

UMNGQOKOLO: XHOSA OVERTONE SINGING AND THE SONG NONDEL'EKHAYA

by

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According to Kropf's 1899 Dictionary¹ *uku-Ngqokola* means "to sing in a hoarse bass voice, producing the sound far back in the throat, and keeping the mouth open". The forms of this word are: *ngqokola* = verb stem (*uku* = infinitive); *umngqokolo* = noun, meaning the technique *ukungqokola*; *umngqokoli* (plural *abangqokoli*) is a person who performs *umngqokolo*.

Hansen² defines *uku-ngqokola* as "voice-changing technique in which the singer sings in a deep, rasping voice 'as if he has umkhuhlwane' (catarrh, influenza; done mainly by diviners; sometimes used with nasalisation; Bhaca/Mfengu term is *ukundondya*." Bigalke³ simply repeats Kropf's definition.

The type of gruff, rasping singing or roaring to which these definitions refer is performed as a kind of vocal percussion, emphasizing the rhythm of the song — an example can be heard performed by one young man (or maybe two, keeping exactly together) in song number 5 on side 2 on the disc GALP 1019, "The African Music Society's Choice, Osborne Award Part 2" (1957), published by the International Library of African Music. In this song, "Umzikwabo uphelele", performed by a group of Gcaleka Xhosa boys and girls, the *umngqokolo* focuses on the tone a perfect fifth above the main tone of the 'tonality shift' (in this case the upper), with the main tone heard on the intake of breath.⁴

This type of gruff singing 'vocal percussion' is also used by young men in the Lumko district, but there is another kind of *umngqokolo* — that used by women and girls — which is a form of overtone singing.

At the time of writing (1985), Lumko Missiological Institute was situated at Lumko Mission, 12 kilometres south of Lady Frere, which is a small town some 48 kilometres east of the Cape Province town of Queenstown. The name "Lumko", which means 'wisdom', is in fact the name of the family which once owned Lumko as part of their farm.⁵

The Lumko district is a cultural backwater, with many people still living the traditional Xhosa way of life. The people are mostly Thembus of the Gcina clan, who were driven into this area by the British during the wars of the 19th century, displacing and absorbing the former Khoi and San (so-called Hottentot and Bushman) inhabitants. The amaGcina call their songs *iingoma zesiXhosa* — songs of the Xhosa culture. But there is good reason to believe that they absorbed many KhoiSan techniques and songs, just as the Xhosa language absorbed much from the KhoiSan languages. Many of the local place-names are click words, deriving from the KhoiSan, and may still be the original KhoiSan names: Ngqoko, the village just above Lumko mission, for example, and some of the areas within the village: Cwerha, Xubani, Gqadu. The next village a few kilometres to the south of Lumko is called Sikhwankqa, and the one between Ngqoko and Lady Frere is Ngcuka. The big river (relatively speaking — it does not often

carry much water) which flows through the Lumko valley is the Cacadu, and its main tributaries give their names to the villages — the Ngqoko and the Ngcuka.⁶

Many of the musical terms are Khoisan words, or words having KhoiSan roots: *-xhentsa*: dance; *umrhubhe* and *umqangi*: names of the friction mouth-bow; *umngqungqo*: the ladies' round dance; *ingqongqo*: the drum made by stretching an ox-skin, either holding it or placing it on the ground. There are many more. Some KhoiSan-derived musical terms may occur only in the Lumko district, for example, *iingcacu* - leg rattles for dancing, made of woven and dried reeds; and also *izicabo* — the parts of a song using different texts. One of the Xhosa KhoiSan words is *umngqokolo*, and it is a word describing techniques apparently found only among the people of Xhosa culture.⁷

That the Lumko area is a survival pocket of Xhosa music, and of music techniques inherited from the KhoiSan, cannot be doubted. Several rare techniques have come to light for the first time in this area, or are still preserved there: not only the use of various musical bows, but, for example, the playing of *imirhubhe* bows in duet, *umrhubhe* whistling techniques, the survival of Ntsikana's hymn (Ntsikana d. 1821) as a bow song,⁸ the survival of rare musical terms and (perhaps) the ur-Xhosa way of using musical terms, and — maybe the most striking technique — *umngqokolo* as overtone singing. If *umngqokolo* overtone singing is what Hansen means by "sometimes used with nasalisation", then her finding that "this singing style is not as old" as the other (vocal percussion) type⁹ may also indirectly witness to its more recent derivation from the KhoiSan.^{10,11}

