KAMBAZITHE MAKOLEKOLE AND HIS VALIMBA GROUP: A GLIMPSE OF THE TECHNIQUE OF THE SENA XYLOPHONE

by

ANDREW TRACEY

The *valimba* xylophone of the Sena people of Malawi has been described by several writers, notably Kubik in his recently published two-record collection "Opeka Nyimbo".[1] This article aims to amplify these descriptions, by discovering what it is that the young virtuoso players are actually doing on their huge xylophone, with its shimmering patterns of sound at breakneck tempo, its sudden repeated notes, and its rich harmonic sequences that are clearly related to those of the Shona in Zimbabwe and their neighbours in Mozambique and Northern Transvaal,[2] and by providing descriptions of the actual playing technique of the instrument to demonstrate something of its unique style.

I first heard the *valimba* during field trips in Malawi and central Mozambique in 1971 and 1972, when I wrote down a few songs from three groups of young Sena musicians. It was not enough to work on, however, and so, always with the thought in the back of my mind of learning more about this music which sounds so like *mbira* music adapted to the xylophone, it was with alacrity that I accepted a kind invitation from Gerhard Kubik, Moya Aliya Malamusi and Donald Kachamba to visit them at their home at Singano Village, Chileka, near Blantyre in southern Malawi in November 1990. They promised to lay on, sparing me the tedious official arrangements that usually go with finding and working with African musicians in a strange place, one of the best *valimba* groups in southern Malawi, and moreover a Nyungwe *nyanga (ngororombe)* panpipe group to boot.[3] When I arrived I found that they had also arranged a Nyungwe *njari* lamellophone player and a Sena/Gorongozi *bangwe* zither player. This must have been one of the most painless bits of field research ever! I am most grateful to each of my hosts and their families for the warmth of their welcome.

Fig 1: Kambazithe's valimba group in Donald Kachamba's yard, Singano Village, Chileka. From right: Albano (nkhocho), Zitete (Magunte), Kambazithe (Pakati), Brandson (Magogogo), with help from November Mmangathayo (njari player) on gaka drum, and behind him Saini Kamowa (bangwe player).

The *valimba* musicians they found for me were a group of four young Sena men of between 20 and 30 years, with whom they had already worked in the past. In fact the leader, Kambazithe Makolekole (aBanda), had made a *valimba* for Moya, which he now keeps in his museum of ethnographic objects at Singano. This was the instrument they played during my visit. Kambazithe mostly played the *Pakati* part on the *valimba* (see below) where the song called for three players, and *Magunte* where there were two. The other members of the group were Zitete Jairos (aTembu), who mostly played *Magogogo*, Brandson Noliji (aMalunga) who mostly played *Magunte* (if three players) and *Gaka* drum (if two), and Albano Beni (aTembu) who played *Nkhocho* rattles. They live at Chikwawa, in the hot Shire River valley, where they had settled when their parents brought them as small children from Mozambique in the early seventies, the time when the Renamo/Portuguese civil war intensified there, thus continuing a process of Sena settlement in southern Malawi that has gone on at least since the beginning of this century.[4] Their parents used to play *valimba*, they said, and this is how they had learned both to play it and to make it.

Description of the instrument

The *valimba* has been well described in the literature,[5] but for the sake of the present reader, I will describe it here.

Firstly, the term *valimba* is only one of several that are used for related xylophones in the lower Zambezi area of central Mozambique and southern Malawi, played by the Sena, Barwe, Gorongozi, Ndau, Mang'anja, Podzo, Cuabo, Cewa, Yao and probably other peoples. Other terms I have recorded are *varimba, ulimba* (esp. ciCewa), *bachi, mambira, marimba* and *ngambi* (esp. chiNdau).

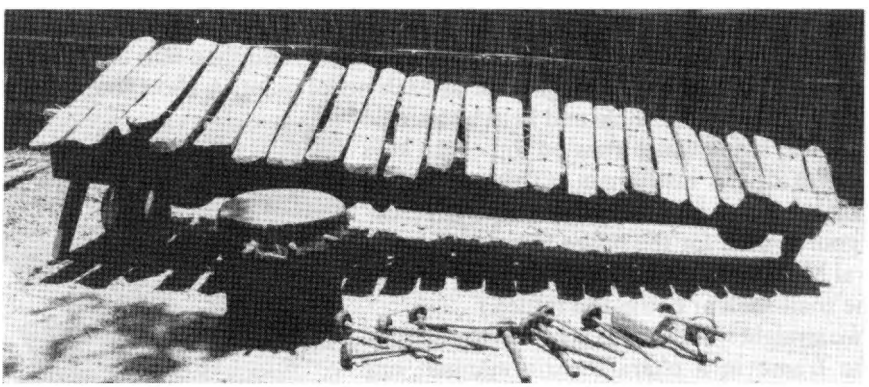


Fig 2: Top view of the valimba. One buzzer membrane is visible on the gourd at left.

Although these terms may also include xylophones of other, simpler types,[6] the *valimba* is usually encountered as a gourd-resonated xylophone built on a box-like plank frame. The main frame members, made of *njale* wood in our case, are two planks lying horizontally, on their sides. The top edges of the planks are not parallel, but positioned directly under the nodes of the keys. The keys are longer at the deep end, shorter at the

high end. In the space thus left between the planks the long, more or less cylindrical gourd resonators (Sena: *dudu/bzidudu*, Cewa: *chikasi*) hang loosely, with their open ends close to the underside of the keys (*mbango/mibango*), which are made of *mulombwa, mulombe* wood (kiaat, pterocarpus angolensis). Each key has a resonator; some may have more than one if there is space, even occasionally hanging on the outside of the frame under the end of the key. The resonators are fitted with membrane buzzers, which are pasted, using a little *nsima* maize porridge, flat on the side of the gourd over a rather large hole, often square, approx. 1 1/2" by 2". The buzzers can be spider's nest membrane, cigarette paper, thin polythene plastic bag, etc.

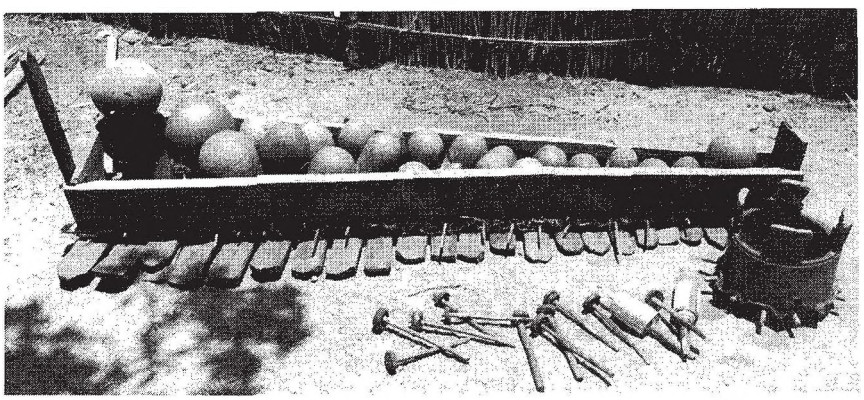


Fig 3: Bottom view of the valimba. Note the sticks on which the resonators are hung.

The top edges of the main frame members are padded with grass bound into round bundles. To hold the resonators in place, a thin stick is pushed through the grass, through two holes near the open end of the resonator, and then into the grass on the other side. The keys have a single hole at each nodal point. A short loop of string is pushed up through this hole and held by a single longitudinal string which runs on top of the keys the length of the instrument. (This method of attachment is also often found on the large resonator gourds used for the *mbira* in a wide area of central Mozambique and Zimbabwe, for holding on the snail-shell or bottle-top rattles.)

Two straight wooden legs are fixed to each end of the frame in a characteristic manner, one straight, one angled, in such a way that the playing surface of the keys ends up angled towards the players at some 20 degrees. The instrument is at a comfortable height to be played while sitting on a chair. Kambazithe's beaters (*nthimbo, mithimbo*) were made of short sticks with circles of motor car tyre pushed onto the ends. They said others wrap their beaters of inner tubing.

