

SOME PATTERNS OF RHYTHM AND HARMONY IN KALUMBU MUSIC

by

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In the 1965 issue of this Journal, I gave some details of the music and tuning of two Zambian *kalumbu* bows. In the present article I should like to discuss the musical patterns of some more examples of this type of music and to add pieces for the *kalumbu* which is found in the Eastern Province of Zambia.

My first example is a beginner's piece for the Tonga *kalumbu*. I find it interesting to collect these pieces to see how a budding player is introduced to the instrument. Whereas a learner on the *kalimba* (mbira) is given a short chordal passage which he is later taught to spread out into rapid figures¹, the beginner on the *kalumbu*, as will be seen from the example, is given two simple patterns. The second of these is more-or-less the converse of the first (see example 1b). The introductory 'doodling' which is so much enjoyed by the skilled player is reduced to three notes and interludes are simply repetitions of the accompaniment, so there is little to learn.

a. $\text{♩} = 147$

b.

c.

Example. 1. "Si kalumbu talili" by J. Simenda.

Example 1c gives all the variations of the melody on one staff.

My second example is, I feel sure, also a beginner's piece although I was not told that this was so. The voice and instrument are entirely in unison throughout and although, unlike the Tonga piece, it has an introduction, interludes and coda, the interludes are simply strands from the accompaniment to the voice, and the introduction and coda are simply musical doodling. I do not quote these as they follow the usual pattern which I have given examples of in my previous article.

The two pieces which follow come from Langson Lumina, from Chalimbana Training College, near Lusaka. He belonged to our local village which was inhabited by members

¹*African Music*, IV, 4, 1970.

♩ = 138

Voice
Sha-lu-bi-la mu ma-to-ngo mu-ku-lya nso-le Sha-lu-ba le-

Kalumbu

-lo Sha-lu-ba le-lo Sha-lu-ba le-lo

Example 2. "Shalubila mu matongo" by N. Chapupa.

of the Soli tribe. Many of his songs, however, are Lenje or Tonga. A skilful performer, he played with great verve and enthusiasm and sometimes composed his own pieces.

I quote only the instrumental part of his first piece because it is a good example of the way these players change from 6/8 to 3/4 and back again. Since the quaver remains at the same speed, this is simply a change of grouping from twos to threes and *vice versa*, or of main beats from three to two and its converse.

♩ = 160

Example 3. "Koleta katundu" by Langson Lumina.

The second piece which is his own composition amused me greatly at the time because I am the subject of it! He is singing my praises because I came from far-away England to teach at the College at Chalimbana. He began by making a little speech in my praise and then praising his chief Nkomeshya, before going on to play his piece

♩ = 143

Voice
V.1 Twa-lu-mbe wa-da Da-(vi)-so-ni e Twa-

Voice
V.2 Nku-le ku-I - ngi-la-nde e Nku-

Kalumbu

Example 4. "Twalumba wa Davisoni" by Langson Lumina.

which has a straightforward instrumental part coupled with a haunting little song. The strands of melody quoted can be repeated *ad lib* (Ex. 4).

I come now to the *kalumbu* which is found in the Eastern Province of Zambia, called the *ligubo* or *gubo*². It is a musical bow exactly like the *kalumbu* mentioned above but the calabash resonator is at the very end of the bow so it is only possible to produce one open note which, with one stopped note, is its total range apart from harmonics. The player whose music I quote produced extremely clear overtones and two of his pieces which had no vocal part were almost entirely chordal in effect. This may be scientifically impossible but it is definitely what comes over to the listener!

The player normally either removes his shirt or opens it at the front and places the calabash on his diaphragm which he expands and contracts rapidly to produce his overtones.

I quote only some rhythms from his first piece. The introduction is a further example of a change of rhythm from simple to compound and the interlude shows how he produces some variety by the introduction of rests.

a. Introduction $\text{♩} = 132$

b. Interlude

Example 5. "Tiyosi a mwale" by T. Kumwenda.

His second and third pieces are taken from dance songs. The first is a *Chionga* dance and the second, *Vimbuza*. The latter is of some interest as it is a curative dance which is, I believe, used traditionally in cases of hysteria. Three drums produce a resultant triplet rhythm to which the sufferer dances so vigorously that every part of the body is brought into play and continues till he drops down exhausted. After a deep sleep, he dances again and so on until he is cured. It seems a remarkably good way of curing nervous tension³ (Ex. 7).

Examples 6a, (a) and (b) give the basic pattern of the piece and two variants. Example 6b shows how the melody comes through sometimes as (a) and sometimes as (b) depending on whether the harmonic at the fifth or the octave predominates.

²*Ed*: A probable descendant of the Swazi *ligubu* and the Zulu *ugubu* bows, taken up to Malawi and eastern Zambia by the Ngoni invaders from Natal in the early part of the 19th century. Records in which the type of *kalumbu* music described in this article may be heard are: TR 41 (A-2), TR 42 (B-3), TR 46 (B-1,2,3,4,5,6) (Valley Tonga), and TR 99 (B-3,4,5,6) (Ngoni) in the "Sound of Africa" Series, published by the International Library of African Music, P.O. Box 138, Roodepoort, 1725, Transvaal, S. Africa.

