SHANGANA-TSONGA DRUM AND BOW RHYTHMS

by

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There are exactly four types of Tsonga drum, and four types of bow, and the prevalence of their sounds in Tsongaland outweighs that of any other musical instrument. The former are played mostly by women, the latter mostly by men, and the social role of each instrument is in sharp contrast to that of the other.





Tsonga drum rhythms (*ncino*) accompany group singing and dancing within the context of four social institutions — the drumming school, puberty school. beer-drink and exorcism; they are but one important constituent of a total group performance. Bow rhythms, on the other hand, belong to the Tsonga musical category *xichaya*, solo instrument-playing; they are the primary and sometimes the only constituent of a solo performance played any time and anywhere, unrelated to institutionalised group activities. These contrasting social roles are reflected in the kind of rhythms considered by the Tsonga to be suitable (*fanekela*) for each of these two classes of musical instrument.

DRUM RHYTHMS

The xigubu, ndzumba, ngoma and ncomane drums are played within the context respectively of the drumming school, puberty school, beer-drink and exorcism. To each of these institutions belongs a discrete body of vocal music, the accompanying rhythms of which acquire distinctiveness of timbre by being consistently played upon a drum which correctly 'speaks' the essential messages of the institution in question.

The drum rhythms and messages are intimately related to the dance steps and varying routines of from two to five dances, directed by from one to five officiants as shown below:

DANCE	DRUM	OFFICIANT
xichayachaya xilala rhambela phikezano muchongolo	Venda <i>ngoma</i> , (v. large bowl-shaped) in sets of 3, for beer-drinks OR <i>xigubu</i> (double membrane, on cylindrical metal body), 2 or more	mufambisi, dance leader kepe-ngoma, dance leader for muchongolo
mandhlozi xidzimba xiNdau	ncomane (tambourines) in sets of 4 for exorcism	<i>dzwavi</i> , 'exorcist' <i>thwasani</i> , 'medium' <i>bangoma</i> , special drummer
ku khana nanajila managa ku thaga ku rhwala tingoma	ndzumba (tall, conical to goblet shape, single membrane) in sets of 2 for kbomba puberty school	nkulukumba, supervisor bangoma, processional drum- carrier mufambisi, dance leader ndzabi, 'schoolmother'
ku wamikapa xifase	xigubu in sets of 2 for drumming school	muqambhi, instructor
mayiwayiwane ku nenga	circumcision school, NO DRUMS	n'anga, doctor madblala, 'shepherds'

THE XIGUBU DRUMMING SCHOOL

Xigubu is a year-round drumming school that takes its name from the doublemembraned drums used for instruction, but more than this it is the name applied to a specific body of musical formulae performed within the context of the school. Xigubu sessions are organized in each village by a muqambbi (composer or music instructor) appointed by and often related by blood to the Chief or Headman, and occupy every afternoon until sunset over a period of about one month. They re-occur intermittently through the year and are mainly attended by boys of pre-circumcision school age (girls are mainly too busy with household duties), who live at home during the session and turn up daily in the area outside the drum storage hut. The following activities are featured:

- (i) drum manufacture;
- (ii) drum instruction;
- (iii) the learning of didactic ideophones;
- (iv) the learning of drum-and-voice conversations (ku vulavurisa xigubu);
- (v) the learning of a special body of songs;
- (vi) the organisation of a xifase competitive dance team which visits other villages.

Manufacturing xigubu drums

The present Tsonga *ndzumba*, *ngoma* and *ncomane* drums are heirlooms, rarely renewed, but *xigubu* drums are commonplace, being made in all villages for everyday use. A goatskin is left soaking in water overnight and in the morning is stretched out over one end of a bottomless, cylindrical scrap-metal canister, with stones suspended from the skin edges. That night the skin is temporarily secured, the canister inverted, and the process is repeated with a second skin, after which the skins are looped together with lengths of thong (*ntambu*). Xigubu drums are made in all sizes, the shells consisting of emptied jam tins, industrial detergent containers, paraffin drums and oil canisters.

Drum instruction

During the first week, in return for a small payment of beer, each student (*mudyondzi*) receives instruction from the *muqambbi* in drum repair, in drumskin tightening by the application of a firebrand, in the use of drumsticks (*swibangoma*), in hand drumming and in left hand/right stick drumming. The following eight didactic drumming formulae are learned during the second week, in the order given: (See page 62).

