KAVANGO MUSIC

by

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Background

From 1979 to 1988 I conducted a number of church music composition workshops in Kavango, among the various population groups there. Because the workshop participants were very much in touch with their traditional music, the music which they produced in those workshops provided excellent material for a study of Kavango musical style. The workshop recordings, together with recordings of traditional instrumental songs made during those trips, provide the data that enabled the writing of this article, the first attempt to document analytically the elements of Kavango music. Much of the material in the preliminary section is based on the books Fleisch and Möhlig (2002) and Gibson et al. (1981).

Kavango and the Kavango People

Kavango lies along the north-eastern border of Namibia, on the south side of the Okavango River, where it forms the border with Angola. Sub-groups of the Kavango are (from west to east) the Kwangali (from around Nkurenkuru eastwards), the Mbunza (from around Bunya), the Sambiu[1] (around Sambiu), the Gciriku (around Nyangana) and the Mbukushu (around Andara and westward). Hints and references in the oral histories of those peoples indicate that in the deep past their forebears were located in the lake districts of Central Africa[2]. In more recent times (possibly 17th to 19th centuries) the ancestors of the Kavango peoples were located in the area close to the Mashi River in south-western Zambia[3], from which they migrated via Angola (where many still remain) to the north and then to the south bank of the Okavango River.

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1 Variations in spelling of Sambiu are: Fleisch and Möhlig (2002) 'Shambyu'; Gibson et al. (1981) 'Sambyu'; the missionaries - 'Sambiu'. For clarity in this article the spelling 'Sambiu' is used to refer to the people, the language, the town and the mission. The spellings 'Kwangali' and 'Mbunza' as given in Fleisch and Möhlig (2002) are used, although 'Kwangari' and 'Mbundza' appear in Gibson et al.

2 For the Kwangali: Fleisch and Möhlig 2002: 297; for the Mbunza: Gibson et al. 1981: 83; for the Gciriku: Gibson et al. 1981: 163; for the Mbukushu, Gibson et al. 1981: 214.

3 For the Kwangali, Mbunza, Sambiu and Gciriku: Gibson et al. 1981: 38; also 83 (Mbunza), 99 (Sambiu), 163 (Gciriku), 215 (Mbukushu). References in Fleisch and Möhlig 2002 include: 19 (Tjaube), 20-3 (for all the Kavango groups), and 275 (Kwangali).

Figure 1. Map of Kavango. Map created by author.

The Kavango languages are Bantu languages. In RuKwangali, the westernmost language, for example, 'people' is '*vantu*'. There was a sixth group associated with the five mentioned, the Tjaube, who spoke a KhoiSan language and may have been of KhoiSan origin, but the Tjaube are now extinct. The Mbunza language was closely related to that of the Kwangali, but now the surviving Mbunza people use the Kwangali language.[4] Gibson (1981: 18) estimates the population of Kavango in 1970 to have been about 65,000[5]. Based on his statistics, this total may have risen to over 70,000 by 1979. Figures given by Gibson (16-17) for earlier years indicate that the largest group was the Kwangali (about 27% of the Kavango people in Namibia in 1964), with the other Kavango groups roughly equal in size to each other.

The Kavango sub-groups have much in common, as do their languages. Kwangali and Mbunza were very similar as are Sambiu and Gciriku. Mbukushu may be the most different, but Gibson (19) writes about "many close lexical and grammatical similarities" between Gciriku and Mbukushu. Fleisch (2002: 21-2) discusses the relationship of the Kwangali and the Mbunza with the Ovambo people, specifically with the Kwanyama. However, he concludes that the Kwangali and the Mbunza, on linguistic evidence, must rather be seen as having a close relationship with the other Kavango groups.

The descriptions of the ritual practices of the different Kavango sub-groups shows them to have much in common. All have a belief in a supreme being.[6] As with other peoples of Southern Africa, the ancestors play a large role in their lives. Gibson describes Kwangali ritual activities by diviners and herbalists relating to the ancestors (76-9; 84-

[4] These languages are designated ruKwangali, ruMbunza, siShambyu (Gibson et al. 1981: 18, has siSambyu), ruGciriku and thiMbukushu. For the sake of readability this article will omit the noun class prefixes, in imitation of Fleisch and Möhlig 2002: 15, referring to the languages simply as Kwangali, Mbunza, Gciriku and Mbukushu and Sambiu (the latter for the sake of consistency, as explained in footnote 1).

[5] It is not clear what proportion of these were in Namibia, Angola or Botswana, but most were certainly in Kavango in Namibia.

[6] In Ovambo languages a name for God is *Kalunga*: see Dargie 2003b, track 5, and CD booklet.

5) and Mbunza customs regarding childbirth, death and burial rituals, involvement of the ancestral spirits, and belief in the afterlife (152-4). Among the Sambiu (147ff) the ancestral spirits are called *vadimu* (singular *mudimu*). Diviners keep the living in touch with the ancestors, and play roles in healing ceremonies and interpreting the wishes of the ancestors. For Gciriku (206ff) and Mbukushu (242ff) indigenous religion and similar matters are also described. These accounts show that the indigenous religion of the Kavango is similar to that of the Xhosa and other peoples of Southern Africa.

Publications on Kavango music

In addition to the two historical/cultural studies of the Kavango cited above, two papers are found in *Ethnomusicology Symposium Papers;* first, by Minette Mans (1999) on dance and music in Namibia and second, by Cecilia Gildenhuys (1982) on musical instruments in Namibia.

Information in Gibson et al. 1981 and Fleisch and Möhlig 2002 on the role played by dances in traditional rituals mention the *nyambi* dance, relating to visions or dreams of the deity Nyambi (1981: 78), a royal dance called *kambembe* (92), a sorcerers' dance called *nzongo* (94), the *kakuruka* dance of the *litembu* girls' puberty ritual (119), and dances called *hathimo* and *mendengure*, used respectively for driving away evil spirits and madness (241). Fleisch and Möhlig (2002) also refers to the *kambembe* dance (81, 169-70), the *nyambi* dance (99), and a shaking dance learned from the Bushmen (146-7). Of particular interest to this article is the dance called *epera* or *lipera* referred to in both works (1981: 92; 2002: 74, 257). According to Fleisch and Möhlig (2002: 257) "the term *epera* refers to a certain kind of music associated with its own specific dance"; and "There are two kinds of *lipera* dance, a profane one just for entertainment and a ritual one for healing purposes" (74). Mans (1999: 39) discusses the *epera* (*lipera*) dance, in which two lines of participants face each other with "individuals dancing to and fro in the central space", and provides a drawing to illustrate the posture adopted by the female dancers.

References to Kavango musical instruments include drums of various sizes used to accompany singing, the *kagrorongongo* rasp bow[7], a bowed trough zither called *shivumba*, and two kinds of "thumb pianos" called *lidumu-dumu* and *ndingo* (Gibson 1981: 109-10). For the Mbukushu mentioned are

> "long drums, friction drums, hand pianos (with gourd or tin resonator), musical bows, musical rasps, clapping boards, castanets, rattles, thumped hoe blades and whistles … Only men and boys play drums, and chiefly only they … play hand pianos, musical rasps and rattles. Women use board clappers and thump hoe blades to accentuate dance rhythms" (241).

Gildenhuys (1982) discusses the construction method and materials used for Kavango drums and mentions Kavango use of mbira types and the *kagrorongongo* musical bow.

[7] This is the friction mouth bow shown in Kirby 1968, plates 66 & 67. It will be discussed later in this article.

Kavango musical style: The party at Nyangana, 1988

This study is based on two bodies of data: group songs performed with drumming, and performances with musical bows and mbiras, usually with singing. The group songs with drumming are compositions created and recorded at church music workshops I conducted in the period 1979 to 1988. These workshops were in the following languages: Kwangali (at Bunya, 1979, Tondoro 1981, Rundu 1981 and 1982); Sambiu (at Sambiu) in 1981, 1982 and 1988); Gciriku (at Nyangana in 1979 and 1988); and in Mbukushu (at Andara in 1979 and 1982). Eight were full composition workshops, the others were for recording songs composed prior to the recording sessions. Many of the workshop songs were clearly neo-Kavango, influenced by Western music, as shown by the use of the 'Afro-diatonic' scale and harmony. However, many of the songs were also clearly in traditional (indigenous) style[8]. The drumming in both the neo-Kavango and traditional songs used cross rhythms and additive rhythms in patterns in which the set of (usually three) drums acted individually while producing combined patterns. Of the songs with bows and mbiras, many were traditional songs, but a number of new church songs were also composed with these instruments; and of necessity, in indigenous styles suited to the instruments.

On only one occasion was it possible to record group songs with drumming in a traditional context. This was at a party held after the workshop at Nyangana in 1988. These recordings provide useful insight into music regarded by the people as traditional. In addition, the dancing performed at the party was typical of the type of *lipera* (or *epera*) dance used for entertainment purposes. Women stood at either side of an open space and sang and clapped while men and boys played drums and rhythm instruments and people took turns dancing in the middle. These recordings provide a useful basis for identifying traditional techniques in group songs and assessing the traditional status of the workshop compositions.

Nyangana party songs

Instruments

Almost without variation in the church music workshops drums (*ngoma*) were used in sets of three, as shown in Figure 2. The drums were made from hollowed-out tree trunks with leather skins. Lumps of beeswax, on the drum skins, were used in tuning the drums, and can be seen on the middle drum. The tallest drum is called *kurugoma* (*kuru* meaning large), the smallest *mundindi* (meaning small), and the middle drum *nkinzo*. When more drums were brought to a workshop, only three were normally used at a time. However, at the party, with its atmosphere of informal celebration, extra drums were used. There were also two friction drums, one large (*ngoma*), one small (*kita*), and a slit drum (*lingoringori*), the two sides of the slit drum being tuned to an interval of about a major third (roughly ↓A and C#). The *kurugoma* was particularly

[8] The term 'Afro-diatonic' denotes African adaptations of the western diatonic scale. The term 'traditional' is used to imply music playing style and form rooted in indigenous/local music prior to Western influence.

