

REVIEWS

CODIFICATION OF AFRICAN MUSIC AND TEXTBOOK PROJECT: A PRIMER OF PRACTICAL SUGGESTIONS FOR FIELD RESEARCH, by HUGH T. TRACEY with GERHARD KUBIK and ANDREW T. N. TRACEY (International Library of African Music, 1969). 54 pp. paperback. \$3.00 £1.15 R2.00.

This is a book both practical and idealistic, the voice of a field collector speaking of the techniques of his trade and calling for a "comprehensive statement in both written and recorded form of the whole phenomenon of African music throughout the continent" south of the Sahara.

The proposal is simple. Teams of experts from universities in Africa and abroad are to do the field research and file reports which will be distributed to all participating groups. With the help of these reports a multi-volume "Tome" will be compiled and distributed by the International Library of African Music at Rodepoort, just outside Johannesburg, South Africa, the coordinating agency which Hugh Tracey directs. From the data of the "Tome" the editors of I.L.A.M. will prepare general textbooks on African music, and, from these, "particular textbooks suited to each African territory can eventually be issued by their own official Education departments, at their own discretion" (p. 30).

The time allotted for this achievement, from fielding the first research team to completing the last of the general textbooks, is 10 years. The goal is that "from the study of the basic performance data an understanding should gradually be gained by Afro-musicologists of the all-important African musical values at the national, and eventually at the Africa-wide level" (p. 28).

The presentation is in three parts. The middle section ("Local Organization and Methods of Research") is full of technical advice based upon years of experience and extremely useful to all but the most seasoned collector. Tracey is at his best in these pages, for he knows a great deal and presents it clearly and persuasively. In almost every paragraph, furthermore, he shows his awareness of the actual field situation.

Perhaps less than satisfactory in this section are his remarks on tuning (pp. 23-26). Tracey has for many years concerned himself with the problem of African intonation. To be sure, it is an immense problem, compounded of endless variety and elusive concepts. He hardly forwards research into this area, however, with his proposal (p. 25) to standardize tunings at the "local, language-group or territorial level." Furthermore, it seems surprisingly narrow to dismiss as "arbitrary or indefinite" (p. 23) pitches produced by winds and stopped strings just because they are not rigidly fixed and conveniently measured as are those of xylophones and mbiras. The tunings of melody he would pass over in favour of the tunings of instruments.

Much of what appears in this central section has appeared before over Dr. Tracey's signature. The massive research proposal of the first and third sections, however, is new. Behind this proposal lies the conviction of a man who has championed Africa musical genius all his life; who was making fine recordings and fine films long before the subject of his interest was taken seriously by more than a few people. If the articulate Africans of today are slow to acknowledge his help, they must at least admit that their self-confidence and self-assurance are new-found.

Several things about Tracey's proposal could only come from a man sympathetic to the African creative process, from someone who wants to see growth in the indigenous music of the continent. He calls for a full team of experts rather than for a lone musicologist, to record the full musical event rather than just its sound. He wants terminology and notational systems developed which are suited to African music and comprehensible to African musicians. He would have the musicologist perform the music he studies, and refrain from comparing what he hears to other musics until the nature of each African expression is fully understood and appreciated in its own right. He would study the construction of instruments so that more could be made and thus more African music taught in Africa.

The most militant African could hardly fault any of these ideas. It is in their implementation that opposition develops. The black intellectual cannot accept a project run from South Africa, first of all. And he is not enthusiastic about research teams that will be predominantly white and western (which is certainly not stated in so many words in this book, but is implied throughout and inescapable at the present moment in any case). Perhaps, too, some of the opposition arises not out of the race issue, but out of the egocentrism natural to our profession and its institutions.

Whatever the cause, there has been an unfortunate lack of constructive criticism out of which a viable approach to our present need might develop. African musical research should start moving forward in a more coherent manner toward some such goal as Tracey suggests. If Hans Hickman did about all one could expect a scholar to do when he summed up our field for MGG, then something like Tracey's plan is overdue.

Of course, we can simply agree not to try to build our individual experiences and insights into a body of knowledge. Philip Peck has rightly questioned why the African needs the musicologist at all if the aim of Tracey's project is to forward the musical instruction of Africans in African musical performance. True enough, Africans have been doing that job for themselves for centuries; but in the face of the power and prestige associated with Westerners and things Western, the thrust of indigenous musical training has weakened. Indeed, among the middle-aged who now run Africa, a great many can be

found who grew up with their faces toward Europe, their backs turned upon their own cultures. Tracey's long-standing effort to associate Westerners with African music is psychologically shrewd and probably as effective a reinforcement of the art as anything one could think of.