Fig 4: End view of the valimba

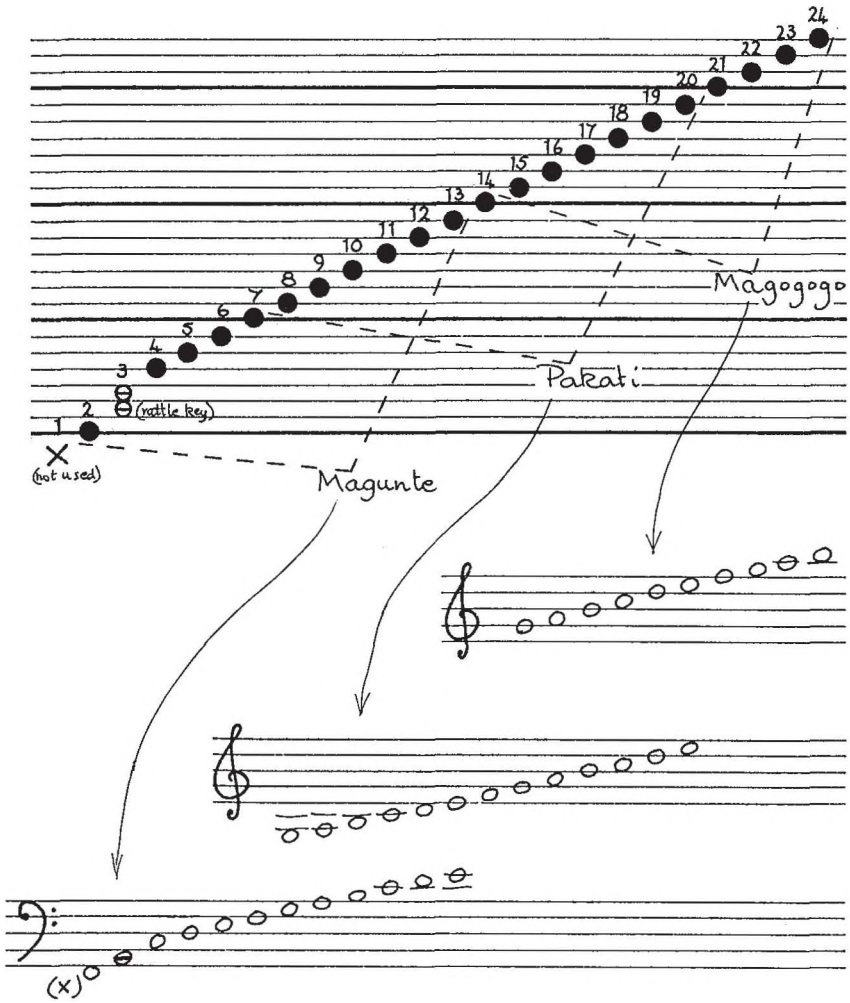


Fig 5: Layout of Moya's valimba

At the top, above, is the layout of Moya's *valimba* on which Kambazithe and his group played, with the names and maximum ranges of the three parts in the songs I transcribed. Not all songs of course use these ranges, particularly the 'modern style' with only two players. The heavy black lines show notes which are an octave apart, starting arbitrarily from the bottom note. There are seven lines to each octave as the scale is heptatonic. Below is the key to the notes of each part as I transcribe them. It is written close to pitch; as you can see in the tuning table below Key 9 happens to be at 220 v.p.s. so I was able to call it 'A'. Otherwise do not read these notes as the Western tempered scale, but refer to the tuning table.

The lowest key was not played. The next key, written as 'F', had a deep, primarily rhythmic function; it was played a-harmonically, i.e. it did not vary with the harmonic changes. In some tunes the 4th key, written as 'C', also had this function. The 3rd key was a 'rattle key', made of two slats of wood tied loosely on top of each other. It does not give a musical pitch, but serves for percussive effect when the *Magunte* player feels like it. The keys continue up to No. 24 in a heptatonic scale whose tuning and cents intervals are given in detail below.

Key No.	Transcribed as	V.p.s.	Code	Cents Intervals
24	B	912	508	
				94
23	A	864	414	
				186
22	G	776	228	
				149
21	F	712	79	
				185
20	E	640	1094	
				158
19	D	584	936	
				188
18	C	524	748	
				152
17	B	480	596	
				231
16	A	420	365	
				137
15	G	388	228	
				159
14	F	356	79	
				142
13	E	328	1137	
				183
12	D	295	954	
				173
11	C	267	781	
				185
10	B	240	596	
				150
9	A	220	446	
				218
8	G	194	228	
				149
7	F	178	79	
				163
6	E	162	1116	
				180
5	D	146	936	
				228
4	C	128	708	
3	Rattle key			629
2	F	89	79	
1	Not used			

The tuning was measured using a set of 54 tuning forks made by Wm. Ragg, Sheffield, calibrated every 4 v.p.s. over the octave 212 to 424 v.p.s.

Kambazithe repaired another little old *valimba* which was at Moya's house, and as he tuned it I noticed that his sequence went like this: most of the checking and tuning he does note-to-note in pairs, then in groups of three adjacent notes. Afterwards he checks octaves, and then plays snatches of songs. In this respect his tuning technique resembles that of many other musicians in the lower Zambezi area. He was not satisfied with the eventual tuning, because the keys were too small and in bad condition, so I did not measure it. Nevertheless he played five songs on the small *valimba* for me to transcribe.

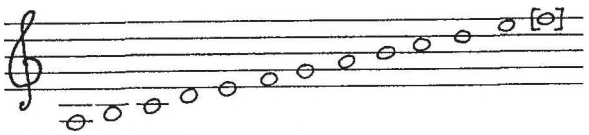


Fig 6: Small valimba layout

Although the two xylophones are not at the same overall pitch level the diagram is written so the notes on the two xylophones can be compared. Kambazithe played one of his songs, "Namala nakupangana", on both instruments, so that gave me a suitable level at which to write the small *valimba*. The top note, written in brackets, was actually too small and he could not tune it at all. Yet he still played it, for demonstration, just as if it were in tune.

His technique for tuning the *chikasi* gourd resonators struck me as being rather hit-and-miss, certainly by comparison with the painstaking accuracy of the Chopi whom I have often watched tuning their *timbila* xylophones.[8] In fact I did not see him actually tuning any gourd, but simply selecting. He holds the mouth of several gourds in turn upside down over a key as he plays it, and selects the one which sounds best.

Fig 7: Kambazithe rough tunes a new key for the small valimba.

Equi-spaced tuning

Statisticians are very welcome to make hay with these tuning figures. What the sound of this tuning says to me, reinforced by the figures, is that (1) this instrument is perhaps a little less consistently tuned than others in this lower Zambezi area, such as *bangwe*

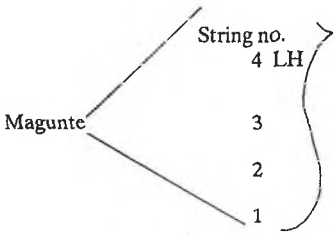
185 cents. I would describe this therefore as influenced by ideas of heptatonic equidistance. (Perfect mathematical equidistance would demand 171.4 cents[9]).

This conclusion is strengthened by my observation that Kambazithe quite often restarted a song at a different pitch level, usually one note away from where he had been playing, but sometimes two or on one occasion three notes away. This could happen on resuming a song the next day, or even after a break of only a few minutes' chat, until I reminded him of where he had been playing before. This unconscious 'key-change' supports the idea that all 'keys' sound the same, because all intervals are considered equal.

Changing key in this way made little or no difference to the sound or movement patterns of the *Magogogo* and *Pakati* parts, but it affected the *Magunte* part as different notes became available/unavailable in his playing area at the deep end of the xylophone. To my foreign ear, accustomed as it is to basing its harmonic perception on bass notes in general, the rather dominant low note, Key 2, which of course cannot alter for each key, appeared to give a different harmonic colour to each key. This note has a very limited harmonic function, and is comparable with the central low note on the *karimba/kalimba* mbira,[10] the lowest note on the left of the *mana embudzi* mbira, both played by the Sena and their neighbours in the lower Zambezi area,[11] or the lowest note on the *ndimba* or *ndandi* etc. mbiras of Zambia,[12] i.e. a rhythmic, low, a-harmonic 'thump' that I have heard Shona musicians in Zimbabwe compare to the low centre stroke on the *mutumba* drum.

