

RECORD REVIEWS

Reprinted, with acknowledgements, from the Journal of the International Folk Music Council, Vol. XII, 1960.

SOUND OF AFRICA SERIES. LP (33 1/3 r.p.m.), 12 in. records. The International Library of African Music, P.O. Box 138, Roodepoort, nr. Johannesburg, South Africa.

A splendid set of records! We do not think this an exaggerated tribute to pay to the issue by the International Library of African Music of the forty-five LP records* in the *Sound of Africa Series*. Many of us have, for years, watched with admiration Mr. Hugh Tracey's pertinacity in establishing, against all difficulties, what is so patently needed in Africa—an institution which will collect and preserve in a scientific manner the abounding riches of African musical culture, and which will serve as a focus for musical studies. He has, in this series, triumphantly vindicated his enterprise.

In this issue he covers South, Central and East Africa in fair detail. Each record contains about six separate bands of recording—a sign that Mr. Tracey has avoided the pitfall of LP recording, namely the tendency to record too much of any one item; and an indication of the enormous wealth of material provided in the forty-five records. Some people might think that there are too many examples of one or other type of song. Yet for the student this very fullness is of importance; one single example is of little value in comparative research, and it is the proper function of a library of music to provide plenty of material for such studies.

In the past, research workers have had to depend mainly on commercial recordings. This is unsatisfactory not only because they are very often made under studio conditions by groups of Africans more or less detribalized: not only because the recording engineers lack that knowledge of African music which is essential to a proper recording; but also because the commercial record is aimed at maximum sales and will thus omit much material which is of prime importance to the serious student. Mr. Tracey, on the other hand, has definitely set out to record all that is of importance in African musical culture and here lies the great value of his series of records. No facet of music seems to have escaped his attention. There are examples of solo performance, both vocal and instrumental, male and female; call-and-response choruses, with or without instrumental accompaniment; work- and pounding-songs; self-delectative songs; songs and music for social occasions; instrumental recordings of great and fascinating variety—indeed, we confess, after twenty years' sojourn among the Tonga, not to have been lucky enough to hear some of the instrumental sounds he records.

Then there are dance-drumming, and examples of *drum-language*, with the spoken text included on the disc, and also some spoken material—*folk-tales with story-songs*. Besides this traditional material, Mr. Tracey gives some good examples of the modern "neo-folk" song-cum-guitar music, and other manifestations of the popular fusion of African with European musical techniques. Christian religious music is represented not only by some typical African singing of Western hymn-tunes, but also by the fascinating and quite extraordinary music made by some of the indigenous separatist Christians in South Africa. To what extent this music springs from truly Christian motives is, perhaps, open to question; but it should be studied by all who have to do with Christian hymnody in Africa.

The quality of recording is outstanding. Anyone who has had experience of the conditions of excitement—the interruptions—the extraneous and unwanted "noises-off" in an African village, will be astonished at the technical excellence of these records. Your reviewer has seen Mr. Tracey at work—he is a wizard with a microphone when in a crowd of African musical enthusiasts. A special word should be said about the drumming. African drumming is exceedingly difficult to record well—we have met very few good recordings—but with a few rather "tinny" exceptions, the recording of drumming is of a far higher standard than usual. One should mention that in order to gain the full impact of what is on the record, the listener should always turn up his volume control and increase the bass gain when there is drumming; only thus will his reproducer give out the authentic full-toned sound.

The records, however, form only one part of this *Sound of Africa Series*. It is, of course, tantalizing to the research student to have records which are insufficiently documented. Mr. Tracey has printed a comprehensive system of cards containing details of each item which pinpoint the tribe, type of performance, nature of instrument, and so on. His card-index files each item under several headings, enabling one to identify it whether from the angle of the tribe, the content, the instrument used, etc. This card-index is of the utmost value and is an example to all who record folk-music, of what can be done to make the recorded material easily identifiable. Incidentally, have we spotted a mistake on the label of TR.24.B, band 1, "*Ijeynye*"? This is attributed to the Bemba tribe, but the internal evidence of the songs suggests that this needs checking in the presence of a Bemba musician.

While there is abundant evidence that African music is, for the most part, built on a single underlying system, these records show—what Mr. Tracey has so often pointed out—the extraordinary variety of ways in which that musical system can be embodied in sound. Each tribe gives its own particular flavour to the system and has its own characteristic treatment of drumming and its own variety of the instruments.

Thus, while we are indeed grateful for this review of the music of South, Central and East Africa, our appetite is whetted for what lies beyond the territory covered by this series. The International Library of African Music deserves the backing of all who have to do with folk music and not least of the Governments of Africa. Mr. Tracey has the equipment and the enthusiasm. He needs the finance and the invitation to extend his expeditions in those vast areas of Africa especially in the north-centre, and in the hinterlands of West Africa. What hidden riches of musical practice lie unrecorded and unrecognized here? It will be both wise and exciting to enable him so to extend his activities that the *Sound of Africa* shall eventually be representative of the whole continent. Meanwhile we offer him our congratulations.