Note that the first five of the above formulae are played on the drum at an unvarying pitch-level, while the final three are played at varying pitch-level. One hand may be assigned to a series of beats while the other hand is silently depressed and released to obtain high and low tone respectively, this action tightening and slackening the head. When both hands are in constant use throughout an exercise, high tone is obtained by striking near the drumskin's perimeter, and low tone is obtained by striking near the drumskin's perimeter, and low tone is obtained by striking near the drumskin's centre. Sticks are used mainly in the teaching of *mancomane* ('exorcism') drum rhythms, though the special *mancomane* drums are not available within the context of the *xigubu* school.

The wide variety of onomatopoeic syllables used is an indication of the discrete tones emitted by individual drums — boys will rummage through the *xigubu* storage hut until they find a drum which is appropriate for the formula to be learned next. In one instance of the use of didactic drumming formulae among the Lala of Zambia, Jones reported that "the drum insists on saying *pa-ku*, i.e. high-low. He had to go to find a little drum with a thin drumskin to get the right sounds . . ."¹.

Note that the number of syllables in Formulae 1, 3, 4, 5, 6 and 8 above is not equalled by that of the accompanying drum tones. A similar instance in Lala formula usage was commented upon thus: "... it is rather strange that in this case his nonsense syllables only cover four out of six quavers, but that is how it is."².

Drum and voice conversations (ku vulavurisa xigubu)

A particularly interesting feature of *xigubu* music is the use of call-and-response form between voice and drum (this occurs also in *khomba* puberty school). There are four known examples of these *xigubu* drum conversations; two of them are very long. One of the two short ones is given below. They are learned during the second week of the school.



Fig. 3. Heli heliya dluv' imani lo nga vula sona a ku dluvani i n'wina (They say the jumping is all finished, you), trans. ma 3rd down, cycle 24 crotchets.

^{1.} Jones, A. M., The Icila Dance Old Style, Longmans Ltd., Cape Town, for the African Music Society, Roodepoort, 1952, p. 19. 2. Ibid., p. 21.



Fig. 2 Didactic drumming formulae: 1. Hiya kona gandlani (we are getting there, at the cramped place), transposed mi 3rd down. 2. Ndzumbandzum' (the big drum), 5th up. 3. Ndle-nga ndle-ndle (drum tones), 4th up. 4. Nila-ntla-ngu nilu-ntlu-ntlun' (drum tones), mi 3rd up. 5. Vu-ngi-ndzengi-ndzi (drum tones), mi 2nd up. 6. Ntiga-ntiga ndu-ndun' i yo zwi (the darkness), ma 3rd up. 7. Ntiga-ntiga i lo ga (just comel), dim 5th up. 8. Ndla-nga-ndza (drum tones), ma 2nd up.

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Having learned the eight didactic drumming formulae and the four voice-and-drum conversations, the *mudyondzi* graduates as a *mabangoma* — fully-fledged drummer, and is entitled to accompany *xigubu* boys' drumming school songs during performance of the dances known as *ku wamikapa* and *xifase*.

Xigubu songs accompany two dances in which girls often join — ku wamikapa and xifase. The first is peculiar to the xigubu school, around whose drums the dance is centred. A circle of about twenty boys and girls is formed and dancing couples take turns occupying that part of the circle not taken up by the drums. Xifase is danced on moonlit evenings when one xigubu school sends a team to compete with a neighbouring school, and members of opposing lines of singing, clapping youngsters energetically dance out in turn to brush a chosen partner with the hand, starting a chain of partner-changing. Children are taught the basic xifase step by being made to repeat the phrase swirhendze swi ta pfimbal (your heels will get sore!) while transferring weight from foot to foot thus:



Fig. 4

DRUM RHYTHMS OF OTHER SOCIAL INSTITUTIONS



Fig. 5 Khomba drum rhythm 1.

The most common drum rhythms found in the music of the girls' puberty school(*khomba*) are *nanayila* and *xisotho*, both of which are variants of this model (Fig. 5):

This rhythm is based upon four crotchets, with the first and third heavily accented.