In the Xhosa usage of the Lumko district, the structure of all songs is described in terms of the activity of the participants. Every song has a leader who leads (*-hlabela*), and those who respond either follow (*-landela*) or 'agree' (*-vuma*). The word for 'to sing' is *uk-ombela*, which means to sing with clapping and body movement.¹² Song structure is invariably of overlapping parts of the leader and the follower(s). Some songs in verse form are found, but most of the songs are built up of a constant succession of cycles. In some, the leader repeats the same cycle over and over, and the other parts are built on to it: beginning after the leader, they may overlap with the beginning of the next leader cycle, or leader and followers may end together. The followers may *cabela* their way through a multiplicity of different parts, or they may sing a constant chorus. The leader too may either *cabela* or sing a constant line. Generally, the *umngqokolo* technique of overtone singing is used by the song leader. The songs which are more likely to use *umngqokolo* are those which it is possible for each part to vocalise continuously. *Umngqokolo* duets will be described below, where one lady sang the lead parts, and the other the follower parts, both using *umngqokolo* overtone singing techniques.¹³

Many of the songs of the Lumko district use additive rhythms, but more frequently a pattern is set up of different rhythms going at the same time, two against three, three against four, and underlying these are rapidly moving pulse systems which the performers feel in their bodies and may use in placing the sung syllables. Thus, in a certain song a rhythm of body movement (clapping and dancing) may be established, and the words sung in a cross-rhythm. Syllables may be sung on different pulses in repetitions of the same line. Sometimes the clapping beat may be displaced so as to fall a pulse behind the song beat.¹⁴

What happens is that the body movement and the song beat fall on the same beat and pulse, but the movement of hand or foot is timed so that the sound or clap or footfall

occurs on a subsequent pulse. The pulse movement may be very rapid, and in some songs it may happen that the clap falls on the immediately subsequent pulse, and the footfall on the pulse immediately after the clap. The **movements** of voice, hand and foot (and of bow-stick etc.) begin on the same pulse, but the **sounds** are staggered.¹⁵ These pulse systems occur in both additive rhythms and cross-rhythms. To go into greater detail about rhythm is not the purpose of this article, but these details have been mentioned in order to explain the transcriptions shown below. These show the *springing points* of clap and dance beats,¹⁶ not necessarily where the *sounds* fall.

The song Nondel'ekhaya (see frontispiece)

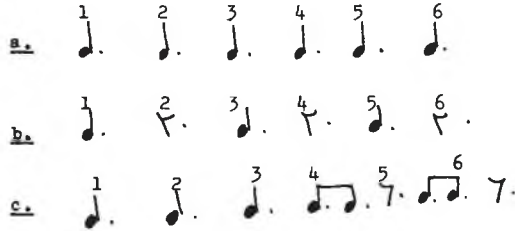
Example 1 below is an attempt to illustrate this type of rhythmic complexity visually. The song is *Nondel'ekhaya*, a favourite for singing with *umngqokolo* technique. As the song progresses both leader and followers pass through a number of song lines or *izicabo*, until the song is extended into the song *uVedinga*; both are in fact one song, but are referred to by the different titles.

Ex. 1. Rhythmic structure and patterns of the song “*Nondel'ekhaya/uVedinga*”.

The diagram illustrates the rhythmic structure of the song across seven staves:

- Staff 1:** CLAP and DANCE. Shows vertical lines for claps and asterisks for dance beats.
- Staff 2:** BODY MOVEMENT and PULSE. Shows vertical lines for body movements and pulses.
- Staff 3:** SONG MOVEMENT. Shows dots for song movements and vertical lines.
- Staff 4:** SONG MOVEMENT PULSE. Shows vertical lines for song movement pulses.
- Staff 5:** UNDERLYING PULSE SYSTEM. Shows a dense series of vertical lines representing the underlying pulse system.
- Staff 6:** ANOTHER CLAPPING PATTERN THEREFORE LONG DELAY. Shows asterisks for clapping patterns and vertical lines.
- Staff 7:** SPRINGING POINTS. Shows musical notes and stems representing springing points.

