

## LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

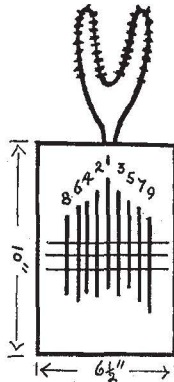
From J. V. OVEN, Freetown, Sierra Leone.

I am very sorry that I have had to keep your waiting so long for fuller information regarding the little kondi (or kondie) I mentioned in my previous letter — the Sierra Leonean version of your mbira. Even now I have not yet managed to acquire such an instrument either for the school where I am teaching, or for myself, but I have met one at the house of a friend and colleague. Its sound-box is made of a biscuit tin, but as you will see in the drawing there is also a protruding part shaped rather like a pair of donkey's ears. These "ears" contain a series of holes through which small metal wires are threaded. The wires are bent and tied to make little rings, no doubt to prevent them falling out of the instrument. Inside the box there are a few pebbles. As you see there is no sound hole in the "belly" of the instrument, but there is one hole each in the left and right sides of the box and one in the "front" (the side to which the "ears" are attached). The fourth side, represented by the bottom line in the drawing, is held against the player's body. The "reeds" are plucked by the thumbs only, while the hands hold the instrument and shake it up and down, thus causing the metal wires and the pebbles to produce a rattling sound. This, of course, opens up the welcome possibility of creating cross-rhythms between the shaking and the plucking.

There are 9 reeds — long and narrow metal tongues (or, as one of my schoolboys described them in a musical essay, "slender irons"). The tuning is pentatonic, extending roughly from E below middle-C to the C above it. I have numbered the reeds in the drawing and the approximate pitches that go with the numbers are as follows:

1-E, 2-G, 3-A, 4-c, 5-d, 6-e, 7-g, 8-a, 9-c'.

This is only an approximation. Reed No. 2 in particular is so sharp as to be almost a G-sharp instead of a G. But I am not at all sure that this is deliberate. The instrument has been in my friend's possession for some time and while he has done a good deal of experimenting with it, he is not himself a kondi player. So I think it is more than likely that there may have been some slipping of pitch. On the other hand, I do not think that there can be any doubt about the pentatonic plan. As I told you in my last letter, the instrument appears to be used in Sierra Leone by the Lokko (or Loko) and Limba tribes only.



There does seem to be a fundamental difference in plucking habits between Sierra Leoneans and Central African players. If a Sierra Leonean is confronted with tongues or blades pointing *towards* him he will *not* use his thumbs for plucking. We have for instance a bigger instrument called *kongoma* used by the Mende and Temne tribes, consisting of a wooden box with three metal blades fixed over a sound hole. The *kongoma* is held in such a way that the free end of the blades points towards the player, but he will use only the *index finger* of his right hand in plucking them, while the left hand is engaged in beating out a different rhythm against the "front" of the box. For want of a better term I seem to use the word "front" whenever I am talking about the side facing *away* from the player. So to come back now to our little *kondi* it is this "front" that is held by the player's hands and fingers other than thumbs, while the thumbs turn towards the player and pluck the tongues which are pointing away from him. It should be remembered that the "back" is held against the player's body, so between his hands and his body the little instrument is easily balanced.

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From A. M. JONES.

I have finished writing my book on the Indonesia-Africa evidence, but am faced with the problem

of finding a publisher. I've had no link with the Clarendon Press and at present the MS is being considered in Holland; meanwhile I keep my fingers crossed. The galling thing is that I cannot possibly present the detailed evidence in lectures — the only way to present it is in book form.

The book has about 200 pages of foolscap double-spread typescript and 66 pictures and a map.

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From DR. JOHN CARRINGTON.

