

## A MUSICAL PILGRIM'S PROGRESS

From GERHARD KUBIK, Vienna.

3rd March, 1963.

I am happy that just before leaving Uganda I could make some new recordings of a great Musoga singer, Waiswa Lubogo, who is blind, and whom I brought hitchhiking from the Foundation for the Blind to his parents. (His mother had not seen him for a year.) After having reached his home together, where I was received with great friendliness I started to record in the region. (It is near Kaliro, south of Lake Kyoga). I even made a short study of *embaire*-xylophone playing; because there were two *Embaire*-bands in the village. All was very encouraging to me and about Basoga music (particularly for *Budongo*). I know quite something now. One thing I definitely found about the tuning: it is always pentatonic but in the intervals from day to day or from week to week *not* constant. Even the best musicians, who tuned their instruments carefully before starting to play, used a slightly different tuning on different days. The tuning of Waiswa's instrument I have recorded three times and it always was "a little" different. But I am also sure that the Basoga *Budongo* players (at least all those whom I have recorded in the past three years, and they were quite many from many regions) do *not* like to tune the octaves *completely pure*. They love a slightly dissonant effect in the tuning of the octave. I intend to write an article soon about Basoga music and I will then give all the references.

From Basoga I hitchhiked north and stayed a day in Dokolo Catholic Mission, near Lira. There I recorded two Kuman musicians playing the *mbira* as well, which they, like the *Lango*, call *Okembe*. There again I could note the great mental and musical difference between Nilotic and Southern Uganda (Bantu) *Mbira* playing.

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Oshogbo, Nigeria. *On his return to Africa.*

3rd September, 1963.

Meanwhile we have arrived in Nigeria and stay at Oshogbo at the moment. I have been giving a number of lectures arranged by the Extra-Mural-Department of the University of Ibadan in connection with the Mbari Arts Club. At Oshogbo I spoke about "Music in the King's Courts of Uganda," "Musical Instruments from various parts of Africa" and "The Drumming Styles of Africa". At Ibadan I gave lectures on "The collective improvisation in early New-Orleans-Jazz", "Music in the Southern Kingdoms of Uganda", "Music of Northern Mocambique", and "Xylophone playing in East and Central Africa." I carry now some 10 hours of recordings with me, copied from my original tapes, to illustrate such lectures

Our journey to Nigeria was very much delayed; the ship from Liverpool taking more than three weeks. I found that things have very much changed in the last three years. Research has become extremely difficult for a European; the musicians normally refuse to play unless you are able to give them something like £1 for every item. You will understand, that under such circumstances, it is almost impossible for me to do anything — and in addition to that there are the transport difficulties. As a European you are expected to pay at least five shillings per mile to sit in a dusty mammie-wagon. Hitch-hiking as I did successfully in Eastern and Southern Africa and also in the Congo during the crisis, is practically impossible here these days. There are no lifts unless you pay enormous amounts.

To solve the transport problem, I have bought a scooter for £36 but this is the most dangerous way of travelling in Nigeria, you can imagine. The mammie-wagons are passing at your right hand on the narrow roads at a horrible speed and carelessly near. I am really afraid of travelling.

There is some very good music around the town Oshogbo, and I have made a number of recordings, although very "expensive". I have also recorded many *Alo*-stories.

(NOTE.—With this letter Gerhard Kubik sent the result of measurements of the pitch of the notes of the scale on a single Ganda *Amadinda* Xylophone showing discrepancies which might have been caused by varying weather conditions, etc., taken from two tape recordings made at the Kampala Museum. The recordings were made at an interval of several weeks and were measured by Stroboconn at the School of Oriental and African Studies by the Rev. A. M. Jones. Since no pitch pipe or tuning fork was used — nor could the absolute accuracy of the tape speed be guaranteed — the results must be considered inconclusive and are not printed for that reason. ERROR.)

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Nanga-Eboko, Cameroun.

8th October, 1963.

We have decided to leave Nigeria soon, and to move eastwards. Because everybody here is only after finishing our money. Even the banks demand 5% commission for any amount we receive from Europe. And for the fees of my University lectures I had to pay 17/- tax (taken out of a total fee of £14). Soldering of one little wire (a work of less than a minute) makes 15/- for a European to pay. One lorry driver who gave me a lift recently for which I paid, said to me: "I hope you will give me £150 tomorrow to repair my car in which I have taken you".