In Example 1, line 1 shows the cycle as 6 clapping beats. In fact, different patterns are used for this song. I have recorded the following three patterns, a, b, and c, the pattern c tending to be used when the song is begun as *uVedinga* (pattern c is a form of the hemiola):



As shown in Example 1, the step moves in 2's against the 6-clap line, the body weight in 4's. The sung line moves in 3's and 2's, giving a 6-pulse movement per clap-beat. When the 'off-beating' or clap delay occurs, it may fall as shown in lines 5 and 6: the combination of the body and song pulse movements gives an underlying pulse or sub-pulse movement of 12 per clap beat (line 5); lines 6 and 7 show how the clap **sound**, pattern c above, is linked to the **springing points**: line 6 shows how the **sound** is delayed to fall on the sub-pulses after the springing points,¹⁶ line 7 shows the springing points, points of coincidence between *body/clap movement* and *vocal sound*.¹⁷

For the purposes of the transcriptions in this article, which must concentrate on the *umngqokolo*, further detailed rhythmic examination will be limited. But there is a parallel between the examination of the rhythm of a song like *Nondel'ekhaya* and the study of the *umngqokolo* performance; it is this: that the musicians who perform this song do not describe what they are physically aware of in the music. The listener must find his own way to discover what the musicians are experiencing, and questioning will not lead to the desired result. After I had first recorded the opening section of *Nondel'ekhaya*, performed with *umngqokolo* technique, I asked the two ladies to sing the same song in the normal way. They at once launched into the next section of the song, using the text "*Yiho! Bandibambel!*" etc. This reflected an important and constantly encountered attitude of Xhosa musicians — that the listener is presumed to be able to experience everything that the performer experiences — and the evidence is that this is true of fellow-musicians and fellow-villagers. There can be no doubt that the musicians of the Lumko district learn by listening, not by explanation, with powers of concentration and hearing very highly developed. As an example, when I asked the *uhadi* bow player, Nosinothi Dumiso of Mackay's Nek, how she learned to play the bow, her reply was, "I never learned." Subsequent questioning brought to light that as a young girl she had carefully observed people making and playing bows, and so was able to make and play her own *uhadi*. In order to understand what is going on in the performance of refined techniques such as Xhosa rhythm, bow playing, and *umngqokolo* technique, the outsider has to have recourse to high-quality recording equipment, but must also think himself into and live the music with the musicians.

In the following discussion about *umngqokolo*, therefore, it should be taken as understood that the performing musicians are aware of far more than can be heard, felt or transcribed by the outsider.

Ex. 2. The opening lines of "Nondel'ekhaya".

The musical score consists of four staves. The first staff is labeled 'LEADER' and contains a cyclic melodic pattern of eight notes: 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 1, 2. Below this staff are the lyrics: 'He! Nondel' e- kha- ya! Wath utywala bu- phe- lil'. (He! Nondel' e-'. The second staff is labeled 'FOLLOW (A)' and contains the lyrics: 'Yewu, ye he, yewu, ye he,'. The third staff is labeled 'FOLLOW (B)' and contains the lyrics: 'Ye- wu, Ndi- ne- sizi nga- ma- nka- jan'. The fourth staff is labeled 'FOLLOW (C)' and contains the lyrics: 'Ye- wu, hayi, Ma, Ye- wu, hayi, Ma'. The notes in the follower staves correspond to the cyclic pattern in the leader staff, with some notes marked with a small arrow indicating a 1/4 tone shift.

Example 2 shows how the song *Nondel'ekhaya* may be begun. The leader repeats her line over and over, the follower passes from one to the other of the lines marked **Follow A, B** and **C**, at will. If there are several followers, the lines A, B and C may be sung simultaneously, with other variants. Variants of this type, which keep within the same cyclic pattern, which do not vary the text (much), and which can all be sung simultaneously because they form a harmonic fit, are called *iintlobo*, which means 'sorts' or variants of the same line. As mentioned above, the lines which vary the text and the melody, and which may begin at different points in the cycle, are called *izicabo*. As can be seen in the lines Follow A, B & C, the *iintlobo* may begin at different levels, but are regarded as the same because they move in parallel.¹⁸ singers performing different *iintlobo* (singular *uhlobo*) are regarded as singing the same line of the song.

This technique of *iintlobo* means that in performing *umngqokolo*, for example, the singer may use notes at different 'levels', while remaining faithful to the harmony.

Xhosa singers and bow players may take any pitch level that is convenient, and pitch levels often change during a song — as the excitement rises, so does the pitch. Therefore for convenience in the transcriptions, the bow chords are written as the triads F major and G major, whether these are the actual pitches or not. The Leader and Follow A and B lines are written in the octave range above the sound, as indicated by the clef C_4 . In the Follow C line the small arrow indicates that the singer tends to sing the tone 1/4 tone above the written G.

