

## ZANDE HARP MUSIC

Observations on  
 "Harp Music of the Azande and Related Peoples in the Central African Republic"  
 by G. Kubik (African Music, Volume III No. 3, 1964)

by

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This article by Kubik is a very well-done study on the only tonality of Zande harp that he could hear. It is a pity that he cannot give the readers a complete idea of the "pathos" of this instrument that impressed so much the first explorers who came to Zande land.

The physical part of this study is very interesting, on the way in which the instrument *kundi* can be made. I did not have either the patience or the time to dedicate myself to such study. I first met this instrument in November 1926. I was interested in the nostalgic sound and the pathetic tune of *Kundi*, besides its gay sounds, more than I was interested in its making.

I met Kpiázá the great artist of this instrument, but he certainly did not invent it, if Carlo Piaggia could have heard it in 1863 and Schweinfurth in 1870. Kpiázá (according to the method used in the schools in Sudan, his name is written like that or Kpyázá according to the pronunciation found in his songs) thought that the *Kundi* must be played vertically: for this reason it was called also *sagiru*, that is: turn (*sa*) its (*ru*) back (*gi*) to the player.

*Kundi* comes from the ancient word *kundbi* and means: *Ku* (pure, simple) *ndbi* (to play, to be happy); that is: pure enjoyment.

The term 'nzanginza' is used by the Auro, that is the real non-Azande. It is a word derived from *nza-nzaga* used to strengthen the word *nzanga* = to be made; and in this case it means "to be mad out of happiness."<sup>2</sup>

Now in Sudan *kundi* and *sagiru* are still played by a few old people. The young generation who played the instrument horizontally, prefer to play, now, *sanzu* or *nakurungba* or *mukanga* or *rikembe*, or *mbira*, which has more notes and is called *kundi* because it has the same re-creative air.

This article by Kubik is a good one, even if I don't agree with some of his ideas. I don't agree with "Flattening of the E for up to a quarter tone usual with Azande harp players, in singing too." (page 44.)

During the 38 years that I spent among the Azande, I have noticed that not all of them sing in the proper tone.<sup>3</sup>

Anyway, the group notes of which he talks: *mi, re, do, la, sol* (from high to low) is a "narrow" 13th (I don't know the technical term for this!)<sup>4</sup> — a *sestiade* (7th) reduced to a *quintiade* (5th) playing the role of a 13th. Such a rich "accordo" can afford any flattening of *mi* (E) if someone can do it.

On page 50 he writes: "Nothing like free improvisation . . . can be found in Azande harp music." I am surprised that after only a few weeks spent among people who were not Zande but simply influenced by Zande culture, he dares to formulate opinions about Azande music. Kpyázá was able to improvise. At the moment in Sudan there is Zangamo, a great artist of *kundi*, who when he hears our symphonies from the records, is able to reproduce them on the *kundi*. These are the artists one should meet and not young boys. The real artists are as rare as they are among us.

Towards the end of page 53 he says: "No triades are played on the harp or sung."<sup>5</sup>

He claims that it is "pentatonic" music and, then, he cannot explain the "accordo di nono" about which he writes on page 51 from line 20 onwards. It is not a matter of "heterophonic dissonance" but it is the natural effect of the drum and the xylophone of the Azande.

If, on the contrary, we consider five notes as a "13th", as I think it to be, everything is easily explained. In this was:

<sup>1</sup> Translated from the original Italian by Silvano Meryckz.

<sup>2</sup> In Kiaranga (Rhodesia) the term used to indicate brilliant playing of the Mbira is "Kupenga nadzo" — "to be mad with 'the notes' or 'instrument'." Editor.

<sup>3</sup> *Musica Africana*, Bologna, 1957, page 48.

<sup>4</sup> Op. cit. Page 94.

<sup>5</sup> Kpyaza's song op. cit. page 29.