Independence brought considerable troubles to us in the Oriental Province. We had to evacuate all our women and children and, as reports of the mutiny of the Congolese army down-river began to reach us, the British Vice-Consul in Stanleyville advised all the men to leave as well. I went to Leopoldville for three weeks to get information from our headquarters in Congo and was able to get back to Yakusu before the end of August and managed to live there — alone for some of the time and then later on with some medical colleagues — though deprived of my usual missionary jobs which had been taken over by African colleagues. Because of the pronounced anti-white feeling engendered by political activity in the Stanleyville area, we had to be careful and try to stay in the background. You will realise that such an attitude on the part of Africans is not conducive to research in musicology! Indeed, I was informed by our pastor in Stanleyville that a legal complaint was being made by some government officials against me because they said I had been responsible for stirring up strife between two villages by inflammatory messages on my personal talking-gong! Nothing came of this, fortunately.

At the moment the young Congolese seem to want to pursue everything European, and show their displeasure at attempts to encourage Congolese art and language. There used to be at least one period a week in the secondary school devoted to African Language and Culture. This has been banished from the time-table. I hope it is only a passing phase and that our educational leaders will begin to see the folly of this. But just now, as you will realise, it is not easy to make observations and encourage interest in "things Congolese". However, I am hoping soon to get on with the investigation I spoke of earlier into the little "Talking-whistle" used by the Topoke people, some of whom we have in school here at Yalembe.

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From GERHARD KUBIK, Missao S. Jose de Mitúcue, Mocambique.

I arrived in Portuguese East Africa on the 4th October and immediately started recording. Looking back through my new field cards I see that it was only on the 6th that I could not record anything; I was waiting for a lift in a car but on all the other five days since the 4th I have recorded traditional music.

At the moment I am at a Catholic Mission about 20 kms. north of Nova-Freixo. The Lomwe Alomwe people here, a sub-tribe of the Makua Amakua have very interesting music for the log-xylophone and also the mbira. Even the vocal music in this part of Mocambique is very original and not influenced by European music as I so often found in Nyasaland.

The log-xylophone, called *Manguilo* by the Lomwe Alomwe people, usually has 11 keys (other informants say 16), and is constructed in almost exactly the same way as the *Amadinda* of Buganda, only the sticks separating the keys, which are pressed into the two banana stalks, are rather shorter here. Four musicians play the *Manguilo*, two against two, opposite each other.

The music, however, has its own peculiar construction, and does not resemble any Uganda xylophone playing.

I shall give you more information about it, when I have heard the old men playing, who taught the young boys whom I recorded at this Mission yesterday. These people are living on top of a very rocky mountain range, and the boys have already agreed to lead me up there in a five hours walk.

The *Mbira* here is a little like the Rhodesian type, but simpler, having only 7 keys. I recorded it yesterday in the Mission here and the day before yesterday, near Nova Freixo (*Ashirima*-sub-tribe). They call the *Mbira*, *Chitata*, *Sbitata* or *Sitata* in the different regions. What is also interesting is that the Rhodesian technique of playing it (with right thumb and right index plus left thumb) is found here as well.

I made a discovery some thirty miles along the road to Mecanhelas from Milange, the Portuguese border post. People in a shop where I was waiting many hours for a lift, told me there were xylophone musicians living nearby, only three kilometers from the road. So I left my luggage in the shop and walked with tape-recorder and camera to that place. What I found was surprising — a trough xylophone which was called *Mambira*. It was a 17-key heptatonic xylophone. In German we call such a type of xylophone *Trogxylophon*.

I, personally, see it for the first time in Africa. (The man had definitely made it from local wood, and he told me the name of it). It would be interesting to hear whether a "trogylophon" has been seen elsewhere in Africa, as I know it is also found in Indonesia.

As far as I can judge from only one week's work, I find the region very interesting and the Administrator of Nova Freixo, in particular, is very helpful to me as we both speak French.

A great problem for me when doing research in North Mocambique is the language, since I do not

know Portuguese. At some places it is almost impossible to collect information about the music, even if you get an interpreter, because the interpreter can only translate into Portuguese. If I ever come back to Mocambique it will be very essential first to learn this language.

On the other hand I have at last met some Africans who speak a little Kiswahili, and on them most of my information relies. The Kiswahili-speaking people in North Mocambique are mostly Mohammedans and usually very friendly to me.

