THE MUSIC OF ZUMAILE VILLAGE, ZAMBIA

by

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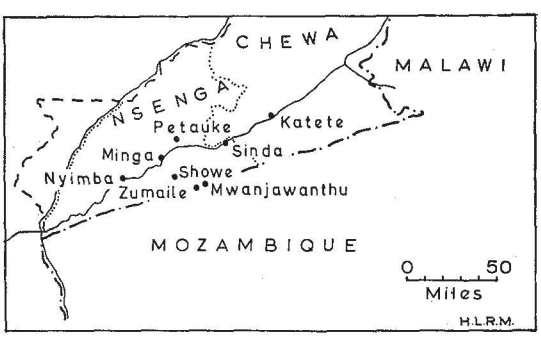
The rise of new musical forms and idioms in twentieth century Africa has created a widespread interest in the question of change. Change may well be the constant in the development of music on this continent. There is increasing evidence to show that what has often been regarded as age-old and unchanging in African traditional music would, in fact, be more accurately described as part of a changing process.

The material presented here is an illustration of this process through a few examples and accounts of their own music by members of a single village. It also depicts some of the ways in which new musical traditions spread, flourish and become outmoded or adapted in new traditions. It is the result of a six months' study involving interviews with over a dozen Nsenga, seven of whom belonged to Zumaile village, the focus of the research. Then groups of musicians were also recorded.

Zumaile village lies south of Minga Mission in the District of Petauke, Eastern Province of Zambia, within three miles of the Mozambique border. The village people belong to the Nsenga tribe.



In 1923 a Roman Catholic Mission was established at Minga, some 20 miles north, and in the following year its evangelizing activities spread to Zumaile where, at the time this survey was made in September 1968, most of the villagers had been converted to Roman Catholicism; although after nearly a half-century of proselytizing some villagers had defected to the Watch Tower group and some had remained unconverted.

Zumaile had approximately 350 people headed by the *Mfumu* (Headman), a descendant of the first settler after whom the village had been named. Some generations ago Zumaile (according to local tradition) had arrived from the Nsenga tribe in Mozambique and settled on this spot.[1]

Many of the musical traditions of the village had become obsolete and new ones had replaced them. What follows is a brief description of these traditions.

MUSICAL TRADITIONS

The musical types and contexts have been classified under three headings, passive, moribund and active. This reflects the way in which most of those interviewed looked

[1] One informant's estimate of the date of the settling of Zumaile was "some time in the early eighteenth century."

upon their musical heritage. They frequently referred to a particular musical tradition as either obsolete, almost dead, and rarely revived, or active and often performed. But since many of the obsolete traditions were still remembered and could be revived under appropriate stimulus, the word "passive" has been chosen in preference to the word "obsolete".

The implications of these headings should not be extended beyond Zumaile village without caution. Musical traditions do not flourish in all areas at the same time. Some of the traditions which had died in Zumaile were, in fact, active in other places within and outside the Nsenga tribe at the time of this survey. For instance, *ndendeule* which was almost forgotten at Zumaile was flourishing in other parts of the Eastern Province, and was included in the living dances exhibited in Lusaka during the 1968 Zambia Arts Festival.

Some of the dances described were widespread and known beyond the Nsenga area to which Zumaile village belonged, and wide local variations existed in the types of ensembles, songs, texts and with the associated dances. *Nyau*, for instance, was a very old and widespread dance enriched by the resources of generations. It is obvious from accounts gathered from Zumaile where it was no longer alive that its vogue had been short and there had been no time for the Zumaile version to acquire all the elements now known to belong to this dance.

(*a*) *Passive Traditions*

Ndendeule, for instance, a circle dance for women, was long dead in Zumaile; but in some other Nsenga areas it was still an active traditional form of entertainment during September, 1968. Ndendeule groups could be found in which the dancers were accompanied only by their own singing and clapping. In Zumaile, it had been a circle dance for women, with male drummers accompanying them from the centre of the ring.

Chipalu. This was a hunting dance performed for entertainment from time to time in Zumaile village. The dancers were dressed in skirts and hats of skin; they performed to music provided by three or four drummers and a chorus. During the dance they were given guns loaded with powder only by assistants, to shoot in turn at a target, an animal skin tied to a tree. Sometimes pellets were included to identify the best marksman.