For interest, I would like to give the tuning, which I measured at the same time, of the *bangwe* zither made and played by Saini Kamowa, who is a Sena/Gorongozi refugee, aged about 60, living in Malawi at the same place as the *valimba* group, as one example of an instrument which is more consistently tuned and shows an obvious preference for intervals even closer to the equiheptatonic standard.

String no.		V.p.s.	Code	Cents Intervals
Magogogo	15	880	446	
				122
	14	820	324	
				164
	13	746	1360	
				181
	12 RH	672	1179	
				162
	11	612	1017	
				179
Matinala	10	552	838	
				184
	9	496	654	
				177
	8	448	477	
				162
	7	408	315	
				179
	6	368	136	
				176
	5	332	1158	
				152



	V.p.s.	Code	Cents	Intervals
4 LH	304	1006		
			199	
3	271	807		
			175	
2	245	632		
			186	
1	220			

Writing the music down

A note about how these transcriptions were made, and how they are written .... As I have done for many years, I prefer to transcribe from live playing, not from recordings, where the pitfalls are many.[13] My technique is first to listen to the piece until its shape becomes clear, and decide on its basic parameters, length, pitch, starting point, 'beat' etc. This shape may not turn out to be the eventual one as written, but I use as a framework whatever is clear to me at the time in order to get an internally consistent transcription down. Subsequent clues, and familiarity with the piece, often lead me to change my perception of its shape.

Then I ask the player, if possible, to play without variations, without changing, to stick to one 'path', one 'hands', or whatever the best word may be. This often gives a basic version of a song such as many players use whenever they are concentrating on singing, when their fingers or hands fall back unconsciously to a comfortable pattern. Although this is unnatural or boring for some players, I thank my many amiable teachers for their patience in repeating their songs at length until I have managed, often with intervals to clear my head, to get all the parts down and in their correct relationship. Kambazithe's group was one of those where frequent 'head-clearing' was necessary, for several reasons, such as their high speed (average pulse 590 to 677!), the interlocking of neighbouring parts, the lack of an obvious main beat, as described below, the visual similarity of the xylophone keys, and so on. These transcriptions therefore offer strictly basic versions of *valimba* tunes, with minimal variation or development, which is why I call this article only 'a glimpse of *valimba* technique'. If the reader can learn to play this music it will serve as a basis for further study with musicians in Malawi or Mozambique.

If a player varies within the general framework he has established for the piece one can usually get it down by using symbols for variations. If the variations become too extensive, then I try to guide him back to where he was, referring to my *madododo* on the page, which often causes some amusement, when he sees that the dots have actually captured the music.

With the cyclical nature of all instrumental music in this Zimbabwe/ lower Zambezi music area two of the hardest elements to decide on, within the constraints of having to put something on paper, are, firstly, a starting point, i.e. not necessarily where the player starts playing, but where he hears the piece or its segments as starting. Experience with a piece, including its singing and its movement, usually gives an answer. But one must remember in looking at these transcriptions that my answer is not absolute. Perceptions must be expected to vary from person to person. All I can guarantee (I hope) is that the patterns are written inherently correctly, and that when played cyclically they will sound right.

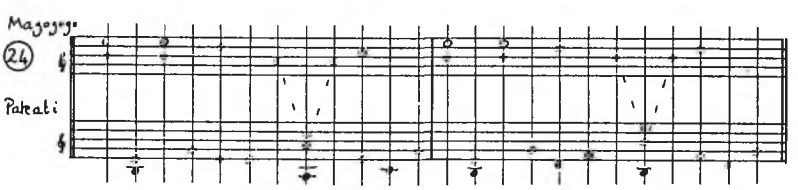
Secondly, the other tricky problem, in some cases, is to decide where the controlling 'beat', the dance step, falls. This concept definitely exists in this music area, where it is nearly always a triple-pulse beat, but some groups of musicians have a less clear idea of it, or perhaps are less concerned about it, than others. If I select, according to my ear, one of the three pulses of the triple-pulse beat, clap it regularly, and ask "Is this right?", some musicians will say Yes, regardless of what they themselves would have chosen. With Kambazithe's group I asked the members of the group themselves to demonstrate the dance beat, the 'feet', and I made this coincide with the start of all the transcriptions. I have the feeling with this and other *valimba* groups, however, that they are not overly concerned about what onlookers may choose as the 'beat', as long as they are all properly synchronised **with each other** inside the group. At Singano Village for instance, where they were playing, the majority of the audience were speakers of Cewa, Yao and other languages, unfamiliar with Sena music, and they were less than unanimous in finding a dance beat.

With regard to the writing of the transcriptions, they are written on the 'pulse-paper' published by ILAM, where the vertical lines represent the small, equi-spaced units of time usually referred to in African musicology as "smallest units" (A.M.Jones), "elementary pulses" or "elementary pulsation" (G.Kubik), "density referent" (Mantle Hood), etc. or simply "pulses" by myself. With the use of pulse lines no durational symbols as used in staff notation are necessary. The two symbols used serve only to distinguish the hands: right hand beats are written with a white note, left hand beats with a black note. The five-line stave is identical to staff's treble and bass clef with regard to the succession of note to note in a heptatonic scale, but with the difference that the notes are tuned as described in the tuning table above, NOT as in Western tuning.

A double bar shows the beginning and end of the cycle. Variations are shown by bracketed notes. They replace the main note/s shown for that hand, on that pulse or in that area. Variations joined by a line form a unit. Square brackets join notes where either may be chosen, there is no preference. *Magunte's* a-harmonic left hand notes are written with small dots. This is to avoid visual confusion with the other, harmonic notes. It does not mean they are played softly!

Transcriptions

First some of the shorter, and older, tunes that were played on the small *valimba*. Kambazithe said that these were the tunes he learned when he first began to play, they were *za kare*, very old. Whether old or not, some of them show influence of modern urban music, but even where this is obvious, they are treated in a traditional way as regards harmony and rhythmic combination on the *valimba*.



1. "Njiva womera manthenga" (Dove has grown feathers), small *valimba*

Like several of these pieces, the I-IV-I-V harmony (E-A-E-B) shows urban influence, tempered by traditional Shona/Sena methods of progressing from one chord to another. For instance after the E (chord) in both halves it moves via a G (chord) as a way of getting to the next chord, i.e. A in the first bar, B in the second. G comes in again at the end as a passing chord to E, just as it does on the *karimba* and other mbiras in the area.[14] To get from A in the first bar to E at the beginning of the second bar, it goes via the traditional intermediate C chord, whereas most urban music would go straight there.

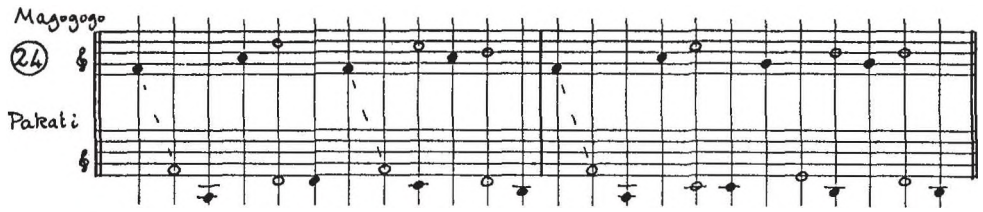
Fig 8: Kambazithe (right) and Brandson playing the small valimba. Note position of Brandson's left hand, about to strike the key which Kambazithe has just played.

Rhythmically, however, it owes nothing to urban music, like the majority of Kambazithe's older repertoire. The two parts each play inherently interesting patterns, all of which can be found in other instrumental styles in the music area, which interlock with each other so as to fill every pulse of the 24-pulse cycle. *Magogogo* plays something resembling a time-line pattern; note also the regularity of his left-hand notes. *Pakati* plays three strokes in the right hand against two in the left, one of the basic building blocks of African rhythmic combination. The *valimba* has its own style of interlocking although it has some elements in common with some of the other African xylophones whose music has been accurately described.[15] Its rhythm patterns are closest, as would be expected, to those on the *mbira* and other instruments in its music area.

Every so often the players intentionally follow each other on the same note. I have marked these points in the transcriptions with dotted lines. These sudden doubled or tripled notes are one of the characteristic sounds of the *valimba*, which also have their counterpart in *mbira* technique. Doubled notes, especially as a result of the combination of different parts, sound good to Shona/Sena musicians, whatever instruments they are playing.

