

## SONGS AND TALES OF THE ARĪMI OF TANZANIA

*by*

HOWARD S. OLSON

The following article contains five songs of the Arĭmi of Tanzania.\* Tales told in connection with the first two songs are included here, and a brief explanation of the background of the other three songs precedes them. The translations into English are rather free.

It is traditional in Rĭmi society for several households to get together after the evening meal for a bit of fun and fellowship. Usually a number of riddles are told after which folk tales preserved in songs are led by various members of the group until everyone is tired enough to go to bed. After the song is sung its tale is related by the leader.

### 1. Mũtũtũi and the Hyenas

Long ago two children were left alone. The boy's name was Mũtũtũi, and the girl's name was Lawĭ. Mũtũtũi was the hunter, and Lawĭ was the cook. Mũtũtũi would often bring home guinea fowl. Each time Lawĭ would prepare the fowl together with some porridge.

Many times it would happen that Lawĭ called Mũtũtũi just as he was about to capture some birds. Invariably he would reprimand her for her poor timing. Whenever Lawĭ prepared food for her brother she would set it before him as she perched herself on the drying rack above the hearth. Greedy Mũtũtũi usually ate all the food, leaving Lawĭ only the neck, head, claws, and a few scraps of porridge.

One day when Lawĭ was out gathering firewood she came upon a procession of ants carrying off chaff and bits of euphorbia. Her curiosity led her to find out where the ants were coming from. By following the track of the ants she came to a house belonging to a family of hyenas. When she perceived that no one was home she ventured inside. To her astonishment she found honey, flour, honey beer, and millet. She took a little of the honey, flour and beer with her, and hurried to her home. She put the honey and millet on the drying rack.

When she had prepared a fine meal of guinea fowl and porridge she called her brother to come and eat. Again he rebuked her for disturbing his hunting. Nevertheless, she faithfully set his food before him. When he started eating in his usual greedy way Lawĭ dripped some honey on his head. Mũtũtũi became indignant asking, "Why did you urinate on me?" Lawĭ ignored the impertinent question. Then even more harshly he said, "Well, why did you defecate on me then?" To this Lawĭ sparkled, "Taste it to see if it is excreta."

When Mũtũtũi licked his finger he was sorry he had been rude to Lawĭ. He said,

\* For a description of the Arĭmi see "The relationship between lyrics and melody in Rĭmi vocal music" in the last edition of *African Music*.

*Ed:* In this article -nk- represents -ŋk-, -ng- represents -ŋg- and ĭ, ũ represent i, u with higher tongue position.

“Give me the honey and you may have all the porridge.” Lawj jumped down from her perch and ate until she was filled. Then M̄t̄t̄t̄i urged, “Take me to where you get this honey.” Lawj led him to the hyenas’ home.

Fortunately the hyenas had not yet returned by the time M̄t̄t̄t̄i and his sister reached their home. Quickly they gathered a heap of stones which are used for roughening the grinding stone. Soon they heard the hyenas singing a song as they were coming back to their home. They were thinking about how good the honey beer would taste. When they reached the doorway of the kraal the hyenas decided that one of them should go in to see if the beer was properly aged. One eager hyena

1. M̄t̄t̄t̄i and the hyenas

Solo

M̄-t̄-t̄-i, M̄-t̄-t̄-i, n̄j̄-ŷ, gi-no-no-re,

Solo All

gi-no-no-re. N̄j̄-ŷ, gi-no-no-re.

Solo All

M̄-t̄-t̄-i, gi-no-no-re. N̄j̄-ŷ, gi-no-no-re.

Solo All

M̄-t̄-t̄-i, gi-no-no-re. N̄j̄-ŷ, gi-no-no-re.

Solo All

M̄-t̄-t̄-i, gw̄-a-ki-va. N̄j̄-ŷ, gi-no-no-re.

Solo All

M̄-t̄-t̄-i, gw̄-a-ki-va. N̄j̄-ŷ, gi-no-no-re.

put his head in the house to test the beer. Mũtũtũi hit him soundly on the head with a stone. The hyena shouted, "My, this beer really has a kick." And with that he dropped dead.

The other hyenas thought that he had fallen in a drunken stupor, so they sent another of their company to sample the beer. This one, too, was stoned by Mũtũtũi. And so each hyena in turn was killed. But the last hyena sensed the danger and ran away.

So Mũtũtũi and Lawj lived happily ever after in the house which had belonged to the hyenas.

In the song the words, "Njuu, ginonore," mean "Come, let us eat sparingly."

## 2. Mũkenkaitumo, the Bead Thief

The story connected with this song is about some girls who went swimming. They left their clothes and beads on the bank. While they were absorbed in swimming and splashing about a bird stole the beads of one of the girls. To this day that bird is called *mũkenkaitumo* which means "bead carrier." The girl followed the bird pleading with it to drop her beads. She was deserted by the other girls who went home. The song describes the plight of the girl as she follows the bird. She gets late for all her tasks and fears that she will be punished by her parents.