Chiwele. The last time chiwele dances were seen in Zumaile was during the late 1940's. It was a dance in which two lines of boys and girls stood facing each other. They danced together in pairs along the space between the lines rejoining their own lines at the opposite end. Drummers accompanied the dancers singing from an adjacent platform erected for the purpose.

Chindikula. This musical type came into vogue in 1950 and died in 1952. Girls sang and danced in a ring, circling around male drummers.

Chitelele. The *chitelele* circle dance developed from the *chindikula*, with three drummers in the middle, and remained in vogue till 1959.

Chimtali and *Sinjonjo*. The *chimtali*, another circle dance with drummers in the centre was introduced from Malawi in 1959, replacing the *chitelele*. It remained popular only until 1963. The membership of the *chimtali* group consisted of girls and unmarried women. They danced to three drums — two played by a male master-drummer and a third by a male assistant. The songs of this dance were sung in the Chewa language, but its dances differed from those of the original Malawian versions.

It was believed that the coming of new political activity at national level contributed to the disappearance of the *chimtali*, for a new dance, the *sinjonjo*, arose, with songs in the Nsenga language on political themes. *Sinjonjo* was equally popular outside Zambia, and some believe it was introduced from Rhodesia.

The similarity of some of these dances may be interesting as they seem to suggest the existence of external associations which justify the use of different names for what appear to be identical dances.

Nyau. Nyau dances are widely performed in the Eastern and Central Provinces of Zambia, and to a lesser extent in other provinces. It is generally believed to be of an ancient tradition introduced into Zambia during the 18th century by in-coming Chewas from Malawi. It reached Zumaile village only during the 1940's. It had first been introduced by an Nsenga called Aidan from Kalemba, a village three miles away. It was known that he had learnt the dance and its music from Chewa musicians.

Once introduced, groups of *nyau* dancers frequently arrived by invitation from across the Zambian-Mozambique border. They usually performed at funerals; but soon local impresarios invited them to perform within temporary enclosures, and audiences were admitted at sixpence (five ngwee) per head. The performing group for each occasion received between £1 and £2 (K2-K4) as an honorarium. This was a paying concern for both the impresario and the musicians, for the dances attracted many youths. Eventually the local young men formed themselves into their own *nyau* band.

Admission to the new group was by fee, followed by an initiation routine involving training and secret rituals. Rumours soon spread that *nyau* members employed witchcraft, visited cemeteries and wore charms mixed with clay from graves. This slowed down the growth of the membership; but the attraction of *nyau* was strong enough to dispel the fears which the rumours aroused. Eventually not only men but boys also joined.

The Zumaile *nyau*, like those still to be seen elsewhere in Zambia, featured virtuoso dances by a masked performer clad in tasselled skirt with feathered headgear, and holding a switch or stick with which he signalled to the accompanying drummers and chorus from time to time.

He initiated each item by starting a song, which was taken up by a leading singer and answered by a chorus largely made up of women supporters. Drums then entered, and the solo dancer began his performance. He danced mainly to the rhythms of the master drum, called *mbalule* in Zumaile. The other drums in the ensemble were the *gunda* or *gunda-gunda*, a pair of drums, with the *gapa-gapa* or the *kelenge*, all bearing onomatopoeic names descriptive of their standard rhythmic lines or rôles.

The drum ensemble built up its music from cumulative entries, through a growing complexity of rhythm to a welter of wild elaboration led by the *mbalule* (master-drum). Every stroke of this drum was reflected in the *nyau*'s rapid foot-work. Dance figures were also expressed in hand movements, pelvic rotation and twitching and in varying postures of the torso. Rafted pod rattles worn on both calves accentuated the *mbalule* rhythms and high-lighted the dancers steps, strides and short leaps.

Nyau performances were really enjoyed, in spite of the prejudices against their secret rituals. The association with 'witchcraft', however, brought *nyau* into conflict with Christianity which had by then become a quiet but potent force in Zumaile. Thus, membership dropped because of the natural exodus of youths from the village, and it was not replenished. The last *nyau* performance was seen in Zumaile village in 1952.

(b) Moribund traditions

The *Kalimba* is one of the well known Mbira family of musical instruments found throughout Africa.[2] The Zumaile version has a resonating gourd held beneath the gourd board. The *kalimba* is normally a personal instrument played quietly to oneself. But when a celebrity musician emerges, a small group may gather around him and serve as a supporting chorus to his self-accompanied singing.