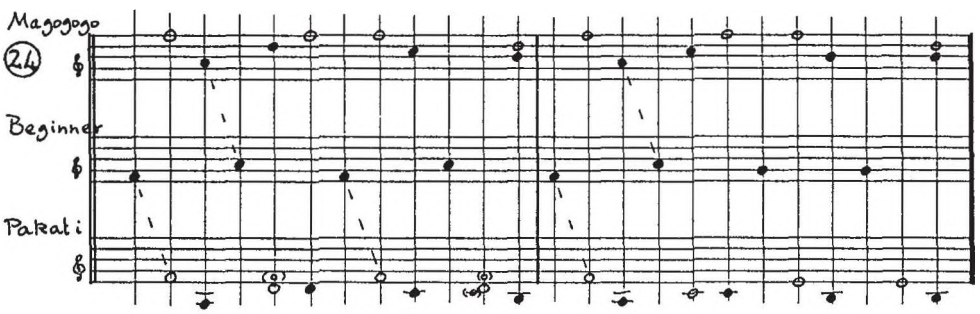
The players have to sit quite close together at the *valimba* in order to manage this, and it is remarkable how at that high speed they never seem to hit each other's beaters. Sometimes one player strikes a little further forward on the key than the other.

Very similar comments could be made for all the following pieces, but as that would be rather boring, I shall restrict myself to particular points of interest for each piece.



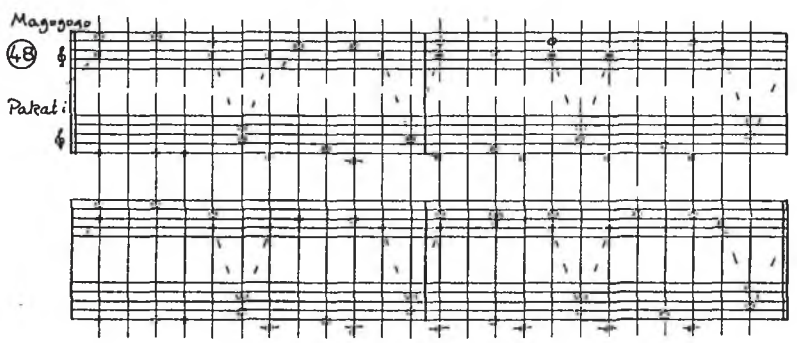
2. "Namala nakupangana" (We will finish by helping each other), small *valimba*

This piece, with harmonies probably influenced by urban music, is interesting because of Magogogo's left hand part. One evening Kambazithe persuaded Donald Kachamba to have a go at playing, said "It's easy", and showed him this part for one hand. Once Donald had got it, the other two players jumped in with their triple-interlocking, as shown below, and immediately there was *valimba* music! Donald's part almost disappeared in the total pattern, as happens also with the individual parts on the Ganda *amadinda* xylophone.[16]



3. "Namala nakupangana", *valimba*

The above examples had cycles of 24 pulses; now we move on to 48-pulse cycles, which account for the greater part not only of Kambazithe's repertoire but also of that of all instrumental music in the whole Shona/Sena music area.



4.. "Wajera ndeu" (You brought trouble), small *valimba*

Harmonically this piece has elements of the classical type of chord progression used in the Shona/Sena music area in Zimbabwe and the lower Zambezi valley in Mozambique, with what might be called the 'aberrations' from it that are often found on the Sena edges of the area. I would refer the reader to what I have written on the subject,[17] but briefly, much of the music in this area is built, harmonically speaking, on chord patterning principles, one of which is that there is a strong preference towards moving to the chord a third or a fourth up, e.g. C to E, or C to F. By 'chord' is meant primarily a two-note chord consisting of I and V, e.g. C and G, or E and B. But the intermediate third also occurs quite often in some styles, as witness the present music. This preference leads to relatively codified chord sequences which can be found right across this large music area of Africa from the Transvaal to Malawi. The four commonest sequences, in approximate descending order of frequency, and all written with the same starting chord for convenience, are these:

1. C E G C E A C F A D F A or what I call the 'C-type'[18]

2. C E A C F A C E G B E G 'A-type'

3. C E A C E G B D G B E G 'F-type'

4. C E A C F A D F B D F A 'E-type'

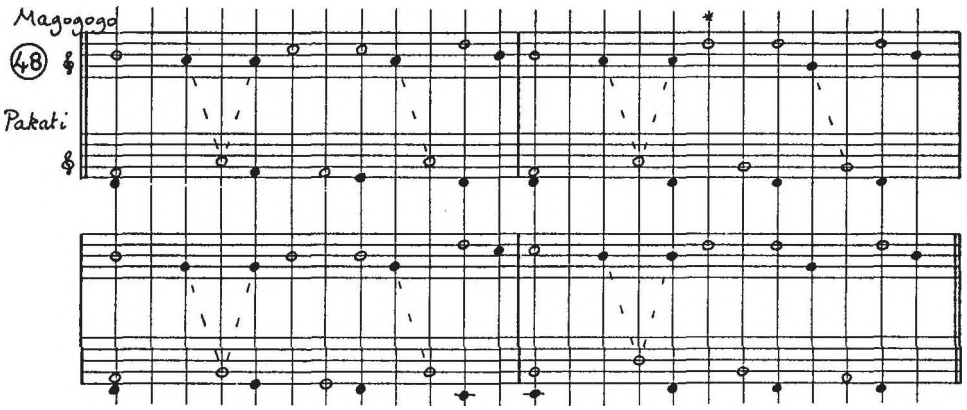
I write them in four quarters like this because this is the way in which the great majority of tunes are organised metrically. The quarters are usually 12 pulses each, making 48 in the cycle.

Having explained this system I find we are already starting with a piece which does not fit it exactly! Never mind, several of Kambazithe's other pieces transcribed below do conform to the presumed 'ideal'. The system obviously cannot explain everything that can be played on the numerous instruments in this large area, but nevertheless it gives a useful insight into the structure of most instrumental pieces. Even where these do not follow the 'system' exactly, as in "Wajera ndeu", the overall structure is often still built on comparable harmonic principles.

Another of these principles is that the four chords that start the four quarters can be perceived by the listener as having their own movement pattern, one which very often consists of two steps. If you look up at the previous diagram you will see for instance that the first sequence has a pattern of 'quarter-starters' that goes C - C - C - D. Compare this with the 2-step patterns of the quarter-starters in the other sequences. Equally, if you look at all the second chords in each quarter, or all the third chords, you will find similar 2-step patterns.

"Wajera ndeu" was one of those pieces where it was hard for me to choose a starting point; it is written here as I heard it at the time. If you look at pulses 5, 6, 7 in the first quarter, i.e. the D chord, and compare the same position in each quarter, you will see the pattern D - D -C - C, which would normally suggest an F- or an E-type sequence. Looking however at pulses 8, 9, 10 in each quarter you get the pattern F - G - E - F. This is now a 3-step pattern, which one rarely finds in Shona music in Zimbabwe, or even

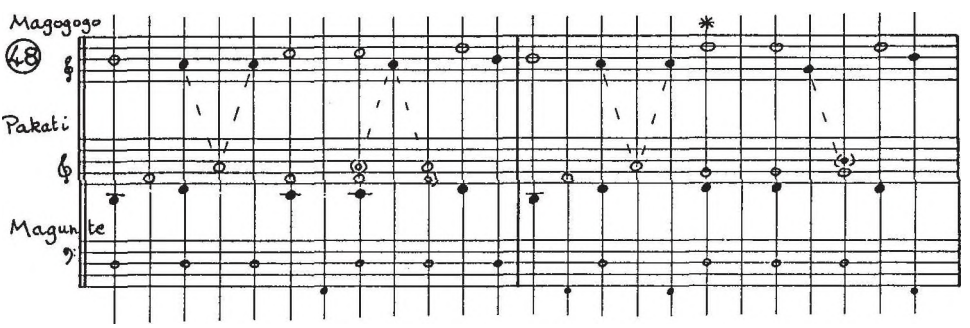
among their musical relatives such as the Nyungwe, Tavara or Barwe in Mozambique. Rather than call this an 'aberration' of the Sena, let us rephrase that to call it a 'creative extension'!