Among Europeans I find more who know French than English: Concerning interpretation the Mission where I stay at present is the best place so far. The Superior, an Italian father, is very helpful and is doing real *work* with me. I owe it to him that the field cards of my recordings yesterday are really complete, and more than that. The name of this father is Father P. Ferrero Domenico, and he has translated all titles, etc., for me into French.

Father Domenico was very surprised when I arrived at his Mission. He has been here since 1940 but he says that so far no ethnologist or musicologist has been in this region, and no recordings seem to have been made in North Mocambique, I do not even think private ones. That is what administrators usually tell me. So it seems, I start here from the beginning.

I am having trouble with my tape-recorder. More and more I see how essential it is for an ethnomusicologist to be a recording engineer as well.

10th October, 1962.

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From GERHARD KUBIK, Karonga, Nyasaland.

I have received your letter from the 19th October, which you had sent to Vila Cabral and I am very happy about the discussion on music of North Mocambique, which you have started.

Meanwhile, as you see from the top of this letter, I am now at the Northern end of Nyasaland at Karonga on the Lake, after having left Mocambique on the 9th of this month.

In the five weeks during which I could do research in Northern Mocambique, much has happened, about which I am extremely happy. With the letter of the Portuguese Consul, your letter, the letter of the Witerwatersrand University, and a letter by my own Embassy in Nairobi, I found the greatest help and all possible facilities from the Portuguese authorities, including transport! It is due to this help that I could cover in the five weeks a comparatively large area, and not only make recordings along the main road, where even in Northern Mocambique little can be found.

I thought it would be good for anybody who intends to do further research there, to draw a map, marking all the places where I have recorded and studied the music and the people. And such a map you will find in this letter. You will see that places are marked from the South-western end of the territory to Rovuma river in the North East. Those marked with stronger crosses are places where I found music of special importance. One of them is where I found the trough xylophone. Another one is on the top of the Mitúcue Mountain range, which I climbed with my rucksack on my back and the tape-recording machine in my hand-bag.

In the mountain villages they use log xylophones, the music of which (although much simpler than the xylophone music of the South) was of enough interest for me to make a film of it in slow motion, from which I will transcribe.

There is also some very fine vocal music on this mountain, sung by women. Since the people over there are Muslims their music has, so far, not been disturbed by any songs of the nearby Catholic Mission.

I shall be sending you from Vienna plenty of information about music in North Mocambique together with tapes but for now I just would like to mention some general characteristics:

The music of the following three sub-tribes of the large Makua tribe: the Alomue, the Ashirimu and the Ameto show very strong Arabic influence. I have recorded many songs there in Arabic or Kiswahili. In your letter you wrote that you are astonished to hear that Kiswahili is spoken as far south as the area of Nova Freixo (Cuamba). The reason for this is the dominance of Islamic religion there, which seems to have been introduced by Waswahili from Tanganyika. Nevertheless, there are also many pure African dances, which I preferred to record.

Quite different from Makua music is the music of the Wamakonde and Wandonde in the North East. You will know that this is the only place in East Africa where one can find a rich sculpture. (It is already highly commercialised, with nothing genuine anymore.) And the music surprised me. It is different from anything I have heard in East Africa. If I had heard the recordings without knowing from where it came, I would have said it was the Congo. You find typical rhythmic combinations and even tunes which I remember from recordings of the Congo I have heard. And moreover, mask dances. I have filmed such a dance and I only hope that the film will be alright. The dancers had masks showing the heads of animals.

There are many more features in the music and culture of the Wamakonde and more even the Wandonde, which reminds one extremely of the Southern Congolese. I think I shall be talking with you about this from Vienna, when all the photographs are developed and the recordings ready to be sent to you. Then there will be a very good basis for discussion. I only wish to emphasize here that, what I have said in the above two paragraphs are statements from observations. I have not said the Wamakonde and Wandonde have migrated from Congo or West Africa. This I better leave to others.

