

more usual 4ths/5ths; and once you have 3rds you are on the way to harmonizing—for the interval of a 3rd is the basis of all block harmony. Some of these people even discovered how to resolve a discord: e.g., a dominant 7th, 9th, and even 12th dropping to the tonic triad (G, F, A and D, resolving to C, E, G.) I have heard canoe “pullers” sing such a resolution, and then, after a G. P. of two or three strokes, sing it again, and so on, *da capo*, repeated over and over again for several hours, matching the monotony of the mangrove swamps we were penetrating. The effect was hypnotic, and even ecstatic. Vertical harmony of this character is rare in primitive Africa.

My last memory is of a procession from Abua to the neighbouring village of Egbolom. Having had the honour of being appointed an honorary Chief, I was wearing my robes—a kind of grey flannel ‘nightie’, plus clerical collar and white topee (very smart!) I and the local clergy walked under a giant umbrella; the Women’s League followed behind carrying a large silk banner on two poles. We proceeded under the juju arch (designed to keep out evil spirits) and through the cassava fields beneath the tattered leaves of banana trees. The ladies provided the band—mostly tomtoms and pepper-pot rattles, with which they measured out a phrase in three/four time: “*Dum*, ticker ticker”. This had to synchronise with two marching steps, yielding a persistent cross-rhythm. Against the “*Dum*, ticker ticker” we sang an exultant melody in four/four time, the words of which meant: “The angels clapped their hands and shouted, Blessed be the name of God. Ye-i-ye-i-ye” (count 5 steps in silence) “Ye-i-ye-i-ye” (count 6 steps). Repeat *ad lib*. For myself, I was so preoccupied with trying to fit in the rhythms and counting the pauses, that I didn’t notice the distance, and soon we encountered the procession from Egbolom which had come to meet us. What happened then, and how the newcomers tried to embrace me, is not a musical memory and need not be recorded in this Journal.

It was usual in those days for missionaries to condemn African music as “rooted in paganism”. No; it is rooted in the psycho-physical nature of the African people. If the people are pagans, then their singing and dancing are indeed mixed up with skull worship, ritual murders, human sacrifice by torture, and ancestor propitiation. But if they look to the Lord, then (like David) they dance before Him. The African Music Society, which is using its influence to keep African music in full flood, is of inestimable value in helping us missionaries to understand the African’s essential nature and spiritual needs. I said just now that Religion and Music were the two main folk-interests of Nigeria. They must go hand in hand.

THE ATILOGWU DANCE

by

MERCEDES MACKAY *in collaboration with* AUGUSTINE ENE

This dance is now being seen quite frequently in London and some other European cities, and is especially welcome to those interested in African culture. For years the more serious minded of us were not permitted to see the virile West African dances in their original form because it was feared by their African exponents that they would give the impression of being “primitive” in the derogatory sense of that word. But a better form of nationalism is now evident, with splendid musicians like Ghanaian Philip Gbeho, and Nigerian E. L. Lasibikan proudly showing African culture to the world in its untampered form. Africans are becoming less ashamed of a naked torso than a Scot is ashamed of his naked knees and thighs when he dons his traditional kilt.

It is lucky that this Atilogwu dance is being currently performed by a young Ibo called Augustine Ene who has studied it thoroughly and insists on being accompanied by his own special recordings of the music. Thus his movements are all perfectly timed to the music, and he is not at the mercy of the vagaries of musical groups which are not always easy to come by in England. It is a pity that the audience cannot see the musicians and their instruments, but this is very specialised music which few students in this country would be able to play. Mr. Ene has had his records specially recorded for him in Eastern Nigeria by the Nigerian Film Unit, and he holds the sole copyright.

The dance originates in the Udi Hills near Enugu, the capital of the Eastern Region, in good farming country, inhabited formerly by farming villagers. The dance requires great skill and considerable physical strength and agility, and is performed in the full heat of the African sun, and is in fact a feat of endurance which can last for several hours, with crowds of women and other onlookers standing round to admire and encourage and also to fan the dancers. Apart from the physical strength required, the steps and the sequences of the dance are complicated in the extreme, and only a few of them can be mastered by any individual dancer. In fact, a young man who has mastered any part of the dance to perfection can achieve the sort of fame and adulation of famous sportsmen of other lands.



