

John Low's *Shaba Diary* is a highly desirable book — especially for 'folk guitar' enthusiasts. Unfortunately, you may not find it easy to obtain. The publisher is Dr Engelbert Stiglmayr, Wienerstrasse 141, A-2822 Föhrenau, Austria.

David Rycroft, Sussex, U.K.

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DANIEL KACHAMBA MEMORIAL CASSETTE, ed. Mitchell Strumpf, with commentary booklet, 26pp, by Gerhard Kubik, University of Malaŵi, Zomba, 1992.

Every now and then a flowering of particular expertise will occur, unforeseen and either of brief duration or leading on to ripples more widespread than could possibly have been anticipated, in some backwater of the world which nobody till then has much regarded. The phenomenon may have been of more importance than we can possibly know: in the eighteenth century Lichfield threw up the Darwins, the Wedgwoods, the Burneys, the Sewards, David Garrick and Samuel Johnson: after which England, and even the world, were never the same again. Leaving aside such examples, we can only speculate, like Gray in his *Elegy*, about those which are forgotten or may have been fruitless.

When I first went to Nyasaland in the 1950s it might as well have been asked, by the few outsiders who had ever heard of the place, can anything good come out of Singano Village? There was music everywhere; many other villages besides Singano carried on both tradition and innovation; there was no reason to single out any one more than another. Yet even then there was a style building up in Singano, fostered by a close kinship of musicians, which was to have a considerable influence on the directions taken by African popular music.

Daniel Kachamba and his younger brother Donald were both born there, but moved in early youth to Salisbury, Southern Rhodesia (now Harare, Zimbabwe). They were the sons of James Kachamba, an accomplished musician, and it was his influence, and that of his colleagues and kinsfolk Mofolo Chilimbwalo and Soza Molezi, which bore more on the development of their styles, and especially the guitar style of Daniel, than did the musical ambience of the foreign city. Daniel was nonetheless both eclectic and highly individual, gleaned what suited him from all he heard, and sometimes as a soloist, sometimes as leader of a band, began to produce music which without departing grossly from the mainstream had an excitement and effervescence of its own,

This cassette is an anthology of his work both as composer and as performer. As such, his self-effacing expertise is very well brought out; Daniel the creator allows his companions to shine while as a player he maintains a vivid background for them. The selection gives a very good representation of his work in both capacities; it also illustrates quite poignantly his good humour and his effortless musicianship, and the breadth of his accomplishment. There have been times when the exuberance of his younger brother has seemed to overshadow him; and though such moments are not absent here, the overall impression is one of his strength and accomplishment. Sadly,

he died in his home at Singano on the 25th July 1987, at the age of only forty years.

One wonders sometimes what would have happened to the Kachamba brothers, and indeed to the whole Singano musical corpus, had they never been taken up by Gerhard Kubik. Their careers might have been different, but it is unlikely that they would never have attained some measure of international recognition. One must pay tribute nevertheless to that most considerable figure in African ethnomusicology, for the part he has played not only in making the Singano school of African popular music widely known, but for his personal concern and friendship for the musicians as individuals. His scholarship and analytical powers are very well shown in the pamphlet which accompanies the cassette. It is appropriate that one of the songs should be a tribute to him.

G.T. Nurse, London

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"ROOTS OF RHYTHM: MUSICAL INSTRUMENTS OF EAST AFRICA", video with booklet, Jacaranda Designs Ltd, Nairobi, 1995.

A promising title leads to nothing but an example of the trivialisation and commercialisation of African culture. An apparently African boy with an English regional accent wanders into a Nairobi music shop, sees a vision of a pop group performing, and next wakes up in the bush surrounded by four people making musical instruments. One would naturally expect these to be experts, but no...none of them appear to assemble or play their instruments with any sign of expertise. The boy then tries, and fails, to play the instruments, the shot returns to the group in the shop, now including the 'traditional' musicians, all attempting to mime to the pop soundtrack, and that, unbelievably, is it! The accompanying booklet invites the reader to purchase 'Afri-kits' containing "authentic, hand-crafted instruments" and other goods. Nowhere is there any indication that these instruments are not toys but the tools of a real culture. This publication regrettably does not touch it.

Andrew Tracey, International Library of African Music

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ORIGINS OF THE POPULAR STYLE: THE ANTECEDENTS OF TWENTIETH-CENTURY POPULAR MUSIC, by Peter van der Merwe, Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1989, pp.352.

As the author intimates in his Preface, this book is the fruit of some twenty years' passionate sleuthing through the annals of parlour song, folk-song, hymn, ballad, early blues, and other sources available to him. Van der Merwe is extremely good at sourcing examples and has tracked down some gems. The discoveries he has made are fascinating and concrete and he has revealed many unexpected connections. The theory underlying his quest and the conclusions he has drawn from it are, however, harder to pin down, and it is this lack of theoretical framework that bothers me most,