

## 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.

GERHARD KUBIK

**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

storytelling session are not familiar with the song, the narrator teaches them briefly to ensure adequate choral response. For the instrumental accompaniment of *okpobhie* one of two instruments is used: the *akpata*, a seven-string bow-lute, or the *asologun*, a small box-resonated lamellophone with nine notes made from umbrella ribs. Professor Ben-Amos devotes a most informative section to these instruments which are nicely illustrated on pages 27 and 28. Benin, he says, is the northwestern tip of a wide distribution area of the bow-lute. (The south-western edge is in Botswana where G.T. Nurse found it among "Bushmen", who had probably adopted it from Bantu-speaking neighbours. See Nurse in *African Music*, 1972. Otherwise it is an instrument widely known in Zaire and Angola.)

Ben-Amos presents evidence of the use of the bow-lute in Benin history, including two seventeenth-century bronze plaques, where it can be seen. In contrast to the bow-lute "the *asologun* is mentioned neither by eyewitness accounts nor does it appear on indigenous commemorative art . . . even today there is a ban on the *asologun* in Benin city itself." (p. 33).

The next section discusses the position and role of the storyteller and the learning process. "When learning from a teacher who is neither a member of the family nor a personal friend, the pupil enters into a contractual apprenticeship, which is typical for Benin society in other cases of extra-familial professional instruction . . . Such relationship lasts from one to three years . . ." (p. 39-40). This section finishes with some historical speculations: Ben-Amos quotes Bradbury who regarded Benin society as a combination of two cultures, an age-graded village-based society upon which a centralized, hierarchical royal structure was superimposed from Yoruba society. He argues that "the fact that the *akpata* players are not well integrated as a group into Benin society may be a result of the fact that the *akpata* is part of the rural culture, which preceded the imposition of the urban Yoruba-type structure." (p. 43). He further discusses a myth about the origin of *akpata* and *asologun* and the tendency of the storytellers to "view playing the *akpata* or the *asologun* as psychological therapy." (p. 45).

The book concludes with some well-done transcriptions and translations of Edo texts by Rebecca Agheyisi, one of Professor Ben-Amos' co-workers, and with — unfortunately — very poor musical transcriptions by Judith Irvine.

GERHARD KUBIK

**THE KACHAMBA BROTHERS' BAND:** a study of neo-traditional music in Malaŵi by Gerhard Kubik. University of Zambia, Institute for African Studies, *Zambian Papers* No. 9, P.O. Box 900, Lusaka, Zambia, 1974, pp. 75, x, plates, diagrams, bibliography, K2.50, £2.25. Related disc (same title): A.E.L. Series Phonographica No. 1, Institute of Ethnology, University of Vienna, Universitätsstrasse 7, A-1010 Vienna, Austria.

The original German text of this monograph was published in Vienna in 1972 (under the same English title) in *Acta Ethnologica et Linguistica*, No. 27. The present English version is in fact rather more attractively produced: the eight photographic plates are much clearer, there are three additional diagrams, and the bibliography has been slightly expanded. We are unfortunately unable to comment here on the accompanying disc as the review copy was damaged in transit and rendered unplayable, and a replacement has not yet come to hand. The quality of some of the original tapes, however, which the author played for me several years ago, seemed to be of high standard.

Dr. Kubik's output has been prolific in the field of African music and his valuable contributions to this journal over the past seventeen years will be well known to readers. While his major writings in the past have mainly been concerned with indigenous music (from a surprisingly wide range of territories) the present monograph is devoted to what he calls 'neo-traditional' music, in Malawi. The subject is handled with that characteristic thoroughness, precision and practicality which one has long come to expect from Gerhard Kubik. The fact that he displays such enthusiasm for 'acculturated' music will cause no surprise among those who already know that, as he says in his own words, he was 'introduced to African music and African musicology through jazz: after the break-up of my New Orleans Jazz Band, in which I played the clarinet, in the autumn of 1959, I went to Africa'. Since that date, Kubik has probably spent far more of his time roaming around Africa, conducting field research, than at home in his native Vienna; but he has never outgrown his earlier love and enthusiasm for jazz and popular music, and the present work represents a most successful blend of deep personal involvement and serious scholarship, in a field that has far too long been neglected by past researchers.