

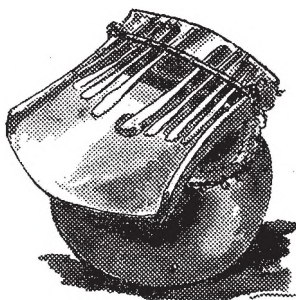
## A LUNDA KALENDI

by

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The eight reeds of the kalendi are numbered from left to right.

The kalimba shown in the illustration is one used by the Lunda people in the North Western Province of Northern Rhodesia. They call it a kalendi (plural tulendi).

It is the usual calabash type of instrument with a fan-shaped keyboard. The keyboard, which has quite a high degree of resonance when tapped by the fingers, even when it is not over the calabash, is made of wood from, either, the Mukula, Mushu or Mukushi tree. My informant was not sure of the English equivalent of these but he thought that the last is the Mahogany tree.

The calabash, called Iswaha by the Lunda people is of the usual type cushioned by a wad of material sewn around the open edges.

The Ineya, or keys are made out of nails which are heated in the fire and then hammered flat. In other areas I have heard of bicycle or umbrella spokes being used for the same purpose!

A piece of white spider-web is stuck over the hole in the keyboard on the reverse side, to act as a buzzer.

Starting with the fourth key the keys on the left hand side give a rising series of note while the right-hand keys starting with Key 5 give a similar series but starting a note higher and thus filling in the gaps. The intervals in these two series of notes vary from 2.72 semitones to 4.00 semitones. In other words some are rather less than thirds and others very close to major thirds with the largest interval between keys 7 and 8 an exact major third.

The scale which is heptatonic is produced by playing the keys in this order: 4, 5, 3, 6, 2, 7, 1, 8. As I have not yet got the necessary set of tuning forks, Mr. Hugh Tracey has very kindly measured the scale for me. He gives the following:

them to two rival lovers. The apparent and gradual change of season with the "short" year which occurs with the twelve named lunar months is sometimes remarked but not questioned.<sup>2</sup> Few stars are identified though the Pleiades, the cluster of seven stars, are often mentioned in connection with agricultural seasons. In Rhodesia they are associated with the planting season for grain and a Zaramo song from the East coast mentions that "locusts come with the seven stars".

Measurement of time is not felt to be important. Few persons know their age; and the approximate position of the sun in the sky is near enough indication of the "hour" of the day. In fact an implied revolt against the precision of clocks has given rise to the eminently justifiable comment that there is only one time in Africa . . . "half-past".

Few remarks are to be found in song about the scenery or the natural "beauty" of the countryside. The Nandi of Kenya are perhaps the single exception to the general rule. For the rest, their interpretation of "beautiful scenery" is in terms of survival, the crops it will grow, the grazing for cattle, the game to be hunted, the presence of wild fruit trees, the poles and grass for hut building—these are the features which determine "beauty", a quality which someone once defined as "suitability for purpose". There are few indications of weather lore such as "Red clouds at night, shepherd's delight". The only good clouds are the dark ones which bring rain. The lower the annual rainfall the more frequently we find songs which mention clouds and rain. This is a familiar subject for lyrics among the Tswana, for example, who live on the eastern borders of the Kalahari Desert, where the daily social greeting is the one word, "Pula", "Rain".

When natural substances of unusual quality are mentioned such as salt deposits or the minerals, iron and copper, they are often embodied in craft songs such as those of the copper smelters of the southern Congo and the iron workers of Rhodesia. The importance of these two metals gives rise to strict rituals in their production which are accompanied by special taboos, incantations and songs. A few natural processes are well understood, discovered empirically over many generations and handed on from father to son who specialise in a single craft. The knowledge is considered to be closely akin to magic and is accepted as part of the mysteries without wonder.

There is a considerable body of knowledge concerning simples, poisons and herbs and both herbalist and the diviner (who is expected to diagnose ailments of both mind and body) are frequently mentioned in song. The combination of three powers, hope, fear and ignorance, which together spell "magic", and the association of ideas which gives rise to what is now called "sympathetic magic", are constantly alluded to. Any translation of a lyric which dismisses these African realities with patronising superiority and the use of archaic terminology misses the essence of their philosophy where reason is no adequate substitute for sincere belief, or explanation for faith. A walk through a Lagos market, like the interpretation of many an African song, is an education in the industry of hope.

From the evidence to be found everywhere in song, it would appear that most Africans live in an atmosphere of the total acceptance of natural phenomena which must be endured. The superior material control displayed by Europeans in their machinery and manufactured goods is also accepted without question on the same plane as the elements. The capacity to wonder, contrary to most popular representations of "primitive" Africa in films and novels, is a strictly limited faculty, for it requires a vivid sense of imagination or one developed in a specific direction.

