BOOK REVIEWS


Gerhard Kubik should be hailed for his perseverance in presenting his unique and original point of view. Already the most-published researcher in our field, long may he continue to write up his wide discoveries. If he is also idiosyncratic, no one so original could fail to be. This CD with booklet follows up on a small family of his previous publications on central African guitarists, always nourished in the background by his close relationship with the Cewa guitar music and musicians of Singano Village, Chileka, Malawi, and spreading from there to every country in central Africa.

Seven countries are represented here with guitar songs by finger-style soloists from Didier Mwenda, son of the renowned Jean Bosco Mwenda, to Acooli singer Faustino Okello to Daniel Kachamba of Singano and eight others. The continued inventiveness of acoustic guitarists is amply proven, still surviving after 50 years of competition from the electric guitar. What is also proven is Kubik's ability to found new areas of study and theory, justified by years of fieldwork on the spot.

Andrew Tracey, International Library of African Music

§


In 1960 and 1963 when I spent several months of fieldwork in Oshogbo and Iragbidi (a smaller town nearby), mostly working on the Òló story-telling Yorùbá tradition, bátá drums were hard to come across, the tradition was considered to be almost extinct. It was the article by the Timi of Ede, Laoye I “Yorùbá drums” which appeared in the journal Odu, 7 (1959): 5 – 14, that set the pace to a reversal of historical trends, and the tireless work by Ulli Beier, resident in Oshogbo, and Duro Lapido who later became well-known with his theatre plays. It is not by chance, therefore that Múrámà Òyèlìmí, one of the young men originally associated with Duro Lapido’s Mbari Club would be invited to the Iwalewa House, in Bayreuth (Germany) founded by Ulli Beier, to carry out studies of dundún and bátá; and Iwalewa House published his book Yorùbá Bátá Music: A New Notation with Basic Exercises and Ensemble Pieces, in 1991.

Amanda Villepastour took her first bátá lessons in 1998 from Múrámà Òyèlìmí, but she was critical of his work using TUBS notation (p. 127). A year later she travelled to Nigeria working in a variety of places, especially Òrùn-Òsùn, and making acquaintance
with several bâtâ drummers, among them Chief Alhaji Râbitû Ayândôkun who would eventually become her main collaborator, both in Nigeria and in the UK during her fellowship at the School of Oriental and African Studies, London. It was soon clear to her that she would not attempt to write another tutor for the bâtâ drum, but embark on an “analysis of the drummed speech surrogacy system and enâ bâtâ, the coded spoken language of bâtâ drummers” (p. 10).

So, what exactly is the meaning of enâ? — Villepastour writes (p. 91) that it “is a generic term for code-talking” and that it “implies some form of secrecy or exclusion of certain people...” Obviously, it is something like a set of expressions, with lexical items that have special meanings, that are group-internal. In a sense, languages by secret societies (although bâtâ is not part of any Yorùbá secret society, such as ogboni etc.) could also belong here, even “gang languages” in the West. It is however, important to understand that enâ bâtâ is not a special language as such, it is Yorùbá, but certain words are used with special symbolic meanings. As to the purpose of enâ bâtâ, the author of this study clarifies that “for contemporary alubatâ” (that is those who play bâtâ, the expert performers) “speaking enâ appears to be less about protecting ritual secrets and more about asserting a common lineage identity” (p. 91). A most important discovery by the author, resulting from her studies was that “enâ bâtâ encodes Yorùbá syllables with the vocables used to transmit strokes on the bâtâ” (p.91). A rudimentary scheme of these “vocables” or mnemonics is found on page 104.

Although the author modestly states that she was not someone with particular training in linguistics, the book is a most important contribution not only to the study of bâtâ message drumming, but to the study of the Yorùbá language, its representations on “talking” instruments, and many adjoining areas of research, including the organology of the bâtâ set and Yorùbá culture history in general.

Prof. Dr. Gerhard Kubik, Sigmund Freud University, Vienna

§


A survey of various catalogues and web sites reveals that there are a large number of books on Sufism and music. Many of them exploit the current fixation with esoteric spirituality in the west, while others pursue a direction, of which Qureshi’s (1986) pioneering book on Sufi music in India and Pakistan, is a significant example. Her book, Sufi Music of India and Pakistan: Sound, Context and Meaning in Qawwali, reveals the complex world of the Sufi movement and the role and function of music in worshiping and creating a community of listeners who draw on symbolic meanings, which may have preceded the advent of Islam in those countries. Qureshi’s book, the first western scholarly music ethnography of Sufi music, is all the more interesting since