A quite different drum rhythm, based on four dotted crotchets (Fig. 6) accompanies another large group of *khomba* songs, perhaps reflecting the musical diffusion known to have occurred in the Northern Transvaal (Junod states that "a characteristic rite has been preserved or borrowed from the Sotho-Pedis, who attach great importance to it. It is called *khomba* . . ."³, and the

present writer recorded Tsonga initiates singing Venda vhusha initiation school songs⁴).



Fig. 6. Khomba drum rhythm 2.

Junod, Henri, The Life of a South African Tribe, Macmillan & Co., London, 1927, Vol. I, p. 117.
Johnston, Thomas F., "The Music of the Shangana-Tsonga", unpublished Ph.D. thesis, University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg, 1971, p. 164.

With the exception of performances involving muchongolo (the national dance of the Tsonga), the commonest rhythm heard within the context of Tsonga beer-drinks is based upon four crotchets varyingly subdivided in order to complement such dancesteps as the xichayachaya (men's dance), one phase of which is shown below:



The beer-drink dance muchongolo, often being based upon three 8-quaver rhythmic phrases grouped as $|: 3 + 3 + 2 : | \times 3$ may be viewed as providing an interesting contrast to the norm.



Note the use of the quaver-grouping 3 + 3 + 2, described by Sachs as ubiquitous ⁵. Gibling describes it as "Afro-Cuban" in the form of the rhumba, 6 and Jones describes it as "Afro-American" in the form of the samba 7.

This rhythm in Fig. 8 above provides for baton-pointing at 2-quaver intervals; vocal syllables at 3 + 3 + 2-quaver intervals; foot stamping at 4-quaver intervals, and a recurrent overall metrical length of eight dotted crotchets for the whole song and the movement which it suggests.

The drum accompaniment (not indicated here) to the above song would consist of one drum marking the vocal accents with a second marking the points of gesticulation and stamping.

The Tsonga exorcism rhythms are mandhlozi, xidzimba and xiNdau; they are used for expelling undesirable Zulu, mild Ndau and bad Ndau spirits, respectively. Mandhlog¹ rhythm is based upon four crotchets, xidzimba is based upon fast triplets (within a four-crotchet framework), and xiNdau is bimetric. Examples of the first two are given below.

Sachs, Curt, The Wellsprings of Music, Martinus Nijhoff, The Hague, 1962, p. 118.
Gibling, R. S., "Notes on the Latin American National Dances", Newsletter of the African Music Society, Vol. I, No. 4, June 1951, p. 32
Jones, A. M., Studies in African Music, Vol. I, Oxford University Press, London, 1959, p. 114.



Fig. 9. Two exorcism rhythms: 1. Mandhlozi. 2. Xidzimba.

TSONGA DRUM RHYTHMS - SUMMARY

The reader has by now probably identified the core drum-pattern of most Tsonga music as being four unevenly accented crotchets, thus: $|: x \times x \times :|$ Various rhythmic relationships to this core pattern are shown in Fig. 10.



Fig. 10. The core drum pattern of most Tsonga music.



Drum rhythms which are in contrast to the core pattern are shown in Fig. 11.

Fig. 11 (left) Bimetric pattern in xiNdau and Khomba music. (right) Dotted crotchet rhythm in Khomba and Xizambi bow music.

The above example of bow rhythm leads us into the second half of this study.

BOW RHYTHMS

The *xitende* braced gourd-bow is taught to beginners via performance of these exercises (Fig. 12):



Fig. 12 Xitende learning rhythms.

Joseph Mageza of Mahonisi performed the following two *xitende* pieces. Note in the first, alternation of 4 + 4 with 3 + 3 + 2, and in the second, alternation of 2 + 3 + 2 + 3 with 3 + 3 + 2 + 2.



Fig. 13 Two Xitende bow pieces: 1. Tshanga ra kona ri lungile wa vuloyi (The people fear the witches), trans. mi 6th up, cycle 16 crotchets.

2. Whayayiso-o (person's name), trans. mi 6th up, cycle 20 quavers.

The *xipendana* mouth-resonated, thick-handled braced bow is smaller than the *xitende*, and is plucked with a safety-pin rather than struck with a reed. The two following examples were performed by Sarah Maphophe and Sophie Maswanganji, *xipendana* duettistes of Samarie.