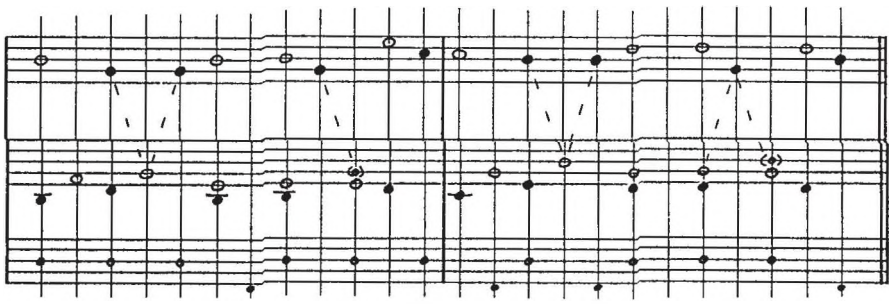


5. "Kamba wakwira moto" (Tortoise climbed into fire), *valimba*, C-type in B

When I played the Magogogo part of No. 6, "Wamkwira mwana", one of the pieces I recorded in 1971, Kambazithe said "Yes, we know that, but we call it "Kamba wakwira moto", and they proceeded to play it with only one note different from what I had written down nineteen years before from Anderson Nowa and his Sena valimba group at Mbangombe Village in the mountains above Nsanje at the southern tip of Malawi, overlooking the distant Zambezi.

The Pakati part was different, however, although it still follows the same chord structure, as you can see from my 1971 transcription below. For easier comparison it is transposed into the same key and given the same starting point. My original starting point (which I also checked for the correct triple-pulse beat at the time, although the two are not the same) is shown with an asterisk.

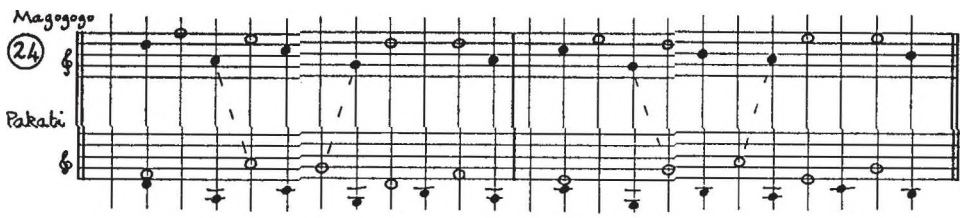




6. "Wamkwira mwana" (You climbed on [slept with] a child) Anderson Nowa, *valimba,* Mbangombe, Nsanje, 1971, C-type in B

If you use the starting point as written the sequence is a C-type in the key of B; if you start at my original starting point it is an A-type in G. Does it **have** to be one or the other? Why can't it be both? A good question. Multiple frames of reference have long been part of musicologists' descriptions of African rhythm. Now we have a case in the area of harmony as well.

Here we see for the first time how a *Magunte* part can join the two upper parts. In this case Anderson played completely a-harmonically, in a rhythm pattern over 24 pulses, somewhat resembling a time-line pattern. In the majority of Kambazithe's valimba pieces, however, *Magunte's* upper hand plays harmonically, while his left hand keeps a regular beat on one or two low notes.



7. "Karikongwe" (small weasel-like rodent), *valimba*

"Karikongwe" is the last of Kambazithe's 'old learning tunes' which I wrote down, played however on the big *valimba*. It seems to be based on a motional rather than a harmonic pattern.

The pattern, which moves in thirds, can be seen most clearly in Pakati's left hand, starting on the last note as written (which is also where they began to play):

B-D A-C G-B, A-C G-B A-C.

Magogogo's left hand also plays most of this pattern. I noticed that there is a close resemblance in many pieces between one hand each of *Magunte* and *Pakati*, as if both players were sharing the same basic shape in their mind, and then

1) filling in the harmony with the other hand, while
2) always preserving the rhythmic density (i.e. filling up available space), and
3) ensuring the proper interlocking on the doubled notes.

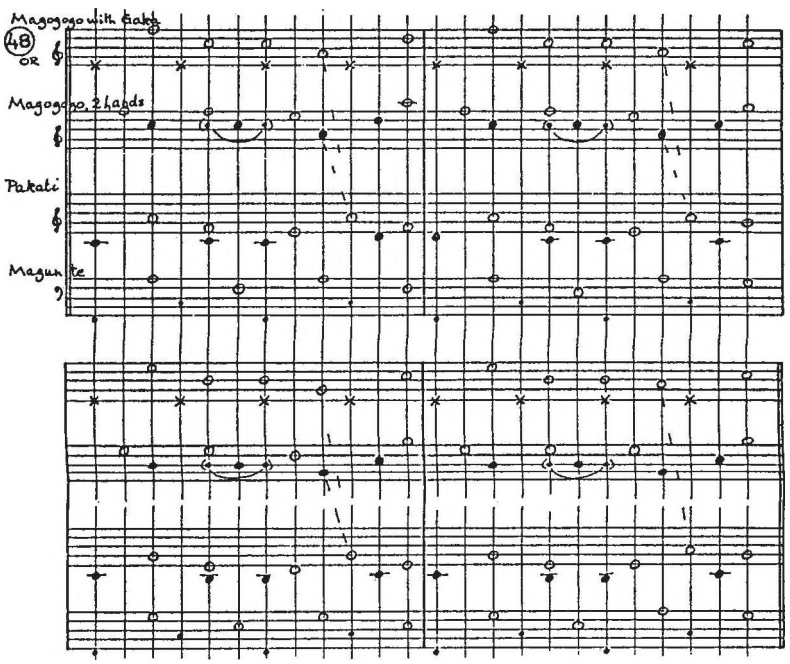
The fact that there is no stroke falling on the first main beat should not surprise anybody familiar with dance music, both traditional and modern, in southern Africa.

Now we come to some of the big pieces in what Kambazithe described as the 'old style', i.e. with three players on the *valimba*, in contrast with the 'modern style', of which four examples are given further on, which only uses two players.

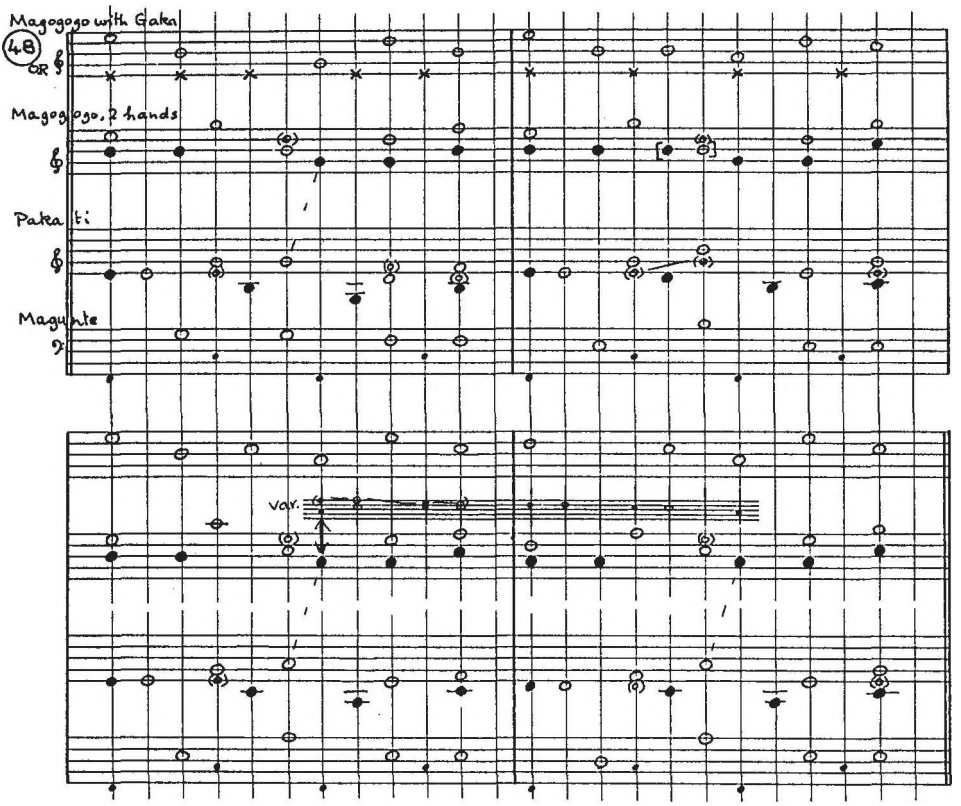
In No. 8, "Kowa wadodoma" and No. 9, "Malikebo", *Magogogo* usually starts off with both hands on the *valimba*, then shifts *ad lib*. to play the *gaka* drum with one hand and a single-note part on *valimba* with the other. This technique was used by most of the half-dozen or so valimba groups I have observed, except that it is not necessarily *Magogogo* who does it, it may be either of the other two parts. So the first two lines of these two transcriptions should be read on an 'either-or' basis.

