A SHONA MBIRA PERFORMANCE IN ZIMBABWE

Heading toward the roundhouse after dark, I heard the powerful sound of people playing *hosho* (large maraca-like shakers) from some distance down the path. As I entered the dimly lit kitchen hut where the ceremony was being held, I could make out people clapping, singing, talking, and drinking; one frail old woman was dancing by herself in the center of the room. Beneath all of this there was still another sound, soft yet deep and moving like the combination of water and bells. This was the *mbira*. Two men, leaning against the far wall, sat with their hands hidden inside large calabash gourds playing mbira. They were the foundation of the musical activity, and the singers, dancers, and hosho players created their rhythmic patterns and improvised vocal parts based on the many simultaneous melodies that the mbira played.

During a break in the music, I asked the mbira players to show me their instruments. Twenty-two slightly rusted metal keys were tightly fastened over a metal bridge on a wooden soundboard, with bottle caps attached to a metal plate on the board. A necklace of bottle caps was also strung around the gourd resonators, creating the buzzing sound a torn stereo speaker
makes. The musicians explained that without the gourds, the mbiras were too soft to be heard in occasions for communal music making, such as the *bira* (ceremony) that we were attending, and without the buzzing of the bottle caps, they would not sound like mbira.

The mbira belongs to a general class of instruments known as *lamellaphones* (plucked tongues or keys mounted on a soundboard or soundbox). It is sometimes referred to as "thumb piano" and thought of as a toy in the United States. Yet the mbira that these men were playing is one of the most highly developed classical instruments of the Shona, a Bantu-speaking people of Zimbabwe in southeastern Africa. Although different types of lamellaphones are played all over Africa, this class of instruments has been most highly developed by the Shona and other groups in southern Africa. The Shona play a variety of lamellaphones associated with different regions of Zimbabwe, including the *karimba*, the *njari*, and the *matepe*, but presently, the twenty-two key mbira is the most popular type. Shona mbira players often specialize on one variety of instrument, each with its own distinct scale pattern and playing techniques; changing from a karimba to an mbira or njari is like switching from a guitar to a mandolin or a banjo.
The musicians sat down and began playing another piece. Listening more closely to the mbira players this time, I could hear distinct bass, middle, and high melodic parts coming from the two instruments. I watched their hands closely. They would play the same patterns for a long time before changing perhaps only one or two pitches by striking different keys, and then would repeat the new variation many times. But even when they were playing the same patterns, I sometimes thought that I heard changes in the melodies.

During their next break the musicians explained that it was always like that. Even simple mbira pieces contained many inner melodic lines that resulted not from changes in the keys played but rather from the particular combination of right- and left-hand parts that were played. They explained that mbira music was an art of creative listening as well as playing, and that the mbira itself seemed continually to suggest new inner melodic lines to the musician even when his hands continued to play the same keys. They told me that this was one reason why mbira players can perform the same pattern for a long time without getting bored or feeling the need to create constant contrasts. It was almost as if the mbira itself magically created its own variations; one simply had to have patience and learn to hear what it had to offer. I enjoyed talking to these musicians and was learning something of the art of listening to Shona music, but it was time for them to return to playing for the ancestral spirits in the bira ceremony.

**The Bira**

The Shona believe that their ancestors continually interact with and affect the involving spirit possession, lives of the living. As in many places, Shona people emphasize maintaining good relationships with their parents, grandparents, and other elder relatives; for the Shona, however, such relationships do not cease when someone dies. Interactions with deceased relatives take place through spirit possession when an ancestor enters and speaks through the body of a living person—a spirit medium. Not everyone who dies comes back as a spirit. However, those who do return select one person to be their medium for life. (Family spirits are usually within the past three generations.) Once spirits make themselves known in this way, family members can call them back to speak with them at a family-sponsored ceremony known as bira. Misfortunes such as illness or losing a job are sometimes interpreted as the result of offending a particular ancestor. People also commonly turn to their ancestors for advice during times of trouble. Even when there isn't a specific problem, some families periodically hold ceremonies to honor an ancestor or simply to keep in touch (just as we might feel the need to call our parents when living away from them). In the central and some
northern parts of Zimbabwe, these ceremonies often involve mbira music and dance to call the ancestors; in other Zimbabwean regions drums are used instead of mbira.

