</sup>

African art can be understood on three levels. Firstly, it can be studied as form and technique. On a second level, the purpose and the meaning of the art must be gathered not merely from the artists but from the critics in society. Finally, African art can be

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<sup>12</sup>Fagg, op. cit., p. 17.



evaluated for its impact on Western, or some other, art. These last two levels can hardly be taken separately for they apply to the needs of Western man regarding the examination of a different culture. Within the last few years ethnomusicologists interested in the study of Africa have begun to realize the great potentials of their studies, and some students are beginning to analyze music as a guide to human behavior.

Many forms in African music are generally associated with religion which possesses a noticeable influence over the creative process. African music definitely possesses a religious connotation, but it also has a political connotation, and an economic or a domestic one.

The aesthetics behind African music are seldom verbalized. There is no need to, and persons in the West who do not realize this must see the extent to which communication in European language changes the real meaning and words, therefore the original perception. This lack of verbalization is not easy to understand because people in the West have not ordinarily examined such problems on the same intellectual plane as have the Bantu. The Westerner must discover for himself to what extent his own art accommodates his aesthetic needs. Then he can begin to determine the meaning and function of art in another culture. In this process of evaluation a background in traditional Western aesthetics alone is not of much help. For us,

this straightforward re-examination of our aesthetics and re-definition of our objectives is only a beginning.

The following is a description of an attempt by one man to comprehend the aesthetics of some African art. It is documented by Hans Himmelheber and is called Neger Kunstler. It describes the Atutu people of the Ivory Coast. "Himmelheber went into the area armed with first-rate interpreters, and with questionnaires. He found nineteen artists with whom he spent several months. He watched them work and he filled in his questionnaires. In the book written in German, one of the questions he reports he asked was 'When you are working, fuhlen Sie noch Schopfungsfreude?' ('do you feel any joy in creation?'). The question was asked in French, interpreted into and answered in Atutu, recorded again in French, and reported in German. Himmelheber is aware of the difficulty and says specifically he thinks his interpretations came through the buzz of language pretty well. The reaction he got was: 'Good heavens, no not that!' Artistic joy is something that all Atutu denied."<sup>13</sup> If it was artistic joy, then the Atutu were oblivious to it. "Himmelheber could not help being put off when Atutu artists claimed they worked mainly for money. Himmelheber was a little sentimental here: artists in our society do not expect to make a

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<sup>13</sup> Bohannon, op. cit., p. 153.

lot of money (neither do the Atutu), but they like to make a living at their art."<sup>14</sup> They all do it for money in one sense, but there is the suspicion left over from the nineteenth century that doing something for money is a sign of the prostitution of talent.

Each man, in whatever type of culture he lives, has a way of looking at the world (whatever that means to him). It is important to understand that opposing interpretations of life would come into conflict even in the smallest human contacts. It is difficult for Westerners to comprehend the value of those things held in high esteem by other people when the value systems in both cultures are based so differently. For example, the importance placed upon mystical or superior beings who control the lives of all humans seems trite to Westerners who live in a highly industrial society predicated on the "ultimate happiness of mankind" as the sole purpose of the universe. The concepts of predestination and the subservience of humans to a complex of Gods is not easily understood by Western man. The survival of the system (the preservation of music through oral transmission) of African music is much more significant than the existence of a few isolated technical features of the music itself. In the United States, the music of the Afro-American exerts a strong influence upon both the popular and the serious music forms. The preservation

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<sup>14</sup>Ibid., pp. 153-54.

(by way of the religious tradition and through oral propagation) of the music of the American black man has occurred in much the same way as did the preservation of music in Africa.

Unlike the folk music of Africa, most of the "serious music" of the West is generally considered outside the realm of both religion and everyday life. "It ceased to be an integral part of the life of Western man at the onset of the Renaissance. No art has been since then. Before the Renaissance, art found its way into the lives of practically all people largely because so much of it was a product of the Church, and the Church was the center of Western man's life. The exchange of deep religious attitudes for the "enlightened" secular concepts caused the chasm between what was art and what was life to come into existence. However, it was unthinkable for the African "to make a separation between music, dancing, song, the artifact, and a man's life or his worship of his gods. Expression issued from life, and was beauty. But in the West, the 'triumph of the economic mind over the imaginative' . . . made possible this . . . split between life and art. Hence, a music that is distinguished from something someone would whistle while tilling a field."<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>15</sup> Leroi Jones [Amiri Imamamu Baraka], Blues People (New York: William Morrow and Co., 1963), p. 29.



There are persons in the West who believe that some non-Westerners cannot adequately produce the human figure in drawing or that because the Egyptians, for example, painted their figures in profile, they could not do it any other way. This biased conception of progress in the minds of the West has been carried over into the music as well. Here, a Westerner will criticize the quality of an African whose singing does not meet the timbral standards of excellence described by the West. The Western concept of beauty cannot be adequately compared with that of the African in that the cultures have little in common.

Twentieth century America offers the possibility of conciliation between the two cultures. There exists a reciprocal effect between the European musical tradition and the Afro-American music of the United States. This relationship could serve as one guideline by which to gauge the impact of black music in America, and in part, some of the music of Africa by purely Western standards. In the West, only a "finished product" has, in the past, been considered beautiful. Just in this century has this begun to change. It is still difficult for persons in our culture to divorce the artificial from the natural. "For a Westerner to say that the Wagnerian tenor's voice is "better" than the African singer's or the blues singer's is

analogous to a non-Westerner disparaging Beethoven's Ninth Symphony because it wasn't improvised."<sup>16</sup>

There is the example of the white jazz musician versus the black one. The former plays jazz in cleaner, softer, rounder tones than the latter. This, contends Amiri Imama Baraka (formerly Leroi Jones), is an insistence upon the same Western standard mentioned above. The value of the music should be determined by the frame of reference in which it exists. Therefore when the untrained black jazz player's music comes off raucous, loud, rough and uncultivated according to Western standards, it is meant to be this way. The imitation of the human voice so characteristic of many good jazz musicians can be described as an extension of the musician into his instrument. Also, among Africans self-expression does not exist as a separation between the creator and the agent chosen as the means for expression.

### The Creator Versus the Consumer-Critic

Art is important in analyzing culture because it supplies means by which some of the most perceptive and original thinkers communicate their experiences. In our own contemporary society this is seen in such creative forms as the "pop" art of Andy Warhol, rock music

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<sup>16</sup>Ibid., p. 30.

of American youth and even contemporary dance forms. American artists and musicians are, more than ever, expressing their attitudes and opinions concerning their society in varied artistic forms. These comments may exist in such forms as satire, comedy, and tragedy and they may occur through the media of music, art, dance, drama or any of these in combination. "Art, then, includes communication, comment, and criticism. The message may be extremely distasteful, it may also be obscure. Yet artists are thinking people; which does not necessarily mean that they are intellectualizing people. So are consumers and critics of art. They are the people on the receiving end of communication. The critics translate for us, who may have less perceptive vision, what it is that the artist is saying, e.g., the postulates that lie behind his message. Artists may hate critics. If they do, it may not be because the critic was obtuse, but it may be because the critic was extraordinarily perceptive and the artist is unable to bear the bold statement of his message in an idiom and in a symbolism different from that which he himself gave it."<sup>17</sup>

African music is naturally demonstrative and is highly indicative of an emotional nature. Its dependence upon the use of folk literature in its composition lends support to the fact that the music is not especially set aside for use by its consumers, but rather that it exists

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<sup>17</sup>Bohannon, op. cit., p. 141.

in accordance with the whole society. In Africa, taste in artistic expression like taste everywhere else is ultimately created by the consumer, who ultimately becomes the critic. For example, in the West we often resent the critic and we say that critics are frustrated musicians who are not capable of becoming successful and consequently find fault with others who have been fortunate enough to become recognized in their fields of endeavor. Despite the general negative public attitude toward critics, their function is seen as basically "constructive"; but even then we require that this criticism be used sparingly. Thus in all cultures there is an exchange of views between the musician and the critic-consumer. In various cultures, the musician, the specialist, are given different tasks by his critics, the public.

Today the music of Africa has become cheapened because there is no longer feedback, drive, or motive from which the musician can direct his production. Bantu Africa is being flooded by amateurs and pseudo-connoisseurs of folk music who know very little about its cultural heritage. In recent years there has been less interchange between the Bantu creator and the Bantu consumer. The reason this music has "gone to pot," as some authorities are saying, is that the market has changed. Because the demands of the consumer have changed, the intentions and motives of the creator have been equally affected.



