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ABSTRACT

IBO MUSICAL INSTRUMENTS IN IBO CULTURE

by William Wilberforce Chukudinka Echezona

The area of Ibo musical studies is broad, therefore, this study is restricted to a single phase of Ibo ethnomusicology--that of the musical instruments of the Ibos, including only such background as is necessary for a clearer understanding of Ibo culture.

Ibo musical instruments are divided into four major divisions: (1) Membranophones--those instruments that depend on membranes of animals for their source of sound; (2) Idiophones--those instruments whose vibrations are produced in the substance of the instruments themselves; (3) Aerophones--those instruments that depend on the wind for the production of their sound; and (4) Chordophones--those instruments that depend on strings for their source of sound. The materials for making these instruments are local.

Ibo music imparts "meaning" and its communication is of particular interest. Therefore, one should take equal cognizance of the music and culture, its formal structure, and its function.

Ibo musical instruments are not museum pieces. They are used primarily for making music. Some like ngedegwu

are melody instruments and are used for solo work or for melody and harmony. At Nsukka, a choir of four or six **akpele** perform purely instrumental music based on known Ibo tunes, one or two playing the melody, while others improvise as many rhythmic parts as there are instruments; some like the drums are rhythm instruments, these produce some of the most complicated rhythms. It is necessary to make two observations here. The first is that in Ibo country it is common to find both instrumental soloists and instrumentalists in groups; the second is that accompanied songs are most significant although it is common to find solo instrumental performances.

Most instruments are used for "talking" and communication, as illustrated by an ogene. An ogene is beaten in various manners which instruct people either to be quiet or to sing; or if they are walking along the road carrying a corpse, ogene may instruct passers-by to clear the road. When omu (tender leaves of a palm tree) are tied round the mouth of ogene and beaten, the sound produced is of a mournful character. When ogene in such a state is beaten round the village, it shows that there is a danger, the next thing is to listen for the message about the danger from the chief's drum.

Some instruments are supposed to have therapeutic qualities. If a child is stammering or cannot speak or

communicate well, ogene is considered a possible means of helping him speak well. The child is taken to Ihu Chukwu (God's presence) and given water out of the ogene for it is supposed to produce clear and beautiful tone quality.

The future of Ibo musical instruments does not seem bright. The Ibos now strive to adopt popular Western instruments, music, and culture. They are unaware that they have a very sophisticated, highly refined, and in many respects, superior music culture and artistic heritage. The civilized world should help the Ibos preserve and develop their instruments, music, and culture. It is evident that the Ibos themselves must be responsible for the perpetuation of the musical heritage because Ibo music is closely related to the language which is not easy for the foreigner to learn.

Good music schools should be established for potential African composers to become musically literate. The course of study should include the expert usage of musical notation, an intelligent appreciation of African musical inherited culture, and a broad and detailed study of European music.

IBO MUSICAL INSTRUMENTS IN IBO CULTURE

By

William Wilberforce Chukudinka Echezona

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

LIST OF PLATES

LIST OF FIGURES

INTRODUCTION

There are four ways in which Ibo music can be studied: first as a complete exhibition of essential principles or facts in a rational dependence, arranged in such a way that the hearer is pleased as far as his cultural anticipation and background are concerned. Secondly, Ibo music may be studied in relation to its meaning to the folks who make and enjoy it. The Ibos have no absolute music as such. Music is always connected with words and therefore an expression of different moods and situations. Thirdly, Ibo music may be looked at in terms of its psychological aspects in so far as it acts as a stimulus and draws out certain activities from the Ibos. An example of this is the work rhythm which will be discussed later. Finally, Ibo music can be looked at as a visible sign of an invisible mechanism. It is a sure sign that music is the motivation which sets the Ibo into whatever he does.

Leonard Meyer has tried to describe the meaning imparted by music in the following words:

> The problem of musical meaning and its communication is of particular interest for several reasons. Not only does music use no linguistic signs but, on one level at least, it operates as a closed system, that is, it employs no signs or symbols referring to the non-musical world of objects, concepts, and human

> desires. Thus the meanings which it imparts differ in important ways from those conveyed by literature, painting, biology, or physics.[1]

Thus it seems imperative that before a person can understand the music of the Ibos, he must fully understand the culture of the people and the relationship of the music to that culture. By whatever standard the music of the Ibos is being studied, it must be approached anthropologically. Therefore, one should take equal cognizance of the music and culture, its formal structure, and its function. Such an all-embracing method is of particular significance when Ibo music is studied, because Ibo oral transmission of information, beliefs, customs, music, legends, etc. from ancestors to posterity stresses "meaning," and because of the sine qua non of music with Ibo life which is social by nature, inclination, and character.

Because the area of Ibo musical studies is broad, this study will be restricted to a single phase of Ibo ethnomusicology--that of the musical instruments of the Ibos, including only such background as is necessary for a clearer understanding of Ibo culture.

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[1]Leonard R. Meyer, Emotion and Meaning in Music (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1956), p. vii.

SECTION 1

THE IBOS

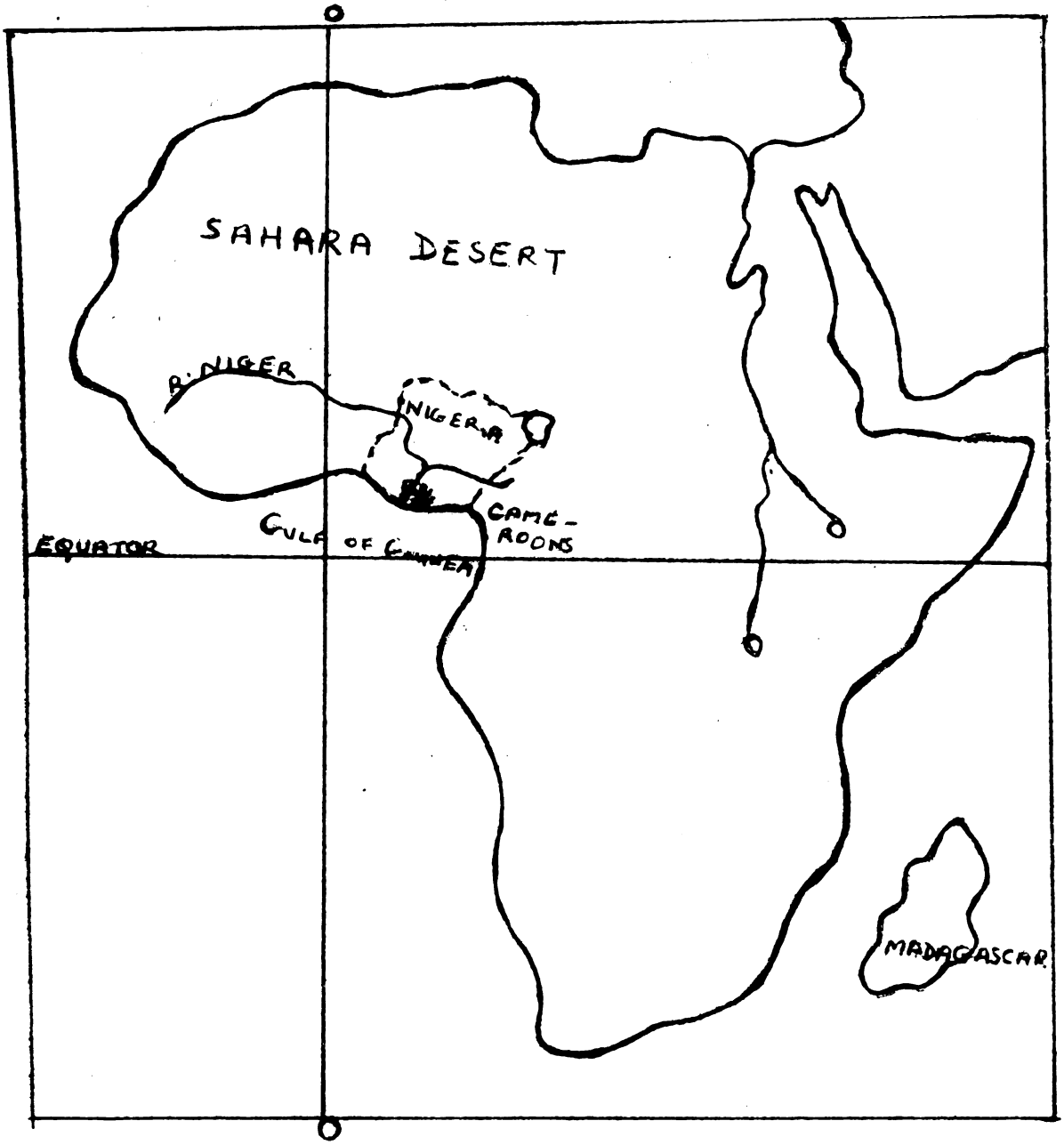

Figure 1. Iboland in relation to other parts of Africa.

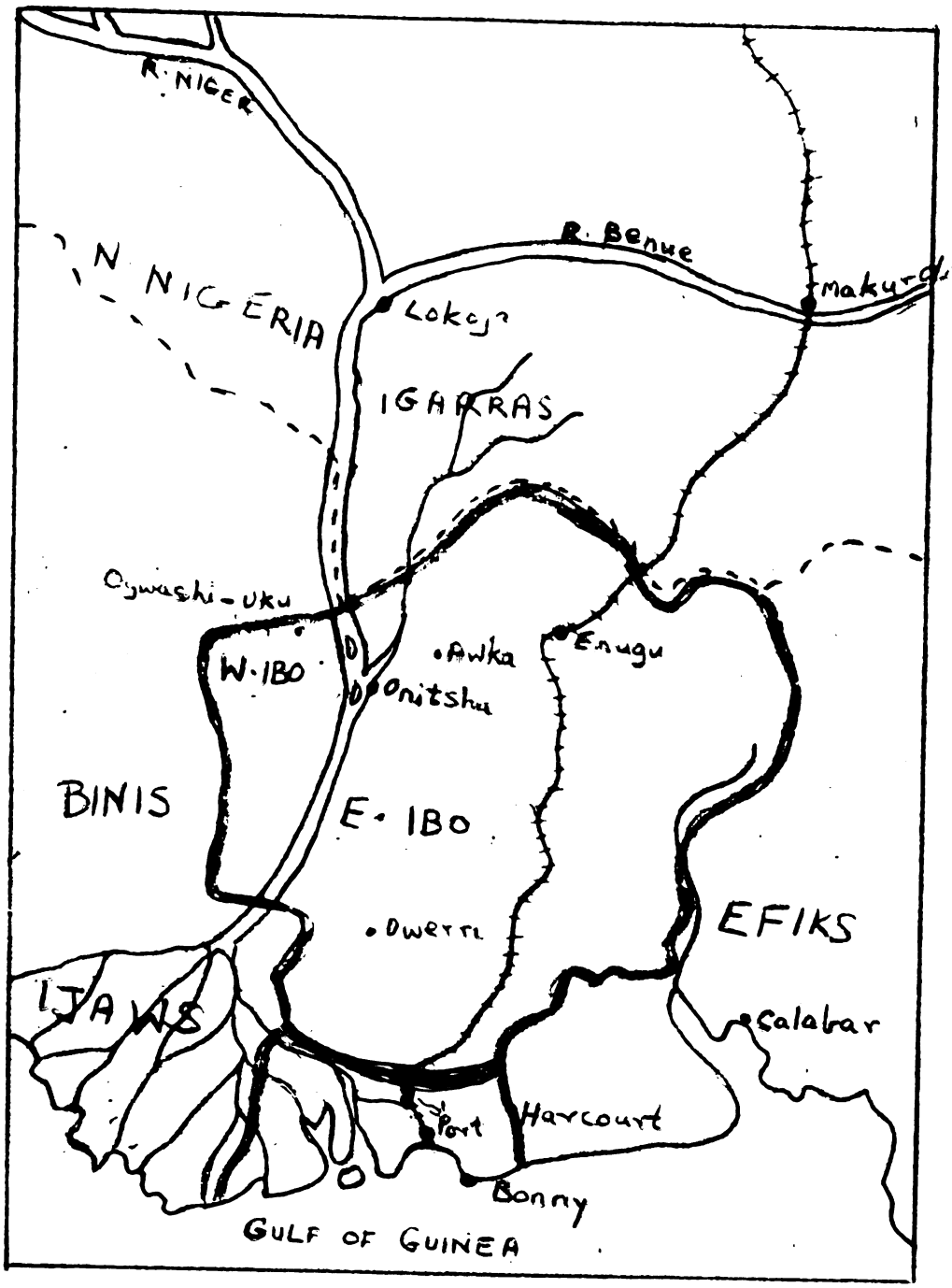

Figure 1. Section of Nigeria showing Ibo territory enclosed in O.

CHAPTER I

THE IBOS

General Background Information

Geographical Location

The Ibo country is considered one of the largest single nations in Africa. It is situated in the central south-east corner of Nigeria. The Ibo country is bounded in the North by the Igarras, in the East by the Efiks, in the West by the Binis and the Ijaws, and in the South by the Gulf of Guinea. The southern half of the country is in the tropical forest belt, while the northern half is in the grassland belt. There are several rivers in the country but the most important is the River Niger which carves out the narrow Western Ibo from the main Ibo country (fig. 1 and 2).

Occupations

Although many Ibos were carried off into slavery, the present population is about six million. By occupation the Ibos are farmers, fishermen, blacksmiths, miners and light industrialists. Those who are farmers engage in farm produce, cultivating food for local use and export. Those who live near the rivers and near the sea coast are good fishermen. They catch both fresh-water and salt-water fish

for local use and for export to other tribes. From the earliest times, the people of Awka and Nkwerri have been engaged in blacksmithing. They make hoes, machetes, knives, and other metallic necessities. Salt is mined in Nkanu. With the advent of the British and engineering, coal is being mined in Enugu, oil is mined in areas near Owerri and Port Harcourt. There are a few industries. Nkanu, Akwete, and Asaba areas are known for their cloth weaving industries; Amawbia and Umudioka are known for their carvings on wood in geometrical patterns; Owerri and Ikwerre are known for their manufacture of musical instruments.

It is in trading that the Ibos surpass most other tribes around them. They are very good traders. The Ibo is ready to travel anywhere to trade, to be educated, and to look for jobs. They have traveled to neighboring tribes like the Ibibios, Efiks, and Ijaws to live. Some have gone to live as far away as Maiduguri and Gusau in the North, Buea and Ikom in the East, Lagos and Badagri in the West. When an Ibo arrives at his destination, he tries to adapt himself to the new environment whether the conditions are favorable or not. He does not allow difficulties in his way. If he is lucky to find another Ibo man in this faraway place, he quickly makes friends with him, and very soon they are so close to one another that they assume a blood relationship and even call themselves "brothers." They do their business in a quiet, unobtrusive, but yet efficient

and decisive manner. The Ibos are known for their generosity, shrewd discernment, and sagacious pursuit of their work.

Art

Although man can continue to exist without art, yet the urge to create beauty is one of the most distinctive qualities of man. Justice Oliver Wendell Holmes, commenting on this, says:

> One of the glories of man is that he does not sow seed and weave cloth, and produce all the other economic means simply to sustain and multiply other sowers and weavers. . . . After the production of food and cloth has gone on a certain time, he stops producing and goes to the play, or he paints a picture or asks unanswerable questions about the universe, and thus delightfully consumes a part of the world's food and clothing.[1]

The Ibo man openly expresses this impelling force of creation and beautification in drawing, sculpture, painting, dance and music. This outlet for his emotions gives him satisfaction and happiness. Many critics like to call this "primitive art," but it is rather forward-looking in style, highly complicated, refined and subtle.

In this century the tendency is to go back to primitive art for inspiration. Although some of this art seems to have technical clumsiness, it exhibits skill, fusing complexity, naturalism, realism, and conventionalized

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[1]O. W. Holmes, Jr., "Law in Science and Science in Law," Collected Legal Papers, p. 212.

abstraction. Some is full of vitality, highly stylized, abstract and symbolic. Apart from songs and dances, the Ibo includes expression of his emotion in clay modelling as in the pots and earthenware vessels he makes, and the artistic designs he creates on mud walls.

Art and religion are closely related because both express emotion, function, and a capacity of the mind whereby it forms and entertains ideas. The Ibo carves out symmetrical geometrical patterns on his doors and those of his place of worship; he makes statues and idols which represent God, the Supreme Deity. The Roman Catholic Church frequently appeals to its followers through the statues of Christ and the Virgin Mary. The Buddists make models of Bhudda. The Ibo expresses his emotions in the designs he incorporates in the cloths he weaves, in the way his women-folk plait their hair and stain patterns on their skins. He carves beautiful figures on his musical instruments as will be seen on plate 2. It is only in the mastery of perspective that the Ibo is deficient. One is reminded of the characteristics or Mannerisms in the Renaissance theater where rules of proportion were defied. Figures were elongated and twisted. It was especially the case with the human figure; they employed thin color, twisted space, and asymmetrical design. They transformed aesthetic space by inverting the perspective and by using a "sprecher." This type of art demands acceptance on the symbolic level without

reference to any commonly accepted view of the real world and how it operates. An example of this is Tintoretto's "Transporting of the Body of St. Mark" in which the body of St. Mark is much twisted.

Character of the Ibos

Little of Ibo life is known before the advent of the British in 1900. For an understanding of the Ibos before this date, Horton's account and impressions of the Ibos as far back as 1868 is very illuminating:

> Ibos (Hackbonus Blacks) - A people much addicted to war and preying on their neighbors, and are themselves lusty tall men. The women wear a profusion of beads. Most Delta languages are Ibo or Ibo descent. The Ibos are considered the most initiative and emulative in the whole of West Africa; place them where you will, you find that they very easily adapt themselves to them. Stout-hearted, or, to use the more common phraseology, big-hearted, they always possess a desire of superiority, and make attempts to attain it, or excel in what is praise-worthy, without a desire of depressing others. To them we may well apply the language of Dryden--"a noble emulation beats the breasts."
>
> Place an Ibo man in a comfortable position, and he will never rest satisfied until he sees others occupying the same or similar positions. Of the emulation power, the Right Rev. Bishop Crowther scarcely a year after the establishment of the Church Missionary Station at Onitsha, in Esuama Egbo, thus wrote: "From all I could gather by observation, the Ibos are very emulative. As in other things, so it will be in learning. Other towns will not rest satisfied until they have also learned the mystery of reading and writing, by which their neighbors might surpass them and put them in the shade. . . . The Egboes (Ibos) cannot be driven to an act; they are most stubborn and bull-headed; but with kindness they could be made to do anything, even to deny themselves of their comforts. They would not, as a rule, allow anyone to act the superior over them, nor sway their conscience, by coercion to the performance

> of any act, whether good or bad, when they have not the inclination to do so; hence there is not that unity among them that is to be found among other tribes; in fact, everyone likes to be his own master. As a rule, they like to see every African prosper. Among their own tribe, be they ever so rich, they feel no ill-will toward them. A poor man or woman of that tribe, if they meet with a rising young person of the same nationality, are ready to render him the utmost service in their power. They give him gratuitous advice and "embrace him as their child"; but if he is so arrogant and over-bearing, they regard him with scorn and disdain him wherever he is met.[1]

Government

Before British Influence

Before the coming of the British in 1900, the Ibos were divided into family groups with one individual as head. The families were self-governing, and no head really aspired to rule another family in addition; but occasionally, a family head appeared stronger than other heads around him and he would become their head as well. It is a common saying that Ibos have no kings, "Igbo ada enwe eze," but all other tribes around the Ibos have their rulers; for example, the Hausas have their Emirs, the Yorubas have their Obas, the Efiks have their Obong, but the Ibos have no kings.

After British Influence

With the coming of the British in 1900 came the unification of the Ibo nation, and constancy of the mode or

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[1]J. B. Horton, West African Countries and Peoples (London: 1868), pp. 159, 163-5, 175, 182.

system of political rule and administration. To facilitate the administration of the Ibo country, the British combined several families and imposed on them a chief, or a paramount chief as the case may be, to be the heads of these assemblages.

The accident of the Ibos being in touch with the British Government, the missionaries, and European mercantile agencies, has fundamentally changed the conduct of government, the economy, and the cultural life of the Ibos. Although the Ibos have been very religious people from the ancient times, missionaries introduced Christianity which has had a great influence on the music of the Ibos in later years.

The Role of Music in General

Songs in Every Day Life

To every Ibo, life has a melodic and rhythmic orientation. Songs act as a stimulant to cooperative work. Any type of work, whether it can be performed in a rhythmic manner or not, is accompanied by singing. On occasions when men march, they keep time with songs. One of the songs for marching is, "Onye isi ike pua n'uzo." This means, "Let the unfortunate clear out of the way." In the olden days when wars were rampant, war songs were sung to work the Ibo up to fury for battle. One such song is "Ayi nwe ndia," which means, "We are so superior physically that we lord it over that town."

Frequent marriage ceremonies are a source of folk singing. One common song at this time is "Ada ayi nwayi imara nma," which means, "Our daughter is a charming young lady." At funeral obsequies, one of the songs people sing is "Nwoke ayi ka ayi nacho, Nzomalizo," which means, "We are looking for the young man who died, nzomalizo." (Nzomalizo serves the same purpose as fa-la-la in madrigal singers). When there are feasts, many masquerades parade through towns and sing. One such song is "Egwu ulaga" which means "masquerade song." For paddling canoes, the paddlers sing a lot of rhythmic songs to help them in their work. "Nyabugbo" (paddle the canoe) is one such song. For tapping the national drink of palm wine, the tappers sing "Gbenchikichiki." This is the rhythmic sound that the tapping knife seems to make as parts of the palm tree are being scooped out.

Again, when a cooperative work group assembles in the morning to go to work on a farm, ogbu oja (a flutist), whose shrill notes have meaning, provides the workers with music for their farm labor--even from a long distance away. Often, the songs and accompanists stress the work rhythms. For example, when prisoners are cutting grass in a field, three or four prisoners are selected to sing "Onye suru achara ibe ya suru, onye akpola ibe ya onyukoli." This means "Let each one of us take his time in cutting the grass, nobody should call the other a prisoner." (see p. 76f). They sing this while they emphasize the work rhythm by each

knocking two machetes together. This is only one of many examples where singing and bodily motions are related.

Another way in which songs are put into use is as an aid to remembering historical deeds, especially in telling a tale containing an account of a chronological list. For instance, a story teller at one point may forget the important names in an event he is narrating. He stops and begins to sing a song as he clicks his fingers. Suddenly he will stop when he has remembered all the names and then continues to tell the story. The song has helped his subconscious mind to remember the names which he had forgotten.

Individual

That the character and quality of Ibo music may differ from district to district does not obviate the fact that the Ibo sings and that he is naturally intelligently appreciative of music. No event happens that is not associated with music. The Ibo has an ardent personal feeling for it, and also has both physical and mental power for it.

An Ibo chief of note keeps and maintains a private orchestra which often includes different types of drums, flutes, trumpets, horns, and gongs of different descriptions. Eze Opi in Nsukka takes personal interest and pride in conducting his orchestra. He rings his brass hand bell for the performers to begin playing and the orchestra to keep going; he rings the bell again for the performers to change

whichever rhythms each one of them happens to be playing. This is done without a break in the music. He rings the bell again to stop the whole orchestra. The members of the orchestra play at the chief's pleasure and he in turn pays them money, gives them food, and allows them certain liberties.

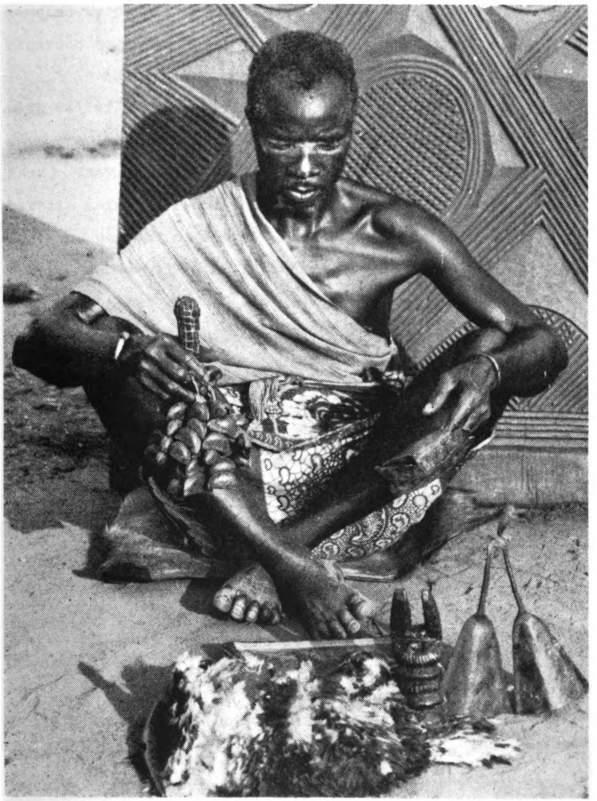
Music in Ceremonies

Music, vocal or instrumental, plays a large part at initiation ceremonies of youths to manhood or to the tribal mysteries. Ibo indigenous religious worship is either an act of worship or the accompaniment of such acts; in short, the function of music should be regarded as an aid to worship.

Religious Music

Dances and songs of religious or ceremonious nature play a large part in religion. The extemporized words of the songs, the swell of the music, the rhythmic motions of the dance, and the gregarious feeling that everybody is taking part in the same action heighten the religious sentiment. Other acts of ritual nature such as processions round the town before the actual burial processions are largely musical.

Certain Ibo musical instruments are used in sacred ceremonies; for example, okpokolo mbekwu (shell of a tortoise) and certain rattles that are held sacred and must not be



1. Dibia (An Ibo Priest at Work)

handled by people who are unclean. The same instruments are regarded as having magical powers or divine properties.

In the Ibo country, two types of priests who deal with belief in the supernatural order of existence are the onye bu alusi, and ndi dibia. Their work is virtually the same. They impose sacred interdictions upon the use of certain things or words or the performance of certain actions, perform ceremonies and rituals. They foresee or foretell future events or discover hidden knowledge. These priests sing chants and incantations in their attempt to convince their clients that they can really prophesy, "igba afa." To the layman these songs have confused, strange, unintelligible words difficult to comprehend. This is comparable to the use of half intelligible foreign, rude and uncouth words in magic formulae everywhere, as demonstrated in the Greek magical papyri and in Gnostic documents.

The Ibo priest makes use of some musical instruments as an aid in his divination. The instruments include a very small slit drum, a twin gong (ogene), different types of rattles, and one or two tortoise shells which he knocks at intervals. (See p. 16 for an Ibo priest at work.)

Unlike other African and some American Indian religious beliefs, the Ibos do not connect the art of making music to a god, but they do believe that it may have come from spirits. For example, the Asaba people who are Ibos who live West of River Niger think that music and dancing were

first learned from a hunter who heard songs from a party of forest spirits, but the Ibos in the East of River Niger do not share this opinion. In fact, they assert that apart from the general belief that all good things come from God, people are inspired to make music and are not specially taught by the spirits to make it.

One point ought to be made here for what seems to be religious but which is not. The Ibos love to share; the drummers, the harpists (ubo-akwara), or flutists often sprinkle some blood from a chicken presented to them as food when they are performing. This has no religious significance as such but is only an act of sharing the food that has been presented. The performer has a mouth, so he eats the flesh. The drum has no mouth, therefore, the only way it can share of the gift is by the sprinkling of the blood, and by the feathers of the chicken being held upon the wooden part of the instrument. People who specialize in performing either instrumental or vocal music are held in high honor. They are thought to be very clever.

In Civic Life

Music plays a very important part in civic life. Wrestling matches are a common occurrence in the dry season after the harvesting season. (This is discussed in detail on page 84). When civil ministers of one town visit another town, usually the town being visited provides music of

drums, xylophones, flutes, ogene, and gongs to meet and accompany the ministers into the town. Likewise, when they are going back, musicians lead them out of the town with music. Should the musicians not lead the ministers in and out of the town, it means that the ministers are not welcome.

