

## LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

From A. M. JONES, The School of Oriental & African Studies, London.

Mr. John Blacking's aggrieved letter (*African Music*, 3, 2, p. 60) about my article on Venda Note-names (*African Music* 3, 1, p. 49) raises a most interesting point.

But first may I clear up a misunderstanding. My Table on page 51 was specifically headed "Xylophone Note-names". Its purpose was to collate the names used for the notes. Mr. Blacking's top two names, *Mutwilo* and *Kutezwana*, are analogous to Kirby's *Matilo* and *Tezani* and I therefore placed them opposite these. Similarly Mr. Blacking's next note *Thakulana* was placed opposite Kirby's *Takulana*. Between these Kirby gives four other names which do not figure in Mr. Blacking's list. Here I placed my question-marks (being careful to place them in brackets); if, by so doing, I have given the impression that his list was incomplete, I apologise. It was the coincidence of similar names which was my concern.

Now for the interesting point. It will be noted that the xylophones whose tunings I give, are all of the old large-scale type containing from 21 to 24 keys (see also Kirby p. 50). I have been told that the British Museum specimen which I quote is one of the last of these big ones, the custom now being to reduce their compass. The xylophone recorded by Professor Westphal, with the two old Venda players arguing, is one of the big ones. On this recording as far as I recall, the notes are tapped out many times, and the note which the old man calls *Phala* is, as I said, near F. The compass of the four big xylophones I quote is nearly, or in one case just over three octaves, the top note lying between E and G, the fourth note down in two cases is C-sharp, in one case B, and in the fourth G-sharp, and the bottom note lies between A and D — varying with the number of *Dzika* notes.

This range and pitch agrees closely with Professor Kirby's Xylophone scale in "*The Musical Instruments of the Native Races of South Africa*", p. 51-52 (quoted by Blacking) where the top note varies between F and E-flat, and the bottom between F and D, the total compass being three or just over three octaves.

Judging from his note-names, Mr. Blacking's xylophones are of the smaller type, containing about 17 notes.

Unless I was mistaken — which I do not think is the case — the old men claim that on their big xylophone *Phala* is about F: Mr. Blacking insists that on the xylophones in his experience, *Phala* is around B, just as in the flutes. This latter is what one would naturally expect, and I was wrong to assume that all Venda xylophone players would agree with the old men. Yet surely one would be rash to dismiss the testimony of these two Venda xylophone players without further investigation from similar old men? Either their testimony is wrong, or it is a pointer to something of interest: at least, that is how I see it.

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From MARJORIE DAVIDSON.

I wonder if any contributors or readers of the *African Music* Journal have met with a kind of free counterpoint used by the Nsenga people called *Mangoli*.

This was described by my informant as patterns added by the older women below the melody of pounding songs.

So far I have only managed to write down one of these patterns. It is added to the melody of the Nsenga pounding song *Mazela*. The intervals used are the second, fourth, fifth and octave. It is clearly counterpoint rather than harmony because the lower part has melodic interest of its own and moves independently.

I should be very interested to hear if anyone else has come across this which seems to me to be a stage in advance of the normal parallel progressions of Zambian part-singing.