As the bira begins people arrive gradually; those already present casually talk and joke together to the music of the mbira and hosho, which will play all night. Mbira players are musical specialists who are invited to perform at the ceremony. They supply the musical foundation, but as the evening progresses, family and community members join in by clapping different patterns and dancing in the center of the room. Men and women also may contribute to the performance by singing melodies that weave in and out of the mbira's bass part or by performing in a high-pitched yodeling style. (Instead of singing actual words, the singers use vocables, rhythmic syllables that have no semantic meaning.) Both well-known verses and improvised words are also sung to fit the occasion, and the poetry moves people as do the dance and the music at this participatory event. After one piece has ended, the two mbira players begin again, each with his specific part, and again the different participants add what they will, until the performance becomes a dense, rich fabric of sound, movement, and feeling. As the spirit medium shows subtle signs that the ancestor is coming, the rest of the participants often begin playing, dancing, and singing more intensely. This collective energy helps to bring on possession.

Good mbira playing and concentrated communal effort are essential for the success of the bira because music is one of the main attractions that call the spirit into the ceremony. As the intensity mounts and the energy within the room becomes right, the spirit enters the body of the medium. Spirits are particularly attracted by the music that they enjoyed while they were living. Thus, playing the right tunes is important for bringing on possession. Once possessed, the spirit medium is usually dressed by an attendant in a special robe. The medium who now has become the spirit may continue singing and dancing, or may become quiet and withdrawn. After the spirit has participated in the event for a brief time, the music comes to a halt. The host of the bira welcomes the spirit with a formal greeting as they sit in the center of the room. He also offers special beer, brewed by the family for seven days, and snuff. The participants then consult the ancestor about the problem or issues that occasioned the bira, and a discussion ensues between the spirit and the concerned participants. After the consultation, the music, singing, and dancing start up again and continue until morning, even if the spirit decides to leave the medium some time during the night.
Shona mbira players Emmanuel Chidzere and David Mapfumo with singer and hosho player Pyo Murungweni, Murehwa District, Zimbabwe.

Shona women of Mhembere singing and playing hosho, Murehwa District, Zimbabwe. Source: Thomas Turino.
THE MBIRA AND SOME GENERAL PRINCIPLES OF AFRICAN MUSIC

A closer look at Shona mbira performance reveals a series of features and aesthetic preferences that are common to many sub-Saharan musical traditions. These include the practice of interlocking—fitting your pitches and beats into the spaces of other parts or alternating the pitches or phrases of one part with those of another to create the whole. As we will see, this occurs at a variety of levels in mbira performance and in the other African traditions we will study. Call-and-response—the alternation of leader and chorus parts or of a vocal and instrumental part—illustrates the principle of interlock at the highest level of musical organization. Call-and-response is a very common practice all over sub-Saharan Africa. A second general feature of African music is the aesthetic preference for dense overlapping textures and buzzy timbres that contribute to a dense sound quality. Third, African music is often cyclical and open-ended in form involving one or more repeated melodies or rhythmic patterns (ostinatos) as the basic foundation of a performance. These repetitive, cyclical pieces are often performed for a long time with gradual variations added as a performance progresses. Community participation is valued in many African musical traditions; repetition and long performances facilitate participation by giving nonspecialized participants a chance to get their bearings and to enter the performance.

African music is famous for its rhythmic complexity. At the most basic level, this involves the juxtaposition or simultaneous performance of duple and triple rhythmic patterns (patterns of two against patterns of three). The multiple layering of different rhythmic patterns creates a tension and, at times, an ambiguity such that a listener can hear and feel the same music in a variety of ways depending on which rhythmic part or pattern he or she is focusing on. Another typical African musical trait is that melodies often descend (start high and end with lower pitches). A final general characteristic is that African music, and musical ensembles, often involve "core" and "elaboration" parts. The "core" musical roles and parts are those that must be in place for a performance to go forward. Core parts are the foundation that make other contributions, variations, and improvisations possible. In mbira performance, core roles include the basic rhythmic flow maintained by the hosho and the basic melodic-harmonic ostinato played in the midrange and bass of the mbira. The "elaboration" parts, no less essential to an artful performance, include clapped patterns, vocal lines, high mbira melodies and bass variations, and dancing.

