

Tiris. Track 4, “*Istenfar*”, which means “Rise Up” is an upbeat ode to a call for action for peace and a home. The trumpet makes a wonderful appearance on this track. This track is quite similar to the jazzy songs of Western Sahara’s southern neighbor, Mauritania. On track 5, the t’bol drum and tidinit accompany female vocals and hand-clapping. “*Ya Jayti*” means “Hey, My Sister”, and is a celebration of social connections and womanhood. The choral singing is amazing on this tune.

Track 6 is “*El Nabi*”, “The Prophet”. The transcendental properties of Saharan music mimics the vast expanse of the environment in which it is composed. This is a slow, but jazzy ode with light percussive accompaniment. The male and female vocals are chillingly transcendental in parts. Track 7, “*El Leil, El Leil*”, which means “The Night, The Night”, is a track that could be listened to night after night. Track 8, “*Assalam*”, which means “Peace”, is a slow, flamenco-tinged and piano infused track with male vocals longing for comfort and peace. Track 9, “*Aid Istiqlal*”, has a reggae-type beat that “celebrates independence”. It is also the only completely instrumental track which is quite reminiscent of popular music coming out of music clubs in Addis Ababa or Asmara. Track 10, “*Ghadara*”, is a musical story about “a gentle betrayal”. Male vocals and female choral additions accompany hand-clapping and ambient soundscapes on this one. Track 11 is a traditional chant, known as “*Ya Dayni*”. It is very similar to Mauritanian music, with female vocals accompanied by a moderately fast beat and jazzy percussion. The final track, “*Eh Heh Esski*”, is a very short song, much like the opening track; the song ends abruptly leaving us yearning for more.

Listeners of West African music, African jazz, North African, Middle Eastern and French music will find Tiris especially enthralling. The indelible music on *Sandtracks* will leave an impression in all our hearts, minds and ears.

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The Very Best of Hugh Tracey: from the monumental cd series ‘Historical Recordings by Hugh Tracey’. SWP Records. SWP034/HT022. Compiled by Michael Baird in collaboration with ILAM. One compact disc, no accompanying booklet.

Lesotho Calling: Lesiba and Sekhankula Music. SWP Records. SWP 033. Recorded and compiled by Michael Baird in collaboration with Dada Moqasa of Lesotho Broadcasting. One compact disc, with 22-page booklet and notes by Michael Baird.

These two latest CDs from SWP Records are excellent additions to this label’s mission to bring some extraordinary field recordings of African music to a wider and more general audience beyond the purely scholarly.

The Very Best of Hugh Tracey (SWP 034) contains one track from each of the previous 21 CDs in SWP’s series “Historical Recordings by Hugh Tracey” and also includes six previously un-released tracks by Congolese guitarist Mwenda Jean Bosco.

These tracks were unearthed from a 1952 radio broadcast made by Hugh Tracey and entitled “How I Discovered Mwenda Jean Bosco”.

Lesotho Calling (SWP 033) is not part of the same series, but instead is a compilation of recordings made in late 2006 of the *lesiba* and the *sekhankula* instruments.¹ Hugh Tracey’s 1957 recordings of the *lesiba* mouth bow inspired this latest recording tour.² Dutch composer and musician Michael Baird sought to explore the present day prevalence of *lesiba* playing and found the tradition “alive and well”. Furthermore, he discovered some healthy developments in the style of this art form.

Perhaps the first thing that strikes the listener upon hearing both of these CDs, which are mostly examples of rural African field recordings, is how completely modern they sound. Hugh Tracey’s recordings were made over fifty years ago under a variety of open-air conditions, and now, re-mastered by Rolf Breemer, sound incredibly fresh and ready to be presented as something new to new audiences. Of course, as Baird acknowledges, Hugh Tracey, “was a damn good recordist”.³

“*Zigezi Karagwe*” is a blistering opening to *The Very Best of Hugh Tracey*, as eight Hutu men from a Royal Drum Ensemble play abira rhythms, crisp and clear with layers of countless cross rhythms. The quality of the sound is remarkable, especially given Hugh Tracey’s own observation that drum ensembles are notoriously difficult to record.⁴ DJs and admirers of electronic music may well be struck by how drum sounds such as these are today reflected in the heavily processed and filtered techno sounds of Detroit producers such as Jeff Mills.