Having encountered and recorded *umngqokolo* performances several times since 1979, but in the context of general singing, in 1983 I asked Lumko employees to put word around Ngqoko village that I was looking for this technique. On 15th November, 1983, two ladies arrived at the Institute and offered to perform. They were Mrs Nowayilethe Mbizweni and Mrs Nofirst Lungisa, both of Ngqoko.¹⁹



Fig 1: The umngqokolo duettists: Mrs Nowayilethe Mbizweni (left) and Mrs Nofirst Lungisa.

Mrs Mbizweni usually sang the lead part, but both performed leader or follower parts at times. They performed and were recorded singing a number of songs in *umngqokolo* duet (see Fig 1), as well as demonstrating some of the songs with *umrhubhe* bow, with humming etc., and by singing with normal voice. Mrs Mbizweni began at once by performing the leader line of *Nondel' ekhaya* with *umngqokolo* technique. "uNondele ekhaya" is somebody who is "married at home", i.e. who is raising a family at home without a husband.

Here are some of the texts of the song, with translations:

He! Nondel' ekhaya! Uth' utywala buphelile.

(Hey! Nondel'ekhaya! She says the beer is finished.)

Yewu, Ndinesizi ngamankazana.

(Oh! I am sorry for the unmarried young ladies.)

Yiyo! Bandibambele, yiyo! bandilingene.

(Oh! They took my place, they were as strong as me.)

He, noyo, he ma, hoth' amandla akalingani.

(...exclamations... (their) strength is not equal (to mine).)

Yiyo, ye, Nothobile, ma, hoth'! amandla akalingani.

(Hey, Nothobile (a name), ... (your) strength is not equal (to mine).)

Ukutshona kwelanga bandilingen'.

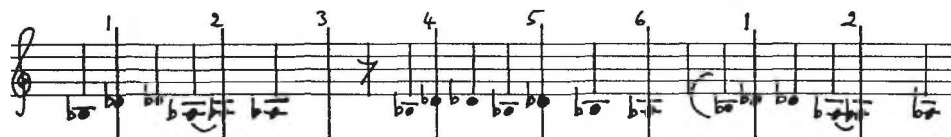
(At sundown they were as strong as me.)

uVedinga is a kind of dark brown blanket. *Yewu, yiyo, he ha, ma* (= mother), etc. are exclamations.

For melodies associated with these texts, see the transcription at the beginning of this article.

First, Mrs Mbizweni began to sing a version of the leader line "*He! Nondel' ekhaya, wath' utywala buphelil' "*" She did not use words, but placed the sound far back in the throat, singing in a gruff voice. Example 3 shows this melody at the approximate pitch:

Ex. 3.



This type of gruff voice amplifies the overtones, and soon she was able to focus on them. The line written as a melody in Example 3 then seemed to become a succession of overtones of much deeper fundamentals, some of which I was able to hear, see Example 4. As she succeeded in doing this, the gruffness of the melody tones became somewhat smoothed, and then by shaping the mouth and nasal cavities, she was also able to make high tones audible, which created an upper melody. I am unable to say exactly what were the physical mechanics of this process, but the simultaneous production of three tones by the same singer is clearly audible on the tape recording.²⁰ The complete pattern of sounds produced by Mrs Mbizweni is shown in Example 4.

Ex. 4.

I have noticed repeatedly that when the *umngqokolo* singer begins to 'tune in' to the overtones, then the gruffness of the sound largely diminishes, and the sound becomes clear and sweet.²¹

In Example 4 I have written in the fundamentals and overtones as I have been able to hear them on the tape recording. In some places I have not written in fundamentals, though they must be there because overtones occur. The deep fundamentals are difficult to hear, but the high overtones emerge quite clearly at times. There is no doubt that the singer herself heard much more than the listener is able to.

In a similar way, Mrs Lungisa began to construct her *umngqokolo* part from the Follow lines. The same elements are audible in the recording of her performance as in Mrs Mbizweni's. The two can be readily compared, as the recording was made in stereo with the two singers separable. Transposing the performance up a major third (to the bow transcription position), a transcription of part of the performance is shown in Example 5.

Ex. 5. *Umngqokolo* duet: the opening lines of “*Nondel’ ekhaya*”.