This instrument has had a long history in Africa[3], and in Zumaile where its origins

[2] For some detailed descriptions of this instrument see the following:
(*a*) John Blacking, "Patterns of Nsenga Kalimba Music", in *African Music* II, 4, 1961, pp. 26-27.
(*b*) Andrew Tracey, "The Mbira Music of Jege Tapera", in *African Music* II, 4. 1961, pp. 44-49.
(*c*) Marjory Davidson, "A Lunda Kalendi", in *African Music* III, 2, pp. 15-16.

[3] See Dos Santos, 1586 (quoted by G. M. Theal, in *Records of South-Eastern Africa*, Vol. vii, pp. 202-203).

could not be traced, it seemed to be a dying tradition. One maker only was located.

One musician, Samaria Mwanza, famed for his frequent broadcasts, was still active. He played and sang to a rather inarticulate female chorus; but his compositions showed him to be an accomplished artiste. His songs were largely philosophical, inspired by his own observations and by the topical news of the day.

Samaria Mwanza was born in Mozambique. At the age of nine he taught himself to play, using a fibre-keyed *kalimba*. At fifteen he changed to an iron-keyed instrument. He then learnt to make one of the instruments in his village, Kaumbwe, in Mozambique, where he helped to spread the tradition. By the time Mwanza left Kaumbwe in 1949, many were playing the Kalimba there. At Zumaile he also found many players, but only one could be considered efficient. He taught a man named Chinguwo to make the instrument; and now, blind at 70, he owns and plays an instrument made by this student.

Two finger techniques of playing were observed. Of the two players closely studied, each one held the resonance gourd with the tips of the fingers keeping it just below the keyboard. Samaria Mwanza plucked with the left thumb and the right index finger, while Isaac Lungu, a young informant, played with both thumbs.

Another significant point of difference was noted in the way in which each had acquired his playing technique. Mwanza was entirely self-taught. Lungu was taught through the playing of one song by an uncle who considered this song adequate for mastering all the technique Lungu would need. While Mwanza had actively kept his art alive, Lungu's was revived only by persuasion.

Kalimba playing was seldom heard in Zumaile at the time of this survey.

Other moribund traditional dances and dance music included:

1. *Sako* (*Kuteta Azimu* or *Nsembe*) connected with a ritual of supplication and propitiation in the form of tragedy.
2. Various *Mashawe* dances connected with spiritual practices.
3. *Mazya* dances in association with different stages of puberty or initiation rites, *Mitungu* (*Chimwangalala*) and *Chinamwali*.

Mr. Lungusani Guluwe poses with two boy assistants before the crowd gathers for the *Chinamwali* dance. Drums (l. to r.): *Mbondombondo*, *nsolo* (small drum), *fulania* (master), *ndumbe*, *kuwiti-kuwiti*.

(*c*) *Active traditions*

Mtomboka was the name given to beer-drinking party music in Zumaile village. There were two beer-brewing houses which took turns in supplying the village with local beer for the whole week. The beer houses always maintained drums and welcomed music-making. Frequently small gatherings raised their own songs, but sometimes a more professional group 'held the stage' and drew in everyone around with lively music.

According to a 50-year-old informant, the most popular entertainment band within living memory was the *Myanje*. It sang songs and performed dances at parties, accompanied by gourd rattles. It attracted young performers who introduced two drums and changed the name of the band to *Mtomboka*[4]. The *mtomboka* band of Zumaile had maintained its popularity. Whenever its drums sounded many came to dance, each in his own way, but contributing to a general team-work that soon developed.

The accompanying drums were the *ndumbe*, formerly headed with water-lizard skin, and the *fulama*, with a similar drum head or with a duiker (*kafundo*) skin. These animals had become scarce and therefore cow-hide was frequently used for both drums. They were played by men, behind whom sat a chorus predominantly of women. The dancers were of both sexes and the songs were largely topical.

Other active traditions

Music in Zumaile was not only confined to rituals, public ceremonies and drinking parties. On many occasions the threshing of corn was accompanied with songs from the pounding girls. One evening a pair of twins recorded songs including hunting and drinking songs which they had frequently heard their parents sing. Other groups included a small band of Catholics who sang church songs composed in the popular idiom of the Christian church, but sung to vernacular texts.

By the end of my visit to Zumaile it seemed that there were still more types of music existing in the village that had not yet been encountered. The fact had become established that one of the strong determinants of the tempo and tenor of Zumaile society was the all-pervasiveness of music; such was the intensity with which the few active and remembered traditions were practised.