It is almost incredible but true. And the saddest news: During our absence from Oshogbo one night, thieves have broken into our house, they have broken the lock into pieces with a chisel, and they stole a box containing camera accessories such as filters, lenses (for making photographs at near distance) which we urgently need for photographing of ornaments and carvings; a very good torch and my *note book* (with half of the collected material), which is of no value to them, but for me a great loss.

That is all what they found in the room, because fortunately we had taken tape-recorder, cameras, travellers cheques, passports, etc. on the short trip. So you will understand that I am fed up as I never was before.

You must know, that throughout the Western Region of Nigeria in every town and even in small villages there is a "Rediffusion" station, which collects the radio programmes from Ibadan, Lagos and other radio stations in and outside Nigeria. From this Central distributor station wires are running into almost every compound of the town. At the end of each wire there is a loudspeaker, and through it the people are blessed with American popular music and West African hits (Highlife, etc.) all day. It is so horrible and the loudspeakers are so many, that for instance in the whole town of Oshogbo you can't find a place where there is peace at night. You are forced to hear it up to 11.30 p.m. until they close down, and at 6 o'clock in the morning it starts again. There is no escape.

All people here believe that this is great progress, and so they turn the loudspeaker to the top volume, and not only that, they keep it outside the house, so that their neighbours who can't afford seven shillings per month to get it, may also have the blessing. Of course, the loudspeaker is never turned off, it would be a loss of prestige. When I came to Nigeria three months ago, I was depressed. Walking in the night through the towns, one rather could believe one lived in the world described in George Orwell's "1984". Anyhow my impression is that they are preparing well for this world to come. The loudspeakers are already established on the stage; remain the "actors", who will soon arrive, perhaps in the form of communism.

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Nanga-Eboko, Camerouns, W. Africa.

12th December, 1963.

I have made some *very* fine recordings in North-Eastern Nigeria, Northern and Eastern Camerouns, during the past weeks.

Most interesting in this collection are previously unrecorded tribes like the Chamba, Kutin Baya and Babuti (the last two recorded near the border of the Central African Republic).

I did the recording trip alone with the scooter. It proved an *ideal* means of transport for a research trip like this, as soon as one is off the big roads. I have constructed an additional device to carry 2 gallons of petrol, which makes my scooter capable of operating in bush areas up to 200 miles. Practically you can go everywhere with it, even to places which otherwise you would only reach by walking. Particularly the Adamoua Mountains I could have done in no better way.

My expedition got stuck a little. Tape recorder and scooter are in repair at Yaoundé.

Also my financial situation is very bad again. Mainly because of expenses in Nigeria.

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Nanga-Eboko, Cameroun.

10th January, 1964.

It seems that on this trip I hardly have any good news for you.

I was arrested yesterday by the police of Nanga-Eboko, because (as it appears) they became suspicious of my musical activities here. Like in the Sudan, I believe, musicology in many African countries is soon going to be considered as politics, and musicologists as something like spies.

From 7 o'clock in the morning until 2 o'clock in the afternoon they kept me for investigation in the compound of the police station with a hungry stomach. Fortunately — in a kind of presentiment — I had taken David Riesman's *'The Lonely Crowd'* with me and spent part of my time reading.

The trouble started a few days ago when I was suddenly stopped on the road near the town by military forces and told to leave Nanga-Eboko the same day. I was perplexed, did not trust my ears. I asked: "Why? Have I done anything wrong?" The answer was that I should not ask such a question but follow the order. "Who gave the order?" "The Sureté Federale at Yaoundé."

Much confused I went home, really at the end of my wisdom. I had already paid the house for a month and leaving within a few hours was even technically impossible, since my typewriter and many books had come from Nigeria. I also had bought a xylophone. How to transport all this?

After some time there was a knock at the door and a policeman came, saying that he wants to write down all my particulars. And he asked me questions like: "What is the name of your father? and of your mother? What are you doing here? Why haven't you got any employment?"

Finally he said: "Can you sign?" I wondered: "What do you mean? Should I put my signature under something?" "No," he answered. "I mean can you write? . . . Write and read? . . ."

After this conversation he left me with the words: "Don't go too far away from your house! You are not allowed to move anywhere without informing us. Not even ten kilometers, not even to the Catholic or the Adventists' Mission." (For a short moment I thought of Father Giogetti in the Sudan).

