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|-----|--|---------------------|
| 17. | Teso | Gallotone GB 1454 T |
| | Kipsigis | Gallotone GB 1470 T |
| 18. | Nguja (Zanzibar) | Gallotone GB 1254 T |
| | Chopi (Portuguese East Africa) | Gallotone GB 1046 T |
| | Luba (South Congo) | Gallotone GB 1112 |
| | Twi (West Africa) | Decca WA 617 |
| 19. | ZeZuru (Southern Rhodesia) | Gallotone GB 971 T |
| | Nyamwezi (Tanganyika) | Gallotone GB 1315 T |
| | Bisa (Northern Rhodesia) | Gallotone GB 1055 |
| | Ga (Gold Coast, West Africa) | Decca WA 626 |
| | Ibo (South Nigeria, West Africa) | Decca WA 1673 |

MUSIC OF THE GOLD COAST

by

PHILIP GBEHO, G.T.C.L., L.R.A.M.

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WHAT do we mean by the term "music" in Africa? It is the combination of three things that are interdependent and never separated: dancing, singing and drumming. The songs are generally short and would probably be dull if it was not for the African's natural gift of improvisation—which is the very heart of music. Having to repeat the short songs over and over again, we have varied the tune with every repetition, improvising and adding extra notes and tones to keep up the listener's—and singer's—interest without totally departing from the particular harmony of the tune. This natural gift of improvisation, thought to be important by great musicians like Bach, is the sign of a man's true musicianship.

Apart from the variations I have briefly described, a singer combines mentally all the rich rhythm of the drums with all the complicated movements which a dancer makes. Thus, you see, the song, though short, has got other factors contributing to make it interesting.

ABUSIVE.

I say that the songs are short, but let me point out that in certain parts of the country the songs can last for up to 20 minutes without a single repetition. An instance is the practice of Halo among the Ewes of the Gold Coast. With them, when two villages have fallen out, they compose abusive songs against each other. These songs are generally directed at an offending Elder of the village who has not kept up with the unimpeachable character expected of him. These songs are very elaborate and can last up to even half an hour.

CROSS RHYTHM.

As prominence must be given to the songs, the drumming takes the form of song recitals, and the harmony of all the songs is not based on chords in their progressions as we know them in Western music. It is mainly a variation, and these variations give the song the true harmony which makes it essentially African.

In all music, rhythm is the very heart of the tune. So complicated is its nature that I think the average musician who is familiar with printed music can hardly follow its complexity. There is what we call "Cross Rhythm"—or playing one rhythm against another. This is so highly developed that an African can mentally cope with more than two rhythms at the same time. In any performance of indigenous music, you may have from six to eight drums playing together. Yet each of these drums plays a different, stereotyped rhythm, but when they are combined they produce the cross rhythm.

Apart from these we have the Master Drum which improvises all kinds of rhythm against the cross rhythm. The effect of this is beyond comprehension. The force of this

great combination of rhythms is sufficient to urge a man to dance for hours on end. The player of the master drum is often described in our society as someone born to the task, and not made.

To an illiterate African, the regular crotchet and quavers in a piece of music would appear rather dull.

MISSIONARIES.

This "Iron Curtain" between the educated African and his own music has been the work of missionaries. They have done many things of which I am justly proud, but their early teachings that our music was the work of the devil—in order to convert us to Christianity—has done a lot to prohibit the music that is the centre of our culture. The result is that today we have a vast majority of educated Africans who have not the slightest idea of their own music and culture.

Music being an important part of the culture of any nation, I therefore feel that to educate the African and leave out his music means his education is lacking a foundation—or in other words is but a thin veneer.

The most serious aspect of our music is the dances. It is through them that we express our deepest emotions. The African dances for joy, and he also dances for sorrow or even for anger. But some missionaries think it a primitive idea to dance at funerals. So let me explain that as this is part of our culture, only an African can comprehend its deep spiritual value. At a funeral the dancer does not dance for joy. He pours out his sorrow into the dances, and I can hardly describe in words the spiritual aspect of this part of our culture.

We dance also for worship. Hence our music is always associated with religion. If the churches had been able to grasp this music and had allowed it to grow into the life of their religious worship, Christianity would have meant a far more serious thing to the African than a mere social convention.

Where rhythm is concerned, the African is ahead of the European.



Philip Gbeho teaching young Gold Coast boys to play drums in the traditional manner. His young son plays the drum on the right.

The drum is the centre of the rhythm. Each drum is tuned differently, and each one when carefully played, can produce a variety of sounds, high or low. The player uses a stick in one hand to strike the surface of the drum, but by carefully placing the other hand on its surface while he strikes, another tone can be produced. The more pressure you put on the surface, the higher the tone produced.

The first man who described our drums as Tom-toms certainly was not aware of the subtleties I have just described. To him it was just a single note Tom-tom which is indeed dull and uninteresting. Thus I strongly maintain that if our music is to survive, it must find a place in the classroom where the coming generations can be found. Besides, it is so complicated that only an early training can give a man complete mastery over the subject. I know that education authorities are beginning to see the great need to preserve this music, but they have not been able to face the problem squarely as yet. It must be organised seriously in the schools and then they will grow to appreciate the importance of this aspect of our culture, which is our national heritage. (See Plate IIb).

INITIATION A LA MUSIQUE CONGOLAISE

by

J. N. MAQUET

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Je reviens enthousiasmé, de chez les Bapende, rapportant comme des trésors—à l'amusement des douaniers—les humbles objets faits de bois, de tiges de bambous, de Calebasses, qui sont leurs instruments de musique. Autres trésors : les bandes sonores où nous avons inclus, mon ami Jean Stroobants, de Radio-Congo, et moi-même, les puissantes masses vocales, les batteries endiablées, les cris de la foule,—toute l'atmosphère de là-bas. Et puis, il y a les précieux carnets de notes fruits de patientes enquêtes, les vocabulaires, les mesurages.

Bien sûr, la musique des Bapende, ce n'est pas, de loin, celle de tout le Congo ! Mais elle nous met en présence de qualités propres à la race : le don d'improvisation, l'aisance de la polyphonie et le sens de l'orchestration des voix, la finesse de l'oreille (ils usent de la tierce neutre, ni majeure, ni mineure, qui échappe à la plupart d'entre nous) et le dynamisme incomparable du rythme, positivement électrisant.

Aujourd'hui, certains savants veulent retirer aux Noirs africains le mérite de l'invention de leurs instruments, dont on recherche l'origine vers l'Asie antérieure, l'Iran, l'Inde, l'Indo-Chine, la Malaisie, ou la Polynésie. Ainsi, le xylophone africain serait venu de Java, les cordophones (et surtout la lyre) remontent à des modèles égyptiens. Tant pis pour le génie inventif de la race noire !

On hésite d'ailleurs à se rallier à cette thèse "diffusionniste" après avoir vu combien les Noirs excellent à tirer des effets musicaux des objets les plus hétéroclites, témoin ce jeune enfant qui, embouchant un vierux guidon de vélo, en sortait des sons et des modulations extraordinaires. (J'en possède l'enregistrement).

Qu'importe encore l'instrument, affaire de technique, de civilisation matérielle ! Et c'est aussi la civilisation, arrêtée chez eux en deçà de l'écriture et de la notation, qui n'a pas permis à la musique africaine les développements de la nôtre.

Mais, pour ce qui est de génie même de la musique, les Noirs le possèdent, au plus haut point.