
REPORT ON THE I.L.A.M. NYASALAND RECORDING TOUR

(May 7th to June 30th, 1958)

Our first objective on this tour was to discover what music might still be available in the two Southern districts of Southern Rhodesia, Chibi and Gutu, on our way up to Nyasaland via Fort Victoria and Salisbury.

To test the prevalence of local music we went to two of the regions where I had first recorded in 1931, twenty-seven years ago, the one at Chief Takawarasha's kraal, Chibi, and the other at the Alheit Mission, Gutu. In both places there were several African people who clearly remembered my previous visit and some who possessed my recordings which were made at that time and had been pressed and published by Columbia. Since most of the 1931 artists had already died, they were especially delighted to have their voices still on discs and they expressed their belated understanding of what we were doing for African people through our recordings which, they said, they had not appreciated at the time.

The diminution of musical talent in the younger generations largely owing to the ineptitude of music teaching in the schools was very apparent. However, there were clear indications in both regions that to a certain extent indigenous music was being kept alive in the home life away from school influence, although instrumental music had suffered a severe setback. Activities such as drinking parties, pagan social ceremonies and the music which accompanies them still retain their vitality in the face of opposition from those who advocate European styles of music as the only ones for those who are Christian and literate.

At Fort Victoria itself, where I had expected to find the usual run of dreary town dance music, I was surprised to find a strong following in the town location for authentic Karanga music, largely stimulated by one musician whose performance on the Mbira ('hand piano') was excellent and his singing both humorous and versatile. So much enthusiasm was shown that the people asked us to call again and record with them on our return journey. This we did, and met with similar enthusiasm with constant expressions of approval that at last a recording unit had come which was interested in their own music and not just in the town style of guitar playing imitated from Bulawayo and elsewhere, most of which contained what they called 'Tukana' (taboo) words connected with sex in which the delinquent town musicians specialize.

The crowds present at both sessions were in fact too large to manage, and we were not able to record as many items as were offering on all sides.

My wife, who has accompanied me on all my recording tours since 1948, had developed a severe cold which later turned into pneumonia and for the first time had to be left behind to return home to Johannesburg from Salisbury.

Mr. L. E. Owles our recording engineer, Danieli Mabuto our veteran native assistant, and I, then set out for the North and our second objective, the music of the Central Province of Nyasaland.

Our first call along the route was the Mtoko District in a Reserve of Sena/Tonga people who are good exponents of the local Mtoko music. We had an excellent session there staying the night at the Native Commissioner's camping site using our own camping kit, commissariat, etc. The music recorded here was very similar to music I had known in 1932 in the same region, singers, musicians and makers of instruments being still alive.

Our next move was across the Zambesi through Tete where I called on the Governor of the Province, Senhor Rodrigues who very kindly telephoned his Furancungo district office to warn them of our arrival and to ask them to arrange a recording session.

After a long delay at the Zambezi ferry we left for Furancungo arriving there after dark. The Administrator Senhor Batista welcomed us and gave us the hospitality of his house and arranged for recordings the next day, mostly among Ngoni people.

Senhor Manuel Albergaria, an agronomist of the Portuguese Scientific Mission to Zambezia very kindly acted as interpreter. We left for Nyasaland the following day crossing the border at Dedza where I made arrangements for our recordings in that district on our way Southwards, as I intended to work in each region starting from the North end of the Central Province.

This was duly arranged upon a visit to the Provincial Commissioner, Mr. Sharp, at Lilongwe before we set out for Dowa and Kota Kota.

Monday, 26th May, found us at the W.N.L.A. Headquarters at Dowa where we enjoyed the hospitality of Mr. W. R. Gemmill, the Nyasaland Director, and made arrangements to visit some of his W.N.L.A. stations in the Central Province.

We then went on North to Kota Kota on the lake where we stayed two nights at the local rest house. The District Commissioner being away on *ulendo* we arranged with the District Officer to record within

the small town itself. They had had a certain amount of unrest in the vicinity and the old Chief was ill. (He died a few weeks later). This made it difficult for the local authorities to arrange a recording session, as they maintained that the people would be pre-occupied with their own affairs. However, we had a successful session which ended after midnight, and the following day, instead of staying at Kota Kota for two or three more sessions as I had hoped to do, we decided to go up into the hills at Visanza where conditions would be more favourable. The roads to both main villages on the lakeside were still impassable to our vehicles and consequently we would have had considerable delays in trying to get to the main centres of population in the Kota Kota lake region. So, with regrets, we left Kota Kota for Visanza where we stayed in the small official rest house used by the District Officer.

Visanza proved a good recording site and the local Chief, Chief Malange, came to the session and enjoyed it immensely. Here we recorded stories and sketches, women's songs and the local popular dance called *Ilala*, performed by young men and boys who moved their heads to and fro in violent jerks not unlike the head action of a walking fowl while their shoulders shook in unison with the rhythmic syncopated drumming.