Figure 2. Left: Kavango drums at Andara; right: Mr K. Karupu playing *ruwenge*, a Jew's harp on which drum rhythms are played, Sambiu 1988. Photos by author.

active, with drum rhythms mostly based on rapid triplet patterns; this was also the case in the workshop compositions. Other instruments included leg rattles worn by one of the male dancers, and skirts of strung wooden beads worn by female dancers.

Dance songs

Most of the songs used little or no harmony. The first of the dance songs used the pentatonic scale, the tones being (approximately) A-B-C#-E-F#.[9] There was an occasional use of a (diatonic) harmony tone. In the second song, the melody used only three tones, approximately B♭, C and D). In this second song some Afro-diatonic parallel harmony was used, treating B♭ as the tonic tone. There was much use of joyful cries and ululation with one of the friction drums at times performing rapid triplets, keeping time with the percussion drums. The third song, which did not use harmony, again used the 'normal' pentatonic scale, the tones being approximately Eb-F-G-B♭-C.[10] These songs, sung mostly in unison and octaves (but with some harmony as noted), and with powerful drumming, reflected the way many of the workshop songs were performed.

The fourth song again used the 'normal' pentatonic scale as shown in the transcription of the sung response/verse below [CD track 1].

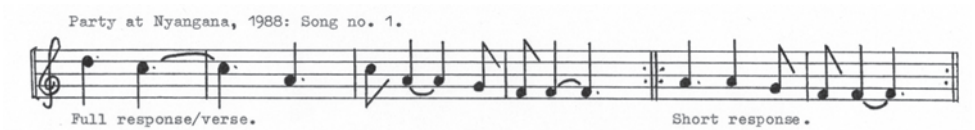

Figure 3. Nyangana party song no. 1 [CD track 1].[11]

[9] During most of the songs the pitch rose during the singing.

[10] "Approximately" refers to the pitch levels rather than the intervals.

[11] I call this "party song no. 1" because it is the first transcribed here. The CD accompanying this

This song was sung with the typical drumming in patterns of rapid triplets. The scale is transcribed (at approximate pitch) as F-G-A-C-D. Singing was in unison and octaves, without the use of harmony, though there was some variation of the melody. Of particular interest is the structure. There was a full response/verse, taking up a complete cycle (8 x 3 = 24 rapid beats). This cycle was sung several times by first the leaders, and then the large group of followers. Then the short response, shown in the score, was used. The short response, half cycle length, was repeated several times, first the leaders, then the followers. This structure was similar to that used in many of the workshop compositions.

The fifth song used an unusual pentatonic scale (including the tones A-B-C#-E-G#). During this song women dancing wore skirts made of strung wooden beads, which rattled as they danced, and one of the male dancers wore leg rattles. Next was a song having what may be described as a pure Kavango sound, shown in Figure 4 [CD track 1].

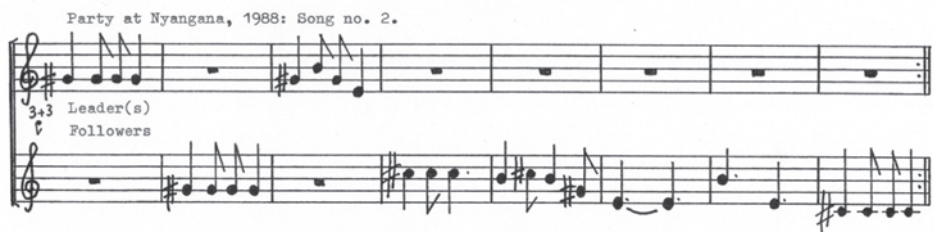

Figure 4. Nyangana party song no. 2 [CD track 1].

This song uses a tetratonic scale transcribed at the song's approximate [starting] pitch as C#-E-G#-B. The scale is made up of two open fifths (C#-G# and E-B) placed a minor third apart. As in the earlier songs the drumming was based in patterns of rapid triplets. There was some interplay between song leaders and followers, responding to each other as shown in the score. The cycle had 8 main beats (8 x [3+3] = 48 rapid drum beats). This cycle was repeated many times in the performance. As in Figure 4 the singing was in unison and octaves, with no use of harmony.

For the next songs the drum rhythm changed, based on patterns (and multiples) of 2 beats instead of triplets. The first song with a duple drum rhythm used only three tones in the melody (the tones of a major triad: at first approximately Eb-G-Bb). This was followed by a song using a tetratonic scale comprised of two open fifths a minor third apart, transcribable as G#-B-D#-F#. This is the same series of intervals as the scale shown in Figure 2. A further song using the same tetratonic scale (with pitch level C-Eb-G-Bb, fundamentals C and Eb) was also performed. The recordings allowed some assessment to be made of the music, as follows. Most drum rhythms were based on rapid triplets, but some used duple rhythm. In all of the songs the drumming used

journal contains brief recorded examples of some of the songs shown in the transcriptions. Fuller recordings of some examples are on *Dargie Collection* CDs.

driving rhythms, providing a powerful underlying movement for the singing and dancing. Of nine songs recorded at the party, in whole or in part, scale usage was as follows: three songs used the 'normal' pentatonic scale, three used a tetratonic scale made up of two open fifths a minor third apart, one song used an unusual pentatonic scale (which can be transposed to C-D-E-G-B), and two used only three notes for the melody (one used do-re-mi only, the other do-mi-sol). Most of the songs were sung without harmony, although some use of diatonic harmony was made with pentatonic and tritonic melodies. All the songs were cyclic and in call-and-response form.

The structure, form, rhythm and drumming technique found in the workshop compositions are similar in style to these elements in the party songs. The scale usage is of particular interest. Pentatonic scales and Afro-diatonic scales are used in many of the workshop songs, but it is the use of tetratonic scales in the workshop compositions which is of special interest. The tetratonic scale made up of two open fifths a minor third apart occurs in many of the workshop compositions, but two other tetratonic scales are also used. Each of the other tetratonic scales is also made up of two open fifths, in one case a whole tone apart, and in the other case (much rarer) a major third apart. These three tetratonic scales are clearly derived from indigenous musical bow music (see Figure 5 below).[12] It is the use of these tetratonic scales perhaps more than any other style element which seems to identify such songs as truly in Kavango traditional style.

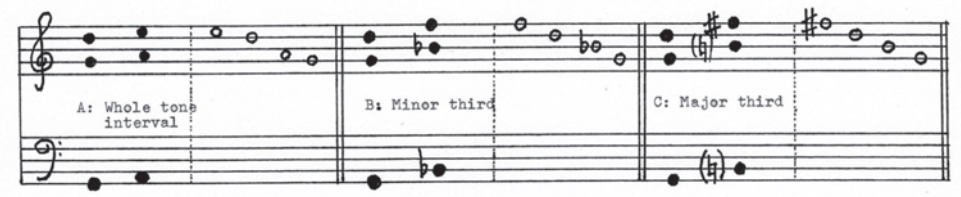

Figure 5. Kavango tetratonic scales, showing the open fifths of which they are composed and the harmonic derivation of these open fifths from bow fundamental tones.

A drum imitator: The Kavango *Ruwenge* Jew's harp[13]

Ruwenge is made from a section of sorghum stalk, cut to form a tongue, plucked by the player, and with a hole through the body of the *ruwenge* through which the player can blow and amplify the sound. With *ruwenge* one cannot play melody, as with most Jew's harps, but by touching the forefinger of his left hand to the tongue of *ruwenge* the player alters the pitch level so as to imitate the high, middle and low sounds of the three Kavango drums. Of the players recorded by the author the most skilled was Mr K. Karupu, a blind man recorded at Sambiu in 1988. By performing rhythms of

[12] Kavango musical bow theory will be discussed below, with examples from bow performance.

[13] The author discovered *ruwenge* in Rundu 1981. Mr Karupu was discovered by Andrew Tracey, who was accompanying the author on a workshop tour, while the author was conducting recording sessions at Sambiu in 1988.

the different drums in succession and not simultaneously as with a drum group, Mr Karupu provides insights into Kavango drumming style.

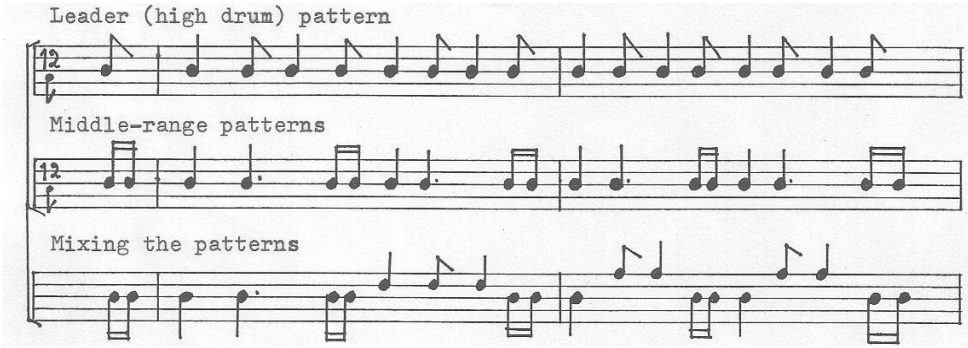

Figure 6. Drum rhythm patterns performed by Mr K. Karupu: the first performance [CD track 2].[14]

Mr Karupu's first performance [CD track 2], shown in Figure 6, was on two drums, *mundindi* as leader, and *nkinzo* as follower. The third line of the score shows the combined rhythm pattern of the two drums.