Gaka is a small cylindrical open drum, in this case about 9" in both diameter and height. A similar, larger drum is usually called *jenje* in eastern Zimbabwe and neighbouring parts of Mozambique, and is often used singly, one stick one hand, to accompany *mbira* groups.

The *gaka* part in "Kowa wadodoma" is unusually simple, merely marking the beat. In "Malikebo" it plays one of the two common 24-pulse patterns, the other being used in No. 11, "Popanda Ngwazi" and No. 12, "Sarimbeta". I would not lay my head on a block for the exact timing of *gaka* against the other parts, but I am reasonably confident that if played like this it would be acceptable. Other combinations are probably acceptable.



8. "Kowa wadodoma" (Bachelor forgot), *valimb*a, F-type in F

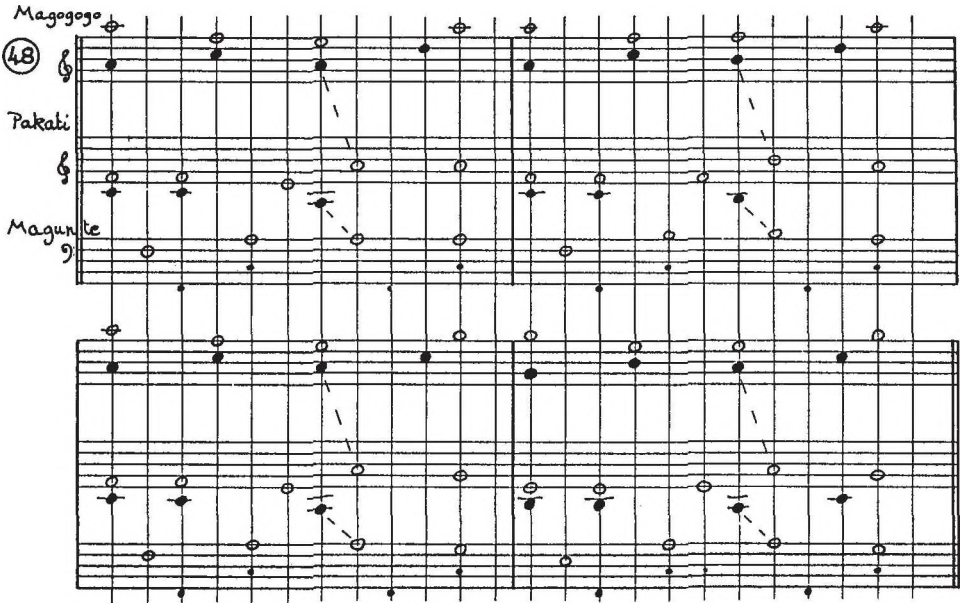


9. "Malikebo" (Man's name), *valimba*, near C-type in E

I call it a 'near C-type' because of the 'wild' D, the first chord in the last bar. In a standard C-type sequence this chord would be F, in order to give the usual C-type pattern of first chords: E - E - E - F.

Here, and in some other pieces, such as No. 10, "Kamba wargwa tamanda", there seems to be some flexibility as to whether to move that last chord up or down, in order to give the contrast needed with the three preceding chords which are all on one level. In a C-type sequence the fourth chord moves up; in an A-type it moves down.

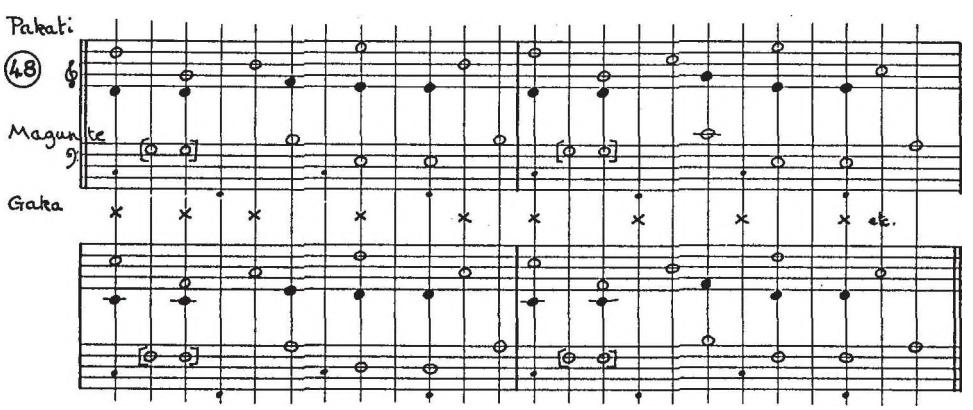
Out here on the fringes of the music area, and without the weight of religious tradition behind it, as with the *mbira* in Zimbabwe, composers can be flexible, and combine elements from different sources, different sequences. So we have a C-type sequence where the 4th bar starts down instead of up. This particular sequence is not an isolated case, e.g. the song "Siti" / "Kanotamba mubani" played on the Sena/Tonga and Tavara *matepe/hera* mbira.[19]



10. "Kamba wargwa tamanda" (Tortoise died in pool), *valimba*, A-type in F

A relatively simple piece, with a different movement in *Magunte*. The remaining five pieces all have at least one modern element:

1) Kambazithe classed pieces with two, not three players, as modern, and I would also include under modern elements:
2) duple, almost 'Rock'-type rhythm, *gaka* playing on-beat,
3) presence of urban harmony.



11. "Popanda Ngwazi tidakafa ndinjala" (Without Dr. Banda we would have died of hunger), *valimba*, based on A-type in G/F.

This was a showpiece of Kambazithe's group, was played at great length with even more than the usual vigour, and had seemingly endless variations in both parts, including sudden exciting unison passages, not unlike those played by experts on the *matepe/hera* mbira. I am very aware that this transcription is only a 'glimpse' of the whole piece. However this is indeed the pattern with which they started. Note that *Pakati's* left hand uses the rhythm of the 12-pulse, 7-stroke time-line pattern which has become well-known with the syllables used by the Yoruba in Nigeria: "Kon kolo kon kon kolo". Other peoples use different syllables for it. (I did not discover if the Sena have a mnemonic for it.)