But the development of African musicians is only one of the aims of the codification project, and so it will not suffice to establish schools "in which Africans as well as musicologists would learn from master musicians" as Peek suggests (1970, p. 505). Tracey also wants to discover "the practical basis of the music" (p. 6), by which he means knowing about it as well as knowing how to play it. How can this be done if not as he suggests?

First we should eliminate the continental approach. For some reason Africa has always been treated as if it were a single entity, its variety a matter of surprise. No one dares combine into one generalization the cultures of Europe, the Middle East, the polar regions, India, Tibet, Southeast Asia and the Far East; yet such attempts are typical of writings on Africa. To suggest that there is an African music is like suggesting there is an African pigmentation or an African political system. Tracey's project would be more realistic, in other words, if it were Balkanized.

This would suit the political realities of the continent as well as its cultural diversity. We may look to the eventual establishment of regional research projects, but the logical and practical starting point is the individual national government and its universities. At this level there can be some realistic approaches and solutions to financing and organizing the research. I.L.A.M. has not offered to fund the project, and cannot do so, in fact. It therefore cannot expect to direct it, and for very practical reasons it should not try to do so, as I shall explain.

But has not Tracey done just this? Has he not simply called upon the individual universities to start working on their own? No, in two important ways he has gone further than this. First, his is a call to submit to centralized control. All reports go to I.L.A.M. for editing and distribution. All recordings are evaluated for publication by I.L.A.M. Further, I.L.A.M. is to write the "Tome" out of the knowledge and attitudes of its editors as well as that of those who have filed their reports. And I.L.A.M. will write the textbooks which are to guide the various ministries of education in meeting their local needs.

This structure is not congenial to the scholar; it lacks appeal for the politician; and it is not a desirable approach to research, in any case. Our present rudimentary knowledge of music in Africa can only benefit from the new approaches, assumptions and insights which a *lack* of central authority will encourage.

Which brings us to the second aspect of Tracey's proposal that puts it beyond a simple call to action: the Codification project promotes a single structure of assumptions and conclusions. For example, it assumes at the outset that there is such a thing as an African music; clues and scraps of evidence suggesting the contrary are apt to be smothered. It assumes that the research team should come from outside the culture under study; they will judge on their own terms what items deserve inclusion in the reported sample, and will even influence these samples ("... criterion for the duration of recordings would be the intrinsic musical value of an item, and performers should be encouraged to conclude their item within such limits . . ." p. 30). It is hard not to feel that "codification" means "selecting for a white audience."

There are other less sweeping assumptions, such as the consistent undervaluing of the visual record (which is surprising in view of Tracey's own vision as a cameraman). The research team he proposes does not include an artist, and there is no mention of television. Another surprising blind spot seems to be dance, for there is no dancer on the team, which is like expecting the driver-mechanic to naturally be able to do the musicological work. My point here is not so much to criticise Tracey's particular bias as to point out that any central direction will impose its bias, and that this kind of direction has no place in research.

Tracey's call to action is timely, and we should move. He has a wealth of expertise to offer those who respond, and should be prominent in the effort. Knowledgeable scholars black and white who are in the positions of authority and influence can not allow our discipline to inch along on the happenstances of individual grants and leaves of absence without inviting a charge upon themselves more serious than that of bias.

HEWITT PANTALEONI.

References:

HANS HICKMAN: "Afrikanische Musik", *Die Musik in Geschichte und Gegenwart*, Vol. 1 (1949-51) cols. 123-131.

PHILIP PEEK, review of *Codification*, in *Ethnomusicology*, Vol. XV, no. 3 (Sep. 1970) pp. 504-507.

Here follows an exchange of letters between the reviewer and the editor:

To: Mr. HEWITT PANTALEONI,

I much appreciate the positive things you have said about the Codification book and also your remark about black African reaction to the centre of the initiative. I also abhor some of the readings which you have made of various parts!

It is *not* implied throughout that research teams will be predominantly white. What is perhaps implied is that workers in a scheme of this nature, whose scale of concept and implementation is obviously western, will be working under a more western than African rationale in the overall concept of the thing, but definitely not in their approach to the music itself.

