

## 2. SOME DANCE STEPS FOR THE NYANGA PANPIPE DANCE

by

ANDREW TRACEY

These dance steps were collected during the last week of November 1990 at Moya Aliya Malamusi's home, Singano Village, Chileka, Malawi, from a small group of Nyungwe refugees from Mozambique. The leader of the group of six players was Sakha Blond, whose original home was Goba. They came across from Chifunga refugee camp, Mwanza, near the Malawi-Mozambique border, at Moya's invitation to stay for a few days. We all stayed together in Donald Kachamba's compound while I recorded and worked with them. I am grateful to both Moya and Donald for their hospitality.

Their Mozambique homes were the same central Nyungwe villages which I had visited in 1970 and 1971, Goba, Rego, Marakeza, Chimpanda, and their music was identical, to my ear, to what I had learned then.<sup>1</sup> I was able to join in with them without hesitation from the very first instant they began to play. Or perhaps before....even as the panpipes came out of their bag I was excited to find that twenty years and many hardships later they were still made with exactly the same distribution of notes, and I could recognise every one the moment I saw it or checked its notes. All the pipe parts were also substantially identical to the ones I had learned twenty years before at Matambo and Goba. Having been playing and teaching *nyanga* for all this time, it was like coming home.... My knowledge and appreciation of their dance led to warm relations as we performed together in the yard of Donald Kachamba's house or as they painstakingly taught me their repertoire of dance steps, communicating in a mixture of Shona, Portuguese, Nyungwe and Cewa.

Some of their dance steps (*nsambo*, plur. *misambo*) were identical in name and rhythm to ones I had learned, but this time I already knew all the pipe parts and could pay more attention to other aspects of the dance. My previous view of the dance steps had been over-simplified, taking into account mainly the *sound* made by the rattles on the right leg; this time I attempted to write down the essentials of the whole movement, including the non-sounding parts.

These Nyungwe refugees in Malawi now prefer to refer to their dance, and its instruments, as *ngororombe*, or *ngololombe* as written in Cewa. This is a general name for panpipes in southern Malawi, central Mozambique and eastern Zimbabwe, while *nyanga* strictly means 'horns'. They felt *ngororombe* was more acceptable to Malawians, as well as less risky for themselves, because horns are typically used to hold diviners' or sorcerers' medicines in Malawi and they did not want any confusion on that score! (See some of their song lines.)

The group at Matambo I worked with in 1970/71 numbered about fifty, with men on panpipes and women singing. This little group of only six players yet succeeded in making a very effective sound, and the enthusiasm and energy of their dancing made up for any lack of parts. In this they were comparable with some small expatriate *nyanga* groups I have seen from time to time in Harare who tended to make much more of the dancing,

<sup>1</sup> See my article "The nyanga panpipe dance" in *African Music*, Vol. 5, No. 1, 1971.

and use a faster tempo, than the huge groups I saw their home country in the more peaceful times of the early 70s.

They played these panpipes, in this order clockwise round the circle: *pikupiku* (Sakha Blond), *siyarena* (Azeite Timozo from Chimpanda), *vore* (Mario Pulazi from Goba), *kwarira mvuu* (Ernesto João from Rego), *pakira* (João Francisco from Marakeza), *jiriri* (also called *mbite*, Antonio Sakha, Blond's son, from Goba). Fortunately they had three spare pipes, *kabombo*, *gogoda* and *nyabziruzi*; I played *kabombo*, a 'ya-fu' pipe, i.e. one which plays in a 3-pulse motional pattern, and they insisted on my standing in the correct place in the circle, between *jiriri* and *pikupiku*, i.e. next to the other 'ya-fu' pipes, *kwarira mvuu*, *pakira*, and *jiriri*. (See my 1971 article.)

Their *gogoda* was an octave above those I described in 1971. They did not remember how to play *nyabziruzi*, and I felt particularly happy that I was able to pay back this bit of knowledge to them from their own tradition.