To ask an African to do authentic folk music (on our terms) would be asking him to make a complete turn-about in his thinking. Part of being a folk artist is the fact that authenticity lies in the relationship between the musician and his audience. The relationship must represent a divorce between the authentic performance and our twentieth century idea of an "authentic" performance. "Joan Baez is not 'authentic' in any sense save that she uses material that is traditional, but uses it - and well - as a highly sophisticated performer. Her relationship is with an audience, not with a 'folk.'"<sup>18</sup> The relationship of the folk creator must be with the consumer, as characteristic of the Bantu.

The continent is full of artists, writers and musicians; therefore one need not worry about the death of African music. Artists are special people, and it is true in Africa as in Western society. African artists are trained today and they always have been. The training may be formal, as it is among the Ivory Coast tribes in which apprenticeship may last up to five years, during which time the apprentice is made to copy the master's work and live in the master's household. Or it may be informally gained through observation of and association with tribal members who participate in music.

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<sup>18</sup>Ibid., p. 155.

Whatever the case may be, style is handed on and individual styles are immediately distinguishable to the trained and aware eye.

## CHAPTER IV

### THE MUSIC OF THE BANTU AND THE SOCIAL IMPLICATIONS WHICH LIE BEHIND IT

#### Bantu Africa: The Social Setting

There can be few places left in the world so comparatively untouched as the African continent, and therefore so interesting as a field for the study of folk music and the social conditions which nurture them, in spite of some anachronisms which now influence the culture. Bantu Africa as we know it today is not a single homogenous unit, and its folk music is correspondingly diverse. African folk music, therefore, cannot be represented by the compositions of a single group or territory, but rather by the music of a great number of loosely related tribes, each having influenced the performance of its neighbors to varying extents.

The social setting of present day African folk music varies from that of the most remote tribes who live in the forests, almost oblivious to the outside world, to the town-people, some of them in the second and third generation of urban families, often of mixed tribal parentage and forming a new lower and middle class of skilled and semi-skilled industrial workers. There is a correspondingly wide

range of music to be found in Africa from folk melodies and rhythms to imported dance music.

There are several historical reasons for the state of the music. The interior of Africa, with the lack of waterways or other means of communication and with disease and inter-tribal fighting, was one of the last land masses to be opened up to the West. The people along the coasts had contact with the outside world for hundreds of years, four hundred or more on the west coast and over nine hundred years on the east. Inside the continent, the more active and warring tribes, such as the Luba of the southern Congo, the Nilo-Hamitic kingdoms of the Rift Valley, and the Zulu of the south, have frequently spread their dialects and culture over wide areas. Other less aggressive tribes may have retained their culture in isolation for several generations.

If one wishes to get to the heart of an African quicker than any other way, one thing is important: he must be able to participate in the enjoyment of his music and have both understanding and empathy for the social customs of the continent. An African music teacher, in replying to a talk given by Hugh Tracey (Honorary Secretary, African Music Society) on this subject, once said in speaking of the government of his territory: "They make new laws for us to obey, and we shall obey them; but if they tried to stop us singing, then, I promise you,



there would be a revolution in two days."<sup>1</sup>

Folk music in the countryside seems to be the most widespread kind of music in Africa. It is practiced largely under the influence of Westernized Africa and is not so well known among the rural folk as are the town, popular or current musics which are presently stealing the limelight. There is a remarkable variety of styles and manners of performance of folk music which ranges from the xylophone bands of the Chopi in the Southeast to the simple melodic fragments which are sung by the Pygmies of the Ituri Forest.

In the realm of popular music, few authentic forms have arisen that have their origin in Africa alone. Many of them are imitations of Negro dances of North and South America, with local touches added; there is a more European style of singing throughout Central Equatorial Africa that owes its origin partly to semi-Portuguese or Brazilian styles of dancing and guitar playing, but mostly to the fact it is much more closely associated with lively indigenous varieties. It is found all the way from Angola in the West, through the Belgian Congo, to Kenya in the east, where there are also Arab, Indian and Swahili styles of popular music.

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<sup>1</sup> Hugh Tracey, "African Music Within Its Social Setting," African Music Society, II (1958-1961), p. 56.

A number of tribes still sing and perform their old regimental dance songs that were current when they had to defend themselves from their predatory neighbors. Since there are no longer any inter-tribal "pleasure" songs of war permitted, a large amount of songs for men is vanishing: no wars, no warriors, no war dances. Since there is no longer wild game for hunting, hunting songs are also being lost into the limited collections of folk song recorders. There has been recorded a number of "mouse hunting songs," sung by Sotho men and boys from Basutoland, which show the state of big game hunting in that territory. The women's songs have not been affected as much. Women's work is still the same, particularly in the country. In domestic chores, such as children's care, agriculture, grinding, and cooking, the women are almost unaided by the non-fighting, non-hunting men who leave everything they can to the women.

### Factors Which Affect Cultural Change

The study of the music of non-literate societies provides materials for the study of cultural change. In contrast to social institutions, to which an individual is expected to conform, a degree of creativity is expected in music, dance, graphic and plastic arts, and in verbal art which is called folklore. This does not mean that everything new is accepted or preferred to the old. For example, certain wood carvings call for no originality; some song and dance

steps must be performed in a prescribed manner; and certain incantations must be recited verbatim if they are to be effective. One can argue as to whether these forms are art or whether they are ritual, but arguments about definitions, particularly in art, are seldom fruitful. Nevertheless, the rigid standards of repetition that are demanded in some forms of religious music, whether written or unwritten, contrast strikingly with the improvisation that is permitted and even expected in some secular music.

To the degree originality is prized in music and other forms of aesthetic expression, they are especially important for the study of internal innovation. Every idea has its origin with some individual living at some time in some society, even though we may never know who, when or where. Because creativity rather than conformity is expected, the nature of the forms in aesthetic expression differ basically from that of social, economic, political and religious institutions. In this difference may lie the basis for the understanding of cultural change, including acculturation which involves adaptation to new cultural patterns, or diffusion which involves the spread or dissemination of cultural patterns.

Music can be precisely measured in terms of pitch, intervals, tempo and duration. Some features of music can be measured

quantatively and, as Alan P. Merriam has shown,<sup>2</sup> can be treated statistically. It is possible to measure the degree of variability that exists with various forms of old and new music, for example, sacred and secular music. This comparison should shed light on the kind and amount of creativity that exists in non-literate and folk societies, a point that is widely disputed. But more significantly, if carried further, it may be possible to show how change develops out of events which occur simultaneously.

Statistics will not teach us all we want to know about music since comprehension of the music of different cultures requires introspection. Even if it were possible to reduce each song to a mathematical equation, this would neither answer all the questions nor solve all the problems. Statistical techniques are most useful in comparative studies, including studies of change, because they can help in distinguishing between accidental and significant differences. Quantitative measurement is possible in the study of the dance and folk-tales, and has been applied to good use in the study of individual behavior in social, economic, and political fields, but of all the forms of expression it is in the study of music that the greatest precision can be

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<sup>2</sup> Alan P. Merriam, The Anthropology of Music (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1964).



achieved at the present. It is in the areas where creativity is expected that one can hope to learn the most about innovation.

Some people speak of the effect of popular art and music on folk music, and of the influence of one music style upon another. From the point of view of musicological analysis, perhaps the human individual can be forgotten in describing musical change and development. But this is always the result of human interaction, and if we are to study change while it is actually taking place, individuals must become the focal point of concentration. The study of internal change must involve the examination of individual variations, not only in a song as it is sung by different individuals, but between the renditions of the same song by the same individual over a period of time. Individuals are the agents through which both external and internal change are induced.

Merriam has also described the effect of an innovation in a given society by following its origin, spread and adaptation. Such a study is difficult, for conditions cannot be artificially or experimentally created. But the media, with the continuous introduction of new songs, provides means by which studies of this kind can be made. The media give an over-all view of change as it takes place.

