

MUSIC AND SPIRIT POSSESSION AT A SHONA BIRA

by

PAUL BERLINER

During the year 1971-72 and the summers of 1974 and 1975, in which I carried out field research in Rhodesia¹ on mbira music, I had the opportunity to attend as an observer and, at times, as a performer,² over thirty spirit possession ceremonies held by members of the traditionalist segment of Shona culture. At these events villagers participate with tremendous energy and the intensity of their music is deeply moving. In this article, my aim is to describe the purpose underlying Shona spirit possession ceremonies as well as the nature of the music and the interaction among participants at these events.

A. Misfortune and traditional Shona religious belief

It is a basic belief in traditional Shona religion that after people die, their spirits continue to look after and to affect the lives of their progeny. The workings of the world of the living are seen to be a function of the workings of the spirit world. In the traditional Shona view, then, a person's fortune and fate in the world are to some extent the result of an interplay of forces outside of the person's own control. If, for instance, individuals within a family remember their ancestors and honor their values, the spirits will look after the family and offer protection (Gelfand, 1962:52). If, however, a person forgets or dishonors departed ancestors, they can withdraw their support. This leaves an individual vulnerable to the forces of the mischievous and belligerent spirits and witches. Thus, a traditionalist's first reaction in the face of misfortune (e.g., a failure of crops, a prolonged illness, or a sudden death in the family) is to ask "What have I done to offend my ancestral spirits?"

Once trouble, such as illness, occurs (that is, literally, has been caused in a person), an individual either privately consults the spirit of his or her grandparents in prayer, or goes to a *nganga* (doctor) for treatment. In the latter instance, if the prescribed herbs do not help the patient and his or her condition worsens, the *nganga* frequently decides that the illness is not a "natural" one. Rather, it was caused by an ancestral spirit to call attention to some personal or social problem or to indicate that a spirit wishes to possess the patient's body as its host. In such cases, the *nganga* passes the patient's case on to the domain of the *svikiro* (spirit medium), advising that the family of the affected person arrange a *bira* (pl. *mabira*).

B. The Bira

The *bira* is a formal religious ceremony in which family members come together to call upon a common ancestor for help and support.³ The ceremony is held in the villages of the tribal trust lands, either in a *banya*, a specialized house built for the spirit and used only on religious occasions, or in a large village round-house kitchen converted for the event. The buildings are usually modest in size with a capacity of

twenty to forty people but, in some instances, are quite large, with space for one hundred or more.⁴ Before the *bira* takes place, the round-house kitchen is cleared of any furniture and cooking ware. The fire pit is filled with dirt to make it level and the large clay cooking pots are cleared from the cement bench against the far wall of the building. The mbira players who are hired for the event perform while seated on the bench and store their instruments and resonators there while taking breaks from the music.

The *bira* begins after sundown inside the *banya* or the round-house kitchen, dimly lighted with kerosene lanterns. As members of the immediate family, neighbors, and guests arrive, millet beer, especially brewed for the event, is ladled out from large clay pots designated for different groups. One is reserved for the spirits and is not touched. At the beginning of the *bira* there is an air of casualness as people drink and chat together, listening to the mbira ensemble. Gradually they enter the performance themselves, dancing, singing and clapping. As the music builds in intensity and more participants are drawn into performance, the seriousness of the occasion imposes itself. No one knows just when the possession of the medium (or mediums) will come and it is sometimes the fate of unsuspecting participants to be chosen as hosts.

It is not uncommon for villagers to invite a professional medium and his or her attendant (*nechombo*) to participate in their *bira*. The medium is sometimes associated with a particular spirit whom the participants would like to consult for advice or, other times, is invited to help bring about the possession of the ailing person for whom the *bira* is held. It is believed that, in some instances, the affected person will only recover after having submitted to possession by the spirit who caused his or her illness.

