

BAFIA KAMEROEN and YAKA-MUZIEK Nos. 7 and 8 in a series of African music recordings issued by the Musée Royal de l'Afrique Centrale, Tervuren, Belgium and the Belgische Radio en Televisie, 1972. 12" L.P. with booklet in four languages, pp. 49 and 60.

These two albums are the seventh and eighth in the growing series produced by the Musée Royal de l'Afrique Centrale in conjunction with the Belgische Radio en Televisie. The format has remained constant throughout: a booklet in four languages, and a 12" L.P. record in a jacket which carries band titles only, the two packaged in a green string-and button-fastened folder.

The original text for the Bafia (Cameroon) album is the French version, translated in full into Flemish, English and German; the translation to English is really quite poor, and the reader is advised to work with the original if possible. Two music examples are printed in each of the four language versions, and four black and white photographs by Quersin are divided between the French and Flemish texts. Three maps locate the Bafia clearly. The recordings were made in 1967, and recording quality is good, save for a heavy hum which appears in my copy on Side II, Band I, and for an overall hollow sound on Side I, Band I, which gives the impression of recording in or near a reverberating concrete enclosure.

The introductory notes speak of the Bafia in time and space, and touch briefly on their language and culture. The longest section (about 1 000 words) is devoted to 'Dance and Music', and we learn, among other things, that a close connection exists between music and dance, and that music is essentially vocal, monodic, cast in the responsorial pattern, and 'jazzy' in overall effect; the section closes with some rather naïve remarks concerning acculturation. No description of music instruments is given except very briefly and in passing in the band notes. The latter are short and neither very informative nor very explicit. Indeed, the notes as a whole do not give the reader a keen sense either of the structure of the music or of its context; they are curiously flaccid and without precision of presentation or of information.

The music is remarkably homogeneous, assuming that the sample is representative, of course. As Quersin indicates, it is primarily vocal, with male or female leaders singing with male, female, or mixed choruses. The singing is almost always in unison, and the occasional snatches of parallel seconds, thirds, and fourths seem to the outsider to be accidental rather than deliberate. The form is leader and chorus, and thus responsorial, but the pattern is not short-phrase litany; instead, it is made up of long, asymmetrical phrases often sung in free rhythm. The internal pace is rapid, and thus the melodic text moves at a brisk tempo. The melody tends to centre strongly around a central pitch, sometimes exhibiting a limited range as well. The infrequent drumming heard (Side I, Band 3; Side II, Band 2) is forceful and often uses multiple meter, but it is not as powerful as much of the drumming heard in the West African region. Two songs of neighbouring people, one of the Vute and one of the Sanaga (Side II, Bands 4 and 5) are included to indicate differences of music style among related peoples; they do contrast rather sharply with the music of the Bafia.

So far as I know, this is the only available album of Bafia music, and thus it adds new information to our recorded storehouse. The bands are few, and thus the listener can be absorbed for longer stretches of time than is usual on records, but it is these two facts rather than the accompanying information that give the presentation its chief importance.

The recording of Yaka music by Ciparisse and Rouwez is both similar to and different from the Bafia album. The notes were written originally in French and translated into Flemish, German and English; the last translation is again poor, and the reader is advised to use the original French if possible. The eight music examples are repeated in all four language versions, while six black and white photographs by Ciparisse are scattered through the French and Flemish sections. Three maps locate the Yaka clearly. Recording quality is good and appears to have been taken in stereo.

The introductory notes begin with a short and confusing background discussion of the Yaka. Most of the space is devoted to the distinction between the Yaka and the Suku, a distinction based upon whether the groups were (Yaka) or were not (Suku) dominated in the 16th and 18th centuries by the Lunda people, but why this is important is never explained, and it is particularly baffling since no Suku music is included in the album. After a few words of ethnographic description, the reader learns that the recordings were made from June to September of 1971, presumably as part of the crash recording program currently being carried out by the Musée Royal de l'Afrique Centrale for the Institut des Musées Nationaux of Zaïre. In the section titled 'The Form and Ambitus of Yaka Songs' we are told that the songs are strophic and widely varied within that form, that they use seven ranges, from a major third to a tenth, that a 'pivot note' (*note-pivot*), which I take to be a tonal centre, is present, and that ending patterns can be discerned, though in the last matter I find the brief discussion absolutely impenetrable in French or in English. More discussion is devoted to 'Yaka Musical Instruments and Rhythm' than to anything else (about 1 000 words), and briefly described are two rattles, two cylindrical and one triangular wooden slit drums, ratchet, xylophone, lamellophone (*kisansi*), two skin-headed drums, and friction drum. It is emphasized that "the idiophone category is the best represented in the Yaka orchestra"; while one aerophone, a whistle, is included, no chordophones are described, and it is not made clear whether this is because none exist among the Yaka or only that none are represented in the album. The band notes are devoted almost entirely to music structural description, and are uninformative ethnographically; the reader emerges with virtually no sense of music in its society and culture.

