

SOME MUSIC FOR THE LALA KANKOBELE

by

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The music quoted in this article was played to me by Leonard Kembe, who is one of the few educated Zambians who can play the *Kankobebe*, a small traditional instrument, with real skill. It is called *Kankobebe* by the Lala people, the larger instrument being the *ndandi*.

The *kankobebe* has the same basic lay-out of keys as the Nsenga and Ngoni *kalimba* and the Tonga *kankobela*. Similarly the *ndandi* resembles the large Nsenga *kalimba* called *ndimba*, the large Kaonde *kalimba* and the small Lozi *kang'ombyo*. I believe that with certain exceptions (e.g. the *likembe* and obviously the Bemba instruments because of their differing harmony), further research will reveal many more instruments with the same basic array.

The *kankobebe* is the beginner's instrument. When the player is sufficiently skilled he may go on to study the *ndandi*. Traditionally these instruments are played by men and boys only. A man will play to enliven his journey while travelling from place to place. Boys looking after cattle or watching their parents' gardens often play the *kalimba* (or *kalumbu*). When a young man plays his *kalimba* all night long, his parents decide it is time for him to be married.

The keyboard of the *kankobebe* is held between the first fingers of each hand, extended along the sides, while the rest of the fingers support the resonating calabash beneath it. The soundboard is held a little distance above the resonator and the performer moves it up and down a little as he plays, to vary the resonance.

The general pattern of the music is as follows:

- (a) Tuning device.
- (b) Instrumental introduction.
- (c) Verse and instrument. Repeat *ad lib*.
- (d) Interlude.
- (e) Coda.

Although (a) is simply to check the tuning, it is usually quite a musical little passage in a rather free rhythm. Section (b) is usually the accompaniment to the song stated once or twice before the voice enters. Sections (c) and (d) are repeated to accommodate the verses or, in a song with only one verse, just for "heavenly" length! In general the coda simply repeats the instrumental part, ending finally with some kind of chordal cliché, e.g.*

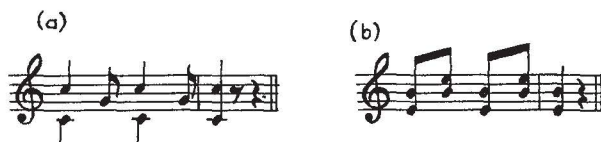


Fig. 1

I think the pattern of the music given above probably occurs in all music for traditional instruments in which the voice is also used. I know from personal experience that it applies to the *kalumbu*, *kawayawaya* and *ciding'indi* (*pango* or *bango*).

* All examples are given in key C, although the *kalimba* sounds nearer G. In other words the *kalimba* is treated as a transposing instrument. This seems to me an excellent plan since it means that any *kalimba* with this pattern of notes can play the examples.

The layout of the keys of the *kankobele* is such that the harmonies can be played by using both thumbs, as is usual with these instruments. A Zambian villager once said, "One row of keys represents boys, the other represents girls and we choose a boy and girl who go nicely together."

The pattern of keys is given below, with their pitches transposed into C.