Two things have clearly emerged from the thousands of recordings of indigenous music which have already been made in Africa. On one hand, there is much originality in musical styles, throughout

the continent, of an aesthetic and structural proficiency sufficient to act as the foundation of national musics in the future. On the other hand, there is a suicidal tendency, particularly among literate Africans, to destroy their indigenous art forms and substitute for them with simpler, less aesthetic foreign styles, most of which do little or no justice to their native musical or artistic talents. In this Africans are unfortunately encouraged by persons of simple or ignorant taste, the curio collector, or the jazz "missionary" (many of them are just that) who will rave over and pay money for a commonplace repetitive piece of music and fail to notice an item of merit which connoisseurs of folk craft all over the world would recognize as a true and mature art.

Consequently there is a paradox in African music. The unschooled, non-literate country folk are usually more "cultured" than their literate and educated relatives. They have, unfortunately, one quality in common: with a few exceptions, neither is yet capable of analyzing his own music apart from its social matrix to the extent of being able to hand it on to the next generation as an established national art form in its own right.

### Symbolism in Music and Dance

In studying the music of Africa, it has been shown that music functions as a total part of the society. The music of Africa cannot

be examined without considering the fact that much of this music is performed along with the dance. With both song and dance we work at abstract levels. Song supplies us with texts on the verbal plane and dance provides us with movement which imitates human action. The symbolic nature of music is more clearly understood when there is the presence of a social context to clarify meaning. Pure, isolated musical sound is more difficult to analyze. Dance movements are more difficult to analyze if they do not imitate man. Music and dance cause certain attitudes, emotions, and aesthetic judgements to be formed. Tempo or tonality for a given piece of music can suggest certain emotions: gaiety if a fast tempo is used, or sadness and contemplation for a piece done in a minor key. This type of symbolism is culturally learned, and is characteristic of our culture. The discussion involves whether or not there are connections between gestures, instruments, songs and instrumental music and cultural ideas.

Dance is a major part of native expression in Africa. Expression of emotion through bodily movement exists in so many forms that it can only be another study by itself. It is feasible to mention briefly some basic factors which show the interrelatedness of music and dance in Africa. Curt Sachs describes an inherent symbolism in

certain parts of the dance.<sup>3</sup> He describes a symbolic scheme correlating the three major types of music material (vocal, instrumental and dance) with femininity, masculinity, physical type, size of dance steps and even cultural traits such as "war-like" or "peace-loving." Some writers see dance to reflect social organization, male-female roles, historical phenomena or other organizational principles. Others feel that the color of music and dance is exemplary of the basic social system characteristic of a given culture.

The earliest traces of music in native Africa are found in dances of worship. No matter what form of religion is practiced, music takes an important part in the ritual. Consequently, many of the dances are related to mystic rites. For example, the dances may deal with fire, sickness, or tutelary dieties. The nature of the ritual is determined by the tribal customs and the value it places upon a given social entity. Some examples follow: "The mystical dance of the Bushmen is called nagoma by the Basutas. This dance is for the ill. Among the Ewe tribes, dancing is a special branch in the education of both priest and priestess. They must be proficient in the

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<sup>3</sup>Robert A. Lystad (ed.), The African World: A Survey of Social Research (New York: Frederick A. Praeger Pub., 1965), p. 462.



art and practice for months in order to acquire the necessary agility."<sup>4</sup>

Apart from the religious, dances connected with ceremonies of state are attended by elaborate preparations and magnificent display, especially those that are held at the coronation of the kings. There are also festival dances. In the territory of Sierra Leone we find what is known as the Hammock Dance which is one of several festive dances. Another dance in British West Africa is called the ugowa, and is danced only at high festivals in Zanzibar.

African dance may vary from one geographical location to another but it invariably reflects the social organization for a given tribe or group of people, their customs, work and life activities. In Africa, as in other parts of the world, dance is possibly the oldest of the arts. It employs movement in steps, leaps and gestures which express feelings of joy, fear and love. In some places only women dance, in others, only men. Whatever the situation, dance in Africa focuses upon contemplation, introspection, and co-exists with music.

Again, according to Sachs, there are some generalizations concerning instruments that also deal with symbolism. Tubular

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<sup>4</sup>Maud Cuney-Hare, Negro Musicians and Their Music, (Washington, D. C.: The Associated Pub., Inc., 1936), p. 8.

instruments, since they are similar in shape to a man's sex organ, are said to belong to males for the playing. A mixture of symbolism results if, for example, a flute is globular instead of tubular. Sound, too, has a masculine connotation when it comes from an instrument which sounds harsh, aggressive or ugly. Most instruments played or chosen by women have a soft timbre.

In East Africa the drum is seen as symbolically feminine. In a few cultures of East Africa there is the belief that drums are equal to a round, domed enclosure, symbolic of earth, night, moon and milk which among these people are connotations of woman and the sexuality of the female. The drumstick is generally considered to be a phallic symbol in East Africa. The drums are struck with sticks made of human tibias, which also have a phallic significance.

There is considerable speculation, because much of the data is not precise, concerning the symbolic nature of African music, musical instruments, dance structure, costume and so forth. It is possible that further investigation will reveal this type of symbolism to be significant. Further investigation would seem worthwhile, especially since correlations such as these would lend themselves to the understanding of other aspects of human behavior as well.

## The Psychological Use of Music

The comprehension of the artistic processes of any society should involve the study of forms, of mental processes and of social value assessments. The following discussion may clarify this point. Among the Shona people of Rhodesia the basic meaning of aesthetics involves a close relationship to sense perception. Kaufmann has done some investigation into sense perception.<sup>5</sup> According to him the meaning of the various sense verbs throws light upon the relationship between aesthetics and sense perception in Africa: kuona means "to see," kubata means "to touch," kuravira means "to taste," and kunuhwa means "to smell." The only verb that includes "to hear" is more comprehensive in its meaning than the other sense verbs. It is kunzwa, and it means "to perceive by touch, sight or hearing; to understand."<sup>6</sup> Its meaning is very close to the basic meaning of aesthetics, and it involves perception through the use of all the senses to gain an understanding.

Hornbostel<sup>7</sup> showed insight into African music when he wrote that there is little that belongs to one sense alone. Movement can be

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<sup>5</sup>Robert Kauffman, "Some Aspects of Aesthetics in the Shona Music of Rhodesia," *Ethnomusicology*, XIII (September, 1969), p. 508.

<sup>6</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 509.

<sup>7</sup>Erich M. von Hornbostel, "The Unity of the Senses," *Psyche*

seen, touched and heard. It seems that touch is important to the understanding of African music. This tactile aspect of African music is one aspect that has long been difficult for Westerners to comprehend. For a long time it was thought improper by Euro-Americans to consider the tactile sense as part of aesthetic expression since it was associated with eroticism. There are several authorities who believe that the exclusion of the tactile sense has caused the gap in aesthetic understanding between other societies and the cultures of the West to exist.

The dance to music is another example of the tactile approach. "Tingu is the word that is sometimes used for the beating of a drum that is far away, and it is also the word that means 'to walk heavily.' Chikinya is a dance term that means 'to beat the ground with heavy steps.' This meaning, according to the Shona, shows that dancers are using the earth in the same way that drummers are using the membrane of a drum."<sup>8</sup>

Handclapping is close to drumming and is often used as a substitute for drums. Clapping is done by both children and adults who have not learned to drum. Clapping is very pleasurable to them, especially since it allows for active participation with the group.

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7 (4): 85-89, October 1927, cited by Robert Kauffman, "Some Aspects of Aesthetics in the Shona Music of Rhodesia," Ethnomusicology, XIII (September, 1969), p. 508.

<sup>8</sup>Ibid., p. 509.



There are some musical instruments which serve as examples of the tactile emphasis in Shona music. The vibration complex of each note of the mbira 'is enjoyed as a pleasant sensation, and thus each lamella (a membrane or skinhead) gives a different feeling to the fingers. The physical contour of thumb movements may be just as important as the intervallic structure in mbira music.'<sup>9</sup>

Contrary to the belief of many Western ethnomusicologists, there are Shona words for describing a work of art. "One of these is chiyavayo. It is used to describe a good, intelligent performance, a decorated pot, a well-told story, or a decorated house. The emphasis in the meaning seems to point toward the skill and intelligence of the one who is responsible for the work of art rather than the object itself. Such a person is called a nyanzvi, or one who is an expert in thinking, expressing or doing."<sup>10</sup>

"Creativity seems to be based on doing more than is necessary, and this is the point that is so often missed by those who accuse African art of being only utilitarian. Chiyavayo cannot be present without decoration or adornment. In the visual arts this is called kunangaidza or kushongedza, meaning 'to decorate, to render attractive, to beautify.' In music this same concept is achieved through manyawi,

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<sup>9</sup>Ibid.

