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EDITORIAL

Gimmickry . . . Africa seems to be considered by many in the Western music world as a vast storehouse of musical gimmicks . . . an exotic instrument with a new 'sound' here, a new idea for a rhythm backing for a pop group there, a germinal idea for a classical composition, classroom material for casual experimentation . . . These ideas, taken from their matrix to cater for the Western taste for novelty, are gimmicks, because they are essentially rootless, superficial, used for their novel effect, with little knowledge of their original meaning.

Most musicians, if they are borrowing from a foreign music, are only capable of using the surface structures. This is enlivening as far as it goes, but is that far enough? The use of gimmicks or what-the-musician-thinks-he-hears has contributed partly to the common, and misleading, stereotypes held about African music. Western music has already been so enriched by African music that it is time that the West showed more responsibility towards the real aesthetics of the original music.

Gadgetry . . . Music, the backbone of the entertainment business, has in the Western world become dependent on gadgets — the amplifier, the tape recorder, the camera, the videotape, the radio — and these things have found their place in Africa too. While nobody can deny their usefulness, gadgetry can never be a substitute for musicianship, observation, memory, personal contact. In fact, it can often obstruct these, spending in the process enormous sums of money, which can only be justified on the grounds of prestige, not music. Think of leaders in music, in any country, those essential people whose genius determines the direction music is going to take, and consider to what extent they have needed gadgets . . . if the money is for music should it not be going to them?

THE EDITOR.