Performing *umngqokolo* is very hard on the voice, and yet on several occasions I have observed how the performer can keep going for several minutes, for a whole song. Usually the *umngqokolo* leads the group, just as the bow leads when one is used. People have told me that, hearing *umngqokolo* in the distance, they have thought they were hearing the *umrhubhe* bow.



Fig 2: *Umngqokolo* technique demonstrated by Mrs N. Mncodane of Ngqoko village. Note how the tongue is protruded to use the mouth as a resonator.



Fig 3: The *umrhubhe* or *umqangi* bow, played by Mrs Nofinishi Dywili of Ngqoko.

The *umrhubhe* is a small bow, the string about 50 to 60 cm long (nowadays of wire, formerly of hair), the stick curved in an arch and of wood about 1 1/2 cm diameter or

slightly thicker. The string is bowed with a cleanly scraped reed or twig, and the sound is resonated by holding the stick against the side of the mouth. A rich range of harmonics is produced, five-note chords being audible. The performer uses shape and size of the mouth cavities to emphasise the melody tones, but full chords are audible.²²

Example 6 shows the song “Nontyolo” as performed on the *umrhubhe*. Large notes indicate the melody tones and the fundamentals, smaller notes indicate the other audible tones.

Ex. 6. *Umrhubhe* performance of “Nontyolo”.

The musical notation for Example 6 consists of three horizontal lines. The top line is labeled 'CLAP/DANCE' and contains 16 asterisks representing claps or dance movements. The middle line is labeled 'UMRHUBHE' and is numbered 2 through 16. It shows a sequence of notes, with larger notes indicating melody tones and fundamentals, and smaller notes indicating other audible tones. The bottom line is a standard musical staff with a bass clef, showing a continuous bass line of notes.

In Example 6 the fundamentals are shown, although they are usually too faint to be audible. The clap/dance is an even 3 against the 4 song beats, with coincidence points at song beats numbers 3, 7, 11 and 15. The clap delay technique described earlier is used, and different clapping patterns occur in the same performance.

The similarity between the effect of playing the *umrhubhe* and the effect of performing *umngqokolo* may readily be seen by comparing Examples 5 and 6. However, in the *umrhubhe* performance the melody tones are much more obvious than in the *umngqokolo*.

Mrs Mbizweni, however, went on to demonstrate a different type of *umngqokolo* which is directly in imitation of the *umrhubhe* bow. This form is called *umngqokolo ngomqangi*, using an older (and otherwise not used in the Lumko area) name for the *umrhubhe*. Kirby²³ gives *umqunge* as an Mpondo name for the *umrhubhe*, and I am indebted to Professor H. Pahl of the Xhosa Dictionary project at Fort Hare University for the confirmation that *umqangi* is also a name of the same instrument.²⁴ *Ukungqokola ngomqangi* means ‘to *ngqokola* with *umrhubhe*’, i.e. in imitation of, or in the manner of, *umrhubhe*.

In *umngqokolo ngomqangi* the singer produces clearly two tones at a time, the fundamental, and the melody tone. In this it is a close approximation to the sound of *umrhubhe*, although the other chord tones are not heard. Mrs Mbizweni used the *umqangi* technique to perform “*uVedinga*”, which as mentioned above, is in reality the same song as “*Nondel’ekhaya*”. When the song is begun as “*uVedinga*”, then the leader and follower singers may perform as in Example 7.

Ex. 7. The opening lines of "uVedinga".

The musical score is written on three systems of staves. Each system begins with a 'LEAD' staff and is followed by one or more 'FOLLOW' staves. The lyrics are written below the notes.

System 1:
 LEAD: Ho! Ve-dinga, Ho! Ve-di-nga,
 FOLLOW 1: Ho! Veding-a-ndi-go-do-li(ma),
 FOLLOW 2: Ye,

System 2:
 LEAD: (Yewu, hayi, ma, Yewu, yewu, hayi, ma.) (etc)
 FOLLOW 1: ma, Yewu, ye ma, yewu, ma, (etc)
 FOLLOW 2: Yewu, ye he, ye-wu, ha ha, Ye-wu, ha ha. (etc)

When "uVedinga" is sung as in Example 7, a leader will begin. The actual pitch of one of my recordings was about a minor third above written. The rhythmic structure is the same as that of "Nondel'ekhaya" (Example 1), and so is the harmony pattern.

