

# AFRICAN MUSIC

## JOURNAL OF THE INTERNATIONAL LIBRARY OF AFRICAN MUSIC

---

---

VOLUME 6

1982

NUMBER 2

---

---

### A WORD FROM THE EDITOR

It is becoming common cause that African cultures tend to be oral/aural rather than visual, and are concerned more with relationships and processes than with static objects and facts, a contrast that can perhaps be understood in terms of the different nature of the two senses, hearing and vision. Given this orientation, what need should there be for written articles on African music? Can they help to spread African music, make it better understood, taught or studied in Africa?

Who reads *African Music*? Certainly very few of the musicians mentioned in its pages, and also, it seems, not very many subscribers in Africa itself. To judge from the subscriptions (nearly two thirds of which are institutional), most readers are probably in the Western academic world, -ists of various kinds, many of whom will never set foot among the people discussed. This raises an issue of responsibility. The writers of our articles are practically to a man (or occasional woman) dedicated people who love the musics they study and are devoted to the cause of strengthening them and the people who make them. I am sure that all of them would like to think that their readers share in the responsibilities that they feel towards them.

What use do you, in fact, make of these pages? Do you use them to widen your knowledge of Africa, to feed into your information factory, to quote in your dissertations? Do you try to play the music described, and does it tempt you to get to know the people themselves? I would like to know your opinions. One of our well-known writers, for instance, at one point virtually gave up publishing usable musical transcriptions on the grounds that he did not want partially informed people playing them both incorrectly and without benefit or reference to their originators.

What is an academic's ultimate responsibility? If you are a geologist there is no moral issue; you do not have to be responsible to your rocks. But in the human sciences we have to be more sensitive to our material and its originators. The editors of *African Music* have always subscribed to the view, as we wrote ten years ago, that research must be relevant to Africa, i.e. applicable, of value, in Africa. And to be relevant in Africa requires more than pursuing academic goals. An article, after all, is a typical Western artefact, a static, visual statement to be enshrined as a 'knowledge object'. In order to be brought to life in an African context it usually has to be *relived* together with the people concerned.

The journal cannot directly help those people who are doing the real job of making music in Africa, transmitting it in the only good way, by word of mouth and long exposure. But it can help those who can help them. The 2,229 pages of *African Music* since Vol. 1, No. 1 in 1954 have become one of the best-known and most-consulted sources on African music. Now that you have access to this 'knowledge object', what are you thinking of doing with it?