Songs

Ibo poetry is made to be sung. There is no conception of poetry without a tune and no tune exists without words; words determine the tune of a song as shall be seen later on page 48. This is the reason why certain European hymn tunes do not fit the Ibo words despite the fact that the Ibo words are the correct translation of the English, French, or German words of the hymn. The sentence, "Chuku nwere nuku ike," which means, "God has great strength," is often sung to the tune of "As pants the heart." This is an example of the tune that does not fit the words because of the rise and fall of the syllables. When the Ibo sentence is sung to the tune mentioned above, the meaning is "God has great buttocks." So in setting Ibo words great care must be taken to see that the music follows the words.

Generally, all words and tunes are extemporized in making up songs but some songs have stood the test of time by being passed on from generation to generation with very little variation. To this class belong most fable songs and historical war songs. These are mostly of the nature

of a rhythmic vocal flowing melody in which the singer sings in a declamatory and rhetoric manner. The bard steadfastly repeats his melodic line with certain changes and then immediately the chorus repeats the entire song or part of the text.

As a general rule, most fable songs are unaccompanied; but there are songs that are accompanied either by playing the drums, striking sticks together, slapping the body, clapping, beating the ground, stamping with foot or a piece of stick, making explosive sounds with the lips, or by humming. Sometimes, the accompaniment may be with ekpili (a type of rattles) as sung by Nwoye Azodo of Awkuzu, or by the Ibo harp (ubo akwara) as used by Ndibe Adii of Achalla, or by Kaffir piano (ubo-aka) as used by the night watch man, by the resonated pot (udu) as used by most women, or by odi--a special type of drum as used by minstrels of Ezinihitte.

Often stories contain metrically recurring formulae which serve as antiphonal responses to the story teller's singing which is called antefable. Most tales all over the world have this characteristic not only among the Ibos, but among the Eskimos, Bantus, and Europeans.

Upon being given a musical and verbal subject, the Ibo often extemporises poetically and his listeners respond by singing fragments of his melody as a refrain.

Certain writers on what we may call primitive music indicate that words of some songs are unintelligible even

to those who sing them. The reason for this is that the words are merely musical sounds, or a particular tribe has adopted the songs of the language of another tribe, or the words are so old, having passed down from generation to generation, that the meanings of the words have been forgotten. This last case is particularly true in Haiti where the original slaves of Ibo descent have passed on words of Ibo songs and dances which have been orally transmitted to the present generation.[1] The present inhabitants no more speak Ibo language but they still have pride in preserving their original language. What is heard now in the songs they preserved is a very unintelligible Ibo, but occasionally one hears one or two words that are Ibo. When such is the case, the emotional and religious roots which gave meaning to the songs usually persist when the real meanings of the words have been forgotten. The original culture mingled with their new culture has given them a completely different one and there is a tendency for them to forget their own original words.

Certainly, the Ibos in Ibo country are not affected by the above circumstances. The Ibos have not had much outside influence in the past and the language has not undergone such a radical change as to be forgotten.

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[1]Harold Courlander, Haiti Singing (University of North Carolina Press, 1939), p. 334.

Rhythm

If the people of any country are gifted with a sense of rhythm, it is the Ibo people, and there is no doubt that their musical abilities have developed from this rhythmical sense. Rhythms dominate the Ibo. He begins to practise the playing of his rhythms, supervised by older children as soon as he can sing. When the Ibo presents his rhythms in tones, he makes music; when he presents them in gestures, he dances. The Ibo loves his complicated and strong rhythms. It is on them that he builds his music. The complicated and difficult set of rhythms from an Ibo band are sometimes very difficult for well-trained musicians to write. The Ibo assembles the rhythms in melodic fashion, he combines them in harmonic style, each instrument beats an interesting melodic set of rhythms which when combined produce counter-point of rhythms.

To a person who has not been introduced or oriented to Ibo music, or African music for that matter, the sole aim of the music makers seem to be to generate noise. The foreigner cannot appreciate the Ibo's love of his drums and rhythms but when he understands the Ibo man and lives with him in his village, he not only appreciates them, he adores them. If the foreigner is a learned musician, he soon finds that most of what "modern composers" try to force into their music has been in Ibo music for centuries. He finds that

deep down in the strange sound of tum-pi-ti of the drums are some compositions in dual modality, asymmetric meters, asymmetric divisions, principles of cross rhythms, non-accented rhythms, shifted accents, changing meters and ostinato resulting from the use of instruments. For this reason "modern music" appeals to the Ibo more than does a fugue by Bach.

SECTION II

IBO MUSICAL INSTRUMENTS

CHAPTER II

IBO MUSICAL INSTRUMENTS

General Observations

The musical instruments of the Ibos have not been standardized and are limited as to ranges and techniques that can be employed in the performance of them; still the Ibos achieve skill, dexterity, and ingenuity with what they have. They make their own instruments and extemporize both melodies and rhythms with profound inventiveness. The music produced serves as a means of communication; for in a dance, certain specific instruments at appropriate times give specific directions to individual dancers. To most non-Ibos all the sounds produced are the same and therefore they are not aware of the instructions; but any intelligent observer cannot fail to notice that a certain instrument at one point or the other is louder than the rest, and by watching the dancers he can see one person or the whole group physically responding to the rhythm of the solo instrument.

Two short observations on the uses of musical instruments in Ibo culture ought to be made here. The first is that in Ibo country, it is common to find both instrumental soloists and instrumentalists in groups; the second is that although it is common to find solo instrumental performances,

accompanied songs are most significant. This is substantiated by the fact that almost no song exists without words, whether those songs are actually performed or not. Therefore, when a musical instrument plays a song, a mental image of the words is invariably formed, although they may not be expressed. In short, the uses of musical instruments are dependent upon the originality of the performers.

Divisions of Ibo Musical Instruments Based on Hornbostel

Despite the fact that so many writers on African music have often overlooked the varieties of instruments other than the drum, there are a great number of instruments which Hornbostel has divided into four major divisions:[1] (1) Membranophones--those instruments that depend on membranes of animals for their source of sound; (2) Idiophones--those instruments whose vibrations are produced in the substance of the instruments themselves; (3) Aerophones--those instruments that depend on the wind for the production of their sound; and (4) Chordophones--those instruments that depend on strings for their source of sound. It will now be observed how the Ibo musical instruments are represented under those four broad divisions.

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[1] E. M. Von Hornbostel, adapted from "Ethnology of African Sound Instruments," from Africa, Vol. VI (July, 1933), p. 303.

Membranophones

Membranophones include the single and double skin drums. On the single skin drums, one skin is stretched over an opening at the end of a cylindrical tubular body of wood and is struck with the hand or with the beater. There are two drums of this type: (1) Cup-shaped drum which has a body like a bowl resting on a slender foot; (2) a larger drum with human shaped legs, the body is on a socket, the bracing tightened by wedges, see plate 2f; (3) Double skin drums have skins stretched over both ends of the body. They are usually short-barrelled and are beaten with the fingers of both hands on the two skins, see plate 2d.

Idiophones

Percussion idiophones include (1) the pot xylophone in which two tuned wooden slabs are laid on earthenware pots and struck with a hard stick. The edges of the earthenware vessel support the slabs at two points, see plate 21. (2) Log Xylophone in which at least twelve tuned wooden slabs are laid on two parallel logs (see ngedegwu, plate 22); (3) Percussion pot--an earthenware pot with an opening at the end of a long neck and another opening about two inches in diameter about four inches from the root of the long neck. The palms of the hands or soft felt are used in beating them (see udu, plate 16).

Percussion bells consist of hollow metallic or wooden

vessels, typically shaped like an inverted cup with or without a flaring mouth that vibrates and gives forth a ringing sound when struck by a moveable clapper hung within the bell. Other bells include: (1) Natural bell--shell of a fruit, e.g., some type of ekpili or idi. (2) Wooden bell--bell carved out of wood (See plate 11). (3) Forged iron bell--Metal bent round into cup-shape without coming together, e.g., kpokokpoko, yom-yom (see plate 11). (4) Bells without clappers which are struck together without a beater. These may be welded iron bells of which the edges of the half-bell are welded together and struck by hand, e.g. alo, ogene (see plate 7). (5) Concussion bells--a pair of detached bells are struck one against the other (see yomyom plate 15).

Similarly clappers or concussion idiophones are two disconnected sticks that are held in both hands and struck against each other (see aja, plate 10).

Rattles--Parts of the instrument are struck against each other by shaking the whole. A container is filled with small, hard objects like seeds or pebbles, and the non-sonorous bodies strike against the sides. The following types are common: (1) Gourd rattle which is held by the neck; the gourd is covered with hard strung seeds or beads (see shakara, plate 32); (2) Gourd-basket-rattle consists of conical basket work enclosing a piece of the shiny part of a gourd; the inside contains pebbles, hard seeds, or other small hard objects (see plate 12). (3) Pellet bell--a

spherical metal covered at both ends but containing pebbles or hard seeds inside. Other kinds of rattles include suspension rattles which are sonorous bodies hung up separately or threaded on strings, so as to strike against each other when agitated; strung rattles or rattling objects strung in rows on cords, or tied in bunches (see ekpili, ashaka, plate 15).

Plucked idiophones include a set of metal prongs which is fastened onto a board over a bridge at one end and plucked at the free end (see ubo-aka, plate 19).

Finally, water-pot drums--graduated earthenware vessels (pots) are partially filled with water to produce specific predetermined pitches (see plate 29).

Aerophones

Among the important aerophones is the flute whose sound is produced by blowing a thin air against a sharp edge. The two kinds of flutes are: (1) Notched flute--a straight flute which produces its sound by being blown on the notch at its upper end (see ogbo, plate 25); (2) Globular flute--a transverse flute which produces its sound by being blown at an opening in the side wall of the tube.

Trumpets include animal horns or gourds shaped like animal horns; the tip or stalk end is cut open, about an inch from this opening is another opening at the side through which a stream of air is blown into the instrument and the

sound is produced with lip vibration. The bell end and the tip end are open and are manipulated by fingers of both hands producing different pitches (see akpele, plate 27).

Reed instrument consists of small pieces of tubular grass which are slit at one end so that blowing on the slit end causes these edges to vibrate and strike against themselves, producing the sound, e.g. ami.

Chordophones

Included among the chordophones are (1) the musical bow--a string stretched between the ends of a flexible wooden bow, the mouth serving as a resonator for the string vibration. Different pitches are obtained by the division of the string being touched with a small stick as the stick is set into vibration by striking it with another stick (see une, plate 32). The other stringed instrument is (2) the Board zither consisting of a board with a wooden box resonator supporting a long neck of several flexible wooden bows of unequal lengths. The strings pass over a bridge on the board and extend to the end of the wooden bows.

From the above, it may be seen that there are more instruments under idiophones than there are under the other three classifications. This may be why most writers on African music think that there are only the idiophones.

CHAPTER III

THE DRUM

General

All the cultures of the world have found it necessary to employ the drum for their music making, but while some have used it merely as a secondary instrument, others have brought the playing of their various drums to the highest degree of performance and refinement. To the latter group belong the Ibos.

The most important element in the Ibo music is its rhythm. The Ibo loves rhythm, and in most cases whenever there is drumming there is also some dancing. Of all the Ibo musical instruments the drum assumes a position of greatest social importance. Any occasion whatsoever, be it funeral, marriage, or naming ceremony, is unimaginable without the drum. It is on the drum that these social ceremonies are built. In contrast to the European music which is built on chords and which uses the drum to ornament the music played by other instruments, the Ibo treats his drumming as music in its own right subordinate to no other instrument. The various rhythms and accents of the drums direct the movement of dancers and excite them to a frenzy.

The Ibo has organized in a scientific way a rhythmic principle which the Western ear recognizes as being different from his own and which seems very complex, but which, on analysis, is very simple. He achieves this by the interweaving of complex, contrasting rhythmic patterns on drums and other musical instruments. In most cases, the drum derives its rhythms from the rhythms of the words of the song; these rhythms are accentuated and varied by other drums and by the rest of the musical instruments. It does not matter what instruments are used to express the complicated rhythms, the result is always a conflict of rhythms in a highly organized rhythmic contrapuntal development. For example, a song which appears to have only one main rhythm will prove, on examination, to have at least two rhythms: one in the melody and one in the accompaniment. Since the oldest and simplest method of instrumental accompaniment is that of hand clapping, we shall examine individual hand clapping.

Individual hand clapping.--Hand clapping has a special advantage of being able to keep time accurately. The tempo can be slow, moderate or quick. When a song is being sung and as long as it is heard distinctly, a group of about thirty people can clap the time regularly in unison without anybody's missing the regular tempo. Notice the term, "in unison." When a song is begun, people clap the regular beats; very soon somebody claps a rhythm different

from the regular; by the time that he has done this twice, he finds some followers, and soon there are about four or five different rhythms going on at the same time. But for occasional intercalation of two against three to suit the words, a song is either duple or triple.

An interesting rhythmic pattern gives zest or pungency to the music of the Ibo. To the Western ear, a song has equally spaced beats as in 3/4 4/4, 6/8. Most classical songs are in those rhythms. With a recent interest in oriental and Indian music, composers made use of changing meters, and more recently, asymmetric meters and divisions. Even people who claim to be authorities in African music discovered that they are unable to notate the correct rhythms in the usual 3/4, 4/4, or 6/8, and consequently feel that the piece is "free."

A common rhythm which drummers or clappers employ is:

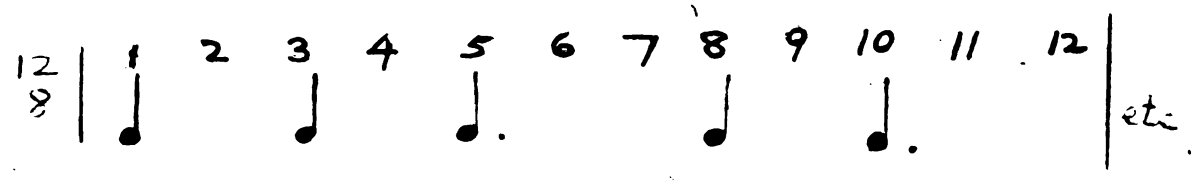

Figure 3

The duration of these eighth notes is of absolutely equal value. The clappers clap on 1, 3, 5, 8, 10 on every measure. Judging by the conventional European standards, it will be seen that the claps are in the most improbable and unacceptable

places, and it is not easy for Europeans to devise or form a conception of a clapping accompaniment to a melody whose strong beats are not in the general agreement with their fixed usages. If upon this accompaniment a melody in 3/8 time is superimposed, this is the result:

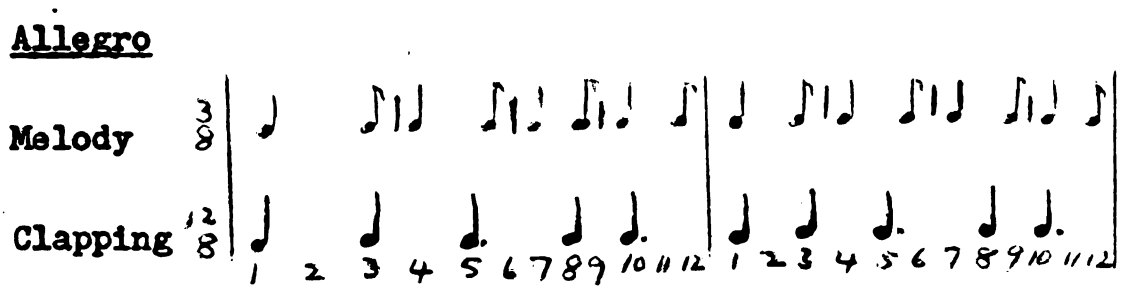

Figure 4

The above is the pattern when the melody is straightforward as in a European melody. When an exotic Ibo melody is superimposed on the clap rhythm, the result is as follows:

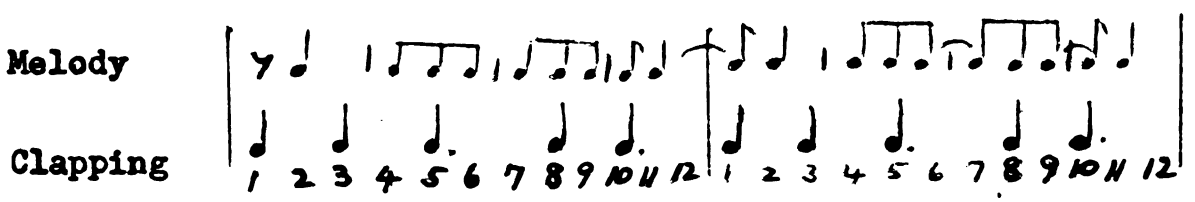

Figure 5

This latter melody is apparently controlled by the equally unseeming free rhythmic clapping. Once the clapping is established, the general plan of it is maintained unless the music itself unmistakingly demands a change of the established rhythm.

Combined Clapping Patterns

There should be at least two people or groups each group clapping either the first or the second beginning at the same time and maintaining the same regularity of time:

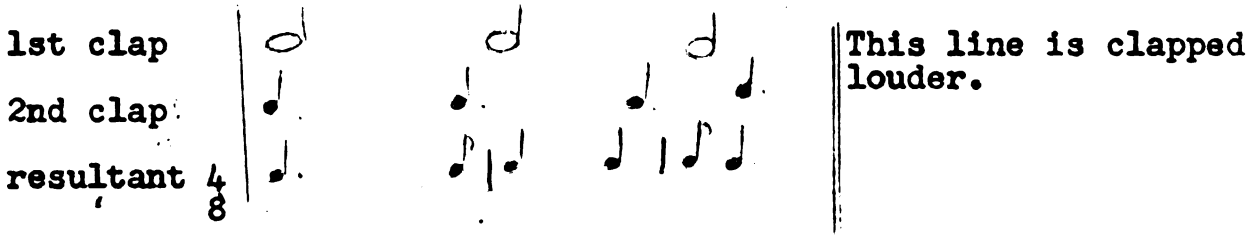

Figure 6

The resultant is duple. See the 2nd measure of the 3rd line.

Clapping the same rhythms but this time reversing the line that is louder, this is the result:

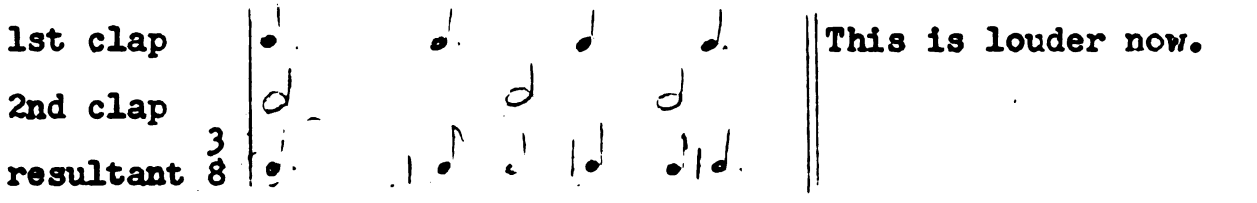

Figure 7

The result is triple.

Here is another example:

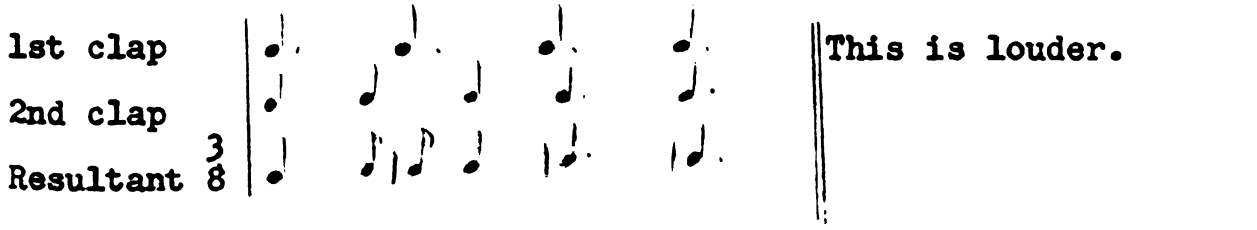

Figure 8

The first two examples demonstrate 4 against 3 and according to which is made louder, the psychological resultant time is either duple or triple. The Ibos frequently employ these two methods of clapping. Incidentally, one can appreciate the complete bewilderment of a European who finds himself trying to disentangle these two rhythms which go on together without the help of each clapping line having a difficult pitch. The clappings themselves are not different but when combined with highly syncopated melody, the difficulty, of course, increases.

When another pattern of clapping is established, this is the result:

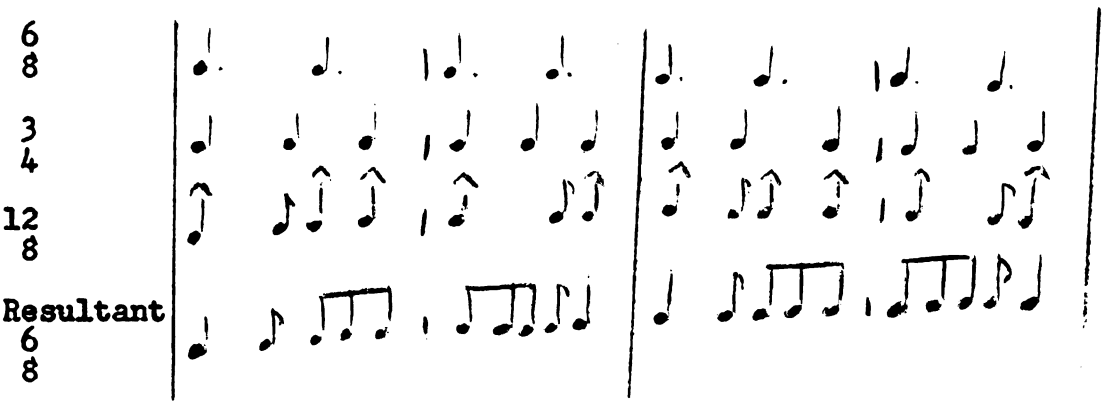

Figure 9

The first two sections are beating 3 against 2. That is simple enough but not so engaging the attention as the third. We have used the marks of emphasis on the third to show the lively, buoyant, springy motion which pervades the whole line, which is in $\frac{12}{8}$ rhythm. When the three patterns

are combined, the resultant sound is an interesting $\frac{6}{8}$ rhythm. Combine this resultant rhythm with an Ibo song with its syncopations, and the result is still very much more intricate. Most Ibo boys will easily clap these rhythms at a tempo = 140. At this stage, it is unnecessary to remind the reader that the rhythm of the song closely follows the speech rhythms of the words which are tonal.

Here is another simple one which two people can clap:

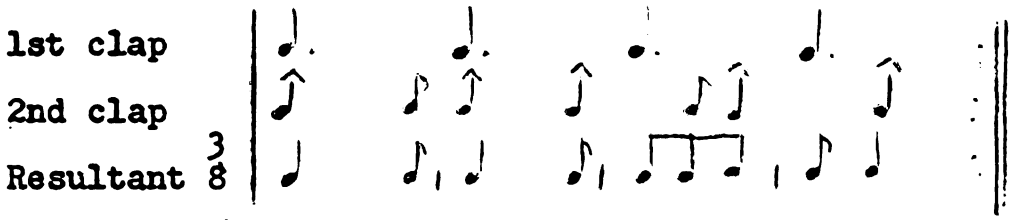

Figure 10

The reader should notice that at the beginning of each 12-beat measure, all the hand claps coincide. They may or may not coincide again until the beginning of the next measure. This is the time to consider the drumming technique.

Drumming Technique

Drums are to Ibo music as the strings are to classical compositions. It is in the drumming that all elements--melodic, harmonic and rhythmic--are exhibited. All these elements are found in all the other media of Ibo music whether in singing, clapping, or in the medium of other instrumental displays, but were we to study Ibo music without adequate

reference to the drums and drumming, we would be missing the most important element. It is true that very occasionally one drum may be used to accompany a song, but usually, no fewer than two drums and more often three, four, and up to eight drums are used for a full performance. Even this number does not rule out the use of other percussive instruments like the xylophone, udu, ogene, and even clapping. Pertaining to the use of percussion, Wilmer T. Bartholomew says of rhythm-making instruments:

> Rhythm is essential to music, and noise of one sort or another is very effective in marking the rhythm. Thus, although a part of the sound made by such rhythm-marking instruments as the drums and cymbals could be called tone, a large part of it seems to our ears only noise, since the presence of inharmonic frequencies destroys the regularity of the vibration form from wave to wave. Yet, we would be quite unsatisfied by music that never contained any rhythmic beats from these or similar instruments.
>
> Another very important use for noise is in a powerful climax chord, where tone alone would never satisfy. Thus, the orchestra gets its most intense effects by adding to the full volume of "tone" the "noise" produced by tremolos on drums and timpani, and on the climactic beat a crash on cymbals and gong.
>
> Jazz music has always emphasized noise, and the modern trend in legitimate orchestral composition is also toward an increasing use of noises not heretofore used in music.[1]

In Ibo music the drums supply the melody and a harmony of free, uncalculated pitch relationships, as well as the

---

[1]Wilmer T. Bartholomew, Acoustics of Music (London, 1942), p. 160.

timbre and a free rhythmic counterpoint. That is why there are usually more than two drums performing at the same time.

The art of drumming is organized in much the same way as the hand clapping which was discussed earlier, in that the rhythm is scientifically developed as in the hand clap; but the interesting facts about drumming are that, in the first place, although as many or more rhythmic patterns are produced as in hand claps, the main beats in most cases often do not correspond exactly. The Ibos feel that the performers have no creative inventiveness if the beats always coincide. Let us see exactly how the Ibo drummers reason as they improvise their rhythmic counterpoint. The master drummer first establishes his rhythm; the second drummer bears in mind where the original strong beats are and he then plays another rhythm which is both melodically and rhythmically as interesting, but he avoids as much as possible having the main beats correspond with the original. We know that the melody that each drum produces is aurally satisfactory because each performer knows how to produce a good number of specific pitches on his instrument. In order that the main beats do not fall together, the second drummer makes full use of suspensions. Another means he uses to achieve the same effect is to have rests where normally a strong beat would occur.

A third device is that of a clapper. After he has invented his rhythm, he maintains it throughout unless there

has been a very good reason why it should be changed; but the master drummer who is the leader of thematic material, frequently varies his rhythms because he has something specific to say. He does not begin from the beginning and say something at once. He says something and repeats it three or four times; he says something different, and repeats that three or four times and continues thus. All the other drums and percussive instruments stick to the rhythms that they have established. A close examination of the master drummer's devices include asymmetric meters, asymmetric divisions, non-accentual rhythms, shifting accents, and changing meters. When all these are superimposed on the fully organized harmonic contrapuntal rhythms of the other instruments, this becomes to most foreign ears, a jumbled mixture of heterogeneous sounds.

A person brought up in traditional way of musical rhythms would expect to see this:

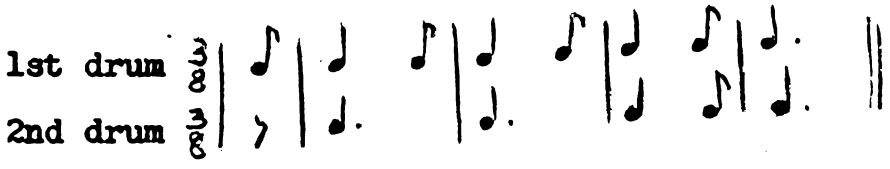

Figure 11

An Ibo would consider this arrangement unimaginative and dull. He would make use of the same two rhythmic patterns but arrange them differently:

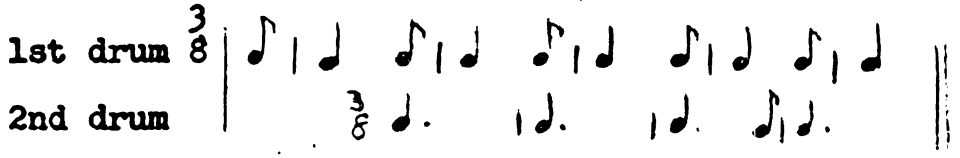

Figure 12

or

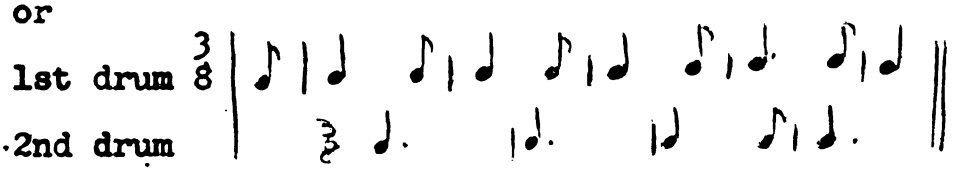

Figure 13

In figure 12, the strong beat of the 2nd drum happens to coincide with the third beat of the 1st drum. It would be a long time before such a coincidence would happen again, but they would eventually happen. In figure 13, the two drums have started with no strong beats coinciding. The two drums would have to play long enough for them to coincide. So, the coincidence is only periodic and not always calculated. Because the strong beats of one do not coincide with the strong beats of the other, so called "cross rhythms" or "cross beats" result.