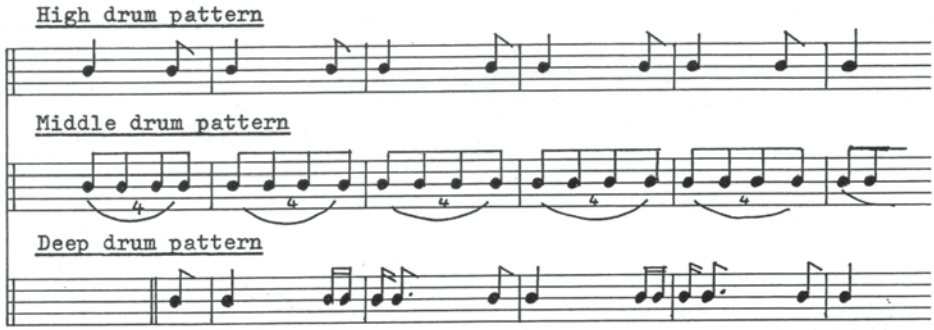

Figure 7. Mr Karupu's second performance [CD track 2].

In his second performance [CD track 2], shown in Figure 7, Mr Karupu 'played' all three drums. In this pattern *nkinzo* plays a cross-rhythm, four beats in the space of three beats by the other drums. Again it is *mundindi* which leads.

From Mr Karupu's performances one may see how the drummers build patterns together, imposed on a basic pattern felt by the drummer. It was clearly a feat for Mr Karupu to be able to feel this basic pattern all the time, while 'switching' from one drum to another without losing the basic continuity of the rhythmic movement. This demonstrates that Kavango drummers play to the same rhythmic pattern in any particular song or style either when using set patterns or when improvising.

[14] Recordings of Mr Karupu's performances may be heard on Dargie 2003c, tracks 38 and 39.

Drum patterns in workshop songs

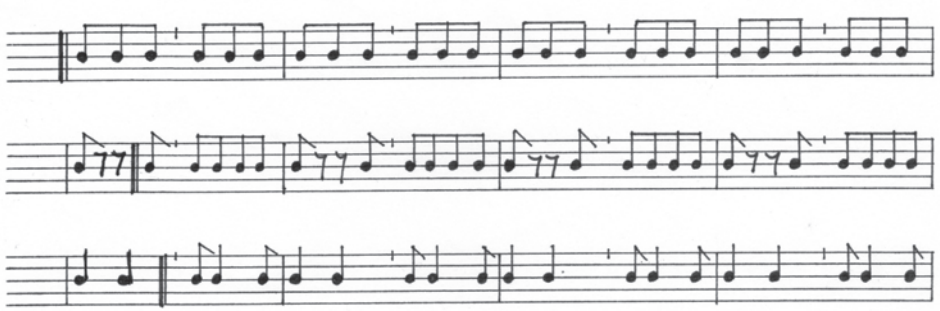

Figure 8. Drum pattern using cross-rhythm.

Figure 8 shows the drumming used in the song "Tanga nokufumadeka Hompa", which was the first workshop composition I recorded in Kavango, at Bunya in 1979 (Dargie 2012). The top line shows *kurugoma*, the middle line *mundindi*, and the lower line *nkinzo*. There are clear similarities with Mr Karupu's performance. There is a driving triplet pattern, with which four beat cross-rhythm moves simultaneously. Here, however, it is *kurugoma* which leads and *mundindi* which "plays across". Here *nkinzo* goes with *mundindi*, whereas in Mr Karupu's performance the third drum (in his case *kurugoma*) goes with the triplet pattern. The drumming patterns are clearly traditional, even though the song itself uses Afro-diatonic scale and harmony.

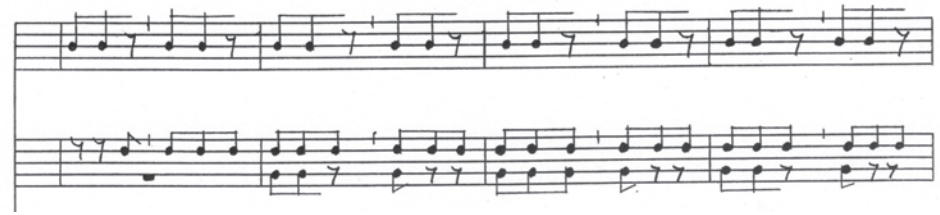

Figure 9. Drum pattern built on triplets.

The Bunya workshop of 1979 was my first church music composition workshop in Kavango. During this workshop the participants composed a number of new church songs, including a complete setting of the Mass in Kwangali language, which they called "EMisa Bunya". While working on the setting of the Sanctus of "EMisa Bunya", the leading drummer mentioned that the song was in the style of *epera*, the traditional dance form which was discussed above. The drumming rhythm of this Sanctus was built on a pattern of rapid triplets, without use of additive rhythms or cross rhythm. The Kyrie of the Mass was in the same style. Figure 9 shows how the drums worked together to build up such a pattern: *kurugoma* is shown in the top line, *nkinzo* in the middle, and *mundindi* is shown below *nkinzo*.

Figures 8 and 9 show typical drum playing in the workshop songs. The following workshop songs are shown in fuller transcription in order to identify other style elements in the songs.

"Dimbireni Hompa gova Hompa"

Figure 10 is a song from my composition workshop at Bunya [CD track 3]. The composer was a leading musician of the parish, who led the drumming and played a large role in composing new songs. The song text means "Sing to the King of Kings".

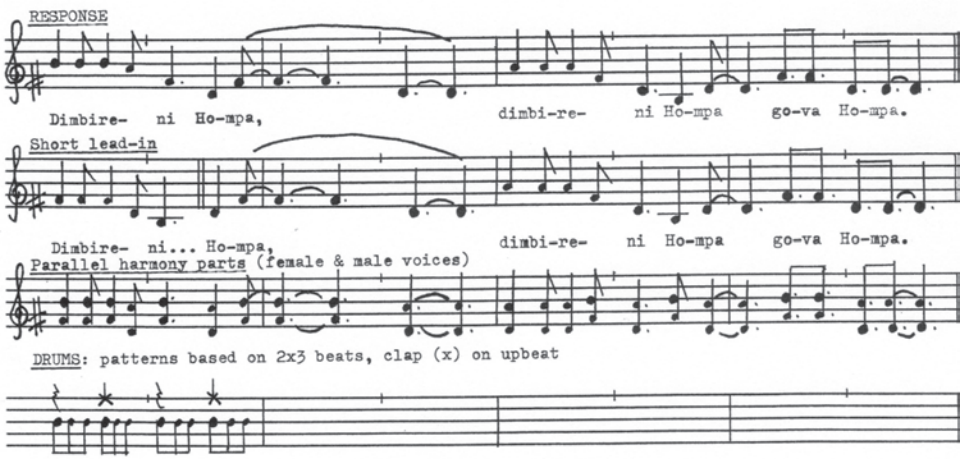

Figure 10. "Dimbireni Hompa gova Hompa", composed by Lorenz Haupindi [CD track 3].[15]

Style characteristics

As listed below, the use of the tetratonic scale, based on patterns of open fifths a minor third apart, together with the use of parallel harmony, typical drumming, structure based on a 16 beat cycle, and call-and-response form are all elements which identify the song as in traditional Kavango style.

Scale: The scale is a tetratonic bow scale, based on an interval of a minor third between the two fundamentals.

Melody: The melody is in a falling pattern typical of songs in tonal Bantu (Sintu) languages, the first phrase beginning high and falling to its end, the second phrase beginning one step lower and falling, but with a short rise and fall coming to its end. The melody pattern is controlled by the patterns of the speech tones.

Harmony: The use of parallel harmony in this song was of particular interest. In addition to the full performance of the song, the harmony parts were recorded separately (just female voices, and just male voices), in order to facilitate transcription of these parts. In some cases, in the workshop songs parallel harmony parts accompanied the melody

[15] Recordings of the Bunya songs, Figures 10, 11 and 12, are on the CDs accompanying Dargie 2012.

line. But here (and also in some other songs) the harmony parts (sung at the octave by male and female voices) clearly concentrate on imitating the harmonic patterns of a musical bow, as if moving parallel to the fundamental tones of the bow.

Rhythm: The rhythm is mostly based on rapid triplets, both in the drums and in the voices, but at times the voice part changes into a 2-vs-3 cross-rhythm with the drums. In this song the singers also clapped, as shown in the Figure 10.

Form: A method of call and response singing, as used in many workshop songs was: after singing the first full phrase of the song, which is then repeated by the group, the leader sings a shortened lead-in, the group then completing the verse. For this song Mr Haupindi wrote several verses (not shown here), each of the verses being sung in the same way. The cycle is 16 main beats.

Instruments: The usual three drums were used, and also clapping.

"Kristus gavhumbuka"

Figure 11 is a song for the *Mysterium Fidei* proclamation in the Mass [CD track 4]. The texts used by Mr Haimbili are his arrangement of the *Mysterium Fidei* (Mystery of Faith) prayer: "Christ has risen, Christ has ascended, Christ will return, Christ will judge the living and the dead." Only the first line is shown in the transcription below. Mr Haimbili was another of the leading musicians at the mission who presented several compositions at the workshop.