The followers may join in as shown at beat 6, or around beat 2 as shown in the continuation. The followers may respond with exclamations and vocables as shown, or with a text. It is doubtful whether the song is ever sung, or started, in the same way twice. Once the singers begin with exclamations and vocables, a great variety is possible. Two lines only are shown (called Follow 1 and Follow 2). If there are fifty singers it is quite possible that there will not be two of them singing exactly the same; but the transcription at least gives a general idea of what may occur.

In addition to the texts given above, other texts may also be used. The following relate to uVedinga:

Ho! Vedinga, andigodoli, ma!

(Oh! my thick brown blanket, I am not cold, Oh mother!)

Ho! Vedinga, asivani ngomthetho.

(Oh! blanket... we do not agree about the law...)

Each text line has two elements, e.g. above: */Ho! Vedinga!/andigodoli, ma/* and any second element may follow any first; or the singer may resort to exclamations and vocables.

Many variant melodies occur, all closely related to the pattern; but as the song warms up, non-harmonic tones are used more, for example the high D in the line **Follow 2** in Example 7, around beat 2. Great freedom also enters into the rhythm of the song. The same rhythmic outline is preserved and felt, but the exact placement of notes is varied according to the pulse system — sometimes drawing out, sometimes crushing together. When a large group sing this song, and particularly when they begin to concentrate on the vocables as text, one can perhaps sympathise with the traveller Lichtenstein, who in 1805 wrote this about Xhosa singing:

The sense of the songs is not to be unravelled, and the greater part does not consist of words, but of single syllables, which are not comprehensible to themselves.²⁵

Nevertheless, there is a profound poetry in Xhosa songs like “*Nondel’ekhaya/uVedinga*”, with the different lines linked by thought association, and building a sympathetic and deeply human picture:

“Hey! You, unmarried mother at home, the beer is finished.”

“Ah! I am full of sorrow for the unmarried women.”

“They have taken my place, they were stronger than me.

Nothobile, you are not as strong as me.”

“Ah, my thick blanket, at least I am not cold.”

The use of vocables gives scope to complex development of a song in a non-literate society. All can join in, any amount of improvisation is possible within the pattern, all belong, all contribute, all share; and the result is a musical product of a complexity with which literacy can hardly cope.

When Mrs Mbizweni used the technique called *umngqokolo ngomqangi*, she used it in a way similar to a singer using vocables, and improvising freely within the pattern of the song, as just described. Like singing or playing the *umrhubhe/umqangi* bow, it is a technique of constantly varying melody sung by amplifying the overtones above two deep fundamentals a whole tone apart. The deep fundamentals were produced in a way similar to that used in the ‘ordinary’ form of *umngqokolo* — gutturally, deep back in the throat.

The type of patterns used by Mrs Mbizweni are shown in Example 8 — and using her technique of *umngqokolo ngomqangi* she was able to sing either leader or follower parts and to play both roles in performance.

Ex. 8. *Umngqokolo ngomqangi*: from the performance of the song "uVedinga" by Mrs N. Mbizweni (with a follow line as sung by Mrs N. Lungisa.) Actual pitch about a whole tone higher.

The image displays two systems of musical notation. The first system, titled "UMNGQANGI", consists of three staves. The top staff is labeled "melody" and contains a sequence of notes with stems pointing down. The middle staff is labeled "audible fundamentals" and contains notes with stems pointing up. The bottom staff is labeled "FOLLOW" and contains notes with stems pointing down. The second system, titled "FOLLOW", follows the same three-staff structure. Both systems are divided into measures numbered 1 through 6, with a repeat sign at the end of measure 6. Below the bottom staff of the second system, the lyrics "Ye! Notho-bi-le, na, a-siva-ni ngomthetho. (etc)" are written.

The transcription in Example 8 shows typical melody patterns used in *umngqokolo ngomqangi* by Mrs Mbizweni, with the clearly audible fundamental tones. Fundamentals and melody tones are about equally loud. One of the *follow* (or *landela*) lines sung by Mrs Lungisa is also shown.

The sound of the *umngqokolo ngomqangi* technique is quite different from that of the ordinary *umngqokolo*. In the latter, the sound is more confused, focussing on the melody as a middle part between deep fundamentals and faintly heard high overtones — compare the middle line in Example 4 with the melody line in Example 3, or the middle line of the leader part in Example 5 with the leader melody in Example 2. In *ngomqangi*, however, only two lines are audible — both equally clearly — fundamentals and overtones, and the overtones give the melody clearly (Ex. 8). In addition, in *ngomqangi* the fundamentals tend to be about a fourth higher in pitch than in the ordinary *umngqokolo*.