One of the first things I noticed when dancing with them was how close together they stood; you have to move accurately or you bump! One reason for standing so close, often leaning so their heads almost touched, is, I am sure, in order to enjoy better the crossing of the panpipe parts with each other. You always stand next to panpipes whose parts conflict maximally with your own. Another feature of their dancing was its great vigour, with plenty of leg tension, twisting and jumps onto both feet. And of course the humour implicit in the inventiveness of the different dance steps... always something unexpected! Refugee life, I gathered, was frustrating, because the many thousands of refugees in the camps had nothing to do. Most of them could not even plant crops, unless they disappeared quietly over the Mozambique border to do so, returning at night. Musical activities were a way of coping with the boredom. Other Nyungwe men who might otherwise have joined the *nyanga* group have joined the church, which apparently prohibits its members from taking part, presumably because of its occasional use for traditional rituals (see preceding article).

The six members of the group looked like a bunch of tough customers, their faces and bodies showing the strain of having lived under civil war conditions in extreme poverty, some of them for nearly two decades. Underneath their tough exterior were real musicians and dancers just the same, and their enthusiasm for their dance, and patience in making sure I took the movements down right were heartening and touching. They did not know if they would ever be able to return home.<sup>2</sup>

Ernesto João, who was fluent in Portuguese and was their scribe, had written the names of their repertoire of steps in a notebook. While actually dancing he held the book in one hand and either sang out the name of the next step to be danced, or else prompted Sakha, who was the lead singer. I have transcribed the steps in the same order as he wrote them in his book.

### The transcriptions

In order to fully understand these dance transcriptions and their relationship with the panpipe and sung parts, please refer first to my 1971 article mentioned above, which gives complete transcriptions of all the parts, panpipes, voices, etc. The musical cycle of

<sup>2</sup> Still today, nearly three years later, there is no sign of improvement in their situation.

the panpipes is 24 pulses long, and is then repeated, making 48 pulses. The lead singer then sings again for 24 pulses, while the dancers walk around the circle to the right using the 'waiting step'. Similarly most of the dance steps are one cycle long, and repeat in the second cycle, but note that in some others the second cycle is different from the first.

The 24 upright lines across the page show the 24 pulses<sup>3</sup> of the cycle. The three horizontal lines show movement in space in relation to the centre of the dance circle: the top line means move the foot in question *towards* the centre of the circle; the centre line means perform *in place* (not necessarily your original place, but where you now are), and the bottom line means move the foot *away* from the centre of the circle. In almost all steps the dancers face centre.

- A right-foot step with sound, often but not always with transfer of weight. The main, and most audible, *nyanga* dance step.

Only the right leg carries a leg rattle (*nkhocho*), on the back of the calf, made of small tins such as condensed milk tins, with small stones inside.<sup>4</sup>

**L R** A foot step, on left or right foot respectively, *without sound*, usually with weight transfer.

(Note that I have not transcribed all intermediate left-foot steps, or all points when the left foot continues to take the weight while other actions are going on. Mostly this is obvious when you come to do the steps.)

- A special '*nyanga* step', done with a slight jump onto the left foot, sometimes with a slight twist to the left as you land with knee slightly bent and tense, while pushing or sliding the right foot forward and striking the ground with it hard enough to sound the leg rattles.

This makes a softer sound, different from the main right-foot step. I consider it a left-foot step although it is done with both feet. I say this because firstly the dancers often omitted the right foot when they demonstrated this step out of the context of the dance, and secondly the one older member of the group who danced less vigorously simply made it a plain left-foot step.

- A two-footed step, jumping with equal weight onto both feet, with sound.

→ ← Move the foot in question to right or left.

———— Hold this position according to the length of the line.

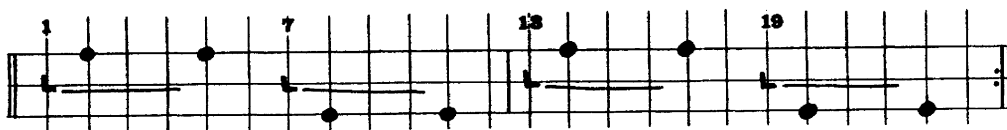
### 1. 'KACHAIRE' or 'CHAIRE' (no meaning)

A more detailed description here to start with; later steps should be more self-explanatory:

Pulse 1: left foot steps in place. Pulse 2: right steps forward with sound, but not full weight. Left remains on the ground in the meantime, continuing to take most of the

<sup>3</sup> Pulses, i.e. the smallest units of time generally recognised as the building blocks of much African rhythm, and variously termed basic pulses, Nennwerte, pulsations equispaciales, etc.