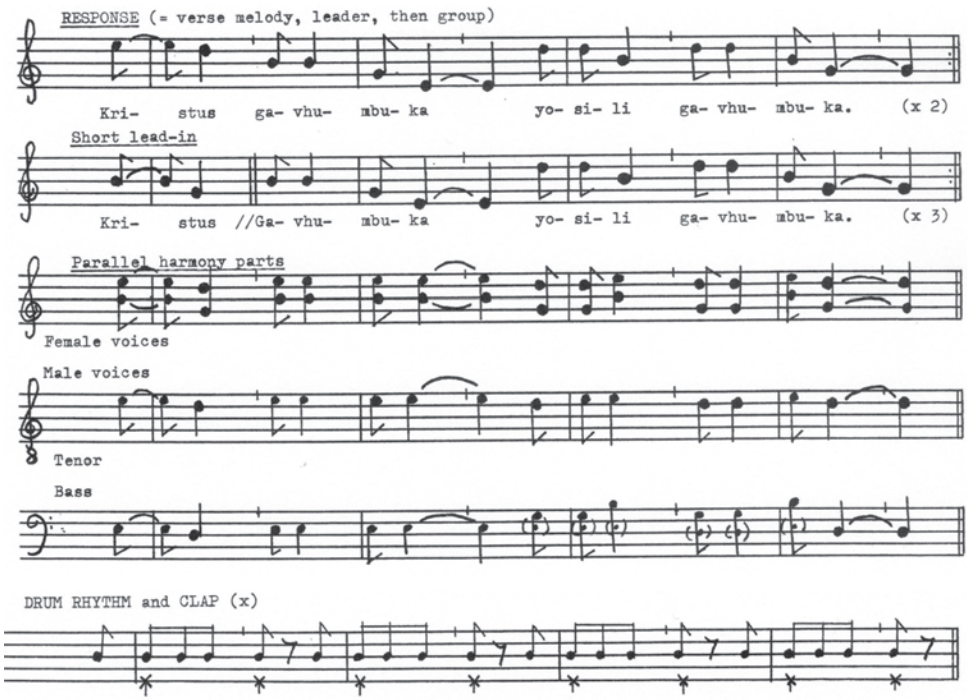

Figure 11. "Kristus gavhumbuka", by Gordius Haimbili (See footnote 15) [CD track 4].

Style characteristics

Scale: As in Figure 10, the song uses a tetratonic bow scale (here written as E-G-B-D) based on two fundamentals a minor third apart (written as E and G).

Melody: The melody uses falling patterns typical of traditional Kavango music. The first phrase begins a tone higher than the second phrase.

Harmony: As in Figure 10, "Kristus gavhumbuka" uses parallel harmony based on the overtone patterns a bow would produce in playing the song. These harmony parts are sung by the higher and intermediate range voices. The bass, however, sings a harmony part which at times partly parallels the melody in the second half of the line.

Rhythm: Drum and voice rhythms are based on rapid triplet beats.

Form: As in Figure 10, the form is cyclic (8 main beats) and call-and-response. Again there is use of repetition of the complete verse by first leader, then followers, and then a short lead-in by the leader with the verse completed by the followers.

Instruments: The set of three drums is used with clapping as shown in the score.

Kyrie of "EMisa Bunya"

The song below [CD track 5] further demonstrates traditional style elements of Kavango music, with the parallel harmony not only following a bow fundamental tone pattern, but also in part moving parallel to the main melody. The drum patterns of this song are shown in Figure 11. The particular interest here is the use of a different tetratonic scale.

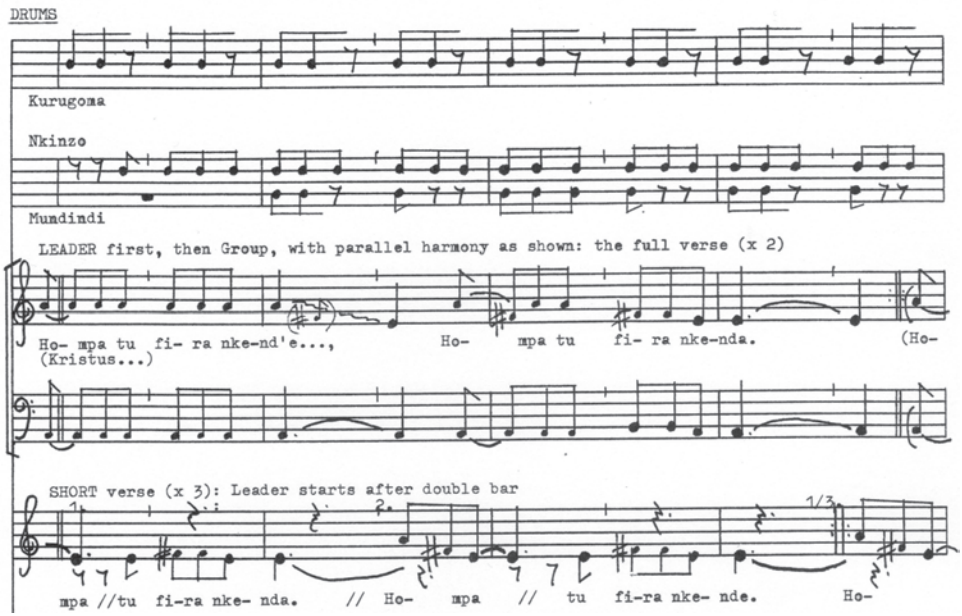

Figure 12. The Kyrie of "EMisa Bunya", a group composition, the melody given by Sr Lucretia SSB (See footnote 15) [CD track 5].

Style characteristics

Scale: This was the first song in the Bunya workshop to use a tetratonic bow scale (written as A-B-E-F#) based on the interval of a whole tone (written as A-B) between the fundamentals.

Melody: The melody is very simple, but nevertheless is in the typical falling pattern.

Harmony: As shown, the bass puts in a parallel harmony part using the fundamental tones.

Rhythm: Singers and drums use a rapid triplet beat.

Form: As before, the form is cyclic call-and-response, with 8 main beats. Leader and followers each sing the complete verse, three times. Then the leader uses the short form of the verse (four main beats, three times), the group responding as shown in the bottom stave of the score.

Instruments: the usual set of three drums. The transcription shows how the drums spread themselves over the beat pattern, in a way typical when all three drums use the same basic rhythm pattern.

Guhyetu

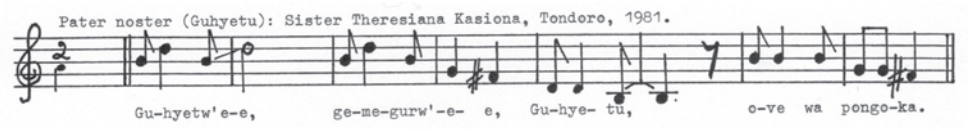

Figure 13. Pater noster (*Guhyetu*) composed by Sister Theresiana Kasiona, workshop, Tondoro, 1981 [CD track 6].[16]

Style characteristics

In most ways this song [CD track 6] was the same in style as in examples shown in Figures 10, 11 and 12. It was cyclic and call-and-response in form (the cycle comprising 16 beats). The structure was the usual: several repetitions of the full response/verse sung first by the song leader (Sister Theresiana) and then by the group, then a short lead-in by the leader, with the group completing the verse, several times. This pattern was then repeated for each verse of the Pater noster. The text of the prayer was arranged by the composer into these verses all sung to the same melody and form, as in many other of the church songs. The voice rhythm repeats the same pattern four times, as can be seen. With the usual set of three drums, there may well have been a constant triplet beat in a high drum, making a cross-rhythm with the voice beats, but for the recording only two drums were used. During the singing there was much enthusiastic ululation by the girls of the school.

The most significant aspect of this song is the scale. It uses the rare third tetratonic bow scale (written here as G-B-D-F#), the one based on an interval of a major third

[16] This song can be found on the CD *Missa Namibia* (Dargie 2003b, track 19).

between the fundamentals (G and B). Although the leader and composer, Sister Theresiana, consistently sang the tone written as G, the schoolgirls responding in the group began to change this tone to G#, so that the G#-F# final tones turned the conclusion of the melody into a diatonic plagal cadence (in B major): a regrettable diatonic erosion of traditional technique.

The four examples shown in Figures 10, 11, 12 and 13 provide insights into style elements in traditional Kavango group songs with drumming, the use of tetratonic scales, cyclic call-and-response form, and parallel harmony. I now turn to traditional Kavango songs with melody instruments, musical bows and then mbira types.

Kavango musical bows

Figure 14. Kavango mouth-bows – left: two women playing *marugoma* plucked mouth-bows, and right: Mr Eugen Hango with *kaworongongo*, a notched bow played by friction. Photos by author.

Rugoma

Rugoma (plural *marugoma*) is a bow of bamboo, about 50 cm in length, strung with nylon fishing line, and played by plucking with the finger as shown. The player holds the bow against the side of the mouth, as shown in the photo, uses the mouth as resonator and selects the required overtone by shaping the mouth. Fingers of the hand holding the bow are used to depress the string to change the fundamental tone. It is the same bow as the Xhosa *inkinge*, discussed by Kirby together with similar instruments used by a number of Southern African peoples.[17] The photograph shows two women in Rundu in 1981, playing a duet with *marugoma*. Transcriptions of two of these duet

[17] Kirby 1968: 220, 225 – with photographs of 9 such instruments of different peoples on his plates 62 and 63. The revised Hornbostel-Sachs classification describes such a bow as a "mono-heterochord musical bow without resonator and without tuning noose", with classification number 311.121.11 (MIMO 2011: 13).

performances are given below. They used only tetratonic scales as shown in the bow theory example above, unlike Ms D. Rukunde, who was recorded playing *rugoma* at Nyangana in 1988.[18] The overtone patterns and scales used by Ms Rukunde are shown in Figure 15 (at approximate pitch). She used one tetratonic scale (G-Bb-D-F) based on the minor third interval between fundamental tones (G and Bb), and one pentatonic (Gb-Ab-Bb-Db-Eb), based on overtone patterns with fundamentals a whole tone apart (Gb and Ab).

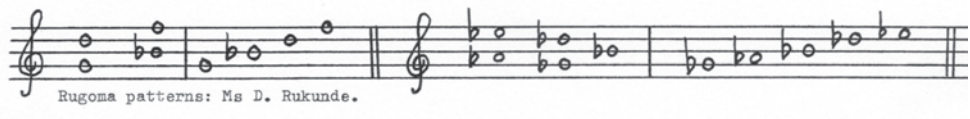

Figure 15. *Rugoma* overtone patterns used by Ms D. Rukunde, Nyangana, 1988.

