OSBORN AWARD 1958

Through the continued generosity of the Dr. Tom Osborn Memorial Foundation, the Society has again this year been enabled to make Osborn Awards for the best recordings of the year.

The standard of performance of the recordings put forward from which the Committee made their choice was not quite as high as in previous years. Some of the tribes from which recordings were taken are not considered to be in the top flight of Africa's folk musicians. However, the awards were well merited and the selected items will be appearing shortly on a 12 inch long playing record for public release.

Details of the items for which Osborn Awards have been distributed are as follows:

SOUTHERN RHODESIA

1. "Musengu" . . . . . A song for the Mondoro Ancestral Rites, with three 'hand-pianos' Masebe dzo Mondoro, and one drum, Maruwabwe Mondoro.

By Murina (Leader), Malekimungwa (Bass part), Musengedza (Higher part) and Mainza (pegged bowl drum). At Mkota, Mtoko District, Southern Rhodesia. Sena/Tonga Tribe. 3m. 60s.

This example of semi-religious music which is associated with their local tribal belief in the Mondoro spirits, is typical of the style of music to be found in the Mtoko region, not only among the Sena/Tonga tribe but among the Kavakore sub-tribes as well. Several players of the Masebe (so-called Hand-pianos) have been famous folk musicians, the most renowned in living memory having been Kadori and his brother Kanimungu.

The instrument is heptatonic and has a range of over three octaves from 79 vs. to 688 vs. with 26 reeds which are plucked downwards with the tips of the thumbs and, in the case of the few outside notes on either side, upwards with the tips of the first fingers.

The body of the instrument is of wood, rectangular and hollowed out from one end like a hell. An external resonator is also used, usually a gourd, to which several metal or shell buzzers are attached.

The name Masebe indicates the unusually low range of this member of the Mbira family of instruments and the three parts which are not easily distinguished from each other, being of similar timbre, can be heard as they are introduced, the leader starting the tune and the second coming in fifteen seconds later, with the bass part player 12 seconds after him. The yodelling is common to most Southern Rhodesian mbira tunes where there are few set words to the lyric.

The tuning of the central octave was . . . . . 158, 172, 198, 228, 248, 280, 316 vs. 3m. 06s.

2. "Karekare Maporisa" 'A Policeman's Journey'.


The art of public entertainment in African villages has been the special concern of hundreds of gifted minstrels who used to walk from one district to another receiving hospitality and small gifts in return for their amusing and stimulating company. There are few of them left and Gumbo, who also calls himself Marikzenhisho, the player of the Mbira, still carries on the tradition with a large repertoire of amusing songs and stories of which this is one.

In it he tells about an occasion when the two policemen, one white riding a horse, and the other, a local Karanga man, riding a bicycle, go on a tour of inspection of their district. The white, English, policeman on his horse soon leaves the plodding bicyclist far behind. For each of them the tale of the story has a little tune . . . . the trot and center of the horse, and the heavy grind of the bicycle.

The black policeman looses all touch with his officer and so carries on alone. At a village he finds a small girl who evades answering his questions as her parents are out at a party in another village. Eventually, he finds a number of dogs which have not been registered and had their dog tax paid for them. He arrests the owner taking him off to the magistrate. The tune for the walk back to the district office now appears followed by the scene in the court, a fine is imposed and the story ends with a tune for the culprit as he goes off to serve his punishment.

The little instrument used by the player is not the traditional one of the region, the Njari, but one he bought from a Nyasa.

The opening words of the song were "Mkwaze mmodzi mperekere ngombe ranga mkafa mkapita naye manda?"

3. "Tsuro wasiye mwana". 'The rabbit has left its child'.

Dance tune for the Gororombe Dance.

With a set of end blown pipes, rattle, drums and voices, by young Tonga men and girls. At Mkota, Mtoko District, Southern Rhodesia. Sena/Tonga Tribe. 3m. 30s.

Dancing is the great passion of the young in most African villages. Fashions in dancing gradually change as in other countries and often spread from one district to another. The Gororombe dance appears to have spread northwards from the southern regions of Southern Rhodesia during the last 20 to 30 years. Here in the Mtoko District it has been given the accompaniment of pipes, each dancer holding 2 or 3 pipes tied together. There are four sets from treble to bass, the two higher, Katere and Shaurere having three pipes each, and the tenor and bass, Dendera and Madobi having two each.