<sup>10</sup>Ibid., p. 509-10.

meaning 'frenzy, excitement, exaggerated self-confidence which is expressed through variation and improvisation.<sup>11</sup> A musical performance will be plain without manyawi, just as a pot will be ordinary without chishongedzo (noun form of the verb kushongedza). Ululation is an important part of manyawi to show approval of the performer's skill or to encourage him to show more skill. The leaders of the musical performance are expected to add variation to the performance. But if one of the performers has the urge to express his feelings appropriate to the occasion he is free to do so. In music or songs that have a very special meaning, this showy style is not used nor is it appropriate. The performers will experience deep feelings and the characteristic response is known as kudzamira, meaning "to be moved deeply."

Finally, the concepts of repression and compensation are considered to be mechanisms which are part of the psychological sphere of African music and which became part of the music of both the African and the American black man. It is considered therapeutic to bring repressed emotions into the open. This is so characteristic of the work song of Africa and the Negro spiritual of the southern United States.

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<sup>11</sup>Ibid.

The musician or the dancer has freedom to comment on social relations that, if made outside the context of the musical sphere, would result in the formation of hostilities. Songs of varied topics, explanatory tales or song stories with a moral help to describe the expected and proper behavior in the society. These are techniques of informal social control which require the use of artistic devices. This is one of the ways in which a spiritually healthy community is maintained among the Bantu.

Margaret Green<sup>12</sup> explains that when Ibo women are ready to judge a woman who is suspected of stealing from someone in the group, they use forceful or threatening rhetoric to insure that all the women attend the meeting. The style of the rhetoric makes reference to the destruction of any woman's sex organs by insects if she does not attend the gathering. Under normal conditions such things as this would not be said. Merriam<sup>13</sup> tells of the manner in which girls on a coffee plantation in the eastern Congo express grievances which had been troubling them for some time. The song lyrics, which are directed only to the plantation owner, provide a store of information which in

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<sup>12</sup>Robert A. Lystad (ed.), The African World: A Survey of Social Research (New York: Frederick A. Praeger, Pub., 1965), p. 465.

<sup>13</sup>Lystad, loc. cit.

any other situation, could not be obtained. The existence of this type of musical system, the performers and their function help to make clearer the expected behavior and give some insight into the social organization of the society.

The song texts listed in the following examples<sup>14</sup> give an idea of the nature of the songs and the varied topics with which they deal:

(A song of love)

### SPITE

Deny me everything I want of you, beauty!  
 Deny me your body as much as you like.  
 Refuse it!  
 The maize your people eat are human eyes.  
 The cups from which your people drink are human skulls  
 The potatoes your people roast in the fire are human fingers  
 Refuse me as much as you like  
 Deny me everything as much as you want  
 None but me would be willing to have you!

(A song of war)

### THE OATH

Take take aim and shoot  
 Spread out in order to fire well  
 Let him who smokes follow the smoke of his gun  
 We only live to serve you, king of beads,  
 When we face an army of heroes  
 We have nothing to fear  
 We shall be invincible

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<sup>14</sup>Examples cited in this section refer to African Songs of Love, War, Grief and Abuse, by Leon Damas (Ibadan: Mbari Publications, 1961), pp. 13, 24, 28, 36.



We shall be undefeated  
 We shall be like the buffalo who cannot be lost  
 In the midst of sheep.  
 We shall arm ourselves with guns to kill them  
 We shall equip ourselves with swords to kill them  
 All together they will die  
 And there will die more than one  
 For we shall be armed with guns to kill them  
 The blood will flow in fountains  
 Heads will be cut off  
 What noise our stamping feet are making already  
 All together they will die  
 And there will die more than one.

(A song of grief)

#### OLD WOMAN'S LAMENT

Diosse has said to me  
 Diosse has said to me the old one  
     Let me let me escape from the dilemma  
     Go and plead with the white men who forced me into it  
     Go and plead with their soldiers  
     Go and see the shore of the dried up lake

But I the old one  
 I the old one say  
     Diosse has not fled but he has well and truly  
     Diosse has well and truly lost his honor  
         Samba has fled  
         Which makes me believe that the whites  
     Whatever you say  
         Are brave

I the old one  
 I the old one say  
     Samba is afraid  
     Samba is afraid of the fear of whites  
     Samba is afraid  
     Samba of Massantola is no longer a man

The sisters of Samba  
 The sisters of Diosse have told me  
 The sisters have told me the old one

Samba and Diosse have declared war  
 Have declared war for nothing  
 They have caused their friends to die  
 Caused them to die for nothing

But I the old one  
 I the old one say  
     I have no more son  
     I have nothing to bite  
     Nothing to bite with my teeth  
     I shall have nothing to carry  
     Nothing to carry on my back  
     For I am old

But we  
 We the sisters of Samba  
 We the sisters of Diosse  
 We tell you old mother  
 We tell you  
     Do not cry  
     Do not cry good old women  
     We shall marry  
     We shall feed you

Do not cry  
 Do not cry good old woman  
 And leave them  
 Leave Samba  
 Leave Diosse with their misdeeds.

(A song of abuse)

### CUCKOLD CONTENTED

My wife told me  
 I go to the market  
 I too went to the market  
 Where I did not  
 Where I did not find my wife  
 My friend has told me  
 I go to my shop  
 Where I did not  
 Where I did not find my friend  
 Walking at the beach

At the end of the day  
 I see the friend  
 Stretched out  
 On top of my wife  
 With a thrust of my knife  
 I could have certainly  
 Certainly killed him  
 If he would not just in time  
 Just in time have awoken

Just to give  
 To give me five pounds  
 Five pounds which I took  
 And taking back with me  
 Taking back with me my wife  
 Because the water takes off the scent  
 The scent of love  
 And money doesn't smell  
 And money smells of nothing.

In song, as well as folklore, a great deal of metaphor is used. The music is demonstrative, highly emotional and is characterized by freedom and lack of restraint.

The words in the songs are usually grouped in short phrases, which are usually repetitive in both melody and text. In the majority of the songs, the repeated verse is changed only by references to kin, friends or to other acquaintances. Secular songs are often difficult to understand and to translate because much of the meaning is implied and translation causes much of the original meaning to be altered or lost.

In addition to the above mentioned songs, a study of the classes of songs of Ghana is especially interesting because of their validity.

## Ghana: Classes of Songs

"The provisions of categories of songs for performance by exclusive bands of men or women is a common feature of musical organization of Ghana."<sup>15</sup>

Nnwonkorɔ. The songs under nnwonkorɔ are considered to be fairly old and therefore traditional. They are sung by traditional popular bands.

There are local variants of individual nnwonkorɔ songs. In text and over-all form the songs generally remain the same but an ending phrase, for example, sung in one locality may be varied in another.

Nnwonkorɔ are sung mainly by adult women (for young girls and adolescents there are nnwonkorɔ songs of nteewa and asɔ). They are generally sung for entertainment and fun. When night life in an African community is bright and gay, friends may call one another out to some open area and sing to them. If there is an established nnwonkorɔ band, the leaders of the community call the members of the band to the street to perform. Nnwonkorɔ may be sung sometimes at a funeral by those who attend, not because they feel gay, but because

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<sup>15</sup> Examples cited in this section refer to Folk Songs of Ghana, by J. H. Kwabena Nketia (London: Amen House, 1963), pp. 31, 37, 45, 49, 75, 77, 83, 103, 133, 169, 195.



they feel it their duty to sing in honor of the deceased who may have been known to enjoy such songs.

The themes of nnwonkor center around loved ones, relations, prominent men of the area, living persons; or they may be sung to the memory of deceased persons. "If your uterine sister is a member of the nnwonkor band, your name never gets lost."<sup>16</sup> This maxim refers to the fact that one will always be mentioned in the songs by his sister when it comes her turn to lead the singing.

Even though nnwonkor are described as songs of pleasure, they do not always reflect a happy mood. There can be allusions to absent friends or longing lines which express blame, hope, disappointment, despair, insult, satire or even death.

