

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

From: GEORGE T. NURSE, South African Institute for Medical Research, Johannesburg.

You may remember correcting my description of an instrument described in my paper in the last issue of *African Music* V, 2, p. 26 from 'zither', which I agree was incorrect, to 'harp'. Since publication, I have received the following interesting comment from Dr. Gerhard Kubik. He writes:

"The instrument . . . is not a 'harp' but a 'bow-lute' or in French: *pluriarc*. This kind of instrument is found in a wide area covering south-western and western Angola (Humbi, Handa etc.) the northern part of Namibia (*sic*) and some parts of southern Zaïre. It is an instrument that was adopted by the Bushmen from neighbouring Bantu-speaking populations, just as were the lamellophones."

From: FR. JAMES ROSS, S.M., Catholic Mission, Namosi, Suva, Fiji.

The Lali or slit drum of Fiji

A glance at the accompanying photograph will reveal that the Fijian 'Lali' is not so very different in concept from the various forms of slit drums found in parts of Africa. In common with many of these it too is used for sending signals. However, the *lali* is no rival for the talking drums of the Lokele tribe of the Upper Congo, not having a language of its own.

Of course, in earlier times the use of the *lali* played a far more significant role in the lives of the people than it does today. *Lali* beats were used to signal a variety of events; funerals (*lali ni mate*), wars (*lali ni kaba koro*), when bodies of the enemy were brought in to be eaten (*lali ni bokola*), to announce the arrival of an important personage (*lali ni veikidavadi*), and many others, all having their own special beats which were recognised by all. Nonetheless, the *lali* still holds an honoured place in Fijian ceremony and everyday village life.

There are two forms of *lali* — the larger of the two is the signal drum and the smaller, the *lali ni meke*, is used to accompany the dances (*meke*).

At one time chiefs had their professional *lali* beaters, who it would appear could be every bit as entertaining as any present day showman. A fellow priest who has worked in Fiji for over forty years told me that many years ago he witnessed a demonstration by the chief's *lali* beaters from the island of Taveuni. He remembers this as being quite an extraordinary display by the two beaters who gave a dazzling exhibition while throwing their wooden beaters (*na i nana lali*) into the air, twirling them, beating the air and so on. Such professionals are no longer to be found and we are the poorer because of this.

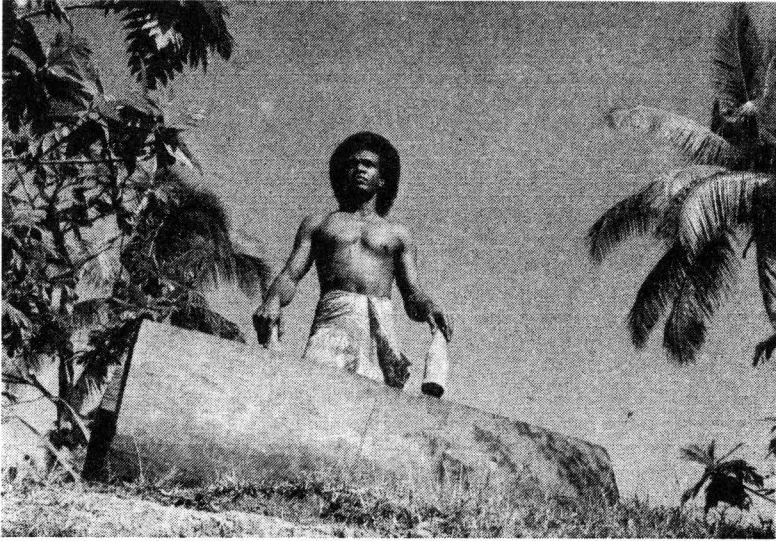
In present day usage the *lali* is still beaten to signal the visit of a chief; at funerals and other special events and it is used continually to call the people together for meetings (*lali ni soqoni*) and for church services (*lali ni lotu*). During very special occasions there are family groups whose duty it is to beat the *lali* at such times and it would be 'tabu' for others to do so.

By striking the *lali* at different points a number of tones are produced and when one or two imaginative beaters get together the resulting rhythms can be most pleasing. Sometimes two *lalis* are used.

School children, too, use the *lali* instead of school bells and I have noticed that it is generally the young girls who seem to have a special talent here.

The signal *lali* comes in a variety of sizes and I have seen some of gigantic proportions, perhaps six or more feet long and three feet deep. Normally, they are of more modest measurements, some five feet long and about eighteen inches deep. A well made *lali* produces deep majestic tones which carry over considerable distances.