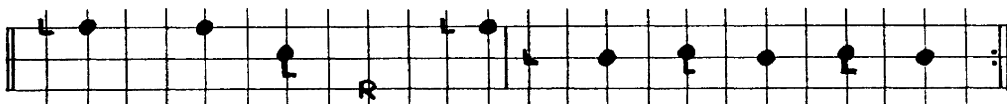
<sup>4</sup> The reduced state of the refugees came home to me when I found that they could not even get condensed milk tins for *nkhocho*; this was one of their urgent requests, not for the contents but for the tin itself.



weight until the next right-foot step on pulse 5, which takes full weight preparing for the next left-foot step on pulse 7.

This is used for starting. First they play the panpipes alone, then bring in the 'waiting step' (i.e. a regular 4-pulse step, see Step 22), then 'Kachaire', which they keep up until all necessary spoken words of welcome or introduction are over. They told me this was the original *nyanga* step, and could find no meaning for the name.

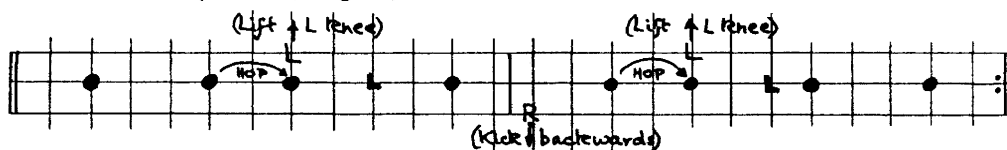
## 2. 'MITHWETHWE' (trees)



Here the left foot steps forward on pulse 1; right joins it for two steps. On pulse 7 the special '*nyanga* step' in place (NB. The fact that this symbol is on the middle line does not mean move back to your original place but perform in place where you now are), then a soundless step back with the right foot, left foot steps forward as at the beginning, and so on.

*Mithwethwe* are trees which wave back and forth in the wind.

## 3. 'FITIBORE' (football, English)



The steps on pulses 7 and 17 are done with a hop onto the right foot, lifting the left knee as if kicking a football. Pulse 13 is a backward kick without twisting the body, no ground contact.

## 4. 'KANDZOMBE' (ox)

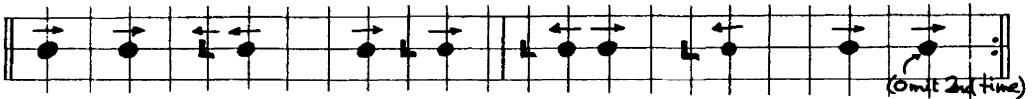


After the first two steps, left-right, hold that position for the next four pulses with knees slightly bent, and again on pulses 13, 14. Remember that the right-foot step on

pulse 7 is one in an outward direction from where you *are*, not necessarily from where you were at the beginning.

Several of these steps end you up out of line with the circle. No problem, you can get back into line during the lead singer's cycle which follows the two dancing cycles, when you walk round the circle to the right with your right hand on the dancer's shoulder in front of you.

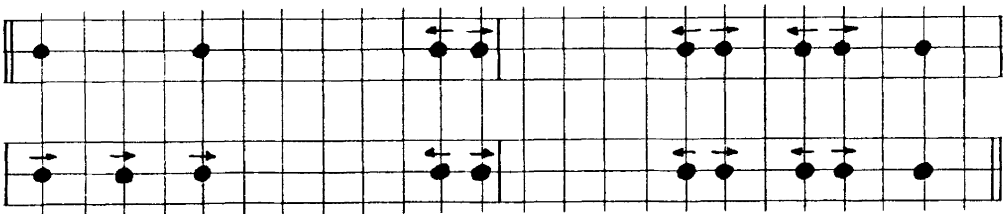
### 5. 'NTSOKOSOKO' (a bush fruit)



This brings in left-right movement. Consecutive arrows in the same direction, as in the first two steps, mean move your foot to the right, and then a little further the next time. The position on pulse 15 is knees wide apart. Conversely on pulse 18, both knees point left. Omit the last step second time through, in order to start the waiting step on pulse 1. (See Step 22 for how to place the waiting step)

A bush fruit, which when it falls "says *ntsokosoko*", it gets squashed under foot, and animals eat it. (see preceding article)