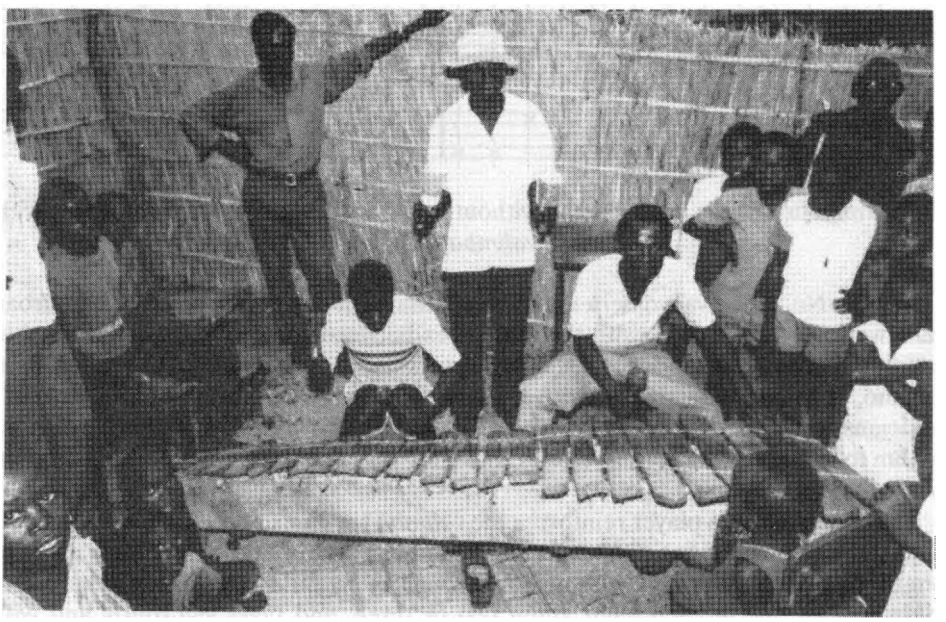
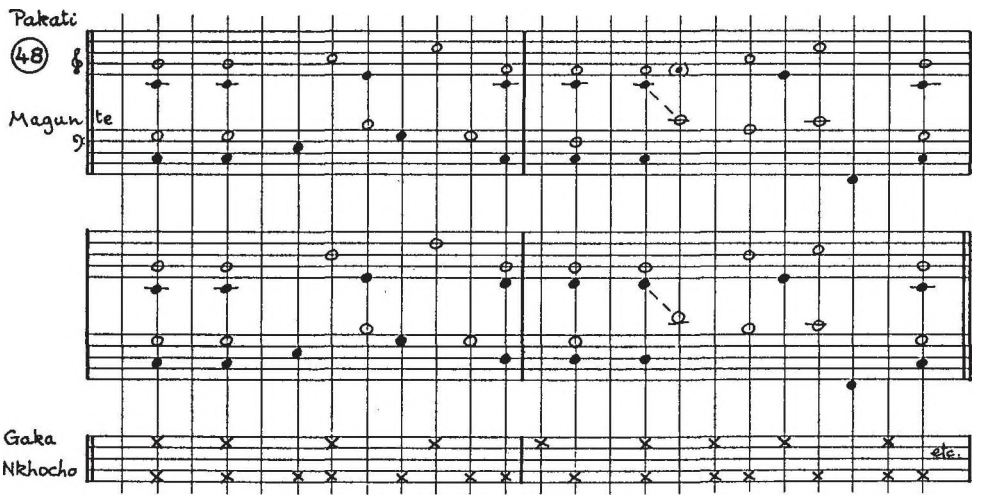


Fig 9: Playing "Popanda Ngwazi...", a modern piece for four hands.

The harmonic structure seems to be based on the first half of an A-type sequence, played first in G, then repeated in F. Another way of looking at it (there is always another way of looking at this kaleidophonic music!) is to consider it an E-type sequence in F, starting on bar 3, with G - C - A substituted in bar 2 for the G - B - D which this sequence normally requires.

Either way, what would most bother a purist of the classical harmonic system, I feel, is the sound of the downward progression from C to A to F, going from bar 2 into bar 3. The problem was presumably to get from G at the beginning of bar 2 to F at the beginning of bar 3, via two chords only. There is only one possible traditional way to do this: to go upwards: G - B - D - F. But Kambazithe has found an innovative way to do it, which would probably, however, not be countenanced by the more traditional musicians in the main body of the music area.

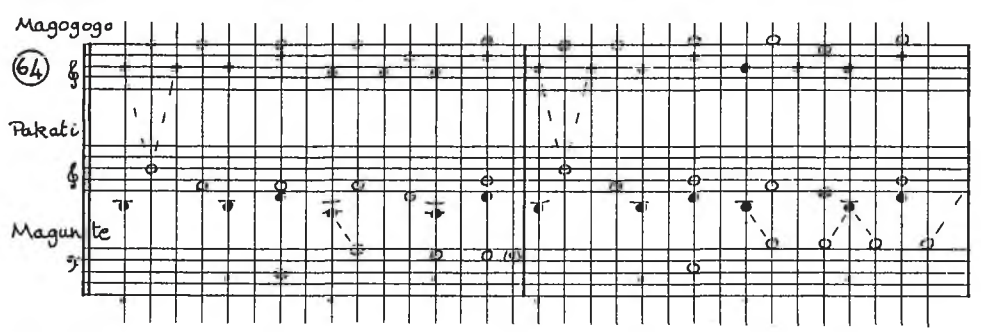


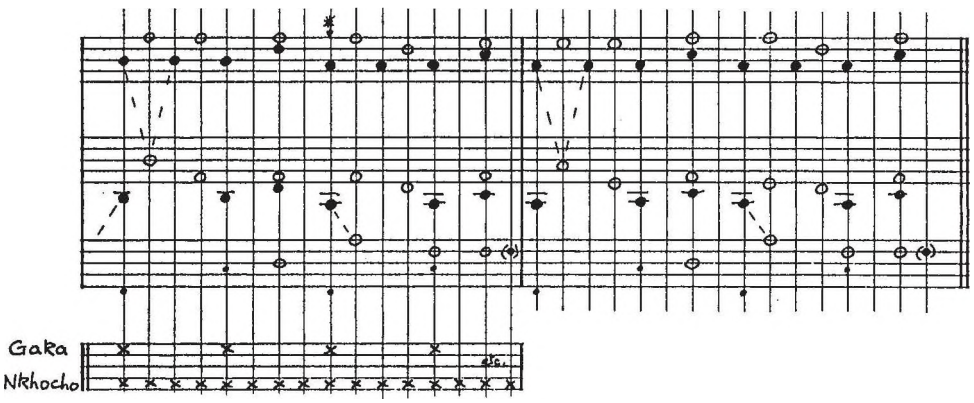
12. "Sarimbeta" (She is not a woman without husband [therefore you cannot play with her]), *valimba*, I-IV-I-V

As with No. 1, "Njiva womera manthenga", the harmony of this piece has an urban framework: C - F - C - G, with the interstices between some of the chords filled in traditional style. The tendency for non-Sena listeners, even some of the villagers at Singano, is to hear the stroke written at the end as the on-beat, but Kambazithe's musicians were insistent about where it should be. This piece has a 'hard', obvious rhythm to it, suitable for tense, vigorous dancing, very much like the following modern pieces in duple rhythm.

The *nkhocho* rattle player reinforces the *valimba* rhythm, and in so doing is actually playing the same time-line pattern as mentioned just above. These rattles are made of longish tins, such as Brasso, with a stick through them and stones inside. The player holds at least one in each hand, often two or three, and plays vigorously and with frequent changes of pattern, usually in a 24-pulse cycle. (Most other rattle-playing in the music area is in 12-pulse cycles.) The *nkhocho* technique is very similar to that in other Sena dances with drum groups, such as *utse* and *likhuba*.

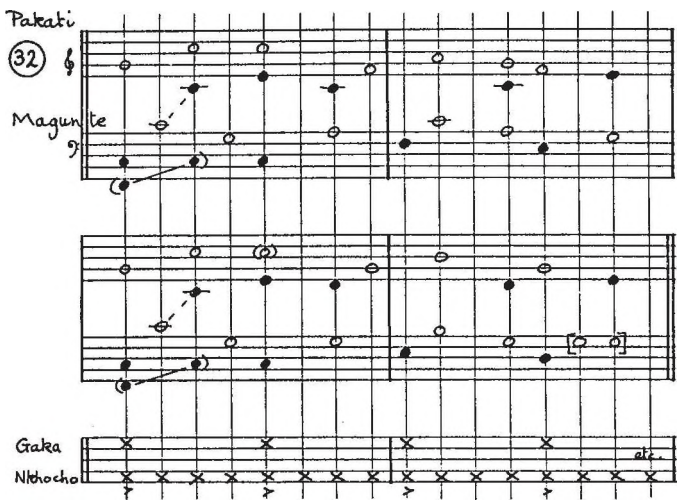
The last three pieces are all duple, with heavy pop-type on-beat stress from *gaka* and *nkhocho*.



