

THE TEXT BOOK PROJECT FOR AFRICAN MUSIC

The A.M.S. Text Book Project*

For many years it has been felt that one of the more important advances in African cultural affairs would be to codify the logic which lies behind the creation of indigenous styles of music and thus to bring it naturally, without prejudice, into the realm of African education.

Sufficient samplings of the many musics in sub-Saharan Africa have already been taken by field research workers in the past twenty years to ensure that the range and extent of the art amply justifies the work now proposed. The rewards which will accrue to Africans everywhere, to their delight, their social pride and national heritage, outstrip those of almost any other branch of cultural study, especially in these days of mechanical entertainment through records and radio with their inevitable challenge to the continuity of neglected national art forms.‡

How to achieve this objective within the diminishing time yet left us is the theme of this enterprise.

The planning of a *modus operandi* will require the careful consideration of persons who have already had practical experience of indigenous music in Africa, in order to delineate a workable project supported by the consensus of the best informed students of this branch of African studies.

It will be mutually agreed, in the first place that the project under consideration is both desirable and capable of realization within a set time limit, and that the objectives are clear cut and are concentrated upon the ultimate production of suitable text books which can be used in all grades of educational work from primary up to University standards.

The published text books, by no means pretending to be the last word on the musical arts of Africa, are likely to bring the whole subject into its true perspective both as an academic study and as a dynamic contribution to African social good everywhere.

The following suggestions are put forward as a basis for discussion which is intended to lead to the crystallization of the project in practical operational form.

(1) Now that Africa is so politically "balkanised", it is no longer possible to organize a music research enterprise under a single management which would be acceptable to all territories.

(2) This being so, it would appear to be the wiser course to enlist as many outside sources of support for the project as possible, each of which would collect data for the project within limited geographical boundaries where it is able to co-operate with the local authorities, Universities or other appropriate bodies.

(3) It is proposed, therefore, to invite Universities and other learned bodies outside Africa, particularly those with an established African Studies department, to bring within their orbit of activity the subject of African music, its structure and logic with all that that entails in allied disciplines.

(4) That each University or Institution volunteering to do so be asked to proclaim its special area of interest in Africa, so that by mutual arrangement as much as possible of the sub-Saharan continent may be covered without overlapping. Such areas allocated

* Being the next stage in the preparation of the project already discussed in Vol. III, No. 4, of this Journal.

‡ Since writing this memorandum, I have read "On Aggression", by Konrad Lorenz (Methuen & Co. Ltd., London), and quote from page 226:

"Quite apart from the danger to one culture arising from contact with another, all systems of social norms and rites are vulnerable in the same way as systems of phylogenetically evolved patterns of social behaviour.

"Not being man-made, but produced by selection, their function is, without special scientific investigation, unknown to man himself, and therefore their balance is easily upset by the effects of conceptual thought as that of any system of instinctive behaviour. Like the latter, they can be made to miscarry by any environmental change not 'foreseen' in their 'programming', but while instincts persist for better or worse, traditional systems of social behaviour can disappear altogether within one generation, because, like the continuous state that constitutes the life of an organism, that which constitutes a culture cannot bear an interruption of its continuity."

to an Institution would be the sole responsibility of the sponsor and local co-workers insofar as the collection of the necessary data is concerned.

(5) Participating Universities and Research Units would be required to select, employ and train their field workers, maintaining administrative authority and directive over their work and arranging for their accommodation, transport, technical equipment, medical care and vacations, etc.

In this way the personnel employed by the sponsoring body would remain attached to their home institution throughout the period of the Text Book Project and might well remain associated with it afterwards.

It is proposed that agreement be reached on standard equipment to be supplied to all participants to avoid technical inadequacies and simplify maintenance problems.

(6) A *Co-ordinating Council* of experts would have to be appointed to direct the general policy regarding the project, and to specify the nature and scope of the data which would be required within a set time limit to enable selected musicologists eventually to prepare the material for publication.

(7) The realisation of the project will require the aid of several technical services in addition to musicology, in particular by linguists, sociologists, photographers, recording engineers, printers and publishers.

The proposer has already received assurance from printers that there would be no difficulty in printing and publishing the text books; and from the Decca Gramophone Company, London, that they would press and publish albums of recordings which might be required to illustrate the subject matter of the text books.

(8) The Project can only be carried out with the consent and encouragement of each territorial Government, which will be asked to grant the necessary permits for field research work to be undertaken by the appointed teams, assisted in every case by local African personnel.

It is confidently anticipated that most African territories will be prepared to participate with enthusiasm, though naturally there can be no question of compulsion.

(9) The financing of the project would have to be the concern of the sponsoring philanthropic bodies, by grants made either jointly or severally to each of the participating Universities or Research Units accredited by the Foundations concerned. Local Governmental support is not expected to be in the form of finance, but might well include the provision of rent-free quarters, local transport and the loan of interpreters for each language group under survey.

A central directive bureau is not contemplated at this stage, though the co-ordinating Council might be able to allocate specific duties to various members of the project who could best undertake them. For example, the preparation and pressing of discs for all participating units might well be done by a single organization for the project as a whole; the maintenance of standard recording equipment upon which all units could rely for immediate attention is another service which might be best rendered by a single depot within easy reach by air freight service.

(10) It is proposed that the first step towards the realization of the project would be to call a small meeting or committee of a few experts with practical African field experience in musical research, to obtain a consensus through which a detailed and practical scheme would be drafted, with the single objective of producing Text Books on African musical theory within a set time limit. A sufficient number of delegates has already expressed willingness to attend.

It is hoped that the drafting of the detailed proposals will not be long delayed.

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