Conclusion

This article has attempted to bring to general attention an example of an African version of overtone singing. Perhaps the Xhosa musicians are the only ones in Africa who practise such a technique. A public performance of the 'ordinary' form of *umngqokolo* was given at the Ethnomusicology Symposium at Rhodes University in 1981, by a young woman — one of a group of musicians of Ngqoko and Sikhwankqa who were

invited to perform at the symposium. A transcription of the song with the *umngqokolo* performance was included in the published papers of the symposium.²⁶

In this article an attempt has also been made to show the richness and complexity of Xhosa song — scale and harmony patterns based on the overtone system of musical bows, a highly developed system of rhythm, an unending variety of polyphonic parts which may be sung in succession but may even all be sung simultaneously, and the whole structured around a subtle and deeply human poetry: music is conceived at least partly as an aspect of speech, and grows out of it.

Only a few songs are performed with *umngqokolo* technique as a rule, although in theory any song can be performed in this way. The *umngqokolo* singers preferred to use songs which they had practised with their technique. The most frequently encountered are “*Nondel’ekhaya*”, “*Inxanxadu*” (The Butcher-bird), “*Umzi kaMzwandile*” (The house of Mzwandile). Mrs Mbizweni performed the first two of these, and also “*iRobane*” (The Robber) and “*Indoda engenankomo*” (The Man with No Cattle). Only “*Nondel’ekhaya/uVedinga*” was sung with the “*umqangi*” technique. Mrs Mbizweni said it was the only one she had practised in this way.

Postscript

Since completing the article, I have made further observations as follows:

1. In ‘ordinary’ *umngqokolo*, the singer creates a resonance chamber by raising the tongue, producing harmonics between tongue and the front of the hard palate. In *umngqokolo ngomqangi* Mrs Mbizweni drops the tongue, producing the overtones at the back of the mouth.
2. Further expeditions have gathered recordings of group singing during which several singers used *umngqokolo* techniques at the same time, including a recording of *Nondel’ekhaya* by thirteen women, of whom five used the technique, as many as four at a time. This latter performance (recorded in full and available on Lumko music tape no. 105) lasted some twenty five minutes.
3. On being interviewed further, Mrs Mbizweni insisted that she had taught herself the technique of *umngqokolo ngomqangi*, getting the idea from the way people (especially boys) use an insect called *umqangi*: this is a large flying beetle, which the boys impale alive on a thorn, and then hold the desperately buzzing insect within the mouth, resonating overtones derived from the sound of its buzzing. Another source (Mr Tsolwana Mpayipeli of Ngqoko village) told me that long ago there was a woman in the village who was called *Nondel’ekhaya*, who use the insect *umqangi* in the way mentioned, and was put into song by the naughty boys because she had the reputation of being stingy with beer.

This information may elucidate the development of the song and technique. It seems certain at least, that the *umngqokolo ngomqangi* technique and name were derived from the *umqangi* or *umrhubhe* bow, either directly or via the unfortunate and misused insect.

Notes

1. A. Kropf, *A Kafir-English Dictionary* (Alice: Lovedale Press, 1915). (First published in 1899.)
2. Deirdre D. Hansen, “The Music of the Xhosa-speaking people.” Unpublished Ph.D thesis, University of the Witwatersrand, 1981, p. 756 (glossary).

3. Erich H. Bigalke, "An ethnomusicological study of the Ndlambe of South-Eastern Africa". Unpublished Ph.D thesis, Queens University, Belfast, 1982, p. 233 (glossary).
4. Much Xhosa music is built on "bow theory" — a tonality shift built on two fundamental tones about a whole tone apart (variation occurs, even in the same song). Over each fundamental a major triad is used, built out of the overtones, as shown in this illustration:

The illustration shows two staves of music. The top staff is a treble clef with a series of notes: F, G, A, B, C, D, E, F. The bottom staff is a bass clef with notes: F, G, A, B, C, D, E, F. Below the staves, the notes are labeled: 'fundamental F' under the first F, 'fundamental G' under the first G, and 'Scale' under the rest of the notes. There are also some handwritten symbols like circles and crosses above the notes.

The following example shows a snatch from the song "Umzikwabo uphelile":

The notation shows a melody on a treble clef staff and a bass clef staff. The melody starts with a series of eighth notes, followed by a quarter note, then a series of eighth notes, and finally a quarter note. The bass staff has a series of eighth notes, followed by a quarter note, then a series of eighth notes, and finally a quarter note. The melody is labeled 'Umngqokolo' and 'Breathe out'. The bass staff is labeled 'Breathe in (faint)'. There are some handwritten symbols like 'v' and 'x' above the notes.