A strange observation which no doubt owed its origin to the local Information Service or to Christian teaching of an "altitude" heaven (African philosophy on the contrary postulates a "heaven" for the dead in close proximity to the living) occurred in a Soga song from Iganga in Uganda, sung to the *Ntongoli* lyre by a man named Mondo. The translation of part of the song ran . . .

<sup>2</sup>Twelve lunar months are approximately 354.36 days, not 365 days.

*"The English wanted to fly up to heaven to see God  
But they failed.  
God set them a limited height of twelve miles."*

### Moral Philosophy

The greatest number of African songs so far experienced in Central and Southern Africa are connected with human behaviour, and the problems which beset any community; . . . the problems of gregariousness, social disciplines, what is considered to be good behaviour and good manners; the problems of adolescence, sex and marriage; the problems of defence, attack and violence; the subject of fear of each other both physical and magical, of intimidation, group and political terrorising; (Many of the old Zulu fighting songs as with a number of modern political songs were intended to instil fear in their opponents); preoccupations with force and the rewards of force; implications of all these are to be found in their folk songs.

Songs about the cruder resolutions of the biological urges which feature almost exclusively in American and European "popular" catalogues do not figure half so prominently in African country songs, as they do in present day town-songs which are heard in full vigour in the dance halls and night spots of industrial towns with no holds barred. The true love poem in the classical European sense is rare though the phrase "I love you" is much the same in all languages. It is fortunate perhaps that African languages, with the single exception of Swahili, do not demand rhyme at the end of their stanzas and so avoid the pitfall of "you, blue, true" or "love, dove, above" not forgetting "arms and charms" which have so effectively gripped English "pop" lyrics in a straight-jacket of mediocrity.

The anima, or man's ideal vision of woman's shape, can often be deduced from song and varies from tribe to tribe. Fair skin is constantly mentioned as an ideal quality. Steatopygic curves are idealised in the new Zulu word "*Esitudubeka*" which was taken from the first stream-lined Studebaker cars, and so on. The satisfaction of finding a marriage partner from one's own home country and language group is demonstrated in this translation from a Nyanja song in Nyasaland.

*Mother, I do not want to marry a Sena girl.  
I want to go home to my own Ngoni.  
There I will marry at Chief Gomani's place  
A true daughter of the Ngoni.  
And when I call her she will answer  
"Wé, Bambo Phiri".*

A Chewa woman's song from the same country ran,

*"When I get a letter from Masula  
I read it with all my heart".*

Her husband like so many others from Nyasaland was away working in the copper mines. The chances are that she could not read at all but would have had it read out to her by a learned friend who had acquired one or two of the three R's.

The Luo in Western Kenya have a special variety of love songs in admiration of their young women. The small village of Yalla in Gem, not far from the town of Kisumu, is rather like "Dublin's fair city where the girls are so pretty" and the Luo charmers there fall into much the same category.

An extract from a song dedicated to one of them went

*"All ladies are civilised,  
But Pamela Atiano is more."*

Another from the same region . . .

*"Arwa Otiano is my love.  
She is so in love with me that she forgets  
her simple duties.*

*I have often to remind her to go back  
to do her grinding.  
She is my love."*

Another . . .

*"'Tong-tong' went the woodchopper's axe,  
And there, beside him, was a girl  
Dancing to the sound of his blows.  
He was entranced."*

Yet another Luo lyric . . .

*"I need no farewell,  
Whether it rains or shines,  
Whether it is dark or cold;  
Even if a beast is coming of a leopard nature  
I need no farewell,  
Because I am in love."*

The aesthetic influence of Arabia is clearly discerned in the love songs of the East Coast from Malindi and Mombasa down to Bagamoyo and Dar es Salaam in both the sung and recited Mashairi poems.

*"You are my heart and the joy of my body.  
You are my eyes and my wisdom.  
You remain in my mind.  
You are dark and slender as a thread,  
You arrange your hair in even strands,  
You are the witness of my eyes."*

The Arabian influence has penetrated into the interior also, along the ancient trade routes, so that among the Nyamwezi of central Tanganyika around Tabora you find songs like this one . . .

*"My love is soft and tender.  
My love Saada comforts me.  
My love has a voice like a fine instrument of music."*

Among the Zulu, love songs are brief and highly repetitive, often just the reiteration of a single short phrase such as

*"I walk alone"*

which, after the thousandth repetition by a serious minded *insizwa*, must impress anyone with his un-blessed eligibility.

In a rather more light-hearted ecstasy the local Noel Coward, a young Soga on a hill overlooking Lake Victoria Nyanza, sang me this one . . .

*"All things in nature love one another.  
The lips love the teeth,  
The beard loves the chin,  
And all the little ants go 'brrr-r-r-r' together."*

Women's songs more frequently reflect the domestic scene.

