

## LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

From THE REV. DAVID HAWKINS, Trinity College, P.O. Box 97, Umuahia, E. Nigeria.

There is a good deal of research and development going on in Eastern Nigeria. Wilberforce Echezona has made a considerable impact in the Onitsha area, and will, I hope continue to do so from Nsukka. Of the lasting value of his own music I am not certain, but he has certainly started scores of young men on to original composition in a developed Ibo style. I suspect that Ibo Music was less developed than some before contact with Europe, and has undoubtedly seized upon a good deal that is European. The Music now being written by young men could certainly not have been known before, but has an entirely characteristic Ibo nature (much more, for example, than Fela Sowande's would appear to be Yoruba). Some of it is very crude, and some superficial, but there is a good deal which obviously goes quite deep. The counterpoint produced by trial and error in the absence of any principles of harmony is quite astonishing.

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From JOHN BLACKING, University of the Witwatersrand.

In his article on "Venda Note-names" (African Music, 3, 1, p. 49), A. M. Jones maintains that the key-note (phala) of Venda xylophones is pitched approximately a fourth lower than the key-note (phala) of the reed-flutes. In support of his argument, he quotes note-names which he claims that I gave him. Beginning with the highest pitch, he gives them as "Mutwilo, *Kutezwana*, ?, ?, ?, *Thakulana*, PHALANA, *Mpinzhe*, *Phephera*, *Veve*, *Ndzbingi*|*Mbwubuli*, *Tshiaravbi*, *Thakula*, PHALA, *Dangwe*|*Tangwe*, *Kholomo*, *Vevera*, *Ka Mazjika*, *Ka Mazjika*, *Ka Mazjika*."

This is not what I gave him in my letter of May 4th, 1958. I said: "PHALA, the 'Tonic', is usually the third or fourth key from the right of the keyboard and the note which begins many melodies. (The right of the keyboard being the treble, and the left being bass.) Reading down the scale, the other notes are: *Mpinzhe*, *Phephera*" etc. as above. "The 'Tonic' (3 or 4 from the right), is often called PHALANA, and above it are *Thakulana*, *Kutezwana*, and *Mutwilo*."

Why does Dr. Jones insert question-marks for four note-names, about which I was quite specific in my letter?

I can only assume that he wishes to prove something about Venda Music which simply does not exist, as far as I can gather after two years of fieldwork amongst them.

The key-notes (*phala*) of xylophones and reed-flutes may differ by a few vibrations from one area to another, as can be seen in the tunings of xylophones quoted by Professor Kirby of pp. 51-52 of *The Musical Instruments of the Native Races of South Africa*, but they do not differ systematically and respectively by a fourth, as Dr. Jones maintains.

The Venda are careful not to call two different phenomena by the same name. Professor Kirby's list of reed-flute names and pitches (op.cit., p. 157) shows that the key-note (Phala) is approximately B, which agrees with the third or fourth note down the scale of the xylophones he quotes on pp. 51-52, and with those that I myself saw, played, or bought between 1956 or 1958. Moreover, Professor Kirby is doubtful about the names of the reed-flute notes above the key-note (op. cit., p. 157) and makes no categorical claim that this list applies note for note to the xylophone scales he quotes on pp. 51-52, as Dr. Jones maintains.

If Dr. Jones had compared the tenses of the xylophones scales with the note-names of the reed-flutes from the bottom upwards instead of from the top downwards, he would not have had to edit the information I gave him, and introduce a fictitious phenomena into the field of Venda music.

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From W. M. KGWARE, University College of the North, P.O. Box Sovenga, Pietersburg, 4th November, 1963.

Although I am no musician in any sense of that word, I do pride myself on being a lover of music. Please accept my sincerest appreciation of what you have done these many years past to preserve for posterity the indigenous music of Africa and also to foster its appreciation. As you well know, our people are passing through that stage in their evolution to nationhood and maturity when they are striving to absorb the cultural possessions of other peoples and nations whom they regard as their superiors; but I can foresee the dawn of the day when the African people will have developed greater national awareness and pride and will then begin to take greater interest in their traditional arts. Your collections should then prove most useful.

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*From Miss C. VAN OVEN, Sierra Leone.*

I am glad to say that there may soon be some more hope and scope for our work in Sierra Leone. A Sierra Leone Music Society has recently been formed, two of its objects being the exploration of Sierra Leonean Music and the establishment of links with other Music Societies. I have been admitted into this Society and when the Chairman discovered that I had already made contact with Prof. Nketia, Mr. Hyslop and yourself he told me that he would propose me for the job of 'Liaison Officer.' Whether the meeting will accept this I do not know and I do not think it matters very much. The important thing is that the keenness for contact appears to be there. I showed the catalogue of your records to the last meeting and there was general agreement that as soon as subscriptions and other money had begun to come in, some of this money should be spent on a selection of those records. As you know, I have long hoped to buy such a selection for myself but I never seem to have money to spare.

In looking through your new catalogue I was struck by two points on which you may be able to enlighten me. You appear to have an excellent alphabetical code for your 'Sound of Africa' Series, showing the origin and merits of each item, but I understand this code is to be found only on the cards themselves, that is on what the buyer receives after placing his order; at least I could not find it in the list of records. Now the student in Sierra Leone (unless he had enough money to order the whole series in one go!) would probably like to start his collection with 'C' records (Continent-wide interest) rather than 'T' records (Territorial interest only) seeing that all the territories you have so far explored are far from Sierra Leone. So I think it would be a real help to such a small and cautious buyer if the alphabetical code could be incorporated in what he sees before placing his order.

My second point concerns the Music of Africa series. I see that this is being reorganised and I wonder whether this means that the Decca records are no longer available even though the new ones that are to replace them are not yet ready. It is just my luck that all the items that I had provisionally picked from this series are now 'in preparation', and although I myself am not in the running just now the Sierra Leone Music Society might be interested in some of these records.

As that Society has only just been born it is too early to say yet how things will develop. Some of our people will obviously have to be trained in field research and recording and I feel that both Prof. Nketia and yourself could give us some very valuable advice there. On the other hand, copies of whatever we do record and details of whatever we discover will obviously be available to you and to other centres of research so that we may get a real continent-wide co-operation. Whether we could ever arrange a recording tour of yourself up here I dare not say as I am not in a position to make such big and expensive decisions, but I for one should certainly like to see you and discuss all sorts of things with you. In any case, let us hope for a fruitful collaboration of these two Music Societies and musicians in other parts of Africa too; I feel sure that we can all be of some use to one another.

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