The upper fundamental (written as G) is the 'main tone' in this song. In other songs the lower fundamental is dominant.

5. At the end of 1985 the Institute moved to Germiston in the Transvaal.
6. In Xhosa the click sounds are written as c, q and x.
7. Some of the musical terms which have either come to light, or whose meaning has become clearer, in the Lumko district, are to feature in the massive Xhosa dictionary presently being prepared by Professor H. Pahl and his team at Fort Hare University.
8. Dave Dargie, "The music of Ntsikana", S.A. Journal of Musicology, Vol. 2, 1982.
9. See note 2.
10. See Hansen op.cit., p. 130.
11. Dave Dargie, "Some recent discoveries and recordings in Xhosa music". Papers presented at the Fifth Symposium on Ethnomusicology, 1984. (Grahamstown, I.L.A.M., 1985).
12. The stem -ombela may be derived from an ur-Xhosa term "uk-omba" which has passed into disuse. Many of the so-called Bantu languages have words with the stem -mba meaning to sing. In the Lumko district people retain traditional uses of words, and the old musicians do not use the school and mission word to sing — uku-cula — except for (stationary) singing in school and church.
13. Lumko music department publishes a series of tape recordings of neo-African church music, and also of traditional African music recorded by D.Dargie. Recordings of these umngqokolo duets and other

- umngqokolo songs are on Lumko music tape no. 84, obtainable from Lumko Institute, P.O. Box 5058, Delmenville 1403, South Africa.
14. This is the "near miss" placement' technique mentioned by David Rycroft in his article "Stylistic evidence in Nguni song", *Essays on Music and History in Africa*, ed. Klaus P. Wachsmann. (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1971) p. 240.
 15. Rycroft (op.cit. p 240 ff) mentions that these "near miss" placements' do not vary. This author holds that the reason is that the movements and sounds are linked to the rhythmic pulse system, which is constant within the song. I call the pulses at which movements (of voice or body) begin 'springing points'.
 16. See note 15.
 17. The transcription of the song "Nondel'ekhaya/uVedinga" has been based on several performances and recordings. The clap pattern c. with delayed clap may be heard in the performances on Lumko tape 84 (see note 12), when the leader plays the leader parts of "Nondel'ekhaya" on the "umrhubhe" bow, and the follower alternately sings (using vocables mostly) and uses umngqokolo technique.
 18. This parallel movement is also linked to following the speech tones in the same text.
 19. It is the local custom for the father-in-law of a new bride to give her a new name on the occasion of the marriage, very often an English word. "No-" is the female prefix. In addition to the name "No-first", one finds No-last, No-mountain, No-iron, No-finishi (the name of the leading uhadi bow player of Ngqoko), even No-Vatican, and many others. I am not sure of the derivation of "No-wayilethe", whether it is floral or technological.
 20. This recording is published by Lumko music department, as tape no.84, called "Ukungqokola: Xhosa harmonic singing". This tape contains the full recordings made with Mrs Mbizweni and Mrs Lungisa, as well as certain other umngqokolo performances, with bow performances of some of the songs for comparison.
 21. For example, in performance of the song "Umzi kaMzwandile" (also called "Ebel'engekho kwaphezolo", also on Lumko tape 84.
 22. This is demonstrated on Lumko music tape no. 43, called "Xhosa music for study", in which a recording of the "umrhubhe" is reproduced at half speed, to facilitate hearing of the chords. The song used for this on tape 43 is "Nontyolo", the one transcribed in Example 6.
 23. P.R. Kirby: "The Musical Instruments of the Native Races of South Africa", Witwatersrand University Press, 1968, pp 239-240.
 24. Interview with Professor H. Pahl at Fort Hare University, 27 February 1985.
 25. H. Lichtenstein, *Travels in Southern Africa in the years 1803, 1804, 1805*, trans. A. Plumtree. Two vols. (Cape Town, 1928-30).
 26. The song was "Ebel'engekho kwaphezolo", also called "Umzi kaMzwandile". The transcription was in the paper "A theoretical approach to composition in Xhosa style", by D. Dargie, published by I.L.A.M. in 1982, in *Papers Presented at the Second Symposium on Ethnomusicology 1981*.