Fig. 14 Two Xipendana pieces: 1. Langutani Maluzani xohomba na makwavo (Look at Maluzani, who plays with his juniors), trans. nil, cycle 12 crotchets. 2. Ximanjemanje (These modern times), trans. nil, cycle 20 quavers.

The *mqangala* hollow cane-bow is the only Tsonga bow which acts as its own fingerboard. The two following pieces were performed by an old man named Risimati Maluleke and his granddaughter (singer), of Madonse.



Fig. 15 Two Mqangala pieces: 1. Hi ye ku lungili (It is all right) trans. nil, cycle 6 crotchets. 2. Mina ndzi ya kaya (I'm going home), trans. nil, cycle 10 crotchets.

The xizambi bow was the subject of an article in the last issue of this Journal (Vol. 4, No. 4, 1970, p. 81).

TSONGA BOW RHYTHMS — SUMMARY

Iambic, trochaic and appogiatura-style rhythms, including the use of unusual and piquant meters, reflect the fact that frequently a solo artist (a professional, above the level of communal music-makers) is at work, often alone. His musicianship is subtle — Tsonga bows are incapable of achieving the high volume of drumming and are thus less suited for accompanying mass ensemble singing and spirited group dancing (though this is not to imply that they have not at times done so).

Bows are at their best within a 'chamber-music' context, where the subtleties of light fruitshell rattle-stick rhythms, of safety-pin-plus-index-finger rhythms, and of strikingreed-plus-calabash-damping (against the chest) rhythms can be heard and appreciated by a small audience. Bow playing, being relatively, but not totally, free from the integrative and normative pressures of the main social institutions, provides a necessary outlet for individualism and the creative process.

COMMENTARY

The acquiring by children of knowledge of the Tsonga rhythmic system is a gradual process paralleled by social and biological maturity. It is accomplished in stages, culminating in beer-drink and exorcism drumming (for women) and, frequently, musical specialist roles (for men). This is shown in Fig. 16.

Women		Men				
Specialist	Nkulukumba supervises khomba music	Thwasani acts as exorcism medium	Dzwavi exorcist organises mancomane music	N'anga doctor organises circumcision lodge and music	Muqambbi Xizambi players; instructs 1 built-in note; drumming requires mature school musical conception	
Adult	Men and women perform adults' songs, accompanied by specialised <i>mabangoma</i> women drummers					
	Girls perform kbomba				Boys play <i>timbila</i> handpiano; many built-in notes; music is physically conceived	
Adolescent				a.	Boys sing didactic songs of circumcision school; no drumming	
Children	Children learn No drumming		from other ch	ildren, story-son	Boys perform <i>xigubu</i> songs; didactic drumming gs from old women;	

Fig. 16 Stages in Tsonga musical life.

The context of the ceremonial beer-drink is an ideal one for viewing both drum and bow rhythms in multi-level perspective. Subtle distinctions in rhythm combine with social factors to determine suitability for different musical activities. In the Chief's court and in the reciprocal musical activities between courts can be heard the rhythms of *muchongolo* dancing, of *rhambela phikezano* adults' competitive team-dancing, of *xifase* drumming school competitive team-dancing, of the wandering minstrel (*xilombe*) playing the *xitende* bow and of the court retainers playing the *xizambi* bow, etc.

Tsonga drum and bow rhythms possess another common denominator in the practice of adapting beer-drink songs for instrumental use. The beer-drink complex of rhythms, by providing the grid for many initiation coming-out songs and instructional drumming formulae, permeates the music of other social institutions, (1) murbundzw boys' circumcision school and khomba girls' puberty school, especially the coming-out songs sung at the beer-party with the relatives on the final day, (2) xigubu boys' drumming school, and (3) mandhlozi, xidzimba and xiNdau exorcism music, particularly when muchongolo is danced within an exorcism context.

Not the least interesting of cultural factors influencing Tsonga rhythms is the diffusion of possession cults from the north. Being an immigrant group without long-established roots in the Northern Transvaal, the Tsonga are particularly susceptible to the blandishments of Shona (exorcism dances), Venda (idea of chief's court, *vhusha* songs, large drums), Ndau (*timbila* handpiano layout, xylophones, children's song words), Pedi (circumcision school, puberty school, *dipila* handpiano layout), Tswana and Lovedu musical practices. The Southern Tsonga are likewise in close contact with the Swazi (exorcism song words, *mqangala* bow) and the Chopi (xylophones).

