

*Theory of African Music Volumes I and II.* Gerhard Kubik. 2010. Chicago: University of Chicago Press. Vol I, 464 pp., Vol II, 359 pp. photographs. maps. musical transcriptions. bibliography. indices. audio CDs.

There are few African music researchers with Gerhard Kubik's breadth of experience in sub-Saharan Africa. He arrived in Africa as a young man in the late 1950s, and in those early years travelled around by hitching lifts, or on a small motorbike, staying for prolonged periods in his research areas, always working closely with local assistants and making every effort to learn local languages. His profound knowledge covers a staggeringly broad area of the continent and is reflected in his multiple publications over the past 50 years.

Volume 1 of this two volume work was first published by Florian Noetzel Verlag in 1994. However owing to the pressures of post-unification in Germany, Volume II never went to press and it took until 2010 for this set of two volumes to be published by Chicago University Press. The volumes are conceived as one work, with chapters numbered continuously through both. Some of the chapters were specially written for this work, and others consist of previously published material. Combined into these two volumes, they form an invaluable reference text for anyone interested in African music and culture.

Kubik makes it clear in the Preface to Volume I that his use of the word *theory* encompasses "a framework, interdisciplinary in its orientation, to bring our current database and its evaluation under some kind of umbrella". He does not want his use of the term "to be understood in the narrow sense of 'music theory'". When dealing with a specific musical style, Kubik offers a detailed description of the musical details: sonic structure, construction of instruments, performance techniques, lyrics, etc. but this is always contextualised by an accompanying discussion of the way that the music is perceived and understood within the culture. Kubik articulates this intension in the preface to Volume II. He writes that his concern is "the creative musical mind of individuals and in tradition; how musical personalities in various African cultures conceive, categorize, perceive and process movement and sound, and how they integrate their specific experiences within the broader realm of culture (e.g. language, oral literature, art, societal environment, historical consciousness)" (vi).

A wide knowledge of the history of Africa's ethnic groups and languages richly informs and contextualises Kubik's narrative. With material from Nigeria, Togo, Congo, Gabon, Central African Republic, Uganda, Tanzania, Malawi, Zambia, Zimbabwe, Namibia amongst other countries, the chapters turn from the study of individual musical traditions, for example Kiganda Xylophone music, to the cross-cultural comparison of musical concepts such as multi-part singing and the underlying harmonic theory that can be drawn from the practice. Kubik's interest in aesthetic thought results in some chapters that focus on non-musical cultural practices which shed light on patterns of aesthetic thought. For example a chapter on *tusona* ideographs discusses patterns

drawn in the sand by Luchazi men in eastern Angola and across the border in Zambia contextualising them within Luchazi culture itself, but also illuminating the underlying aesthetic principles occurring in other African artistic traditions.

The ten chapters are divided equally into five chapters in each volume. Volume I includes two chapters on Ugandan Xylophones, “Xylophone Playing in Southern Uganda” and “Composition Techniques in Kiganda Xylophone Music with an Introduction into Some Kiganda Musical Concepts”. The three remaining chapters are entitled “Harp Music of the Azande and Related Peoples in the Central African Republic”, “A Structural Examination of Multi-part Singing in East, Central and Southern Africa” and “Concepts about Movement and Sound in the Eastern Angolan Culture Area”. The chapters in Volume II are an in-depth exploration of different concepts as they apply to African music. The first two, “The Cognitive Study of African Musical ‘Rhythm’” and “African Music and Auditory Perception”, provide many insights into African conceptualisation of rhythm, (from elementary pulsation to time lines and cyclic patterns) and how musical patterns are perceived within specific cultures. The sound of the music alone is only half of the story and the value of Kubik’s inquiry is that he probes the subtleties of the ways in which the music is perceived within the culture. To this end he discusses in detail the phenomenon of inherent patterns and the fluidity of the perception of ‘the beat’ in different musical traditions. The remaining three chapters, “Àlò – Yoruba Chantefables: An Integrated Approach toward west African Music and Oral Literature”, “Genealogy of a Malawian Musician Family: Daniel Kachamba (1947-1987) and His Associates”, and “African Space/Time Concepts and the *Tusona* Ideographs in Luchazi Culture” further explore ways of thinking about cultural aesthetic concepts in African contexts.

Kubik’s readable and lucid writing style allows the reader to quickly grasp sometimes complex ideas. There is an element of storytelling, as he recalls encounters with musicians, and this personal element well serves the narrative. CDs accompany both volumes and contain tracks referenced in the text. Numerous illustrations, scores and transcriptions add further clarity to the text and many black and white photographs, mostly Kubik’s own, appear in all of the chapters.

Although some time has passed since the original preparation of the material in this book, and Kubik explains, for the most part, that the revisions made for the 2010 publication were slight, the consistent focus of the text is on the way that the music is structured and how the musicians think about it. These insights ensure that the books will have an enduring significance as reference texts. The two volume set will be an asset to any institutional library, as each of the chapters could stand on their own, offering a wealth of detailed information on a wide diversity of topics, and as a complete work the overview of African musical performance and thought is unique and extremely valuable.