### 6. 'GATOMA' (Kadoma, town in Zimbabwe)



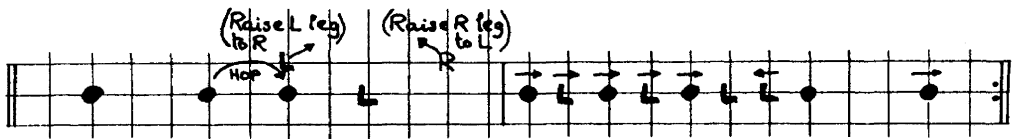
Has the same double left-right step as in Step 5. What you do in the long gaps, e.g. pulses 6-10 or 13-16, is up to you: although it looks empty it is filled, in African style, with just the right amount of body movement so you can swing into the next dance step, pulse 11, 17, etc. at exactly the right spot. Note that there is an extra step added in on the repeat.

The sound of 'marching' all the long way from Tete, Mozambique to Kadoma, Zimbabwe to look for work.

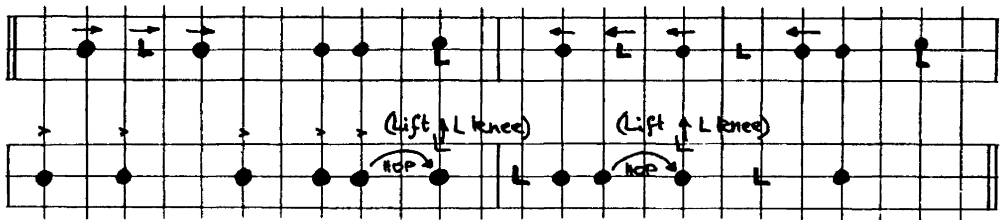
### 7. 'NYANG'OMBA' (bird, see preceding article)

A similar hop to '*Fitibore*', Step 3, but with the left knee raised to the right, then the right knee to the left. Sudden changes of direction like in the second half of this step are often done with a strong twisting motion, throwing the knees left and right.

*Nyang'omba* is a large bush bird, with yellow wattles, probably a hornbill. This humorous step comes from its movements when it sees food, they explained.



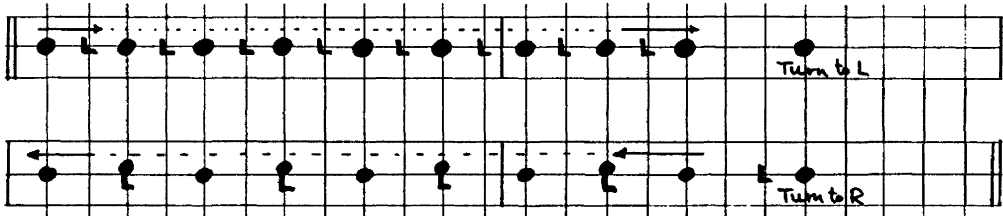
### 8. 'MALOMBO LUNEYA' (spirit, woman's name)



This step brings in the use of half pulses. If a symbol is written between two pulse lines it means that it is exactly half way between them. Only four steps in their repertoire used half pulses, Steps 8, 13, 17 and 18b, and here it is only a 'passive' half pulse, when the left foot, on pulses 3 +, 15 + and 18 +, steps exactly half way between two right-foot steps which are three pulses apart.

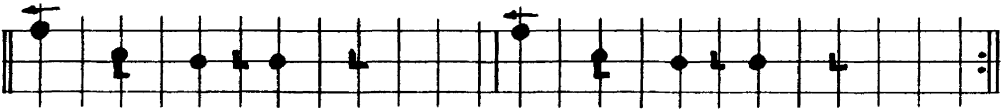
'Malombo' are a type of spirit often referred to as 'mashave'. Not ancestral spirits, they have specific connections with certain groups of people or animals, or with abstract human qualities, talents, skills. Luneya is a woman's name.

### 9. 'CARREIRA' (bus, Portuguese)



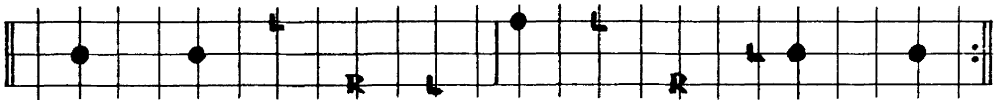
A bus, unlike a train (see Step 19), "keeps stopping, running back and forth between places". Here you move continuously to the right up to pulse 17, turn on pulse 20 ready to go back, move left up to pulse 17 again, and turn right on pulse 20 ready for the walk around while the lead singer sings.