It must not be imagined that this diffusion is in one direction only. Of 'foreign' use of the Tsonga neomane exorcism drum Kirby states the following:⁸

"... the Swazi have copied this method of exorcising evil spirits from the Tsonga ... I have even obtained a specimen of an actual *mancomane* made and played by a pure Swazi ... Many Tsonga doctors have a great reputation outside their own country, and it is not surprising to find the *mancomane* used by one of their number who has settled among people of another race."

^{8.} Kirby, Percival, The Musical Instruments of the Native Races of South Africa, Witwatersrand University Press, 1934 (reprinted 1965 Johannesburg, p. 43).

Huskisson mentions its use by the Pedi in sets of three,⁹ and Krige mentions its use by the Lovedu¹⁰. Tsonga use of the Venda ngoma drum and Swazi/Pedi use of the Tsonga neomane drum help to illustrate some of the external forces influencing the rhythms of the Tsonga and other Bantu-speaking peoples of Southern Africa in the twentieth century, and to suggest that, within each musical heritage, perhaps one of the more important invariables is change.

RECORDS AND BOOKS FOR SALE

We would like to draw members' attention to the books and records published by the African Music Society and the International Library of African Music.

Records

A catalogue of the "Music of Africa" Series is enclosed with this number. The Series consists of 23 records, selections made from the I.L.A.M.'s primary series (see below). The material is grouped in various ways, to satisfy most cases of artistic or general interest. The "Sound of Africa" Series, at present consisting of 213 discs, remains by far the largest, most

comprehensive and best documented existing collection of African music. The material is arranged on the records by language groups, and comes complete with a card information system enabling one to look up items in four ways:

by language, social function, instruments used, and your own library system number. This series has been widely bought by universities and African studies departments. The full catalogue can be obtained from the International Library of African Music, P.O. Box 138, Roodepoort, Transvaal, South Africa, at 29c (S.A.), 40c (U.S.), 15 p (U.K.), including postage.

Recordings that will illustrate certain aspects of articles in this issue are these: CARRINGTON: "The musical dimension of perception in the Upper Congo", TR. 129. LAURENTY: "Les Cordophones des Luba-Shankadi", TR. 40. JOHNSTON: "Shangana-Tsonga drum and bow rhythms", TR. 193. A. TRACEY: "The nyanga panpipe dance", TR. 85, 173, 25, 108, 111, 117, 193, 194, 204.

Books

"African Dances of the Witwatersrand Gold Mines" by Hugh Tracey. 120 pl., pp. 156. A.M.S. 1952. R1,05 \$1.42 £0.54 "Chopi Musicians, their poetry and instruments" by Hugh Tracey. pp. 180, Oxford University & ress, 1948 R3,00 \$4.05 £1.53 "The Icila Dance-Old Style" by A. M. Jones and L. Kombe. pp. 49, A.M.S. 1952 R0,85 \$1.15 £0.43 "Lalela Zulu", 100 Zulu lyrics, by Hugh Tracey, ill. by Eric Byrd. pp. 121, A.M.S. 1948. R0,50 \$0.68 £0.26 "Ngoma", an introduction to music for Southern Africans, by Hugh Tracey. pp. 91, ill., Longmans Green 1948. R1,25 \$1.70 £0.64 "The Lion on the Path", 25 African stories, by Hugh Tracey, ill. by Eric Byrd, pp. 128, Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1967. R2,50 \$3.38 £1.28 "How to Play the Mbira dza Vadzimu", an instruction book for the Zezuru mbira of Rhodesia, by Andrew Tracey, pp. 25, I.L.A.M. 1970. Newsletters of the African Music Society, six editions 1948-1953 each R0,50 Back numbers of "African Music". All available except Vol. I/4, and Vol. II/1 and 2. R1,00 \$1.35 £0.51 R0,50 \$0.68 £0.26 Prices on request I.L.A.M. manuscript paper for African music transcription: per sheet R0,02 \$0.03 £0 01 Fitting ring binder R3,00 \$4.05 £1.53

Huskisson, Yvonne, "The Social and Ceremonial Music of the Pedi" unpublished Ph.D. thesis University of the Witwatersrand Johannesburg, 1958, p. 119.
Ibid. (Huskisson quoting Krige), p. 16.