The girl followed the bird determinedly. As it neared its home it came down and turned out to be a man. Now the man invited the girl into his house. There she met his brothers also. When night fell the man and his brothers turned into lions. This in itself was terrifying enough, but to make matters worse she overheard the lions asking, "When are we going to eat this girl?"

She made plans to run away as soon as she would be left alone. While biding her time she noticed that the head lion took off his claws and removed his teeth before going out for a stroll.

One day when all the lions were gone she hid the lion's claws and teeth among the hearth stones, and ran for home. When the lion discovered that the girl was gone he reached for his teeth and claws in order to pursue and kill here. He was furious when he could not find them. So he bounded off without them looking for the girl. When he found her in the forest he demanded, "Where are my teeth and claws?" She lied, "Oh, they are on the roof."

The lion raced back to get his "cutlery" and the girl continued on toward her home. Soon the lion came back panting, "They were not on the roof; tell me at once where you put them." Again she lied, "They must be under the grinding stone."

Trustingly the lion sprang back to the house in no time at all. When the lion could not find his teeth and claws under the grinding stone he went into a purple fury.

When he found the girl again he raged at her, "You get just one more chance to tell me the truth. Now where are my teeth and claws?" This time the girl replied honestly, "I put them by the hearth." As the lion bounded off again he growled, "I'll eat you when I get back!"

Fortunately while the lion was gone the girl met her brothers who were hunting. Quickly she told them all that had happened. With little time to spare she pleaded, "When the lion returns kill him with your arrows and spears." The lion reappeared very confidently, but the brothers killed it on the spot. Thereafter the girl lived safely and happily.

The word, *mysanyumbi*, is used simply to provide an antiphonal response. It has no independent meaning. A free translation of the text follows:

Carrier, please drop the beads.  
Drop my beads.  
I shall be rebuked repeatedly.  
At the well, I'll be late.

To get greens I'll be late.  
To get wood I'll be late.  
I shall be rebuked by my father.  
I shall be rebuked by my mother.

### 2. Mũkenkaitumo, the bead thief

Mũ-ke--nka--i--tu--mo--o, fũ ta--gha--a, mũ-ke--nka--i--tu--mo,  
fũ ta-gha, mũ-sa-nũ-mbi, ta-gha gi-ntũ ga-ne, mũ-sa-nũ-mbi,  
Ni-nji ũ-tũ-ka-n̄gwa, mũ-sa-nũ-mbi; ũ-ry-ji no na-ti-nya, mũ-sa-nũ-mbi.  
ũ-nya-nyi no na-ti-nya, mũ-sa-nũ-mbi; ũ-nkwĩ no na-ti-nya, mũ-sa-nũ-mbi.  
Ni-nji ũ-tũ-kwa na ta-ta, mũ-sa-nũ-mbi; ni-nji ũ-tũ-kwa na yi-ũ, mũ-sa-nũ-mbi.

### 3. In Praise of Mwaljda

This is the plaintive song of a grass widow singing about her growing son. She apparently conceived a child out of wedlock, and as a consequence was disowned by her husband and his brother, Lũsjnda and Lecemo. They would not accept her son, and they drove both the mother and child away. Now the mother sings with tears of pride and sorrow – sorrow over being ostracized, and pride in her handsome young son. She wants her son to be seen by the men who rejected him so that they might live to regret their hasty, arrogant decision. This song is sung at the women's initiation rites (both *Imaa* and *Itĩma*). It is started by the leader, and from the second line the leader and group sing together. The words and translation are:

Ntegeeye di ũnkhambi,  
Nj mbura aruma;  
Ngwĩ, mweeso ũkwenenda.  
Mwaljda wane,  
Nainga ũmũdidima,  
Njhange mũjengei,  
Vaihe vamũhitie.  
Nkũmũtũkja (v)ĩrũngũ,  
(V)ĩrũngũ iti mũnaana,  
Nkũmũtũkja caghõ.  
Mũtoi kianja,  
Aonwe na Lũsjnda,  
Aonwe na Lecemo.

I hear "di" in the camp,  
Like rain pattering;  
Alas, he is walking.  
Mwaljda, my son,  
I shall care for him,  
That I may get someone to build for me,  
His fathers rejected him.  
I shall adorn (his hair) with shells,  
Not just with eight,  
I shall adorn him with ostrich shells.  
Send him outside the kraal,  
That he may be seen by Lũsjnda,  
That he may be seen by Lecemo.