After the policeman had gone, my patience was also at the end. I took my scooter and the most precious things like tapes with Nigerian recordings, manuscripts, diary, note-book, my clarinet, a book, tent and sleeping bag, packed it all into my rucksack, shut the door and off I was with speed. It was already night. Now I wanted to find out myself the reason of the trouble.

In Yaoundé at the Sureté they were polite and pretended to know of nothing, I should try the Commissariat Special. When I arrived there I was also received in a friendly way and told that no special permission was necessary to stay at Nanga-Eboko, my visa was still valid and all my documents in order.

What now? I drove back the 168 kms. to Nanga-Eboko, arrived late in the night. Next morning at 7 o'clock I found myself arrested. It took about six hours until the Commissaire Special came himself and asked me harshly for my passport. He looked into the pages carefully and I tried to explain to him what I was after here and how I had come to Cameroun. After a few minutes he left with my passport in his Jeep. I was sitting again on my chair in front of the fire, one policeman guarding me.

After about an hour's time the Commissaire Special returned; one of the men accompanying him jumped out of the Jeep, threw my passport in front of me on the ground and said: "You can go to your house now!"

You can imagine, although the story has its humorous sides, that I have lost all pleasure to do anything more. It is serious. I have no idea what will be the next to happen. I better send this letter off today.

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Yoko, Central Province.

15th February, 1964.

I am trying to bike myself through. Have just returned to *Yoko*, Central Province from a two-weeks' expedition to the Tikar people, in company of one African boy who showed me the way. This was so far my cheapest expedition. I had only a tent and sleeping bag, camera and recording machine, films and tapes with me. No medicines, no food, no water, not even a single Malaria pill. I lived practically from begging — from the maize and manioc, which people gave us in the villages, that are often a day's walk apart from each other.

The Tikar are a rather isolated tribe, there are no roads leading into the heart of their country of deep forests and savannahs. We did it all on foot walking some 160 Kms. from Kong (near Yoko) westwards, almost up to the border of the Bamum-country (Foumban), and back again. You will see from the map that this is quite a distance. I did a lot of recording in almost every village. Tradition here is very little disturbed. In Ngambe, the last and largest village on our way my recording machine again stopped working, just when I was recording the sacred music of the dead kings. The Tikar at once found an interpretation of my machine's refusal. I had not sacrificed some bottles of palm wine for the ancestors, the *Ntuo chie* (dead kings) and they destroyed my tape recorder as a revenge.

Well, the fact is now, that I am again thrown into my old really nerve-killing trouble. Had I been in a comparatively optimistic mood all the way until Ngambe, I was so depressed on my return that I hardly came forward and sometimes thought I would never reach Yoko safely again. My tape recorder — (it is that old model which you have seen in Roodepoort with me in 1962!) does not work again! How often has it happened during all these years in an obsessive repetitiveness! I shall go again to see this brother, some 500 Kms. from here. And then? For how many days or weeks will the machine work?)

In October 1964 it will be my fifth anniversary of doing research in Africa. If I look back all these years and all these enormous efforts with practically no means, usually living on 2/- a day, sometimes even less, I am only partly happy about the results. Below, I should like to give you a list of all the tribes that I have recorded so far. (Those names in italics are particularly well represented in my collection.) Perhaps you would like to publish this list in the Journal because there are some which have never been recorded before and also many *types* of music, previously unrecorded, or from remote areas where normally musicologists hesitate to go — I would be glad to send copies to anyone who would despatch a tape onto which I can copy and pay the expenses of postage.

If I see this list and if I imagine that all the numerous items which give already a small sonothèque could have been recorded with a good tape-recorder or with a machine that is at least working always and does not stop every three weeks to keep me inactive for a month — I can only weep. And if all this and the studies could have been done with a little more practice — how much more even I could have found out. In all these years more than half of the force and youth, which I wanted to devote entirely to research was wasted, striving for the most primitive urgencies of life. How often have I walked miles out of towns in Africa to escape the expensive European rest-houses — (with my 20 kilos rucksack on the back) — in order to find a quiet place in the bush, where I could pitch my tent and sleep. And the next day waiting hours for a kind man to give me a free lift to the next town, from where I would walk into smaller villages. Recently I have met some "musicologists" here in Cameroun, who are working with expensive recording machines, Landrovers and UNESCO grants. But I saw that they are more deeply interested in their daily lunch and dinners than in the folk music. If they would have only a slight idea of how many lunches and dinners I have consumed since 1959!

