

DVD REVIEWS

Zimbabwe Children's Singing Games, DVD by Natalie Kreutzer (2007), Lionel Hampton School of Music, University of Idaho. **Length?**

This instructional DVD presents an excellent selection of twenty Shona children's singing games and dances from the Nharira communal lands, Midlands Province, Zimbabwe, for use by schools in the USA, from the 1992–94 research of Natalie Kreutzer. It is good to know that so many of these games and dances still existed at the time the research was done; under the current conditions in Zimbabwe let us hope that the children of today are still finding cause to dance. (An unexpected comment on the state of the nation was given me recently by a Zimbabwean refugee in South Africa: "We have no more *ngano* (animal tales) because there is no firewood.") I also hope that Kreutzer will compile a Shona version for today's children in Zimbabwe; those of her research after all are already young adults by now. Are they going to teach *their* children?

Each song is presented in a thorough manner, with much subsidiary material, including the Shona words, spoken and on the screen, music transcriptions, some instrumental patterns in box notation, additional versions of the same song with and without commentary, and references to other works to be consulted. The songs are catalogued in an index giving the song names, the musical type, movement shape and even the emotion associated with each song. There is a thorough introduction to the DVD spoken by Kreutzer with a neuro-psychological approach, which will persuade you of the value of music and dance to young children, if you had any doubts about it. But, this permanent concern of music teachers everywhere cannot have too much reinforcement. So there is absolutely no reason why you should not succeed in bringing these singing games to life in your classroom! She makes the telling comment, amongst others, that you should not simply plunk children down in front of the screen and leave them to it, but should interact, and teach by doing.

The camera work and sound are good enough to learn from, with long uninterrupted shots, but when the camera is far enough away to take in a full circle of children the built-in camera mike can also be too far away. The last two or three songs/dances could be a challenge for the Western classroom, but are part of every Shona-speaker's heritage. The design and presentation are excellent. In fact much thought has gone into this production, which makes it the more surprising that some of the music transcriptions appearing on screen are optimistic and need more careful editing to be reliable. Little children's voices can be indefinite, although they are helped out by adults in many songs. The two chorus parts in "*Mhondoro dzinonwa*" are out of synch by two bars! Some of the rhythmic structures too should be taken with a pinch of salt, especially those with a triple-pulse beat (6/8), oddly enough since this is the typical Shona beat. The names of the transcribers are Shona, which should give a measure of confidence. However, if we tried to learn a song like "*Vhaya kadhimba*" from its transcription alone, something very

funny would come out. Fortunately, most people, even musicians, learn songs better by ear than by eye. Why is African music transcription so often inaccurate, and so little used in Africa? I conclude that it is mostly because transcribers are held in the grip of the Western music system – this is all that is codified and taught in music school. African music has its own principles and systems too! It is eminently transcribable, if you just start from the right ideas.

Andrew Tracey, ILAM, Rhodes University

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Siaka, an African Musician, 80 minutes, DVD. *An African Brass Band*, 72 minutes, DVD. Author and Producer-Director: Hugo Zemp

Selenium Films has released Hugo Zemp's¹ two most recent films about African music, *Siaka, an African Musician* and *An African Brass Band* in DVD format. Both were shot in July and August 2002, a few weeks before the outbreak of the civil war in the Côte d'Ivoire and show the country in peaceful times.

Siaka (pronounced Shaka) Diabate is a musician from Bouake, the second largest city in the Côte d'Ivoire. With a mixed ancestry, he is not a pure Mande griot but considers himself to be one. He certainly has the musical talent to be recognized as an accomplished musician. This film documents Siaka performing with the "Soungalo Group" led by Soungalo Coulibaly while practicing his various instruments and includes interviews with Siaka and Soungalo regarding Siaka's musical history.

Using long continuous shots that give priority to the music and to the commentary, this documentary introduces viewers to the musical talent of Siaka as well as the fascinating world of urban music that incorporates traditional songs and dances by griots in the Côte d'Ivoire. At times employing a *cinéma vérité* style, Zemp manages to make the viewer feel part of the various festivities that he records while presenting a "living portrait of this lovable and highly skilled musician working in a traditional environment" (DVD liner notes).

The logical structure of the film makes for easy viewing. Divided into seven chapters, five of them concentrate on the instruments that Siaka plays expertly, namely the *Senufo* and *Maninka balafons*,² the *kora* harp, the *dundun* drum and the electric guitar. Chapter 1 begins with Siaka telling his life story. The English sub-titles are subtle and easy to follow. The viewer is able to take in the interesting shots of Bouake while later freeze-frames of information anticipate well-shot scenes from the various celebrations where Siaka performs. Chapter 2, entitled "The Large *Senufo* Balafon" shows Siaka playing the instrument and relating the charming story of how he learned to play the balafon when

¹ Hugo Zemp is an honorary member of the ethnomusicology Centre of the CNRS at the Musée de l'Homme in Paris. He has made numerous documentaries on music in various countries, many which have won awards at international festivals.

² Wooden xylophones with gourd resonators.