The possession itself, which usually takes place early in the morning after hours of music and dance, is often sudden and startling. The prospective host, sitting quietly with a glazed look in his or her eyes, can be seized without warning as if by an epileptic fit, filling the *bira* with cries of anguish. Once this physical manifestation of possession subsides, the medium is fitted with traditional dress (e.g., in the Mondoro area, often a black skirt and black feather headdress) by the attendant and joins the other villagers participating in the music. From this point on, the medium's words are considered to be those of the spirit.

When the possessed medium is ready for consultation, he or she calls for the music to stop. The medium sits on the ground beside the attendant and the villagers then gather around them. The attendant frequently acts as an interpreter since the medium's words may be a mixture of different languages or dialects, not easily understood by the villagers. The discussion with the medium takes on a democratic character in which everyone present has an opportunity to raise questions or to state his or her positions on the issues raised. Usually it is not until after a great deal of deliberation and consideration of the many opinions discussed that the medium makes a final judgment in the matter at hand. In some respects, the medium acts as the "mouthpiece of the community" (Garbett 1969:125).

The particular issues vary, of course, from one *bira* to the next, according to the problems in the village. At one spirit possession ceremony that I attended, a possessed medium was confronted by a worried young couple and their ailing child. The child had been seriously ill for some time and the *nganga's* medicine had failed to improve her condition. During consultation with the parents, the medium con-

firmed the *nganga's* former diagnosis that the illness was not a natural one, but one which had been caused by gravely disturbed ancestors. He explained this in terms of other family troubles which the parents revealed to him: shortly before the child became ill, her grandmother had died and her grandfather, having become greedy in his old age, had refused to return his wife's possessions to her side of the family. This transgression of the traditional Shona law of inheritance had angered the ancestors who, then, afflicted the granddaughter in order to point out the seriousness of the offense and to demand rectification of the matter. The medium advised the worried parents to pressure the child's grandfather into giving up his departed wife's possessions or to risk the prolonged illness or, possibly, the death of his granddaughter. The medium's clients expressed their gratitude for his advice and the consultation was concluded.

After such consultation at a *bira*, the villagers resume their participation in the evening's music. Sometimes the medium remains in a state of possession for much of the remainder of the ceremony. Other times, he or she leaves the building for a few minutes, shortly after the consultation is over, and then returns with former dress and personality to participate in the music with the villagers until sunrise when the *bira* is officially brought to an end. If the particular occasion warrants it, the *bira* is concluded with a short procession, led by the mediums and accompanied by the mbira players, to a place at which a ritual ox is sacrificed in honor of a particular spirit, and the animal's meat is divided up among the participants.

C. The music of the Bira⁵

In its many aspects, the *bira* is a communal affair; its music is the sum total of the contributions of all the members of the village who choose to participate. The nucleus of the music is usually provided by an mbira ensemble consisting of two or three mbira players, a *hosho* (gourd rattle) player, and one or more singers — often from among the players themselves.⁶

Traditionally, the mbira has been regarded as a sacred instrument by the Shona. As expressed to me by a well-known mbira player who performed for a powerful medium, "The mbira is not just an instrument to us. It is like a Bible . . . It is the way in which we pray to God." In the context of the *bira*, the mbira is thought to have the power to project its sound into the heavens, bridging the world of the living and the world of the spirits, attracting the attention of the ancestors. In the hands of skilful musicians, the mbira is said to be able to draw spirits down to earth to possess mediums. At the *bira*, then, the mbira players are responsible for the possession of the spirit medium (or mediums). Additionally, their music places other villagers in a meditative state and inspires their tireless participation in the dancing, clapping and singing which accompanies the mbira music throughout the evening.

The basic structure of the music heard at the *bira* is provided by the mbira compositions. For the most part, these pieces consist of four phrases of twelve beats each, played in a continuous cycle. Each composition is designed to be played by at least two musicians: one plays the solo or lead part (*kushaura*) which contains more of the melodic essence of the piece, and the other "weaves" a second interlocking part (*kutsinhira*) which tends to emphasize the bass notes. As each piece is developed, variations are played and the interwoven melodic lines change and interact with each other throughout the performance. The music has a character which can aptly be described as "kaleidophonic" (A. Tracey, 1970:12).