The sound of the *lesiba* mouth bow is stunningly rich and full, blown and wrestled across the top of a small piece of quill that is attached by thin wire to a broom handle or long stick. It is described as being “a meditative sound, almost abstract but definitely breathing, an array of overtones, music of the ancestors, music of birds and mountains, a sound that could only come from Africa”.⁵ The sound, with its rasping, its roaring and its sparks of overtones from inside deep guttural grumblings is at once deeply personal and monumental. The instrument is mainly played by lone Basotho shepherds in the “Kingdom of the Sky”, and here on SWP 033 are seventeen examples of extraordinary playing and technique within two different registers. However coincidental, these sounds could at once be compared to country blues harmonica and to the scratchy squelches of distorted bass lines in acid house music. This all points towards the potential of these recordings, and how they could easily reach and inspire a whole generation of new artists and producers.

¹ The CD also includes an example of corostina (a type of concertina) and some extraordinary whistling.

² Available on *Tswana and Sotho Voices – Botswana, South Africa, Lesotho 1951, '57, '59* (SWP 017/ HT 11).

³ Michael Baird interviewed by Bruce Miller, in *Global Rhythm* (March 2007, p. 16)

⁴ See liner notes to *Music of Africa 29 – Musical Instruments 3, Drums 1* (CDMOA 29). Gallo records originally published the album.

⁵ See liner notes to SWP 033, p. 2.

SWP 034 is described as being, “the perfect introduction to Hugh Tracey’s recordings”.⁶ Indeed, the choice of tracks showcases admirably the incredible diversity in music across Sub-Saharan Africa, from the haunting beauty of solo instruments such as the Xhosa Uhadi bow (“*Inkulu Into Ezakwenzeka*”, track 12) to the spiralling mass party dances of musicians in the Congolese forests (“*Yando*”, track 3).

The inclusion of “*Guabi Guabi*” by Zimbabwean star George Sibanda (track 18), “*Wukati Lakukawa Hinenge*” by Felicia Gomes (track 17), and “*Skokiaan*” by the Cold Storage Band (track 21), along with the six bonus tracks from the radio broadcast on Mwenda Jean Bosco, show that Hugh Tracey was not simply a purist or a traditionalist. Gerhard Kubik noted that, “in the 1950s and 1960s only a handful of individuals were even taking note of the new traditions that were coming up in some of the urban centers of West, Central, East and Southern Africa”,⁷ and that Hugh Tracey was consequently somewhat unique in that, “he, unlike ... purist ethnomusicologists of that era, did not discriminate against African traditions of more recent date”.⁸ Hugh Tracey recorded what existed because he respected what existed. If most of these recordings are not predominantly commercial, a few of the songs included here have already reached a mass audience in one form or another. “*Guabi Guabi*” was recorded by Arlo Guthrie and Taj Mahal (amongst others), and “*Skokiaan*” (composed by August Musarurwa) has been performed by countless artists, including Louis Armstrong, Bill Hayley and the Comets, and by Hugh Masekela and Herb Alpert in duet.

SWP 034’s bonus tracks by Mwenda Jean Bosco are a delight of discovery. The full radio broadcast is not included here but is housed (along with 180 more) in ILAM’s archive and includes Hugh Tracey narrating the full story of how he “discovered” Mwenda Jean Bosco in 1952 when he was sitting with his guitar on the pavement in Jadotville, Congo. Mwenda Jean introduced himself as being “the best guitarist in Jadotville” and so a recording session inside an abandoned brick hut was hastily arranged. From the nine tracks originally recorded on 3 February 1952, with Hugh and Mwenda Jean Bosco sitting opposite each other on two piles of bricks, six are presented here. Included is the original version of the gorgeously shimmering “*Masanga*” (track 22) along with a specially requested instrumental version of “*Masanga*” (track 27) which itself is slightly faster and more intricate in its variations. These six tracks are an important historical document and mark a key moment which catapulted Mwenda Jean Bosco from his position as a messenger for the Passport Office in Jadotville and into the world of more commercial record labels and international touring.

⁶ <http://www.swp-records.com/pages/index_flash.html>

⁷ Kubik, G. 1991. “Urban/Rural Interaction in Central African Guitar Styles of the 1960s”, in Muller, Carol (ed.) *Papers Presented at the Tenth Symposium on Ethnomusicology Number 10*, 96–103. Grahamstown: International Library of African Music.

⁸ Ibid.

Both CDs contain examples of songs with important historical and social information. “*Dale Wangu Ukamunyenga Masotho*” (track 8 on SWP 034) is a solo piece played by blind Malawian musician Beti Kamanga on a *bangwe* raft zither made of papyrus stalks. The song title translates as “My Darling Has Married a Sotho” and warns of the dangers of men leaving in numbers to work on the mines for the Witwatersrand Native Labour Association in Johannesburg. This is significant as the mines were an early sponsor of the Hugh Tracey recordings and Hugh himself sought to distribute to migrant workers on mines as much music from their rural home as possible.

