

BOOK REVIEWS

YORUBA SACRED MUSIC FROM EKITI by ANTHONY KING, Ibadan University Press, Nigeria, 1961, pp. x, 46, xlix (text and music), 8 half-tone illustrations, 8½" x 5½".

This book is one of the first crucial steps towards the enormous task of analysing and notating African music.

Although the author acknowledges A. M. Jones' recent book "Studies in African Music", this book has unfortunately been strenuously criticised both by European musicologists and by Ghanaian musicians themselves. This is because A. M. Jones received all his information in London from one Ewe master drummer, and did no research in Ghana.

One sees at once that Anthony King makes no such generalisations, and confines himself not only to Yoruba music alone, but also to one drum family, advised by one "Baba Mogbe" (chief priest of the god Sango), who comes from one small place Ifaki-Ekiti. Being on the spot, and also a qualified musician, the author has seen at once that there is such an enormous variety of differing cults, differing drums and differing gods, that a separate study must be devoted to each small enclave. Thus this excellent little book rings true, and avoids that error which can occur in a book written by a European without field research.

Anthony King first discovered that even in the areas around University College, Ibadan, where he lectures in music, four different drum families are traditionally allocated to the four most important Yoruba deities. Luckily, however, he discovered through Mr. Ojo Ajayi that at Ifaki-Ekiti the newer "dundun" family of drums has largely taken over the sacred music for all the four gods concerned, and that these drums were likely to supercede the older groups. He therefore concentrated on this one group, with Mr. Ajayi, the high priest, to reveal to him the most fascinating details of the ceremonies of the Sango worshippers. In studying this same drum family we are also told about the music for the gods Obatala, Ogun and Ifa.

Few people, before reading this book, have differentiated between the various drums of the *dundun* family, the usual pattern of which is known in many parts of Nigeria (it is called "kalengo" by the Hausa). It seems that there are four members of this family with only the "gudugudu" having a different construction. The others are all shaped like an hourglass with a membrane at each end joined by thongs. The size, number of thongs, and decoration are all different, and the tone and pitch extraordinarily varied. I have heard the *iya ilu*, (often the "mother drum" of the orchestra, recognised by its bell ornaments), played in England by E. K. Lasibikan who drums out messages which can be instantly translated in the audience into vocal Yoruba by the tonal variations.

The author describes exactly how the drums are made, and what function each performs in the orchestra. He then goes on to describe the music, song and ceremony used to worship the various gods. There is infinite variety, even although the book confines itself to sacred music and does not touch on the social and practical uses of these drums. It brings home to the reader the reason why musicians in Yorubaland are a people apart, handing down their skill and knowledge from father to son through special families. The invasion of the organ and the saxophone makes even more worthwhile this painstaking research, and the hours of work which Mr. King has given to this subject. There is a fifty page appendix devoted entirely to the actual music. Here the author was helped by Mr. D. O. E. Adetunmbi who guided him on the orthography of the words of the songs and supplied the tonal values. The book ends with a fascinating study of the relationship between speech tone and song, illustrated with tables.

Having read the book, my mind at once went back to those traditional drum families dedicated to the different gods which the author has not yet studied. We sincerely hope he will do so, and that all this music will be recorded by the African Music Society, or other bodies, before these older instruments are seen only in museums. The task ahead is frightening. This book can in fact be regarded as one splendid chapter in the study of Yoruba music which might eventually end up as two or three volumes. It is a beacon which may well arouse the enthusiasm of serious minded Africans not only actively to help the research, but also to preserve this music for the future. It is, after all, a vital part of Africa's cultural history, and a new and stimulating study for musicians all over the world.

Mercedes Mackay.

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A note on the musical transcriptions.

The transcriptions, which occupy a full forty six pages of the ninety five page book, can be criticised from two important angles. One is that the author does not give any indication as to *how* he obtained the musical information contained in these pages, and this in itself may perhaps lead some readers to doubt the absolute accuracy of the transcriptions. Did he, for instance, learn to play the various instruments himself, did he record on tape, or on an A. M. Jones-type electrical impulse recorder, or did he simply spend many hours with Mr. Ojo Ajayi in repetition of rhythms and songs? In a scientific work