In the last example, we have illustrated cross rhythms with two rhythms in triple time. The Ibos frequently have a rhythm going on in triple time and another in duple time, for example:

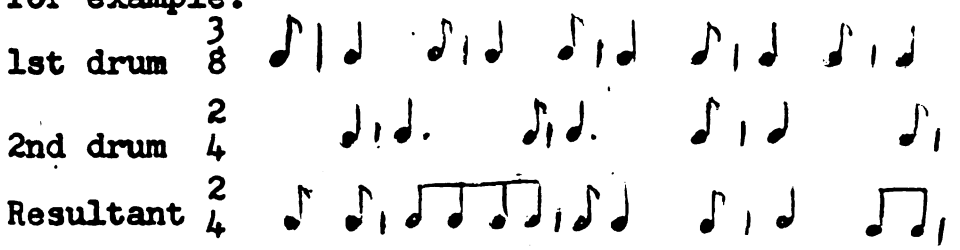

Figure 14

The resultant sound is not as monotonous as it looks on paper for the sounds of the first drum stand out in contrast with the sounds of the second drum. When the rhythms of the master drummer and all of the subordinate drummers are put together, the combination is traditional and imaginative. In short, Hornbostel's comment is appropriate:

> If rhythms are to be arranged in the order of their relative simplicity, those of the African drum would represent the extreme development, those of the Chinese and our own classical composers the most elementary stage.[1]

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[1]E. M. Von Hornbostel, "The Ethnology of African Sound Instruments," Africa, Vol. VI, No. 2 (April, 1933), p. 133.

SECTION III

MEMBRANOPHONES

a.

b.

c.

d.

e.

f.

CHAPTER IV

MEMBRANOPHONES (LEATHER DRUMS)

Different Names of Leather Drums in Different Parts of Ibo Country

We shall now consider the drums that are made of wood and have leather covering. The drum is usually cylindrical in shape. It is hollowed and covered on one or both ends with leather. Varying from one foot to about four feet in length, the smallest size of the drum is called ekere in Owerri, the largest size is called ogwe in Umuahia. The regular type of leather drum is called igba in the Onitsha area. In the Owerri area it is called nkwa. In Western Ibo it is called egede; in the Brass area it is called okuma. Nkwa is the music produced by both ekere and ogwe.

Construction

The wood used in constructing igba is ufie (camwood), akpu (cotton tree), okwe, egbu, ube (pear tree), ngwu, while the coconut stem is traditionally reserved for the making of ogwe. After the wood has been hollowed out, it is generally made in such a way that in the normal igba one end is thicker than the other and the circumference is larger. In the making of ogwe, both ends are almost equal and of

the same thickness. The wider end is selected for covering with leather while the other end is left open or constructed in such a way that it has three legs on which the ogwe would stand.

In covering one end with leather, aṅa rope (special rope from a type of elephant grass) is used to keep the leather in position, and several wedges are forced between the aṅa and the leather. These wedges are for tuning purposes as will be seen later. The types of leather suitable for use in the making or covering of igba are those of mgbada (antelope), aghu (alligator), agu-iyi (crocodile), eke (python), ewu (goat), okpijo (a type of poisonous fish), ehi (cow skin), and agu (leopard skin).

Performing Technique

Fingers are used in beating an igba, but often, a small stick bent in the form of a bow is used in beating the drum. Fingers of both hands are used for beating purposes, but more often those of the left are used to control the pitches. If the fingers do not press any part of the leather while the drum is being beaten, the pitch produced from striking is deep and sonorous, but when any part of the leather is pressed and the remaining portion made to vibrate by beating, the pitch is higher. When the wedges are driven in and therefore made tighter, the resultant pitch is higher; conversely, if the wedges are slackened, the pitch is lower.

Even after the wedges have been used to produce a higher pitch, a still higher pitch is produced by exposing the leather to the heat of the sun or to an open fire. The pitch can be lowered by slacking the wedges or by moistening a piece of cloth slightly and rubbing it on the leather. This last method is not often employed. It can now be seen that the tuning of igba is done by driving in wedges to raise the pitch, by slackening the wedges to lower the pitch; by warming the leather to raise the pitch, by cooling or moistening it to lower the pitch. It is also apparent that the source of sound in igba is the leather that vibrates when beaten and that the cylindrical opening of the wood serves as the resonator and amplifier of sound.

Uses

Igba is extensively used for dancing, rejoicing and wrestling. In Obolo in Okigwi Division, at about 5:00 a.m. on festival days, nkwa is played to tell people that the festival day has dawned. In observing funeral ceremonies, nkwa-ike is played to show that a hero is dead. At Ngwa in Aba Division, nkwa-ike is played on the roof of the deceased at midnight. The ordinary nkwa is played to rejoice over the birth of a newborn babe.

In Eziama Obiato in Owerri Division, during a burial ceremony, spectators assemble and drummers perform on their instruments. Only those people who lost one or both parents

dress for the occasion and dance. At intervals the drummers stop; then a hero who has performed a remarkable feat such as killing people in battles or killing leopards walks out holding the skull of an animal he killed, and tells people in a boastful manner how he performed the feat. After that, drummers beat a special number for him and he dances. The number is drummed in a particular way and the master drummer by means of his drum tells everybody how brave the man is, how the whole town should be proud of him, how others should try to imitate him. Suddenly the drum stops abruptly and the dancer is supposed to stop at the same time as the drum. If he does not, it is generally believed that he may have some misfortune in the near future. Ezinihitte town shares this sort of custom.

The Talking Drum

Often, people hear of the Ibo traditional "talking drum." Almost any type of Ibo musical instrument is used in "talking." Here are a few reasons why this is possible. Ibo language is tonal and the language calls to mind an agreeable succession of tones which combine themselves into interesting patterns and rhythms using syncopation as one of the devices.

Let us take the word, <u>isi</u>. Depending on how the syllables are raised, lowered, or accentuated, the meaning changes. <u>Isi</u> means "head." <u>Isi</u> means "smell." <u>Isi</u> means

"blindness." Isi means "you said." Isi means "if you say." Isi means "to measure." Isi means "to say." Isi means "six." Isi means "if you go from." These are nine different ways of using the word, isi, but there are many more. Consider this sentence:

Ndi isi isi ahu bipuru isi ndi isi ha dotara n'agha.

This means:

Those six headmen cut off the heads of the six blind men captured in the battle.

Staggering, isn't it? Here is one more, a play on the word, oku. Oku means "fire." Oku means "fishing." Oku means "inheritance." Oku means "earthenware vessel used in making soup." Oku means "pipe for smoking." Oku means "he planted." Oku has many more meanings. Consider this sentence:

Nwam nyem oku ka m'we se oku tupu m'gaba oku.

This means:

Son, give me fire that I may smoke before I go a-fishing.

Here is another sentence:

Otu madu nke nagabiga na akwa huru okuku nke neyi akwa, na nwa okoro nke na akwa akwa, na otu nwanyi hke na akwa akwa.

Now, let us see how many akwa appear. There are six of them. The meaning of the sentence is:

As a man was passing through a bridge, he saw a hen laying eggs, a lad crying, and a woman stitching.

This is because akwa means "bridge," akwa means "eggs," akwa means "crying," akwa means "cry," akwa means "stitching," akwa means "cloth." The word can only mean these different things only when proper accents are applied on the syllables.

Take my own first three names for an example, William Wilberforce Chukudinka Echezona. You can say, William Wilberforce, using the same pitch all through, or you can accentuate any syllable you like; at worst, it may sound a little odd or strange but the meaning or intention is not in the least affected. You can let the accent fall in each case on the first and last syllables, it is perfectly all right but you cannot do this with the Ibo word, Chukudinka. In the first place, every Ibo name has a meaning, therefore, the tone pattern must be right for it to be intelligible. The actual rise and fall of the syllables in Chukudinka are ¯ ¯ _ _. Do it any other way and it is wrong. I can play it on the piano. It can even be embellished for "ku," Chukudinka, ¯ \ _ _ . If I were to reverse the tones, the word becomes meaningless. In fact, if I were to pronounce it this way, ¯ ¯ _ ~ ¯, it would mean that God is very old, while the meaning intended is "God is most artistic."

It follows then that any word or sentence can be played on the piano or the fiddle, or on a drum, or on most Ibo musical instruments, provided that patterns are kept intact. As we have seen earlier, the pronunciation of one word may have three or four different meanings, but in

conjunction with the rest of the words of a sentence, the actual meaning becomes clear. Even in the English language, "one, won, worn, warn," all seem to sound the same, but when each is used in a sentence, the meaning is unmistakable.

With such a language, talking drums are extensively used to warn the villagers of an impending danger such as a neighboring town's invasion. The British would never have defeated many Ibo towns, in fact, the reverse would have been the case if they had not learned about the "talking drum." In each case, the British soldiers made sure that the source of the tum-pi-ti was first silenced. A village scout with his drum on top an iroko tree drummed to the whole town, warning them of the approach of the British soldiers, the direction from which they were coming, and how the villagers should surround and attack them first.

An early example of the "talking drum" appeared in "The Expedition to the Niger, 1841," concerning Kru men who are alleged to have been descendants of the Ibos and Yorubas. The account states:

> The Kru pilot, Glasgow, was in Captain Allen's cabin one day, answering some queries relating to the river. Suddenly he became totally abstracted and remained for a while in an attitude of listening. On being taxed with inattention, he said: "You no hear my son speak?" As we had heard no voice he was asked how he knew it. He said, "Drum speak me, tell me come up on deck." This seemed very singular, so Captain Allen desired him to remain below and privately sent messages to the performer in the boat alongside, who executed them by a variety of taps on his wooden drum; and these Glasgow interpreted in a way that left no doubt of his having

> understood perfectly all that the "drum spoke." He also said that they could communicate by this means at very great distances by "the war drum" which is kept in every village to give and repeat these signals.[1]

Again, the talking drum is used to tell the villagers that such a man is dead, that he belongs to such an age group, that he is a titled man, and that his death has caused great sorrow to the whole town. Within a short time, people assemble to do the last honor to the deceased.

A long time ago when there was not much education in the Ibo country, when there was only one hospital--Iyi-Enu hospital at Ogidi, when Christianity was new to the people, and, when the power of the medicine man was great, the medicine man used his stock in trade and the drum to both heal people both physically and psychologically, or to instil fear in the minds of people while taking advantage of their ignorance. His stock in trade included okpokoro mbe (tortoise shell), ikenga (household god), alusi (a consecrated god), ego ayolo (cowries), okpukpu azu (certain types of fish bones), okwe (epidermis of certain type of nuts of a certain tree), nzu (white lime), edo (a yellowish substance), agwu isi (god of magic), oyo (rattle), ogene (a type of gong), and a drum, all arranged in a certain order. It is interesting to see that a patient under the influence of a medicine man may seem so physically weak and in a critical condition, yet

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[1]G. T. Basden, Niger Ibos (London: Seeley, Service & Co., 1921), p. 364.

lying in this condition he may turn his head rhythmically at the gentle suggestive rhythms of the medicine man's drum.

Acoustics

The drum contains a stretched membrane which vibrates as a whole and in parts. When there is a fairly established first or fundamental harmonic, a tolerably clear and unmistakeable pitch can be heard, otherwise both the fundamental and the upper partials are very unstable and therefore there is no recognizable definite pitch. The result is a noise. All Ibo membranophones except perhaps odi (the small drum covered on both ends with leather) have definite pitches. The odi has no definite pitch because the tension of the membranes is not high enough.

Both the drums that have definite pitch and those that have no definite pitch have their places in the percussion orchestras of the Ibos. Both can be used to produce appropriate rhythms through a crescendo to a cogent culmination of loudness.

With both ends of the hollow wooden cylinder covered with leather, when the leather on one end is struck, the other vibrates in sympathy because the enclosed air joins the two pieces of leather together and energy jumps from one piece of the leather to another. In short, the first leather yields its energy to the second; when this is done, the first stops vibrating temporarily, then the second yields

energy to the first which now vibrates while the second stops vibrating temporarily, and so on. This act of giving and receiving energy goes on until the energy is too weak to be heard. All these happen in a second.

The shape of the wooden part of the drum affects the acoutics of the drum. When a drum is covered at one end and the other end curves slightly inside, certain overtones are magnified. Also, in a drum covered at one end, the harder the wooden body, the more the reflection of sound, and therefore the louder the sound. When the wood is hard and has a bell ending, the sound seems much louder than otherwise.

The eventual tone obtainable from an Ibo drum is variable depending on (1) the type of leather used for the drum (human skin is best, but now that there are no wars, antelope skin is the next best); (2) the quality and evenness of the head; (3) the type of material used in beating the drum (a soft drum stick produces a velvety sound while fingers produce hard percussive sound); (4) the type or the quality of the wooden part of the drum (the harder the substance, the better the quality of the sound); (5) the tautness of the leather; (6) the player's technical skill; and (7) the particular spot upon which it is played.

The pitch of the drum depends on the size of the membrane (everything being equal, the smaller the size, the higher the pitch); the tension (the greater the tension,

the higher the pitch); and portion of the membrane that is allowed to vibrate at any given time. For instance, to raise the pitch on the Western timpani, the timpanist either screws down the leather with the screws provided, or manipulates the pedals, but the Ibo drummer selects by hand the area he wants to vibrate by stopping with his left fingers the area he does not want to vibrate with his right fingers or with his bent, beating bow-stick.

SECTION IV

IDIOPHONES

a.

b.

c.

d.

3. Different types of slit drums.

CHAPTER V

THE SLIT DRUM

Different Names of the Slit Drum

Slit drum is known as ekwe in Onitsha area, ekere in Owerri area. Common names in all areas include okwa, ikoro and uhie. The smallest type is ekere, the largest types are uhie and ikoro.

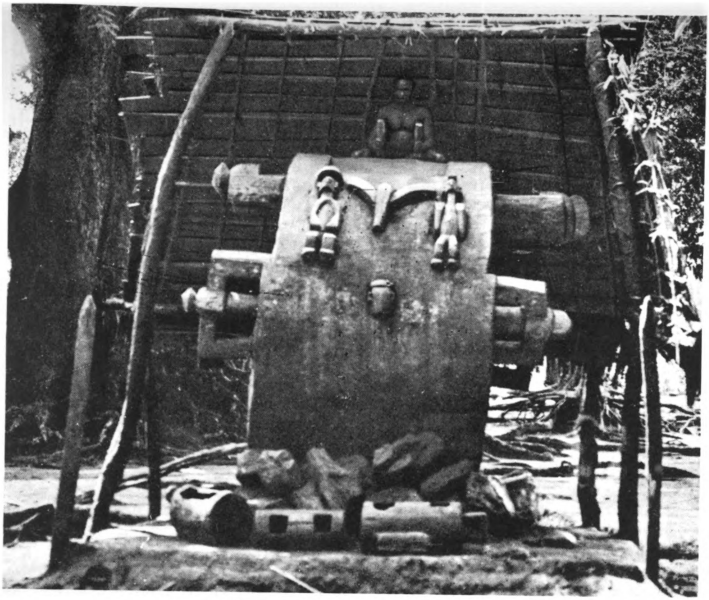
Construction

The simplest type of ekwe is made from a section of otosi (bamboo tree). All along a hollow bamboo tree there are partitions. When a suitable tree is selected, a hollow section bounded on both ends--that is, two partitions on each end--is cut out, care being taken to allow some four extra inches on one end. This segment will later be shaped to form the handle. A slit is made as described earlier, but since thickness all round the bamboo is equal, and since there must be a variation in tone, the length of one lip is slightly shorter than the other, for makers have discovered by experience that a shorter length produces a higher pitch when all the other things are equal.

A regular ekwe is made from a log of wood about 2½ feet long and 10 inches in diameter that has been selected from a variety of different suitable trunks. Those considered

suitable include ube (pear tree), ufie (camwood), ukpaka (oil bean tree), ngwu, uko, okwe, oki (iroko), obeche and mahogany. The bark of the selected log is removed. From one end, a length of about 6 inches is measured out. This will later serve as the handle. From this time on, the maker will have to bear in mind certain acoustical rules, or rules of sound, one of which postulates that everything being equal, a piece of stick which is longer than another is deeper in pitch when struck with a piece of stick. Another rule that the maker must bear in mind is that when two pieces of sticks are equal in length, breadth, and thickness, the heavier one gives a higher pitch when struck with another piece of stick.

About 2 feet of wood is left. A convenient narrow slit about 2 inches wide and about 10 inches long depending on the size of the drum is made. This slit does not touch both ends. Through this slit, the inside of the wood is scooped out, leaving an approximately uniform wall of about ½ inch all round each side of the slit, forming a lip. The maker makes sure that one lip is slightly shorter and thicker than the other. During actual performance, this thicker lip produces a higher pitch than the other lip. The inside is made very smooth. The 6-inch wood reserved for the handle is now carved in the form of a human head or the head of a beast. The ekwe is now left to dry properly, then fine tuning of the lips is made.



4. The giant drum at Umu-Nze.

Many ekwe are very large. These huge ekwe often form part of the emblems or symbols of a town, and they often describe the picturesque characteristics of the town.

Let us pay a short visit to a town called Umu-Nze in Awka Division. This is a flourishing town of about 2000 inhabitants where many huge trees grow. Since the town is so large and centrally located many people from far and near come to buy and sell at the large market. The market is evidence of the town's economic and social prestige.

In the center of the market place under a shelter is housed a collection of drums from the smallest to the largest. The actual length of the largest drum is 10 feet 2 inches (including its ornamental ends, each 2 feet 3 inches). The height is 8 feet 5 inches, and the width is 7 feet 10 inches. It was made from a single trunk of iroko wood and was the work of a man from Amawbia in Awka Division about 30 miles from Umu-Nze. This man was known in and outside Awka Division for his ability to make the best sounding, the largest, and the most durable of all drums. Because of his reputation and because Umu-Nze people wanted to be talked of as the owners of the largest drum in the vicinity, they decided to hire the drum maker to make for them the largest drum possible. This large drum in the market place was the result. The man was adequately paid for the work he had done, but was waylaid and killed to keep him from making another drum of this or larger size.

The making of all types of drums affords the maker of an opportunity to express himself by exquisite carving. Carvings on each drum tells a story. The drum on plate 3c tells the story of an important man in the village. It is customary for important people to be buried with the heads of certain slaves who would minister to them in the next world. On this particular drum there are four slaves on each side of the drum and there are two heads of important people. The story on the drum depicts the death of an important chief and his prime minister who were buried with eight slaves.

Technique of Performance

In certain drums where there are two square openings joining the central slit, when one of the openings is closed and one of the lips is hit with a stick, the pitch is much lower than otherwise. The degree of lowness depends on how much the hand is cupped. When the square opening is closed half way or quarter way, the resultant sound is always deeper and that, of course, means a variation in pitch. By manipulating one of the square openings, it is easy to obtain the first four notes of the diatonic major scale of the key in which the drum is tuned.

Often two drums are used simultaneously and the hands cross and recross in a most fascinating manner. In the same way, modification, mutation, or deviation of note is produced

by the performer on drums made of wood without any leather. Every small section of the slit drum has its own timbre or quality, and by manipulating the fingers, more notes and other qualities are procurable.

Acoustics

According to its behavior, the slit drum should be classified as a bell rather than as a gong (as is often done), for in a bell, the edge vibrates, but in a gong the center vibrates. Therefore, the reader should look at page 82 (Acoustics of the Bell) for a further discussion.

Uses

Okwa and ekwe are used as percussive accompaniments to the human voice and to other members of Ibo orchestra; therefore, each lip of the instruments is expressly made to produce a specific pitch, high or low. Ekwe is used for announcements. At Awka in Okigwi Division, when the chief decides to summon a meeting, an announcer is selected and he goes 'round the town with the chief's special ekwe to state his message. For instance, this is what may be said in Ibo:

> Eze ala kara si, na olu ama-ala ga adi ubochi nkwo ma erichala nri ututu. Ndi nwoke na abia, ha kpara nma na ogu; ndi inyom na abia ha buru ekete na efere eji ekpo aja. Onye na abiagh ga akwu ego abuo.

This in English means:

> The chief has commanded that there is going to be a communal work on Nkwo day after breakfast. Men should assemble with their cutlasses and hoes; women should assemble with baskets and pans for carrying sand. Punctuality is essential. Penalty for absence is two shillings.

At Ngwa and Okigwi area, the day the villagers harvest palm nuts, every able-bodied adult assembles at the market square. The elder of the village checks to make sure that everybody is there. If the number is correct, the very big ekwe about four feet high is beaten, then the cutters are sent into the bush to harvest the palm nuts. Some sing and some shout for joy as they run into the bush.

People are often summoned to meetings by the use of drums. Even in this modern era, some churches use this type of drum for summoning people to church in the same way that bells are used.

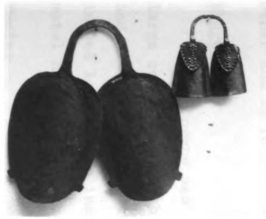
Some of the slit drums of smaller pattern are distinguished from the ekwe and are technically known as ufie (see plate 5). Ufie is generally found in the royal place and not in the hands of the commoners. It is the king's prerogative to own and to have the sole right to use one. Its sound is somewhat different from the ordinary ekwe and its note is immediately recognized by the Ibo, even though the foreigner may be unaware of any difference. Some of these are cylinders standing upright (nearly three feet) on legs, with skin stretched over the top. Steady practice is necessary in order to become a qualified performer

5. Uhie

6. An Ibo Orchestra

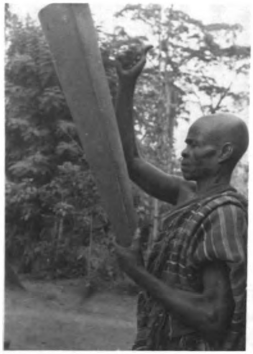
on these. The performer must know his instrument thoroughly and be able to gauge the differences in sound produced by the whole top surface of the drum.

Big drums are not primarily for making music. They are mainly for spreading information over a wide area, for certain ceremonial rites, and for the town's great sacrificial observances. The only time these giant drums are played for music is when a titled man, ozo, dies. These drums are played for him and not for anyone of lesser rank. Some market days are often devoted to certain idols when the priest of that idol beats the uhie or ikolo to show which god is the owner of that day. Where uhie is used, there are always two drums used.



a.

b.



c.

d.

e.

7. Ogene (a and b)
Alo (c, d, e)

CHAPTER VI

OGENE

Different Types of Ogene

Ogene is a type of bell made of hammered iron which is from about four to six inches in length. Its shape is oval with the edges flattened. The twin ogene is called ogene mkpi nabo. Occasionally three ogene may be joined to be used as one, in which case it is called ogene mkpi ito. In a twin ogene, there are really two of them not more than eight inches in length and joined at their base by a stem (see plate 7, a and b). One type of twin gong is flatter than the other and is found around the Udi area.

Where Made

Both ogene and its giant sister, alo, are made on a large scale by local blacksmiths, especially those of Awka and Nkwerri. Twin flat ones found at Amokwe measure eighteen inches long by ten inches wide and are joined by a curved metal handle six inches long (see plate 7a).

Tuning

Depending on the size of the ogene, the pitch may vary from A_1 to C_1. The twin ogene are tuned a major third apart. Alo is usually tuned to any pitch ranging between C_2 to C_1.

Technique of Performance

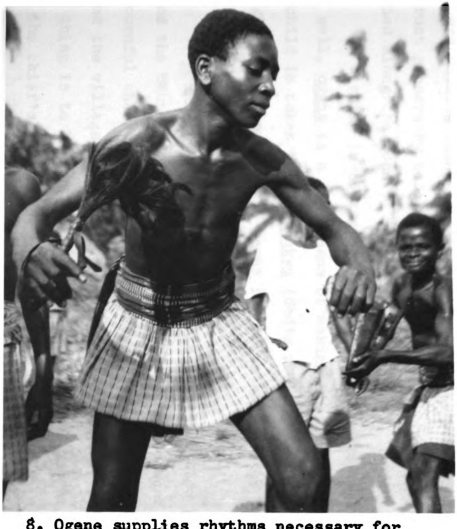
All twin gongs and small single ones are held upright with the base downwards, and about a foot in front of the neck when struck. Others are occasionally struck with the fist as in plate 7c. However, the usual ways of playing the large ones, alo, are demonstrated in plates 7 c, d, and e.

If the player wishes to produce more than one pitch when using a single ogene, the first pitch is obtained by holding it by the handle and striking it near the mouth or open end. A higher pitch is obtained by holding the playable part of ogene in the middle and striking it near the mouth. Also ogene can be inverted in such a way that the mouth is covered by the ground.

The quality of the sound can be varied by the type of the stick used in hitting the instrument. The harder the stick the louder and more hollow the sound. The softer the stick the softer the sound.

Uses

Ogene is principally used to supply rhythms for dancers as in the case of the dancers called mgbaga and etilogwu. The two different pitches often employed in the use of the ogene can show whether the dancer is expected to use his right or his left leg or, when one foot is doing the motion, whether that foot should move up or down (see plate 8).



8. Ogene supplies rhythms necessary for mgbaga dance.

9. An orchestra of twin giant ogene and other instruments.

Ogene is also used as an accompaniment for other percussive instruments such as the ngedegwu (xylophone), abia (a set of drums), and in combination with the udu (earthen pot) instrument discussed previously).

In Ngwa, Ogene is used in summoning meetings of the rulers of the land. Ogene is also used for a burial ceremony. In some parts of Iboland like Ngwa, it is customary to carry old women when they die, to their original parents' home where the people of her age group and all the "daughters of the land" assemble for her burial. Ogene is the principal means of communication. Ogene is beaten in various manners which instruct people either to be quiet or to sing; or if they are walking along the road with the corpse, ogene may instruct passers-by to clear the road, for a corpse is being carried along the road.

If a child is stammering or cannot speak and communicate well, ogene is a sure means of making him speak well. The child is taken to Ihu Ghukwu (God's presence)--shrine--and given water out of the ogene for it is supposed to produce clear and beautiful tone quality.

When omu (tender leaves of a palm tree) are tied around the mouth of ogene and beaten, the sound produced is of mournful character. When ogene in such a state is beaten around the village, it shows that there is a danger. The next thing is to listen for the message about the danger from the chief's drum.

Alo is not used to give rhythms as in ogene. In a dancing ensemble, the alo is hit a few times with a soft stick, but more often it is hit with the fist near the open mouth, to denote a climax. It is also used to warn the villagers to listen for an important announcement from the chief. Because the alo is essentially an instrument of one pitch, it is not used for "speaking" as the drum and some other instruments are.

10. Aia (Clappers)

CHAPTER VII

AJA (CLAPPERS)

History

Knocking two pieces of wood together is one of the earliest ways of accompanying songs and dances common in all cultures. The first instruments that Egyptian documents recorded were the clappers. Vases made about 3000 B.C. depict women dancers holding one clapper in each hand to accompany their dancing. These early Egyptian clappers consisted of two sticks shaped like boomerangs. Sticks similar in shape were used in hunting, and anthropologists have given them the name--"missiles." It is easy to see the connection between them: When the Egyptian hunters came near the dense growth of papyrus, they clapped their missiles together to frighten the water birds. Then they threw the missiles at the flying birds.