Kaworongongo

Kaworongongo is the name I was given for the bow called *kagrorongongo* in Gibson et al. 1981.[19] It seems clear that the name is onomatopoeic, imitating the scraping sound made when playing the bow. Here it is called a "rasp bow", referring to the notches cut into the bow stick. The player sounds the bow by scraping a stick over the notches, holding the string, made of a strip of palm leaf, across the mouth as shown in the photo, and shaping the mouth to select the overtones for amplification. The player touches a stick, held in the hand which holds the bow, against the string in order to produce the required higher fundamental tone. The end of this stick can just be seen in Mr Hango's left hand at the left side of the photo. *Kaworongongo* is the same as the Thonga *zambi*, discussed by Kirby with similar instruments of other peoples.[20] The photo of Mr Hango with *kaworongongo* was taken at Rundu in 1981, on the same occasion as the photo of the *rugoma* players.

Recording musical bows and mbira types in Kavango, 1981-88

In Rundu in 1981 I held a small, informal type of workshop. There was a relatively small group of church people, mostly women, who worked on composing new songs, and with the help of Father Heinrich Duttmann, the local priest, Mr Eugen Hango was brought in with his *kaworongongo*. Mr Hango was a blind man who wandered around the streets dressed in tatters, earning some support for himself by playing his bow. Among the women attending the workshop were two, Ms J. Kapande and Ms M. Mpingana, who played the *rugoma*. These two women played *rugoma* duets. Mr Hango and the two *rugoma* players recorded some traditional songs, and also helped with composing church bow songs.

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[18] Dargie 2003c, tracks 33 and 34.

[19] Gibson et al. 1981: 110.

[20] Kirby 1968: 235-9 – photographs on plates 66 and 67. The Hornbostel-Sachs classification number is 311.121.11, the same as that for *rugoma*.

Musical bows at Rundu: *Rugoma* songs

The following two songs, Figures 16 and 17, were performed by the *rugoma* players shown in the photograph above [CD tracks 7 and 8].

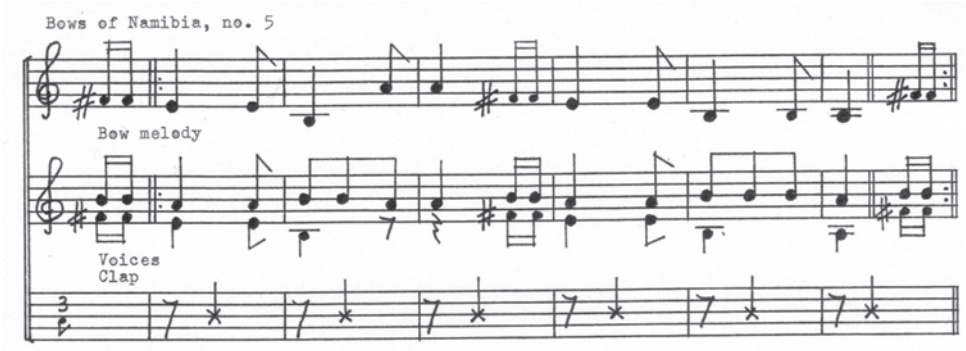


Figure 16. Traditional song, with two *marugoma* plucked mouth bows played in duet by Ms J. Kapande and Ms M. Mpingana, and female singers, Rundu, 1981 [CD track 7].[21]

Both bows followed the same melody. The singers sang two independent polyphonic parts, but using harmonic parallelism. As they sang they clapped, not using a cross-rhythm but with the claps falling between the *rugoma* beats. The scale (written as A-B-E-F sharp) is tetratonic, based on two fundamentals (A and B) a whole tone apart. The cycle is 6 main beats. The clap falls on a weak beat after the bow main beat.

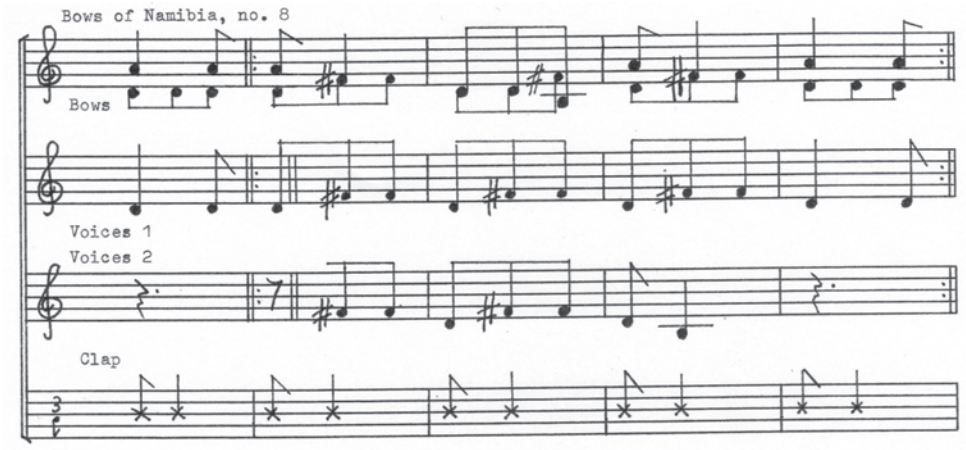


Figure 17. Traditional song with *marugoma* duet, same performers as in Figure 16 [CD track 8].

In this performance the two bows had their own individual parts, overlapping each other polyphonically. The lower bow part follows the voice part 1. Voice part 2 reflects

[21] Recordings of Figures 16 and 17 are on the CD *Musical Bows of Namibia* (Dargie 2003c).

part of the upper bow part. The tetratonic scale (written B-D-F#-A) is based on two fundamentals a minor third apart (B and D). The clapping imitates the bow rhythm a beat later, hinting at the use of two main beats, one for bow and singers, one (a beat later) for the body rhythm. The cycle is 4 x 3 = 12 beats.

Songs with *kaworongongo*

The text of the response verse of this church song, "Tu pandureni Hompa", means "We praise the Lord" [CD track 9].

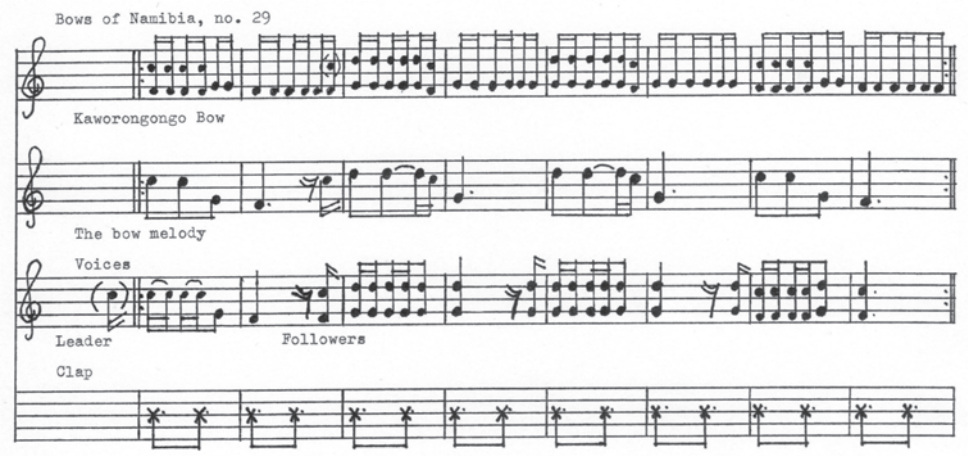


Figure 18. A church song: "Tu pandureni Hompa", a group composition in traditional style with the *kaworongongo* bow played by Mr Eugen Hango, Rundu 1981 [CD track 9].[22]

Style characteristics

Scale: this song uses the tetratonic scale (transcribed as F-G-C-D) based on bow fundamental tones a whole tone apart (written as F and G).

Melody: Mr Hango played the melody of the song on his *kaworongongo*, using falling patterns as shown. The lead singer imitated this melody, but the followers responded by singing the bow chords as shown, using the bow chords but not the bow melody. This clearly relates to the harmonic style used by the singers in the group songs shown above.

Harmony: The relationship between the chords sung by the followers, and the overtone patterns of the bow, is very clear. The song demonstrates the derivation of the sung harmony from the bow overtone chords.

Rhythm: The bow uses a rapid rhythmic pattern, as shown. The singers clap a cross-rhythm: 2 x 3 = 6 beats for the clapping pattern, across 3 x 2 = 6 bow beats, as shown.

[22] Recordings of examples shown in Figures 18, 19 and 20, performances by Mr E. Hango, are on the CD *Musical Bows of Namibia* (Dargie 2003c).

Structure and form: the song is cyclic (with a cycle of 8 main beats) and in call-and-response form. The leader sings a short lead-in verse at the start of the cycle, and the followers respond each time with the same text and melody: *Tu pandureni Hompa*, three times.

Traditional songs with *kaworongongo* mouth bow

In the transcriptions below the semiquaver pattern (indicated by the lines crossing the stems of the notes in the bass clef) shows the scraping rhythm used by Mr Hango. In the treble clef, the notes with tails pointing down are played using bow overtones, the notes with tails pointing up are tones sung by him. The transcriptions shows two cycles of the song (each 6 main beats), played in the same way by the bow, but with Mr Hango varying the sung melody. Each phrase of the sung melody uses the characteristic falling pattern, but the short phrases of the bow melody are perhaps not related to sung texts. The tetratonic scale (written F-G-C-D) is based on an interval of a whole tone between the fundamentals (F and G).