The mbira players often begin the *bira* by selecting pieces which are not technically demanding so that they can warm up while performing. At the beginning of each piece, the tempo gradually increases until it reaches a peak at which it remains throughout the performance. Often the lead player begins with deliberate slowness and, after a few repetitions of his part, he is joined by the second player who adds an interlocking part. As the two parts mesh, the *hosho* player joins in, playing a basic three-pulse figure with an emphasis on the downbeat. Together the mbira players and the *hosho* player accelerate and the piece gets under way. The performance of each mbira piece lasts as long as the musicians remain in the mood, usually from ten minutes to a half-hour or more.

During the course of the *bira*, mbira players take brief breaks in between tunes and, at various points in the evening, take a break for as long as ten or fifteen minutes to drink beer with the other participants. This is not simply for refreshments. Playing the mbira becomes hard work as the evening progresses. Musicians can be called upon to play for as many as twelve hours. At times the beer serves as an anaesthetic so that the players will not feel the pain from their swollen fingers and can continue to perform all night. It also serves as an energizer for the villagers who resist their fatigue so that they can participate in the music throughout the evening as well.

Around the nucleus of the mbira music and the basic supporting rhythm of the *hosho*, participants at the *bira* engage in three forms of musical expression: singing, hand-clapping and dancing. There are three main vocal styles: *mahon'era*, a low syllabic or humming style, *huro*, a high, syllabic, yodelling style, and *kudeketera*, a poetic verbal style. These styles are each, to a large degree, based on the melodic-rhythmic parts which the performers hear in the mbira music.

While *mahon'era*, *huro* and *kudeketera* are sung by both men and women, a fourth vocal style, exclusively of the province of the women, is also heard throughout the night. This is ululation (*kupururudza*). It comes as an expression of approval or encouragement for all the performers and adds to the excitement of the music. In response to the ululation, people put more of themselves into whatever part they are playing in the total musical event.

The poetry which is sung at the *bira* adds an important social dimension to the music. It consists both of traditional "lines" and their variations as well as improvised "lines". These can be sung by anyone present and take the form of a mosaic of texts dealing with all aspects of the lives and experiences of those participating in the music. Their themes range from humor and social commentary to proverbs and historical references and reflect the world view of the Shona people (Berliner, 1975). Because of the deep cultural association of mbira music with the ancestral spirits, many of the lines sung are melancholy in mood. As one singer reminded other participants through her poetry, "You may think that I am enjoying myself while singing here, but inside, my heart is filled with pain for those buried below the ground." Other traditional lines are devoted to mourning departed relatives and petitioning ancestral spirits for help with troubles in life.

In general, there is a great deal of flexibility in the vocal parts and participants join in the performance of singing at will. Sometimes performers sing standardized phrases in unison, and other times they sing different phrases simultaneously. Frequently individuals vary the standard parts as well as improvise new ones at the time of the performance. This degree of freedom reflects the communal nature of

the music in which highly talented or professional musicians can express themselves without constraint within the same context as beginners. Each individual performs at his or her own level of proficiency.⁷

Singers frequently alternate the different vocal styles, *huro*, *mahon'era* and *kudeketera*, within the performance of one mbira piece. Sometimes, if their talents lie in one area such as yodelling, they concentrate their performance in this style during a particular piece or throughout the evening. People with specialized talents also compositely weave their parts together: some singing overlapping *mahon'era* phrases and others adding *huro* passages, or singing out interjections of the poetry to the music. When sung together, these different parts overlap rhythmically and melodically, forming a beautiful, richly textured background for the mbira music.

The participation in dance at a *bira* is as informal as the participation in singing. Throughout the evening, individuals rise to dance when they feel moved to do so, and for as long as they wish. Sometimes they dance in place where they have been seated; at other times, looking for more space, they come forward into the center of the round-house in which the *bira* is held and dance in front of the mbira players. Although the participants frequently dance in place and in close proximity to each other, they move without bodily contact with the dancers around them. Many stare out into space before them as if their minds are far away in their own personal world of expression, some perhaps thinking deeply of their departed ancestors.