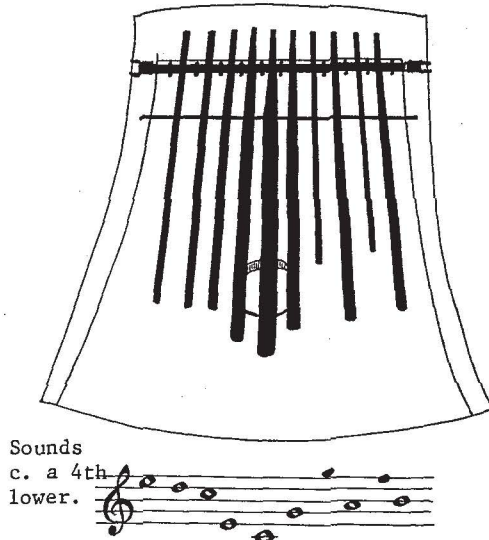


Fig. 2

The open notes are the basic scale; the black notes are later additions, in the upper manual of keys. The octave $5 + 3$ is used constantly, the others, $4 + 1$ and $6 + 17$ cannot be used together because of their position on the keyboard. It will be seen from the next example that the basic harmonies are the fourth, fifth and octave. Curiously enough there is an occasional sixth and tenth although the Lala people normally harmonize in fourths and fifths. In an article in "Africa" (Vol. XX, No. 4) Dr. A. M. Jones mentions the same point. My own feeling about it is that an unessential note has crept into the harmony. There are other instances of harmonies which are extraneous to the essential pattern. These do not make any great impact, however, partly because the scale differs from our own and partly because the tone of the instrument is slight, and the performance is usually very rapid.



Fig. 3

The black notes indicate harmonies outside the usual harmonic pattern. The last two chords are those using the additional keys.

The next diagram shows how easily some of the main harmonies can be learned if

both hands start from the outside and move inwards. The left hand moves by step 1, 2, 3, 4, while the right plays 10, 6, 5, and back to 10.



Fig. 4

The exact pitches of the sounds, as measured by tuning forks, are given below in scale order.

| <i>Keys (L to R)</i> | <i>Pitch (v.p.s.)</i> | <i>Intervals (cents)</i> |
|----------------------|-----------------------|--------------------------|
| 7 | 576 | |
| | | 204 |
| 9 | 512 | |
| | | 112 |
| 1 | 480 | |
| | | 182 |
| 2 | 432 | |
| | | 186 |
| 3 | 388 | |
| | | 110 |
| 10 | 364 | |
| | | 202 |
| 8 | 324 | |
| | | 204 |
| 6 | 288 | |
| | | 316 |
| 4 | 240 | |
| | | 350 |
| 5 | 196 | |

Seven examples of the music are given below. I have classified them according to their accompaniments in three different categories:

1. Harmonic figuration.
2. Plain chordal accompaniment with decoration.
3. A mixture of types 1 and 2.

In each example I have quoted:

- (a) Words.
- (b) Translation.
- (c) Voice and accompaniment.
- (d) Variations in voice part.
- (e) Thumb parts on two staves.
- (f) Any instrumental variations.

(c) ♩ = 104

Ci - nshi - nshi Ci - nshi - nshi.

(d) line 2 line 3
 Mu - nsha ka - li - mba Twa - sha ku - ma - ba - la
 line 4
 Twa - ku - ya - ko - ma - i - lo tu - ka - le - te

(e)
 R. H.
 L. H.

(f)
 a
 b etc.

Fig. 5

TYPE 1. HARMONIC FIGURATION.

Cinshinshi.

- (a) *Cinshinshi, Cinshinshi,*
Munsha kalimba mwasbapi?
Twasha kumabala ku nsawa.
Twakuyako mailo tukalete.

- (b) Silently, silently,
Munsha, where have you left the kalimba?
I have left it at the garden, in the shelter.
We shall go there tomorrow to fetch it.

A beginner learning to play this first piece begins with a simple chordal basis. When he can do this fluently he is shown how to spread out the chords into decorative passages.

Kube nabuko balindowe. (Sometimes called "Chafwe" after the kalimba expert who composed it, some time in the 30's.)

- (a) *Kube nabuko balindowe.*
Kube nabuko balampensha.
Temulandupo iya welele.
"Cimbe babukwe iya welele."
- (b) My in-laws have bewitched me.
My in-laws persecute me.
It doesn't matter.
"Hello! sister-in-law!"

(c) $\text{♩} = 100$

Ku - be na.bu.ko ba li - ndo.we.le. Ku be na.bu.ko ba la - mpe - nsha.

(d) Phrase 1 Phrase 2.

(e)

R.H.

L.H.

(f)

Variation of harmony for lines 3 and 4:
Melody notes are ringed.