Fifteen selections are presented on the record, some rather longer than others, and none short. Yet I

find it extremely difficult to characterize the music. The first side emphasizes vocal music, sometimes instrumentally supported, which the authors consistently describe as strophic; our understanding of the meanings of terms must differ sharply, since these songs are responsorial (sometimes antiphonal Side I, Band 5), often short-phrase call-and-response forms which I would call litanic. Spoken passages are present (Side I, Band 2), and in several selections (Side I, Bands 3, 5, 6) musical pitch seems to be conceived with unusual flexibility. Side II begins with slit gong and whistle signalling (Bands Ia and b), but only loose translations are given, and nothing is said concerning the fairly long spoken passages, one of which appears to be a portion of a folk tale. Also presented are the lamellophone (Bands 2 and 3), xylophone (Bands 5 and 6), and other, supporting instruments. Bands 4 through 7 all include a solo singer whose style is marked by short sung segments followed by long pauses in which the instruments are heard; this kind of 'bardic' singing is known in many parts of Africa.

Neither of these two new releases from Belgium is a strong album, and in both cases, it is the notes which are disappointing. Much more attention must be paid to this crucial aspect of what could be an excellent record series if it is ever to fulfil its considerable potential.

ALAN P. MERRIAM

CONTRIBUTION A L'ETUDE DE LA MUSIQUE SACREE ZARMA SONGHAY by Bernard Surugue, Etudes Nigériennes No. 30, Centre Nigérien de Recherches en Sciences Humaines, Niamey, Niger Republic, 1972, pp. 63, viii, plates, diagrams, maps.

This small book is a thorough piece of work on a restricted subject. It is based around a description of the *hollay* possession cult dance of the Zarma-Songhay people, who live around Niamey in the south-western part of the Niger Republic, and up the Niger as far as Timbuctoo in Mali. The initial research appears to have been in the form of a 16 mm. colour film made by the author, entitled "Godié", published by the Centre Nigérien de Recherches en Sciences Humaines, Département d'Afrique Noire, Musée de l'Homme, Paris, 1968. The author focuses closely on the organology and acoustics of the instruments used, the *gôjé* one-string fiddle, and the calabash drums (no Zarma name given). The description is admirably detailed, from the invocations used on cutting the wood for the fiddle neck, to the construction itself of all parts of the instruments, considered from an acoustic point of view, to photographs of the fingering, to some impenetrable 'sonagrams' of the sound of the fiddle. An interesting feature of this fiddle is that, while both playing string and bow string are made of horsehair, the former is flat in cross-section and the latter is circular, contrary to the practice in the European fiddle. The typical resulting tone-quality is described. The calabash drums are hollow half-calabashes inverted over a depression scooped in the sand, air-tight but for a small hole left facing the player, the calabash being supported at this point by a stick which passes under the seated player. They are played on top with two 'fans' of seven thin sticks tied together at the end.

Another section of the book gives an account of the genealogical/mythological/religious foundation of the musical repertoire. As in some other parts of Africa, each spirit (about 90 of them) is said to have its own song.

Pages 1 and 2 are duplicated and page 24 is missing in my copy.

ANDREW TRACEY

THE MUSIC OF CENTRAL AFRICA by Rose Brandel. Martinus Nijhoff, The Hague, reprinted 1973, original edition 1961.

It is a pity that this book has been reprinted. I refer the reader to the review by Gerhard Kubik of the original 1961 edition, published in *African Music*, III, 1, 1962, p. 116. His conclusion was "... I can only hope for the sake of accuracy that her book will not be taken as a reliable addition to the understanding of African music". I would add that several mistakes that have been pointed out by reviewers have not been corrected.

ANDREW TRACEY