A record of Zulu *ugubu* songs, performed by Princess Constance Magogo, mother of Chief Buthelezi, Prime Minister of KwaZulu, has just been published by the International Library of African Music.

³*Ed*: See the article on this subject by A. B. Chilivumbo, "Vimbuza or Mashawe: a mystic therapy", in the last number of *African Music*, V, 2, 1972.

The musical notation for "Chionga dance" is presented in three parts. Part (a) features two staves: "Strand I" (top) and "Strand II" (bottom). Strand I is written in 6/8 time, and Strand II is in 3/4 time. A tempo marking of quarter note = 128 is shown. Part (b) shows the same two strands in a different order. Part (c) shows a single staff with rests used to add emphasis to the melody's entry.

Example 6. "Chionga dance" by T. Kumwenda. The two strands of melody recur in varying order.

Example 6c is an illustration of the use of rests to give added point to the entry of the melody.

I should like, now, to draw some general conclusions about the rhythm and harmony of these pieces.

A. The rhythm

(1) Apart from the introductory passage the rhythm is usually regular but where there is no vocal part e.g. example 7, the player is free to follow the dictates of his fancy and obviously enjoys doing so.

(2) A common feature is moving from simple to compound time. The most common example of this is the change from 3/4 to 6/8. Since the value of the quaver remains the same, this is simply a change of grouping and hence of accentuation, i.e. ** ** * to *** **.

(3) There may also be the occasional cross rhythm on a similar pattern between voice and instrument as shown in (2).

(4) As can be seen from example 8a to m the player tries to introduce as many rhythmic variants as possible. He is obviously aware of the limitations of his instrument and except in beginners' pieces it is rare to find a monotonous pattern of quavers.

B. The harmony

Ex. 8 (over) gives examples of the harmonies which are produced by all the variants of the melodies which are sung concurrently by one singer or in harmony by several. For the sake of clarity, these are written on one staff an octave above the instrumental

Example 7. "Vimbuza dance" by T. Kumwenda.

part, although they are not necessarily so. Sometimes the performer sings at the same octave as his instrument.

The examples are selected from pieces sung by three different players.

My purpose, in this, is not to show what the harmonies are since these are invariably 4ths, 5ths and 8ves unless the performer is imitating European styles, but it is to show how the harmonies arise, i.e. by what progressions in the individual parts they are arrived at. This applies both to the harmonies which result from the combination of all the variants of the melody and the combination of the voice with the instrumental accompaniment.

By far the most common way of producing harmony in these examples and indeed in most music in the Eastern province of Zambia, is progression from the unison to the 4th and vice versa. One part moves by step and the other leaps a third. Example 9 gives five examples of this which are taken from Example 8 in which there is a total of twenty-one instances of this progression and its converse.

Example 9.

a.  Langson Lumina

b. 

c. 

d. 

e. 

f. 

g. 

h. 

i.  Amon Nakwambwa

k. 

l.  Nawa Chapupa

m. 

Example 8.

After this initial step the parts may return to the unison or they may move along for a time in a series of parallel fourths or a mixture of 4ths and 5ths (see Examples 8g, h. and j.).

Exactly the same process occurs between voice and instrument but inverted. Example 10 gives two instances from 8a, which are marked with an asterisk. They are given first in the original form and then inverted, with the octaves eliminated to make it clearer.



Example 10.

Sometimes the vocal patterns actually start in parallel 4ths or 5ths, which gives the impression that this is a kind of rudimentary harmony and not a combination of melodies, until one voice takes its own way and, as in Example 8j, shows that there are two distinct melodies, but there are examples of almost entirely parallel movement as in Example 8h.

There are two other ways in which the harmonies occur in the above examples. The first is from the unison to the fourth as in 8a, bar 2, but since the unison is outside the interval this involves the leap of a fifth in one part and of a second in the other. The second Example, 8f, bar 2 (counting from the first complete bar), shows the leap of a fourth in one part while the other part remains.

These are all the methods by which the harmonies arise in these examples. This does not mean that these are the only harmonies which occur in Zambian music but it does show clearly the prevalence of the method of initiating harmony which I showed in Examples 9 and 10.

It will not escape notice that all the notes in the melodies which are not in unison with the bass are overtones of the fundamental note produced by the instrument. But these progressions are to be found in hundreds of songs without instrumental accompaniment to the extent that I regard this as a definite fingerprint of Zambian harmonic, or contrapuntal style, in the Eastern Province, and I think it may well be so in all the tribes which harmonize in fourths and fifths, although I have not enough evidence to support the latter statement.

Note:

(a) I have written all the examples at the same pitch to avoid unnecessary complications but it will be obvious that the pitch of the open note will vary according to the length of the bow and other factors.

(b) I have not given an exact tuning of the *ligubo*. Unfortunately, I had packed up my material prior to my return to Africa before I realized the omission. The approximate interval between the open and stopped notes is a tone.