

approach, of many of which she appears to be well aware, stem from the fact that what she is attempting is archival research without any basis of relevant field experience. To help her she had a single Bulo woman, obviously well-informed and sympathetic but no substitute for the interactive gatherings described by Agalic, Schott and others.

This would not matter had the author succeeded in introducing any novelty of analysis or insight, but she simply selects what suits her from the methodology of earlier writers, Good, Kubik and especially Brandl, and within the scope of this subjects the musical part of the story to minute, often absurdly detailed, analysis which is musicologically impeccable but often ethnographically irrelevant. Her selection of methods, and the points she chooses to emphasise, though reasonable enough, are more haphazard than systematic. For instance, she rejects Nketia's division of the songs into those with a regulative beat and those in free rhythm, because he associates the one and not the other with bodily movement, while, she states, what she is looking at is explicitly narration, not dance. She lays stress on the variants of particular and recurrent songs, not discriminating between structural and circumstantial variation. Since she appears to have no experience of the situations which gave rise to the songs, she is unable to assess the extent to which these may be due to the individual whims, rather than the styles, of performers.

This may appear an unduly harsh judgment, especially since the book comes with the *imprimatur* of Schott himself, and since the author is so conscious of the shortcomings of her approach; but self-knowledge does not excuse inexperience or exculpate from the adoption of mistaken emphases. On the other hand, Ulrike Blanc is, on the evidence of this work, a capable musicologist, and one who is likely to make good use of extended field experience, especially if she will allow herself to construct her own analytical methods in the light of it. This she is plainly capable of doing. Now that what appears to have been a student exercise is behind her with this publication, it is to be hoped that she will progress to something more independent, do some fieldwork in the field rather than the archive, and allow her individual talents to make an individual contribution to African musicology.

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JUKWAA LA TAARAB — ZANZIBAR, by Issa Mgana, Mediafrica Books, Helsinki 1991, 101pp, photos, charts, song texts, KiSwahili text.

*Taarab* is the popular music played for entertainment at weddings and other festive occasions all along the Swahili coast of east Africa. Zanzibar is reputed to be where the style began, just over 100 years ago, and this island continues as one of the leading centres for its performance. Other important centres are Mombasa and Lamu in Kenya, and Tanga and Dar es Salaam in Tanzania, but *taarab* has reached such levels of popularity that groups now also exist as far inland as Burundi and Uganda.

*Taarab* music contains all the features one might expect from this region,

combining influences from Egypt, the Arabian peninsula, India and the West with local musical practices. It provides a remarkable forum for the examination of consequences of culture contact and of processes of musical change.

*Jukwaa la Taarab — Zanzibar* ("The Taarab Stage — Zanzibar") is one of the very few studies on this subject. Apart from a few articles (mainly in kiSwahili: Khatib 1981, Saleh 1980, 1988, Suleiman 1969, Whiteley 1966), one other published monograph (Khatib 1991) and an unpublished doctoral thesis (Topp 1992) very little literature relating to *taarab* exists. Perhaps the relatively high proportion of material written in KiSwahili by Zanzibari researchers and writers reflects the position this music is afforded within Swahili communities; and that most of the writings concern *taarab* in Zanzibar is indicative of its place in this society specifically.

The book has four chapters. Chapter 1, *Chimbuko la taarab Zanzibar* ("The sources of Zanzibari Taarab") discusses the history and development of the style. Chapters 2, 3 and 4 are biographies of three musicians who have figured centrally in the development of *taarab* music: Siti binti Saad, Bakari Abeid and Idi Abdulla Farhan. The book is in KiSwahili. Much of its content has been usefully paraphrased in a review by Graebner (1993), to which I refer readers.

Chapter 1 is broken into 13 sections which broadly discuss history, instrumentation, patrons, clubs, poetry and aesthetics. It begins by describing the meaning and derivation of the word *taarab* (from the Arabic *tarab* meaning feeling of joy, rapture, pleasure). In Arabic the word does not denote a style of music, but a mood evoked by music. In Zanzibar *taarab* has come to denote a type of music which is more or less distinguishable from other forms of music on the island, namely *muziki wa densi* (modern electric dance band music modelled on styles from neighbouring Zaïre) and *ngoma* (local music and dance events).