The dance steps are quite diverse. They are similar to the singing parts in that they include simple basic patterns which are technically within the grasp of all the participants. Like the mbira parts as well, the basic patterns of the dance steps can be gradually extended to more complex movements. While some mbira songs require specific styles of dance, many others allow participants freedom to express their individuality in dance. Highly talented dancers frequently improvise to their own satisfaction, in effect, creating their own styles. Among the most basic dance steps is a form consisting of hopping on each foot twice on two consecutive downbeats of the *hosho* pattern before shifting weight to the other foot in continual alternation. In minor variations of this step, while one foot carries the weight of the body for two beats, the other foot is either extended backwards (bent up from the knee) or extended forwards with the knee bent level with the pelvis. A further development of this step consists of kicking the extended leg forward on the second stomping beat of the leg that bears the body's weight. The procedure is then alternated from foot to foot as the dancer turns slightly from side to side in the direction in which the foot is kicked.

In another style, a person dances in a slightly crouched position with his or her knees bent and arms extended forward, palms upward. While the dancer bobs up and down to the pulse of the music, his or her arms are alternately extended forward and drawn back to the body. Some styles are more reminiscent of the acrobatics of ballet — great leaps in the air with arms outstretched and one leg extended in the air behind the dancer. Other styles include steps which repeatedly lift the dancer off the ground so that the person gives the effect of dancing almost in the air.

At a *bira*, in addition to the dance and vocal styles previously described, the participants join freely in two forms of drumming, expressed through hand-clapping and dancing.⁸ In the first form of drumming, the participants clap interlocking figures that fit the mbira music. At their simplest, they consist of clapping on each downbeat of the three-pulse *hosho* figure which is played. The hand-clapping patterns

(*makwa*) can also be quite complex, however, with various rhythms being clapped against each other. Wooden board clappers may be used as well as a whole array of homemade percussion instruments with different timbres. One evening, I heard an old man add a very complex rhythmic accompaniment by throwing uncooked rice from side to side in a metal bowl.

The second form of drumming is expressed by the dancers' feet. Performers speak of this as the *shangara* style (alluding to the formal *shangara* exhibition dance), which involves "dancing with a voice". When employing this technique, dancers stomp out complex rhythmic patterns as if using the earth's surface as the membrane of a drum (Kauffman, 1969:509). Sometimes small round gourds filled with seeds (*magavhu*) may be attached to the performer's legs to amplify the rhythms. Individuals who specialize in dancing in this style know many patterns and can perform with much greater skill than others who have not cultivated the ability. Just as a group of individuals can sit together and clap out complex rhythmic figures, sometimes two or three people dance *shangara* styles together, drumming out different interlocking rhythmic patterns with their feet to the music of the mbiras. The *shangara* style is physically very demanding and many are unable to maintain its performance for long periods of time. Thus, it is often the case that dancers will alternate this style with others during their performance.

At the *bira* there is a great enjoyment taken in the challenge of carrying on more than one musical activity at a time. Participants are often simultaneously involved in the performance of different musical skills: singing and clapping, dancing and singing, playing *hosho* and dancing or singing, and so on. The musicians themselves frequently play the mbira and sing at the same time.⁹

In some respects at the *bira*, the roles of the performers and the audience overlap. On the one hand, while musicians have been hired to bring about the possession of professional mediums and other participants, they, themselves are permitted the full range of audience participation at the event and can even become possessed by the music which they are playing.¹⁰ On the other hand, it is through the audience's part in the singing, clapping, and dancing which accompanies the mbira music that their role becomes one with that of the performers. The audience's participation comes as expressive response to the mbira music and it is, at the same time, an integral part of the overall musical scene itself.

D. Social interaction and direction of musical proceedings at the Bira

The musical proceedings of the *bira* are the result of the interplay among the participants, the musicians and the medium (or mediums). First, the mbira players themselves determine the music which is played. Often, there is one member of the mbira group who takes on the role of the leader, making decisions regarding such matters as the particular pieces which should be played, the order in which they should be played, and when the group should take a break from performing, etc. In the group, "Mhuri yekwaRwizi," for instance, Mude, the featured singer, acts as the leader, and calls out the pieces to be played during the event. At the same time, members of the group can also suggest their preferences.