Love, as a rule, is not dwelled on as a theme. Interest may be in the loved one, for instance, his personal attributes or his absence or presence, but not idyllic love. Occasionally, oblique references are made to sex in some of the songs.

The dance which accompanies nnwonkor is actually a simple movement. It is done "in place" and is characterized by stylized mannerisms. It is not elaborate choreography.

Nnwonkor songs are usually performed in a meter of six regular beats, or in two groups of three.

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<sup>16</sup>Ibid., p. 17.

Yaa Nyaako, you are a stranger here.  
 This occasion is in honor of the stranger whom we bid farewell.  
 We shall give her leave to depart in three days.  
 Behold, an obere; behold, an obere  
 See where the horned snake lies.

Stranger, Yaa Nyaako, you are a stranger here.  
 This occasion is in honour of the stranger whom we bid farewell.  
 Nana Antoben, let us see her off slowly,  
 And give her leave to depart in three days.

In the preceding song, any name can be substituted for the term Yaa Nyaako. Obere probably refers to a snake which implies something bad or evil.

I sleep long and soundly:  
 Suddenly the door creaks.  
 I open my eyes confused,  
 And find my love standing by.  
 Mother Adu, I am dying.  
 Adu, kinsman of Odurowa,  
 What matters death to me?

In the above song love is likened to death because one can be literally "killed" by love. When someone likes something to a point of obsession the Akan say that he has been overcome by it. Hence instead of saying: "love stands yonder," one can say "death stands yonder." In the fourth line any name can be substituted for the word love.

Nankwaa,  
 It was my love and I.  
 My love and I were together:  
 But he has gone somewhere.  
 Though my love is not here,  
 The sky is overcast;  
 He will surely come back.

A cloudy sky is a sign of rain. A downpour of rain in a hot climate can be very refreshing. A cloudy sky is, therefore, used in this song to denote hope, that is, the hope of seeing an absent friend.

Look out!

Do not tread in the footprints of  
your enemy.

Dragonfly Gyasi Apire,

Look out!

Lest you tread in the footprints  
of your enemy.

What good is such a person?

Look out!

Lest you tread in the footprints  
of your enemy.

He is bent in ruining you.

Look out!

Lest you tread in the footprints  
of your enemy.

The above song is self-explanatory. The "enemy" is obviously a person of false character.

Assadua. "The creation of new musical types for 'popular' use is encouraged in African societies. Among the Akan in Ghana much music types come into vogue every few years and are then abandoned by creative individuals for a new one; mpe, dwae, sobom, adakam and osode were at one time dances popular throughout the Akan area. Now they are only found in isolated places. Assadua . . .

is in the line of popular creations.<sup>17</sup> 18

Assadua is fairly recent in origin. It is not certain how this dance type got its name (literally Assadua means "tree of a sweet berry"). It is thought of as a dance for pleasure and enjoyment. It may be played during recreation or whenever people feel gay. It can also be played at funerals if the mourners want it.


Performances of assadua are given by assadua bands, members in associative relationship, usually young people. The membership is predominately male, even though some women may join as dancers. The singing and drumming is done by young men but older men may be asked to join as patrons in order to give the performance social standing. Attitudes toward assadua vary and can range from gay to satirical to sensual. Individuals may be praised, criticized or insulted. The barren woman, the spinster or the chief may form the subject of its text as can love, sorrow, or joy. Since assadua is constructed mainly for dancing, the songtexts appear to lack poetic depth.

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<sup>17</sup>Ibid., p. 68.

<sup>18</sup>Music and dance forms which are popular with the youth do not last long. The average life of new popular music and dance is between five and seven years. As new creations become popular, the older ones are abandoned. When people grow older, they become less and less attached to the popular music of the youth. Sometimes, however, they cannot help looking back to the music and dance they enjoyed in their youth. Through the young people, they attempt to revive it.



The performers of assadua do not take turns singing as is done in nnwonkoro. The recognized cantors do all or most of the solo singing. Unlike many categories of songs, assadua are usually sung in one rhythmic pattern:  a basic pattern of alternating twos and threes.

Otiwaa, alas!  
 I mean Otiwaa.  
 Otiwaa, I am ashamed.  
 I am shamed.  
 Abashed, I trudge along  
 Around the corners of houses  
 Like a wretched pig.  
     Otiwaa, we went on a spree  
     But have returned.

The above example is in the nature of a popular song. It speaks of excesses, or the lack of moderation by a person who is engaged in recreation or amusement.

Whip-holder, witchcraft is evil.  
 If she gives me money, I will refuse it.  
 If she gives me cloth, I will refuse it.  
 Whip-holder.  
 Whip-user, witchcraft is evil.

This song was originally sung by devotees of cults. Its more recent interpretation describes a punitive god, a god that exposes witchcraft and all that is evil. It describes the determination of the god to punish all evil doers. We cannot be bribed with money or wealth.

Behold the barren woman.

Alas! Alas!

The childless woman.

Behold, behold,

The childless woman!

Alas! the barren woman.

Behold, behold,

The childless woman!

He-that-once-knew-you no longer  
knows you,

Barren woman.

Behold, behold,

The childless woman!

A quarrelsome woman lies in the  
sand,

Barren woman.

Behold, behold,

The childless woman!

A mere woman has shut herself up,  
ashamed to come out,

Barren woman.

Behold, behold,

The childless woman!

He-that-once-knew-you no longer  
knows you,

Barren woman.

Behold, behold,

The childless woman!

She has made the hunter remain on  
the tree,

Trapped, entangled.

Behold, behold,

The childless woman!

Alas! Alas!

The barren woman.

Behold, behold,

The childless woman!

This song is typical of insinuations that are made in assadua songs. The childless woman is made fun of instead of being pitied. It is the general attitude of the Akan toward having children that makes this possible. In the past, barrenness was considered to be a curse.

Adowa. Adowa is performed by bands of predominantly female choruses and is probably the most frequently performed. There are two varieties of adowa. They are found inland and on the coast. The first type is accompanied by just one drum and gourd rattles. It is performed on special occasions like the festival and the funeral. The other type of adowa is accompanied by a large drum ensemble instead of rattles. Adowa is performed largely for the funeral but may also be performed on other occasions.

The funeral provides the most common situation for performing adowa as practiced by the Ashanti of Ghana. When adowa is played "all the dead who played it in the past come and join."<sup>19</sup> "If we leave out adowa," according to one native lady, "we are not inviting the dead to the festival. We never play adowa frivolously, only to call the dead."<sup>20</sup>

The female lead of the adowa has a very important place in the community and is often an elderly lady or a close counsellor

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<sup>19</sup>Ibid.

<sup>20</sup>Ibid.

to the queen mother. She is not only a good singer and a poet but she is also a person who understands tradition and is familiar with the local history. When the queen mother wants to call the women together, she calls the adowahemmaa, the "queen" of adowa, a very influential woman who is head of the band of which many women of the community belong. "She is expected to give leadership in both singing, rejoicing or any type of musical life for which there is no organized band set aside in community life. It is this close relationship between the queen mother and the adowahemmaa, the queen of adowa, that has given adowa players in some areas the character of the queen mother's musicians. The queen mother is one of adowa's most important queens."<sup>21</sup>

Adowa often deals directly with the funeral, death, the queen mother, and the queen of adowa. The songs may also deal with matters concerning the state and one's allegiance to it.

There is generally no fixed rhythm pattern, just durations of syllables in music.

Kwagyansa, I cannot sleep any longer.  
 Let "Fine boy" accompany me  
 To the funeral celebration.  
 Kwagyansa, I shall not sleep any more.  
 Allow me to go to this funeral of mine.



Kwagyansa, I cannot sleep any more.  
 The queen's funeral,  
 Let me go to this funeral of mine.  
 Kwagyansa, I shall not sleep any more.  
 Allow me to go to this funeral of mine.

This song deals directly with the important areas of adowa music: the "Queen Mother" of Ashanti, death and the funeral.

Yiadom Konadu Mansa,  
 Please call the queen for me.  
 A child of Obos is called Konadu,  
 the Queen,  
 Please call her for me.  
 Hurrah!  
 The Queen of old,  
 The Queen of old,  
 Call her for me.

This is about the "Queen Mother" of Ashanti. Obos literally means "stone." This refers to the town Mampong Ashanti which is otherwise known by the expression "where the stone wears down the axe."<sup>22</sup> The word "old" here is used to refer to someone in an ancient line of succession to a throne.