Mgana then describes the "arrival of *taarab*", which clearly is the 'official' version of the episode well documented in oral history, and the version one would read in all other sources. The music was brought from Egypt to Zanzibar by leisure-loving sultans towards the end of the 19th century. As with other discussions, (Saleh, Khatib 1991) Mgana relates the history of *taarab* to Zanzibar's longest surviving group, *Akhwani Safaa*, (derived from the Arabic meaning 'pure brothers'), first established in 1905 by local, Arab-descended Zanzibaris to perform primarily at the palace and at other Arab, usually affluent venues. This club epitomises *taarab* music in its narrowest definition and is a living document of the connections the style has always had, stylistically and aesthetically, with Egyptian forms of entertainment music.

Other sections in Chapter 1 describe the instrumentation and the development of the *taarab* ensemble to include electronic and western instruments. By the 1940s cello, double bass, piano accordion and bongo drums had been added to the core of Arab instruments, the *ud*, *qanun*, violin, *dafu*, *dumbaki*, *mirwas*. During the 1960s and 1970s electronic instruments including a keyboard and electric guitar were introduced, and on occasion even clarinets and saxophones were used. Once again it must be said that the text discusses developments within narrow constraints. Nothing is said of the small informal groups which emerged during the 1930s and 1940s to play popular *taarab* songs on make-shift instruments initially including only two

*kidumbak* drums (Y-shaped hand drums modelled on the *darabukka* of the Arab ensembles, called *dumbak* in Zanzibar), later to include a violin, single-string tea chest bass (*sanduku*), maracas (*cherewa*) and sticks (*mkwasa*). Virtually nothing, apart from a mention in the listing of clubs on pp.7-8, is said of the very active network of women's *taarab* clubs which emerged in the late 1930s on the wave of the popularity of Siti binti Saad. These groups had virtually no access to the instruments that were becoming a part of the *taarab* ensemble. As a result they developed a far more percussive orientation which aligns them more closely with other local *ngoma*. These groups have nevertheless become integral to the '*taarab* scene'.

Mgana briefly discusses the nature and structure of *taarab* poetry, outlining some of the differences between past and present. Given the importance of the words generally afforded by all *taarab* fans and acknowledged by Mgana notably on p17, perhaps more time should have been devoted to this parameter. He cites only two short examples here. In the biographical chapters, however, poems associated with the respective artists are given and these provide useful material for analysis, although more contextualisation would have been useful. This reviewer has elsewhere written at length on the contributions of women to *taarab* in the realm of poetry (Topp 1992). It is a pity that once again no acknowledgement is made of this.

Possibly because of the association with the Arabic mood element of *taarab*, many people's definition of *taarab* is centred on aesthetic criteria rather than on purely musical ones. Mgana's definition falls into a conservative bracket. On p.17 he outlines five main aesthetic criteria: 1) attractive songs which work their way into your brain; 2) cheerful and beautiful singing; 3) "respectable" music; 4) poetry which burns into the heart and mind; 5) beauty of the singer and his/her "nice" face. *Taarab* should be soothing and gentle, and it should be sat and listened to, not danced to. If one explored less conservative approaches it would become clear that in some circles the primary aim of a performance is to encourage the audience to dance.

The definition of *taarab* is always problematic. The question is always intertwined with personal perspectives which are to a large extent determined by family background and group experience. Many people will define the style narrowly requiring close association with Egyptian popular entertainment music. Others allow their definition to be much broader, in which case there is a great deal of overlap between *taarab* and *ngoma*. As time has gone on, the distinction between *taarab* and *ngoma* has become less and less clear so that some forms of music performance, namely *taarab ya wanawake* (women's *taarab*) and *kidumbak* (the performance of popular *taarab* songs by informal groups on make-shift instruments) should be included in the definition (Topp 1992). Rather than looking outwards, *taarab* musicians in Zanzibar, even from conservative camps such as *Akhwani Safaa*, are looking further inwards, into the musical practices of their own culture, for the development of this all-pervasive style of music, providing unusual evidence of 'Africanisation' and 'de-Arabisation'. These developments are not easily swallowed by hardened purists. The last section of Chapter 1 turns to some of the main issues debated among musicians and *taarab* enthusiasts: 1) how should *taarab* be played? 2) what are *taarab* keys? 3) which instruments are needed? 4) how should it relate to African traditions? (p.19). An obvious dilemma emerges: whereas purists would have

*taarab* closely modelled on Arabic music, they would also like to identify it as distinctly Zanzibari and Swahili. Members of different sectors of the society would answer these questions in very different ways. Unfortunately Mgana only allows space to conservative voices such as Seif Saleh and Idi Farhan. The majority of the literature available, including the book under review, takes *taarab* in its narrowest sense and in so doing, it is the opinion of this reviewer, denies it its rightful place as a truly Zanzibari music.