The four drums played by three men are of different sizes in order to produce distinctive pitches of sound. Two were conical pegged drums, Mutumba and Mtinho kurupi-kurupi, and the other two were cylindrical funj and Ulindi. The player of fnj used his heel, pressing it against the membrane of the drum as it lay on the ground in order to raise and lower the pitch. This can be distinctly heard in the recording.

The rattle, Besha, was a simple tin with wild canna seed inside.

NYASALAND

4. "Mkwaze mmopodi". Can I give cattle?

Topical song to the Sani (tribva) by Getazon Kwale. Birungi Village, Dowa District, Central Nyasaland. Nyanja/Chewa Tribe. 2m. 44s.

The opening words of the song were "Mkwaze mmopodi ntembereke ngombe ranga mkaa mkapita naye manda?"

"Can I give cattle to my wife, for when I am dead I shall go together with her to the grave".

"Mkwaze mmopodi ntembereke ngombe ranga mkaa mkapita naye manda?"
Much of the folk philosophy of the countryside is to be found in the simple songs of solo singers such as this Chewa man from the central province of Nyasaland.

His small eight note instrument of the Mbiura family is called Sansi, and it has a long bell shaped wooden body (13 inches by 4 inches), a shape common only to this region. It is similar to the smaller varieties of Mbiura found in the lower Zambesi valley also called Sansi, from which the generic name of Sansi for the whole family of such instruments was wrongly derived in the time of David Livingstone.

The tuning of this small pentatonic Sansi was as follows having two notes below the tonic (202) . . . . . . 154, 172, 202, 232, 264, 308, 344, 404 vs.

5. "Mwadzi idra" 'She has done it herself'.

"Nga-nga-nga ndareka". 'Lift and drop'.

"Lila-Lila". 'Cry, cry!'

"Dzombe rija", 'My Grasshopper'.

"Mkazi wa molomo". 'The talkative Woman'.

The girl takes her place. Chikwawa District, Southern Nyasaland.

Technique: In the music of the Ndau tribe being noted for their Mbira playing. They live in the south-eastern comer of Southern Rhodesia and in the adjoining regions of Mocambique territory (Portuguese East Africa). The burden of his song is about the necessity for his wife to consult him before she undertook some new action. Banda, he says, of one of the villagers, is an undesirable person and they would like to put a charm on his doorstep to let him know that they would be happier if he did not live in the same village.

3m. 02s.

Drums played by Bauleni Zhuau, at Malindi, Port Herald District, Southern Nyasaland.

Dance tune for the Likhuba Dance, with 9 Tuned drums, rattles, sticks and clapping.

6. "Lila-Lila". 'Cry, cry!'

Self delectative song to the Mbira dza WaNdau., by Josephu Ngonyama Shumba, from the Gogoyo Village, Sipungabera District, Portuguese East Africa.

Sets of tuned drums are not common in southern Africa although sometimes found among the Hima peoples of the Nile basin. In the central province of Nyasaland the nhamawuta goli sticks of the Manganja are the nearest equivalent to drumming. Greatly reduced in size from the drums of the North they are about 20 inches long and only a few inches in diameter. They are struck by the硬木 (in their early days by the Zambesi of Rhodesia) using one end of a round stick as a hammer, and the sound is produced by a small gourd mounted on the top and a shell or hollowed out bone fitted into the bottom. The instrument is used to accompany the dance to continuous music of the dambiri type, and both drum and dance are a manifestation of the dance tradition of the North. The drums and the dance are said to be a traditional gift of the moon to the earth and they are used for entertainment and while the players cherish the melody. As there are no words set to these tunes played by the Manganja the melodic line may vary according to the whim of the performer. To facilitate the playing of certain tunes, the players will alter the sequence of notes, though normally they are set out in correct order of pitch.

The tuning was . . . . . . 212, 246, 280, 312, 364, 424, 440, 496, 576, 624 vs.

6m. 35s.

Humorous song to the Karigo one stringed lute by Muzizi Mware from Visanzi, Kotakota District, Central Nyasaland.

"Dzoxombe rija", 'My Grasshopper'.

7. "Dzoxombe rija", 'My Grasshopper'.

Self delectative song to the Kwaja board zither, by Thawani Mware.

The Bangwe board zither was, until recently, the most popular instrument of Nyasaland, most adult males being able to perform upon it with skill. The instrument being slight in tone is ideal for quiet solo playing in the evenings and a large proportion of the songs which are set to the Bangwe are personal laments or statements intended for the delectation of the performer himself and not for an audience beyond his immediate friends or family sitting with him in the hut.