INTERLOCKING
The practice of fitting one's pitches and beats into the spaces of other parts, or alternating the pitches or phrases of one part with those of others to create the whole; also called hocket.

CALL-AND-RESPONSE
The alternation or interlocking of leader and chorus musical parts or of a vocal and instrumental part.

OSTINATO
Repeated melodic or rhythmic pattern. In much African music, one or more ostinatos provide the basic form for musical sections and pieces.
GENERAL CHARACTERISTICS OF AFRICAN MUSIC

- Interlocking melodies and rhythmic parts
- Preference for dense, overlapping textures and *buzzy* timbres
- Cyclical forms (based on melodic/rhythmic ostinatos)
- Flexible approaches to rhythms often combining or juxtaposing units of twos and threes.
- Descending melodic shape.
- Musical roles including "core" and "elaboration" parts.

**Interlocking**
The longest, lowest keys on the mbira are found in the center; the metal keys become shorter and higher as they fan out to each side. On the left side of the instrument, a row of longer bass keys are set directly below the midrange keys, with the row of the highest keys on the right side of the instrument. The keys on the left side are played by the left thumb, and the right thumb and forefinger play the keys on the right side. Mbira pieces are constructed so that the left thumb interlocks with the right thumb and forefinger to play a single midrange melody. On many pieces, the left thumb also alternates between the midrange keys of the upper-left row and the bass keys of the lower-left row to produce an independent bass line that interlocks with the midrange melody. Finally, the right forefinger plays the smallest, highest keys (far right) to produce additional descending high melodic lines; these pitches again are alternated with the left hand part in interlocking fashion. The bass, midrange, and high melodies create a variable contrapuntal texture, and a listener's perception of the piece can change substantially by shifting attention from one line to another or to the resultant melodic patterns that emerge from the relations between different parts.

The hand-clapping patterns, dance movements, and vocal melodies performed by participants at a bira and other occasions frequently do not simply reproduce the basic beat and, typically, are not performed in unison. Rather, each participant may add his or her own clapped patterns, sung parts, or dance movements, so that they fall in between or around central beats and pitches — in the spaces — of other people's parts, thereby providing another series of interlocking aspects. A basic musical value among the Shona, and in many African societies, is the ability to add one's own distinctive part to the ensemble while making it blend with the whole. Call-and-response singing, an obvious form of interlocking, is also very common in Shona music-making.
Density
The final contrapuntal, multirhythmic character of a communal Shona performance results from the interlocking and dense overlapping of the participants' contributions. The Shona, like many African peoples, prefer dense, rich sounds. Bottle caps or shells attached to gourd resonators and mbira soundboards create a buzzing aura around the discrete pitches that contrast with the clear, "pure" instrumental timbres (tone qualities) preferred in the European classical tradition. The multiple layers produced in a communal performance also add to the density of sound, as does the very nature of the mbira, on which keys previously struck continue to ring through the following pitches sounded, with each key producing multiple overtones.

Cyclical Form and Variation
The typical form of classical mbira music is a melodic-harmonic cycle, or ostinato, of forty-eight quick beats; the particular ostinato of most classical mbira pieces is divided into four twelve-beat phrases in 12/8 meter. As an mbira performance progresses, small variations, including traditional formulas and improvised lines, are gradually added to, and over, the basic ostinato. Mbira players say that a skilled musician must have patience and not rush the variations. It is not considered good playing to use overly apparent or dramatic contrasts; rather, one variation must be built on the last and subtly lead to the next within the ostinato cycle. Usually, each variation will be repeated a number of times before farther development is attempted.