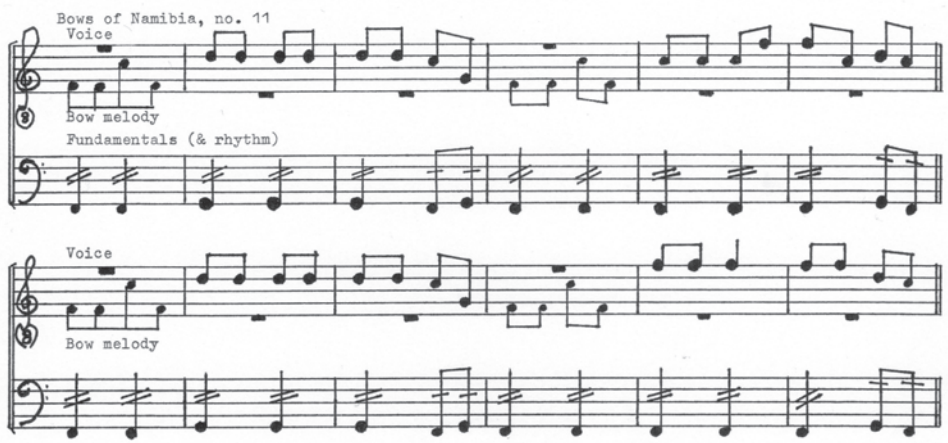


Figure 19. Traditional song with *kaworongongo* mouth bow: Mr E. Hango, Rundu, 1981 [CD track 10].

Mr Hango's song shown in Figure 19 [CD track 10] was relatively simple. The song in Figure 20 [CD track 11] was more complex, with a longer cycle (6 x 4 = 24 beats). In between cycles in which the bow performed the melody, the score includes one full cycle in which he sang (voice notes with tails pointing up, bow melody overtones with tails pointing down). The three voice entries have irregular numbers of beats, the voice part growing longer each time. The 'key signatures' at the start of each clef mean that, in the treble clef, the tones written A and E are always Ab and Eb, and in the bass A is always Ab.

The tetratonic scale (written F-Ab-C-Eb) is based on two fundamentals a minor third apart (F and Ab). Mr Hango uses additive patterns in the rhythm of the bow overtone melody, to good effect, contrasting with the straightforward rhythm of the sung parts. The phrases of the sung melody begin with an upward leap, but are otherwise in the typical falling pattern. As demonstrated in Figure 19, the phrases of

the bow melody do not follow the falling pattern, hinting that the bow melody is not related directly to a sung text. In Xhosa music, for example, bows are considered to take the role of singers, leading or sometimes following a song, using the melodies fitting to the speech tones of song text lines and by implication singing text lines themselves.[23] Mr Hango's construction of his accompaniment is more purely instrumental.

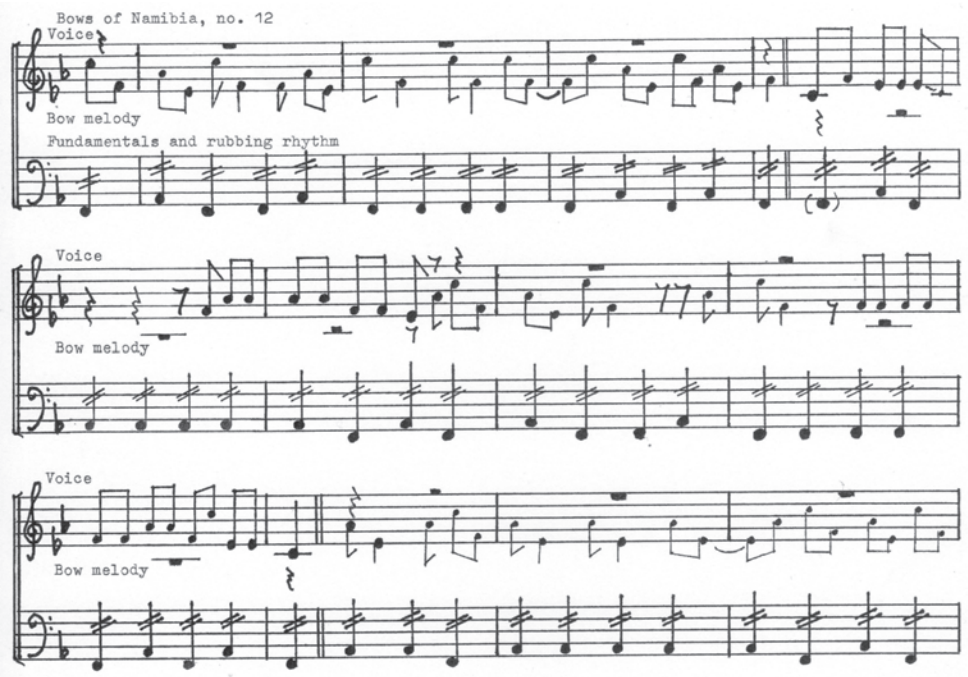


Figure 20. Traditional song with *kaworongongo* mouth bow, by Mr E. Hango, Rundu, 1981 [CD track 11].

***Lipuruboro* musical bow**

At Sambiu in 1981 I 'discovered' and recorded a musical bow used only as a rhythm instrument called *lipuruboro*, a large hunting bow strung with leather, which is converted into a combination 'drum' and rattle. The photo below shows how it is played. The man on the left holds the bow with his left hand onto a grass mat on top of the resonator, a three-legged iron pot. The man on the right beats the bow string with two short sticks, producing the sound of drumming. The man holding the bow holds an enamel mug containing dried mealie kernels with his right hand, and touches the mug onto the vibrating string to produce the rattle sounds. *Lipuruboro* players took part in performing three traditional songs and one church composition in traditional style.

[23] Dargie 1988: 64-6, 92-3.

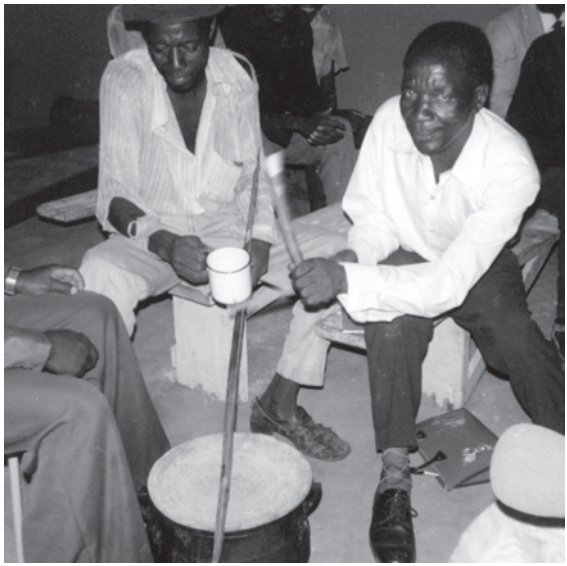


Figure 21. Two men playing the rare *lipuruboro* musical bow; one holds the bow onto a mat on top of a three-legged pot with his left hand, and has a mug with mealie kernels inside in his right hand. The other beats the leather bow string with two sticks. Photograph by author.

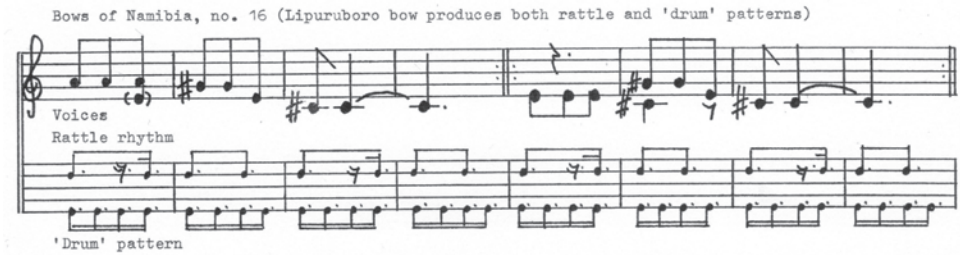


Figure 22. Traditional song accompanied by the *lipuruboro* musical bow: recorded Sambiu, 1981 [CD track 12].[24]

This song [CD track 12] uses the rarest tetratonic bow scale, based on an interval of a major third between the bow fundamentals. The scale is transcribed as A-C#-E-G#, the bow overtone (perfect fifth) intervals being A-E and C#-G#, with fundamental tones A and C#. Although the scale is bow-derived, it cannot come from *lipuruboro* which is not an overtone instrument.

The upper line of the score shows the sung melodies. The leader sang the first sentence of the melody (before the double bar) several times, each time the sentence being repeated by the followers. The leader (transcribed with note tails down) then sang

[24] Recordings of this and other songs with *lipuruboro* are on the CD Dargie 2003c.

the first phrase of the second sentence, and the followers (transcribed with note tails up) completed the sentence. This pattern was followed a number of times, to the end of that particular performance of the song. The 'drum' and rattle patterns performed on *lipuruboro* by Messrs P.M. Karufere and P. Haididira, shown in the photograph, are shown in the lower line of the score. 'Drum' and voice beats form a 4-vs-3 cross-rhythm. It seems extremely likely that the bow name *lipuruboro*, like the bow name *kaworongongo*, is derived onomatopoeically, from the "*puru puru*" of the rattle sound and the "*boro boro*" drumming on the leather string.

Mbira types

Although Gibson et al. 1981[25] refers to two types of Kavango "thumb pianos", called *lidumu-dumu* and *ndingo*, these terms are not names of the instruments, but descriptions. The instruments are called *vitandi* (singular *sitandi*, in Mbukushu *thishandzhi*). *Sitandi lidumodumo* is the 'thunderer', the larger and deeper-toned instrument, *sitandi ndingo* is the smaller, higher-toned one.