The subject of this song reflects the matrilocal nature of their Chewa society, where the woman and especially the titter is the head of the family, and the relationship between a brother and sister is of the greatest importance. A certain woman about whom he sings was in trouble and had been brought before the court. She sings to her brother to come and help her out of her difficulties.

The Bangwe board zither is a simple instrument, usually a short length of board or sometimes a raft of reeds, along which seven strings (or one continuous string in seven loops) are stretched with two small tuning bridges at end of each segment. It usually requires an external resonator to increase the volume of sound. The players sit at the centremost of the ring and does a clever rhythmic routine ending with a sharp pelvic jerk. As one girl finishes another immediately joins in. The tuning of the Bangwe board zither is usually a short length of board or sometimes a raft of reeds, along which seven strings (or one continuous string in seven loops) are stretched with two small tuning bridges at end of each segment. The Karigo is played with a short stick, which holds both ends of the stretched string, a small bridge being located on the membrane. Tuning of the one fundamental note is achieved both by a normal peg and also by a straining string which can be easily adjusted for fine tuning. The Karigo is played with a short stick and in order to protect the sileus from which the string is made a length of palm leaf is bound around the string at the point where the friction of the bow is employed.

The instrument is tucked under the arm and the one string is stopped by the backs of the fingers of the left hand.

The performer, a man in his fifties, sings: "Where does that grasshopper of mine sleep? I won't eat until everyone helps me to catch it."

8. "Nga-ngu ngu ndareka". 'Lift and drop'.

Dance tune for the Likhuba Dance, with 9 Tuned drums, rattles, sticks and clapping.

Drums played by Bulentu Zhuau, at Malindi, Port Herald District, Southern Nyasaland.

9. "Mwadzi idra" 'She has done it herself'.

Self delectative song to the Mbiura dza WaNdau., by Josephu Ngonyama Shumba, from the Gogoyo Village, Sipungabera District, Portuguese East Africa.

This 27 note instrument is tuned to a hexatonic scale in common with all Ndau instruments of this family. The resonating body onto which the metal tongues are attached is bell shaped and the player uses an additional external ground resonator to enlarge the sound.

This item is representative of many such songs sung by a man softly to himself in the quiet of his hut at night, the musicians of the Ndau tribe being noted for their north-eastern playing. They live in the north-eastern comer of Southern Rhodesia and in the adjoining regions of Mozambique territory (Portuguese East Africa). The burden of his song is about the necessity for his wife to consult him before she undertook some new action. Bandi, he says, of one of the villagers, is an undesirable person and they would like to put a charm on his doorstep to let him know that they would be happier if he did not live in the same village.

PORTUGUESE EAST AFRICA

10. "Mwadzi idra" 'She has done it herself'.

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OSBORN AWARDS 1958
10. "Ngoneni ngoneni bakithi". 'What have I done?'
Topical song to the Makweyama braced musical bow, by Rosalina Ndhlole and Juana Nkosi, at Matafin, Nelspruit District, Transvaal, South Africa.
Swazi Tribe.

The musical bow is commonly found in those Territories where timber is scarce and consequently only small musical instruments can be manufactured by the country folk. Some varieties of musical bow are frequently, as in this case, about the same size as the local hunting bow, the string being strained back towards the bow by a wire or cord in order to divide it into two segments each producing its fundamental note when struck with a light stick. The pitch of the two notes on this instrument were 190 and 220 vs. giving an interval between them of approximately two and a half semitones.

The two Swazi women performers were friends living in adjacent huts and constantly played and sang together in the evenings.

11. "Indlaliso". 'Games'.
Chants to accompany military drill or games 'Tiga', by Swazi men of the Lindimbi age group, at Entonjeni, Pigg's Peak District, Northern Swaziland.
Swazi Tribe.

It appears to have been a Swazi custom among the fighting regiments to perform a number of routine steps set to song or chants as a kind of danced drill. In this way the men kept themselves fit and learnt to act in perfect unison. In after life, the drill songs of the regiment to which they belonged were treasured memories and bound the companions of the age-group together until old age. This recording gives a brief extract of one performance, each change of chant being accompanied by a change of action, leaping, stamping, moving into file, and so on. The men taking part all appeared to be between the ages of 18 and 30 years. Entonjeni where the recording was made was the old royal kraal of the Swazi Paramount Chief and founder of the Swazi tribe, Umswati, before he moved his main headquarters further south to a site near Mbabane. The hill nearby is still used as a burial ground of some of the members of the royal lineage.

—Copies of this L.P. recording can be obtained through the African Music Society.