## EXAMPLE I.

In I "A" I used the African "accordi". In I "B" I used the African "accordi" adapted to the piano, introducing and connecting the basic accord with the lateral one.<sup>6</sup>

One can demonstrate that it is like that by playing and singing at the same time the score N.1 and N.2 (tuning "en anglais") and one would reach the effect of a xylophone in the background and of a sound supported by the wooden drum (*gugu*) of the Azande. In order to realize that the famous five notes, erroneously considered "pentatonic", are in reality an accord in 13th,<sup>7</sup> where I use an accompaniment of the *kundi* type.

The term "Tuning en anglais" must be one that is used in Central African Republic; in Sudan I never heard it.

About the music on *kundi* that I collected,<sup>8</sup> Between page 24 and 25 there is a photograph of Kpyázá, the great artist of *kundi* (the editor erroneously wrote *Jangara*). These songs by Kpyázá have the same tone of the 15 scores of musics written by Kubik, that is in *Do* and *Sol*. (*Do* without "accidentals" is in the "Gruppo Modale" of *sol* for African music.)

"Song of Kpyázá" (but not the accompaniment, which is for the piano) on page 71, with *re, do, la, sol, fa* tones (always from high to low) in the first musical period; and *re, do, sib, sol, fa* in the second one; all in the model group of *do* (that in African music has a flat in the key).

Another song on page 90 with tonality *mi, do, si, la, fa*, which is the reverse of *fa, mi, do, si, la*; a 13th based on *la* and always in the model group of *sol* (that for the Africans is without accidentals). A nostalgic accompaniment of *kundi* on page 106 in tonality of *mi<sup>b</sup>, re, do, le<sup>b</sup>, sol*, based on *sol* in correlation with *si<sup>b</sup>*.<sup>9</sup> With this very beautiful cord of 13th diminished with 9th, one can accompany the first half of the "Funeral March" by Chopin. Another tonality that I find in my notes: *La, Sol, Mi<sup>b</sup>, Re, Do*, which is the reverse of *Mi<sup>b</sup>, Re, Do, La, Sol*; a 13th based on *Sol* in Pathetic Minor, of the model group of *Fa*.

I write here three tunes on the *kundi*, but only the accompaniment as at that time I did not know the Zande language at all — that I collected in November 1926 after I heard them during the night from the porters of my personal luggage on my first journey to the jungle.

## EXAMPLE II.

A minor 7th diminished that can be based on *Sol* and on *Re* or *Fa*.

## EXAMPLE III.

A chord of 10th based on Major Tonality of *Do* (that in African music has a flat in the key).

<sup>6</sup> Op. cit. Page 50, simple essential accords.

<sup>7</sup> See my "Canto Popolare Zande per la Pasqua e Altre Feste." Editor: Nigrizia, Bologna.

<sup>8</sup> "Musica Africana" from page 24 to 29.

<sup>9</sup> On these correlations of tonality, see my op. cit. Chapter V. The tonal systems — Page 103-116.

## EXAMPLE IV.



The tonality of this song is nothing but the reverse of *Sol, Fa, Mi, Re, Do*; they would practically form a chord of 11th based on Lyric Major *Do*, of the model group of *Sol*.<sup>10</sup>

I add another tonality that I heard from the great artist Kpyázá:

## EXAMPLE V.

$\text{♩} = 80$

Canto

Kundi: Gi. ni pe-ro sungu asungo gbuá wa ká, ka sunguri kpyaza?

*Literal translation:* "What person is it who sits and sits without doing anything and then blames Kpyázá?"

## EXAMPLE VI.



It is a chord of 11th with 9th diminished if based on *Si* (with four dieses in key); it is a 13th diminished if based on *Mi* (with three dieses in the key).

These are the tonalities that probably moved Piaggia, Schweinfurth, Miani, Casati, Junker and Potago and other pioneers.

At the end of page 57 Kubik writes *Mama in e*. There are not English influences as it literally means "Leopard in the water" or "Spirit of the water."<sup>11</sup>

<sup>10</sup> For the explanation of these terms see op. cit. Page 45, 46, 47 and Dr. Bro Basil in "African Music's" Journal.

<sup>11</sup> See, on this point, F. Gero's "Zande Superstitions", Bologna, 1966. Nos. 98, 99, 100, 101, 102.