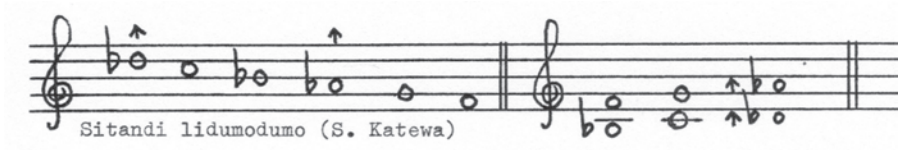
I recorded several blind men who may have been among the last musicians keeping certain instruments alive, Mr Eugen Hango (*kaworongongo*), Mr K. Karupu (*ruwenge*), and Mr K. Marungu, with his *sitandi*, a *lidumodumo* type. Mr Marumgu was recorded at Sambiu, together with Mr S. Katewa, who had both the *lidumodumo* and *ndingo* types.

Figure 23. Kavango mbira types. Left: Mr S. Katewa holding his *vitandi - sitandi lidumodumo* with two layers of keys, and *sitandi ndingo* in a calabash resonator; right: *vitandi* duet by Mr Katewa (left) and blind Mr K. Marungu holding tins as resonators under the *vitandi lidumodumo*. Lumps of beeswax stuck under ends of keys are used for tuning the keys. Photos by author.

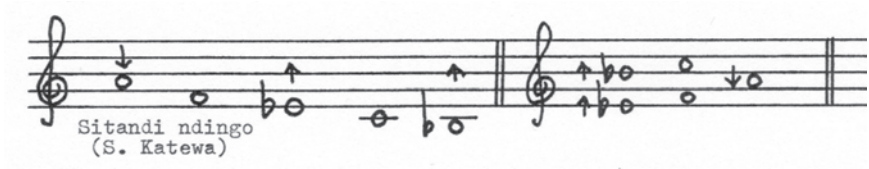
The scale patterns used by Mr. Katewa and Mr. Marungu are shown below. The arrangement in fifths on the right side of the staff lines indicates possible relationships

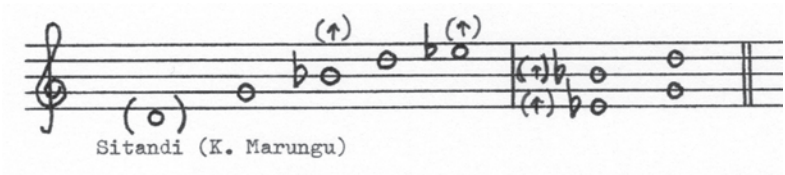
[25] Gibson et al. 1981: 110, quoted above in this article.

with bow harmonics, even though mbira scales may be completely artificial. It may be that bow related scales were used because such scales were sung by themselves and those they accompanied. Some intervals were altered by microtones, indicated by the small arrows in the score.



Mr S. Katewa's *vitandi* scales, above: *sitandi lidumodumo*





Mr K. Marungu's scale with *sitandi* (a *lidumodumo* type)
Figure 24. *Vitandi* scales.

In addition to their individual performances, Mr Katewa and Mr Marungu carefully tuned their *vitandi* to the same tones in order to play in duet. This was in fact a bow scale. They played several songs in duet with this tuning, including two in which Ms E. Kunyima joined, playing a *rugoma* mouth-bow, while a group of singers sang with the three instruments. They first performed a traditional song, and then a church song built from the traditional song.[26] In both the songs performed with the *vitandi* the *rugoma* produced the same pitches as the *vitandi*. The melody of the traditional song, which the *vitandi* performed with singers and the *rugoma* mouth-bow played by Ms E. Kunyima, is shown in Figure 25.

[26] These duet performances may be heard on Dargie 2003a, tracks 22 to 26.

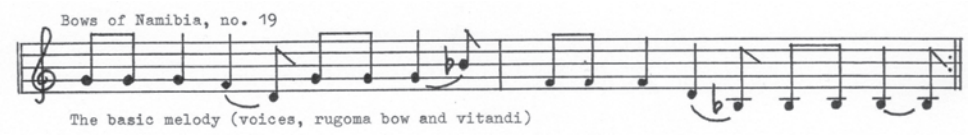


Figure 25. Traditional song performed by two *vitandi* (S. Katewa and K. Marungu), *rugoma* mouth bow (Ms E. Kunyima) and singers, Sambiu, 1981.[27]

The scale (G-Bb-D-F) is a tetratonic bow overtone scale, using an interval of a minor third between the fundamental tones (written as G and Bb). As stated above, the two *vitandi* and the *rugoma* of Ms Kunyima were perfectly in tune with each other. The rhythm is also of interest. It is an additive pattern 2 + 2 + 3 + 2 + 3 = 12 beats.

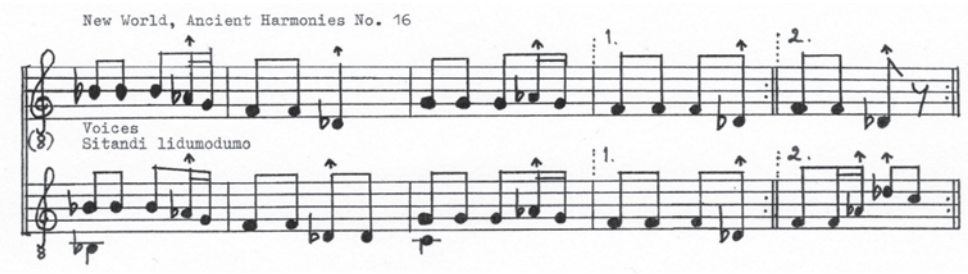


Figure 26. Traditional song performed with sitandi *lidumodumo* by Mr S. Katewa, Sambiu, 1981 [CD track 13].[28]

The *sitandi* played the bottom line of the score, Mr Katewa (and the followers) sang the melody on the upper line. The song was cyclic, the cycle being 8 main beats x 2, with the *sitandi* link back to the beginning (at the sign 2). The small arrows in the score indicate alterations of a microtone in the direction of the arrow.

The scale used is hexatonic, written as Bb-C-↑Db-F-G-↑Ab. This scale includes three perfect fifths. The tones Bb and C are used as bass harmony tones on the first beat of each of the two phrases. Mr Katewa, as leader, and a group of followers sang the tones of the *sitandi* scale. The same group of singers sang bow songs on the same occasion. Whether these considerations suggest a relationship between Mr Katewa's tuning and bow overtone patterns is anybody's guess. It is tempting to wonder if this hexatonic scale could be a combination of bow scales, combining overtone fifths Bb-F, C-G and ↑Db-↑Ab, with fundamentals at steps of a whole tone (Bb-C) and a minor third (Bb-↑Db).

The lower line of the score (Figure 27) shows the *sitandi ndingo* melody/ accompaniment part, the upper line is the sung melody. The transcription shows two

[27] This song is recorded on Dargie 2003a, track 24, and on Dargie 2003c, track 19.

[28] Recorded on Dargie 2003a, track 16.

full cycles of the song, the start of the cycle being the pattern of 3 x 2 = 6 beats played by the *sitandi* (across the 2 x 3 = 6 voice beats), and the cycle comprising 2 x 8 = 16 main beats (= 48 beats *in toto*). Each phrase of 8 main beats is concluded by a long held sung tone. The (pentatonic) scale used in the song is written as F-↓A-↑Bb-C-↑Eb, the arrows indicating alterations of a microtone. Mr Katewa's playing style was different from that in the previous example. Here he mostly used accompaniment figures, except for the brief falling pattern in cross-rhythm at the start of each cycle. Occasionally, especially at the beginning, he used the tone ↑A (below middle C) as a harmony tone.

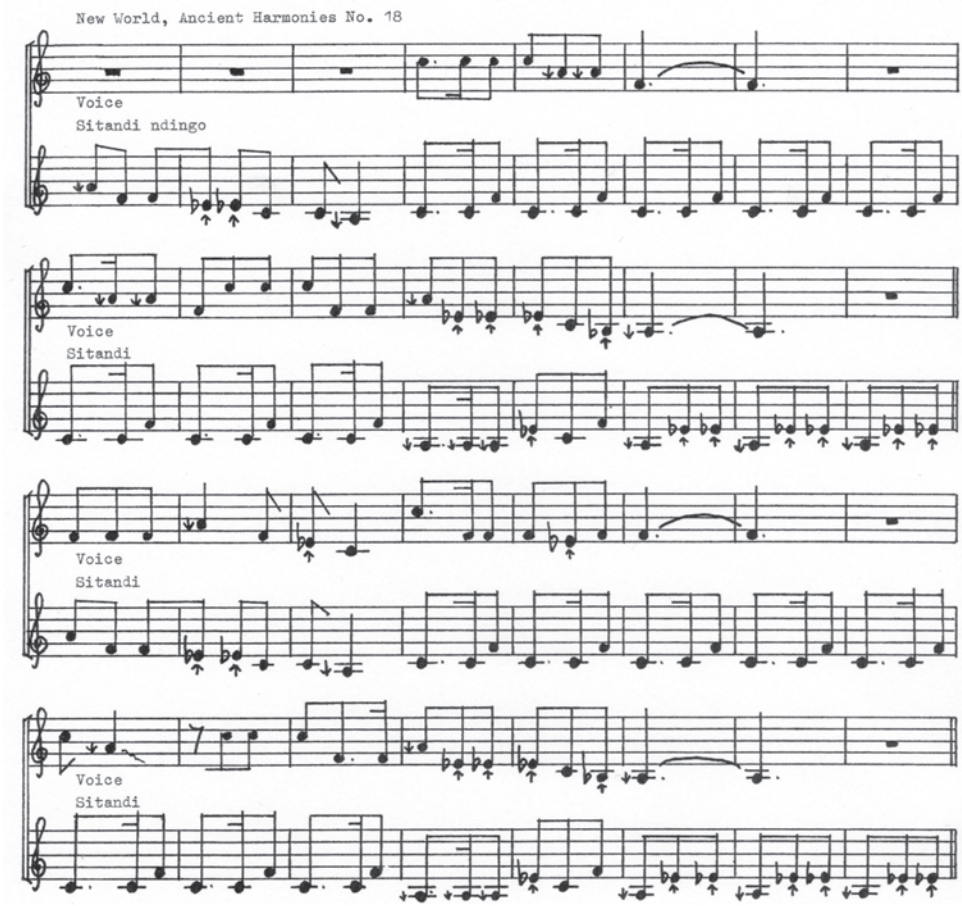


Figure 27. Traditional song with *sitandi ndingo*, performed by Mr S. Katewa (with group of followers) at Sambiu, 1981 [CD track 14].[29]

Compared to Mr Katewa's songs above, Figure 28 shows a relatively simple song, using the same short melody over and over, with Mr Marungu and the group alternating

[29] Recorded on Dargie 2003a, track 18.

with different texts. Mr Marungu introduced each sentence with an arpeggio on the *sitandi*. Of particular interest is the use of tetratonic scale (written as ↑Eb-G-↑Bb-D), similar to a bow scale based on the interval of a (very slightly reduced) major third, ↑Eb-G. The small arrows indicate a (small) microtonal alteration in the tones Eb and Bb, so that the interval between Eb and G (and Bb and D) is a very slightly reduced major third.