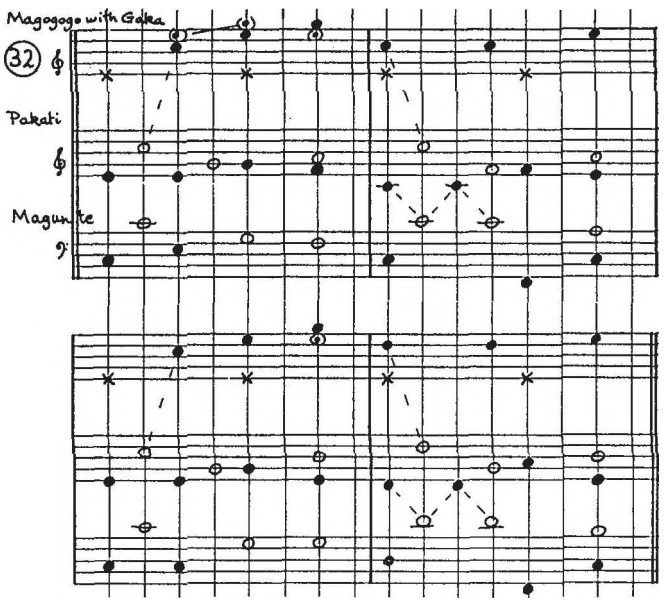


13. "Abwera liti ambuye Yesu?" (When is our father Jesus coming?)(Cewa) *valimba*, A-type in B

I take it from the way it is phrased that this is an A-type in B, starting as written. But it could also be a C-type in D, starting at the asterisk.



14. "Sanganza pana mako pano" (Don't talk much when your mother is here) *valimba*, I-IV-I-V in C



15. "Rega kusembedzera puta" (Don't use prostitute) *valimba*, I-IV-I-V / A-type in C

The A-type sequence has proved the most adaptable to I-IV-I-V urban harmony, as it already contains the four chords required, and in the right order:

CEA CFA CEG BEG
C .....F.....C.....G7.....

The last four chords together serve as the dominant seventh; G gives the notes G and D, and B gives the other two notes of G7, B and F. The note E of the penultimate chord often creeps in as a passing note to return to the beginning, and gives a sign that the musician has a background in traditional Shona/Sena music.

In a modern piece like this not all the traditional intermediate chords are used, but they persist in certain key spots, e.g. the A in bar 2, pulse 7, and the E in bars 3 and 4, pulse 7. These 'vestigial' chords from the traditional harmony are one of the trademarks of the modern urban music of the Shona/Sena music area.

Notes

1. Aliya, in press, Dias 1986, Dziko & Strumpf 1984, Kubik 1968, 1989, Kubik & Djenda 1967, Som 1974, Tracey A. 1970, 1980, 1984, 1990.
2. Kubik 1988, Tracey A. 1970, 1988.
2. Tracey, 1971.
4. Kubik 1989.

5. See note 1.
6. Tracey A. 1984.
7. Cf. Mensah 1970.
8. Tuning resonators by varying the aperture with wax, having first set the membrane buzzer to the correct tension, and checking by puffing air gently across the aperture. See also Tracey H. 1948.
9. Som 1974, Schneider 1990, Van Zanten 1980.
10. Tracey A. 1961.
11. Tracey A. 1972.
12. Blacking J. 1961, Jones A.M. 1950
13. See, for example, Kubik's 1962 review of Brandel.
14. Tracey A. 1961.
15. For example, Kubik 1960, 1965, Strumpf 1970, Jessup 1983, Ngumu 1975/6, 1980, Tracey A. 1976.
16. Kubik 1960, et al.
17. Tracey A. 1961, 1970, 1971, 1988.
18. The C-type sequence is arbitrarily so called for the sake of a name to start with. The others are called (remembering that all these sequences are different expressions of one and the same sequence) by the note where they start in the C-sequence: 'A' starts on the 6th chord, 'F' on the 8th, and 'E' on the 2nd.
19. Tracey A. 1970.

References

Blacking, J. 1961. 'Patterns of Nsenga kalimba music', *African Music*, Vol 2, No 4.

Dias, M. 1986. *Instrumentos musicais de Moçambique*, Instituto de Investigação Cientifica Tropical, Lisbon

Djenda, M. 1968. 'Moderne Musik in Malawi: Stile, Instrumente und Musiker', *Afrika Heute*, 15, Bonn, Aug. 15.

Dziko , A. & Strumpf, M. 1984. 'A survey of musical instruments', *Baraza*, A Journal of the Arts in Malawi, No 2, June.

Jessup, L. 1983. *The Mandinka balafon: an introduction with notation for teaching.* Xylo Publications, La Mesa, California.

Jones, A.M. 1950. 'The kalimba of the Lala tribe, Northern Rhodesia', *Africa*, XX/4.

Kubik, G. 1960. 'The structure of Kiganda xylophone music', *African Music*, Vol 2, No 3.

_____ 1962. Review of 'The music of central Africa' by R. Brandel, *African Music*, Vol 3, No. 1.

_____ 1963. 'Discovery of a trough xylophone in Northern Mozambique', *African Music*, Vol 3, No 2.

_____ 1965. 'Transcription of mangwilo xylophone music from film strips', *African Music*, Vol 3, No 4.

_____ and **Djenda, M.** 1967. Recordings of c. 10 *valimba* groups made at Nsanje and Chikwawa, Phonogrammarchiv Berlin, also held at Dept of Fine and Performing Arts, University of Malawi, Zomba.

_____ 1968. 'Ethnomusicological research in southern parts of Malawi', *Society of Malawi Journal*, Vol 21, No 1, Blantyre.

_____ 1987. *Malawian music: a framework for analysis*, University of Malawi, Zomba.

_____ 1987. Super 8 film No. 67, 90 min, 'Lydia Malamusi interviews Moya Aliya about his experiences in Nsanje with the *valimba*', private collection Kubik, Vienna.

_____ 1988. 'Nsenga/Shona harmonic patterns and the San heritage in Southern Africa', *Ethnomusicology*, Vol 32, No 2.

Kubik, G. & Malamusi, M.A. 1989. *Opeka nyimba* (Musiker aus Malawi [südliches Malawi]), 2 LP records with book, No. 15 in Museum Collection, Musikethnologische Abteilung, Museum für Völkerkunde, Berlin, ed. Artur Simon.

Malamusi, M. A. (in press). 'Zur Herstellung einer Ulimba: Kalebassenresoniertes Xylophons der Asena', in *Xylophone und Lamellophone*, ed. Artur Simon, Museum für Völkerkunde, Berlin.

Mensah, A. 1970. 'Principles governing the construction of the silimba: a xylophone type found among the Lozi of Zambia', *Review of Ethnology,* Vol 3, No 3, Stiglmayr Verlag, Vienna.

Ngumu, P-C. 1975/6. 'Les mendzan des Ewondo du Cameroun', *African Music*, Vol 5, No 4.

_____ 1980. 'Modèle standard de rangées de carreaux', *African Music*, Vol 6, No 1.

Schneider, A. 1990. 'Okutuusa amadinda: Zur Frage äquidistanter Tonsysteme und Stimmungen in Afrika', *Festschrift für Constantin Floros*, Breitkopf & Härtel, Wiesbaden.

Som, A. 1974. 'Acoustics of a Malawian xylophone', *8th International Congress on Acoustics*, London.

Strumpf, Mitchel. 1970. *Ghanaian xylophone studies*, Institute of African Studies, University of Ghana, Legon.

Tracey, A. 1961. 'The mbira music of Jege A Tapera', *African Music*, Vol 2, No 4.

_____ 1970. 'The matepe mbira music of Rhodesia', *African Music*, Vol 4, No 4.

_____ 1970, 1990. Recordings of *valimba* in Malawi and Mozambique, International Library of African Music, Grahamstown.

_____ 1971. 'The nyanga panpipe dance', *African Music*, Vol 5, No 1.

_____ 1972. 'The original African mbira?', *African Music*, Vol 5, No 2.

_____ 1980. 'Mozambique', in *New Grove Dictionary of Music and Musicians*, Vol 12, pp 662-7, Macmillan, London.

_____ 1984. 'Valimba', in *New Grove Dictionary of Musical Instruments*, Vol 3, p.706, Macmillan, London

_____ 1988. 'The system of the mbira', *7th Symposium on Ethnomusicology*, International Library of African Music, Rhodes University, Grahamstown.

Tracey, A. & **Zantzinger, G.** 1976. A companion to the films 'Mgodo wa Mbanguzi' and 'Mgodo wa Mkandeni', ILAM.

Tracey, H. 1948. *Chopi Musicians*, International African Institute.

Van Zanten, W. 1980. 'The equidistant heptatonic scale of the Asena in Malawi', *African Music*, Vol 6, No 1.