

## BOOK REVIEWS

"AN ATTEMPT TO A KINYANKORE CLASSIFICATION OF MUSICAL INSTRUMENTS", by PAUL VAN THIEL, W.F., Review of *Ethnology*, No. 13, 1969, pp. 1-5, Institut für Völkerkunde, Vienna University.

Father van Thiel has here attempted a novel way of classifying African musical instruments — by the verbs used to indicate the action made to sound the instrument. The Ankole apparently use four: *okuteera* — to hit, *okugambisa* — to make speak, *okushungura* — to shake as in winnowing, and *okubonda* — to stamp.

From a practical point of view, it is a pity that so many of the Ankole instruments happen to fall under the first heading, 13 out of 20. There are five in the second group, and only one each in the last two. This, to me, diminishes the usefulness of the system. A second point is that the author does not mention to what extent, if any, the Ankole themselves conceive the classification of their instruments along these lines. This must surely be an important consideration.

Having classified the instruments under these headings, the sub-headings follow the Hornbostel-Sachs system, which I happen to find inadequate for describing many African instruments, but that is beside the point. What is important is that van Thiel has used African terms as a basis for classification — an approach that is, and should become, the direction of movement in Afro-musicology.

ANDREW TRACEY.

"THE STUDY OF PRIMITIVE MUSICAL INSTRUMENTS. Brief notes on some existing approaches and systems of classification", by DAVID RYCROFT, Review of *Ethnology*, Volume 1, 1969, No. 14, pp. 1-8, and No. 15, pp. 1-5, Institut für Völkerkunde, Vienna University.

David Rycroft comments upon different methods of classification of primitive musical instruments.

The primary object of any classification system for musical instruments is to reveal the intrinsic physical nature of the instruments concerned and so provide a standard of comparison for musicologists and others which can be readily understood. Either too simple or too complex a system will defeat its own ends but should be tempered to the range and complexity of the instruments to be studied. An ideal system would not only state clearly the *physical* properties of the instrument but also give an immediate idea of the nature of the music produced from it.

The Hornbostel-Sachs system of classification, of which the author approves, has provided the basis for several systems adapted to local conditions. However, Rycroft's recommendations add little to the clarification of classification difficulties when dealing with the specialised problems of African instruments. This may be, in part, the unfortunate method the printers have employed in setting out his improved system. A field worker in Africa would perhaps have difficulty in determining exactly what was intended. In addition several important aspects of instrumental description are omitted, such as the number of strings, slats, reeds, etc., the kind of scale produced, whether penta-, hexa-, heptatonic, etc., and no provision at all is made for detailed description of Africa's common and widely varying musical instrument, the *mbira*. Without such indications embodied in the decimal system it might prove to be adequate for the casual or museum collector of instruments, but ineffectual and even misleading to the student dealing directly with the instruments themselves and the music produced by them.

There appears to be no good reason why a system devised for any particular part of the world should have to conform strictly to one devised for all instruments of the world seen as a whole, provided always that the local system is thoroughly logical and by its very nature readily translatable, when necessary, into the terms of a general system. In this respect Afro-musicology in particular is only one part of ethnomusicology and must first work out its own solutions before it can contribute fully and properly to the wider universal problems of all musics.

HUGH TRACEY.

## SONGS, DANCES, MIMES AND SYMBOLISM OF VENDA GIRLS' INITIATION SCHOOLS.

A series of four articles in *African Studies*, Volume 28, Nos. 1-4, 1969, by Prof. John Blacking, University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg. Part 1. Vhusha; 2. Milayo; 3. Domba; 4. The Great Domba Song. Total pp. 186, 32 pp. ill., 12 pp. music.

"Lured by the promise of witnessing ancient fertility rites, dark-skinned maidens dancing to the throb of tribal drums, we found ourselves at last in the fabled kingdom of the Bavendas . . ." Thus might have started, at any time in the last hundred years, a typical travel magazine article on the so-called "Python Dance" of the Venda of the northern Transvaal, the name by which it is known to tourists, travel agents and the average South African who has ever heard of it.

Like a reporter for the National Geographic, but never having visited the Venda in their home country, I set out rather on a journey of exploration through the forest of social, textual and musical description contained in this series of articles by John Blacking, with the question in the back of my mind — will this simply provide more fuel for the sensation-mongers? My report is that, for those dedicated people who will study this work in its entirety, it should certainly dispel the aura of exoticism, old-fashioned African romanticism and eroticism which have surrounded this particular African dance,