The following day found us at Kasungu where we had recorded eight years previously and were well remembered by the local people. Chief Mwasi quickly arranged a night recording session at his village and we had another long evening ending after midnight.

On the following day we had a satisfactory recording session at a small village a few miles from Kasungu, where a family group of Chief Vidzuma sat around us and sang the small traditional songs of the village. It is not easy, as a rule, to obtain recordings of such songs unless the group is sufficiently small and the villagers are well known to each other. Large groups tend to produce only dance music, whereas the small domestic songs, many of which are more musically developed, are the practice of the individual women and small groups of children. This is the kind of valuable social documentary recording which should be done by local workers, and we cannot overstress the importance of these family songs, and music which form the backbone of the whole of Africa's musical life, and are almost entirely ignored by Europeans and educated Africans alike.

From Kasungu we went through Dowa and on down to the Lake at Salima. After lunch, by the kind invitation of the District Commissioner, Mr. Aston, we went to record at the local market place. Market places are not always the best locations in which to record on account of the great activity and chatter associated with such places. The bulk of the crowd was interested enough in witnessing a recording session, but not interested enough to stop chattering for a moment. As a result the recordings we made were certainly of the actuality kind with market and other noises in the background. The community living in and around Salima itself is of mixed tribal origin and this, as we so often find, also detracts from good recordings as there is less community discipline and the youngsters are out of hand. They were unusually so just after dark as we were packing up our equipment, in fact, objectionable and dirty.

The day was memorable for the fact that Dr. Johan Louw, the headmaster of the Dowa Mission School and a member of the African Music Society acted as our interpreter. Obtaining adequate translations of the many songs we record is one of our main difficulties throughout Africa. It is necessary, not only to have an interpreter well versed in the local language, but also one who knows the background out of which the songs arise.

Our second day at Salima was spent at Chief Pemba's village where we made 16 recordings, only six of which were accompanied by the Bangwe Board Zither. On the last occasion on which we recorded in this district in 1950 there were far more zithers to be heard, every second man playing one. To-day they are rare.

We returned to Dowa the following day, 2nd June, and recorded both at the mission, by kind invitation of Dr. Louw, and at the recreation hall, arrangements having been made by the District Commissioner, Mr. Swan. Both sessions were interesting and proved to be one of the best days we had on the whole tour. This, we must gladly acknowledge, was in no small measure due to Mr. Swan the District Commissioner, Dr. Louw and A'Thaba the local African Welfare Officer.

The following day A'Thaba also accompanied us over to Mponela but here we were out of luck. No musician of any merit was discovered.

I decided therefore to go on to Lilongwe to prepare for recordings in that district, and to effect a few necessary repairs to equipment and vehicles.

The excellent welcome and hospitality we received here from several officials was not matched unfortunately by the quality of music available in the district. We visited both the Chiefs where we had recorded eight years before and in each case the quality of the music presented was well below previous standards. Here also it was noticeable that what songs there were referred in most cases directly or indirectly to venereal troubles, as the local District Assistant Menasseh A Phiri explained—we had arrived in the middle of the 'Snatching' season when men were being paid for their fire-cured tobacco, had plenty of money in their pockets and were snatching any woman or girl they fancied. "Many, many court cases these days" he remarked.

After Lilangwe we recorded at Dedza. Both the District Commissioner and the Resident Manager of the W.N.L.A. had helped to arrange for recordings, the latter, Mr. Rickett, offering us the hospitality of his home.

Our recording session at Chief Kachere about 25 miles from the village of Dedza with 26 items all told, was the best single day's recording in Nyasaland this year.

An attempt to record at the Dedza Secondary School was not so successful but enlightening in other ways. It was, for example, the only Secondary School in Africa I have visited where not a single pupil played a musical instrument. The school, later in the year, had to be closed before the end of the term, an account of insubordination of the pupils.

We were equally well looked after at our next district Ncheu where Mr. and Mrs. Morony of the W.N.L.A. gave us hospitality for three nights at the old historic Fort Mlangeni. Here we recorded at the village of Chief Njolomole where there were both Nguni and Chewa people.

This completed our swift visit to the Central Province of Nyasaland from which over 18,000 Chewa and Nguni men go to work on the Gold Mines of South Africa every year. The total number of male workers away from Nyasaland at any one time is said to be about 160,000.

From the Ncheu District we worked our way South in order to discover whether the music of the Manganja was as good as it was reported to be. To do so I called in at Fort Johnston on the way South to Zomba to try to get a few Yao recordings. We were unlucky as the Queen's birthday celebrations coincided with our visit and to get good recordings we would have had to go up into the hills on the far side of the lake which would have taken us too long.

We made several good recordings at the Zomba Police camp between visiting Officials at the Secretariat, and had we had time I would have liked to have stayed much longer in this vicinity. The police proved most co-operative as they had done before, in 1950, and it was interesting to note the improvement of technique of the Police Band under their African Bandmaster, A Numero. We also made a few complimentary recordings for the 2nd K.A.R. Military Band under their Bandmaster, Mr. Smith.