One of the exclusive means by which women and children in Iboland accompany their folk songs and dances is by clapping the rhythms. In the past, a person clapped the rhythms she wanted with the palms of her hands. In the early 1920's, girls discovered that two wooden blocks used as clappers were louder and were much kinder to their palms. Following this discovery, they paid many visits to the carpenters' sheds.

Since then, carpenters have turned out wooden clappers for the girls. These wooden clappers were very inexpensive because they were made from unwanted pieces of wood which the carpenter had cut off, besides the fact that wood is very cheap in Iboland.

In the past, white wood was used because it was light in weight and a woman could easily make her own clappers from it if a carpenter was not available. White wood, however, has some serious disadvantages: (1) It does not last very long and crumbles to pieces with use; (2) Worms eat through the wood very easily making it useless for its intended purpose; and (3) with frequent use, clappers made from white wood crack easily and badly, moreover the dry wind called the harmattan (which blows from the Sahara desert during the months of December and January) is so unmerciful to these instruments made of white wood that, if the clappers survive all the other inclemencies, a new pair must be made after the harmattan season. The tendency now is to use hard wood like camwood, iroko, mahogany or other woods of this type. These obviate all the disadvantages of white wood and sound louder when knocked together. To counteract excessive weight, the thickness is reduced to a minimum of about one quarter of an inch.

Technique

For techniques in clapping, the reader is referred to the section on drumming which deals with clapping and clapping patterns.

Uses

Apart from producing rhythms for accompanying folk songs and dances with clappers, clappers are used to foster work-rhythm as an aid to a more pleasurable attitude while working. The use of work-rhythm as a source of musical activity is found among the Ibos and often utilized by convict prisoners when they cut grass. Prisoners in Nigeria have no grass-cutting machines. After breakfast the prisoners are marched out by the jailers, each with his own grass-cutting matchete furnished by the prison authorities.

A gang of prisoners normally numbers about thirty. From these, two or three prisoners are selected to sing and clap rhythms to which the others will work. Each of these selected is given a pair of clappers so that he can knock them together (see p. 14). This is the type of song they sing:

Onye suru achara ibe ya suru,
Ony'akpolibe y'onyukoli.

The meaning in English is:

Let each one of us take his turn in grass cutting.
Nobody should call the other a prisoner.

The physical movements involved in this grass cutting are as follows: The prisoners stamp their left feet lightly on the ground. At exactly the same time they make a clean sweep with their matchetes by raising them high above their heads on the right and sweeping the top of the grass in a clean semicircular movement which is completed at the other

side of their bodies. All this takes only a second, and all these movements take place on the words "suru a." It is on this "suru a" that they bend down, lightly stamp their left feet on the ground and cut the grass. On the word "suru" in the first line, the prisoners stand straight. On the word "kpoli" in the second line, they step backward with their left foot which twists their trunks slightly backwards. On the word "koli," their trunks are twisted to the right as far as they will go while the left feet remain where they were. On the word "suru a," the whole cycle of action begins again. It will be noticed that the underlined words mark the strong beats, and it is only on these that the important movements take place. The speech-rhythm forming the melody is as follows:

Allegro

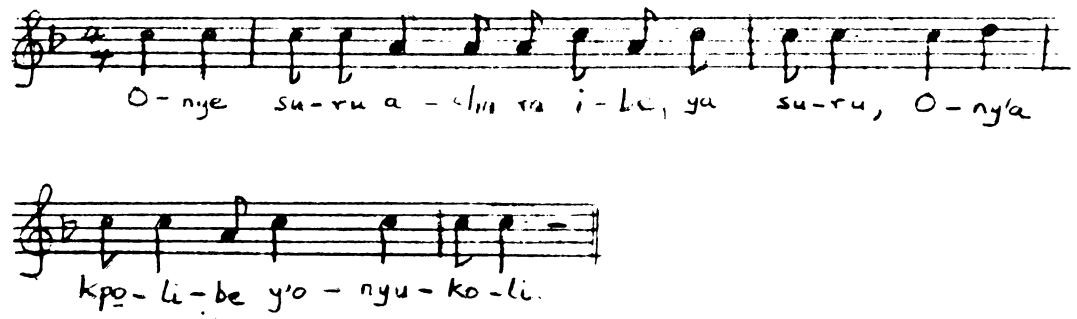


Figure 15

11. Kpokokpoko

12. Oyo

13. Ubo-aka

14. Aja

15. Yom-yom

CHAPTER VIII

THE RATTLES

The rattle is another type of instrument found in all cultures. There are two different types: (1) Objects that are suspended so that when shaken, they clash and make some noise. These are found in Iboland as ekpili, yom-yom, and kpokokpoko. (2) A receptacle containing small objects that rattle when shaken. Almost all the Ibo rattles belong to this second type, and form the family known as oyo. The selection of materials used in making rattles depends upon what is available in the particular locality, the skill and imagination of the people, and the symbolic and fanciful values that they attach to various objects and materials. Let us examine the first group, ekpili.

Ekpili

Ekpili is the seed of ekpili tree. Botanists have not yet identified this tree with any botanical name. However, ekpili seeds (which grow to about an inch in diameter) are harvested when still tender and the larger ones are cut in two longitudinally in such a way that each half looks like a boat or canoe. The pulp is removed and holes pierced through them, after which they are allowed to dry in the sun.

When dry, about thirty are strung on a strong thread. Now the ekpili is ready for use. The row is tied to the calves of the legs of men or women, or to their ankles, or to their waists, and they rattle as they dance. Usually the larger seeds are tied to the waist. Dancers of etilogwu, mgbaga, eriko particularly like to use ekpili. Mo (masqueraders) also like to dance with ekpili.

Oyo

Oyo belongs to the second type of rattles. Some kind of vessel is used to enclose small, hard materials which rattle when the vessel is agitated. The Ibo oyo has a base of dried gourd usually cut in circular form at least three inches in diameter. Holes are burned all around the gourd through which tapered mid-rib of palm leaves are passed in such a way that the stalk of the mid-rib is wedged in the soft part of the gourd, while the rest completely encloses the hard shiny part of the gourd. These mid-ribs serve as the skeleton for the basket work to be wrought which eventually tapers to a point (see plate 12).

Before the basket work is finished, hard seeds, pellets, or gravel are placed inside the receptacle. After that is done, the makers continue the weaving to enclose the top and produce a handle for the instrument.

A pair of oyo is used at a time, held in each hand and shaken in definite rhythms.

In recent times, cigarette tins have been used to make types of oyo by putting a few pebbles in each cigarette tin and bending the top so that the pebbles do not fall out. This type of rattle is very simple to make, lasts well, and makes rough noise.

Yom-yom

Yom-yom is a type of rattle which really is made of tiny bells of about half an inch to three-quarters of an inch (see plate 15). The bells are brass and sometimes they are double bells on a single stalk. About thirty or forty of them are strung together and tied around the ankles, calves and waist. The name "yom-yom" is derived from the sound they seem to make when they are shaken. Bigger bells of about four to five inches are sometimes worn on special occasions.

Bells in general have been associated with ozo (the conferring of titles) ever since their early and continued importation by the Portuguese. Bigger bells, sometimes two in number, are worn by the titled man himself or his page, when they are moving from one part of the village to another. As they walk, the bells jingle to let people know that an important man is passing by. In those early days, only the relative of the chief would wear yom-yom to distinguish them from the rest of the dancers in the village square. As the chief's relatives got married to others either in the village

or outside it, they carried with them their regal privileges and introduced them to other dancing groups.

Chiefs who had no brass bells made their pages carry a single or double ogene (gong) which they struck whenever the chief was moving from his compounds to another part of the village. Bells were also used by the local doctor as part of his stock-in-trade.

Acoustics of the Bell

Often we hear beats in the sound of a bell; that is because the bell when sounding divides into segments which have deficiencies in their structure owing to slight unevenness in the construction, this puts them slightly out of tune with each other. When an instrument produces sound, partials are produced. The lowest is known as the fundamental and the rest as the upper partials. In the bell these relations are much more complex than was at first suspected.

A bell should be regarded simply as a type of disk. "Where the hammer strikes the side of the bell a ventral segment is formed; and when the fundamental is sounded, the bell divides into four of these segments, separated by nodes. When these touch the nodes they remain nearly quiet; but when they are in contact with the segments they are forcibly repelled."[1]

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[1]Clarence C. Hamilton, Sound and Its Relation to Music (Philadelphia: Oliver Ditson Co., 1912).

16. Udu

17. Water-drum Pots

CHAPTER IX

UDU

Another instrument that is seldom found in any other culture except in the Ibo country is the udu (see plate 16). Taking a quick glance at an udu, it appears to be like any other earthen water pot in most African countries, however, a closer look reveals that it is different.

What It Is

The udu is moulded out of clay and baked in an open fire like any other water pot. The differences between a water pot and an udu are: (1) The udu has a much longer and narrow neck; (2) It has an extra hole or opening approximately two inches in diameter and about two inches from the neck; (3) It is often decorated with artistically placed lines and rounded ornamental protuberances. The thicker end of a palm frond which has a protruding tine or fork is used to mark the clay while it is still wet. The potter (usually a woman) uses her discretion to draw straight or curved parallel lines on the wet clay using the wooden instrument. As a work of art, udu reveals the ingenuity of its maker.

Construction

At this point, a more detailed explanation of how an

udu is made is in order. Raw clay is beaten to a smooth paste, mixed with fine ground pieces of broken pot, and rotated in the hollow of the neck of a broken pot. The neck which is forming a new udu can be turned over and over by the maker until, when finished, the result is a perfect, symmetrical, hand-made udu. The quantity of clay is slowly shaped by skillful movement of the fingers and is later smoothed with the hand as the udu is slowly revolved.

When a sufficient number of udu and other pots have been made, they are fired. This is done by spreading dry grass and branches on the ground, placing the new pots on top of them, then placing more dry materials on the top of the pots and lighting the fire. The fire burns vehemently as more fuel is added until most of the pots are nearly red hot. When they have been allowed to cool off in that position, they are brought out ready for sale or for use.

Technique

The udu is one of the instruments that girls and women seem to favor. Women also favor the aja or nkponkpo (wooden clappers), and yom-yom (tiny bells), which provide accompaniments for the udu. The performer sits either on a mat or on a bench and supports the udu on his or her lap, grasping it tightly between the knees to keep the instrument in position. Both hands are raised, the palm of the left hand strikes abruptly against the hole at the body of the instrument. The pitch produced by striking against this

sidehole is lower by an interval of a fourth or a fifth than that produced by striking the hole above the neck. The palm of the right hand strikes the hole above the neck at the same time that the left palm is raised. By gradually increasing the curvature of the fingers and the arch of the left palm while the right palm is striking, any interval up to a fifth is easily obtained.

The intensity of sound produced depends on the force used in striking the holes. Another characteristic sound obtained is that of slurring a lower note to a higher one. This is done by arching the palm and the fingers of the left arm on the hole on the body of the instrument while striking the other hole, and immediately afterwards, raising the left hand off the hole completely. An experienced performer can slur any two pitches from the lower to the higher one. Slurring from the higher pitch to the lower one is not practicable.

The quality of the sound produced is not unlike that of a bass drum that is beaten lightly. The performer can beat very complicated rhythms on the udu and, at the same time produce another quality of sound by rhythmically beating the body of the instrument. Some performers even put small pebbles inside the udu and, at certain times, agitate the instrument while performing on it. The performance requires great skill and dexterity.

Uses

The main use of the udu is, like the ogene, to supply rhythms for dancers. The two predominant pitches employed serve to tell the dancers whether they are expected to use the right or the left leg, or, when one foot is doing the motion, whether that foot should move up or down. In singing, udu helps to set the tempo and rhythm of the song, occasionally adding new rhythms in agreement with the tempo of the song.

At the celebration called "spinster's eve," it is delightful to watch girls sing to the accompaniment of the udu. One such song is called "egwu obi" which means "song of the heart."

Although the udu can be used for talking in the same manner as the drum, it is normally used only to make music, and is essentially a rhythm instrument.

WATER-POT DRUMS

Closely resembling udu are the water-pot drums. These differ from an udu in the fact that a water-drum has no side hole; moreover, a single udu can be played alone while there must be at least eight water-drums to be used at the same time.

What They Are

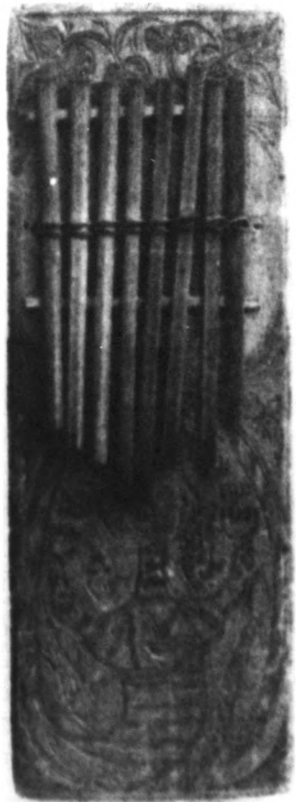
Graduated earthenware pots are partially filled with water to produce specific predetermined pitches of a diatonic major scale (see plate 17).

Technique

A performer plays at least eight of the graduated post assembled round him in a semi-circular form. He beats across the open mouths of the pots with a beating pad made of palm felt. He usually plays known tunes which are within the compass of an octave.

Use

The water-drums are played for amusement only. They are sometimes accompanied by other instruments like bottle-knocking and drums.



16. Ubo-aka without a resonator. Notice the beautiful carvings.

CHAPTER X

UBO-AKA

Historical Account

This is an instrument found in West and South Africa (see plate 18).

> Called by some the African piano or music box. It is widely distributed, more plentifully, perhaps, in South and West. . . . David Livingstone heard it played by a native poet, who had joined his party, composing in honor of the white man, and playing and singing whenever a halt was made.[1]

Ubo was introduced to the Niger Delta by the Ibo slaves who were taken there awaiting shipment to America. They still call the instrument, ubo, despite the fact that they do not normally speak Ibo.

Ibo slaves have also taken ubo along with xylophone or marimba as far as to East Africa, but it has not caught on with other nations in the same way as the marimba. As far back as 1586, Dos Santos saw this type of instrument in use. This was an account of it:

> These Kaffirs (the Karanga) have another musical instrument, also called ambira, . . . but it is all made of iron instead of gourds, being composed of narrow flat rods of iron about a palm in length, tempered in the fire so that each has a different sound.

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[1] G. M. Theal, Records of South-Eastern Africa (Capetown, 1901), p. 201.

> There are only nine of these rods, placed in a row close together, with the ends nailed to a piece of wood like the bridge of a violin, from which they hang over a hollow in the wood, which is shaped like a bowl, above which the other ends of the rods are suspended in the air. The Kaffirs play upon this instrument by striking the loose ends of the rods with their thumb nails, which they allow to grow long for that purpose, and they strike the keys as lightly as a good player strikes those of a harpsichord. Thus, the iron rods being shaken and the blows resounding above the hollow of the bowl, after the fashion of a jew's harp, they produce altogether a sweet and gentle harmony of accordant sounds. This instrument is much more musical than that made of gourds, but it is not so loud, and is generally played in the king's palace, for it is very soft and makes but little noise.[1]

Wangemann describing this instrument, mbila, of Bavendaland ascribes it to the Bakalanga (Karanga), living in Rhodesia, and giving it the Karanga name, thereby, stressing its northern origin, the path of the slaves being taken from West Africa to the East.

> He (Chief Pafuri) brought me the Bela (mbila) of Bakalanga and played upon it. This (instrument) is quite differently constructed to that of the Bavenda. It consists of tuned metal tongues, which reinforced by a bottle-shaped calabash resonator, produced quite a pleasant sound, like our glockenspiel with steel bars.[2]

Different Names in Iboland

Almost all Ibos call the instrument ubo-aka. In Okigwi and Aba areas it is called ikpa; in Isoko, which really is not Ibo, it is called akpata, and in English, some call

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[1] Ibid.

[2] D. Wangemann, Ein zweites Reisejhar in Sud-Afrika (Berlin, 1886), p. 167.

it Kaffir piano, African piano or music-box. The ubo-aka is an instrument which cannot be compared with any foreign one. Of all the solo instruments, this is the commonest.

Construction

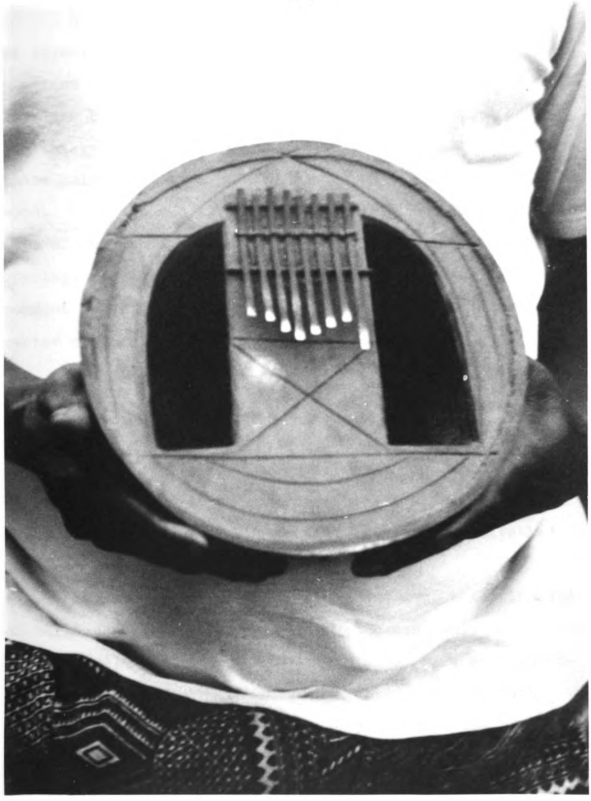
If the materials needed for making an ubo are ready, one can be made in three days. A dry calabash whose diameter is from eight inches upwards can be cut longitudinally or latitudinally into two with a small sharp pointed knife. The seed and all the matter inside are removed and the inside kept scrupulously clean. The cut edge is smoothed with the same sharp knife and further smoothed with a kind of leaf called anwilinwa. This leaf behaves exactly like a smooth sand paper. Now the outside of the selected part of the calabash is carved in an artistic design. Some people like to carve geometrical patterns, some carve people making music, and some carve beasts.

A soft white wood like okwe, ulu, ube, egbu, owuru, is prepared in such a way that it would fit the top end of the cut calabash. On the lower end of the wood and at both sides of it, two openings shaped like new moons are made, one on each side so that the fingers of each hand can fit conveniently well into them. From about eight to fourteen different lengths of pieces of flat metal or palm frond backs called ofolo are selected. Usually these pieces are of the same width. The ends on which the thumbs are to play

are further flattened in the case of metal.

As the ubo is played with thumb nails, and as the music is rapid, it is essential that the little metal prongs which produce the sound should not only be in tune but also in line or in a sweeping curve so as not to trip up the thumbs as they move from one prong to another. The problem, then, for the maker is to adjust the prongs so that when they are in line they are also in tune. Further, he has to make them of such a thickness and springiness that they will not only give a sweet and even sound, each note having the same intensity, but their main harmonics should harmonize either with the note itself or with one of the other consonant notes.

In many cases, the prongs are arranged to form the letter V, having the longest strip of metal, one on the extreme left and the other on the extreme right; or the figure \/ | , having the longest piece of metal on the extreme right and the next in length right in the middle (see plate 19). The distance between one piece of metal and the other is roughtly one-fifth of an inch. The positions of these pieces of metal are now marked on the wood and removed. The idea is to secure one end of the metal to the soft wood leaving the other free to vibrate. The ends that are not going to be free are arranged more or less in a line very near the end of the wood and the free ends stretching right across the soft wood following the grain of the wood.



19. A man shows off an Ubo-aka.

Near the end of the wood, where the free ends must be secured and in the space of one-fifth of an inch already provided for, holes of about one-tenth of an inch or a little less are bored by using a red hot steel needle of appropriate thickness and piercing the soft white wood. It is through these holes that later the pieces of metal are secured to the wood. The center opening is made in such a way that the tips of most prongs stretch just beyond the edge of the center opening. The diameter of the center opening is again dependent on the size of the calabash. Some ubo-aka have no center opening. These are not so resonant.

The pieces of metal (prongs) are fixed in position by tying them with a piece of string through the holes. These strings are the types which are often found on a palm-wine tree--akwara. Two pieces of metal about one-tenth of an inch in diameter are put across on either side of the string and under the pieces of metal. This raises the playable part and gives it springiness.

At the moment, certain people use soap boxes instead of calabashes in making ubo. In such cases, only metal prongs like an umbrella and bicycle spokes are used, wire strings employed instead of akwara; in such a case, one very much misses the beautiful carvings usually found on the back of these calabashes. It must be remembered that when strips of metal or prongs are lashed to the sound box between the two fixed bridges, the loose ends are cut to different lengths

and separated wide enough to permit freedom in fingering.

Acoustics

We shall next try to record some acoustical observations on ubo. The calabash acts as the resonator. Where the prongs are assembled without the resonator, sound is present but it is not sweet and rich as is the case with a resonator.

Let us now examine the prongs themselves. Each prong is fixed at one end and free at the other. In a sense, it behaves like an organ reed. One difference between the prong and the reed is that the vibrating metal of the reed is supple and just enough force of air is sufficient to set it vibrating. The prong, on the other hand, is not so supple as the vibrating part of the reed and no ordinary force of wind can set it vibrating. It needs to be twanged. So, the method of excitation in each case is different, and therefore, the quality of sound produced is also different. The attack of sound by the reed is gentle, round and not accompanied with an audible noise; while that of the prong is always accompanied by noise depending on the force used in excitation, and the attack is not so gentle and round as that of the reed.

The fact that the prong is fixed at one end and free at the other demonstrates transverse vibration of rods, if we may call the prongs rods for a moment. This is sometimes

described as a fixed-free condition. Where the prong is obviously fixed to the wood, is the node and the free end is the antinode. We have noticed when we were examining the construction of ubo that the prong has some thickness as well as length and breadth. We know that in instruments making use of reeds like the clarinet, the reed vibrates, but for the production of sound, the vibration is closely associated with resonant air body. This is not always the case, for the reed of a harmonium does not depend on resonant air body, and so is the case with the prong of the ubo. The resonator certainly improves the quality of the sound, but the sound does not depend on the resonator. Therefore, for the moment, we shall deal with the prong as an independent vibratile agent. The diagram on page 98, figure 16a, shows when the prong is emitting the fundamental tone. Rayleigh has proved that:

> The fundamental frequency of a vibrating bar of type shown in the diagram is approximately expressed thus:
>
> $$f \text{ equals } \frac{kt}{l^2}$$
>
> where t is the thickness parallel to the directions of bending, l the length, and k a constant which in turn involves the coefficient of elasticity of the material of which the rod is made. The thickness at right angles to the direction of vibration is not a factor.[1]

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[1] J. W. S. Rayleigh, Theory of Sound (New York: Dover Publications), Vol. 1, p. 186.

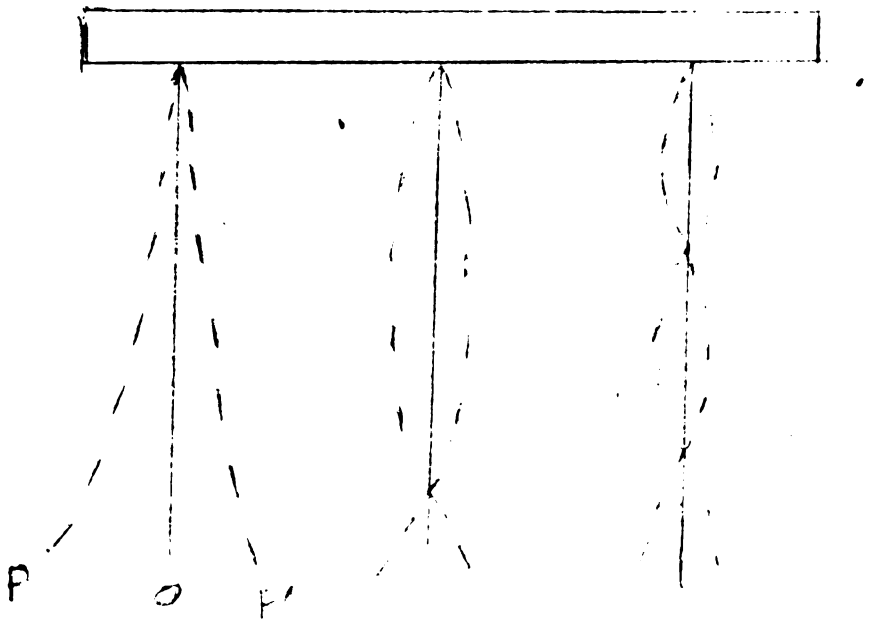

Figure 16. (a) (b) (c)

Demonstration of transverse vibration of rods

Adapted from: (1) Sound in Relation to Music by Clarence G. Hamilton (Boston: Oliver Ditson Co., 1932), p. 58.

(2) Musical Acoustics by C. A. Culver (New York: McGraw-Hill Book Co., Inc., 1950), p. 238.

In figure 16a, the prong so located oscillates as a whole between the positions indicated by the dotted lines up and down between p o and p' o. With the advent of the second partial the fixed end must form a node, but the free end, unrestricted in its motion, becomes the center of a ventral segment. The other node must therefore occur at a distance of a half segment, or one-third of the length of the vibrating portion of the prong, below the free end, the remainder of the prong forming a whole segment (figure 16b). Likewise, when the third partial arises, the prong forms two and one-half ventral segments, with the first node located at one-fifth of the length from the free end, while each of the entire segments occupies two of the remaining four-fifths (figure 16c). Succeeding partials would continue to divide the prong according to the odd numbers 7, 9, 11, etc.

These upper partials rise very rapidly in pitch, and are inharmonic in character. Thus the first upper partial has about 6¼ as many vibrations as the fundamental, while the next has 17½ times as many. It is easy to hear the high overtones which ring out as the prong is twanged, but which very quickly vanish, leaving the fundamental. Rayleigh has shown and experiments confirm that the relative vibrations per second of the first five upper partials are in the following relationships: 1, 6.25, 17.5, 34.4, 56.5, and 84.

Another observation is that when the prong is twanged, the duration of sound is amazingly long.

Tuning

Now comes the tuning of the ubo. The lengths of the prongs produce variable pitches. The nearer the two horizontal pieces are brought towards the string used in tying the prongs, the higher the pitch; again, the farther the prongs are moved, the deeper the pitch. The more each prong is moved towards the center opening, the more the vibrating part of the prong is increased and therefore, the deeper the pitch and vice versa. The maker now tunes the instrument to follow the inflection of the human voice, that is, the human voice is tonally imitated. "Tuning is systematic, a performer frequently testing his instrument and adjusting it between tunes.[1] The arrangement of the prongs looks rather strange but is well adapted to the music played on the ubo. The first diagram shows the prongs arranged in the form ⋀ . When the instrument is properly tuned, the left thumb nail plays 1, and the right thumb plays 2, in other words, the left thumb nail playing all the odd numbered prongs and the right thumb nail playing all the even numbered prongs, the result is figure 18. Even when there are more prongs than eight, the scale is tuned and played as just described. It will be observed that the highest pitch is played

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[1]P. Kirby, The Musical Instruments of the Native Races of South Africa (London: O. U. P., 1934).

