

## CHOICE OF MUSIC FOR FESTIVALS IN AFRICA

by

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One of the most significant developments in the sphere of music in Africa today is the increasing popularity of Music Festivals. At most of these both African and European music is sung. In Kenya three major Festivals are held each year, one in the area of Lake Victoria, another in Nairobi, the capital of the Colony, and the third at the coast. In recent years considerable attention has been paid to the choice and treatment of African songs for performance at a Festival and the selection of the best music from the West.

### CHOICE AND TREATMENT OF AFRICAN SONGS

The most suitable African songs are those commonly sung by a leader and chorus, of which there is an almost infinite number and variety. Very often the song will be in a vernacular which will be understood by only a section of the audience and consequently it should rely much more on melody and rhythm for its interest than on the text. It goes without saying that a translation of the text should be given to the adjudicator before the performance.

There are some delightful African songs which are however too short for performance at a Festival. Very often it is possible to join two or three such songs together but there are certain important principles which must be borne in mind when this is done. The text of the various songs should obviously deal with the same or kindred topics and it is best if the melodies show some contrast in colour. A musical pattern known as Ternary Form in Western music is a very suitable system to adopt in linking different songs together. The first song 'A' is followed by the second one 'B', after which 'A' is repeated in the order A - B - A. This can be extended into what is known as Rondo Form in which any number of songs could be joined together in the pattern A - B - A - C - and so on. The group must always end with 'A'.

The question of the addition of unsuitable harmonies to African songs is mentioned elsewhere in this Journal. Few choirmasters can resist the temptation to add another part a third above or below the melody, but this can become very tedious. In the classical development towards part singing, both in Europe a thousand years ago and in contemporary African music, the first step has been a system known as Organum in which different voices sing the same melody four or five notes apart. This practice is found today for example amongst the Wasukuma and Wanyanchusa in Tanganyika and also incidentally in Icelandic folk music. It would add interest to the performance of some African songs at Festivals if organum could be introduced combined perhaps with unison singing. If four parts are used the original melody could be put in the second part, another being sung a fourth above and two below, one a fifth and the other an octave. Dr. Scholes writing in the Oxford Companion to Music says of Organum that "Performed by voices in good tone and a flexible manner, and with the plainsong (melody) emphasized above the accompanying parts . . . these strings of consecutives are, to most ears today, far from unpleasant".

The introduction of an instrumental accompaniment can add considerable colour to the performance of an African song. It may be a drum, a rattle, or some other traditional percussion, stringed or wind instrument. The guitar is almost certain to prove unsuitable as it will employ foreign harmonies and rhythm. At the Nyanza Music Festival in Kenya this year, the winning choir in one section gained first place very much on account of the clever use of a stringed accompaniment.

Any elaborate dance will obviously not be in keeping with a Choir Festival but some movement need not be out of place during the singing of an African song. Occasional hand clapping or tapping of the feet, possibly combined with the use of ankle bells would be entirely natural. At a recent Music Festival for African Women's Clubs in Kenya, the winners sang a perfectly charming threshing song and they threshed away their canes as they sang.

Light and shade in the performance of any song adds interest to it and in the singing of an African song, the spirit of the words may indicate that some parts should be sung louder than others. A good crescendo leading to the climax of the song is often most effective but it will certainly demand good control of the breath. On the other hand no liberties should be taken with the rhythm of an African song.

#### SELECTION OF EUROPEAN MUSIC FOR AFRICAN CHOIRS

Mention is made elsewhere in this issue of the fact that with regard to the choice of European music for African choirs, it is that of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries which is most suitable, because of its strong rhythm and clean intervals. An alternative is the music of fairly modern composers, for the same reasons. A list is given below of suggested European music for African choirs. That marked with an asterisk has either already been used in Festivals in Kenya or it has been set for 1956.

#### TWO PART 1st and 2nd Soprano.

- \*Nymphs and Shepherds .. Purcell (1658-1695). Arranged Keighly. York Series 1081, Banks & Son. (Staff and Solfa).
- \*Cradle Song .. .. . Schubert (1797-1828). Arranged Morecroft. York Series 1458, Banks & Son.