Te - mu.la.ndu.po

Fig. 6

TYPE 2. SONGS WITH CHORDAL ACCOMPANIMENTS.

Teka.

- (a) *Teka mwandi kanteka.*
 (b) You dance in one (place).
 I dance in one (place).

Note:

1. This is a dancing song and it may be accompanied by a drum.
2. I have a recording of the identical song by a Nsenga player with Nsenga words. Leonard Kombe thinks it may have been Nsenga in the first place.
3. At the end of this set of examples I quote short figures which the player uses in his interlude.

(c) $\text{♩} = 100$

Te - ka mwandi ka nte - ka Te - ka etc.

(d.)

(e.)

R.H.

L.H.

(f.)

Fig. 7

Mbacindo cipeye bama.

- (a) *Mbacindo cipeye bama (wesu)?*
Ni Lesa epeye bama?
Kakumbi katulika bama.
- (b) What has killed my mother?
 Is it God who has killed my mother?
 The sky has opened for my mother.

The additional word "wesu", which means "dear", is sometimes added.

(c.) $\text{♩} = 104$

Mba - ci - ndo ci - pe - ye ba - ma

(d.)

- ye ba.ma we. su.

(e.)

R.H.

L.H.

(f.)

etc.

Fig. 8

Ba Nkunta

- (a) *Ba Nkunta balubila muſilala.*
 „ „ *kaike kababwene.*
 „ „ *fwe balokwenda fwenka.*
 „ „ *cimbwi cakulyako.*
 „ „ *muleke cende ende.*
 „ „ *bacenda busanene.*
 „ „ *kwenda kwabaweme.*

- (b) Ba Nkunta was lost in the forest.
 He was found by a small child.
 All on his own without relatives.
 The hyaena will eat the corpse.
 Don't wander aimlessly.
 One who walks looking up.
 Walk like a handsome man.

Note:

1. As far as I can gather, the meaning of the last three lines is that Ba Nkunta was lost because he was wandering heedlessly, and so the singer moralises about the importance of travelling with care.
2. Variations in the melody here are of little importance, so they are omitted. The introduction is quoted here because it overlaps the voice part.
3. It is a modern tune and European influence is shown in the shape of the melody.

(c) ♩ = 132

The musical score consists of several systems. The first system (c) shows a vocal line in treble clef and a piano accompaniment in treble and bass clefs. The time signature is 2/4. The tempo is marked as ♩ = 132. The lyrics are "Ba Nku - nta ka - i -". The piano part features triplets. A star symbol is placed above the second measure of the vocal line. The second system shows the continuation of the vocal line with lyrics "- ke ka - ba - bwe - ne Ba Nku -" and "etc.". The piano part continues with triplets. The third system (e) is a piano solo in treble and bass clefs, featuring a melodic line with triplets. The fourth system (f) shows a piano solo in treble and bass clefs with a long melodic line and triplets, ending with "etc.". The label "R" is on the left of the third system, and "L" is on the left of the fourth system.

Fig. 9

TYPE 3. MIXTURE OF CHORDAL ACCOMPANIMENT AND HARMONIC FIGURATION.

Iya elele.

(a) *Iya elele.*

(b) No translation. It is just a joyful noise like "tra la la".

(c) $\text{♩} = 72$

Musical notation for Iya elele, part (c). It shows a vocal line and a piano accompaniment. The vocal line has lyrics "I.ya e - le - le" and "I.ya etc.". The piano accompaniment consists of two staves with chords and rhythmic patterns.

(e)

Musical notation for Iya elele, part (e). It shows a right-hand (R.H.) and left-hand (L.H.) piano accompaniment. The R.H. part has a melodic line with eighth notes and rests. The L.H. part has a rhythmic accompaniment with eighth notes and rests.

Fig. 10

The title and words of the final example are not quoted as it was composed to draw attention to the bad behaviour of a person who is still alive.