The chapters that follow describe the lives and roles in *taarab* of three central figures. Chapters 3 and 4, on Bakari Abeid and Idi Abdalla Farhan respectively, seem to sit comfortably with the description of the history and development of the style dealt with in the first chapter. Abeid as a singer and Farhan as a multi-talented instrumentalist, composer and teacher have each found a place in this '*taarab* story'. Abeid is by far the least conservative, having been a founder member of Michenzani Social Club and experienced the hardships faced by these smaller groups to compete with the likes of the well-patronised *Akhwani Safaa*.

Siti binti Saad, the subject of Chapter 2, is legendary in the whole of East Africa for her contribution to *taarab* during the 1930s to 1950. However, her story does not tie in well with the 'official' history. In all biographies of this artist (Suleiman 1969, Jahadhmy in Whiteley 1966) she is heralded for her contribution as a singer and a poet, but in Chapter 1 of this book she is only mentioned in passing twice and the musicians connected with her receive no mention at all. This begs questioning, given that it was through the recordings she and these musicians made for companies such as Columbia and His Masters Voice in India, Egypt and East Africa studios, that *taarab* rose to fame. If one truly examines Siti's achievements it becomes clear that her contribution does not sit well because she broadened the definition of *taarab* and at the same time broadened the audience to sectors of the society in which *taarab* had been hitherto inaccessible: she began to sing in kiSwahili rather than Arabic, and she sang about subjects of local concern rather than of sentimental love. As a result she inspired more women to become involved in *taarab* (*Akhwani Safaa* only opened its doors to female members after the revolution in 1964), and she inspired the formation of *kidumbak* groups mentioned above. Those arguing for narrower boundaries cannot reconcile these achievements with what they like *taarab* to be.

As a reporter, Mgana's approach to the presentation of material is factual, being based virtually exclusively on oral data from active *taarab* musicians. The more scholarly reader might wish for more references and acknowledgement of sources. Issa Mgana's book is a welcome addition to the paucity of literature available on a style of music that is performed over such a vast area and which obviously plays such an important role in the lives of many people.

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#### Further reading and references

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### Recordings

This book is published as part of a larger project, published by Mediafrika, including 6 cassettes of *taarab* from Zanzibar and Dar es Salaam.

*Music of Zanzibar*, Vols. 1-4, Globestyle ORBD 032, 033, 040, 041.

*Orient de luxe*, Taarab All Stars, Piranha PIR 22 (CD).

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MYTH, RITUAL AND KINGSHIP IN BUGANDA, by Benjamin C. Ray, Oxford University Press, New York, Oxford, 1991, 239pp., illus., photos.

What happens to a researcher who is profoundly interested in a chosen subject of study, if he is cut off for decades from his research area, due to war or other adverse circumstances? He will probably try to act like the inhabitants of the former German Democratic Republic before 1989, who in their case were locked in rather than out: he will read all the available literature, almost sentence by sentence, and eventually end up more knowledgeable about his subject than anyone else.

Such thoughts came to my mind when I was reading Benjamin C. Ray's book. His visit to Uganda in 1972 was under an unlucky star. Ray set out to study religious aspects and practices associated with the *Kabakaship* (or kingship) of one of the most powerful pre-colonial east African states: Buganda. However, in May 1966 (not 1967 as written on p.5, probably a misprint) Milton Obote, then prime minister of Uganda, had given orders to his army general Idi Amin to make an assault on the *lubiri*, the royal enclosure in Kampala. This resulted from a political crisis in which the Kabaka had threatened secession of his kingdom from the rest of Uganda. Kabaka Mutesa II managed to escape and he fled across western Uganda to Burundi, finally to England, where he died years later under mysterious circumstances.

When Ray came to Uganda in 1972, the kingdom of Buganda no longer existed and the royal enclosure was burnt. Fortunately, the destruction had spared the royal