Given the historical importance of the Hugh Tracey recordings and Tracey’s own meticulous field notes and documentation, the only fault I can find with SWP 034 is the absence of any liner notes to accompany the chosen songs. The listener has to go back to either the original twenty-one CDs in the SWP series or to Hugh Tracey’s own “Sound of Africa” catalogue, which was published in 1973 and is currently being digitised by ILAM.

SWP 033 provides evidence of development in the style and form of the *lesiba* instruments. “*Phakoe Setheng*” or “Hawk on a Sorghum Heap” (track 22) is a *lesiba* piece played by Sello Mothibeli who was accompanied by a friend who danced in a graceful and birdlike rhythm. Baird notes that, “this is interesting as it seems no longer to be the musical expression of the traditionally solitary herdsman, but an extension of *lesiba* culture, as it were”.⁹

The other main instrument featured on *Lesotho Calling* is the *sekhankula*, a bowed string instrument that is made from an empty five-litre paraffin tin, wire, and a curved stick. Its sound is sharp and caustic, and is instantly engaging. Baird compares its sound to “that of a bowed steel pan”,¹⁰ and remarks that at times it is “sounding almost like some kind of brass instrument or horn”.¹¹ The instrument is played by sheep herd boys and is also sometimes used to address social issues. “*Ke a Lekhalemela Le Lona Bacha*” (“I Warn You Youths too” – track 26) is played on two *sekhankulas* and sings of the ravages of HIV, the disease that can swallow everybody.

Both of these releases mark an important step in the ongoing work of SWP Records and ILAM that aims to bring the recordings of Hugh Tracey and the musical cultures that they document to wider audiences. They are themselves valuable enhancements to ILAM’s current digitisation project, which has already greatly increased the accessibility of ILAM’s holdings. Referring to the 218 LPs in the Sound of Africa series that were published by Hugh Tracey,¹² Michael Baird notes that, “the sheer size of this collection, and its accessibility only in university departments around the world, has barred the

⁹ *Lesotho Calling* liner notes, p. 18.

¹⁰ *Ibid.* p. 14.

¹¹ *Ibid.* p. 17.

¹² Andrew Tracey continued the series with a further eight additions.

general public from appreciation of the wonderful music it contains".¹³ Hugh Tracey himself expended vast energy in pushing to get his recordings heard and circulated as widely as possible. The first thing I expect *The Very Best of Hugh Tracey* to achieve is to send listeners back to more recordings of the broad and rich musical traditions contained within every song. And then, ideally, perhaps musicians and researchers, like Michael Baird, will continue to track the changes and current health of exceptional musical traditions such as the mountain herding music of Lesotho.

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Zanzibara. 4 volume CD series, published by Buda Musique, Werner Graebner, producer. Detailed booklets for each volume in French and English. Titles: *Ikwani Safaa Musical Club Volume 1*; *L'âge d'or du taarab de Mombasa Volume 2*; *Ujamaa, le son des années 60 en Tanzanie Volume 3*; *La mémoire de la musique zanzibari*, Volume 4.

Over the last ten years the French record label Buda Musique has demonstrated a laudable commitment to the preservation and presentation of African popular music. The label's crowning achievement has to be its Ethiopiques series, which has interested a generation of American and European music lovers in Ethiopian music, and sparked international careers for some of Ethiopia's greatest artists; the series currently stands at 23 cd releases, and two dvds. The artistic and financial success of this series encouraged Buda Musique to replicate the Ethiopiques model with the popular musics of several other African countries. First up was a five volume series that traced the history of Angolan popular music from the late 1950s to the 1990s. The label's latest series is called 'Zanzibara', and as the name suggests, it is devoted to the popular music of Zanzibar, the Indian Ocean archipelago off the coast of mainland Tanzania. So far Buda Musique has released four volumes of Zanzibari music, and I am pleased to say that this series lives up to the high expectations raised by the Ethiopiques series.

All four of the volumes have been compiled, or more appropriately, curated, by Werner Graebner. I say 'curated' because each of these four volumes more closely have more in common with well-conceived art exhibits than with most modern reissues of African popular music. As he did with his previous releases of East African music on his own Dizim label, Werner Graebner pays detailed attention to the visual layout, artwork, and color schemes of each of the four Zanzibari releases. The notes to each CD are stuffed full of beautifully drawn maps, rare archival photos, and thorough notes in both French and English. The visual appeal of these releases is enriched by very well researched notes that introduce the listener to the history of Zanzibari music in general, provide histories of the groups on each disc, and full translations of the lyrics to all of the songs. And I am pleased to report that the care and attention that have gone into the

¹³ From liner notes to *Tswana and Sotho Voices – Botswana, South Africa, Lesotho 1951, '57, '59* (SWP 017/ HT 11) p. 2.