At Blantyre, the Provincial Commissioner, Mr. Nicholson, and his assistant, Mr. Watson, made arrangements by 'phone for us to visit three stations in their Southern Province, Port Herald, Chikwawa and Mlanje.

From here on the weather changed to overcast, cold and wet, and it naturally was somewhat detrimental to our recording sessions. In all three places we were only able to record about half the number of items which we might well have done had the weather been better.

In the light of the knowledge that we could not have anticipated at the time, we would have been better advised to have continued our journey Southwards over the Zambesi to Sena and carried out what I had originally intended . . . sample the music in the Portuguese districts between the river and Beira entering Southern Rhodesia by way of Umtali.

We spent four nights in Port Herald, two at Chikwawa where the local District Doctor, Dr. Nurse, put us up very kindly in his new house and a couple of days at Mlanje spent in almost continual rain.

The Southern Province was frankly disappointing although Port Herald provided me with one or two novelties of musical technique which I had not met before.

I took the opportunity, being in the region, of going down to the Portuguese district headquarters of Mutarara (Dona Anna) on the Zambezi, opposite Sena, in order to find out for myself what chance there was of crossing the Zambezi at that point and what arrangements could be made to record in the region on a return visit. We found the Governadors from Tete, Senhor Rodrigues, visiting this outstation of his, and were warmly invited to return whenever we could.

After reporting progress to the Provincial Commissioner's Office at Blantyre we set out for the South and Salisbury.

It was something of a pleasure to be able to get rid of the intense dust of Nyasaland with which we had been covered ever since entering the country. Our clothes and equipment were all impregnated with fine, red dust, much to their detriment.

Leaving Salisbury on Saturday morning, 9th, we called in at Fort Victoria for a final session as arranged (and mentioned above) and arrived back at the Library on Monday, 30th, with 350 recorded items to show for the tour.

The list showing the types of music and songs recorded in 17 languages will give an overall picture of the work done.

It is interesting to note the high proportion of stories recorded on this tour. On the other hand there was an unusually low percentage of instrumental music, the direct result, it would appear, of the semi-indigenous dance music programmes continually broadcast and sold on commercial records and the lack of positive approach to music and music-making in the schools of the territory.

The non-co-operation on the part of African clerks and persons of that class on account of the present political situation in Nyasaland was also noticeable and no doubt accounted for our relatively poor recording sessions in some places but by no means everywhere. The common people, the villagers and the general run of local African society other than the clerk class, still show little or no apparent interest in territorial and Federal politics and it is certainly not reflected in their songs which would be normal practice in most parts of Africa. One can but conclude that the political agitation which is so widely reported in the Press emanates from a minority group and the few industrial centres. The few expressions of political opinion, particularly with regard to the Federation, that were made in our presence were simple in the extreme and so ill-informed as to be somewhat pathetic to an outsider observer.

The general impression of Central Nyasaland music is that it is not so lively or complex as that of the Northern Province amongst the Tumbuka people, nor so spontaneous as the Nyanja music around Zomba. The Manganja music we were offered was far below the standards we were led to expect and in the Lomwe music around Mlanje the subjects mentioned in their songs were amongst the most primal and crude we have yet experienced in any of our tours in the past ten years.

The Rhodesian music, however, was still well worth recording, away from the main centres, and would merit special attention when we have the opportunity to do so.

DETAIL OF ITEMS RECORDED ON THIS TOUR

<i>Languages</i>	<i>No. of Items Recorded</i>	<i>Languages</i>	<i>No. of Items Recorded</i>
Swahili	2	Yao	9
Tumbuka/Henga	14	Lomwe	9
Tonga	4	Zulu/Ngoni	12
Nyanja	21	Zezuru/Zimba	2
Nyanja/Mang'anja	58	Karanga	1
Nyanja/Chewa	153	Karanga/Duma	16
Sena	2	Karanga/Mhari	14
Sena/Nyungwe	6	Ndau	6
Sena/Tonga	21		
		TOTAL	350

<i>Types</i>	<i>No. of Items Recorded</i>	<i>Types</i>	<i>No. of Items Recorded</i>
Dances	99	Mohammedan Chants	2
Stories	56	Drum Rhythms	3
Self delectative Songs	39	Sketches	2
Party Songs	24	Historical	1
Topical Songs	19	Speech	1
Drinking Songs	17	Recitation	1
Humorous Songs	14	Nostalgic	1
Pounding Songs	10	Work Songs	1
Laments	9	Herdboys' Songs	2
Weddings	8	Evening Song	1
Fighting Songs	6	Praise Song	1
Funerals	6	Canoe Song	1
Initiation	5	Riddles	1
Tunes without Words	4	Girls' Song	1
Recited Verses	3	Sentimental Song	1
Ancestral Rites	3	Love Song	1
Lullabies	3	Onomatopoeic	1
Children's Verses	3		
		TOTAL	350

HUGH TRACEY,
Director I.L.A.M.