WEST AFRICAN POP ROOTS, by John Collins, Temple University Press, Philadelphia, 1992.

AFRICA O-YE!: A CELEBRATION OF AFRICAN MUSIC, by Graeme Ewens, Da Capo Press, New York, 1991.

BREAKOUT: PROFILES IN AFRICAN RHYTHM, by Gary Stewart, University of Chicago Press, 1992.

In the last three decades, the rise of styles or urban musical expressions in Africa has attracted the attention of ethnomusicologists, historians, and sociologists as a valid source of data for the study of the process of assimilation of borrowed musical elements, as well as being a valid record of historical events, the documentation of social changes, and the world view of its makers. Concurrently, the popularity of these musical expressions in Europe and the Americas has also stimulated the interest of recording industries and mass communication media in these continents. The result is sustained by re-release of past hits on compact disc, the publication of countless books written by chronicle reporters, videos, newspaper columns, special reports, and the inclusion of entries in major encyclopedias of popular music.[1] In the field of ethnomusicology, this interest is attested to by the presentation of theses and dissertations from universities in Africa, as well as in Europe and the Americas, on myriad aspect of urban musics in Africa. These works assert not only the growing interest in the study of urban musical expressions in Africa but also confirm and affirm the prominence of urban ethnomusicology in the academic milieu. Ironically, in spite of the interest manifested in both popular and academic circles, the bulk of published works about urban music in Africa now available is written by European and American reporters and newspaper correspondents, whose output has been flooding the market since the 1980s. The three books under review belong to this category.

Although these books share a common topic — urban music of Africa — they each reflect their respective author's understanding of the processes of traditional musical creativity in Africa, in general, and those of urban musical styles, in particular. In *Africa O-Ye*, the author attempts to present a total picture of African music in a progressive and regional approach. Divided into eleven chapters, the first three are devoted, respectively, to the summary concept of traditional music pointing out some of its functions and usages. In the second chapter, the author highlights the influence of America's music on the urban styles of Africa. To conclude with these external influences, the author discusses what he refers to as the "Islamic inflexions" on the musical expressions of the Pan-Arabic zone of northern Africa. The remaining seven chapters are devoted to the discussions of regional styles of urban music in Sub-Saharan Africa. Throughout this work, the author's arguments are corroborated with a series of black-and-white and coloured photographs of musicians and their bands, strengthening a visual dimension often omitted in similar works.

Unlike Graeme Ewens, the author of *Breakout* has taken a different approach. He

[1] *The Penguin encyclopedia of popular music*, 1989, and *The Guinness encyclopedia of popular music* (1992), to name just these two.

has selected thirteen of what he considers the most representative traditional and urban musicians and one ensemble from the many musical styles from Ghana, Nigeria, Sierra Leone, and Zaïre. The book contains twelve chapters which contain biographical notes of the selected musicians and their bands. Like *Africa O-Ye*, the content of the book is also strengthened by the inclusion of black-and-white photographs of musicians and their bands. The author closes his presentation by providing brief discographies of the selected works of the musicians discussed, a selected bibliography, and an index.

The thirty chapters which constitute John Collins' *West African Pop Roots* are grouped into five sections entitled "Roots", "Feedback", "Today's sounds and personalities", "Music business", and "Cross-overs". As with the first two books, the content of Collins' book abounds with black-and-white photographs of the artists and musical ensembles discussed, and an index at the end of the book, which provide visual and reference aids to the reader. Comparative examination of these three books reveals weaknesses that are characteristic of the journalistic style of writing adopted by the three authors.

For example, John Collins' many positions as the Chairman of the Bokoor African Popular Music Archives Foundation, Manager of the Bokoor Recording Studio and member of the Ghanaian National Folklore-Copyright Administration Board, afford him privileged and unrestricted access to unlimited sources of information. Despite this, the content of his book does not fully reflect what he has been privileged to collect. Throughout *West African Pop Roots* Collins makes statements about artists, musical practices, and definitions, without substantial evidence. This assertion is sustained by Collins' omitting to credit his sources of information throughout his work. For example, he has used popular photographs of artists such as Louis Armstrong (pp.55, 56), and Kwame Asare (p.36), without crediting the source. This practice is also apparent in *Africa O-Ye*, in which no photographs are credited, including that of the singer Salif Keita, which appears on page 225 in *West African Pop Roots* credited to J.M. Birraux, but appears on page 214 of *Africa O-Ye* without credit, and one of the most celebrated photographs of Kabasele Tshamala (p.130) and that of Lwambo Makiadi (p.131).