Second, the participants themselves influence the musical proceedings. They often call out for their favorite compositions to be played and the mbira ensemble honors their requests. Also, it is sometimes the case that individual musicians (or a whole ensemble) appear at a *bira* without having been officially hired (or invited).

On such occasions, the villagers give each a chance to exhibit his skill and then select the best players to perform for the remainder of the event.

Throughout the evening there is a lively interaction between the audience and the musicians. When the mbira players are especially pleased with the music, they sing out exclamations of praise for themselves and other participants. When they are dissatisfied with the music, they can sing lines of poetry criticizing participants who are not performing well. The mbira players are in return the object of comment by members of the audience and are affected by the nature of their response. The audience can either voice its criticism or its praise of the mbira players. In the latter instance it is not uncommon for a participant to drop a few coins into the gourd resonators of the mbira players as a token of approval. This gesture is sometimes accompanied by the exclamation "Vasekuru" (Grandfathers!), calling upon the ancestors to assist the musicians in their performance, and evokes a response of ululation from the women.

Third, the possession of the medium has a great impact on the music of the *bira*. As the medium is seized by the spirit, the air is filled with ululation. In response to the possession, the participants perform their parts with tremendous intensity and vigor, and the musicians play mbira with all the strength which they can muster.

In order to bring about the initial possession of the medium, musicians perform the pieces which they say the medium's spirit favors. If the musicians are familiar with a particular spirit (that is, if they have performed previously for the same medium), they know the spirit's musical preferences. However, if they are hired to perform for a medium for the first time, or if an unsuspecting participant becomes possessed at a *bira*, they must experiment with different pieces until they discover those to which the newly possessed medium responds. Theoretically, the pieces which appeal to the spirit are those which the spirit enjoyed years ago when he or she was a living being. For this reason mbira players must be familiar with the classics of the mbira repertory which have been passed down orally for many generations.

Once the spirit has taken over his or her host, the musical proceedings of the *bira* revolve around the possessed medium. Just as it is the mbira players' music that is responsible for bringing about the initial possession of the medium, it is their music which is responsible for keeping the spirit at the *bira*. That is, if they let up the intensity of their performance after the medium is possessed, the spirit may drift away from its host and depart from the *bira* shortly after his or her arrival. As long as the medium is possessed, the mbira players are responsible to his or her musical tastes and whims.

The interaction between the musicians and the medium is an important part of the ritual of the *bira*. The musicians follow the directions of the possessed medium, changing pieces whenever the medium expresses interest in another. The medium sometimes abruptly orders them to begin a second piece before they have concluded the first, or gives them advice about their performance and coaxes them on. The mbira players willingly submit to the demands and the criticisms of the medium because his or her spirit is considered to be a shrewd judge of the quality of the mbira performance (that is, having heard many great musicians in his or her previous existence). Also the very presence of the spirit is a credit to the mbira players and testifies to their skill and ability as performers. At the same time, through critical interaction with the mbira players, the medium demonstrates the

presence of his or her spirit to the participants, that is, the ability of the spirit to perceive and to share the experience of the music with the others who are present.¹¹

Occasionally at a *bira*, musicians experience great difficulty in bringing about the possession of the medium for whom they are playing. Under such circumstances the participants frequently look elsewhere for mbira players who can attract the medium's spirit. That is, it is said that the spirits have preferences not only for particular mbira pieces but for a particular type of mbira, and even for the members of a particular mbira ensemble. For this reason it is not uncommon to hear of mbira players travelling some distance from their homes to other villages to perform for mediums who have requested their services at ceremonies.

Finally, as in the following story, told by musicians about the virtuoso, Mubayiwa Bandambira, it is sometimes the case that even the best mbira players fail to bring about the possession of a medium at a *bira*. Bandambira is an extremely knowledgeable and powerful mbira player who throughout his career has been in great demand at *mabira*.