## 4. Jĩbulĩ takes a bath

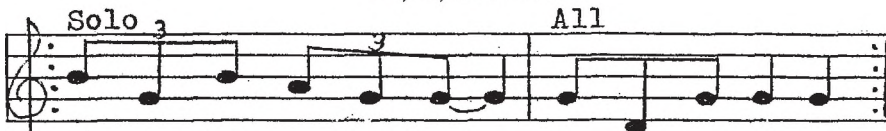
This is a children's song about the spring-hare. The spring-hare is a nocturnal animal which somewhat resembles the Australian wallaby. It makes long jumps with its powerful back legs, and digs with its front legs. The back legs have cloven hoofs, but the front legs have claws. The jerky movements of this animal are ideal for mimicking in song.

The children accompany the music with bodily movements which simulate the leaps of this little animal. First the hands are on one side of the body, then on the head, and then to the other side, over and over again until the end of the song.

Not all the words seem meaningful, but such is the way of many songs. For the locusts to eat the spring-hare seems as likely as apples growing on the lilac tree.

## 4. Jĩbulĩ takes a bath

Solo All




Jĩ--bu--lĩ, jĩ--bu--lĩ, hu--ĩ, si--ni--ngĩ.

Solo All




We--ndye ku--o--gha. Hu--ĩ, ki--ra--mbo.

Solo All



(I)-ra-mbo ra mu-tĩ-ki? Hu-ĩ ra mu-ŋkho-nje.

Solo All



Dku-mbĩ-ku-mu-kwa-ta. Hu-ĩ ki--da--bwa--si.

*Solo*

- : Jĩbulĩ, jĩbulĩ,  
Spring-hare, spring-hare,
- : Wendie kuogha,  
It has gone to bathe,
- : Irambo ra mutĩki?  
The lake of what tree?
- : Nkumbĩ ikumukwata.  
The locusts will catch him.

*All*

- Huj, sijnĩngĩ. :  
Huj, sijnĩngĩ bird.
- Huj, kirambo. :  
Huj, at the lake.
- Huj, ra munkhonje. :  
Huj, of the munkhonje tree.
- Huj, kidabwasi. :  
Huj, the dappled bull.

## 5. A drinking song

Solo

Mwe-ngi wa ntu-i, nyee, Na-mwira mu-nya-gwe-nga

Response

A-ti ntu-i, ntu-i a-hi-ra-na gy---mbee,

ntu-i, Yi-u, ntu-i, ntu-i, nyee,

Response

A-ti ntu-i, ntu-i a-hi-ra-na gy---mbee? A-hi-

Ntu-i ntu-i ku-ni yi-u, ga--ti, Ti-mwi-ri mwe-ngi wa

Response

ra-na gy--- mbee? A-hi-ra-na gy---mbee?

ntu-i Yi-u, ntu-i wu-ri gy-mbee,

Response

A-ti ntu-i, ntu-i a-hi-ra-na gu---mbee?

vee? Yi-u, yi-u, ntu-i, vee,

Response

A-hi-ra-na gy---mbee? A-hi-ra-na gy-mbee?



### 5. A Drinking Song.

This type of song is sung at rites such as *imaa* or *Ngoi* or at any of the communal work projects. It can be led either by men or women. Both sexes drink beer at the same time, but in separate groups. The women generally drink in the kraal, and the men drink in the men's hut. Unmarried youths are not permitted to drink beer, but are given an unfermented drink called *mausu*.

A free translation of the lyrics follows:

Brewer of beer, you there,  
 Tell me, Is the beer all gone in the house?  
 I say to you, brewer of the beer,  
 Tell me, Is the beer all gone in the house?  
 Mother, the beer, the beer --  
 Is it all gone in the house?  
 The beer there by you, mother,  
 Is it all gone?

In leading the song the soloist may repeat any phrase at any time, and the group will respond accordingly.

\* \* \* \* \*

## INTRODUCTION TO DANCE LITERACY PERCEPTION AND NOTATION OF DANCE PATTERNS

by

NADIA CHILKOVSKY NAHUMCK

### HOW DO YOU WRITE DANCE?

*Imagine trying to study speech without writing, or music without music notation! Yet this is what many of us do with dance.*

Various forms of dance notation have been invented, one having firmly established itself as pre-eminent over the last fifty years.

**Introduction to Dance Literacy** is a new handbook giving a practical introduction to Labanotation, the technique invented by Rudolf Laban of perceiving, notating and analysing dance movement. It is designed both for the dancer, in any culture, and for the specialist in other spheres such as musicology, anthropology, folklore, education or the stage whose interests touch regularly on dance. Dr. Nadia Nahumck is former Dean of the Philadelphia College of the Performing Arts and has spent a lifetime as dancer, teacher, choreographer and author.

Published by the International Library of African Music, 1978. 95 pp.

**Enquiries to:**

International Library of African Music, Rhodes University,  
 Grahamstown 6140, South Africa.

**Price:**

R10.00 (S.A.)