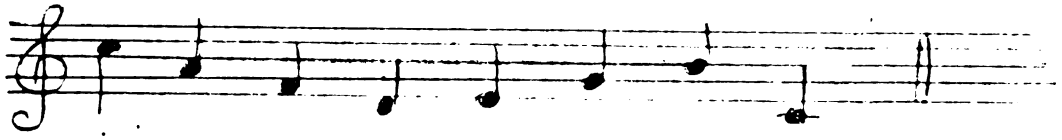


Figure 17

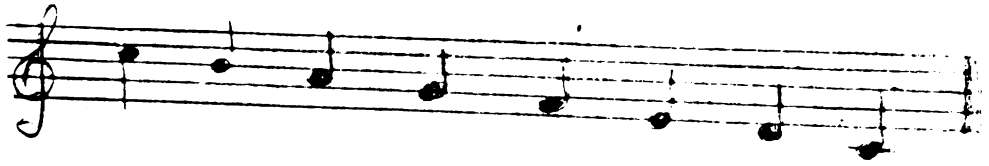


Figure 18

with the left thumb nail and the corresponding prong is located at the extreme left, unlike the ngedegwu (xylophone) described later.

The ubo-aka that was brought from the Ibo country was tuned by an old Ibo player who has not come in contact with European music. It was taken to the Physics Laboratory at Michigan State University for an acoustical analysis. The result is astounding.

Note	Cents	Length in Inches
C'	1225	1.44
B	1100	1.5
A	928	1.57
G	695	1.7
F	490	1.8
E	398	1.86
D	205	1.95
C	15	2.1

Figure 19

The thickness of each prong is uniform as 1 millimeter. The instrument used in determining the cents was a Stroboconn tuned at A equals 440.

With the exception of the lower C, the pitches correspond very closely to the previously stated law that the frequency is inversely proportional to the square of the length.

Without knowing what the key on the instrument was, the author asked the player why he chose that key and not anything higher or lower. He said that he could tune it up or down, but that at that moment the key most suitable for his voice was what he had tuned it to. The author asked him how he knew the intervals between the prongs. He said that he did not know and asked the author to watch him tune the ubo-aka again. He pushed the prongs in and out with his nail and played them to assure the author that they were not in pitch. He sang a phrase of an Ibo song, tuning the prongs between the melodies he sang. Look again at the figures and remember that a cent represents the hundredth part of a semitone. Isn't that amazing?

In the Ibo country, especially in Owerri area, experts often play more than one ubo at the same time. The player selects three or four of them of varying sizes. He does not tune all prongs in all the instruments, but he only tunes about three or four prongs on each instrument using a short melody which he repeats very often as he does the tuning. This leaves many prongs on each instrument not tuned. The result is that he can play the melody of a tune on all these

instruments, his hands crossing and recrossing to get the notes he wants. Because of the number of instruments used, the player gets a wide range of notes. Depending on the sound he wishes to obtain, the player pushes the prong forwards or backwards with the flat end of a nail. The largest of the set of ubo is lucky to have more notes in tune than the rest, for the player's helper plays an ostinato bass as an accompaniment. This means that only two or three notes are out of tune in this instrument compared with the others that may have up to nine prongs out of tune.

Foreign visitors who collect instruments, after they have heard this performer play, may elect to pay a good price for one of them. The performer gladly sells the instrument. The collector goes away and asserts that the prongs on the particular instrument he had bought represent the scale which the performer used. The author wishes that a foreign collector to any country at all would look for a guide to help him do his collecting.

Technique

After the ubo has been tuned, some strung beads are tied loosely round the back of the calabash to produce an additional percussive effect while the player is playing, for he sometimes intentionally agitates the instrument. The instrument is held in both hands with the tailpiece pointing away from the musician, while the thumb nail is used for manipulating the prongs. The nails press cleanly on the

strips, and are then slipped sharply backwards, the result being a twanging sound, the notes varying according to the different lengths of the prongs. Sometimes, the prongs are stopped with the index fingers in order to produce higher pitches, which enables the performer to modulate temporarily to another key. This is not done often, for the quality of the sound produced is often poor, especially in the hands of an amateur.

The performer often uses his fingers that have been passed in between the soft white wood and the calabash to beat out some rhythms at the same time that he is playing his melody. It is very surprising how he can coordinate all his fingers and brain in both playing a melody distributed between the two thumbs of the two hands and at the same time, beat regular consistent rhythms, remembering that the melody must be translated to words by the hearers.

Experts in Owerri area play the ubo both with the right thumb and striking the metals with smooth light stick held with the left hand. The resultant music is called oweni-pa. Oweni-pa is what the ubo seems to sing when it is played.

Very often, ubo playing is accompanied by the knocking of an empty beer bottle with a piece of hard stick or with the end of a metal spoon. The ubo plays the melody while the knocking of beer bottle marks the rhythm. Ubo does not always play the melody or double the voice. Sometimes it

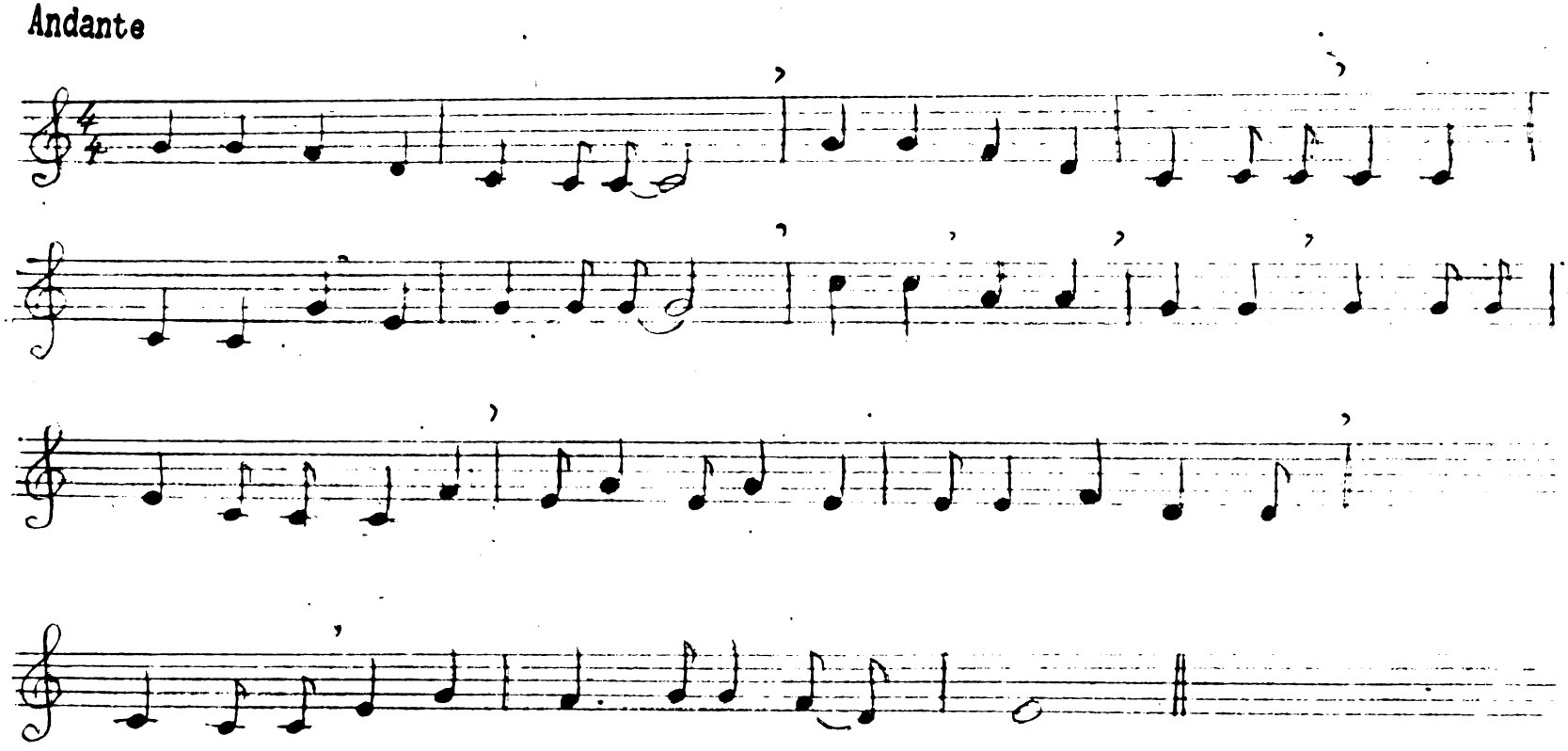


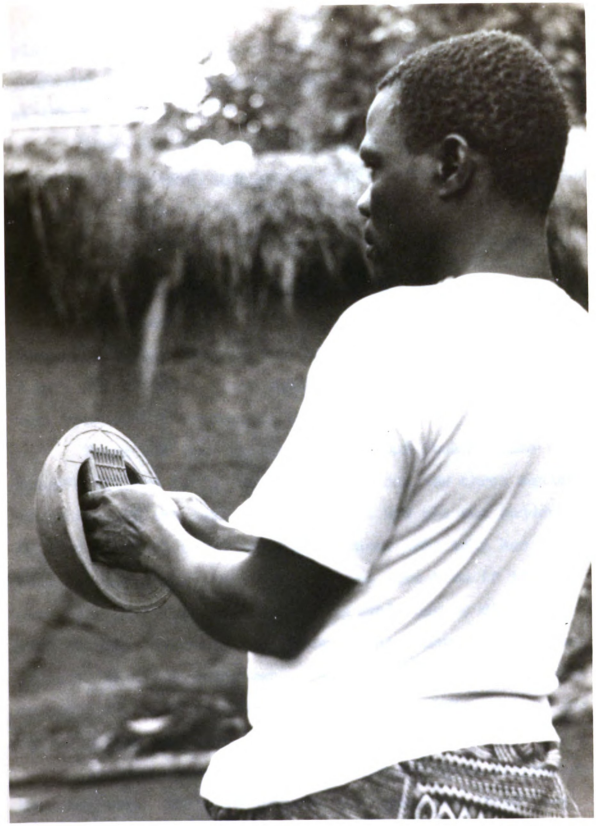
Figure 20

Type of music played on Ubo-aka.

assumes the role of accompaniment. In this capacity it plays an ostinato bass and marks the beats while the knocking of beer bottles marks the rhythms. When the voice stops, it improvises fresh melodies as an interlude, until the voice comes in again and it goes back to playing the ostinato bass.

Use

Now that we have shown all the technical points about ubo, let us see when it is used. The ubo is a representative of the harp family, and therefore it is essentially a personal instrument for private pleasure. Apart from the night watchman who employs an ubo in order to ward off sleep, people who play it go about the town collecting current news; then in the evenings, when people come back from work and perhaps sit around enjoying their palm-wine, the players extemporize both the music and the words, telling the people such news as they have gathered. Secret news is revealed by the players as they play. There are no newspapers so it is well known that if people hear ubo music in the evenings, they drift near so as to hear the latest news and gossip. The music produced is sometimes danced to. At funerals or marriage ceremonies, experts are invited to perform. In certain Ibo areas in the past, when you see a young man continually playing an ubo, it is a sure sign that he is in love. Young men nowadays are gradually losing the art of



20. A man plays an Ubo-aka.

playing ubo. As mentioned earlier, an ubo is an intimate companion when one is on his own; the player plays and sings at the same time.

Using the same method explained earlier under the section of ngedegwu, ubo-aka is used in telling stories, the ubo either doubles the voice, or it tells the story on its own. Here is a short story as told in Ibo with an ubo-aka:

Amuma (Lightning)--An Ibo Girl

Once there was a girl whose parents gave the name Amuma (Lightning) because she had a light complexion and a very lovely face. When she became a young woman most men were very much attracted to her.

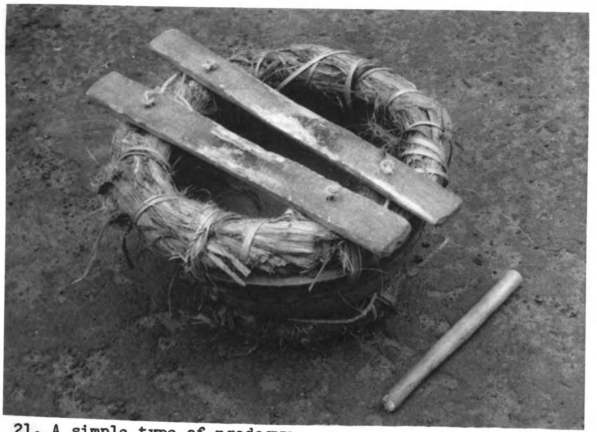
Young men from villages throughout Iboland came to Amuma's village for a festival. When she saw three handsome young men, it was love at first sight and she was suddenly in love with all three of them at once. She told her friends that she would marry all three at the same time if it were possible. Her friends tried to persuade her to dismiss such thoughts from her mind because they knew, though Amuma did not, that the young men were really fish that had taken on human form. Amuma would not listen to their advice, and declared that she would marry them anyway.

Amuma's mother tried, without success, to discourage her daughter. She also spoke to the young men, told them what was in her daughter's mind, and explained how unusual and absurd it would be to have three men married to one woman.

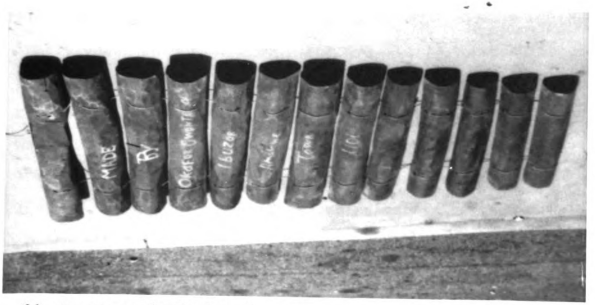
She suggested the following plan: after leaving the village, they were to fight among themselves and the survivor would return and marry Amuma.

When the festival was over and the three young men left the village, Amuma ran after them to remind them of the plan her mother had suggested. Two of the men fought each other and the winner then fought the third man. The man who emerged victorious from the second fight instantly turned into a fish. Amuma, though horrified, fulfilled her earlier declaration and became the wife of the fish.

This story obviously is for children, but it shows that children understand what these instruments say.



21. A simple type of ngedegwu.



22. Ngedegwu (xylophone)

CHAPTER XI

NGEDEGWU (XYLOPHONE)

What Ngedegwu Is

At the very beginning, it is necessary to explain the basic difference between a xylophone and a marimba. A xylophone is a percussive instrument in which graduated bars of wood are made to produce musical notes by striking the bars with a hard stick. The graduated bars of wood rest on two frames near the ends of the bars and are free to vibrate easily. The marimba is exactly like the xylophone but under each bar, there is a resonator that is tuned. This may be a gourd, a cedar box, or a metal tube.

The xylophone belongs to a group of instruments classified under idiophones. This scientific name shows that the instruments sound (phon) by their own (idio) nature without needing any type of special tension, like strings or drumheads. To this group belong lithophones (those instruments whose source of sound is stone); and xylophones (those instruments whose source of sound is wood). An example of lithophone is pien-chung of the Chinese; that of the metallophone is the Chinese later model of ranat; and that of the xylophone is ngedegwu of the Ibo.

History

Although the Chinese were the first to make a co-ordination of a series of different tones (pien-chung) as far back as 2697 B. C. a marimba made of slabs of solid stone and set with jewels was found in Greece, and was estimated to have been made in 2300 B. C.,[1] in Northern Nigeria there are standing musical stone gongs of great antiquity which served as bells to the Hausas in summoning the Hausas to meetings.

It was only in the sixteenth century that anything at all was written about marimbas in East Africa by a European, Father Joao dos Santos, although the Arabs had earlier mentioned it in their books about West Africa. In the fourteenth century A. D. in East Africa, the Bantus were noticed to develop a type of marimba analogous to the models in Java. Strongly propounding the theory of Malayan and Bantu akinness of musical instruments is Curt Sachs, a German musicologist. He states that: (1) Many tools and implements of the Bantu are similar to the ones used by the Malays; (2) The Azandeh tribe of East Africa beat their "xylophone" two bars at a time, as do their Malayan brethren to the East.[2]

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[1]Gordon Peters, "Treatise on Percussion" (unpublished Master's thesis, Department of Music, Michigan State University, 1961).

[2]Curt Sachs, History of Musical Instruments, 1st ed. (New York: 1940), p. 50.

There is no doubt that the stage and characteristic features of development and advancement in civilization as found in Java and the Bantus of East Africa and that the analysis of certain facts and of certain common dates support the speculation that migration must have taken place. When Colin McPhee, an anthropologist, recently played to the Balinese the music of indigenous peoples from Java, Siam, and parts of Africa, "They listened intently and were quick to recognize affinities with their own music."[1]

Hirth and Rockill state:

> The slaves who were natives of the islands beyond the sea [of China] may have been African negroes, in which the Arabs of those times carried on a large traffic. . . . The practice of keeping black slaves continued in China down to the latter part of the 14th century, perhaps even to much more modern times, . . . many families [in China] buy black people to make gate keepers of; they are called ". . . devil slaves, or . . . black slaves or servants." Mayers mentions the fact that in 1381 the King of Java sent 300 black slaves as a present to the Chinese Emperor. Now the King of Java would not denude himself of his black slaves in sending a gift of 300 to the Emperor of China. Here then is an indication of the number of black slaves that must have been in these regions in 1381.[2]

For a more detailed discussion on the presence of Negroes in China and the Far East, the reader is referred to "Negro Influences on Indonesia," by M. W. D. Jeffreys

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[1]Colin McPhee, "In This Far Island," Asia (December, 1944), p. 36.

[2]M. D. W. Jeffreys, "Negro Influences on Indonesia," from African Music, Vol. 2, Number 4 (Transvaal, South Africa: African Music Society, 1961), pp. 10-16.

where he concludes:

> Enough historical evidence has now been marshalled --there is much more of it--to establish that the Arab slave trade lasted well over a millenium and a half and is sufficient to account for the present existence of the Oceanic Negroes. . . The similarities in music between Indonesia and Africa are due to the impress that African Negroes, imported into Melanesia by the Arab slave trade, exerted on the culture traits of Indonesia.[1]

Since anthropologists are satisfied that there was no immigration from Java and Siam to Africa, but the other way round, it stands to reason that the immigrants took their instruments with them.

The Chinese and other Far Eastern countries have suitable stones from which they could make marimba types of instruments. They also had metal, and so they could experiment with metal. The Ibos do not have the type of stone suitable for making a lithophone slab. The types of stone they have are so different that it is not quarried as it is done in other countries of the world. Moreover, they had no metal, but they have different types of hard wood. They capitalized on this commodity.

The Equatorial and tropical forests of Africa are noted for their hard woods like the iroko, mahogany, teak, and cedar. In the past, no timber of any type was exported; the Africans themselves hadn't much use for all the luxuriant trees. The trees just grew and flourished. It stands to

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[1] Ibid.

reason that should there be any work that required doing with any material, the people first tried to find out which parts of the trees or leaves could be employed before resorting to other materials. While at play, they discovered that they could produce rhythms by knocking together two pieces of sticks. From constant use, they discovered that the longer the slabs of wood, the deeper the pitch; and if two slabs are equal in length and thickness, the wider the slab, the deeper the pitch. Very soon a scale was assembled and music was produced by striking these slabs with wooden mallets. This, then, in broad outline, was the birth of a marimba or a xylophone, which will be treated later in greater detail.

It is interesting to note the absence of the marimba north of the Sahara. The reasons are not difficult to find. The first was that there was a scarcity of hard woods generally and especially those suited to the making of a marimba. The second and third reasons are historical. The Sahara desert was a barrier to communication. To cross the Sahara, a person must carry only a few of the barest necessities of life; often, most of the slaves that were being taken across the desert died of thirst, hunger, excessive heat, and wounds that resulted from the leather canes called koboko in the hands of their masters. So the marimba was only to be found in areas south of the Sahara and was generally known as the Kaffir piano (on p. 92 ubo-aka is called Kaffir piano). One man who has made a serious study of

African music, Professor P. R. Kirby of Witwartersrand University, strongly believes that although the marimba is now seen all over the world in different stages of development, it is a native of Africa and the others are its offspring. Edgerley confirming his statement says:

> Then there is the marimba, used both here and in Central America so many years ago that it is difficult to say where it originated. Africa, however, may be given preference in this respect.[1]

K. C. Murray, who was the Director of Antiquities in Nigeria, the African Music Society's representative in Nigeria, and who has taken a keen interest in artistic and musical affairs in Nigeria for about thirty years, discusses music and dancing in Nigeria and pinpoints the existence or presence of the xylophone to the Ibos in Eastern Nigeria. He said:

> Instrumental music itself is often used as a means of communication. . . . More tuneful to European ears is the music of the Eastern Region, where the dancing is usually varied and elaborate. The organization of a dance by the members of an age grade or a club represents quite an achievement upon which no information has been given in books or, it seems, has been collected by anthropologists.
>
> The variety of types of dance with their accompanying music is quite considerable, although there are of course underlying similarities of the kind that makes West African dancing different from Indian. The differences exist in varying degree: there are the distant characteristics of the dancing of the Ewe (Gold Coast

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[1]Beatrice Edgerley, From the Hunter's Bow (New York: G. Putman and Sons, 1942), p. 76.

> and Dahomey) contrasted with those of the Yoruba and Ibo; and there are the tribal differences between, for instance, the dances of Ibo and Ibibio, . . . and the local differences that exist in any particular place between the dances themselves and in individual interpretations. There are also the differences of instruments; the xylophone and slit gong for instance are in the Eastern Region not in the West. . . .[1]

The Ibos are generally regarded as the originators of the marimba or more correctly, the xylophone, but having originated it, they lost touch with its further developments elsewhere. For instance, the Ibos do not have any idea about the use of the gourds to act as resonators. There was no necessity to carry the xylophone about, but the slaves on the march or on the move had to make portable xylophones which they could carry about. If the Ibos had any idea of the use of gourds as resonators, they would have made some of the finest xylophones with gourds--marimbas.

One may ask, "Do the Ibos have gourds?" The answer is "Yes." Gourds are very plentiful, in fact gourds are used for most household things. Small gourds are used for collecting palm-wine from palm trees; big gourds are used for storing palm-wine and distributing it for sale; gourds are used for bringing water from streams because they can hold a lot of water and are themselves very light in weight; gourds are used in serving food and soup; women make use of

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[1]K. C. Murray, "Music and Dancing," Journal of the African Music Society Newsletter, Vol. 1, No. 5 (June, 1952).

21. Two marimbas from the Congo.

particular types of gourds as spoons for stirring soup when it is cooking; the smaller variety is used as a spoon for drinking a kind of mush called akamu; a type of gourd is used in native surgery when impure blood is extracted from the human body. Gourds are artistically carved for storing trinkets like beads, gold, and other valuables; for carrying merchandise to and from markets; large gourds serve as containers, the same way as enamel pans are used today; some gourds are used in storing soap for toilet use; other types of gourds are traditionally set apart for drinking palm wine. (Until recently, some well educated people refused to drink palm wine with the conventional cup or tumbler).

In making music, different sizes of a particular type of gourds are used as wind instruments--opi--producing round mellow sounds; gourds are woven into a basket with handles and pebbles are put inside so that they rattle when agitated. This type of instrument is called oyo. There are many more uses of the gourd. So the Ibos definitely know about the gourd, but as they have never made use of it as a resonator for the slab of the xylophone, and as they have never seen the instrument utilizing the gourds, the report is confirmed that having discovered how to make and use the instrument, the knowledge spread to other parts of the world by means of the slave trade. Other peoples developed the instrument further.

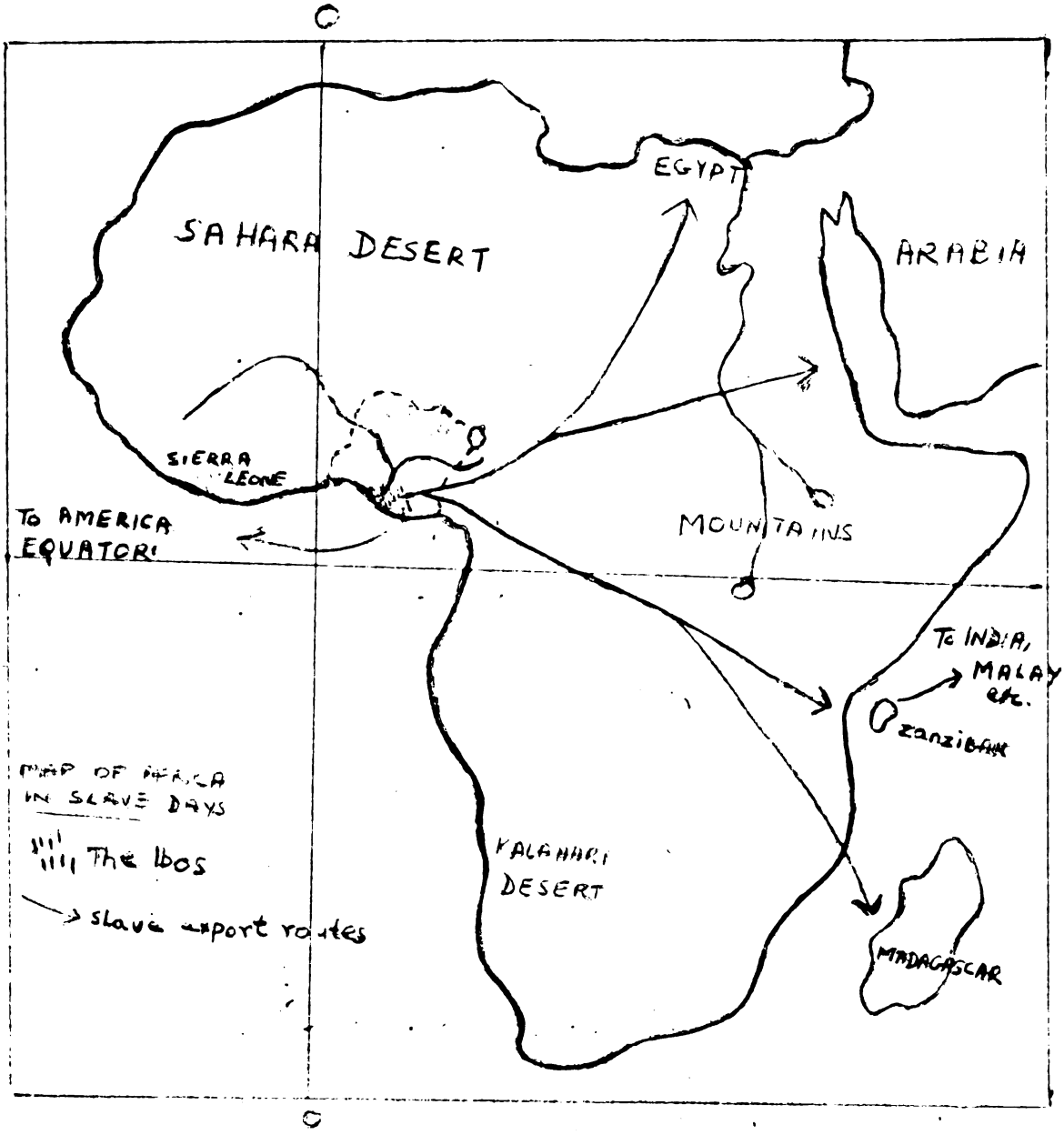

Figure 21

"For many decades, Zanzibar was the eastern terminus of the slave route, . . . over which thousands of elephant tusks were carried each year by the blacks, both ivory and slaves being sold here.[a]

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[a]F. Carpenter, Uganda to the Cape (New York: Doubleday, Page & Co., 1926).

Let us see how slave trade was responsible for disseminating this knowledge. Probably the people that suffered most because of the slave trade were the Ibos, Yorubas, and the Ghanaians. When these slaves were sold from hand to hand to the Portuguese or the Arabs and they found themselves in India or America, there was no hope for them ever to come back. Captain Adam's figure of 370,000 Ibo slaves sold in the Delta Markets over a period of twenty years (equal to about one quarter of the total export from all African ports), gives some idea of the scale of human wastage, and slave trade lasted for over four hundred years.

The Arabs were the first to engage in slave trade. They carried the slaves off to all parts of Asia, western and southern Europe. This was several centuries B. C. We know that the theater of Dionysos at Athens about 465 B. C. was built with the help of Negro slaves. The Sumarians and Chaldeans of Old Testament fame made use of Negroes from areas south of the Sahara. The first Europeans to come to Nigeria were the Portuguese who landed there in 1444 and started trading in pepper, palm oil and ivory. The lucrative trade also lured the British, French, and the Dutch into similar ventures. Very soon the Portuguese found that traffic in human slavery was more lucrative than other commodities. Other European nations followed suit and carried out large scale slave operations following the discovery of the Americas. This intensive slave trade continued for

nearly three centuries culminating in British monopolization in 1712.

