

## BOOK REVIEWS

AFRICAN MUSIC FROM THE SOURCE OF THE NILE by JOSEPH KYAGAMBIDDWA, Frederick A. Pareger, New York, 1955 XII, 255.

There are two factors—little known material and personal knowledge of the tribe's music—which should attract a well-disposed and eager public for Mr. Kyagambiddwa.

It is all the more regrettable that, for a musician, the book makes such difficult reading and that, for an historian, there are in it so many statements unsupported by fact. This has made reviewing a difficult task, but having said this much it must also be explained that some of its material is fascinating and that it poses problems which cannot be brushed aside because they are badly stated.

The author is a single-minded person; his unusual background and career are reflected in his writing and in his argument. He grew up in the lap of the Roman Catholic system of education, and he must have been a pupil of great promise. He also received instructions in the elements of the western musical tradition. The first fruit of his enthusiasm was a "Catechism of Music," written for his own people in the vernacular and dealing with the rudiments of western music in question-and-answer form. It is distressing that no publisher could be found, in spite of the recommendations of those who read the manuscript.

However, it was through this manuscript on western music that the author made many friends, and through them was introduced to the study of indigenous folk music at the Uganda Museum. There he was initiated into the instrumental music of his country; the Museum's team of demonstrators took him in hand and he learned to play the xylophone himself. It is a pleasure to record that during the seven months Mr. Kyagambiddwa spent at the Museum he was supported by a small salary from the Colonial Development and Welfare Fund as a temporary assistant to the Music Research Scheme. He learned to apply his previous knowledge of notation to the music of the *Kiganda* xylophone and wrote the scores which make up the second and most important part of his book.

As to the first part, it hardly reflects credit on the advice given by his teachers. The reader should be warned to be on his guard if he should be unversed in the ethnography of musical instruments and in the problems of African pre-history and tribal migration.

The xylophone scores (pp. 119-234) add much to our knowledge of music. They cover the *Kiganda* repertoire well and are interesting to follow, especially in connection with the author's cross-references to vocal versions of instrumental tunes. As a piece of musical orthography the scores fall short of perfection, but perhaps it would be ungracious to complain where so much is offered.

The *Kiganda* instrumental pattern is essentially this; the notes of two isorhythmic themes interlock like the fingers of folded hands, so that no two notes are ever sounded simultaneously. In xylophone music two players are required for the execution of the themes, each playing his theme with two beaters which move over the "keyboard" in parallel motion an octave apart.

There are, of course, variants of this technique among the other tribes. In Buganda proper there is added to this basic pattern a third part played on the *amakonezi*, the two top keys of the xylophone. Incidentally, the *amakonezi* represents the standard interval to which all the other intervals are tuned by transposition step by step. The *amakonezi* sound an octave above the two "middle" keys of the *amadinda*—the 6th and 7th in a 12-key instrument—and sound two octaves above the two lowest notes. Their task is to duplicate the themes in octaves, but since there are only two *amakonezi* notes it is obvious that they must remain "tacet" when any of the other notes, outside the range of the *amakonezi*, is touched upon by the basic themes.

The effect of the *amakonezi* technique is the artistic illusion of an independent third part, a sort of descant. It also adds intricacy to the rhythm. It is difficult to play, and expert players are rare. How much expertness is in fact required will become clear from a discussion of Mr. Kyagambiddwa's theory of "muko."

The text barely describes the structure of the "muko" Mr. Kyagambiddwa relies for further explanation on a set of "Rules governing the arranging of *miko* (Appendix I, pp. 235-6). However, like most rules this particular set is quite unintelligible. Luckily there is reference to a musical example which reveals the facts observed by the author.

He is concerned here with two phenomena: octave displacements and transposition. In folk music generally neither need have much effect on the performance of a piece; it matters little whether a folk tune shifts, say, from a compass *c e'* in one performance to *d d'* in another; as soon as the singer reaches the limit of his range he will sing the note which defeats him in a position an octave higher—or lower, as the case may be.

On the *Kiganda* xylophone such liberties will have far-reaching consequences because transposition of the main theme will create entirely new rhythmic and melodic patterns on the *amakonezi*, which cannot follow the shift without re-deploying their limited resources, and octave displacements will lead to the inversion of intervals and alter the appearances of the basic theme. Thus in Mr. Kyagambiddwa's example 162-I (Fig. 1).



Fig. 1

a shift of the centre theme by two keys—that is, by approximately a fourth—will lead to example 162-III (Fig. 2).



Fig. 2

No wonder then that Mr. Kyagambiddwa observes that “each *muko* has its own character, and a listener of player will prefer this or that *nuko*” (p.107). Appreciation of *muko*, in my opinion, probably depends on the effect which transposition has on the *amakonezi*.

A discussion of the *amakonezi* would not be complete without mention that since every piece finishes on either of the two *amakonezi* keys, they give the impression of finalis notes.

This observation leads unavoidably to discussion on key, mode, and scale. There is much theorizing in the book on these subjects. On p.20 we read that “the ancient Baganda had a special name for each of the five degrees of the scale,” and the author postulates—in brackets—that “Evidently they were bound to possess a perfect pitch.” I cannot find any evidence which would support Mr. Kyagambiddwa here.

Another theory put forward by the author is that “the Baganda divided their scale into (1) the Lower Scale (*Olutamba olwa wansi*), and (2) the Higher Scale (*Olutamba olwa waggulu*). A song has to fall into one or the other of the two related kinds.” It appears that the two sequences of notes which the author has in mind are a fourth or a fifth apart. However, there are no references to musical examples which could lend reality to the theory. Elaborate comparisons with the western system only add to the confusion.

Questions of scale are notoriously tricky. According to Mr. Kyagambiddwa “the scale of Ganda music is the natural equal temperament Pentatonic scale, consisting of five degrees which proceed by the distance of  $1\frac{1}{5}$ th. tones and are sung or tuned...” (p.19), and he continues to assure us two pages later that “the Baganda have semitones and chromatics” in vocal music but not in instrumental music. Further, we learn that the “Ganda semitone is not actually a half-tone, and its interval is smaller than the western semitone. That is one of the reasons why we blacken the Ganda sharps, flats and naturals.”—It may be significant that the only two examples which employ blackened accidentals are in illustration of ‘Ganda recitatives’ (no. 60) and Ganda odic songs (No. 64).

To return to Mr. Kyagambiddwa’s description of the Ganda scale, it implies that the Baganda have an appreciation of scale rooted in some acoustic system, and that the approximately equidistant instrumental tuning is a compromise, a temperament, in the true sense of the word, of this “natural” pure scale. I personally have no evidence that this is so, and Mr. Kyagambiddwa’s book does not produce new evidence either. It is important that the reader should see the implications clearly if he is to appreciate the musical phenomena which the author’s xylophone scores present to him.

There is no doubt that the publication of sixty-two xylophone scores and the discovery of the *muko* effect are major events in ethnomusicology. Your reviewer suggests that the text of the book deserves to be rewritten, to make it usable, and that the unintelligible and unsupportable issues—of which only a few have been mentioned here—should be treated in simple and scholarly terms. In fairness to the author, I must point out that the method of presentation in this review is based on my own interpretation of Mr. Kyagambiddwa’s argument.