

NOTES AND NEWS

MWENDA JEAN BOSCO'S COMEBACK

Since 1981 West Germany has been riding what one journalist (Dr. J.R. in *Frankenpost*, 24 June 1983) has described as the "Afro-wave". The German public, only gradually becoming educated to the realm of African music studies and appreciation, is usually exposed to either "national" music/dance troupes sent by friendly African governments or commercially oriented groups formed by Africans living in Europe ('Tomtoms', naked bodies etc.). In contrast with this are the activities of learned institutions in Germany such as the Museum für Völkerkunde, Berlin, or Iwalewa House of the University of Bayreuth. Dr. Wolfgang Bender, who is in charge of the music section of Iwalewa House is particularly interested in the new forms of African music which have developed in many parts of the continent since 1945.

On the suggestion of Gerhard Kubik, Iwalewa House sent an invitation to the legendary Zairean guitarist Mwenda Jean Bosco (alias Mwenda waBayeke) in May 1982. Bosco, a successful and much admired guitarist and composer in the 1950s and 60s, dropped into virtual oblivion when commercial record companies in Central and East Africa began to publish only electrically amplified bands. It took several years of research (by a few interested people — Gerhard Kubik, Walter Schicho and John Low in particular) even to locate Bosco, who lives alternately in Sakanya, near the Zambian border, and Lubumbashi.

Bosco, who writes letters in a flawless, almost 'ministerial' style of French, agreed to undertake a European concert tour as a solo guitarist. He came to Europe in May 1982 and had a very successful tour of various cities, Bayreuth, Cologne, Berlin, Graz and Vienna. Observers were surprised that Bosco still plays the old music to perfection, as much as he does the new compositions. His performances were a revelation to many people. Gerhard Kubik who, like David Rycroft and Andrew Tracey, has long admired Bosco's music writes about his impressions:

"Although until recently we did not know many details about Bosco's playing technique, I was already able to draw a tentative conclusion from his 1952 photograph, published in the *African Music Society Newsletter*, Vol. 1, No. 6, 1953. Our scant knowledge of Bosco was amplified by extrapolation from more detailed knowledge of the guitar techniques of other musicians from Central and East Africa. From this it became nearly certain that Bosco, like all the other guitarists from Central Africa whom I have known personally, used *two* fingers for plucking: the thumb and index. In the 1952 photograph this is suggested by the fact that only the index is slightly bent, as if about to strike, while the second and third fingers are firmly planted on the soundboard.

"It took nine years until the opportunity arose to meet Bosco and verify our thesis. During his 1982 European concert tour organised by Iwalewa House, Bayreuth, he also came to visit us in Vienna, on which occasion we made a synch-sound film of three of his compositions, including "Bombalaka". When Donald Kachamba, Moya Aliya and I met him at the railway station, it was our first meeting with him. On June 19 Bosco and Donald had a marvellous musical meeting in our apartment, when Bosco explained the techniques of several of his compositions: "Tambala Moja", "Bombalaka" etc. He also played the Zimbabwean song of the 1950s "Vula Matambo". Within half an hour of his arrival it was clear that he does indeed use the two-finger technique of all the other Central and East African guitarists I had met in the last twenty years. He also revealed that he uses different tunings for different compositions. He uses the so-called standard tuning (EBGDAE) when playing in the key of G, while in 'Full C' he sometimes raises the sixth string a semitone to F in order to be able to stop it with the thumb on the second fret for the C and G chords, leaving it open for F. This is a common tradition in Central and East African 'dry' guitar styles, and I had documented it with other guitarists. (See the films of Daniel Kachamba, E 2136 and E 2137, Inst. for Scientific Cinematography, Göttingen, West Germany)

"In the Central and East African two-finger guitar technique the movement of each finger of the right hand forms an organised pattern in itself, to the extent that a performer can appreciate separately the patterns emerging from each. Each finger is allocated a distinct playing area, the thumb usually the three bass strings, the index finger the treble strings. In special circumstances the areas may temporarily criss-cross. Further, the guitarist's left hand also performs *movement patterns* and not merely a "fingering". Left and right hand patterns may form inaudible cross rhythms.

"A guitarist who tries to imitate Bosco or some of the the other early Congo/Zaire guitarists using Classical or 'Spanish' guitar techniques can never get the real feel of it. This also applies to famous compositions such as Bosco's "Masanga". In their aural dimension a concert guitarist's reproduction may come very close to the sound of the original as we know it from Bosco's records, and yet it does not reflect the spirit of his music. A careful observer will notice differences in the accentual and dynamic structure resulting from the fact that different fingering patterns are being used. The Western performer who attempts to learn Bosco's music concentrates on the sounds he hears on the records, in conformity with the Western notion that music consists of sounds, and failing to understand its motional content. The resultant differences may appear subtle, even irrelevant to a Western ear, but they are decisive from the viewpoint of African music. Accordingly, the function of the left hand of an African guitarist is not to be explained in terms of 'finger positions' alone. Each hand functions as a motional centre in its own right, and the patterns of the left and right hand fingers are interrelated.