The costume consists of a brief skirt or cloth round the loins with seed rattles (*fig. G.*) round the waist, below the knee and round the ankles. Augustine Ene dramatises this a little for European audiences with a very gay coloured fringed skirt, and soft handmade bootees. The important part of the costume is the headdress which varies in size and elaborateness with the skill of the dancer, the leader often wearing plumes of great height and elegance. In the War Dance sequence the leader carries a stylised sword, and the rest of the dancers small triangular fans made of palm leaf.

The Musical Instruments

Six different instruments are used for this dance, all locally made and mostly from indigenous materials. They are all percussion instruments except for the OJA whistle flute. No membranophones are used at all in two of the dances performed by Mr. Ene, but a small drum called the IGNA is used in his third sequence, the War Dance.

The *Alo* or *Ivom* (Fig. A). This is an elongated and elliptical cylinder made of metal, and usually ornamented with white paint. It is shaped like a clapperless bell, is 4 feet long, and is beaten with a wooden baton. It produces deep notes which vary according to which part of the gong is struck. When this instrument is played with the open end upwards it is called the *Alo* and serves as the main cue for the dancer's steps. If however the instrument is in the position illustrated with the open end downwards it is called the *Ivom*. The base rests on a soft pad on the ground, on which it bounces when struck, giving off a quite different muted sound. The instrument is then merely a background beat, and the dancer takes his cue from the *Igba*, and the dance becomes the *Ogwulogwu*, and also the war dance sequence in the *Atilogwu*.

The *Ogene* (Fig. B.). A much smaller version of the *Alo* and often double, ornamented with white paint, it has a high pitched bell-like tone.

The *Gedegwu* (Fig. C.). A type of xylophone which is peculiarly Ibo. It consists of one or two slats of hard resonant wood tied loosely across the top of an earthenware cooking pot, sometimes put onto a small base to raise it from the ground and improve the tone. Several of these pots of varying sizes, with slats of different thicknesses can produce a complete scale of notes, and music not dissimilar to that of the Wachopi xylophones of East Africa. Only one is included in the *Atilogwu* orchestra.

The *Ekwe* (Fig. D.). A wooden slit-drum (gong) which is carved out of a single log, and gives two well defined tones according to which side of the slit it is struck. A universal instrument the origins of which go back to the first stirrings of the musical instinct in man.

The *Osha* (Fig. E.). A small bellshaped rattle made of palm fronds set on to the circular base of a small calabash, the latter bored with holes for the purpose. A similar instrument in the Cameroons has a circle of leather for a base. It is filled with seeds or small pebbles.

The *Oja* (Fig. F.). A whistle-flute, almost as ancient as the slit-drum in origin. These instruments were made by early man of birds' bones. It has two stops and gives shrill very penetrating sounds. It is often used by the head of a work gang to encourage the labour; it dominates most of the other instruments in the orchestra.

The combination of these instruments is powerful and effective music, with every cross beat of every instrument having special significance for the dancer who leaps and whirls in an ecstasy of excitement. Augustine Ene performs three sequences, the Adoration dance which is a harvest thanksgiving, the Hunting dance, a preparation for the hunting of dangerous animals, and the War dance which demonstrates precision and fitness for war.

Before coming to England, Augustine Ene entered his dancing group into the Nigerian Festival of Arts in 1952. His team won the silver cup given for the occasion by the Nigerian newspaper the *Daily Times*. In 1956 he was one of the performers billed for the B.B.C. television show called "Panorama" on the night Princess Margaret visited the studio. Eventually he hopes to get to America where his dancing could earn him enough to complete his engineering studies for which he originally left Nigeria.

Although this young student hopes to make a financial success of this dramatic dancing, he has carefully preserved its traditional characteristics, being guided in his steps by recordings made in his own country by his own successful *Atilogwu* musicians. The music and the dance are so inextricably woven in Africa that any variations are only possible for both mediums together. This dance seems further evidence that the percussive Eastern Nigerian music relies more on a dancing accompaniment than on the tonal drums and melodious songs of the Western Yoruba.