## 10. 'KATEWERA' (trap)



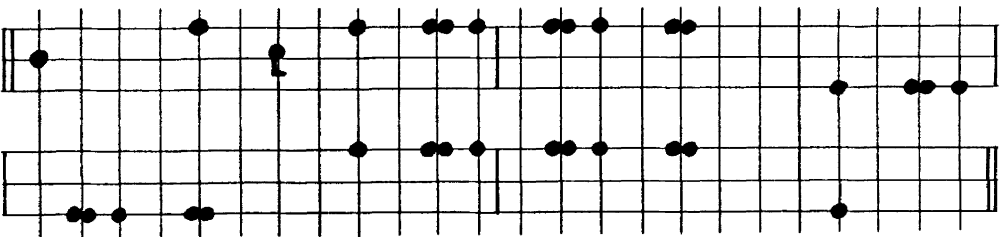
In this step the *'nyanga step'* on pulses 3 and 15 has more emphasis on the right foot than in other steps. It is also slid a little further along the ground in front of you than usual, with more of a jump onto the left foot. (Yet even here they omitted the right foot when demonstrating.) The step represents the movements of an animal with its foot caught in a metal trap.

## 11. 'KATERERE' (okra)



A different step here on pulse 7, where the left foot is placed on the ground far towards the centre of the circle, without weight. Remember that the three lines do not show positions on the ground, but in which direction you move.

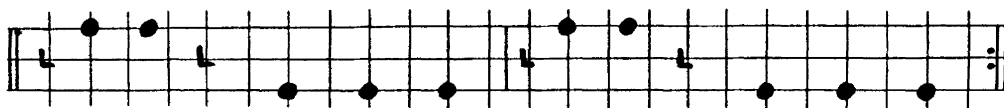
## 12. 'MARIYU MAKATE' (pelvic thrust, woman's name)



Another new step here on pulse 11, 14 etc, where you jump equally onto both feet, immediately followed by another right-foot beat. Keep moving forward (resp. backward) slightly through these phrases, e.g. from pulses 9 to 17, 21 to 5 etc. I find this step tricky because its clever phrasing does not fit exactly into one cycle, it crosses over into the beginning of the second cycle.

*Makate* is a woman's name. *Mariyu* as I understand is a pelvic thrust, as for instance when a man and a woman are dancing together in other Nyungwe dances. They come together at times and both thrust. The forward and backward motions in this step may represent this.

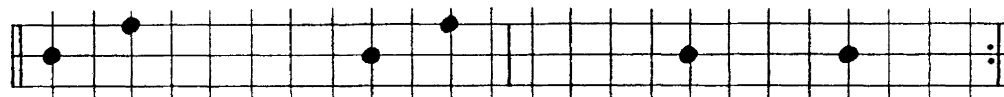
## 13. 'CHITOWE' (sesame)



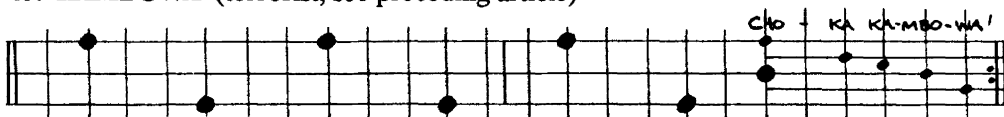
"You must move fast!", they said, referring to the rhythm of the first two right-foot steps, where the second one, on pulse 3 + , falls between the pulse system of the panpipes. As in some of the other steps, and not always transcribed, the left foot merely fills in between the main groups of right-foot steps.

*Chitowe* is described as Port: gergelim, i.e. sesame, a low bush which is cultivated for its seeds which are ground up to give oil.

## 14. 'MASARAZI' (a bush fruit)



## 15. 'KAMBOWA' (terrorist, see preceding article)



On pulse 19 stop playing, turn inwards or outwards, perhaps towards a particular dancer or member of the audience, crouch over your panpipe as if shooting a gun, and sing "*Choka, kambowa!*", Get out, terrorist! For the pitch of the singing refer to my 1971 article, written E being the last note of the panpipe cycle.