I disagree completely that there is no such thing as "African music". Looked at from outside Africa I do not see how you can deny that many features of African musics from one end of black Africa to the other are quite cohesive and also quite significantly different from any other part of the world. Looked at from the inside, however, there are obviously enormous differences in aesthetics as well as in actual practice. I am always quick to ascribe political reasons to statements about Africa but I am at a loss to think what good reason you can have for this.

As you say, "The practical and logical starting point is the individual national government and its universities". This is exactly what we said. We are only volunteering to do a lot of the donkey work for them.

Sixth para. from the end: Since when has the possession of funds been an indication of intellectual, moral or leadership ability?

Fifth para. from the end: The choice of editors for each section of any publication is not discussed in the codification book, which I think was a pity. I think that in most cases it should obviously be the people who know the most about the subject, i.e. those who have worked on it themselves in the countries concerned. The main purpose of the general editorship of the I.L.A.M. is to ensure uniformity of style, presentation, what you will. Of course, it would also be possible for every researcher to publish his own book, in his own way, in his own style, but while I would never suggest tampering with anybody's approach to the subject, I do feel that a certain unification is necessary, perhaps merely the unification of several contributions inside one cover, such as Wachsmann's *Essays on African Music and History*.

I do not think that it says anywhere that the I.L.A.M. will write the textbooks. It is plain common sense that only somebody with a personal knowledge of a country, and also acceptable to its education department, could write textbooks for its schools. The codification book has to be read with this kind of common sense in mind the whole time.

Third para. from the end: Isn't there some of your white American guilt coming out here? The last sentence in this para. seems to reveal something very ambivalent in your attitude towards our motive, maybe also in your attitude to your own work. The codification project is entirely directed towards Africa, incidentally to American Negroes, and only peripherally towards the white scholars and musicians who happen to like the music.

ANDREW TRACEY.

To: Mr. ANDREW TRACEY,

(1) "white". If you want to substitute "western", I'll go along: the research teams will be predominantly western. How can you expect to have a "scale of concept" and "implementation" and "rationale" that are western, but not be western "in (the) approach to the music itself"? If only western questions are asked, the approach is western.

(2) "African music": since when is Africa only Black Africa? Point two: there is no detailed basis yet established for your assessment that the "enormous difference in aesthetics . . . (and) actual practice" that you know exists within Black Africa is nonetheless not so different that any part of it sounds more like the musical practice of some other part of the world than it does like the practice of Africa. Certainly not vocal timbre. Call and response structure? No. Polyphonic drum rhythms? Not a pan-African characteristic. Etc., etc. It is, also, far more helpful to the practice of good scholarship that your conclusion be voided until forced upon us. For if we accept the conclusion, we bend the research.

(3) Starting with the Governments and universities: the "donkey work" I.L.A.M. offers to do seems, some of it, to be substantive and interpretive. Hence my view of your role is not quite yours. Perhaps, however, I.L.A.M. would not insist that the textbooks be written using the tome as the guide.

(4) Money. The possession of funds is, I agree, no indication of "intellectual, moral or leadership ability". Just the same, he who pays the piper calls the tune, which was all I was saying. The psychology of funding deserves your very close and critical attention, as it will absorb the African.

(5) My whole point is that the codification is for Africans primarily, as your father says: IT IS A BLACK TOME, in other words. It is not to adorn my library and be appreciated by musicologists trained at Harvard like myself. Therefore you have to divest yourself of the assumption that what Jones wants to say is what the African needs to hear. I do not mean to come on big fat and racist. I just want to emphasize this sneaky bit about assumptions and points of view. Your words about the western scale and rationale, etc., etc., give me pause.

HEWITT PANTALEONI.

To: Mr. HEWITT PANTALEONI,

"Westernism" in this project exists to the extent that the results of codification will be applied to the system of school education itself, which is largely western in origin and practice, and will probably remain so in most African countries; also in the use of standard comparative musicological and other

scientific techniques. Must this amount of westernism make the whole scheme west-serving? All through we tried to stress the paramount importance of African values, and of practical application in Africa. I agree with you absolutely that the codification is for Africans primarily, and also that we have to be careful lest westerners introduce irrelevancies or false assumptions based on lack of understanding of the true needs of the situation.

ANDREW TRACEY.

GRUNDPHÄNOMENE UND GRUNDBEGRIFFE DES AFRIKANISCHEN UND AFRO-AMERIKANISCHEN TANZES. (Basic phenomena and concepts of the African and Afro-American dance) by HELMUT GÜNTHER, Universal Edition, Graz 1969.