On one occasion, Bandambira was hired to play for a village *bira* in which a very stubborn spirit refused "to come" (that is, refused to possess the medium). It is said that Bandambira played through the night without sleeping and at sunrise asked that food be brought to him so that he could continue performing. Bandambira is said to have played on for two days and two nights, taking only short breaks for food and naps, before he finally gave in to the spirit and the *bira* was concluded.¹² The story epitomizes the great strength and endurance of mbira players as well as the extent of their devotion to the spirits for whom they play.

At a *bira*, then, there is a lively interaction among the participating members: the audience, the musicians and the medium (or mediums), all of whom can influence the evening's musical proceedings. Because the interplay among them is never exactly the same on different occasions, each *bira* takes on a unique character.

E. Conclusion

Shona ritual, rather than seeking to analyze statements of ideology, acts them out, dramatizing them and in so doing, "gives each member of the ritual group an opportunity to take part" (Murphree, 1969:58). In this respect, it is through the music and the dance of the evening that all members have an opportunity to take part in the drama of the Shona *bira*. Their vigorous participation in singing, dancing and clapping supports the role of the mbira players in bringing about the possession of spirit mediums, bridging the world of the living with that of the ancestors.

While the primary purpose of the *bira* is, of course, religious, the event at the same time affects participants deeply in other ways as well. Throughout the evening people dwell on the strong cultural associations which the music has for them. These are largely involved with the past: the ways of the ancestors, traditional Shona values, historical events, and so on. The music also serves as a vehicle for the expression of troubles and grievances directed not only at the ancestors but at other villagers who are viewed as part of the problem. In this respect, the music of the *bira* performs a cathartic function for the participants.

Finally, there is the overall feeling of solidarity achieved in the village through the common experience of sharing in the music of the evening's *bira*. In some respects, the *bira* is like a long, communal journey through the night, climaxing at the moment of spirit possession. The music then stops and the participants seat them-

selves around the medium who deliberates his or her message as an official representative of the spirit world. The medium explains the troubles which have plagued individuals or the village as a whole, making these problems less formidable, and consoles the participants. After the spirit leaves, the music resumes, ending finally with sunrise. By the end of the journey, the whole village has travelled together through the evening without sleep.

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FOOTNOTES

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- 2 I wish to express my gratitude to Hakurotwi Mudi, the renowned Shona singer and mbira player, for permitting me to perform with his ensemble, "Mhuri yekwaRwizi", and for making arrangements for me to attend numerous *mabira* at which his group provided the music.
- 3 A *bira* for the family spirits (*vadzimu*) can be held at any time during the year when there is cause. In addition, special *mabira* are held at regular intervals during the year in relation to the changing seasons. These ceremonies are directed at the powerful tribal spirits (*mhondoro*) since they control the rainfall, the excess or absence of which will ruin a good crop. Murphree (1969:46) indicates that *mabira* for the *mhondoro* spirits differ from those for the family spirits in that "it is the chief who is responsible for providing the necessary ingredients for the beer to be brewed and initiating the proceedings". Finally, spirit possession ceremonies are also held for the *mashave*, animal spirits or the wandering spirits of people who were not accorded proper burial rights. It is sometimes the case that at the same *bira*, mediums representing each, or some combination, of these different groups become possessed.
- 4 A large *banya* of such dimensions was built at the home of the medium, Muchatera, whose following believes him to have the spirit of Chaminuka, an ancient tribal spirit.
- 5 The description in this section is confined to the music of *mabira* of the Zezuru people in which the *mbira dzavadzimu*, an instrument closely associated with religious ritual (H. Tracey, 1969:84), is performed. In other parts of the country in which other types of mbiras are used in spirit possession ceremonies, the accompanying musical traditions also differ from those of the *mbira dzavadzimu*. For instance, Gelfand (1962) describes a women's circle dance (*mafuwe*), performed to mbira music at Korekore rituals in the northern part of Rhodesia, which is quite different from the dance styles I observed at spirit possession ceremonies of the Zezuru people. Also, not all spirit possession ceremonies are accompanied by mbira music. Depending on the part of the country and the requirements of the particular medium's spirit, drums alone can be used in place of the mbiras.
- 6 In some parts of the country, particularly where the *njari* is popular, drums are sometimes included in the mbira ensemble. As a general rule, ensembles consisting of the *mbira dzavadzimu* do not include the drums in their performances. As one player explained this to me, "The *mbira dzavadzimu* has a big voice and doesn't need the drums. However, the *njari* has a small voice and needs the drums' help." While many mbira ensembles have a specialized *hosho* player, some do not. Since the ability to play *hosho* is less specialized than that required to play the mbira, musicians can count on individual participants at a *bira* assisting them by playing *hosho* throughout the evening. On such occasions the instrument is often