*Kambowa, chigawenga, gandanga* are synonyms, all meaning as far as they are concerned the Renamo soldiers who are the direct cause of their exile. This was the only dance step which referred in any way to the war in Mozambique. But some of Sakha Blond's solo song lines touched on it, e.g:

*Kutama kunamarodza ningona kuponi?*

To move home is disaster, where shall I sleep?

*Kuna mai koko kokoliko, o kutama kunamarodza ndatama kwawene*

Here is grandmother (cockcrow), oh to move home is disaster,

I have moved to a strange place (i.e. Malawi)

*Ntenepo ndipo kulikwatu mungadawona nimbagwa marombo*

It's like this, if it were at home you would have seen me be

possessed by *marombo* (spirits)

*Da licença, ndipo akulumwe, tatokoza aKamuzu mwabzibva alumbwana?*

Excuse me, gentlemen here, we thank Kamuzu, do you hear, men?

*Moyo uno ndipo ngwa Kamuzu, ningadakala Mosambiki ningadafa*

This life is Kamuzu's, if I had stayed in Mozambique I would have been dead

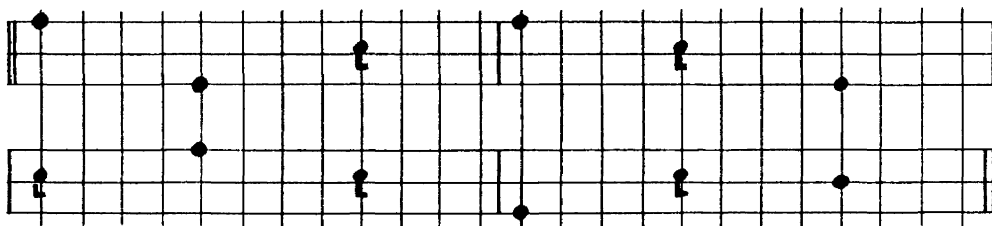


And on the topic of the name of the panpipes:

*Kuna mai pomwe, mundzarewa nyanga nyanga, nyanga nja mankhwala*

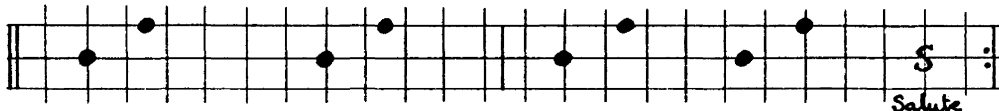
Here's my mother, you will say *nyanga* are *nyanga*, but *nyanga*  
are for medicines

### 16. 'KUPURA' (to grind)



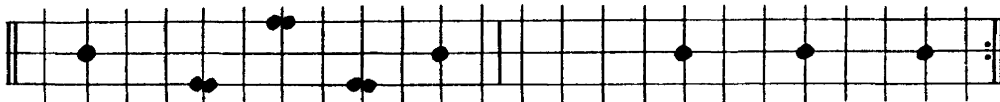
This step imitates the forward and back action of grinding on a grindstone.

### 17. 'CONTINÊNCIA' (salute, Portuguese)



This step is used for greeting dignitaries, such as administrators or generals. It gives them a "bom dia!" (Portuguese: Good day!). On pulse 23 salute military style with your free hand, no matter which. Watch out for the two steps on pulses 18 + and 20, they come earlier than you might think.

### 18a. 'KUTUNDA' (to urinate, men)



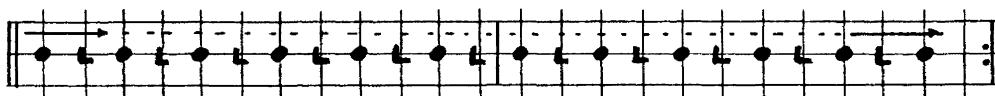
A humorous impression. On pulses 5, 7 and 9 both feet jump together, with sound, legs together, knees slightly bent.

### 18b. 'KUTUNDA' (to urinate, women)



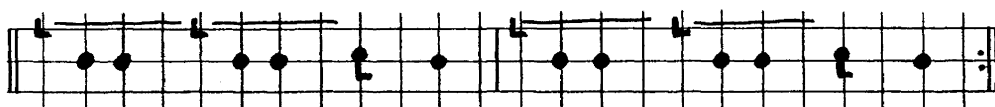
The same thing, women's version. Same jumping action, but now with half-pulses. Hold the position at pulse 9.