Apoo. "The songs in this section are selections from those performed during the apoo ceremony of the Brong-Abofe region of Ghana."<sup>23</sup>

The attitude of those who participate in apoo shows that even though this music offers a large amount of pleasure, the appeal of

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<sup>22</sup>Ibid.

<sup>23</sup>Ibid., p. 144.

apoo is strongest in the verbal expression. A great deal of dramatic expression is employed in the performance of apoo. "The word Apoo means 'something that is whole or of one piece' . . . apoo refers to the year, a whole that has finished."<sup>24</sup>

The verbal action embellished by the music constitutes the most important element of expression. The content of apoo is concerned with the annual festival and the worship of the god Ntoa, who by tradition is worshipped in the manner of apoo. The festival is an annual affair, practiced mainly in the areas in which Ntoa is worshipped by the whole community. The importance of surrendering to this god is readily stressed in the songs. All the worshippers of Ntoa are proud of their god. They all address him in kinship terms and call themselves children of Ntoa. They may refer to him as "one who owns my head and neck."<sup>25</sup>

Apoo is always an occasion for the renewal of the faith, and the reassurance that Ntoa is a live and vital force in their lives. There are apoo songs of welcome, joy, and songs declaring the love of their faith. Private worship of Ntoa is practiced by individuals throughout the year, but on the day of festival, Ntoa is worshipped and apoo is celebrated by the state as a whole.

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<sup>24</sup>Ibid.

<sup>25</sup>Ibid., p. 145.

Songs of apoɔ are usually short, repetitive and have no fixed rhythmic pattern.

Go and find out if I know him.  
 Go and find out if I know him.  
 Go and find out if I know him.  
 Father Ntoa.  
 Go and find out if I know him.  
 Ntoa, that owns my head and neck,  
 Go and find out if I know him.  
 Ntoa, King of Wankyi,  
 Go and find out if I know him.  
 Ntoa that owns my head and my neck.  
 Go and find out if I know him.  
     Adodoo,  
     Adodoo went to eat.  
     Krampire, Ntoa-mono,  
     We bid you welcome.

The above song asks the question: "How much faith do I really have in this God, Ntoa? Since he is the controller of my fate, I must put all trust in him."

The state is not yours:  
 It belongs to Sekeyre.  
 Asamoa, like the keg of gunpowder,  
 Asamoa, the keg of gunpowder  
     standing amidst guns,  
 It is chief, Kwasi Sekeyre  
 The state of Mampon is not yours:  
 It belongs to Sekeyre.

Owuwu Sekeyre is a departed chief among some of the Ashanti. The words in italics may be changed or substituted according to the discretion of the singer. The song describes the importance of one's respect for the government.

Ntoa, it is he.  
 Father, chief of helpers.  
 It is he.  
 Ntoa.  
 It is he.

Giver of daughters,  
 It is he.  
 Ntoa,  
 It is he.

Father of Kwaa Amoa.  
 It is he.  
 Ntoa,  
 It is he.

Father of Apea-hene,  
 It is he.  
 Ntoa,  
 It is he.

This is simply a song of the faith and belief in the god Ntoa.

I cry out for the valiant one  
Opanin Kwaku, our elder.  
 I cry out for valiant Kwaku.  
 Leader of the host, precious one,  
 Come to us.

The little god-like child is ill.  
 Noble one!  
 Noble one, I suffer alone.

Alone, Adu.  
 Help! Adu!

The god-like child is a person of noble blood, the chief, a child of the chief or an immediate relative. Adu is used in the sense of a helper, benefactor, or friend.<sup>26</sup>

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<sup>26</sup>Ibid.



## Exemplary Musico-Social Situations Amongst Various Bantu

Music is important to Bantu Africa in many ways. It allows large numbers of the population to participate. It is integrated with other aspects of the culture that are not understood outside of that context. Indeed, it is a part of almost every aspect of society.

The following five discussions describe various uses of music in Bantu Africa.

The drummers of the Akan. In the Akan society all the important drumming is carried on by individuals or groups of individuals selected from the male section of various communities. "Drumming, then, is the business of a few individuals in various communities holding the office in the state, or appointed by common consent of a band or an association to perform for all because of the skill, knowledge and reliability they have shown. Correlating with the principal agencies of drumming, there are drummers of popular bands, drummers of associations and drummers of the state. The drummers and indeed all others who drum in Akan societies, perform not when they feel like it, but rather when directed by custom and tradition or by corporate interest, e. g., the interest of bands, associations, village and town communities or states and chiefs for whom they drum."<sup>27</sup>

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<sup>27</sup> J. H. Nketia, "The Role of the Drummer in the Akan Society," African Music Society, I (1954-57), p. 34-35.

All drummers, regardless of their stature, are unpaid artists even though they may be highly trained. Some drummers are considered to be more important than others, but socially all drummers are considered to be keepers of the language and music of their culture and so they are encouraged to give freely and willingly of their talents. In popular bands much responsibility is given to the drummers. In matters of state drummers are expected to live off the bounty of the chiefs and to remain at the court of these chiefs as much as possible. No matter what the event, the cooperation of all grades of drummers is important to the success of the occasion. Drummers are protected by the community during their performances. They are not to be interfered with while they are drumming. "A drummer in the act of drumming is considered a sacred person and is immune from assaults and annoyances, nor must they be interrupted; they are not as a rule regarded as sacred persons, but while engaged in the actual act of drumming, they are protected by the privileges of sacred persons."<sup>28</sup>

There are said to be strict forms of etiquette practiced by the drummers and toward them by others. Society gives drummers the special privilege of making remarks or observations that would not otherwise be made outside the context of music. The drummers can also make remarks to the chief which may not be said by anyone else.

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<sup>28</sup>Ibid., p. 41.

All agencies, chiefs, singers, or dancers whom the drummers serve are expected to be courteous to the drummer and visa-versa. The difficulty of the work of the drummer lies not only in the skill and knowledge required to be a good drummer but also in the fact that at all levels he must work in cooperation with others. Even though the drummer gives freely of his time, it is really considered a privilege to associate with the chief in the bringing off of a ritual or recreational event. The drummer is an indispensable person in certain forms of social life. He promotes both the dance and music as a means of individual and social expression among the Akan.

The Bashi Mulizi flute and the cattle songs of the Belgian Congo.

In the Belgian Congo the Bashi Mulizi flute is used in connection with cattle. It is the instrument of the cattle herder, and the music produced by it is reserved almost entirely for the cattle. "The Mulizi, while under no specific set of rules and regulations, may be played either when the herder is out alone, or in a company, with his cows, in which case it is played for his own pleasure, or at feast times when others are present, for the general amusement."<sup>29</sup> In the music of

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<sup>29</sup> Alan P. Merriam, "The Bashi Mulizi and Its Music: An End-Blown Flute from the Belgian Congo," Ethnomusicology, XIII (September, 1969), p. 144.

the Bashi Mulizi flute the reference is almost often to cattle and cattle herding.

There is also vocal music which deals with cattle. A song may describe feasting which follows the discovery of the carcass of a cow which has died; another song tells about two herders who quarrel and threaten each other over who takes better care of his cows; a third song describes the instructions the chief herder gives his subordinates in regards to proper care of the cows; or tells of daily morning activities of a chief herder.<sup>30</sup>

Musical organization among the Adangme. Among the Adangme, the musical content of any celebration is not entirely organized just for the sake of music itself. It is very important that the music should be set to the needs of the situation.

There is special music for the funeral, music for the birth of twins, music for puberty celebrations, music for annual festivals, music for particular gods as well as music for recreation. There is a contextual organization of musical forms and types; and each social event of the year calls for a different program of music. "There is then a variety of musical forms in use of Adangme communities. On the one hand there are forms of Adangme origin such as Klama (with

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<sup>30</sup>Ibid., p. 145.



the sub-categories Maa, Me, Nimeli a do, Ohue, Sabe, Tegble, etc.). Ogbe, He on the other hand and those of non-Adangme origin such as Asaa, Adowa, Adenkum, Atia-Agbeknor, Kple, Obonu, reflect the interaction between Adangmes, and their Ghanaian neighbors."<sup>31</sup>

The organization of the musical forms is based not only upon the significance of the occasion but also upon the needs of the participants. Since the social needs of women, men, young and old vary, then the nature of traditional Adangme provides for age-sex grouping of performers. There is musical style for the young as well as the old. "For example there are two styles of performing the music of Oleeno. One is used by young people and the other by older people (Nimeli a do) while another section (Hae) is the music for young girls who have completed their transition into womanhood."<sup>32</sup> They perform the rites of Dipo or Otufo. The music of Ogben is performed by men to the accompaniment of drums while Oleeno and Nine are largely women.