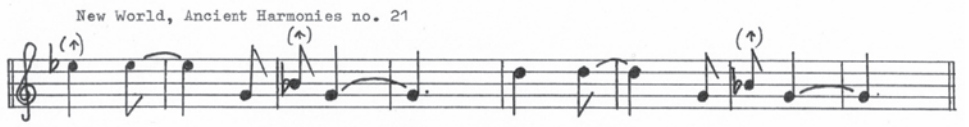


Figure 28. Traditional song with *sitandi (lidumodumo)*, by Mr K. Marungu, with Sambiu group, 1981.[30]

Conclusions regarding Kavango musical style

Drums: Drums play a most important role in group songs. Dances may start or continue supported by the drums alone, before singers join in, or when there is a break in singing, as happened often at the Nyangana party. Drumming patterns have a strong influence on song structure, as well as on the texts used, as the author learned at Bunya when, during the composition work on the Bunya Sanctus, he was told by the musicians that, because the song was in *epera* style, the texts had to be fitted to the drumming patterns. The drums establish the rhythm cycle of a song, and the song structure fits the drum cycle.

Rhythm: Drummers did not make much use of additive patterns (using groups of 2 and 3 beats within the same pattern, e.g. 3 + 3 + 2 = 8 beats, or 2 + 2 + 3 + 2 + 3 = 12 beats). Such additive rhythms are used in the song shown in Figure 25, which is sung without drums, but with *vitandi* and *rugoma*. The preferred usage was driving rhythms mostly based on patterns of rapid triplets but also using duple rhythms at times. However, cross-rhythm patterns (2-vs-3, 3-vs-4, etc.) were often used, either between voices and drums or between different drums. The most striking uses of additive rhythm which I recorded in Kavango were in instrumental songs (without drums).

Structure: The structure and form of Kavango songs is typically African traditional in that it is cyclic and in call-and-response form. However, the actual structures of the call-and-response system as used in Kavango music differentiate it from much other African music. A usual method is for the leader(s) to sing a complete sentence, which is then repeated in full by the followers. This is done several times, often three times before a change is made, but sometimes more often. There may be some use of overlapping of parts, but not a great deal. Often a shortened call-and-response form is then used, frequently involving the use of a shortened lead-in by the lead singers, with the sentence then completed by the followers, so that in effect a full sentence is shared

[30] Recorded on Dargie 2003a, track 21.

between leaders and followers. If this happens, then this shared sentence pattern may be repeated several times, at least three times, but also more often at times. It can happen that after the repetition of the full (long) sentence a short sentence (perhaps of half cycle length) is then used, sung in full by the leaders and repeated in full by the followers. Repetitions of the musical sentence may use different texts, without much change to the melody.

Melody: The melody is clearly related to the text being sung. In the workshops the composers frequently built their melodies by going from speech to song. However, as noted above, when new texts are introduced into the song this must fit with the drumming pattern being used. Following the basic tones of speech in the tonal Kavango languages, melodies typically begin high, fall to the end of the phrase, again begin high (usually not as high as in the first phrase), and fall to the end of the sentence in the "saw pattern" found both in the speech and the melody patterns of the Bantu (Sintu) language peoples of Southern Africa.

Harmony: Neo-Kavango music, with elements of the western diatonic system being brought in, was clearly in a strong development phase in the period that I worked in Kavango (1979-88). A type of harmony was developing which was similar to the Afro-diatonic harmony used by peoples of South Africa (Xhosa, Zulu, Sotho, Tswana et al.). However, there were significant differences in the way harmony was used in songs in traditional Kavango style. In many traditional songs harmony was either not used at all, or was used minimally. This included both songs sung with drumming and songs sung with mbira types. At times the harmony moved in parallel with the melody tones. But there was another way parallel harmony was used when singing with musical bows, or when singing songs using scales based on musical bow overtone theory. Harmony parts could move in parallel, not with the melody, but with the fundamental tones, in imitation of bow overtone patterns. Examples of this are shown very clearly in the transcriptions of traditional song no. 1 with *rugoma* duet (Figure 16) and of the song "Tu pandureni Hompa" accompanied by the *kaworongongo* mouth bow (Figure 18). Of the workshop song transcriptions, use of parallel harmony based on the underlying bow overtone pattern of the song is shown in the transcriptions of the songs "Dimbireni Hompa gova Hompa" and "Kristus gavhumbuka" (Figures 10 and 11) respectively).

Polyphony: The Kavango music recorded did not use much polyphony. There was some use of overlapping between leader and followers, and some use of polyphony between follower parts in songs with musical bows, seen for example in the transcription of the traditional song no. 2 with *rugoma* duet (Figure 17). However, it would be difficult to imagine a wider contrast than that between the sparse use of polyphony in Kavango music and the rich uses of polyphony in the songs of the Xhosa of South Africa[31] or the Ju | 'hoan [32] who are neighbours to the south of the Kavango in Namibia.

[31] Dargie 1988, passim, especially 87-9, 122-30.

[32] Olivier 2007.

Scales: What perhaps primarily differentiates Kavango music from the music of their neighbours in Namibia is the use of tetratonic bow scales. The Kavango do use other scales as well, including pentatonic scales, both the 'normal' pentatonic and others, and there are occasional uses of hexatonic scale, including in *sitandi* music. At the Nyangana party two songs used only three tones in the melody. The pentatonic and hexatonic scales may have been derived by Kavango musicians from bow scales by adding an extra tone to turn a tetratonic scale pentatonic. They may have come in from the music of neighbours or other peoples, or from the ever-intruding diatonic music of mission songs, pop music and so on. But without question, the tetratonic bow songs are special. The author has not encountered similar sounding music elsewhere in Namibia, nor in South Africa.

Continuing with comparisons between Kavango music and that of other peoples in Namibia and South Africa, there are some similarities between Kavango use of parallel harmony and the use of such harmony, based on intervals of fourths and fifths (and related to bow music), in Zulu traditional music[33]. But otherwise Zulu music is very different from Kavango music.

In Namibia, the Ovambo, neighbours of the Kavango on the west, use a seven note equal spaced scale for singing, and a hexatonic bow scale based on two fundamental tones a whole tone apart. For considerations of how musical style might reflect the history of a people, the author was most fortunate to have Andrew Tracey, with his wealth of knowledge of African music, as a companion on two of his Namibia music journeys. Tracey likened the music of the Ovambo to that of other peoples further north on the west side of the continent. At Otjikondo in 1982 he pointed out the similarity of the Herero songs recorded there[34] to the music of cattle people in East Africa. The Herero are also cattle people. Damara singing, which the author recorded at Okombahe also in 1982, uses two different tetratonic scales, which can be transcribed as C-E-G-Bb or C-E-G-A (A-C-E-G). These scales may be bow derived, but the Damara singing was very different from that of the Kavango, with constant multi-part improvisation. Andrew Tracey, who was present on this occasion, compared the Damara singing to the type of free improvisation which occurs in Xhosa group songs. These musical similarities give hints about the past history of the various peoples involved: the contact in the deep past between the Damara and the Xhosa, the possible origins of the Herero among the cattle people of East Africa, the links of the Ovambo with peoples to the north of them.

It was the clear difference between Kavango music and the other musics of South Africa and Namibia that led me to decide to present my documentation of Kavango music in this article. If the ancestors of the Kavango brought their musical style with them all the way from their ancient home area in the Great Lakes district of East Africa, or whether they acquired it on the long trek from there to the Okavango River,

[33] *Cf* Dargie 2007.

[34] For example, the song "Ma tu tanga Muhoma", track 6 on the CD Dargie 2003b. This song uses only four tones in the melody, but not the same tones as any of the three Kavango tetratonic scales. The rhythm is slow; drumming was not used.

or whether they developed it themselves on the way, is something that cannot be established. But Kavango musical style points to a different historical path from that of their present neighbours. In addition, the fact that there is so much similar in the musical styles of the various Kavango peoples, despite the different paths they followed in coming to the Okavango[35], seems to indicate a common history for all the Kavango groups in the deep past, just as does the similarity of their languages.

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[35] See Gibson et al. 1981: 22-3, 38-9, 83-4, 99-100, 163-4, 214-5. In these passages the paths of the various Kavango peoples, from their possible common place of origin to their present locations along the Okavango river, are traced according to the traditional lore of those peoples. The various chronicles in Fleisch and Möhlig 2002 also trace out the paths of migration.

Discography

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2003a *New World, Ancient Harmonies* (CD with booklet).

2003b *Missa Namibia* (CD with booklet).

2003c *Musical Bows of Namibia* (CD with booklet).