A Teso woman's song contained these lines reflected in every country in the world . . .

*"However well a woman may cook  
Her husband is never satisfied."*

Their special delight in social parties is often a theme of songs. Each year when the cashew apples ripen Chopi women of the east coast quickly collect and ferment the fruit and try to be first with a cider party to which they like to invite the most socially acceptable guests. A song sung to the thunderous sound of massed *timbila* xylophones by the men declaims this piece of social-anthropological information . . .

*"Cider time has come.*

*So women nowadays favour the chiefs!"*

Domestic complications are constantly aired in public, perhaps on the principle that public confession is therapeutic in itself. Since there is no effective law of slander,

names and full identities of the accused are seldom hidden. These extracts from three widely separated villages in equatorial regions will demonstrate the point, the first two were sung by women . . .

*"The modern girl is no good.  
She will not stay at home.  
She only wants to paint her face  
And roam the country doing no work".*

A thousand miles south, a Xhosa dance band leader said of the girl singer who accompanied them "She does no kind of work at all. She is just musically minded". These lines occurred in a song which aired the pros and cons of certain local belles . . .

*"Prostitutes are always in trouble  
Without knowing why!"*

And this male injunction appears to have closed some domestic crisis between neighbours . . .

*"Forbid your wife to argue with you!  
Forbid your concubine to quarrel with me!"*

Examples of this kind of evidence in almost any African language are legion.

I am particularly fond of songs in which herdsmen boast of their cattle or musicians boast of their skill. An Ankole cattleman recorded for me his praises in honour of his herd in which this sentence occurred . . .

*"When men come to see my cattle  
They shade their eyes and stumble away!"*

What higher praise could he have bestowed on his beloved beasts?

A Kamba musician singing about a girl at Machakos in Kenya called Mbengi, "the loveliest creature on earth", had no doubts about his own talents . . .

*"While I sing of her  
I wish no one else to utter a sound.  
I can chant so well  
That my words alone might make a girl conceive  
Or make a poor man rich."*

Two groups of orchestral performers, the one on *Budongo* Mbiras from Uganda and the other on *Timbila* Xylophones from Mocambique sang this about their respective instruments . . .

*"We play our Budongo only for the big people.  
They are good instruments and we come from Bugabula.  
Oh! Budongo music is enchanting!"*

*"Hark how the music thunders!  
Listen with your wives and hear the call.  
To play timbila you must dream about it.  
Timbila music is so moving it brings tears,  
This music of Katini's timbila!"*

One need not go further than the songs of a country to appreciate something of their sense of fun and humour, their indifference to suffering in man or beast, their care of children, their passion for dancing, in fact every facet of their lives. Here are two amusing sidelights, the first by a young man, the second by an exasperated wife . . .

*"Now that the love of my heart has gone away  
To whom shall I talk?  
My father said 'Dear son, what can we do?'"  
But the Chief said,  
'You must go and fetch her back  
Even if you have to walk all day.  
Don't think about lions or anything else'."*

*"I am tired of pounding for a lazy lizard  
 Who is too tired to go to Johannesburg to work!  
 Get out of that hut!  
 If you refuse to come out  
 I'll put you out!  
 If it were me, I would go to Johannesburg  
 Because if women were always telling me to go and work  
 I would go!"*

### Metaphysical Philosophy

Finally, to complete the trio we find a considerable number of songs sung often by solo performers to the accompaniment of some simple instrument on religious or contemplative themes. As life closes in they are rarely Christian in manner but employ a symbolism which belongs to all generations past. These are a few random examples from my collection of songs . . .

*"Mary, let us go to wash ourselves at the river.  
 On earth we live but to die.  
 Mary join in the singing because  
 We both know we live but to die.  
 There are some beautiful people on earth,  
 So Mary, sing with me this song."*

*"When I die, dig my grave in front of my door.  
 I do not wish to be buried with all the others."  
 "The grave has no shame.  
 It takes old and young alike.  
 The path to the grave has no shame  
 It takes even the suckling child from its mother  
 Leaving her weeping."*

The Masai of the Serengeti Plains, preoccupied with the importance of defeating death through the continuity of their own group, their family and themselves, sing briefly . . .

*"High God, Ngai,  
 Give all the women children!"*

One of the most moving Zulu songs I have collected, sung, they say, from before the time of Shaka, which puts it back into the 18th century reads . . .

*"Guga mzimba sala nhliziyu,  
 Guga sitbebe kade wawudlela,  
 Akukho sibonda saguga namagxolo aso,  
 Akukho soka lahlala imbangi ikhala."*

which I have translated . . .

*"The body perishes, the heart stays young.  
 The platter wears away with serving food.  
 No log retains its bark when old,  
 No lover peaceful while the rival weeps."*