A.M.J.

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BARBOUR, J. Murray and KUTTNER, Fritz A.

1. Meantone Temperament in Theory and Practice.
2. The Theory and Practice of Just Intonation.
Musurgia Records (P.O. Box 242, Jackson Heights 72, N.Y., U.S.A.).
Theory Series A, Nos. 2 and 3. Each 2 s. 12 in. 33-1/3 r.p.m. 5 (US) 8.75 and 9.25.

These records should be of special interest to the student of African music, in that they attack a similar problem — that of recording, analyzing and describing pitches, intervals and interval-ratios which differ from those of equal temperament.

Both record-albums include a set of analytical notes (16 p.) which briefly describe the tunings and temperaments of Aron, Zarlino, Silbermann, Marpurg, *et. al.* (using superparticular ratios and the interval of the cent) and compare these methods with Pythagorean tuning and equal temperament. The many charts, tables and diagrams which accompany the text are all very clear and well drawn (for supplementary reference, Dr. Barbour's excellent book on this subject¹, will prove most useful). Musical examples, demonstrating the actual sound of the various systems, are played on the harpsichord and electric organ by Robert Conant.

Most of the musical examples chosen for the meantone temperament record are taken from keyboard works by composers living when this temperament was in use (Tallis, Gibbons, F. Couperin, Handel, Bach, *etc.*). For the just intonation record however, the authors included familiar melodies ("Auld Lang Syne", "Nearer My God To Thee", "Drink To Me Only With Thine Eyes", "Abide With Me", *etc.*) harmonized with simple triads². One might argue that such examples lack intrinsic musical merit, and have no place on a scholarly demonstration record. To do so, however, would be to lose sight of the primary purpose of the examples — that of demonstrating the *sound* of just intonation. Since the sound of its major and minor thirds (tuned in the ratio 4 : 5 and 5 : 6 respectively) is one of the most readily recognizable features of just intonation, why not exploit this fact in the illustrative examples — and what better way than by taking a familiar melody and harmonizing it with simple triads? With meantone temperament, on the other hand, one distinguishing feature is the overall sound of a piece played on an instrument so tempered. The choice of keyboard pieces written by composers living when meantone temperament was used is therefore quite logical.

Many "purists" will rebel at the sound of the electronic organ. It was used, however, for practical reasons. The authors rightly state that a pipe organ would have been impossible to tune and keep in tune as precisely as was required for this record. (See below). Personally, I would have preferred that the authors had gone one step further and used variable-pitch oscillators instead of a harpsichord to demonstrate individual pitches and sizes of intervals. The resultant clear, clean sound would perhaps make it easier to concentrate on the size and shape of the intervals in question.

I tested the meantone record for fidelity and accuracy³ (the claim is made in the analytical notes that, given ideal conditions, all pitches and ratios will be accurate to within 1 cent). During the period of testing, frequent checks were made on the line frequency (60 cycles A.C.), accuracy of the Strobocoann (used to check pitches), and the speed of the turntable. A low level hum was in evidence during the narrated portions of both sides of the record, and a slight flutter (app. 10 c.p.s.) was found on Example No. 5 (especially noticeable towards the end of the excerpt). In addition, the individual pitches in Examples 1, 2, 3, 16 and 17, the A naturals in Example 13, the A and D naturals in Examples 18 and 19, the A flats in Example 20, and the B naturals in Examples 21 and 22 all tested 2½ to 3 cents sharp. It must be pointed out however, that the foregoing statements are made merely for the record. Any competent audio engineer will assure the reader that these are very minor faults indeed — if in fact they can

¹ Barbour, J. Murray. *Temperament and Tuning, A Historical Survey*, East Lansing, Michigan: Michigan State College Press: 1951 (2nd Ed. 1953).

² Also given are six examples of works by composers active c. 1420-c. 1520.

³ I wish to acknowledge the most helpful assistance of Mr. F. Breckenridge in this respect.

be called faults at all. Moreover, the uniform sharpness does not affect the interval ratios — these are precisely as stated in the analytical notes.

In every respect, these records aim at and meet a very high scholarly standard, and their study will prove invaluable to the specialist in African music. Sooner or later the music he hears must be precisely described and notated; we must have more charts, diagrams and tables showing how the various tonal systems are built, what their interval ratios are and how they differ from (for example) equal temperament. These records and the analytical notes which accompany them are an excellent object lesson for us all.

DARIUS L. THIEME