

## REVIEWS

GRAHAM HYSLOP has written a Magnificat and Nunc Dimittis (OUP, 1962) set to African melodies for S.A.T.B. It is most welcome to note that composers are turning to the folksong of Africa for musical inspiration of one sort or another and Mr. Hyslop's example is a practical, tasteful and worthwhile piece of composition. Yet I have a complaint about it and a strong one at that. I am disappointed that his harmonization of the melodies is so insipid; the style belongs strictly to that school of twentieth-century English church music which includes composers such as Charles Wood and Herbert Howells. However important this school has been to the resuscitation of Anglican liturgical music its idiom and style is indisputably foreign to anything African. All things considered in this day and age, it is musically wrong to encase an African melody based on one or another of the pentatonic scales with flabby diatonic triads. The original strength and flavour of the melody is quickly removed and one then feels that the composer may as well have chosen a Chinese, Argentinian or what-have-you tune.

My point is borne out when one compares the ways in which Liszt and Bartok have treated Hungarian folk tunes. The scheme for harmonization in this instance should have been worked out from the melody itself even boldly using parallel fourths, fifths and octaves which is characteristic of much African harmony. One receives the impression that Mr. Hyslop came across the tunes concerned and wrote his composition with an ear not yet familiar with the "African sound". But this is a beginning and it will be interesting to see and hear what development will take place in this direction in the music of Mr. Hyslop and other composers of similar bent.

STANLEY GLASSER.

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AFRICAN MUSIC IN GHANA by J. H. KWABENA NKETIA. Pp. 148 including 30 pp. music transcription and 2 maps. Longmans, 1962. 30/-.

(Reprinted with the kind permission of the International African Institute)

This book, says Professor Nketia, is a general introduction to Ghanaian music and a basis for future investigation. He discusses the social setting of musical activity and the occasions on which it is used, types of music and of performing groups, vocal music, melody and harmony, and the rhythm of songs. He includes a very short survey of musical instruments and a bibliography in which the references to Ghanaian music are particularly welcome. There is no index.

While the book contains a lot of informative material, it produces a rather confused effect on the reader, owing partly to the chapter lay-out which prevents the author from handling in the same place, the various aspects of any one topic, and causes repetition, but chiefly to the literary mannerisms — the author adopts an astonishingly complicated way of saying simple things.

As to harmony, the variety of available chords and chordal sequences is surprising — though Professor Nketia in his final summary indicates that as a general rule, people — as elsewhere in Africa — sing either in parallel octaves, fourths and fifths, or in parallel thirds.

In the transcriptions the music is all scored within conventional Western bar-lines; this, while mathematically possible, seems dynamically questionable as it appears largely to disregard the irregular melodic accents described in the text.

But what is most surprising is that the rhythmic aspects of drumming — the exhibition *par excellence* of African musical genius are dealt with in less than one page.

A. M. Jones.

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"THE MUSIC OF CENTRAL AFRICA" by ROSE BRANDEL. Martinus Nijhoff. The Hague. 1961, XII and 272 pp. with 135 pp. of musical examples.

It is, unfortunately, still the conviction of several musicologists that transcribing music from records or tapes without first-hand experience of the originals, is an adequate method of research in African music. Where this leads can be seen from Rose Brandel's recent book. Almost half the pages are covered with diligent transcriptions from records, of which probably not a single one is either adequate or correct. I personally would hesitate to transcribe from a record such a difficult and complex piece as "Irambi" played by the Makondere horn band of the Omukama of Bunyoro. But Dr. Brandel

is optimistic indeed and so inevitably she becomes the victim of the inherent rhythms which may appear to be heard by the listener but are not played as such by any of the performers.

We have only space in this review to correct one of her transcriptions. The composition named "Katego" (transcribed on page 221) for the *Amadinda* xylophone of the Ganda is very well known to me since I have often played it myself with Ganda musicians. What she transcribes as "Katego" is, in fact, another tune called "Kalagala ebwembe". Fortunately both tunes are equally well known to me.