You ask in your letter about a generic name for the little Mbira in Northern Mocambique. I have made a number of recordings on that instrument there, which at all places except *Chitambo*, near Milange, was constructed in the Rhodesian way, only simpler. The instrument was attached on a gourd resonator and had usually 7 or 8 reeds made of the ribs of an umbrella (a material used commonly for the Mbira in Southern Tanganyika). The players had "Sections" to play, that means the different fingers were restricted to a definite range. And unlike Tanganyika they played with the thumb of the left hand, the thumb of the right hand and the right index which plucked the metal prongs in an upward movement. On the gourd there was usually attached a rattling material from Cowrie shells, metal pieces, fruit kernels or other materials. (I shall send you drawings and photographs.)

It seems that the name generally understood in the areas of North Mocambique where I recorded is *Shitata* or *Chitiatia*. This is a short list, giving you the names of the Mbira in North Mocambique.

Name of Instrument	Place (where recorded)	TRIBE
CHITIATIA ... ..	Namaua, near Mueda ... ..	Wamakonde
SHITATA ... ..	Mitúcue-Mountains, near Nova Freixo ... ..	Alomue and Ashirima
CHITIATIA ... ..	Nachomba, near Mocimboa do Rovuma ... ..	Wamakonde
CHITATA ... ..	Murmela (10 km southwest of Nova Freixo)	Ashirima
BANGWE ... ..	Chitambo, near Milange ... ..	Cuabo

You can see from this list that the names used in Northern Mocambique are similar over a wide area, but different from Tanganyika (*Malimba*), Southern Africa (*Mbira*) and Congo (*Likembe*).

It is very interesting that the name Bangwe which is usually applied for the board zither (Nyasaland) was applied to the Mbira near Milange by a Cuabo man. And his trough xylophone he called *Mambiral* (The Wandonde call the board zither *Bango*).

It is interesting that you found a xylophone over a box in Northern Rhodesia. The form of "my" trough xylophone is already developed and I will be glad to send you a good print from Vienna, where Mr. Hillegeist, whom I introduced to you, will print them all for me (as well as his own from British East Africa and Mocambique).

I am now in a hurry to go north, because I am not feeling very well. I had malaria again in Northern Mocambique and it was the most terrible one I had so far. For a couple of days I was absolutely exhausted.

One year and four months doing very hard research in Africa is perhaps just the time limit. It would be bad if I would fall sick seriously, which might even have consequences for other trips in the coming years.

I wish to stop in Tabora, where there is a blind school. It is possible that I find traditional musicians there.

Next stop will be Kampala and then north in a straight line. I very much would like to be at home by Christmas.

Perhaps this short report will give you at least some impression of my travelling north so far and I really look forward with great pleasure for the coming months in Vienna, where I can work very well on the collected material. I will write to you again from Sudan.

20th November, 1962.

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From GERHARD KUBIK.

I am happy that just before leaving Uganda, I could make some new recordings of a great Musoga singer, WAISWA LUBOGO, who is blind, and whom I brought hitch-hiking from the Foundation for the Blind to his parents. (His mother had not seen him for a year, and I very much thought that it was a similar case to mine!). After having reached Waiswa's home, where I was received with great friendliness, I started to record in the region. (It is near Kaliro, south of Lake Kyoga). And I made even a short study of EMBAIRE-xylophone playing; because there were two Embaire-bands in the village. All was very encouraging to me and about Basoga music particularly for Budongo I know quite something now. One thing I definitely found about the tuning: it is always pentatonic but in the intervals from day to day or from week to week *not* constant. Even the best musicians, who tuned their instruments carefully before starting to play, used a slightly different tuning on different days. The tuning of *Waiswa's* instrument I have recorded three times and it always was "a little different". But I am also sure that the Basoga Budongo players (at least all those whom I have recorded in the past three years, and they were quite many from many regions) do *not* like to tune the octaves *completely pure*. They love a slightly dissonant effect in the tuning of the octave. I intend to write an article about Basoga music soon and here, I will then give all the references.

From Busoga I hitch-hiked north and stayed a day in Dokolo Catholic Mission, near Lira. There I recorded two KUMAN-musicians playing the Mbira as well, which they, like the Lango, call *Okembe*. There, again, I could note the great mental and musical difference between Nilotic and Southern Uganda (Bantu) Mbira playing.