Now the list of recorded tribes:

1. EGYPT: Nubians, Egyptian Fellachs. 2. CAMEROUN: Fulbe, *Kutin*, Hausa, *Vute* (*Babouti*), Mvele, Eton, Gbaya, *Tikar*, Ewondo, Bavok. 3. KENYA: Abaluhya (with most sub-tribes). 4. KONGO: Logo, Azande, Mongbande. 5. MOZAMBIQUE: *Alomue*, *Ashirima*, *Makonde*, Ayaua (Yao), Andonde,

Cuabo. 6. NIGERIA: *Yoruba*, Ibo, Chamba, Fulbe. 7. NYASALAND: Henga (Tumbuka). 8. SUDAN: Shilluk, Arabs. 9. TANGANYIKA: Wabena, *Wakisi*, *Wapangwa*, Wanyasa, *Wanyakyusa*, *Wagogo*, Wakimbu, Wasukuma, Wanyamwezi, Wanyanturu, Gorowa, Wasangu. 10. UGANDA: *Baganda*, *Basoga*, Banyoro, Banyankole, Bakiga, Banyaruanda, Bagwere, Basamia, Bakonjo, Iteso, *Alur*, Acholi, Kumam, Lango, Madi, Logbara.

I want to continue by all means and will be soon off to the Central African Republic. I don't want to leave Africa defeated and lead an unproductive life between the volumes of an archive in Vienna. I want to *work!* I have already packed my typewriter, manuscripts, books and clarinet to send all home to Austria because my "scooter" is too often in repair and obviously was overloaded. A propos: I learned recently from an English speaking friend at Yaoundé that my "scooter", with which I tried to overcome my fate of a hitch-hiker, is not at all a scooter! In French they call it Velo-Solex or Velo-moteur. I don't know what the appropriate name in English is for such a kind of vehicle. It is actually not more than a bicycle with a small motor. But I make up to 200 kms. bush roads with it a day.

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Berberati, Republique Centre Africaine.

20th March, 1964.

Looking back I see that altogether my trip to the Camerouns was not too bad and unsuccessful. I have recorded at least some 15 hours of music. Originally I had more, but the less worthwhile stuff I had to wipe off (what I normally never do), because I am also at the end with tapes. But particularly in the last month after having been able to soothe the government of Cameroun and to convince the authorities that I don't want to kill the president, I could start to *study*. I have once again taken lessons in Mbira-playing. With the Vute (or Babouti as the French call them). They have a very nice Mbira-music for three to four large instruments, the construction of which is very special. Tuning, for example, is not done by pulling the lamelles at different lengths over the bridge, but by attaching small lumps of black wax at different lengths over the bridge, but by attaching small lumps of black wax onto the prongs. You will hear more about this when I am back in Vienna (or any other restful place) and write out the collected material and my observations.

The list of recorded tribes which I have sent to you should be enlarged. In the last weeks I recorded: The *Sanaga*, the *Njanti* and *Bavoek* in Cameroun.

Here in the Central African Republic, all seems to be very nice, as far as I can judge from the few days I am here. The people are *very* kind — incomparable with those of Western Nigeria.

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Catholic Mission Berberati, Republique Centre Africaine.

2nd April, 1964.

Without waiting for your letter, which might have already reached Bangui, I should like to write you again, assuring you that I am well and presently in a little more optimistic mood. Starting from Berberati, where I was received with great friendliness by the French Missionaries, I drove on my Solex the 136 kms. down to Nola in the region of the great equatorial forest. Some ten days I lived in the bush near the border of the Congo (Brazzaville) and recorded a fascinating music and wonderful stories of the *Mbimo*, a small Bantu-tribe settling in this area.

As everywhere in the R.C.A. so far, I was received by everybody, whether white or black, whether Missionary or simple peasant with great hospitality. The *Mbimo* are still a rather traditional tribe with a culture that seems to be linked to the South: Congo-Brazzaville and Gabon. (Listening to their *Kembe* playing, one would not believe to be in the Central African Republic. Indeed my recordings here resemble much those of Gilbert Rouget along the shores of the Ogoüé-River in Gabon. Note the name *Kembe!* How widespread it is in one or the other form in Central Africa).