Conceptions of Music
The very definition of what constitutes a musical "piece" in Shona society, and in many sub-Saharan societies, suggests another characteristically African feature. Although mbira pieces have titles, the composition is conceived as an aggregate of musical resources that may be put together in different ways, making each performance recognizable as "the piece" and yet unique. These resources include the harmonic, temporal, and melodic character of the basic ostinato; a series of stock variations and motifs associated with the piece; and certain sung melodies and lines of text. The length of a given performance, the number of variations used and the order in which they are performed, the speed and character of development, and the improvisations on the basic patterns, however, make each performance distinct. This approach resembles that of jazz, blues, and some rock performers, indicating one way that people working in these styles may have been influenced by the African heritage.

In Shona villages, "the piece" and music itself are conceptualized as a process linked to specific people and particular moments or contexts, whereas for some musical traditions in the West, music has become a reproducible sound object that can be, and is, isolated and abstracted as a thing in itself. Recordings and written scores perhaps facilitate thinking about music as an object that can be purchased, consumed, collected, and copyrighted. It is significant that the Shona words for the two basic parts of a mbira piece—kushaura and kutsinhira—are not...
nouns, referring to things, but rather are verbs ("kushaura" means literally "to lead the piece"), underlining the notion of music as an interactive process.

**LISTENING GUIDE**

**LISTEN: MBIRA MUSIC: "NHEMAMUSASA"**

Chris Mihlanga and Bernard Matatfi, mbiras, Tom Turino on hosho
Recorded by Tom Turino in Harare, Zimbabwe, July 1993

Although the mbira can be played solo, a piece is not really considered complete unless two players are present to play their separate complementary parts that interlock to create the whole. One part is called the kushaura ("to lead the piece," to play the basic piece), and the other is called kutsinhira, a second accompanying part. On many pieces the kutsinhira part is almost exactly the same as the kushaura, but it is played a beat behind so that each pitch played by the first part is doubled by the second. This doubling effect produced by the two instruments can be heard on the high descending lines of *Nhemamusasa* (heard for the first time at 0:40 approximately). With the exception of the high melodies, however, *Nhemamusasa* (cutting branches for a shelter) involves a second type of kushaura-kutsinhira relationship in which a completely different accompanying part is composed to interlock with the kushaura part.

0:00-0:05  Fades in
0:05     Statement of basic ostinato or kushaura played by one mbira; interlocking accompaniment part of 2nd mbira. Four twelve-beat phrases comprise the basic forty-eight-beat ostinato. This recording fades in on phrase three; the basic forty-eight-beat ostinato is then repeated four times. Different players "hear" the beginning of the cycle in different places. This aspect is not fixed, thus my designation of phrase numbers is somewhat arbitrary.
0:40     New, higher-pitched, descending melodic variation played over the basic ostinato heard for first time; played for two 48-beat cycles
0:58     Return of the basic ostinato repeated twice with reduced high key variation
1:15     Full high key variation repeated twice; basic ostinato played twice with increased bass note accents towards the end (1:46)
1:50     High key variations X 5 cycles
2:33     Basic ostinato X2 cycles
2:48     High key variation X2; basic ostinato X1; high key variation (fades)

**AFRICA GENERAL AND AFRICA SPECIFIC**

To this point, I have tried to link certain features of Shona mbira playing with more widespread African musical characteristics. Indeed there is a tendency among North Americans and Europeans to think of Africa as one place and African music as a single, identifiable phenomenon. The continent of Africa has over fifty countries, however, and linguists have identified at least 800 ethnolinguistic groups. In Nigeria alone, 386 different languages have
been identified. The organization of sub-Saharan Africa into modern nation-states is primarily a colonial legacy based on the way the continent was divided by the European powers at the end of the nineteenth century. It has little to do with internal social divisions within these territories or with the linguistic groups that cross national borders. (Mande societies, for example, span parts of Senegal, Gambia, Mali, Burkina Faso, Ivory Coast, Guinea, and Sierra Leone.) Because many musical traditions are linked to specific ethnolinguistic groups, it is often better to think about African music in these rather than in national terms.