In his short discussion of the creation of Orchestre VeVe founded by Verckys (b. Kiamwangana Georges and today Kiamwangana Mateta) (p.184), Collins makes several incomplete statements. In the first, the reader is given the artist's stage name of Verckys (misspelled Vercky in the book) without giving his entire identity. Second, to be completely informative, the author should also include the year when these orchestras — O.K. Jazz, 1956, and VeVe, 1969 — were created.

The presence of female musicians in the field of urban music in Zaïre does not begin in the 1980s with Abeti Masikini, as suggested by Collins (p.185). Lucie Eyenga, Tekele Monkango, Lisanga Pauline, Yenga Moseka, and Badibala Marthe, to name just a few, were very active in the 1950s recording for Ngoma studio in the company of Paul Kamba, Bowane Henry, Antoine Kolosoy (Wendo), Zacharie Elenga (Jhimmy) and others. This error is also committed by Stewart in *Breakout.* Discussing the fate of females in the African society and their breaking out in an

urban musical career, he writes:

> Women suffer the dual impediments of parental veto and their secondary status in Africa's largely male-dominated societies. The "woman's place is in the home" syndrome that Western women have fought to remedy still thrives within Africa's well-entrenched patriarchy. An independent woman making it in the music business is a rarity. Those who succeed are usually relegated to roles as backup singers or dancing girls in skimpy costumes adorning a stage dominated by the male star. (p.4)

What is expressed here by Stewart is his misunderstanding of the functionality and the application of the division of labour in African society. This statement reflects the colonial mentality which continues to be perpetuated. In spite of the prominent position that music occupies in African societies, a musical career has never been accepted by parents as a proper choice for their children (male or female). One of the reasons for this attitude is that the life style associated with a music career is not conducive to the fulfilment of the individual's role, let alone that of a female, as a moral and productive member of the community. This concept not being limited to female members of the community, it would be a mistransfer of cultural values for one to quote the colonial simplification that in Africa "a woman's place is in the home". This assertion becomes a cultural blunder when qualified as a syndrome and compared with the social struggle of Western women.

Another discrepancy worth mentioning here is the discussion of the music industry in Africa. Collins' attempt to provide an historical account of the recording industry in Africa lacks accuracy. For example, he mentions the European labels *Decca* and *Phonogram* were at one time active in Zaïre but operated primarily out of their European bases, but omits the names of Jeronimidis' *Ngoma* which began to operate in 1947, that of the Benatar brothers *Opika* (1950) and Papadimitriu's *Loningisa*(1957), to name just these three, which were installed and operated in Kinshasa, turning this city into a recording capital of Central Africa between 1947-1960. These studios had a strong impact on the training of local musicians, the process of urban musical creativity in Kinshasa, and on the formation of the national style. Stewart also makes a brief statement about the evolution of the recording industry in Africa, but avoids mentioning any specific geographical location where it might have taken place. Nevertheless, he places the period of this evolution between the mid-fifties and mid-seventies (p.5), dates which contradict Collins' claim of 1907 (p.247) in South Africa.

Whereas Graeme Ewens and Gary Stewart avoid defining the scope of their projects, leaving their readers guessing their intentions and the criteria by which the content was selected and organised, John Collins finds it difficult to delimit the content of his book to reflect its title. As a title, *West African pop roots* is misleading. Collins cultivates total confusion for the readers:

> *West African pop roots* lays bare the inner driving forces and influences of popular music in Africa since the turn of this century — the great names, their frustrations and struggles, setbacks and successes; their love of music and of each other; their common bonds; and their belief in the power of body rhythm ... (it) explores other fusions, such as South African kwela, congo jazz, Sierra Leone maringa, Afro-reggae, and Afro-disco ... (it) not

> only presents the outstanding personalities, the developments in cross-overs, and a whole way of life. It is also a cameo of historical episodes in the life of a continent: the colonial intrusions of forts, ports, and the military; insights into what it was like to live in Monrovia, Liberia, in the nineteenth century, when the black American Liberians settled there, bringing along the quadrille and their own cultural resources ... Finally, this book exposes the global reach of the roots of pop, and the search of Western superstars, all returning to Africa. (pp. x-xii)

The stretching of the geographical area in Collins' book gives an impression of overkill and weakens his argument for the roots of West African pop music. This procedure, conscious or unconscious, seems to benefit the three authors who have approached the subject from a journalistic perspective as if they were competing for the 'story'. The three books are written as newspaper columns without due consideration to simple rules of scientific writing. The result is a collection of readings in African popular music, which do not necessarily have any rapport with each other, leading to a conclusion. Statements are made without being developed, leaving the reader puzzled as to their accuracy and relationship to what precedes and what follows. This practice not only cultivates confusion, but also leaves the authors open to unnecessary criticism.