Those slaves taken to India, China, and the Far East were driven overland across Africa to ports in East Africa. Wherever these slaves had the opportunity to live together, for social entertainments they sang and played their drums and xylophones. The discovery of the resonators in Central Africa, South Africa, and East Africa, was mainly by chance. The slave being constantly on the move, devised the method of constructing marimbas that were portable, and no matter in which country he found himself, be it in South America, Mexico, China, Java, he made his favorite instrument and it soon became popular among the peoples around him.

The earliest mention of a marimba in Africa is by Father Joao dos Santos describing his visit to the Karanga in Eastern Ethiopia in 1586:

> Quiteve (the chief) makes use of another class of Kaffirs, great musicians and dancers, who have no other office than to sit in the large room of the king's palace, at the outer door, and round his dwelling, playing many different musical instruments and singing to them a great variety of songs and discourses in praise of the King, in very high and sonorous voices. The best and most musical of their instruments is called the ambira, which greatly resembles our organs; it is composed of long gourds, some very wide and some very narrow, held together and arranged in order. The narrowest, which form the treble, are placed on the left, contrary to that of our organs, and after the treble come the other gourds with their different sounds of contralto, tenor, and bass, being eighteen gourds in all. Each gourd has a small opening at the side near the end, and at the bottom a small hole the size of a dollar, covered with a certain kind of spider's web, very fine, closely woven, and strong, which does not

> break. Upon all the mouth of these gourds, which are of the same size and place in a row, keys of thin wood are suspended by cords so that each key is held in the air above the hollow of its gourds, not reaching the edges of the mouth. The instrument being thus constructed, the Kaffirs play upon the keys with sticks after the fashion of drum-sticks, at the points of which are buttons made of sinews rolled into a light ball of the size of a nut, so that striking the notes with these two sticks, the blows resound in the mouths of the gourds, producing a sweet and rhythmical harmony, which can be heard as far as the sound of a good harpsichord. There are many of these instruments, and many musicians who play upon them very well.[1]

The above description by Joao dos Santos fits the Ibo ngedegwu (xylophone) except in the following three points: (1) The beaters have no balls of sinews and, or rubber, they are plain; (2) The "slabs of wood of higher pitch are placed" to the right of the instrument. (3) There are no gourds and spiders' web attached to the instruments. In other words, the Ibo instrument is a xylophone, not a marimba.

Kirby's comments on Father Joao's account as follows:

> This is an extraordinarily interesting description. Its date clearly shows that the instrument has developed entirely without European influence. It will be noted that performers upon it were specialists, and that its name ambira is the same as mbila, by which it is known today. Further, that the beaters had heads made of balls os sinews, not of rubber, which is invariably used at the present time. This remark about the beaters explains why one pair in my possession has heads of thin rubber threads wound into balls upon the sticks. The

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[1]G. M. Theal, Records of South Eastern Africa, Vol. vii (Capetown, 1901), pp. 202-203.

> rubber has been taken directly from the tree and wound thus after the manner of the sinews of old. . . Joao dos Santos' statement that the slabs of wood of higher pitches are placed to the left of the instrument does not hold nowadays; but his account is so wonderfully accurate that one hesitates in suggesting that he was mistaken in this solitary particular.[1]

In some parts of the continent of Africa, the instruments are constructed in such a way that a man carries the instrument and plays it as he goes along. Le Caille, on January 1, 1753 wrote:

> I have seen an instrument played which is used by the Kaffirs. It is composed of twelve rectangular boards, each eighteen to twenty inches long, whose breadth goes on diminishing from the first, which is about six inches, to the last, which is hardly two and a half. These boards are assembled side by side on two triangles of wood, to which they are attached by means of leather thongs, so that the whole instrument forms a kind of table four feet long and twenty inches broad; under each board, there is a piece of calabash which is attached to it [sic] to increase the resonance. A man carries this instrument in front of him, almost in the same way that our women in Paris carry an inventaire (a flat basket suspended before the wearer). He plays by striking thereon with two mallets of wood, of which the shape and size approximate to those of a plumber's soldering-iron. This instrument is tolerably sonorous, and with its twelve notes a great many tunes can be played upon it.[2]

Certainly the Ibos do not carry this type of ngedegwu about, playing it at the same time. There is a diminutive type which has only two, or in rare cases, three bars on a

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[1]La Caille, Journal Historique du Voyage Fait au Cap de Bonne Esperance (Paris, 1763), p. 192.

[2]C. P. Thunberg, Voyages de C. P. Thunberg (Paris, 1796), Vol. 1, p. 233.

light earthenware vessel (see plate 21). Professor Kirby affirms that such xylophones as are carried about are found in the Tshopi country on the east coast and Mashona from Southern Rhodesia.

The Ibo ngedegwu is not the only type on the continent of Africa without calabash resonators. Thunberg, in listing the musical instruments of the Hottentos, described this type of xylophone without the calabash resonators.[1] But it is known that Hottentots never originally had such instruments. The likelihood is that some Hottentots might either have acquired this instrument which had been brought into their country, or, that after seeing it, they copied it; perhaps this was what Thunberg saw.

Curt Sachs divides the different types of marimbas and xylophones found in Africa into five, beginning from the simplest to the complex:

1. The log xylophone--a few rough slabs of wood are laid across a player's legs. Sometimes this type is played over a pit to give better resonance. In Madagascar, two women play a leg xylophone at right angles to one another suspending logs on legs.

2. The log xylophone--bars are laid on two parallel logs.

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[1]C. P. Thunberg, Voyages de C. P. Thunberg, Vol. 1 (Paris, 1796), p. 233.

3. The table xylophone--bars rest on a frame fastened down.

4. The bail (hoop-like) xylophone--frame suspended from the neck and held away from the body by semi-circular nodes. The frame is generally at waist level.

5. The trough xylophone--wooden slabs (keys) lie cross-wise on pins piercing the slabs at one end and lie between them on the other.[1]

In each case the wooden bars were supported at two points: the node of vibration. The range was from six to twenty slabs. The Ibos have only the log type of xylophones and one other (pot xylophone) not mentioned by Curt Sachs. This was mentioned on page 124.

Construction and Tuning

Ngedegwu is the name by which the xylophone is known in Onitsha area; in Udi area, it is called igo and in Owerri area it is called ngelenge. Materials required for making an ngedegwu are: Ogwe ojoko abua--two logs of banana stems the diameter of each being at least four inches.

It is from either okwe or abosi wood that slabs of the ngedegwu are made. Abosi wood is technically known as ptaeroxylon obliquum. This wood is found more often in a big forest. It grows slowly and it is hard and tenacious.

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[1]Curt Sachs, History of Musical Instruments, 1st edition (New York: 1940).

The diameter of an average stem is about five inches. Okwe wood grows in a forest near a river. It grows to a great height and it is light in weight. When used for making ngedegwu, it is more resonant and therefore preferred to abosi wood. Furthermore the wind cannot crack the wood as is possible with abosi wood.

Udo--This is a strong cord of about one-fourth inch in diameter and about thirteen feet in length. This is used for cording together all the slabs in a manner to be described later, and also for carrying the ngedegwu about.

Osisi--are four short pieces of sticks about nine inches long, one inch in diameter, and fairly heavy.

Tools needed include anyike ukwu na anyike nta--big and small axes, anyike oyioyi--a chisel, obejili--a sharp matchete, anwilinwa leaves--these are used as sand papers.

The man who makes the ngedegwu has to go to the bush to select the particular wood he wants. If he is to be paid a large sum of money, he selects okwe wood; if not, he selects abosi wood. He may go as far as twenty miles to get the wood he wants. He cuts the wood down with his big axe and cuts it into appropriate lengths, having in mind roughly how long the longest slab is going to be; then he splits the pieces down the center. He now exposes them to the sun to dry partially so that he can carry them from the bush. This drying may last about a week or two depending on whether it is dry or rainy season. When he feels that they have

dried enough, he goes back to the bush, takes them home, and allows them to dry well under the sun before he begins to work on them. The bass slab may be as long as three feet and about five inches wide. The thickness at the ends may be about one and a half inches, and at the center about a quarter of an inch. These dimensions gradually decrease. If, in the making of a big slab, the maker accidentally makes it too short, he doesn't throw it away, but keeps it for a higher pitched slab.

As each slab is at least one and one-half inches thick at each end, the iron awl is made red hot, a hole is pierced in such a way that it goes through mid-way the thickness from one side of the slab to the other across the width of the slab at points five inches from both ends. The holes should be large enough so that the cord can pass through them easily and afford each slab every opportunity of vibrating and jumping about freely.

Tuning is usually left until after the rough pieces of sticks, later to form the proper slabs, have been sunned, allowed to dry and lose weight, then each slab is dressed and tuned. Tuning is systematic. The maker often tests an ngedegwu between tunes by chipping off bits of wood of the slab, a little at a time. If too much wood has been chipped off, this slab is condemned and set aside for another negedegwu that may require that particular slab, and another slab is prepared.

The Rev. Henri Philippe Junod accurately described how an ngedegwu in tuned when he said, "The slabs are tuned by cutting, exactly as those of the European xylophone are tuned, and by thinning the center of a bar on the underside to flatten it, and by thinning one end of the upper surface to sharpen it."[1] In fact, a large amount of wood is taken out in the middle and varying amounts of wood thinned out from the center towards the ends of the slab. In other words, the center is thinnest and the ends thickest.

After the first round of tuning, the maker exposes the slabs to the sun again to make sure that the slabs are very dry. If the weather is not very good, he makes a fire of about three feet in diameter in the center of his compound. He stands the slabs round the fire, turning them every half hour for about eight hours a day for three or four days consecutively. He goes to all this trouble because he maintains that after tuning, if the slabs are not properly dried, they will go out of tune, and of course, performers will no more patronize him. It is important to note that the maker does not tune the slabs until the slabs are arranged on the two logs of ogwe ojoko (banana stems) already cut and dressed for the purpose. On these, slabs can jump and vibrate freely when beaten, without the logs vibrating

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[1] H. P. Junod, "The Mbila or Native Piano of the Tshopi Tribe," in Bantu Studies (Johannesburg, 1929), Vol. III, no. 3, pp, 275-85.

in sympathy. When the maker is satisfied that the slabs are very dry, he assembles them again for fine tuning as described above, the bass slabs on the left and the treble slabs on the right. He tries as much as possible to get all the slabs to be smooth but he does not sacrifice smoothness of the slabs for their being in tune; therefore, a person should not be surprised to find that certain slabs are rough to the eye. To make the slabs smooth, the maker makes use of anwilinwa leaves to rub them smooth. These leaves behave in exactly the same way that sand-paper behaves. Each time the maker tunes ngedegwu, he selects a pitch like G, G, A, A above the middle C and which is convenient to his voice. By singing a tune periodically, he soon assembles a number of slabs which give an octave. The pitch he selects is not necessarily the key note of the scale, but merely a note within the scale. Having got a scale, he does not find it difficult to reproduce an octave higher or lower of a given note. It is important to note that the resultant scale is a diatonic scale. The Ibo ngedegwu maker has not yet learned to make a chromatic scale as found on a piano. If the key is G on a particular instrument, he perpetually plays all his tunes on that instrument in that key; if it is a different key, he performs in that key and there is no question about modulations.

In tuning the ngedegwu and in performance, perhaps, the slabs are assembled on the two banana logs, which are

laid on the ground. The banana logs are not parallel, but taper towards the right in such a way that the shortest slabs can lie conveniently on them and still there are, at least, three inch projections on either side of the slabs.

When the maker is satisfied with his tuning, the next question is to cord the slabs together in order, so that their lengths diminish from left to right. It will be remembered that holes through which this cord will pass have already been made with the red-hot metal awl. The length of the cord depends on the number of slabs and their widths. The principle is to thread the ngedegwu if possible with a single unjoined cord, and to allow a sufficient length for carrying it. He allows a generous unbroken cord of about thirteen feet. The maker cords the slab in such a way that there is about one and one-half inches of chord from the end of each hole on either side of each slab, and a knot which he ties. The knot prevents two slabs from touching while the slabs are vibrating during performance. The maker begins cording from the smallest slab. He intentionally leaves about three feet of cord free from this end. After the cording and knotting of the longest slab, he allows the cord to run loosely along the longest slab. When he reaches the hole at this end, he makes a knot as usual and continues as before until the last short slab. When the last slab is corded, the other free end of the cord and this second loose end are tied together so that

there is one and one-half inches of cord from the end of the hole. One can see that there is a free loop of cord at this end. This loop is used in tying, hanging, or carrying the ngedegwu. By "carrying the ngedegwu" is meant that the slabs united by the cord are carried and the banana logs are left behind because other banana logs are easily procurable.

In Owerri area, cords are not used. Before the wooden slabs are tuned, the awl is used to make one hole each at either end of the slab, at a point, say, five inches from the end. When the ngedegwu is finished, mid-ribs from the coconut leaves or bicycle spokes cut short to about four inches long, are used to pin loosely the slabs to the banana logs. The disadvantage of this method is that on taking the ngedegwu somewhere else, the pins may drop on the way. But this is not serious, because other pins are easily procurable.

In a whole district, one maker is normally acknowledged as the best maker. His fame soon goes beyond the district and performers all vie among themselves to get an instrument made by this maker. As the maker normally copies his work, he tunes all the instruments that he has made to the same key. Thus, in an ensemble, there is no difficulty in performance; but should there be a rival maker who probably makes his instruments in a different key, performers in an ensemble decide among themselves to use the set made by one

maker at a time, making sure that ill feelings are not created, but such a situation does not often happen.

Performers are very particular about the interval between one note and another. It is the maker who can satisfy the great demands of the performers who is always acclaimed the best ngedegwu maker. As the makers have no instruments for testing the proper vibrations of a slab, there is no doubt that once in a while the interval may be more or less out of tune. Usually it should not be so out of tune to be noticed by the general public. Only a few trained ears of expert performers may notice it and this difference is lost during performance when many complex and complicated things are going on together. However, a slab which has gone out of tune is promptly corrected by the player. One very good point about ngedegwu is that if a suitable material has been used in making it and if the slabs are allowed to dry well before the final tuning, it very rarely goes out of tune. There are examples of some ngedegwu that are up to eighty years old and still in tune.

Normally, the ngedegwu is assembled and played in the open space in a compound under a shade of trees. It is played in the open space to let people from near and far hear the music, and to afford room for the large number of spectators to sit or stand in comfort. It also allows room for dancers to dance to the music, and to let air circulate freely on them while dancing. That it is played

under the shade of trees is for the sake of the performers. The slabs do not crack under the sun if the makers have selected the proper wood, sunned, and dried the slabs well in the usual manner. Performers in the Ibo country do not use sticks that have been rubberized, unlike those described by Kirby from South Africa. They perform with short sticks as described above.

Acoustics

It is generally accepted that primary motions of a bar with both ends free and in the center are seen by holding a six foot flexible stick about a foot from each end. When the stick is shaken it oscillates between the positions shown in A in figure 22, the points at which it is held forming nodes. Held nearer the ends, it vibrates as under B, with three nodes. As its fundamental which occurs when the two nodes alone are present, a free bar gives out a tone six and one-fourth times as acute as the fundamental of a similar rod fixed at one end, or a tone corresponding to the first upper partial of the latter. The same thing happens with the bars of a xylophone or marimba. The succeeding partials rise rapidly in pitch, bearing about the same relations to their fundamental as those in connection with bars fixed at one end.

When such a bar is vibrating at its fundamental, it has two nodes, each of which is 0.224 from each end, where

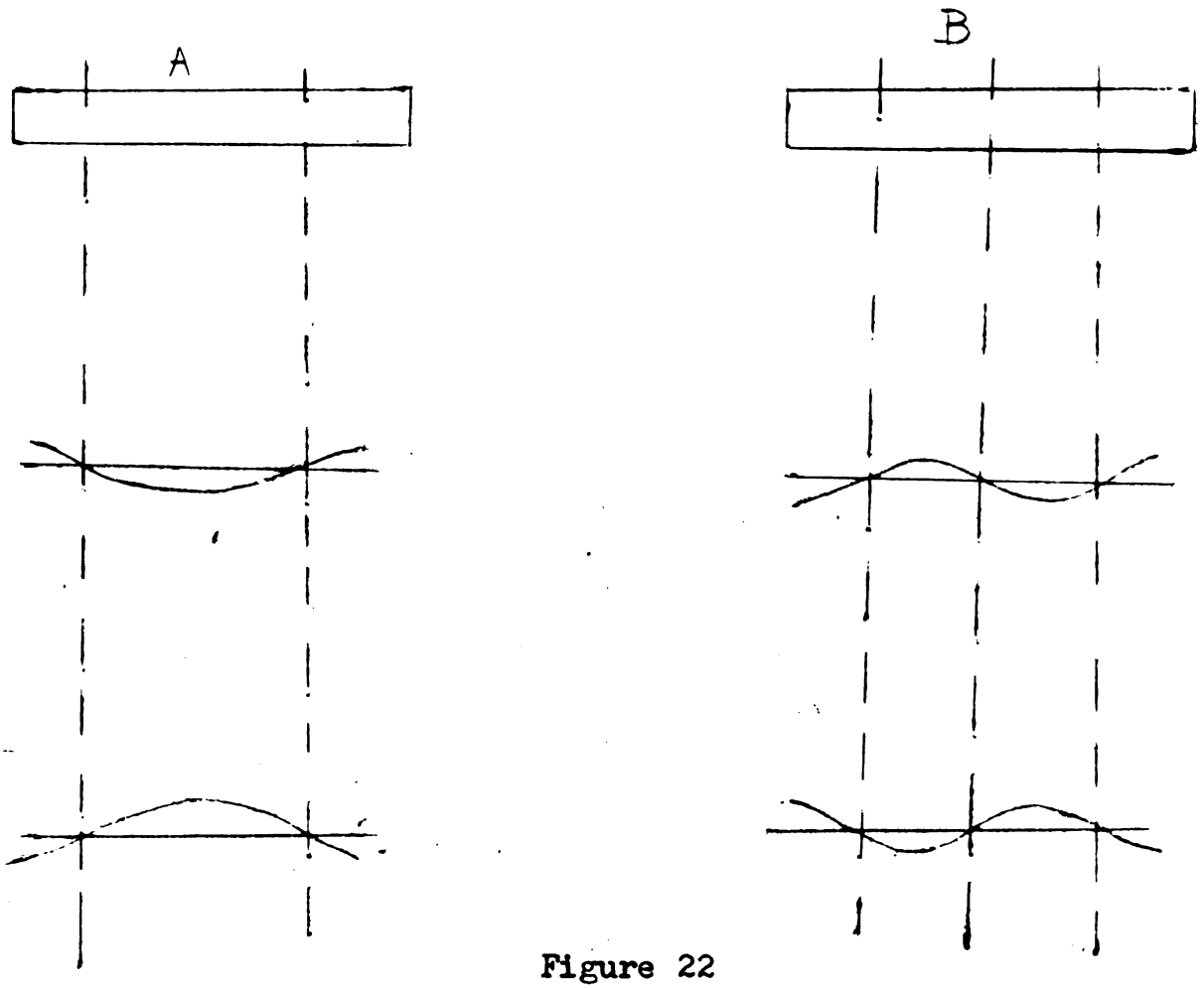

Figure 22

Positions of oscillation when a flexible stick is shaken.

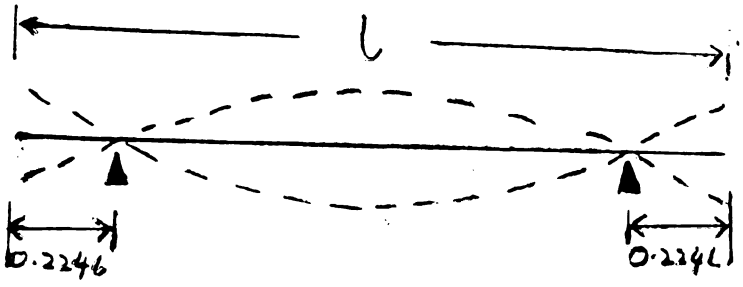

Figure 23

Fundamental vibration of a bar of xylophone.

represents the length of the bar (see figure 23). When a slab rests on two logs of banana stems and struck in the middle or at one end of the slab, the slab produces its fundamental note, and this fundamental note varies inversely as the square of the length. Frequency is like that of the tuning fork in which the end $\sim \frac{h}{l^2}$ where h is the thickness and l is the length.

The frequency of the harmonics of such a slab varies as $(2n - 1)^2$ where n is the number of nodes. Since the smallest number of nodes is 2, the relative frequency of upper partials would bear the relations given by the numbers 9, 25, 49, 81.

Now let us examine an ngedegwu made by a reputable Ibo maker.

The author brought ngedegwu from Nigeria and made the following measurements:

Note	Cents	Lengths in inches	End thickness in inches	Width in inches	Middle Thickness in inches	Weight in ozs.
D#	2736	22.5	1.9	4	1.9	28
C#	2540	23.2	1.8	4	1.8	29
B	2345	23.7	2.4	4	1.0	26
A	2090	25.2	1.6	4	.8	27
G#	1975	27.2	2.1	4.1	1.5	34
F#	1800	28.4	2.0	4.2	.7	40.5
E	1620	29.3	2.2	5.0	.9	44
D#	1495	29.5	2.1	4.5	.9	39
C#	1305	30.6	2.5	4.5	.4	39
B	1090	31.7	2.5	4.5	.6	37
A	865	31.3	2.7	4.8	.7	35
G#	835	33.0	2.7	5.0	.6	40
F#	590	33.5	2.4	4.3	1.0	39

Stroboconn A equals 440.

Figure 24

Each slab is semicircular; therefore, "thickness" means the thickest part.

In the vibration of a bar free at both ends, frequency varies directly as the thickness and inversely as the square of the length. It appears as if the frequency of ngedegwu does vary inversely as the square of the length. However, it is very difficult to determine whether the frequency varies directly as the thickness since most of the slabs have been hollowed out so that the thickness varies from 2.7 inches at the end to .4 inch in the middle. Moreover, the two sides of each slab are not always equal; the ends of the slabs are not cut square; the body of each slab is not smooth and regular.

Each of the banana logs was six feet nine inches long, six inches in diameter. The slabs were threaded together in such a way that it was not necessary to tie knots in between two slabs so that they do not touch as in the diagram:

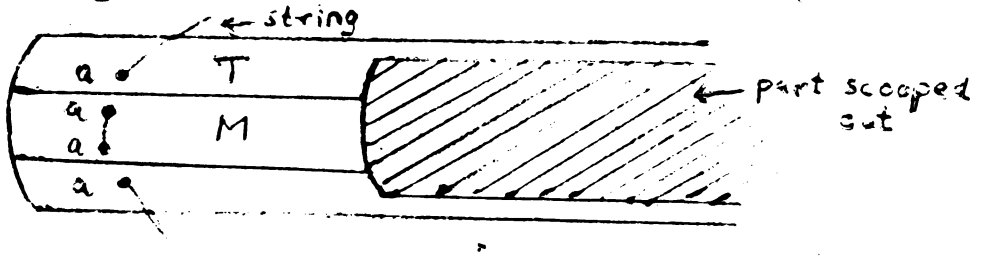

Figure 25

Four holes (a) were drilled in such a way that a straight hole drilled from each side T, six and one-half inches from either end appeared on top of the slab M. It is through

these holes that a string is threaded as shown on the diagram. The overall length of the string used was nine feet, the thickness of the string was eight inches. Workmanship was fairly smooth.

Technique

In performance, there are two performers when only one ngedegwu is used. The two performers squat on the ground on the same side of the ngedegwu. The principal performer is on the right. He has two sticks for performing. He plays on most of the slabs except the four or five left for his descant man. Wangemann described the performance of this instrument at Tshewasse (Sibasa, N. Transvaal) in 1884:

> . . . two men were playing at the same time. He who played the higher sound had two beaters, while he who played the lower sounds had three, two beaters for the bass sounds being held in his left hand, by means of which he struck different tones at the same time. The music was quite artistic. The left hand of the descant player (Diskantisten) or the left hand of the bass player produced the quite simple though clearly recognizable melody E D C B while the remaining tones, always five at the same time, added partly the harmony and partly variations moving around the melody in quick figures and new patterns.[1]

It is the descant man who begins the performance by playing the ostinato bass, thereby establishing the time and rhythm before the principal performer, played with both hands,

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[1]D. Wangemann, Ein Zweites Reisejahr in Sud-Afrika (Berlin, 1886), p. 161.

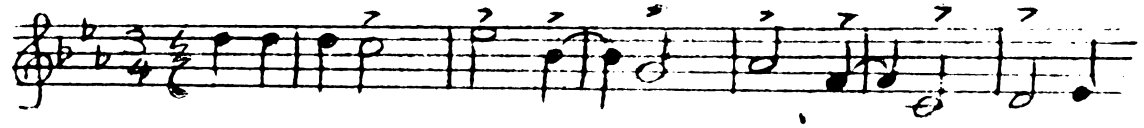
contrasts in absolute details with the melody and rhythm of the descant man. He employs all the techniques possible in his melodies. The principle of crossing the main beats as found in the performance of drums, is also true in ngedegwu music. In some melodies, although the main rhythms are different, the main beats of these two players coincide; in others diametrically opposed to each other; still other melodies are intricate variations on the ostinato. Rhythms and meters give the melodies their characteristic basic elements.

In an ensemble, there is always one ngedegwu that marks the main beat. This is done by the descant man with the stick in his left hand. All the melodies are improvised; therefore, there are no questions about bar lines, but certain prolonged notes, or notes approached by leaps, become more important than others and therefore assume the role of strong beats where they are. This is unconsciously done, but the rhythmic pattern which follows the tonal language of the people, the melody of whom the performer has in mind, gives rise to these non-accentual rhythms. Compare the following from "Obodo Donuo."[1]

[1]W. W. C. Echezona, unpublished manuscript of Ibo folk songs.

Again, in conjunction with the ngedegwu that marks the regular accent, another phase of the language of the Ibos which players of ngedegwu employs is evident. These are shifted accents. This means that those notes that normally should not be accented are accented. Compare the following "Obodo Donuo" by Echezona:[1]

To this section also belongs shifting the accents in such a way that a different time altogether is implied; again, this example comes from "Obodo Donuo" by Echezona:[2]



This could easily be:

Figure 26

Another way in which the Ibo speaks has given rise to another technique used by the ngedegwu player. These are what we may call asymmetric divisions. One can normally have $\frac{8}{8}$ in a bar, which means that the principal accent is on the first note and a very slight one on the fifth. But

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[1] Ibid.

[2] Ibid.

in certain Ibo melodies, the number of notes and accents may not follow that accepted pattern. One may have it thus expressed: $\frac{3 \text{ plus } 2 \text{ plus } 2 \text{ plus } 3}{8}$, which means that in a bar, if it were to be written, an accent falls on the 1st, 4th, 6th and 8th notes. Of course, without the preceding music, it will be difficult to figure out that the music is in $\frac{8}{8}$ time. It is this kind of division more than anything else that baffles most foreigners who wish to write the Ibo folk songs down in noteform, and they conclude that they cannot understand it. It is only when a person knows the language very well that he can fully appreciate this type of division and be able to write it down. Compare the following:

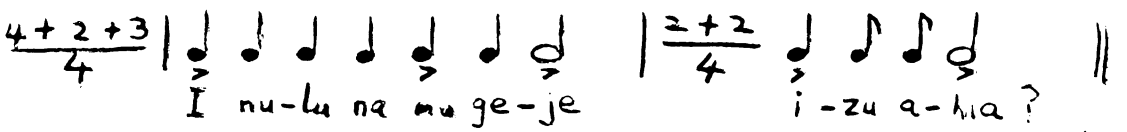

Figure 27

This leads us to asymmetric meters. Certain meters like 4 can be broken down into $\frac{3 \text{ plus } 2}{4}$ or $\frac{2 \text{ plus } 3}{4}$, e.g.