It is rather unnerving to a non-participant to find that such joyous and spontaneous motions as those of African and Afro-American dancing lend themselves to such meticulous, and even pedestrian, analysis. The dance as Günther sees it is no "wit's offspring and the work of art Image of concord and of comeliness"; it is a combination of carefully-specified bodily movements, a matter of buttock and knee, shake of breast, rotation of pelvis, walk, run, jump; polycentric motion implying bending of the upper body, tapping of toe, ball or heel of foot as contrasting allocation of the weight, employment of the knee "consciously and actively as a technical device" (*bewusst und aktiv als technisches Mittel*). One's first surprise that this work should have been entrusted to an anatomist for review falls away, and one would be tempted, did the triviality of the fundamental premises not repel one, to consider it in the first place as an ergonomic study.

Indeed, such value as it does possess lies entirely in its unoriginal but nonetheless competent treatment of the details of bodily motion. The author is at his best when most elementary: the blending of head accents into single swings or rolls, the five directions in which it is possible to thrust the hips, the isolation, in more than one sense, of upper arm, forearm, palm, thumb, fingers and phalanges. His talents appear to lie so emphatically in the treatment of the particular that it is unfortunate that he has so often been impelled to generalize. So frequent are his references to cinematic representations of African dances that one receives the impression that his first-hand knowledge and experience of Africa are probably slight; an impression that is reinforced by such statements as: "No-one can contest the fact that the dance represents the foundation, centre and peak of black African culture" (*Niemand aber kann die Tatsache bestreiten, dass der Tanz Grundlage, Mitte und Gipfel der schwarzafrikanischen Kultur darstellt*) or, referring to the almost agonizing movements of the female breast in some dances, "These motions have possibly also an erotic meaning" (*Diese Motionen haben möglicherweise auch einen erotischen Sinn*). Assertions of this kind, so unblushingly banal in their inaccuracy, abound: Beat, Soul and Pop, on the very first page, do not derive from, but "demonstrate", a "pure African style" (*zeigen rein afrikanischen Stil*): "education in dance, life and sex coincide in Africa" (*Tanz-, Lebens- und Sexualerziehung fallen in Afrika zusammen*): "dance and music in Africa form an indivisible whole" (*Tanz und Musik bilden in Afrika eine untrennbare Einheit*). Can anyone who has actually watched men laugh scornfully and without excitement at the ludicrous flapping on a Sena female torso, who has listened to young men returned from the city compete with their elders on the drums, who has heard the hush of *cinamwali* initiation among the Ntumba or met a solitary *mbira*-player on a lonely path, take any of these statements seriously?

Even the list of references with which the study closes contrives to give a somewhat deadeningly trite impression. The author cites such works of his own as "*Schwarzer Tanz und weisser Traum*" and "*Die Jugend unserer Lokale tanzt afrikanisch*", the very titles of which emphasize the superficial and journalistic in his approach: both, as it happens, appeared in daily newspapers. Of the concluding forty-odd books listed, barely more than half are actually quoted in the text, and the rest are of little, if any, relevance.

What one misses most in Günther's work is any sense of the reality of the dance, any hint that it can be enjoyable to watch or perform. One cannot deny that he shows an interesting analytical ability; but this is not enough in a matter of aesthetics. "Time the measure of all moving is And Dancing is a moving all in measure": in no art can the universal be dismissed with a wiggle of the shoulder-blades, a rude contortion of the abdominal muscles, and a shrug of the knees, however eloquent.

G. T. NURSE.

NEUE MUSIK IN AFRIKA, ASIEN UND OZEANIEN. DISKOGRAPHIE UND HISTORISCH-STILISTISCHER ÜBERBLICK (New music in Africa, Asia and Oceania. Discography and historical and stylistic survey), by WOLFGANG LAADE, published by the author, Heidelberg, 1971.

GEGENWARTSFRAGEN DER MUSIK IN AFRIKA UND ASIEN, eine grundlegende Bibliographie (Contemporary enquiries into the music of Africa and Asia, a basic bibliography), by WOLFGANG LAADE, Verlag Valentin Koerner, Baden-Baden, 1971.

Both of these competent volumes are concerned with the establishment of temporal base-lines for the study of the music of Africa and Asia. As such, they serve a very useful purpose and are of particular value as works of reference. One may quibble at the vastness and lack of strict interrelation of the subjects of the first book, but a certain connecting thread is to be found in the impact on all the areas