"Mwenda Jean Bosco today, at the age of about 55, is in good health and remarkably 'well preserved', both physically and spiritually. It poses no major problem to invite him for concerts and lectures anywhere in the world. His present address is: Monsieur Mwenda waBayeke (Mwenda Jean Bosco), B.P. 955, Lubumbashi, Zaire.



Mwenda Jean Bosco in Vienna, June 1982. Photo: Moya Aliya

David Rycroft notes:

"Having long been a devotee of Mwenda Jean Bosco's guitar-songs ever since 1949 when Dr. Hugh Tracey first discovered him and recorded him in Jadotville, Congo Belge (now Likasi, Zaire), I had the unexpected delight (in 1978) of hearing a tape of some much later performances by Bosco, dated February 1974. It was played to me in Vienna (amid snow and 5 degrees of frost) by Dr. Walter Schicho, of the Institut für Afrikanistik of Vienna University, a colleague of Dr. Gerhard Kubik (who was my host). Dr. Schicho had spent some time in Zaire in 1974 on linguistic research. He had met Mwenda Jean Bosco socially in Lubumbashi and visited him at his home on

several occasions, where he was able to make some private recordings.

"The first item on the tape was Bosco's celebrated "Masanga" (which besides its wide popularity in the 1950s on Gallotone GB1700 and on Decca LPs 1170 and 1171 in the "Music of Africa" series, lent its theme for inclusion in Sir William Walton's *Johannesburg Festival Overture*, of 1956). Bosco's 1974 rendering of this song is set a whole-tone lower than his original performance, and the tempo is a shade slower, but it has lost none of its fine artistry over the intervening quarter of a century. The remaining eight items were titled as follows (as noted down by Dr. Schicho): "Bibi Teresa", "Jikita sokucomale", "Mukwenu vadima malimi", "Watoto wawili", "Usianze kusikitika", "Masimango", "Kila muntu ana penda kwako" and "Bayama". Five of these are clearly identifiable with previous commercial recordings made by Bosco between 1952 and 1962 (as listed in my 1962 article) but three of them I was not able to recognise (unless "Bibi Teresa" is the same as "Teresa walala", on Gallotone GB1726). My stay was unfortunately too short to allow more detailed investigation, but it is to be hoped that Dr. Schicho will later publish his findings regarding these treasures.

"One point that emerges, however, from the fact that Bosco's 25-years-later rendering of "Masanga" differs hardly at all from his original version, is that I was perhaps incorrect in applying the term 'improvisation' to his music in my analytical articles of 1961 and 1962 ('The guitar improvisations of Mwenda Jean Bosco', *African Music*, II/4 and III/1). If his songs retain essentially their same form and substance in subsequent performances they should of course be classed as 'compositions' rather than 'improvisations'. It would be interesting to find out, however, whether Bosco, in continuing to reproduce his earlier songs virtually in their original form, may have been influenced to any extent through listening to his old recordings of them.

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NEW BOOKS ON AFRICAN MUSIC IN GERMAN

The Ethnomusical Department of the Museum für Völkerkunde, West Berlin, has just published a reader on African music containing the most important German language publications on this subject since 1945, 432 pages, illustrated with black and white and colour photographs, sketches, drawings and transcriptions, with two cassettes (two hours), housed in the back cover, of recordings of hitherto unpublished African music: *Musik in Afrika* (Ed. Artur Simon), West Berlin 1983. The contributors are: Alfons M. Dauer, L. Gerhardt, H. Jungraithmayr, Gerhard Kubik, Artur Simon and H. Wängler. It can be obtained from Musikethnologische Abteilung, Museum für Völkerkunde, D-1 Berlin 33/Dahlem, Armimallee 23/27, West Berlin, Fed. Rep.. of Germany.

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Another volume on African music, probably the first of its kind, has been published by the Deutscher Verlag für Musik, Leipzig (GDR), *Musikgeschichte in Bildern: Ostafrika* (Music history in pictures: East Africa) by Gerhard Kubik, Leipzig 1982. The volume (ca. 200 pages, colour and black and white photographs) gives a detailed account of the history of music and dance in East Africa on the basis of written and pictorial sources from the past to the present. Individual chapters deal with: Amhara music of Ethiopia, the former court music of Buganda, the *siwa* horns of the Kenyan coast, migration of musical instruments such as harp and lyre, musical history of Tanzania, musical history of the Nyasa/Ruvuma culture area, the impact of 19th. century military music in East Africa and popular music in East Africa after 1945. This volume can be ordered from: VEB Deutscher Verlag für Musik, Postschliessfach 147, DDR-701 Leipzig, Karlstrasse 10, German Democratic Republic.

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