Growth and Survival

Even in the living music of Zumaile village the element of change is noticeable in the material that once belonged to song repertoires, drum ensembles and dance routines of outmoded traditions. The long list of remembered traditions is also a strong pointer towards the process of growth and demise.

The rise and decline of types like *ndendeule*, *chiwele*, *chindikula*, *chitelele*, *nyau* and *chimtali* in Zumaile all occurred in response to the natural need for entertainment and in accordance with the capacity of the types of music to retain interest. For instance, although *nyau* in its original Malawian form carried rigorous rituals and taboos, it took roots in Zumaile village for its attractive dances and appealing drumming. *Chimtali* (also of Malawian origin) throve on the beauty of its songs, which were sung in the Chewa language, although the dances were replaced by Nsenga ones.

Of the moribund types, the origins of *sako* and *mazya* derived from so far back in antiquity that no informant knew the circumstances of their birth in Zumaile. *Mashawe*, however, had one feature that pointed to external sources. Since the language of the *shawe* was largely in the Korekore or Chikunda languages, external origins may be presumed.

This brings the number of externally borrowed musical traditions to three. In *nyau* and *chimtali* aesthetic considerations combined with the capacity of the Nsenga to accommodate new patterns seem to have been decisive conditions of establishment and growth. The *mashawe* tradition, on the other hand, provides an instance in which appropriate context was a prerequisite for the existence of a musical tradition, meeting the need for personal and group security in life. Other contexts offering music were available in Zumaile. Within the scope of *mazya*, for instance, lay a large part of the mechanism

[4] This is perhaps an indication that the name (though perhaps not the dance) is a borrowed one. In a conversation with the Mwata Kazembe, paramount chief of the Lunda of the Luapula Province of Zambia, the chief said to the writer that *mtomboka* (spelt *umutomboko* by his people) was a name given to one of the types of dances performed by royalty at special festivals. (*Ukutomboka* means to jump). The Lunda version of the dance involved leaping. The Zumaile version did not.

for socializing the individual, unifying the interests of individuals within society, and contributing to their cohesion. This mechanism required music, for in the songs, dances, and the arts of the *mazya* tradition lay expressions of a consensus, with sanctions and injunctions binding on everyone within the society. In this category may also be placed the *chisilili* — the story-telling tradition which incorporated music within the narrative and combined entertainment and education in its ultimate objectives.

In order to come into being and become established, musical traditions in Zumaile had to have both high entertainment value and an ability to express ideas that conformed to social traditions.

Change — Decline

Once established, musical traditions developed resilience against decline through further enrichment. Thus the *chimtali* enriched itself by increasing its drum ensemble from three to four; and when the *chindikula* took the place of *ndendeule* the singing was strengthened by the drumming accompaniment. It is therefore in the virtue of being able to retain freshness and entertainment value that one can ascribe the long or short life of some of them. The survival of a few songs of the 'passive' type is evidence that this virtue has importance in the longevity of any music.

Outside the realm of music, the art of *chisilili* (story-telling) indicates that popular arts need not all be transient. Perhaps the capacity of *chisilili* to diversify, modify and thus refresh its content in response to social need underlies its comparative permanence. Entertainment music in Zumaile had not developed a capacity to adapt, and it is in terms of inertia in creativity that their rapid demise might be explained.

The long vogue of the moribund musical types seems to have depended on the survival of the contexts within which they occurred. It had enabled them to build up wide and diversified repertoires. They therefore retained their freshness. But undermining influences were at work as young people were ceasing to be proud of them. The school educated informants referred to *mazya*, *mashawe* and *sako* with positive detachment. Some blatantly dissociated themselves from the beliefs that inspired their devotees. A recording of a *sako* ritual song was made in the presence of a group which had just sung a number of Roman Catholic church songs. As soon as the *sako* song began, their leader left the scene, expressing horror. *Nyau* was known to have been suppressed by growing Christian influence. Although it had gained popularity by the beauty and novelty of its dances and drumming, some of its secret rituals had come to be associated with 'witchcraft'; which conflicted with Christian teaching. One female *shawe* was known to have been forbidden to perform her 'spirit-possession' dances in Zumaile by her Christian husband, though she was able from time to time to go to her own village and perform in full dress when urged by inward promptings. Informants also admitted that the *sako* cult was clandestinely practised by a few Christians as well as by non-Christians of Zumaile.