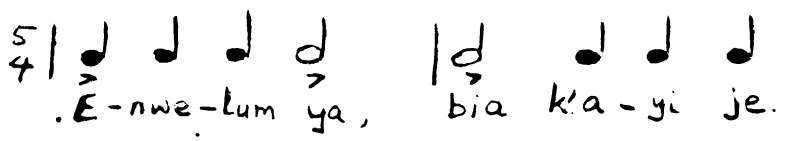

Figure 28

Changing meters are often met with when people are excited. Sometimes meters and measure-lengths change so often that collectors are flabbergasted. A melody may contain such meters in quick succession: $\frac{3\ 3\ 2\ 3\ 3}{2\ 4\ 4\ 4\ 2}$ etc.

This type of expression is much used by modern composers such as Owen Reed in his "La Fiesta Mexicana"--a Mexican folksong symphony for concert band. Stravinsky uses this in his "Rite of Spring," Bartok in his "Piano Pieces for Children," Vol. 11, No. XXX; and Copland in his "El Salon Mexico."

The ngedegwu ensemble players all use these techniques, each performer using the one that he thinks will express best what he feels. In an ensemble such as the author found at Diobu, there is no descant man; each performer had his own ngedegwu, and there were varying sizes. There were about eight playing at the same time. Somebody started playing his instrument, the left hand marking the main beats, and the right hand playing a simple rhythm. This man was soon joined by another performer on his instrument, beginning with his left hand and later, with his right hand. One by one, each performer joined, each improvising something different from the other players and yet, when listened to as a whole, the music was a contrapuntal conglomeration of rhythmic and melodic patterns, one frequently heard duple against triple measure, triple against quadruple, and triple against quintuple. The fact is that the performers do not realize the difficulty of their performance; they take it as a matter of course.

In some parts of Ibo country such as Ikwere in the Niger Delta, and Nsukka, an ngedegwu is primarily to be

played together and at the same time with other ngedegwu. Solo performance is not common. In other parts like Owerri and Agbudu Udi, an ngedegwu is played solo, and it is a rarity to find more than one ngedegwu played at the same time. In both cases the ngedegwu is accompanied with abia (different types of drums), oyo (a type of rattle), and Oja (piccolo type of instrument).

Uses

An ngedegwu is played at festivals like Ana-Udi, Okwuluma Agbudu, at the funeral of one who belongs to the performing group (otu), when visitors like ministers of state visit a town, or at a wrestling match; for example, at Ikwere, where a team of about eight ngedegwu play together at matches. The best player at Udi now is thirty-five year-old Madukwe Oyanta. Each village has ndi akwa, persons who play this instrument from childhood. Normally, people who make this instrument are different from the performers, but performers often have to replace defective slabs without consulting the makers because it might be expensive.

At Nsukka, it is a taboo for women to see the menfolk play ngedegwu, for it is played only at rituals. They are allowed to hear the music but to make sure that women do not see the performance, a storied mud hut is built to house the players. Performers play on the top floor with doors shut, windows and doors of the lower floor are also

shut, and it is illegal for women to go into any of the floors or to see any of the instruments. Violation of any of these taboos carries heavy penalty even death, the author was told.

Ngedegwu is used in telling stories. When this is so, it is unaccompanied by any other type of instrument such as abia, oyo, or oja mentioned earlier. It is only the descant man who plays his ostinato and affirms by it that what the principal performer is saying is true (ife o nekwu melu eme). This is understandable because sounds from other instruments make the necessary speech sounds from ngedegwu obscure and unintelligible. As mentioned earlier, Ibo language is tonal. Every sentence can be played on the piano. The speech rhythms and meters explained earlier are expressed by the ngedegwu, including the non-accentual rhythms, shifted accents, asymmetric divisions, asymmetric meters, and changing meters. It takes an expert to tell a story that is easily understood by people, and when he does, people smile when they should, express horror at appropriate places, and nod their approval, which show that they are following the story.

Here is a story that has been told with an ngedegwu and was perfectly understood by listeners:

A Sad King Who Had No Children

A powerful king had many wives. Not just a few, but hundreds of wives! In spite of the fact that he had

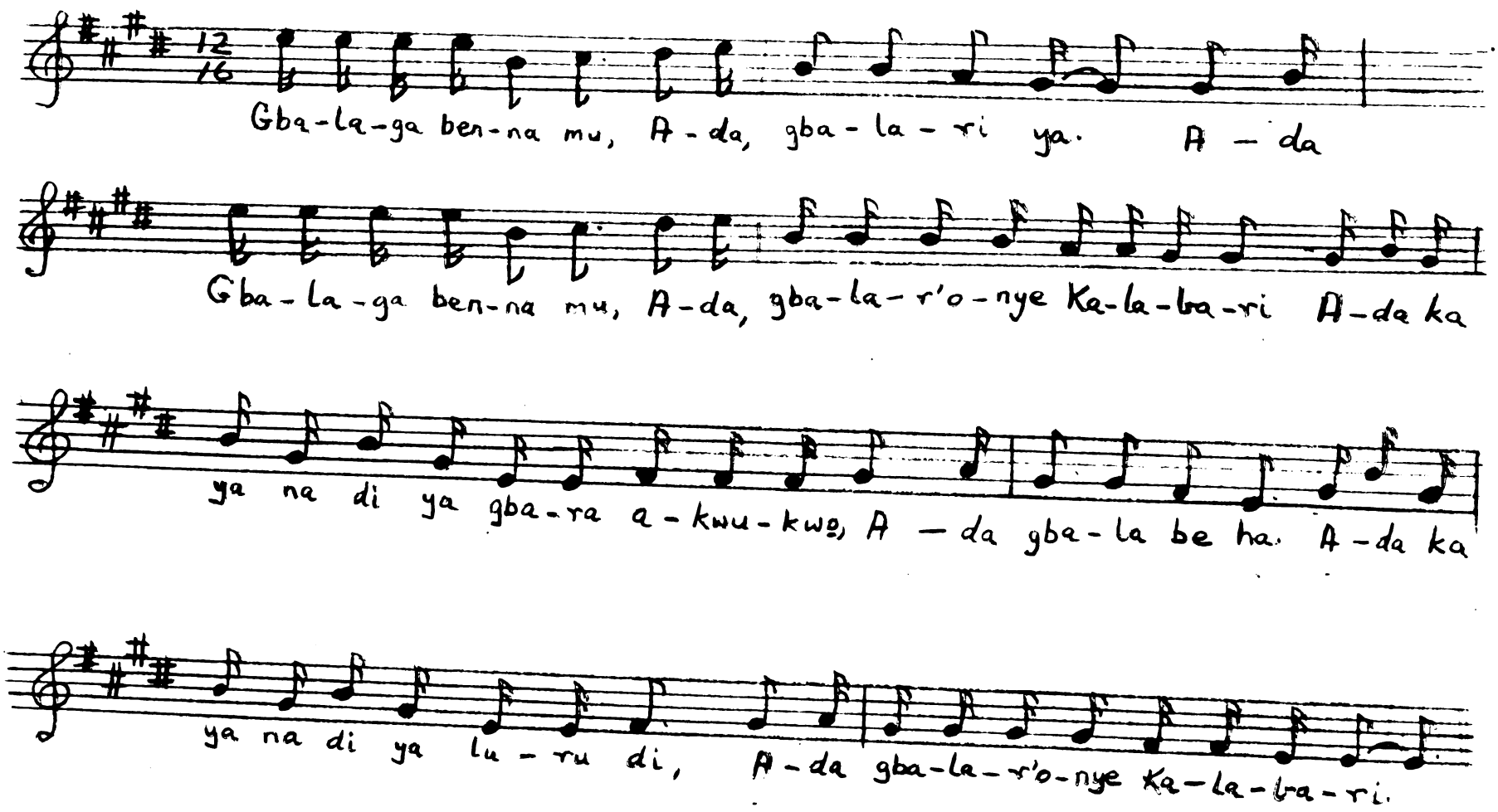

Figure 29. A melody sung by Amokwe women.

many wives, he was a sad man because he had no children. One day, the king and one of his servants were inspecting the quality of some oil which the men had been pressing from palm-nuts they had gathered, when they came upon one pot of oil which seemed fresher and more beautiful than all the others. The king exclaimed, "I have longed for a child for many years and have been disappoined. Oh! How I wish that this wonderful oil could be turned into a lovely child for me!"

The king went on his way inspecting the oil in the other pots. When he returned, the pot with the fresh, beautiful oil had vanished and, there in its place stood a lovely young girl, radiant with health. His wish had been granted. He took her to his home and performed the naming ceremony, calling her Odiuche, which means, "My wish come true." The king then instructed his servants to watch over Odiuche continually, and never to allow her to go out into the sun. He warned them that if they did allow her to go out into the sun and anything happened to her, he would punish them severely. When Odiuche wanted something that was outside, a servant had to get it for her. She was allowed to go outside only early in the morning or late in the evening.

One day, Odiuche was left unattended. No one paid any attention to her when she became hungry and asked for something to eat, so she went to the kitchen to watch the

Andante

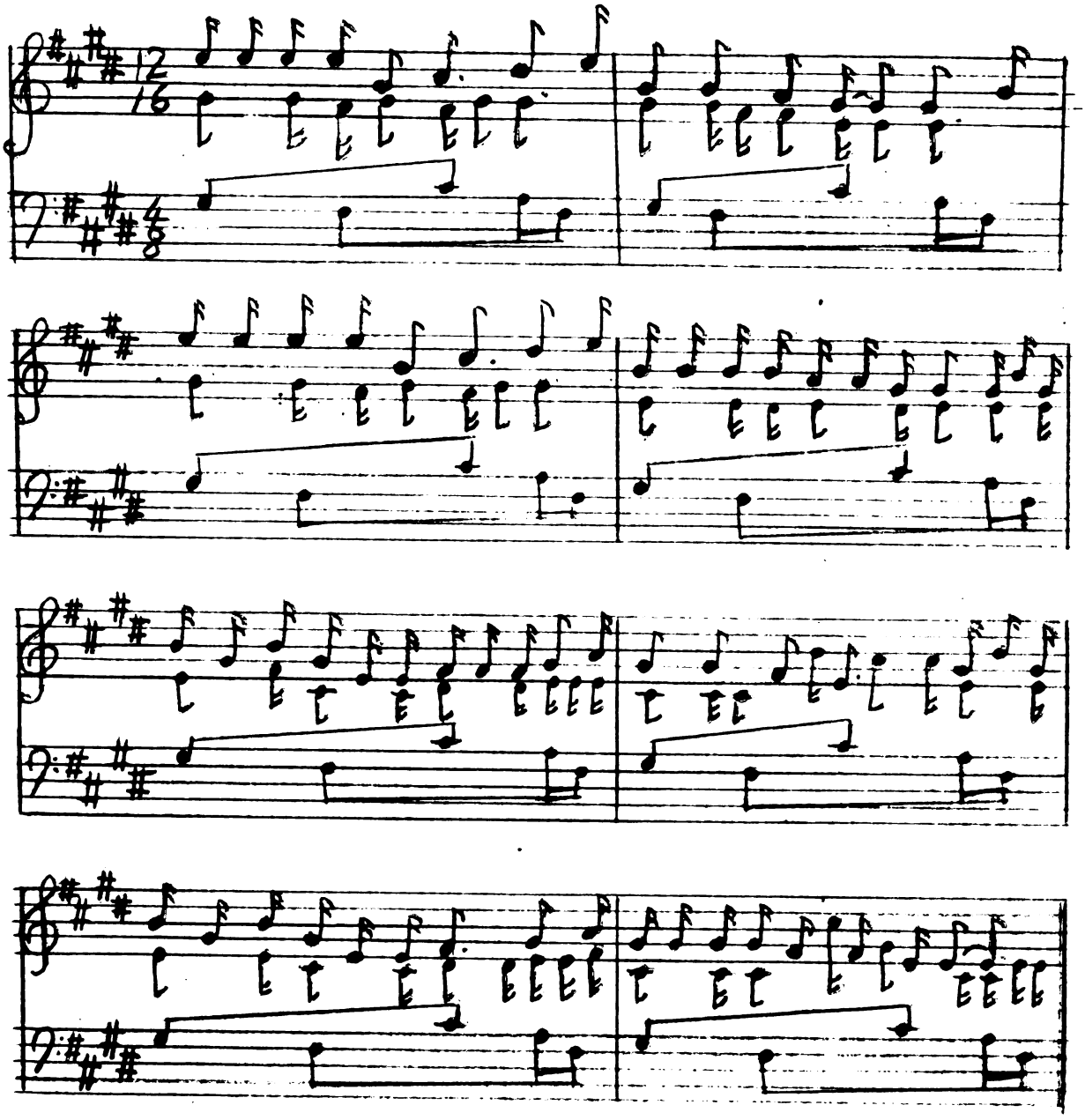

Figure 30. Doubling and accompanying melody of Figure 22 by ngedegwu.

food prepared. There, one of her legs began to melt and then the other until the kitchen floor was covered with oil. A bird in the market place began to sing telling that the king's kitchen was full of oil and the people could bring containers to collect it. Some of the king's men heard the song but were afraid to tell him what was happening. After some time had passed, the bird came to perch on the king's shoulder and sang his song in the king's ear. When the king realized what was happening, he ran to his home as fast as he could. Arriving there, he found Odiuche half melted. She was still a lovely young woman from the waist up, but half of her body was melted away. The king became angry and flew into a rage. When he had called all his servants together, he killed them and set fire to the kitchen and to himself. He no longer had any reason for living because that which he valued most in life was gone.[1]

It is unfortunate that this art of telling stories with the ngedegwu is fast dying away as the older people are dying out. The number of experts who can play the ngedegwu is very few now, and young men are losing the art of interpreting what the ngedegwu says because they drift early into the townships where such instruments are regarded by their fellow countrymen as strange and therefore they lose contact with this type of instrument.

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[1]W. W. C. Echezona, unpublished collected stories.

Pepper's Account of Ibo Xylophone

M. Pepper, in his short account of ngedegwu which he saw at Owerri, agreed that the instrument is used in talking. He notated the sound of ngedegwu and put down the words sung by women as the words fall and rise with the notes of ngedegwu. Here are some of the sentences and notes that represent them. I have made slight alterations on some notes to express fully the meaning:

Figure 31

Ana agbamana, ka anye lemano.

This means, "Well danced, let's go home."

The next example is:

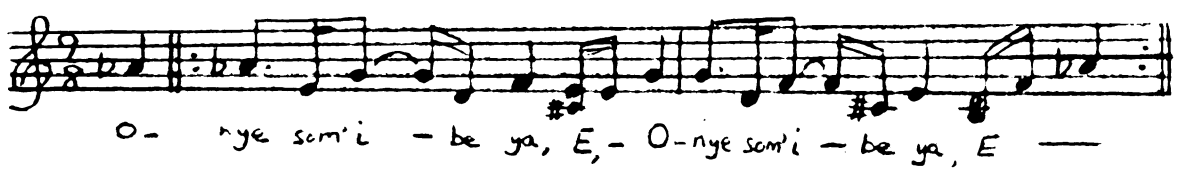

Figure 32

Onye soma ibe ya.

This means, "Dance to the steps of your predecessor."

Here is another:

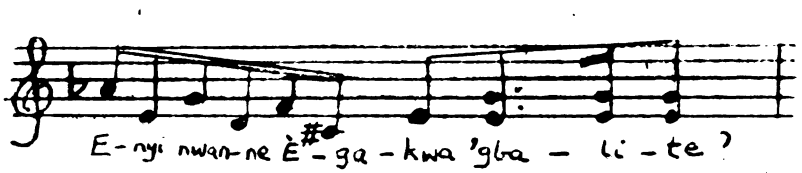

Figure 33

Enyi nwanne e ga kam agbalite?

This meaning is, "My brother's friend, can you dance better than I?"

Here is another:

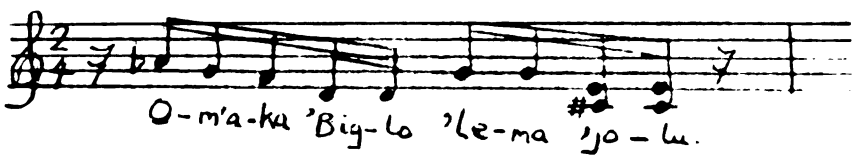

Figure 34

Omoaka 'big'lo 'lema 'jolu.

It means, "Children of Abigolo, imitate 'Jolu'."[1]

Let me first congratulate M. Pepper for his interest and for being the first to write something down about the Ibo xylophone. The author is an Ibo man and is greatly impressed with Pepper's effort. Since the author happened to be born in that part of Ibo country, he can fully appreciate what he has done. The author will, however, make a few observations on his account:

First of all, the following is the range and the scale which M. Pepper said that he found in use in this part of the Ibo land:

Figure 35

This is a synthetic scale that is quite foreign to the Ibos generally. The author is of the opinion that M. Pepper ran

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[1]M. Pepper, "Sur Un Xylophone Ibo," African Music Society Newsletter, Vol. 1, No. 5 (June, 1952), p. 35.

into an instrument of poor workmanship probably by an inexperienced maker; or that he was in a hurry to put down something and therefore used a professionally made instrument, the slabs of which had not quite dried. Many foreign collectors get into such predicaments with the result that they carry away improperly tuned instruments. As indicated earlier, after ngedegwu is tuned for the first time while the slabs of wood have not quite dried, the slabs are allowed to dry properly in the shade and later, in the sun, before fine tuning is made. All this period of drying takes weeks. After the fine tuning is made, ngedegwu can keep indefinitely without the slabs changing their pitches. Professional recordings from different parts of the Ibo country and specimens of the actual instruments establish the fact that the scale is that of a diatonic scale, but that the melodies performed may be in different modes.

Looking again at figure 35, it will be seen that he has two accompanists, one at either end of the instrument. It is very unusual to find accompanists at both ends. Generally, there is only one accompanist playing his ostinato bass, using the lowest three or four notes; or a separate instrument is procured specially for the accompanist. In the latter case, the slabs are only about four in number. The accompanist may even be given a full-sized instrument in tune with the other instrument, on which he plays the few notes of his ostinato. It is presumed that Pepper did not understand his informant in this respect.

Pepper's attempt at translating melodies played on ngedegwu confirms what has been written earlier, that ngedegwu is used in talking and telling stories. One can easily see that M. Pepper does not really understand the language because the rising and falling pitches of the music played by ngedegwu do not often correspond with the sentences broken up into syllables and placed under the pitches that are supposed to represent them. See, for example, figure 36.

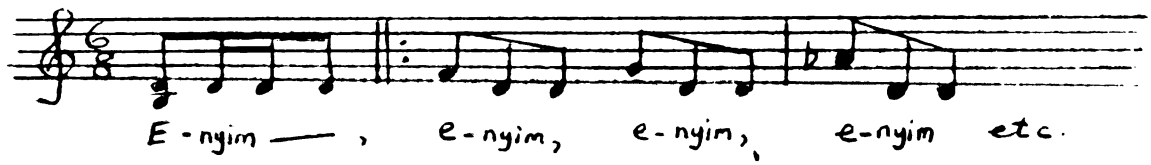

Figure 36

The words written in are "enyim, enyim, enyim' etc." This means "My friend, my friend, my friend" etc. But with M. Pepper's inflection, the first "enyim" means "my elephant"; the remaining inflections of "enyim" mean nothing in Ibo. In order for "enyim" to mean "my friend" in Ibo, there should be three notes at a time, but the third note should rise a tone as shown in figure 37.

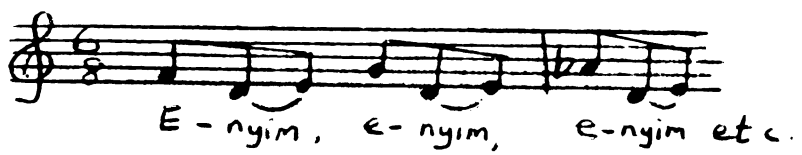

Figure 37

Apart from these few observations, I think that M. Pepper did a good job.

The range of the particular ngedegwu that the author studied at Amokwe in Udi District of Enugu Province, is as follows:

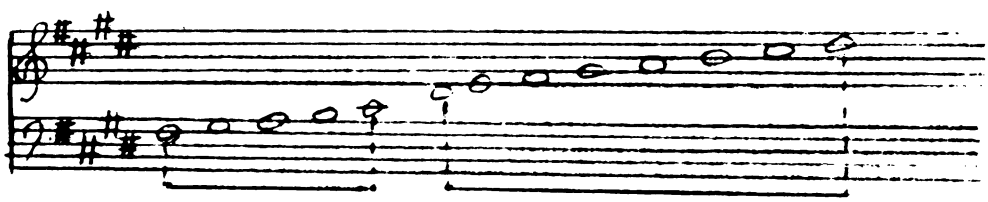

Figure 38

Women sing the words to the melody in fig. 29. The words are:

Gbalaga be nna mu,
Ada, gbalari ya.
Ada, gbalaga be nna mu,
Ada gbalar' onye Kalabari.
Ada ka ya na di ya gbara akwukwo,
Ada gbala be ha.
Ada ka ya na di ya luri di,
Ada gbalar' onye Kalabari.

The explanation of this song is that a certain girl called Ada was married to a Kalabari man. This man was nice before they were married, but after marriage, he started to mistreat Ada. The first part of the song describes Ada's brooding and asking herself why she should not go back to her father's house. The second part of the song shows that she has carried out her decision of returning home.

The principal performer of ngedegwu doubles the melody sung by the women. This is notated as the top voice in the soprano (see figure 30).

SECTION V

AEROPHONES

CHAPTER XII

WIND INSTRUMENTS

Types and Materials for Making

Wind instruments are comprised of horns and trumpets, opi, akepele, oja (flutes), ogbo (piccolo), ugene, odu-okike (horn), and elephant tusks. Southern and western Iboland are abundant with wild animals which have horns such as mgbada (sable antelope--hippitragus Niger), ene (gemsbok--oryx gazella), atu (bush cow--strepsiceros capensis). The Ibos are excellent hunters. When such wild animals with sizable horns are killed, they are skinned, the flesh is eaten, and the horns made into musical instruments. However, in Northern Ibo like Nsukka and Ogurugu areas, such wild horned game is scarce, so, a special type of long gourd instead of animals' horns is used in making musical instruments.

The horns of the sable antelope and those of the kodoo (strepsicaros capensis) are in great demand because of their large size. Those of the gemsbock are also used, but not frequently. When no other suitable horns are found, those of the ox may be used.

Let us look at the longitudinal cross section of an animal horn. In the figure on page 156, it will be seen

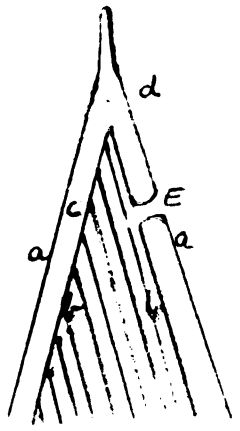

Figure 39. A cross section of an animal horn.

that there is flesh "c" sandwiched between the bone "b" inside and the horn "a" outside. At "d," the corneous layer is much thicker than any other part of the horn.

General

Wind instruments are used in many parts of Africa for many different occasions. Kirby reports that the signaller or envoy of the chief of Venda summons, the chief's subjects to work for him with the phalaphala when cooperative work is necessary,

> . . . or to call the dancers from various kraal to execute the national dance called tshikome. In former days the phalaphala sounded the call to arms, and on hearing it, the warriors would seize their weapons and make for the chief's kraal.[1]

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[1]P. R. Kirby, The Musical Instruments of the Native Races of S. Africa (London: Humphrey Milford, 1934), pp. 74-75.

In Ibo land, it is a taboo for women to play the opi or akpele. The instrument is a prerogative of men. Stayt noted a curious Venda practice connected with the instrument:

> When the star Sirius appeared as the morning star, rising early in the winter mornings, they called it nanga (horn). Its first appearance as nanga was the signal for the commencement of harvesting, and the first man to notice it climbed up a high hill and blew the phalaphala horn to spread the news, and the chief rewarded him with the present of a cow.[1]

Occasionally, one encounters a wooden horn. Only one has been seen by the writer at Isiokpo in 1939, and that one in a very bad state of repair. It was made of hard wood, was in one piece, and was beautifully carved. A few of them were made because of scarcity of real antelope horn and perhaps a bad harvest of suitable gourd. The size of his "horn" was about a foot long and about two and a half inches in diameter at the widest section.

Range

It is difficult to define a range for the horns because each horn is different in length and in the diameter at the widest end. Some horns are as long as two feet three inches measuring along the curves of the horns; the sounding portion measures a foot and nine inches while the diameter

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[1]H. A. Stayt, The BaVenda (Oxford, 1931), pp. 210 and 227.

at the widest section measures up to four inches. Some horns measure as little as six inches along the curves with the sounding portion only about five inches long and one inch in diameter at the widest portion. Until the sizes are standardized, the ranges will always vary.

Smaller forms are constructed from stems of pumpkin and petiole of the pawpaw leaves, and are sounded by boys who use them for signalling. Pitches are very difficult to produce because the air-column is extremely small and the pitch of the fundamental note is so high that harmonics are out of the question. Apart from the fundamental notes, some artificial sounds are possible. This is accomplished by manipulating the lips and by producing sound with the human voice which is somewhat amplified by the long tube of the instrument. By this method, various pitches characteristic of the Ibo speech are easily produced. By such suggestion of words, boys begin to learn to carry on simple conversations. They easily comprehend the change in pitch, or tone of voice, when the sentences or phrases being practised are simple and deal with what they see everyday.

24. Small Odu

25. Opi

26. Odu

27. Akpele

CHAPTER XIII

OPI

Construction

When a maker of opi sees the type of horn he likes, he may employ one of two possible methods of extracting it from the head of the animal. The first is to allow it to decay, which means that the flesh sandwiched between the horn and the inside bone will no longer bind the two together. Applying the second method, the head is cooked in hot water. In this case also, the sandwiched flesh becomes loose and the horn comes off easily. The maker decides on where to make an opening for blowing. He decides this by looking in to see where the bore of the horn begins. The opening which the maker cuts at this point "E" is rectangular, approximately three-fourths inch long and one-half inch wide. He rounds the edges off.

In the good old days, the maker also carved dancers or animals or trees on the tusk of the elephant but not on the horn of the antelope which is already decorated by nature with beautiful corrugations. To make the horn lighter in weight, a maker may attempt to level off the corrugations. This makes the horn look plain and ugly, so to beautify it, the maker may cut a series of V-shaped indentations completely

round the tip. In recent years, makers seem to be in such a hurry that the corrugations are not completely removed, nor are the series of V-shaped indentations deep enough. Full or partial removal of the V-shaped indentations automatically makes the wide end thin and liable to crack during the harmattan when everything is very dry, or when the horn accidentally falls, or is knocked against a hard object.

To prevent the edge of a horn from cracking, especially after the corrugations have been removed, a piece of leather is usually tightly stitched around the flaring mouth of the horn. To prevent its falling and to help in carrying it about, one end of a piece of string is attached to the piece of leather around the mouth and the other end firmly secured to the tip of the horn. This string, then, acts as a strap by which a player carries his instrument over his shoulder from place to place.

The horns, odu, produced from elephant tusks are of varying sizes from about a foot in length and about one inch in diameter at the widest part to about four feet in length and about five inches in diameter. They are sometimes very exquisitely carved with beautiful scenes of people making music, or with geometrical designs, or animals. They are very expensive, the small ones costing about fifty dollars and the big ones about two hundred dollars. The price, of course, singles out those who would use it. Only wealthy titled people play the instrument at important

ceremonies. As a matter of fact, an enormous tusk forms part of the insignia of the coveted ozo title.