#### THREE PART 1st and 2nd Soprano and Alto.

- \*As torrents in summer .. .. Elgar. Trios 517. Novello.
- The Nightingale .. .. . Weelkes (1575-1623). Trios 200. Novello.
- How merrily we live .. .. Michael East (1606). S & B 2021. Stainer & Bell.
- \*Now is the month of Maying Morley (1557-1603). PS233, Stainer & Bell.

#### THREE PART 1st and 2nd Tenor and Bass.

- \*How merrily we live .. .. Michael East (1606). S & B 2461, Stainer & Bell.

#### THREE PART Soprano, Alto and Bass.

- \*Where'er you walk .. .. Handel (1685-1759). Arranged Finlay.
- \*Ho Ro my Nut-Brown Maiden Traditional. Arranged Finlay.  
Both these songs come from Choral Songs for  
Schools, Bayley & Ferguson.

#### FOUR PART Soprano, Alto, Tenor and Bass.

- \*Laudate Nomen Domini .. Tye (1497-1572). M.T.94, Novello.
- \*Almighty God .. .. . Ford (1580-1648). Sh Anthm 122, Novello.
- \*Jesu the very thought is sweet Vittoria (1535-1611). No. 879, Novello.
- If ye love me .. .. . Tallis (1505-1585). Tudor Music 69, Oxford  
University Press.
- \*Silent Worship .. .. . Handel (1685-1759). No. 61358, Curwen.
- \*The Farmer's Daughters .. Traditional, Arranged Williams. No. 61193,  
Curwen.
- \*Sheep Shearing .. .. . Folk Song, Arranged Sharp PSB 1094, Novello.

- \*Waltzing Matilda . . . . . An Australian Song. Arranged Wood 790 Mixed Voices. Oxford University Press.
- Linden Lea . . . . . Vaughan Williams. No. 138, Boosey & Hawkes.
- \*Fain would I change that note Vaughan Williams. PSB 1030, Novello.
- \*Little David, play on yo' harp Negro Spiritual. PSB 1535, Novello.
- FOUR PART 1st and 2nd Tenor and 1st and 2nd Bass.
- Waltzing Matilda . . . . . An Australian Song. No. 362, Allan's, 267 Collins St., Melbourne.
- Silent Worship . . . . . Handel. No. 50755, Curwen.
- FIVE PART Baritone Solo and Men's Chorus (T.T.B.B.)
- \*Peter, go ring dem bells . . . Negro Spiritual. Orph 637, Novello.
- Swing low, Sweet chariot . . . Negro Spiritual. Orph 632, Novello.
- Were you there . . . . . Negro Spiritual. Orph. 635, Novello.
- All the above three Spirituals Arranged by Granville Bantock.
- Shenendoah . . . . . Sea Shanty Arranged Richard Terry. 50690, Curwen.
- FIVE PART 1st and 2nd Soprano, Alto, Tenor and Bass.
- \*Sing we and chant it . . . . . Morley (1557-1603). S & B 1367, Stainer & Bell.
- FIVE PART Soprano, Alto, 1st and 2nd Tenor and Bass.
- Now is the month of maying Morley (1557-1603). S & B 1367, Stainer & Bell.
- FIVE PART Solo and Chorus of Mixed Voices (S.A.T.B.).
- Shanty Choruses . . . . . Arranged Geoffrey Shaw. 61364, Curwen. A selection of 16 songs.

All music marked with an asterisk should be well within the scope of a moderately competent choir, with one exception. The three part arrangement of Elgar's 'As torrents in summer' proved too difficult for most of the girls' choirs in a Festival in Kenya this year, although one choir gave an exceptionally fine performance. The other two works for 1st and 2nd soprano and alto are certainly not easy. In the list of music for four parts the only possible difficulty that might arise would be with the time in Tallis' 'If ye love me'. Richard Terry's delightful arrangement of Shenendoah for baritone solo and men's chorus would be beyond the reach of many choirs but any other piece of music mentioned in this list could be chosen for a Festival with confidence that given choirs of average ability, it would be well sung.

Elsewhere in this Journal there is a report of a music course conducted for some 120 choirmasters in preparation for one of the Kenya Festivals. Wherever possible it is essential that this kind of help should be given to choirmasters so that they may thoroughly understand the music which their choirs will be required to sing. It is difficult to see any other way in which progress in performance can be made. It is quite certain that in Kenya these courses have had a remarkable effect on the standard of musicianship shown at the Festivals and a much wider appreciation of the scope of musical study has resulted.