The entire Collins book is full of inaccurate assertions that raise concern about the editorial evaluation of the manuscript before accepting it for publication. Still on p. 84, Collins write: "Doctor Nico, who before joining Kalle had been a technical college teacher, formed his Orchestra African Fiesta in 1966; the vocalist Rochereau left Kalle two years later, and with Guvana and Faugus ... set up the Orchestra African Fiesta National. After several internal changes Rochereau formed the Orchestra Africa in 1972". Where Collins received his information is, once again, unknown. He is not only totally wrong, but he has fabricated some information. When Dr. Nico (Kasanda wa Mikalayi, b. Kasanda Nicolas) joined the African Jazz ensemble, he was a student at the Institut Technique de Kitambo, and not a teacher. African Fiesta was formed in 1963, with Rochereau (Tabu Ley, b. Sinamoyo Pascal), the same year African Jazz split for the first time. In 1966, Rochereau lest African Fiesta and created his African Fiesta National. The dispute over the use of the name 'African Fiesta' between Dr. Nico and Rochereau led the former to rename his ensemble 'African Fiesta Sukisa' (African Fiesta the Last), to express the superiority of his ensemble over that of his rival. Ultimately, Rochereau chose the name 'Afrisa International' for the band with which he made the historical trip to Olympia (Paris) in 1970.

Further misinformation is found on page 185, as the author writes about the rise of the music of the younger generation in Kinshasa. Collins' discussion about the creation of the Zaiko Langa Langa in 1970 fails to recognise that Zaiko Langa Langa is an offspring of older ensembles of the younger generation of musicians in Kinshasa called Thusaina, Lipwa Lipwa, which started the trend of musical style in which Zaiko Langa Langa became the index starting in 1974 until its demise in 1984, leaving behind an array of offspring, collectively constituting what is known as "Clan Langa Langa".

Discussing the "contexts and connections" between Africa and the Americas, Ewens defines the Brazilian 'capoeira' as a dance with highly acrobatic movements accompanied by the berimbau single-string bow harp which originated in Angola (p.29). Not only is capoeira far from being a dance, the berimbau is not a harp as he claims.[2] The number of errors in these books is too large to be enumerated in this review. However, the omission of the South African singer Lucky Dube from the discussion of reggae in Africa raises still more questions as to Collins' and Stewart's reasoning. Where Dube is mentioned in Ewens, it is done perfunctorily, without mention of artistic contribution to the prominence of reggae as a style of urban music in Africa. and his active involvement in the struggle for the eradication of apartheid in his South African homeland.

In spite of the blunders ranging from the format and a total disrespect for the basic rules of scholarly writing, to misinformative statements, there are merits in these three books. Unfortunately, their value is overridden by a deluge of inaccurate assertions. The journalistic style of writing adopted by the three authors provides a non-scientific format which weakens whatever is valid in the content. After several readings of these books, this reviewer became disappointed with the authors who have unrestricted access to the sources of information about African urban music, and yet have not produced works to reflect their accumulated knowledge. They have produced half-baked documents written *à la hâte* in order to be the first to break the story. Their publication by reputable university presses does not validate them, but rather raises questions as the editorial evaluation of manuscripts before publication.

Those who are familiar with the evolutionary processes of urban musical creativity in Africa, and those for whom these expressions are more than just the stories of fame and glory will agree with this reviewer that *Africa-o-ye, Breakout* and *West African pop roots* downplay the history and the art of a people, and are a slap in the face to ethnomusicologists to whom these expressions provide valuable documentation for the study of the people's world view, their history and social organization, as they strive to understand "Why a musical style is the way it is".

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[2] See Gerhard Kubik, 1979, pp. 27-36; see also Kazadi wa Mukuna, 1979, pp. 135-142.