(c) $\text{♩} = 52$

Musical notation for the final example, part (c). It shows a vocal line and a piano accompaniment. The piano accompaniment consists of two staves with chords and rhythmic patterns.

(e)

Musical notation for the final example, part (e). It shows a right-hand (R.H.) and left-hand (L.H.) piano accompaniment. The R.H. part has a melodic line with eighth notes and rests. The L.H. part has a rhythmic accompaniment with eighth notes and rests.

(f) (a)

Musical notation for the final example, part (f) (a). It shows a single staff with a melodic line consisting of eighth notes and rests.

(b)

Musical notation for the final example, part (f) (b). It shows a single staff with a melodic line consisting of eighth notes and rests, ending with "etc."

Fig. 11

Some comments on the music.

Harmony

(a) The basic harmonies are fourths, fifths and octaves. There is some variation in the quality of the fourths and fifths, but two of the octaves, keys 1 + 4 and 6 + 10 are exact. Curiously enough, these are never played together due to their position on the keyboard, while the octave 3 + 5, which is not exact, is used constantly.

(b) Some unusual harmonies occur, either in the instrumental part or between voice and instrument. These are marked with asterisks, and consist of thirds, sixths and tenths. They are due either to variations in the melody to accommodate different words or to notes which are fundamentally decorative in character occurring with the harmony notes. They are not in any sense basic, but just fugitive effects. The curious clash in "Ba Nkunta", for example, is obviated when the singer follows the instrumental part which he does in some places.

(c) There is an interesting little ostinato in the last example. It was the player who drew my attention to this when he said that the first, second and third keys must always be present in the variation. In section (a) of the interlude it appears in 3/4 time and in section (b) in 6/8 as shown below.



Fig. 12

Melody

(a) A number of characteristic features of Zambian traditional music can be found in these examples:

1. Downward melodic trend.
2. "Gapped" melodic line with the minor third as the most common interval.
3. Repeated notes at cadence points.
4. Anticipatory notes prior to the cadence, which are found in four of the examples.

The prevalence of fourths in the melody is not, in general, a feature of Zambian songs, and it is obviously due to the harmonic pattern of the instrument, and the interchanging of melody and harmony notes in the vocal line. I have, however, found that fourths occur fairly often in some Eastern Province dances, e.g. *Ngoma*, *cimbuza*, *cinyau*.

(b) The player feels that four of the examples have a minor ending and four are major. It is quite common for the first phrase to give a major ending and the second to suggest a change of tonality to the minor, but there are no indications upon which to base any positive comment.

(c) What we consider melody and harmony notes are freely interchanged in the vocal part. There is not, however, as far as I can see, any proof that Africans think in terms of harmony at all, although they probably do so in this type of instrumental music. In their songs I believe that they think in terms of adding a part to an existing part to beautify it. This seems to me a polyphonic rather than a harmonic approach. In an article in the 1965 number of this Journal* I quoted an example of a *kalumbu* song of two phrases which could be sung straight through by a singer, or combined if there were two singers. Here is the example.

* "Kalumbu musical bow". *African Music*, Vol. 3, No. 4.



Fig. 13

(d) The use of short figures from the main theme in the interlude of “*Teka*” is a small point of interest which I have found also in *kalumbu* music. It is, however, merely repetitive. The Zambian musician has not yet, in my experience, learned the art of figure development in the real sense of the word. Further experience, however, may prove me wrong.

(e) The melodies appear mainly in the left rank of keys. This is to be expected since this is where the higher notes are found, but most of the examples have at least one melody note in the right rank of keys. In “*Cinshinshi*”, the first example, the melody is entirely on the right side. Some notes of the vocal melody do not occur in the instrumental part.

(f) With the exception of “*Ba Nkunta*” which has a three-bar phrase, all the phrases are of two bars (starting to count from the first complete bar).

These are only a few points of interest from one facet of Zambian music which offers a field for further research.