On the other hand the *lali ni meke* is quite small and produces a sharp high-pitched tone. These are perhaps two feet long and only about four inches deep. Furthermore, the whole length of the drum is not hollowed out. It is held upside down cradled in the arms of one who sits cross-legged in front of the beater. In order to give the *lali* a better tone it is pressed tightly to the chest. In general, the *lali* beat which accompanies the *meke* is a somewhat basic rhythm with little variation. *Mekes* are also accompanied with hand clapping and chanting. However, as with the signal *lali*, I make no claim to having made any great study of either instrument nor have I heard the *lali* beating from many parts of Fiji. The fact that the *lali ni meke* can be played with an intensity and excitement of rhythm was made clear to me some time ago when I saw a group from the Ra Province of this island of Viti Levu perform a fan dance (*meke iri*). The accompaniment included a pair of these drums played with quite exceptional results. I remember well being struck by the similarity of the rhythms and those on a recording from Tanzania which is in my collection. I recorded part of the performance and I have compared it with the Tanzanian recording and I am satisfied that my first impression was justified. While the sound of the *lali* is at a higher pitch and the *meke* rhythm is taken at a faster pace, nonetheless the basic rhythm and the cross rhythm are almost identical. The Tanzanian recording to which I make reference is Dr. Tracey's recording 'Manyanga' by three drummers of the Nyamwezi tribe (*Music of Africa* Series No. 25, Galp 1320, Side B-5). I mention this solely to give the reader some rough idea of what the



performance sounded like rather than to suggest that the similarity has any significance. However, it may be of passing interest to note that at one stage it had been thought that the Fijian people migrated from Africa. This theory was postulated because a certain similarity was noted between place names in Fiji and place names particularly from around the Lake Tanzania areas. However, this theory is now out of favour and it is thought that should it have had any validity at all it would simply be to suggest that the Fijian people and the peoples from this part of Africa may have had a common source of origin.

Along with the *lali*, pieces of bamboo differing in width and length are used to accompany the *meke* in some parts of Fiji. The different sizes produce a multiplicity of 'notes' when pounded upright against the soft earth. Apart from these two percussive instruments the only other musical instrument which can be called traditionally Fijian is a panpipe style nose flute which has now become a museum piece.

I am sure that I have not missed out on any musical instruments here, insofar that in the course of my work I spend a great deal of time in our villages. Namosi, in particular, is a most isolated area and visiting my people necessitates long journeys into the hills. Since it is quite impossible to return to the Station I travel from village to village and live with one of the families in each place I call. I am certain that I would have come across any little known instrument by now.

The guitar is now the popular instrument with the younger generation and its use is widespread throughout Fiji. There are many expert players and the music and songs of this popular style music idiom are not unattractive.

However, one can only hope that our young people will still appreciate the value and necessity of preserving and keeping alive the more traditional and authentic forms of Fijian music and culture.

From: MR. STEEN NIELSEN, Ruhija Evangelical Academy, Music Department, P.O. Box 98, Bukoba, Tanzania.

I have as yet not had sufficient opportunity to go into a detailed study of Haya music and instruments although I am taking great interest especially in the *amadinda* which was built at our workshop by our instrument maker who is a former pupil of Mr. Evaristo Muyinda of Kampala. The production of the workshop is centered on Haya (Ganda) drums, prices ranging from 50 to 250 shs. according to size, xylophones with carvings on the sides and usually tuned to a western diatonic scale because most of our customers are visitors from Europe. But I am sure that we could make our tunings available if so desired. The price for a xylophone covering 2 octaves is 170 shs. Also we build the Buganda harp known as *Ennanga*. It sells at 50 shs.

Up to now we have preferred customers to come and pick up the instruments, but I hope that we can find a way of sending the instruments abroad.

Lately I have been involved in a revision of the Lutheran Haya hymn book. It contains 231 hymns out of which only four have Haya tunes. We plan to include a far greater number of local melodies. As part of the preparatory work we have made a complete recording of the hymn book and this has

given me a fascinating insight in the modification of European tunes when implanted in an African musical tradition. I am now trying to make a detailed survey of the modifications to see if there would be any general tendencies. Also, I believe that one of many approaches to African music for a westerner would be to study how the music of his own tradition fares in Africa. At a later time I should very much like to write on the Haya music itself.

On 7th February we start a two year course and we expect to include students from several parts of Tanzania, Kenya and one student from West Cameroun. This course might be fruitful in bringing together several musical traditions.

From: REV. DR. A. M. JONES, 52 Warwick Road, St. Albans, Herts., England.

I refer to the article 'Three Principles of Timing in ANLO Dance Drumming' by Hewitt Pantaleoni in your last issue (*African Music*, Vol. 5, No. 2, 1972), where on pages 54-58 he deals with what he says I said in my *Studies in African Music* (O.U.P. 1959).

He seems to think that he, Pantaleoni, has made the vital discovery that the whole dance and drum ensemble is rhythmically controlled by the bell (*Gankogui*) whereas, he says, I hold that the handclaps are the "fundamental means of helping the time in Anlo dance drumming" (p. 58). I can only conclude that he has not read Vol. 1 of my book.

Did I, or did I not write on p. 53 of my book, "(The *Gankogui*) provides a background rhythm which keeps the whole orchestra in time"? And why does he imagine in over 200 pages of transcription I placed the *Gankogui* (bell) stave right at the top of the score?

And did I, or did I not write on p. 69, anent the handclaps, "The handclap is the rhythmic link between the song and the other instruments. It takes time from the *Gankogui*"? The point is, of course, that if you want to know the relationship between the song, which is in 'free rhythm' and the drums, you have to find where the claps come *vis-a-vis* the song words: and as the claps are dependent on the *Gankogui*, and so are the drums, the claps form the rhythmic link referred to.