Uses

Odu performs dual functions: (1) As a musical instrument to supply and establish rhythm when used in the rare important ceremonies with other instruments, and (2) In communication. George Basden, discussing ways of spreading information in Iboland, has this to say:

> The custom of transmitting signals by sounds is a common one and is not confined to these whistles. The chiefs entitled to carry ivory horns send out messages by powerful blasts of dot and dash notes. The horns are blown flute-wise, and the note can be varied in length, and made higher or lower in tone. The chiefs are experts in the art of trumpeting on the horns, and use them for communicating quite long messages. More often, they perform upon them purely for display, especially in assemblies. Half a dozen chiefs, emulating one another, are capable of making a great noise! A satisfactory result depends on the proper use of the lips rather than blowing with force.[1]

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[1] G. T. Basder, Niger Ibos (London: Seeley, Service & Co., Ltd., 1921), p. 358.

CHAPTER XIV

AKPELE (HORN)

Construction

This is made usually from the horns of the sable antelope, hippotragus niger, although other suitable horns can be used. In the absence of a horn, a long gourd shaped like a cucumber is used. Both ends are cut open and a rectangular blow hole which is about three-fourths inch long and one-half inch wide is cut about two inches from the small end hole. When the akpele is finished it is approximately six inches long and one inch in diameter.

Technique and Acoustics

Although harmonics are obtained by overblowing, a diatonic major scale is easily obtained by manipulating the fingers and palms which control the end holes. With a suitable instrument, a horn having the proper size of bore, narrow mouth opening in the correct place, and having the proper flare or bell, one can obtain with the aid of harmonics an almost continuous diatonic scale with one chromatic note missing at the fourth octave--the sixteenth harmonic. The notes of this scale are not quite in pitch with the normal scale, but it is not often that the Ibos use this

scale obtained by harmonics. They use it only for color, descants, doubling the melody, or playing a melody around the existing one.

The lips of the player perform several functions in the successful performance of a horn: (1) The lips allow wind to pass into the horn; (2) They act as a double reed which, when set into vibration, cause the column of air in the horn to vibrate in sympathy and provide the fundamental tone; (3) Because the human lips are very adaptable, that is, they can change their shapes, size, and the tension of the muscles, an experienced, practised performer can easily control the intensity and the intonation of the sound produced.

The timbre of the sound produced is controlled by the adequate manipulation of the lips but the flare of the bell of the horn also helps to improve the quality. The bigger the bell, the lower the notes produced, but this also makes possible very high harmonics therefore improving the color.

The Ibo horn has no special mouth piece. A rectangular opening is cut at a convenient place about two inches from the small opening at the narrow end of the horn. The shallower the distance between the mouth opening and the side immediately opposite it, the higher the pitch. Similarly, the deeper the distance, the lower the pitch.

Uses

Akpele is almost always played with other instruments.

Sometimes they accompany singers; this is frequently the case at Asaba where akpele doubles the melody. Akpele can perform by themselves as at Nsukka where a choir of four or six of them perform purely instrumental music based on known Ibo tunes, one or two playing the melody, while others improvise as many rhythmic parts as possible.

The Asaba method of accompaniment is rather interesting. There is a short prelude by all the akpele based on the phrase of the song to be sung later, then, singers come in with the song. The akpele doubles the melody and improvises the parts just as the voice also sings the melody and with other voices improvise the other parts. When the verse of the song is completed, a choir of akpele improvises an interlude based on a phrase of the melody, usually the last phrase, then the voices come in again. There are many repetitions of this systematic improvisation. At last, the voice stops and the choir of akpele improvises a short coda. In these improvisations, whether vocal or instrumental, the harmony produced is very pleasing to the ear and yet the people who produce it do not know the simplest rules of harmony and counterpoint other than that the resultant sound should be interesting. The only source of the influence of European music until very recently has been hymns sung in the local churches.

28. Ogbo

29. A man playing an ogbo.

CHAPTER XV

OGBO (PICCOLO)

General

Two types of flutes have been in existence since antiquity: (1) Those that are end-blown like the recorder, the ogbo, and (2) Those that are side-blown (transverse) such as the akpele. The oja belongs to the highly pitched part of the flute family called the piccolo. The ogbo is found mainly in the Eastern Iboland while the akpele is found mainly in western Iboland. Most people in Eastern Nigeria call the instrument, ogbo, but in Ngwa it is called okpokpo.

Construction

Five special types of wood are used in making ogbo; they are egbu, udara, uturu-ukpa, ora, and uko woods. These are used because they do not crack during the harmattan.

An ogbo is cylindrical in shape, between five inches and six and one-half inches in length, and about one inch in diameter. An ogbo has four openings: (1) A continuous hole runs all the way from top to bottom of the instrument. It is one-half inch in diameter at the blowing end which is shaped in the form of a "V" so as to fit the lips when

blowing, and it narrows to about one-tenth inch at the other end. (2) Another hole originates about two and one-half inches from the blowing end, runs at right angles to the hole just described and comes out at the other side. This hole is also about one-tenth inch in diameter, and comes out of two projections, these are the other two openings; one at each side of the instrument where it is concave. The ogbo is carved with geometrical patterns or animal figures.

Technique

The player blows across the mouth hole at the top. His breath striking sharply on the edge of the hole sets the column of air inside the tube in vibration. By manipulating the finger holes and the pressure of air that the player blows, most performers are able to produce a diatonic scale from C^3 to A^3.

Uses

The ogbo is one of the smallest musical instruments of the Ibos, yet the brightest. It has a shrill tone that rings out above all others when an orchestra is performing. A systematic study of ogbo shows an absence of upper partials which gives it its peculiar quality characterized by clearness and transparency.

Another characteristic of the ogbo is an extreme nimbleness which performers have sometimes exploited to the point of vulgarity. Ogbo is always used when men are assembled,

during communal work, and during the dancing of men. Because Ibo language is tonal, sentences are made with an ogbo. When important men are assembled, especially when they are assembled in the open, the ogbo player by playing his instrument tells everyone present the name and titles of the speakers as they speak, and what brave deeds they have done previously.

During communal work, dancing, and wrestling matches, the names of people and also words of encouragement are played on an ogbo to infuse energy into the parties concerned. Sometimes hunters use it to call fellow hunters or to lure animals during a hunting expedition. An ogbo is also used to direct dancers regarding their steps and movements. Ogbo is sometimes used to send messages to relations and friends in faraway places. Obviously, secret messages cannot be sent with an ogbo since everybody understands the language technique.

CHAPTER XVI

OJA (FLUTE)

Materials and Where Found

Of the different types of materials which man has used for the making of musical instruments, the bamboo stands out as the most widely used throughout the world where it is available. The area where it grows includes southern portions of N. America, S. America, eastern Asia, Australia, New Zealand, Madagascar, and tropical Africa.

The bamboo has a special quality; it exerts force in opposition to change, this means that its physical peculiarities make it possible for some musical instruments to be made from it without much effort. Some physical peculiarities are that it is straight, conveniently narrow, cylindrical, that it can be bent only by an expert workman, and the inside wall is smooth and even.

Some musical instruments from the bamboo include ubo ikpo and ubo akwara (types of raft zither), ekwe (types of slit drum), and oja (flute) of which there are two types: the transverse and the vertical.

Construction

For making the transverse oja, the maker selects that

portion of the bamboo about fifteen inches in length, whose internodes are the right diameter--about three-quarters of an inch, and even. He cuts the portion between nodes. He decides on which end the open end should be and cuts it open. With a red hot metal awl he bores a hole one-fifth of an inch in diameter about one inch from the closed end. The player blows across this hole; he bores six other smaller finger holes, six inches from the air hole and one inch between each hole. Each of the smaller holes is about three-sixteenths of an inch in diameter. All the holes are bored in a straight line. The transverse oja is ready for use.

Use

Oja has a very beautiful round, smooth, and soothing tone comparable with the concert European flute. The range is two octaves, the first octave being obtained normally but the second by over-blowing. The player exploits this range by playing already known melodies or improvisations on parts of the melody. In an ensemble, a descant is improvised a 3rd, 4th, 6th or an octave above those flutes playing the melody. Often the transverse flute plays solo. As with the other musical instruments, it is used for "talking."

VERTICAL OJA

Construction

The vertical bamboo oja is found only in Nsukka area.

A section of bamboo about eight inches to twenty-four inches long and about three-quarters of an inch in diameter is selected and cut open at both ends. At the blowing end, a slight depression is made on which the lower lip rests in blowing. From the blowing end, between two and six holes are made for fingering. The band of Eze Opi includes four such oja-- eight inches, nine inches, sixteen and one-half inches, and twenty-four inches long, all about three-fourths inch diameter and the number of holes being two, two, four, and six respectively.

Performance

The quality of the sound produced is like that of the transverse flute but the range of each, except the twenty-four inch flute, is less than an octave. By overblowing, they also get sounds an octave higher than their fundamentals. The range of the twenty-four inch flute is an octave plus another octave produced by overblowing. Usually, the instrument that has the most holes is the leader in an ensemble of between four to seven instruments. All are graded as far as pitches are concerned. Music performed is always familiar music. The middle oja is selected because of its range. The other instruments extend the range of the chosen one and fill in the notes when it is their turn. As soon as a flutist finishes his own section of the melody, the next flutist continues, the total effect being that of the hocket. In a hocket, the flow of melody is

interrupted by the insertion of rests, generally in such a way that the missing notes are supplied by another voice so that the melody is divided between the voices.[1] This continues until the melody is finished. Occasionally they have a few notes in common. With a few exceptions these flutes are not used for harmony.

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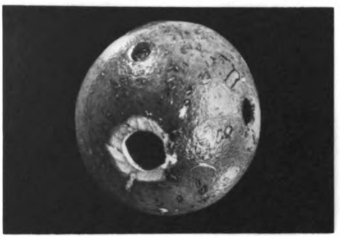
[1]Donald Grout, A History of Western Music (New York: Norton & Co., 1960), p. 104.



30. Ugene

31. A man playing an ugene.

CHAPTER XVII

UGENE

Construction

Another wind instrument that is now totally extinct is the ugene (in West called ocarina). It is a kind of whistle (see plate 30). It is constructed from either baked clay or from ukpadi shell (strychnos pungens). It is very simple to make. When the ukpadi shell is used, three holes are made while the shell is still green, then it is left in a cool place so that the inside may rot and the seeds become loose and fall off, after which it is ready for use.

When baked clay is used, it is formed about the size of a billiard ball with a large open space inside. Two or three holes connect the outside with the inner cavity. One of the holes is larger than the others. This larger hole serves as the mouth piece through which air is blown into the instrument to produce musical tone. The other holes are for varying the pitch of notes produced. By careful manipulation, that is by partially or completely covering one of these holes by itself or in combination with the other holes, or by overblowing, a diatonic scale of an octave is easily obtained.

Technique

The method of varying pitches when playing the ugene is rather curious. Supposing that the air is blown through the proper place and the left hole is closed by a finger with the left hand, the player, to vary the pitch, moves a finger of his right hand closer to or further away from the hole, at a right angle to the body of the instrument. The farther away he moves his finger, the deeper the pitch; the nearer he brings his finger towards the hole, the higher the pitch. It takes an experienced player to know the approximate distance he needs to obtain the particular pitch he wants.

The breath is blown across the mouth opening of the instrument in such a way that an edge tone is created, and the sound produced is shrill and piercing.

Use

Dr. George T. Basen writing about ugene said:

> I first met with it during the war between Nkpaw and Ogiddi peoples, where it was used for signalling purposes. . . . The men on outpost duty, perched in trees, sounded the alarm and communicated messages by means of these little instruments.[1]

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[1]G. T. Basden, Among the Ibos of Nigeria (Philadelphia: J. B. Lippincott Co., 1921), p. 185.

SECTION VI

CHORDOPHONES

32. Two men playing musical bows.

CHAPTER XVIII

UNE (MUSICAL BOW)

General

Une music is a rarity nowadays in most parts of Ibo land. Some youngsters up to the age of fifteen may never have had the opportunity to hear it. Apart from the one heard by the writer in connection with research for this dissertation, the most recent hearing was in 1930. At that time, it was a common instrument among the Ibos. The une is a solo instrument and is not used in combination with other instruments.

Construction

Any flexible branch or stem of about one inch in diameter which is hard, tenacious and light can be used. For example; in Andoni, ada stem is used; in Owerri, osu or anyasu stem is used; in Isoko, aleze stem is used. Such a stick about five feet long is cut while alive, the bark is removed, and the stem slightly bent to resemble a new moon. The bending is done by drawing to each other with any piece of string that can stand the tension. In this position, the bow is left to dry in the sun.

The type of permanent string to be used is called ana (typha capensis), Ekwere, a soft string from palm tree frond is also used but only as a second choice. Whichever type of string is decided upon, a long strip of about six and a half feet and about one-fifth of an inch thick is dressed by having the back smoothed by sanding. When this is done, the string is ready for use.

About three inches from each end of the selected stem, a hole about one-fifth of an inch in diameter is made by burning it through with a red-hot iron awl. While the string is still wet, it is secured through the hole in the thicker end and wound tightly. It is then passed to the tip of the wood on the end, and stretched to the tip of the other end and wound tightly. Before being properly secured so that it will not slip, the string is pulled to the required tension. The instrument is now ready for use. A smooth light stick about nine inches long and one-quarter of an inch in diameter is held in the left hand, which also holds the instrument. A thick ngwo broom (palm) stick about one foot long is used to tap the string of the instrument lightly (see plate 32).

Performance

Une is held in such a way that the string passes across the open mouth. Because the Ibo une is constructed without a resonator, the mouth serves as the resonator. The

string vibrates into the oral cavity and the lips do not touch the string at any time. To get several pitches, the string is divided by touching it with the small stick held in the left hand which also holds the une. The string is set into vibration by striking it with the other short stick held in the right hand. The longer the length of string that vibrates, the wider the mouth is opened, the deeper the pitch, and the more sonorous the sound. If the cavity of the mouth is not adjusted, some of the notes sound tinny. Von Hornbostel writing about the division of the string in the mouth-bow by a pressing stick says:

> The fact of its being confined to a limited area--from Togo to the Congo--makes it extremely probable that the bow with pressing-stick in northeast Peru was imported by Negroes.[1]

Uses

It is generally accepted that une music was acclaimed to be one of the most entertaining items in the past. Here is a story told by a person actually affected by the music. This lady shall be referred to by the name, Ugoye. Her story was told this writer in 1932, when he was very small at which time Ugoye was an aged great-grandmother. When Ugoye was about fifteen years old she was very beautiful and very tall for her age. She went in the company of three other

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[1] E. M. Von Hornbostel, "The Ethnology of African Sound Instruments," from Africa, Vol. VI (1933), p. 295.

girls to collect wood from a place not far from her home. When they had collected the fire-wood and were about to go home, two huge, stalwart-looking men suddenly emerged from a nearby thicket and caught two of the girls, including Ugoye. They were now marched through winding lanes to the compound of a chief where they were to be killed for the burial ceremony of the dead chief.

Just before they were due to be tied to a tree until morning when they would be killed, one of the girls mysteriously escaped leaving only Ugoye. One can imagine what was going on in Ugoye's mind as she was left to die alone.

At night, one man who was attracted by Ugoye's beauty and who was always having violent quarrels with his wife, stealthily came to Ugoye and told her that if she would promise to make him a good wife, he would arrange her escape. Ugoye promised and was released to live with this man's family. Though she was well loved, Ugoye did not actually want to live there and become the man's wife. Ugoye's home was only two miles away. However, the distance seems greater when one realizes it had to be travelled by dodging through winding lanes that might lead her into the hands of slave dealers.

One morning, on the pretext of going to fetch water with the other wives of the family, she suddenly disappeared and was on her way home to her father's house. She did not go along the regular road, but chose to walk through the

bush because she thought that was safer.

After a time, she heard beautiful music coming from somewhere in the bush. She stopped, listened, and went in the direction of the music, hiding in the thicket and enjoying the music as she went. It happened that the player was a tired hunter who had sat down to rest and who was playing his une after hunting all night. Ugoye, after a time, suddenly made her appearance while the hunter was playing. The hunter, who was originally thought to be very brave, seeing this beauty suddenly began to shake, and gradually let his une drop to the ground.

"Play on. I am enjoying your wonderful music," the girl said. When the man had regained his composure, he played some more and asked Ugoye to marry him. Ugoye agreed, but only on the condition that he would play the music whenever she wanted it. She told him of her capture and escape, and the hunter led her to her home. In due time the marriage ceremony was observed, and they lived happily ever after--all because of the music of an instrument that is hardly seen nowadays.

Une is also used in playing a game of "hide and seek." Something may be hidden somewhere. Children are called together to assemble before the une player. He plays the name of one of the children. The child whose name is played is supposed to recognize his name. If he doesn't, of course, everybody laughs at him and ridicules him. This makes everyone

attentive. When the child has recognized his name, he steps forward and listens to the une describe what is hidden, and where it is hidden. In case the child does not understand the first time, the une is played again repeating what was played previously. You know how children behave in this type of game. Those who have caught what was said begin to jump up and down, raising their fingers and asking to be allowed to go and find the hidden object. The boy who was asked to go and find the object, in the meantime, has gone. All this time, the une player is playing some incidental music. The nearer the boy gets to the object, the louder the une plays, and others shout; the farther away he is from the object, the softer the une plays. The reader may ask, "How does a person know what the une says?" Here the structure and inflection of the language as explained in the "Talking Drum" chapter is again basic to the communications.

Another Use of Une

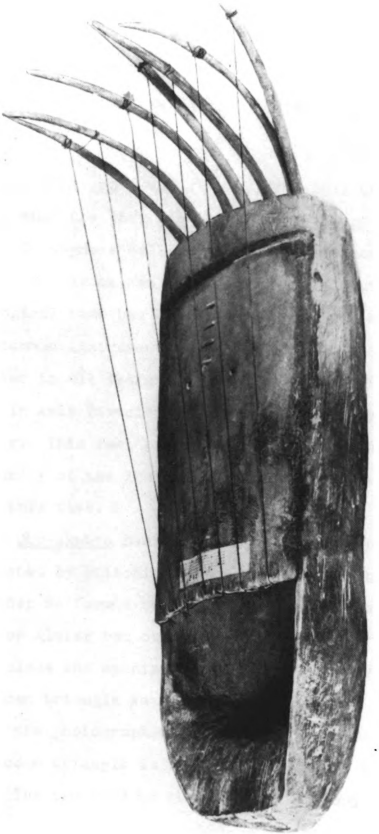
In some parts of the Ibo country, such as Umudioka, in the 1920's, three or four neighboring towns would appoint a day for a wrestling bout, each town producing one or two of its best wrestlers. On the appointed day and time, all would meet at the wrestling square of one of the towns. Almost all the members of each town would turn out en masse to encourage and cheer their representative who would be wrestling. Drummers from each town would station themselves

at one of the corners of the square, and behind them would stand the whole town. The drums would play and the women of each town would sing songs hoping that their representative would win.

Back home, the wrestler would have his own group of supporters which number half a dozen including his medicine man, and the une player. The une player would tell him by playing, of his past achievements (if he has had them), what it would mean to the whole town if he won the bout, what his ancestors had done in wrestling, and that they are at that time watching to learn what he will do and how he will stand the tricks of the other man. In some parts of Iboland, the people did not mind very much if their representative lost, but would care to know how he fell down; whether he fell down making a big noise that everybody would hear, or whether he fell down softly like a small roll of fluffy cotton. In the case of the wrestler who fell like cotton, his opponents would laugh him to scorn for that indicated he was not well fed. If he fell with a big bang, that was all right and indicated that he was well cared for.

Just before the wrestling began, the drums and singers stop and the une takes up again continuing until one party appears the weaker. The supporters of the strong wrestler, their hopes raised high, shouted encouragement to their champion. The flutists, oja players, of both sides take up the work of une because people are now shouting, and this

deadens the sound of une. When both sides appear equal again, une may take over. After the wrestling when one side has either won or lost, the winners returned home with drums playing home and women singing. The losers go home quietly and miserably.



33. Ubo-akwara

CHAPTER XIX

UBO-AKWARA (IBO GUITAR)

Description

Apart from une (musical bow), the only other stringed instrument that the Ibos have is the ubo-akwara (see plate 33). Some foreigners call it the Ibo guitar, and some the Ibo banjo. As far as can be ascertained, no European or anthropological name has been assigned to it. At one time it was a common instrument all over Iboland, but now there are only two in all Iboland. One belongs to Ndibe Adii of Achala in Awka Division and one was specially made for this writer. This fact provides the reader with an idea of the paucity of the Ibo musical instruments available and in use at this time.

The ubo-akwara has a body shaped like a prism. It is constructed by stitching three pieces of light, tenacious wood together to form a triangular hole and then either stitching or gluing two other pieces of wood at the top and bottom to close the opening (see plate 33). The top piece of the wooden triangle is not nearly as long as the other two. From the photograph on plate 33, it can be seen that the top wooden triangle is bigger in size than the other two sides. The two ends of this triangular body are not closed.

Type of Materials

The types of wood most often used include okwe, abosi (ptaeroxylon obliquum). It should be noted here that these types of wood are also used in making the ngedegwu (xylophone). Their special advantages are: (1) They are light in weight so that the player can easily carry them about. (2) They are hard and seasoned which is especially important in that white ants will not eat them up very quickly and they can stand the dry north-east wind called the "harmattan" which breaks up most wooden furniture that is not seasoned. The fibre used in sewing the three pieces of wood together include akwara-ngwo (a special type of fibre found on a certain type of palm tree), and akwara-nkwu (a slender, thread-like, tough root obtained from the lowest part of the palm tree and polished to the required thickness).

At three different places on the underpart of the prism-shaped box, eight tough, pliable canes of various lengths are securely bound with rope. The canes stretch out well over and above the head of the instrument and are bent to face upwards. Strings knotted at the underpart of the top board about an inch from the end opposite the head, passed upwards, and tied to the tips of the cane. The strings used are the same akwara-ngwo described earlier. Because the canes stretch well above the head of the instrument, the strings are raised above the sounding board, and therefore, there is no need for a bridge. A bridge is only

34. A man playing an ubo-akwara.

necessary in an ubo-akwara when there is not much clearance between the string and the sounding board.

Tuning

Tuning is easy. To lower the pitch, a cane is bent forward and the string unwound once or twice and tested to determine whether or not the string has been tuned to the desired pitch. To raise the pitch, the same process is used but instead of unwinding the string, it is wound tighter once or twice depending on the pitch desired.

Performance

The ubo-akwara is held in a different position than that of the ubo-aka (see plate 34). In the case of ubo-akwara, the canes point away from the body, whereas in ubo-aka, the prongs point towards the player. In performance, the method of playing is the same in that both right and left thumbs play an equal number of strings on the ubo-akwara and prongs on the ubo-aka with a sharp, vibrant, ringing tone. The ubo-akwara is used in the same way as the ubo-aka: for doubling the melody sung by the player, for accompanying songs (in which case, the melody is not necessarily doubled), and for telling stories. At the moment, Ndibe Adii is the only owner, and performer on the ubo-akwara.

SECTION VII

CONCLUSION

35. A group of women making music with shakara.

36. A group of young girls making music.

CHAPTER XX

CONCLUSION

The aim of this dissertation as expressed in the Introduction has been to discuss the musical instruments of the Ibos, including only such background as is necessary for a clearer understanding of them and their place in the present stage of advancement in civilization among the Ibos of Nigeria.

From time immemorial, art and music have been used as an index to determine the characteristic features of a particular stage of advancement in civilization of a race or a group of people. Without an artistic tendency, musical instruments cannot be made. The drive to make something beautiful and interesting has been a criterion to distinguish and identify human beings from other animals. Justice Oliver Wendell Holmes puts it thus:

> One of the glories of man is that he does not sow seed and weave cloth, and produce all the other economic means simply to sustain and multiply other sowers and weavers. . . . After the production of food and cloth has gone on a certain time, he stops producing and goes to the play, or he paints a picture or asks unanswerable questions about the universe, and thus delightfully consumes a part of the world's food and clothing.[1]

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[1] O. W. Holmes, Jr., "Law in Science and Science in Law," (Collected legal papers), p. 212.

Man has discovered that art and music help to set free tensions by the artistic making of a visible manifestation externally of his feelings, conceptions, and impressions. These have led man to public expression in dance, music, sculpture, painting, drawing, color, rhythm, etc.

The way a group of people collectively and idiomatically express themselves shows the type of culture they have. In the foregoing chapters, an attempt has been made to describe the various instruments, their techniques of performance, and their use in the Ibos self expression.

What is the future of Ibo music, whether instrumental or vocal? There is no doubt that most instruments except the drums are fast becoming extinct. Une (musical bow) is so scarce now that one has to search hard to find one or to find a player. Ubo akwara (Ibo guitar) which was once a common instrument is also scarce; there is only one instrument left in the whole country and when the present owner and player dies, his instrument will become extinct. Ngedegwu (xylophone) is also becoming a rarity in some parts; people who were proficient in making these instruments are either dead or no longer interested. Oja (flute) is now hard to find. Ugene is totally extinct, and only a few people remember it. One can keep on enumerating the various instruments which are becoming extinct, and unless something is done to revive interest in them and preserve the few remaining

ones, the future generations and the rest of the world would think that the Ibos never had any instruments of their own and perhaps had nothing to contribute to the world. This certainly is not the case. Ibo songs, chants, and choruses may undergo a type of change and in the process lose their idiomatic expressions.

Something must be done now to preserve the music, musical instruments, and the native culture of the Ibos before they are lost. At present the Ibos would like to throw away anything that may suggest that they are inferior to other nations and in the process, they cast away their musical instruments as well. They do not appreciate the differences between material gains and industrialization on the one hand, and musical and artistic values on the other. They are unaware that they have a very sophisticated, highly refined, and, in many respects, superior music culture and artistic heritage. The Ibos now would strive to adopt popular Western instrumental and choral music, or to produce modified vernacular songs based upon Western styles, however badly they are performed. There is a bright future because town life in Iboland is still closely in touch with country life, especially at weekends and public holidays.

Since Ibo music is so closely related to the language, it may be necessary here to summarize those instruments that are used for "communication." These are various drums, ogene, udu, water drums, ubo-aka, ngedegwu, opi, akpele, ogbo, oja,

ugene, une and ubo-akwara.

Again, since Ibo music is so closely related to the language, it is evident also that Ibos themselves must be responsible for the perpetuation of the musical heritage. The question is always asked, "Why is it that Ibos have not yet risen to this challenge?" The answer is simple. Ibo musicians must be trained for the task so that they can respond. But how can they get that training when there are no music schools and colleges manned by qualified staff specially devoted to training Ibo musicians? It is very important then that hand-in-hand with the preservation of folklore, music and musical instruments, good music schools should be established for potential Ibo composers to become musically literate. The course of study should include: (1) The expert usage of musical notations; (2) An intelligent appreciation of Ibo musical inherited culture; (3) A broad and detailed study of European music.

A great interest has been aroused on both sides of the Atlantic as regards Ibo and African music. The interest is such that there is every prospect of saving both the music and the musical instruments before they are completely lost. Both Western and African music would mutually benefit from a careful preservation and critical study of Ibo music and its problems. Alan Merriam, the expert American anthropologist, discussing music in the study of acculturation said:

> Western and Flathead musical systems, having little in common, have in fact exchanged virtually no ideas. Flathead music is little affected by Western traditions, and Western music has borrowed virtually nothing from the Flathead, for the two systems are simply not compatible. On the other hand, African and Western music, having a great deal in common, are mutually influential upon one another; we have borrowed much from Africa and Africa has borrowed much from us.[1]

This dissertation does not pretend to have exhuasted all the facts about Ibo musical instruments and their relationship with Ibo culture, but at the least, it will form a basis for further research. At the moment, little or nothing of value has been written on this subject. The making of Ibo musical instruments has been inherited, developed by training and discipline, and passed down to the present generation from the previous ones. It is incumbent upon the present generation not only to keep those things that have been passed down but also to improve on them where feasible.

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[1]Alan Merriam, "The Use of Music in the Study of a Problem of Acculturation," American Anthropologist, Vol. 57, No. 1 (February, 1955), p. 34.

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