## 19. 'COMBOIO' (train, Portuguese)



A train "just keeps on going, far without stopping", unlike a bus (Step 9). This step keeps on going round to the right, with only a brief pause at the end of the cycle.

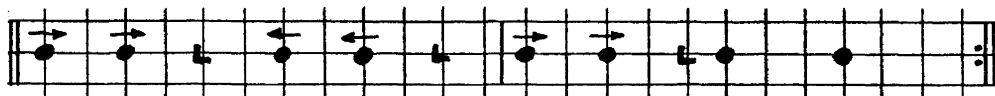
## 20. 'KUGWEGWERUKA' (to stub toe)



Put the left foot down in front on pulse 1, and keep it there for the right-foot steps, done in original position. It only returns to place for the 'nyanga step' on pulse 9.

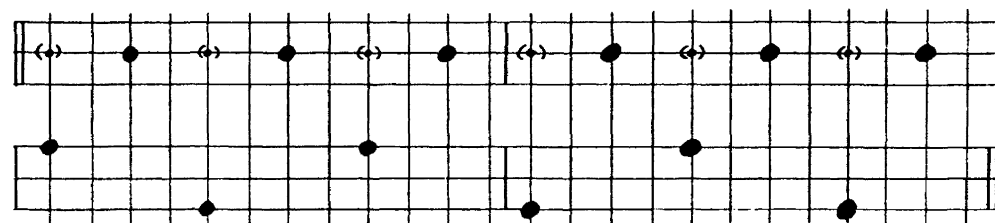
*Kugwegweruka* refers to stubbing your toe and stumbling on a stony road, *mai-we!*

## 21. 'NJIRA ZAWANDAWANDA' (many paths)



"Many paths, people just walking anywhere, in the street, getting run over by cars..."

## 22. 'NYAKANYAKA' (commotion, confusion, trouble)

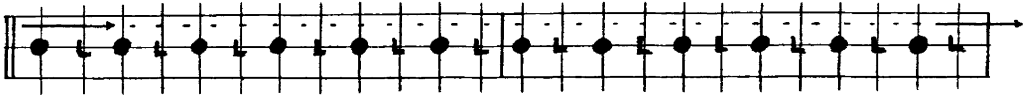


Immediately on the first pulse the circle breaks up, each dancer moving in and out and around at random, doing twisting or other movements ad lib. After this planned confusion the dancers come back into place by the first beat of the second cycle, and hit pulse 1 as shown, whichever 'waiting step' they had been doing before.

The rhythm of the foot-steps in the first cycle follows on without change from the 4-pulse 'waiting step' which the dancers do during the lead singer's cycle. The waiting step can either be on the large notes, or on the small bracketed notes. This in turn depends on how the step before that ended. If for instance it ended four pulses from the end of the cycle, i.e. on pulse 21 (as in '*Njira zawandawanda*', Step 21 above), the waiting

step would start on pulse 1. If it ended only two pulses before the end of the cycle, i.e. on pulse 23 (as in '*Kutunda*', Step 18 above), the waiting step would start on pulse 3. In any case, after the first time through '*Nyakanyaka*', which ends on pulse 21, all remaining repeats of this step would start on pulse 1.

### 23. ENDING STEP



This is a continuous dance to the right, much like '*Comboio*', Step 19, but with no stopping at all. It is done about six times in a row, to end off the occasion.

### CORRIGENDA

- Vol. 5, No. 1, 1971, p. 84 in Andrew Tracey: "The nyanga panpipe dance", part No. 10, Magunte, is out by one pulse. All the notes should be written one pulse-line later, in the manner of part 20, Mbecho. Correspondingly near the bottom of p.78 Magunte should be moved to the 'PAUSE' column.
- Vol. 6, No. 4, 1987, p. 173, in Notes and News, line 5 of paragraph starting "Gradually it has been possible...", replace the word *jando* with *lupanda*.
- Vol. 7, No. 1, 1991, p. 87 in Andrew Tracey: "Kambazithe Makolekole and his valimba group: a glimpse of the technique of the Sena xylophone", the following text is missing at the bottom of the page:  
(zither) and *nsansi* (mbira), in respect of octaves, and of consistent patterns repeated in each octave, and (2) there is a noticeable preference for intervals from about 150 to