There is little doubt that the effects of Christian evangelism and especially of school education might complete the process of rendering these ceremonies and rituals outmoded to all members of Zumaile society. This point was stressed by one event. Three schoolgirls were pounding maize. They had been singing happily until I arrived and was noticed, when the singing stopped. One of them had previously recorded two school songs but she would not lead the others in singing corn-threshing songs before a stranger. A non-school-going girl had sung these songs unabashed in front of a tape recorder and a gathering audience, but to the schoolgirls threshing songs were unwelcome publicity.

The causes of decline in musical traditions in Zumaile lie not only in their becoming hackneyed, in creative inertia, or in the declining importance of the ceremonies in which they occurred, but rather from their loss of prestige.

Conversely, the flourishing of musical traditions in Zumaile depended upon the continuity of traditions, continuing prestige and the capacity of the music to meet aesthetic needs. These vital points could perhaps be applied to musical traditions in wider situations.

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INTERNATIONAL LIBRARY OF AFRICAN MUSIC:

CODIFICATION AND TEXTBOOK PROJECT

The Library has been occupied during the year with further groundwork and raising enthusiasm for the Codification Project, as outlined in our 1969 publication "African Music Codification and Textbook Project". At least twenty-four musicologists and students have already indicated their intention of participating as soon as funds can be found to support their work in the many African countries concerned. As these countries themselves will be the prime beneficiaries of the work once it reaches fruition in the form of textbooks it is hoped that each government will not only approve the Project but also give substantial aid to workers within their own borders.

It is still not recognised however, in most quarters, even in Africa, that the aural arts are perhaps the major means of philosophical communication between Africans, and, when fully studied, may also be between Africans and the rest of the world. The very word 'music' is usually taken, by university boards for instance, to indicate the least important of human activities, whereas in Africa it is second to none. The proper recognition of this side of African genius, by the provision of the right textbooks, will have far-reaching effects upon human relations both in Africa and "Africa overseas".

The increasing demand for this Journal, almost entirely from universities in America, is an encouraging sign of their growing interest in things important to Africans. Now it only remains for you, the reader of this Journal, to carry your interest into the practical sphere of support for actual research into African music, the kind of work which makes the Journal possible.

Funds for African studies have been much curtailed during the year for various reasons, not least, in our particular case, being our geographical location in South Africa, which of course is entirely irrelevant to the Africa-wide research which we are trying to encourage. The work we have been able to do in the last two years to develop the idea of the Codification and Textbook Project has been entirely due to a grant from the Ford Foundation for the purpose. This, however, expires this year, and the financial situation is such that the activities of the I.L.A.M. and A.M.S., *which include the publication of this Journal*, will soon have to be severely curtailed or even abandoned, if further funds are not found.

Drive for funds

With this in mind, as part of a drive for support for the Codification Project, the I.L.A.M. has recently issued an attractively illustrated colour brochure (whose printing costs themselves were donated) describing in brief the pressing reasons for the Project and the extent of the work, and asking for support, partly for the I.L.A.M. itself, and also for musicologists and universities who would like to undertake fieldwork in any part of Africa. A copy has already been sent to all our members.

The Library has a large number of these illustrated Brochures, and the Editor will be very glad to send further free copies to you, or any reader of *African Music* whether you want them for your own purposes, or to bring the proposed research project to the attention of any person or institutions who you think may potentially be interested.

The book "African Music Codification and Textbook Project", I.L.A.M. 1969, pp. 54, which describes the Project fully, with suggestions for the practical side of fieldwork, can also be bought from the I.L.A.M. at $(U.S.)3.00 or equivalent.

Fieldwork

Dr. Hugh Tracey acted as musical adviser to Mr. Volkmar Wentzel and Mr. Curt Wittig of the National Geographical Society, Washington D.C., U.S.A., during a month-long recording tour of Moçambique in June, 1970. The team recorded in stereo all over the country, from Portuguese folk music in Lourenço Marques, the Chopi and Tswa xylophone orchestras of the south, the panpipe orchestras and large mbiras of the centre, to the drumming of the north and the Arabised music of the islands. A record will eventually be produced by the National Geographical Society.

Andrew Tracey spent two-and-a-half months in north-eastern Rhodesia and the adjoining parts of Mozambique studying the music of the many types of mbiras played there. Some of the fruits of this research can be seen in his article in this Journal.

Gerhard Kubik, having had a successful lecture tour through West Africa up till January this year, has remained in Vienna writing up previous fieldwork and compiling historical information on African music for the Codification Project.

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