- passed from hand to hand during the *bira*, as each performer begins to tire.
- 7 There is a tacit assumption in Shona culture that musical events such as the *bira* should include everyone who is present. To respond actively to music is considered "natural" to the extent that I have often seen individuals listening through earphones to the playback of a recorded *bira*, dance and sing new parts to the music as if they were present at the live event.
 - 8 These styles as well as the vocal styles performed at a *bira* can be heard on a record produced by the author for Nonesuch Record's Explorer Series (H-72054) entitled "The Soul of Mbira".
 - 9 The remarkable physical coordination and musical concentration that simultaneous performances require is epitomized in the talent of mbira player Simon Mashoko. He has become a legend among his followers for his ability to play mbira, sing, improvise poetry, dance and act, all at the same time. His performances represent the extent to which the various arts as defined in the West find ultimate unity in African culture. He is at one time composer, musician, poet, singer, choreographer, dancer, playwright, and actor.
 - 10 On occasions in which I have seen an mbira player possessed during a *bira*, the other musicians in the ensemble have filled in his part until the possession had run its course and he rejoined them. As a general rule, however, the mbira players do not become possessed by their own music, unless they themselves also happen to be professional mediums. In the case of a *hosho* player possessed, some member of the audience will take over his role and perform with the mbira ensemble.
 - 11 One can speculate that the nature of the relationship of the mbira players and the medium (with regard to the submissiveness of the musicians) can be seen as a symbolic enactment of the relationship of all the participants to their ancestral spirits. As mentioned previously, traditionalists see the events in their own lives as being subject to the will and the whims of their departed relatives. In this respect, the capriciousness of the spirits is represented in stories which I have heard about possessed mediums actually attacking mbira players physically at *mabira* and throwing their instruments out of the *banya*.
 - 12 Cosmas Magaya, performer with "Mhuri yekwaRwizi", personal communication, March 1972.

CONTRIBUTORS TO THIS ISSUE

- Pie Claude Ngumu, Dr.:** Musicologist, former maître de chapelle at the Yaoundé cathedral, founder of the Maîtrise des Chanteurs à la Croix d'Ebène. Address: Wetterskamp 1, 45 Osnabrück, W. Germany.
- Laz E.N. Ekwueme, Dr.:** Musicologist, Head of Music Department, University of Lagos, Nigeria.
- Samuel Akpabot:** Musicologist, studied at the Royal College of Music in London and the University of Chicago. At present lecturing on African music in the Music Department at Michigan State University.
- David K. Rycroft:** Linguist and musicologist, lecturer at School of Oriental and African Studies, London University.
- Gerhard Kubik, Dr.:** Musicologist, with many years of field experience in Africa. Ph.D. dissertation on initiation among the Nkangela of Angola. Address: Musikwissenschaftliches Institut der Universität, Wien.
- A.M. Jones, Rev. Dr.:** Missionary for many years in Zambia, now retired from Chair of African Music, School of Oriental and African Studies, London University.
- Paul Berliner, Dr.:** Ph.D. dissertation on the mbira and its use in Shona religion, Rhodesia. At present Assistant Professor, School of Music, Northwestern University, Evanston.
- Donald Thompson:** Professor of Music, Faculty of Humanities, University of Puerto Rico.