

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/-.

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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