Not only is the content of the music organized but also its performances. Most social situations in the Adangme society do not require that the music be wholly improvised or spontaneous. Usually

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<sup>31</sup> J. H. Nketia, "Organization of Music in Adangme Society," African Music Society, II (1958-61), p. 29.

<sup>32</sup> Ibid., p. 30.

the music for a given occasion has to be led by someone or by a group of musicians who belong to a social group which specializes in a particular type of music.

Performing groups exist in the form of associations. They may be: musical associations or "popular bands," religious associations, heroic associations, or political associations. Each association specializes in the music of its particular interest. For instance, the birth of twins on three consecutive occasions (regardless of whether or not they survive) entitles a woman to become a member of the Tegble association. This group admits those who perform deeds of valor. She will join them in future performances.

Kinship groups may also have their own musicians who are responsible for performances at all kinship ceremonies, especially those dealing with the life cycle. The music which these groups perform may be familiar to all but they still may specialize in other forms of music of their own creation. Even though other people may, in the course of time, become familiar with these lineage musical forms, only those members of respective kinship groups are authorized to perform them.

Adangme music is organized in many details. The varied types of musical forms created for a given performance function as integral parts of such occasions. Since specialization and individuality are encouraged, everyone in the society can make a contribution to the

musical life of their communities. Specific musical tradition is carried on. The strength of the Adangme music lies in the tradition of bringing "all aspects with social action and in the assignment of roles and responsibilities to individuals and social groups within the society."<sup>33</sup>

The Basongye funeral. Among the Basongye a major funeral cannot take place unless musicians are present. It is the musicians who are actually responsible for consoling the relatives of the deceased. The professional musician appears after the body has been interred and is counted upon by the mourners to perform several functions. The funeral is structured so that the professional musician is a non-involved but participating by-stander helping to express the tensions and emotions of the relatives. It is the musicians' role to help the mourners forget the tragedy of death. After the musician arrives, people smile and joke and begin to dance for the first time. There are other persons in the society who are capable of performing these functions, but as the funeral is presently structured it is the musician who performs the function. He is the most important figure in the funeral. The absence of the musician would cause the entire structure of the funeral to be markedly changed.

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<sup>33</sup>Ibid.

Among the Basongye, musicians are considered to fall low in society. It is not considered well to aspire to become a musician but the people still say that they would not care to be in a village where there is no music or musicians.

The Basongye: Drum-making and social structure. Merriam gave a vivid and detailed description of the phenomena of drum-making among the Basongye people of the Democratic Republic of the Congo.<sup>34</sup> They have lived in the Eastern Kasai Province of the Democratic Republic of the Congo since the fifteenth century. This field observation took place in 1959 and occurred over a period of ten days.

Simple observation led Merriam into many areas of exploration, all of which possessed varying attitudes and levels of interest and relationship to the situation. The event which Merriam described was not only ethnomusicological but led to the discovery of a great deal of varied information.

Music instruments are generally made by musicians or ex-musicians and the work is considered, by those in the society, to require special ability. Almost everyone though, can take some part in the making of a drum.

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<sup>34</sup> Alan P. Merriam, "The Ethnographic Experience: Drum-making Among the Bala (Basongye)," Ethnomusicology, XII (January, 1969), pp. 74-100.



It is believed that the presence of the observer tended to speed up the making of the drum. Had the ethnographer not been present, the drum-making process would have probably been extended over a longer period of time. This may indicate that drum-making is either not a very important process or that work patterns do not involve long periods of concentration for a single task.

Work patterns differ sharply from those of the West and industrialized world. The Bala neither keep regular hours nor perform tasks which are to be completed by a given or specified time. The work of these people is less regular and less formalized. Some of this is due to the agricultural cycle which affects life among the Basongye at different times in the year, but most of this informality is the general pattern. Activities in the day are constantly different. This is also true of allocation of work for a given period of time.

Once the drum-making process started, the villagers, after they know this work was taking place, began to join in on the making of the instrument. As people gathered, those who were interested began to participate because: the pooling of labor is commonplace in this society; many Basongye were eager to try to make a drum because they were genuinely interested to see one being made (some did not know how to make a drum and others had never seen one made); the pattern "having watched you do it, I could probably do it better than you," is a strong point in all aspects of process in any material

culture and is also true of the Basongye; work patterns are group patterns in the sense that a substantial number of persons all contribute their skills to a project which could actually be performed by one skilled man at any given time.

From this experience other work patterns emerged: The drum-making activity became the center for short periods of relaxation for those resting from other labors. Many people came and went, but stayed for only short periods of time. No one smoked while he worked, but engaged in this activity later. Smoking is considered to be a leisure time activity, not one to be combined with work as in Western society. Those who were involved in making the drum were not idle. Those who had work which could be brought to the site did so, and they did not lose any labor. They simply made it more pleasurable by accompanying it with a congenial working group and situation.

Phenomena concerning work patterns also gave Merriam information concerning children's games, taboos, real and idea behavior, technical information such as types of woods and sources of colors, linguistic information, terms for parts of the drum, ideas of Europeans, concepts involving design, learning by imitation (a strong learning pattern), friendship, and jokes. Practically all of these items require study in themselves, but all are direct or indirect phenomena of this drum-making process.

The process also turned out to be a very good methodological device. Social life and rapport were established since the activity of drum-making is considered to be a harmless activity, not one of taboo. Merriam was finally able to establish himself as a member of the community by overcoming several varied social hurdles.

This event describes the interrelatedness of a human culture, but it also gives much information about the culture and the society. The implications extend far beyond the knowledge of just the music of the Basongye people.

## CHAPTER V

### IMPLICATIONS

What has been said about the place of music in Bantu Africa can be applied to many other countries which treasure their folk music and present the example of linking the child, as an individual, to the musical culture of his society as he is helped to understand, perceive, and discriminate in his personal musical growth. Keeping this thought in mind, one may discuss the place of authentic folk music in music education, that is, folk music considered as a culturally valid musical idiom that the educator must include in his overall program and as material that, if used in a systematic way, can contribute in specific directions to the musical education of the child and to his breadth of knowledge, understanding and range of acquired skills.

In the parts of Africa which have been discussed, composers of popular music are finally beginning to turn to their indigenous folk songs for creative material for new musical ideas. Despite these developments, and despite the fact that a great deal of material is available, music specialists and others similarly involved with music in both Africa and the West still do not seem to have come to grips with folk music.



No program of music education that sets out to be comprehensive can ignore areas of musical activity that are entrenched in the life of a society that is recognized as culturally valid. Hungary is an example of a people in the West who have made considerable progress in this direction. By employing the folk idioms characterized in the native music of his country, Zoltan Kodaly has been instrumental in causing Hungarian music to become identified with the customs and institutions of musical education in Hungary, and a common acceptance or identification with a musical language whose roots are in Hungarian culture exists in that country today. Here, the use of folk music in education is regarded as a means to an end, that is, understanding and love of the great classics of art music of all times.

Africa and several Asian countries represent areas in which folk music is practiced as an unbroken tradition. On these continents folk music is still a living music integrated with community life. Much can be learned from contextual organization, conceived in Africa, for example, on the basis of sex, age or associations. In Africa the music system is already constructed in such a way that provides a basis for selection and grading for school use. The folk music of a country may represent not only a heritage of individual items of music but also a musical heritage that speaks its own kind of language; music that has a distinctive vocabulary of its own, evident in its choice of scales, use of modes, characteristic emphasis on particular intervals,

cadential patterns, melodic contours, meters, and rhythmic combinations as well as in its vocal techniques and singing style.