Dr. Brandel starts well with the Omunazi's part, so long as he plays alone, (though I cannot agree with her bar lines and meter). But as soon as the Omwawuzi starts, she is "off". The transcription does not show which musician plays which part. Most probably Dr. Brandel could not know and could not be expected to know from listening to the record only. Thus the nature of the third part, the *Okukonera*, is completely obscured. This part in her transcription (constantly related to the 3/4 bar scheme) would appear to bring various chords into this *Amadinda* piece, such as seconds, thirds and fourths which in reality do not exist at all in *Amadinda* music.

Worse examples even are her sheets of Ntara xylophone music (page 208) and the Enanga-harp music of Temusewo Mukasa, whom she spells Timuso Mukasa and who, according to her, plays "enonga" (page 218). In the transcription of "The Executioner" nothing at all shows that the hands of the harpist play two interlocking parts, like those played on the *Amadinda*. Instead of this she creates all kinds of "paper" rhythms, which I cannot afford to call "inherent".

One would not criticize her for making these elementary though understandable mistakes, but rather for trying to achieve the impossible and attempting to demonstrate the structure of African music from the analysis of gramophone records alone. The result is highly misleading in almost every case.

For African instrumental music, particularly xylophone and mbira music, a safer method for students who are not able to witness the performances would be to transcribe from ciné films, though naturally the most adequate way for any musicologist is to take lessons in Uganda, Congo or elsewhere from the performers themselves before attempting to transcribe their rather complex techniques.

The following, Fig. I, shows what, in fact, the Kabaka's musicians were playing on the record she analyses. Fig. II shows her own transcription which may prove interesting as an example of the difference between what is actually played by the musicians and what to the listener appears to have been played.

♩ = M M 360

Okukonera 2/4

Okunaga 2/4

Okwawula 2/4

COMPARE FROM HERE UP TO THE END

etc.

etc.

Fig. I

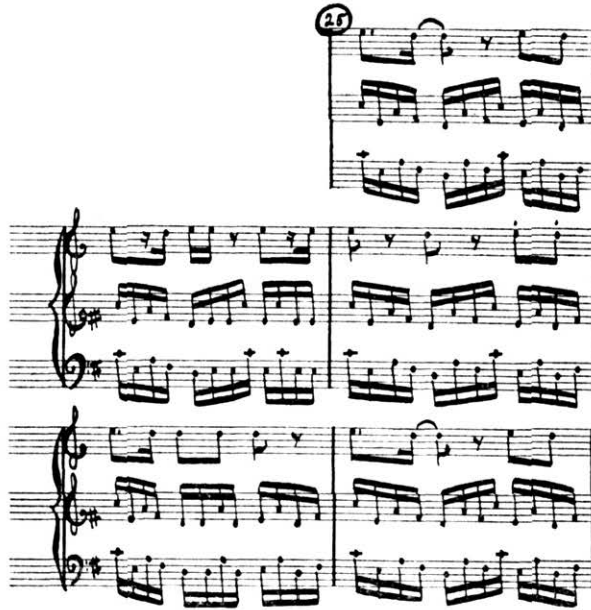


Fig. II

Besides this, she makes another grave mistake in the linguistic field. Her approach to the words of the songs as they are heard on the record is extremely unscientific. In the transcription of vocal music covering a wide field of African languages, she only reproduces the syllables of the supposed words, as they sound to her from the record. The result is a "text" being completely unintelligible, and that to such a degree, indeed, that one has difficulty to find out what language she is transcribing!

For these and several other basic errors of transcription which occur throughout the whole work I can only hope for the sake of accuracy that her book will not be taken as a reliable addition to the understanding of African music. This is all the more regrettable as she has clearly devoted much time and labour in an unprofitable direction, which for this reviewer masks whatever virtues her book might otherwise have had.

Gerhard Kubik.

**Key to the transcription:**

European tempered scale: (for comparison)

C C# D Eb E F F# G Ab A Bb B C

Amadinda scale:



Names of notes (in Luganda):

BA FE KI JO VU BA

Transcribed in staff notation as:

C D E+ G A+ C

V.p.s. (as measured by Hugh Tracey in Kampala, 1952)

172	194	228	260	304	344
	388	456	520	608	688
	776				

Note.—To avoid paper-wasting repetition the entrances of "Okwawula" and "Okukonera" have been transcribed two choruses earlier than on the record. Also a few melodic mistakes happening to the Omunazi at the beginning of his "Okunaga" part in the record have not been reproduced here.