Remarkable is the women's singing in *Mbimo*-country. In one dance, called *Akindalo* they employ a distinct kind of yodel. I suppose that they have learned it from the pygmies, which I frequently met in the area. At Bilolo, for example, there is, some 3 kms. from the village a large camp of *Babinga*-pygmies. Father Martin and I visited the camp carrying a load of salt with us "comme cadeau"! It was late in the night and the pygmies danced for us, a typical music, not very different from pygmies' music that I have heard in Central Cameroun. However: here only the women — while sitting in a semi-circle on the ground — were yodelling, the men kept quiet. There were three dancers having grass-bundles around the hips and dancing mainly by trembling with the corpus and shoulders in a quick left-right movement. As a result of this the dress of grass bundles "swoll up" a little and remained static in this position, while the dancers were continuing their left-right-trembling. I observed that the body was strictly moving in duplets from left to right which gave a nice counter-rhythm to the dominant impression of triplets produced by the two drummers. The two drummers were squatting on their drums which were lying horizontally on the ground. The movement of the hands was rather isorhythmic, the impression of "off-beating" mainly came from accentuation, that is by arrangement of the striking of different drum parts.

As a race the pygmies of the Nola-area are no more pure. They are much mixed with the *Mbimo*. I was astonished to see "pygmies" as tall as myself! At least those at Bilolo (elsewhere in the area I have seen some more characteristic species) seem to have widely lost their physiognomic features, which



are difficult to describe but easily to distinguish by experience. Culturally however they seem to have remained entirely as they were, at least in their spiritual culture. Within the group of some 200-250 persons there was *one* who spoke some French, a few others could say "Bon jour" et "Au revoir", none of them has abandoned yet his native religion.

There is a strict caste-barrier between the Mbimo and the Babinga-pygmyes. The Mbimo refuse live with the pygmies together, the Babinga are actually living in "reserves" outside the big villages. No Mbimo would eat together with a pygmy. All this is very remarkable, because *physically* there is at present very little difference left between Mbimo and pygmies at Bilolo. From where then, one may ask does the mixture come?

Despite the strict caste-barrier and impossibility of "legal" marriage according to unwritten tribal laws the male members of the superior Mbimo caste frequently search their concubines among the girls of the caste considered as inferior! This phenomenon of concubinage "from higher to lower caste" is quite well known in social psychology and this psychological law seems to be valid also for other societies where psychological conditions are similar. In most cases the children are then left in the "inferior" society. That is why racial mixture is more apparent in the "inferior" rather than in the "superior" caste. But as far as the Mbimo are concerned, the pygmy can be well-traced in some individuals among them as well. A number of "pygmoid" types I saw and photographed among the Mbimo, and I was told that occasionally the father takes his child and even his concubine into the "superior" caste.

It is psychologically interesting to note, that in spite of considering the pygmies as inferior, the Mbimo enjoy the pygmies' music! And somehow they seem to admit that the music of the inferior caste is superior to their own and more exciting. I stumbled against the same phenomenon in the Camerouns between the Tikar and the pygmies that were practically living as slaves under the dictatorship of the "lamido" (paramount chief) of the Tikar. The Tikar as well as the Mbimo have learned from the pygmies their wonderfully "polyphonic" style of yodel.

I am happy to see again some progress in my work, and the friendly climate of the Central African Republic and its *modest* and helpful people (so far at least) are indeed refreshing to me. I would like to visit this place, as well as neighbouring territories (Chad, Congo) again in some two years. As I explained to you already in my last letters, it will be only a brief visit that I intend to make in Europe, as soon as I have some money in my pocket I will be out again — More and more I am also interested in recording stories and get them transcribed and translated by local interpreters. In the Mbimo-country I was quite successful. These people have a wonderful folklore. Some of the transcribed stories have much in common with dreams and are of phantastic images of obsessional character. I had two young friends (14 and 16) in the Mbimo country who travelled with me to far places and translated all for me into French.

After having completed my survey of Central Africa, I would like to choose one tribe with the most interesting and unexplored culture (and music) and remain there for a year, learning everything (language, instruments and so on). A place in the Central African Republic would not be too bad for such a project.

While writing this letter, I am waiting for news whether a lorry is going from here to Bangui. I should rather prefer to load my luggage plus Solex on a lorry and do the unpleasant and little interesting road without physical endeavours. Probably I shall leave here tomorrow.