

REVIEWS

MUSICAL INSTRUMENTS OF EAST AFRICA, 1 KENYA by Graham Hyslop, Nelson Africa Ltd, P.O.Box 73146, Nairobi, 1975, pp. viii, 64, photos, transcriptions. Companion recording (not reviewed): Folk Music of East Africa 1 Kenya, Phillips (EA) PKLP 102.

Like trichocephalus, amoebiasis and giardia lamblia in the world of tropical medicine, there seem to be a few pestilences in the field of African music studies that are equally resistant even to the most sophisticated eradication programmes. One of these is the ideological basis of Mr. Hyslop's recent book on East African music. One can only be amazed at reading in 1975 (!) observations such as the following: "It is hoped that those young people now acquiring general musical knowledge will find ways of applying this to the development of traditional musical instruments and the music that is played on them. There are all kinds of possibilities, such as improvements in the construction of instruments and in the materials used, the widening of scope of performance, and the writing of new music firmly rooted in the old, both for solo and ensemble." (p.4). Or this: "Few will probably dispute the fact that on the whole, African instrumentalists are at home in the old way of life. They seem to have got left behind in the main stream of revolutionary social change." (p.63). What a pity that African music is, according to Hyslop, in such desperate need of "development" and "improvements"!

The author describes Kenyan musical instruments and Kenyan music exclusively from the angle of his own training in Western classical music. Example: "Another centre of modality used with this tuning is a minor mode based on B. The soloist enters on a high F# falling to the tonic B. The voice part clings to this B as a kind of reciting note. In the accompaniment there is continual alternation between the B minor chord and the A minor chord." (p.24).

The transcriptions in Western time signatures, with flats and sharps, and the resulting motional and tonal falsifications belong to an era some decades back. Due to the absence in Mr. Hyslop's book of any evidence of a contemporary scientific approach to the study of Kenyan music, I cannot review it as I would review the work of a colleague. Unfortunately this book has the potential to do further damage to East African music, as it perpetuates some of the old and more insidious stereotypes about African music, and may be used credulously by some East African teachers without their realising that they are using a textbook aiming at cultural indoctrination.

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SWEET WORDS. STORYTELLING EVENTS IN BENIN by Dan Ben-Amos. A publication of the Institute for the Study of Human Issues, Philadelphia, 1975. (Director of publications ISHI, 3401 Science Center, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania 19104.) Library of Congress Cataloging in Publication Data: Bibliography: p. 1. Tales, Bini. 2. Story-telling. I. Title GR351.32.B56N46 398'042'09669 75-26677 ISBN 0-915980-00-2. 93 pages. Photographs, illustrations and music transcriptions.

Professor Ben-Amos has presented a most interesting study of the social and cultural background of storytelling in Benin society (Nigeria). The content is based on the author's extensive field-work in Nigeria in 1966 and a brief restudy in 1973 at Benin City. The original tape recordings on which some of the analysis is based are stored at the Center for African Oral Data at the Archives of Traditional Music, Indiana University.

The book discusses the "communicative events" of two verbal forms in the society of the Edo people, the indigenous people of Benin. These verbal forms are distinguished as *ibota* and *okpobhie*. Narration is their common feature, but *ibota* storytelling lacks instrumental accompaniment and the narrators are not professional artists. "The *ibota* is primarily a family event in which children, youths, wives, and the head of the household participate." (p. 23). "*Ibota* signifies a relaxed interaction in the evening, extended at most until midnight." *Okpobhie* on the other hand is the work of a professional narrator who accompanies himself with a musical instrument. It "denotes an active effort at entertaining that lasts until daybreak." (p. 22)

Both events include important musical aspects. In *ibota* there are songs interspersed throughout the story. "Each song is associated with a specific narrative" (p. 24). In case some members of the