Again, Pantaleoni says I maintain that "each musician times his part from the playing of his neighbour" (p. 54). I said no such thing.

And as to his Fig. 3a on p. 55 where he purports to set out a transcription "in the manner of A. M. Jones", if any pupil of mine had produced such a score he would have received short shrift from me. It is a travesty.

The whole thing is a quite astonishing perversion of what I have written, as anyone may confirm by reading my book.

Finally he accuses me (p. 56) of being influenced by "Western durational and melodic formulas" and seems to object to my bar-lines and time signatures. So I have interpreted African rhythms with a Western ear, have I? There is a simple technique whereby one can discover *from the African himself* where he feels the stresses (and therefore the bar-lines) to lie. I will not reveal this to Dr. Pantaleoni. If he cares to read my book with due attention he may find out for himself.

Meanwhile your readers will do well totally to ignore his account of my work — it is an almost undiluted *catena* of complete nonsense.

From: REV. A. M. JONES, 52 Warwick Road, St. Albans, Herts., England.

This letter is prompted by the fact that I have just finished reading your very interesting article about the Mbiras (Andrew Tracey, 'The Original African Mbira', *African Music*, Vol. V, No. 2 (1972)). Now near the end you say you can't see how the arrangement of notes on the Kalimba — "bass in the centre, scales alternating left and right" — links with the xylophone.

This all depends on how you think the xylophone was played. Under certain circumstances, if you wanted to make a PORTABLE xylophone, i.e. a Kalimba, this would be the only rational arrangement of the notes. Let me explain.

There is evidence both in Africa and in Java that there is or was a manner of playing the xylophone using two players simultaneously, each facing the other on each side of the xylophone. This is still the custom in Uganda (3 players — 2 on one side, 1 on the other) and I can show you a photo from Nigeria — 2 players, one on each side. As far back as the 8th century A.D. the Javanese evidently played in this way: see Photo 17 in my *Africa and Indonesia* — Pantaran sculpture, 8th century A.D. I think myself that the line down the notes of the xylophone is a mortar joint between two stones and that they are playing one single xylophone.

Now then: the leading player (as in Uganda) has the high notes on his right, and the low notes on his left. But the second player has the high notes on his LEFT and the low ones on his right. If you are a xylophone player you will be used to both these positions of the high notes according to where you sit.

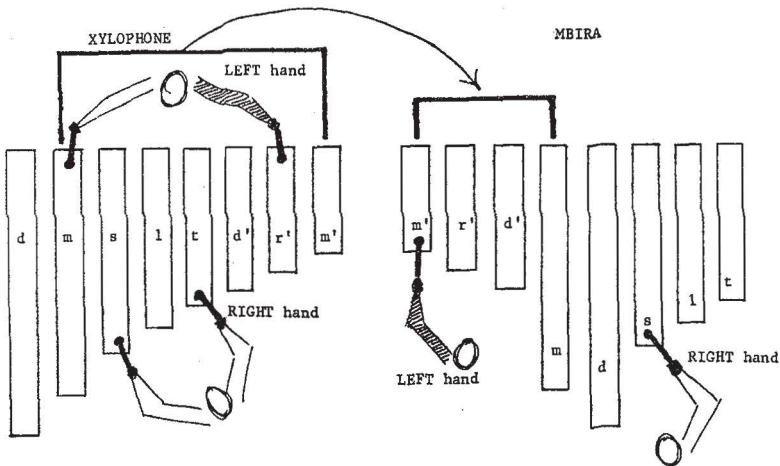
One also has to remember the INTERLOCKING technique of playing, shown for Uganda by Kubik, and for Bali see the new edition of my *Africa and Indonesia*, pp. 258 ff.

If you now want to transfer this playing technique to a SINGLE player on a portable Kalimba, how would you naturally arrange the notes? Giving the right hand to the leading player's part, you will arrange the notes, low to high, from left to right. Giving the left hand to the second player, you will

put the notes in the order he is used to, i.e. with the high notes on the left. Using both thumbs you can now play the interlocking technique, as in fact Kalimba players always do, using alternately the right and left thumbs.

If you look at Laurenty's exhaustive list of some 200 tunings of Mbira from the Congo — J. S. Laurenty, *Les Sanza du Congo* — you will see that the vast majority of them have this same order of notes, descending from high on the left and right to the lowest notes in the centre. Similarly, the fact that as you say, we find Mbira with notes arranged in order from low in the left to high on the right, may reflect the alternate way of playing the xylophone in which there is only ONE player, but SEVERAL instruments. In this case you can still produce the interlocking technique of playing, by using alternate thumbs on the Mbira, as in fact the Africans do to a very large extent. And the presence of the occasional extra notes, especially for the LEFT thumb, (notes raised above the others as you point out) emphasises this point. You are doing on one instrument what would normally be done on at least two.

I enclose a sketch to illustrate the point.



On the mbira these two imaginary players are merged in one single person.