

## THE MUSIC OF TIV

*by*

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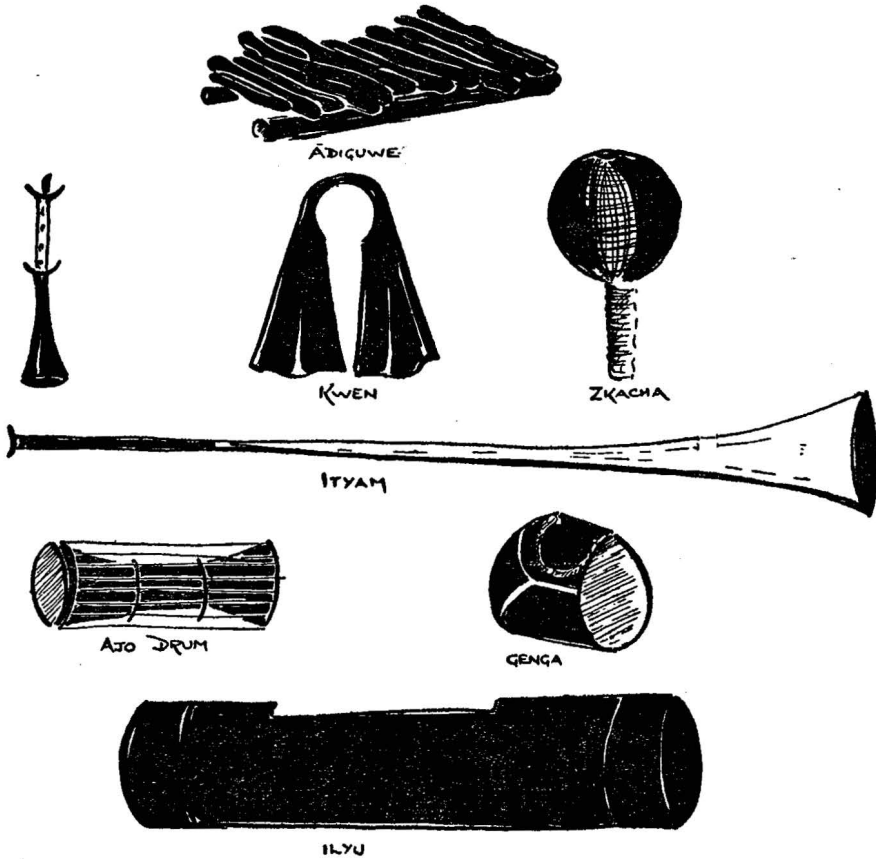
BORDERING the Benue River, geographically bulging on either side, the Tiv people have developed a musical style which reflects the individuality of their customs and thought to an interestingly marked degree. A semi-Bantu people, the Tiv have combined the true essentials of the arts of their race with a highly developed sense of mimicry, not unlike that found in the shadow play of Java. This sense of mimicry has no time barriers, however, and in its ancient god-worship form carries with it the jerky rhythm patterns and sharp dancing movements, now moulded by the twentieth century and European contact, but still leaving the angular fingers and sharp percussion crying for favours from A'Ondo, their God of the heavens and the father of Tiv and Uke. Tiv was the father of Po'or, Chongo and Pusu and these ancestors are the forces behind everything affecting their lives. It is said that when Po'or died he left no issue so one of his brothers took one of his bones to keep his memory fresh: that bone has, in the course of time, been destroyed but the Imborivungu pipe now represents it. It is made from a human bone to which is affixed a wax or metal head with eyes made from stone, metal or cowrie shells: human hair is stuck to one end. The lower part is generally adorned with coloured beads and half way down there is a hole where the navel would be; this is stopped up when the pipe is not in use. The foot is covered with batswing or frogskin to act as a sounding board.

The Imborivungu is very rarely, if ever, played nowadays, but its place has been taken by the Imar, made of wood and named by the number of holes it has on its face, it is played across the top, the column vibrating vertically.



I show opposite some of the more prominent instruments with, where possible, their names.

The instruments show no originality when the whole continent of Africa is taken into account, but the Tiv have recently found a strangely moving method of producing glissandi in their M'liyam (Dirge). I have tried to get one of these clever performers to play a solo using the slightly appoggiatura glissando technique but without success, and I suspect some form of ensemble understanding is necessary to produce the full effect. The player slurs his note until the nodal change and places a hand across the bell of the instrument at the psychological moment as he takes the next harmonic: the feeling is one of full glissando.



The most important type of song is called the Icham; this is sung by a soloist with chorus, frequently the soloist being the composer. A new song is submitted to the tribe by its composer for approval, even new words to an old setting can prompt a "Royal Academy Sitting"! One of the most popular songs in Katsina Ala at the moment was composed by an agricultural labourer and I have heard the same song sung by a different singer in Gboko, the Tiv capital, with almost no variation, and what variation there was was rhythmic only. The words are mostly small stories about animals or their own lives or simply a repeated phrase. Sometimes one story will have repeated and prolonged popularity such as "Jato Aka"; I give below a condensed, but literal, translation.

"See what has befallen me, tell me what I have done to deserve it. In the days gone by, I farmed for my mother and when I was tired I rested; if I had anything to say I said it, and when I was hungry I ate.

"This chief and that chief have been given staves of office by the white man, but of what use are they? Once they used to hold courts, but now they do so no longer. Favour has fallen on Gom Kbanju but now he no longer tends his paternal kin. Wait though, he'll be hanged one of these fine days. The white man has imprisoned Abagi and he is wailing, 'Forgive me! I'll never do it again. Just let me see my son once more and you can take me away.'



Melody is within pentatonic confines and always appears to end with a diatonic cadence and very attractively on a sigh. There is a microtonal quality in most songs, a fact that is difficult to assess when the whole appears to be so completely diatonic in character and mode, but the instinctive sharpening or flattening of certain progressions, sometimes with a rhythmic change, brings one back to appreciation of the instinctive enharmonic change that twists the line and makes ordinary melody extraordinary song. Here is a song from six labourers pulling a cartload of bricks at Makurdi. I have done my best to indicate the microtonal change but the reader will have to be patient and excuse me if this is not quite clear.



(The G flat is strictly a quarter-tone).

One of the major points in listening to Tiv music is to understand the word form wherever a jump of a fourth is heard; after a time one realises how dominant is the interval and one thinks round the circle and this natural progression, two of the easiest things for a child to understand. Curt Sachs in his *Rise of Music in the Ancient World*, draws an analogy here; I have noticed how my own child tends to sing in two tones, and how the little boy next door, a year older has slight definition on a descending tetracord. Is the next stage an interval of a third and how long will it take these two children to reach the fourth? The best example I have of this is the phrase which the boys of the Benue Middle School at Katsina Ala used to greet their Inspector General of Education when they held a Wassa in his honour:



and this song sung by labourers in Makurdi:



Notice the strong positioning of the fourth. I could not get the words, unfortunately, so cannot explain anything but the musical domination of the interval.

There is a Tiv proverb which says:

“As long as life lasts a cow never ceases to move its tail.”

It will be interesting to see which way the musical tail of the Tiv will move.