The folk music of Bantu Africa is characterized by or possesses some of the following attributes. They are related, in varying degrees, to a person's education and social growth. These attributes involve the preparation that gives the child the confidence and the readiness for participation in the musical life of his community: (1) It includes songs, instrumental music, combined instrumental and vocal forms, movement which goes with instrumental techniques, and movement demanded of singers in different situations; as well as dances (taking into account their organization, costumes, use of masks, make-up, etc.); the oral literature which forms an essential component of folk music; and of course, the body of social and cultural traditions that govern the practice of this music, including contextual organization. (2) This music cannot properly be studied in isolation. Bantu music follows a tradition which correlates music with dance, language, arts and crafts and drama wherever possible. Music learning is translated into a meaningful social activity. Story-telling is an example of this. The training of the child in the music of his tribe is expected to result in a person who functions as a chronicler of the society. He is expected to show a command of language and to possess the ability to use the traditional proverbs and maxims of his society. He is also expected to have a knack for saying the right

things at the right moment in his songs. (3) The song repertoire is both interesting and educational in a way in which, through the experience of singing, it introduces to all people, beginning at childhood, step-by-step learning of the vocabulary of the language in folk music. (4) Bantu music employs a variety of scales and possesses a variety of simple musical instruments such as idiophones, membranophones, chordophones and aerophones. (5) Bantu music fosters and nurtures the virtues of oral tradition. It does not disregard the development of good ears, musical memory, and the ability to imitate, on which so much depended in the past. It is valuable as a useful tool of learning and encourages creativity, especially in performance by developing aptitudes for and skills of improvisation.

The African approach makes folk music the basis as well as the material of music education. It may be used as a framework for the realization of the individual. It regards folk music as something distinct, vital and worthwhile in itself. In most Western countries, the musical life of communities revolves around a small number of musical institutions, that is, the organized ways of fostering musical cultures that concert halls, theaters, conservatories and the like represent. Both the learning process and performance are institutionalized, and special facilities are provided for each of them. In societies with institutions of this nature, the use of music in other



contexts merely extends the range of opportunities for making and enjoying music.

The music education programs of a country in which musical life is promoted through musical institutions will naturally have an institution oriented approach, and the musical experiences offered to the child will tend to be based on adult models in the society as a whole. Although educators are conscious of the need to adapt such models to suit the level and interest of children, there is nevertheless a tendency to think only in terms of adult models and to regard the musical life of the young as a pale reflection of adult musical life that will get brighter and sharper as the child grows up. There is a tendency to underrate the child's own efforts that reflect the place music rightly occupies in his life and that need fulfillment and progressive development as he takes his place in community life.

A different set of problems exists in communities of the non-Western world, especially in those places in which ethnicity provides a basis for group action.

In traditional Africa music is regarded as a form of community experience. It is the social occasion that provides the outlet for the performing arts. The concepts of leisure and of the place of music in this society are quite different from that held by Western countries, and it poses a number of problems for the music educator in contemporary Africa.



In Africa, as in Western countries, there are also different musical publics in the community which support music and which tend to cluster into different interest groups. As previously stated, some musical types are associated with the community as a whole, others may be identified with social groups within it. Social groups are distinguished on the basis of their kinship affiliations, or on the basis of their common activities or common interests, and each of them may be identified with a particular musical type or a set of musical types.

The opportunities given to children to participate in adult musical activities are in addition to those that society provides for their own activities. Due recognition is given to the fact that children have a social life of their own and that they like to play together, make music together, and tell stories to one another. Hence, there are traditional songs they learn to use as well as others that they make up themselves. The participation of older children helps the younger ones acquire the traditional stock of musical items.

Because music-making is so much a part of community life, the primary objective of musical training is to prepare the individual for his musical roles in community life, that is, his role as an instrumentalist, a lead singer, or a member of a chorus. Participation in one capacity or another is always expected of a member of a social group when the group assumes the role of a performance

group. Finally, there are very clear expectations of the breadth of knowledge required of those who take on leading roles.

A community oriented musical life and its system of music education are well suited to traditional Africa. It seems likely it will continue to be valid if the sense of community continues to be as strong as it is in present day Africa.

It is clear from the changes that have already taken place as a result of the impact of Western culture and technology on Africa that musical life that depends solely on informal processes of enculturation for its survival cannot endure the pressures of the modern world. In a community oriented music education program for contemporary Africa, therefore, it is necessary that the learning process be systemized and organized on some formal basis.

It is evident the two approaches discussed have both strong and weak points when considered in relation to life in the community or in relation to the development of the individual. Many Western countries with their highly developed institution oriented music education programs do not appear to be sufficiently community oriented at the present time. On the other hand, while Africa is strong in its community oriented approach, it is weak in its institutional approach to the development of the individual.

The music educators of Africa (and other non-Western countries) and the West can learn from each other. What this statement

suggests is a unified approach to music education in all societies, involving very close collaboration between two groups of educators: those responsible for the education of the youth in schools and similar institutions, and those responsible for the arts education of the general public and the community.

## CHAPTER VI

## CONCLUSION

Many things are now being learned about Africa. It is recognized the great majority of Africans are not really "savages"; they possess an adequate civilization and culture, primitive only to us; they possess a folk literature that is rich and full of variety; and they possess an art and music both of which are highly demonstrative, historically significant and aesthetically sound.

In the Western world, the study of music has often been confined to the study of Western music only. However, there is some indication that this preoccupation with studying only what is culturally familiar is changing to a study of music that is wider in scope and of world significance. Western music occupies a dominant, place in the study of the world's music, but this is only a part of the story as, for example, the history of Europe is to the rest of the world. All music, despite its diversity, contains a touch of universality, and while Western music has its fair share, it does not have an absolute monopoly.

Since the beginning of the twentieth century, there has been an increasing interest in the examination of music from other cultures in an attempt to relate that music to its particular culture. The



underlying theme in recent conferences of the International Society for Music Education has been to seek a deeper understanding of world music by increasing the perspective. The study of different musical cultures has largely been an area for the specialist, and the average music educator has remained unaware of the work being carried on.

Ethnomusicologists have studied the various types of non-Western art music, the music of the primitive societies, and to some extent, the folk music of the world. Since ethnomusicology is a mixture of musicology and cultural anthropology, they have also examined music as a cultural phenomenon. The difficulties for the investigator are obvious. A person trained in the technical investigation of music is generally not well prepared for the anthropological aspects, and vice-versa. To examine musical traits of a culture and to ignore anthropological features, or the other way around, would be to move outside the realm of ethnomusicology. Alan P. Merriam considers these factors to be necessary for the complete study of the music of any given culture; the training of musicians; the uses and functions of music in the culture and the examination of music as part of the creative cultural activity of the group under study.

Bantu Africa affords numerous instances of cultural contact such as Arabic and Indian, distinct from the West. In all parts of the continent, the end of war, the expansion of trade, the appearance of all types of transportation, industrialization, migration, urban

living and mass communication have increased contacts and interchange between peoples of different cultural backgrounds. These factors have brought together Africans who were formerly separated by distance of hostility. Africans are learning customs, dances and music from each other. New forms of music and dance which draw on several African traditions and which manifest some European influence are developing.

During the last twenty years, particularly since political independence, popular music has been developing in Africa. This new music is on the radio, in nightclubs, and in dance halls in the urban areas. It is a synthesis of Western and African styles, materials and instruments. Because of urban migration, many different ethnic groups contribute to the new musical genre. The styles change constantly and are subject to the moods and attitudes of each country.

Because of the multitude of the ethnic groups and cultures and the lack of thorough research, knowledge of African music is very limited. The need for studying in this area is immediate. Several authorities predict that many of the traditional songs and instruments of Africa will have all but disappeared within the next thirty years. The traditional African music training of the past, which requires a retentive memory and highly developed powers of observation, imitation, repetition, and participation, is gradually giving way to more formalized training. Today Africans are studying music at home and abroad. Highly trained musicians, such as

J. H. Kwabena Nketia of Ghana and Fela Sowande of Nigeria, have made tremendous contributions to our present meager knowledge of the art. Valuable contributors from all parts of the world, such as A. M. Jones of Britain, Alan P. Merriam of the United States, and Hugh Tracey of South Africa, have also served to bring attention to African musical life.

Most of the continent of Africa is in a constant state of flux. Situations such as this and others in different parts of the world provide innumerable opportunities for the study of cultural change while it is taking place; opportunities from which anthropology and musicology can both benefit. What we learn about change in music will contribute to our understanding of change in culture as a whole.

Let us hope that the study of African music will continue to expand, for a full understanding and assessment of African life and culture would be incomplete without it.



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