In contrast to the stereotypic vision of small, so-called primitive tribes in Africa, various kinds of traditional political organization include (1) complex, hierarchical, centralized states with political authority vested in the hands of hereditary rulers; and (2) more decentralized, smaller-scale societies where political power was regulated by interactions between kinship groups such as clans or lineages. Centralized kingdoms with highly developed political organization have existed in Africa from early times. One example is the state of Zimbabwe (the modern country was named after this early empire), which was thriving by the twelfth century. On the other hand, small egalitarian bands of hunters and gatherers such as the BaMbuti Pygmies have lived for centuries in the central African rain forest. Hunter-gatherer groups such as the Pygmies and the San (Bushmen) are in a small minority, however. The majority of African societies depended on agriculture and animal husbandry for subsistence—stable agriculture being important for state formation. Just as political and economic systems differ widely between specific African societies, family and social structures are also diverse.

Sometimes there are important correlations between economic modes of production, social structure, and musical practices and style. Given the socioeconomic diversity among African societies, we would expect musical diversity as well. Indeed, there are important differences in the styles, processes, and functions of music-making among different African societies, just as there are differences in conceptions about music, the role and status of musicians, and the types of repertory, instruments, and dances performed. As I suggested earlier, however, some basic similarities in musical style, practices, and aesthetics span the sub-Saharan region, even among such diverse groups as the Shona in southeastern Africa, the BaMbuti Pygmies in the central rain forest, and the Mande peoples in the northwestern savanna region. Taken at the most general level, these similarities allow us to speak of "African music" (much as the European harmonic system, among other general traits, allows us to identify mainstream "Western music"). Nonetheless, it is the facets that distinguish the different African musical cultures, rather than the similarities, that will probably appear as most significant to Africans themselves.

In the sections that follow, similarities with the major characteristics outlined for Shona mbira music will serve as a focus for the discussion of several specific African musical cultures. At the same time, differences among the musical cultures will be emphasized, and these differences will be considered in light of the distinct ways of life and worldviews that characterize different African societies.
The Pygmies

The word Pygmy is an outsider generic term applied to social groups found in the equatorial forest area stretching from Gabon and Cameroon in the west to Uganda, Rwanda, and Burundi in the east. People in these groups self-identify by more specific terms such as BaMbuti, Bibiyak, and Baka. The Ituri Forest, bordering on Uganda to the east and Sudan to the north, remains a major stronghold for Pygmies, and about 40,000 live in this region. The majority of groups maintain a semiautonomous hunting-and-gathering existence. Centuries ago, the Pygmies found their central forest region invaded from the north by Bantu (a major linguistic category in sub-Saharan Africa) and Sudanic groups, who were cultivators and pastoralist. The Pygmy languages were abandoned for those of the neighboring groups, with whom they entered into types of patron-client relationships. The anthropologist Colin Turnbull, however, suggests that the BaMbuti Pygmies of the Ituri Forest lead a kind of double life, maintaining their own traditional ways (with the exception of language) when alone in the forest and taking part in Bantu ritual and musical life on their visits to the villages. Here we will concentrate on Pygmy life and music in their forest home.

The BaMbuti net-hunters maintain a nomadic existence, setting up camps for a month or so in different places in the forest as they continue their search of game. Net-hunting, like most aspects of Pygmy life, is a communal affair, with male family members stringing their nets together in a large semicircle and the women and children beating the brush to scare game into them. The catch is shared. Bands are composed of nuclear families, and although certain individuals are considered to have more expertise in some realms of activity than in others, there is little specialization of social and economic roles within age and gender categories. A formalized hierarchical system of leadership is not present. Because survival is dependent on cooperation rather than competition, the keystones of Pygmy society are egalitarianism, consensus, and unity. Because of their nomadic existence, the ownership of goods and property is minimal among most Pygmy groups.

All these aspects strongly influence their musical activities. The Pygmies have few musical instruments of their own. Pygmy instruments include whistles and end-blown flutes made from cane. They may be used to accompany singing or in duets for informal music-making. In flute duets, one instrumentalist plays a repeating ostinato pattern, while the other plays a part that interlocks and overlaps with the first, reminding us of the basic principles of Shona mbira performance. Rhythm sticks and rattles are found, as are several trumpet types such as the long, end-blown molimo trumpet. Some Pygmy bands also use a musical bow. A few other instruments, such as small lamellaphones and drums, may be borrowed from their Bantu neighbors.
Vocal music is at the core of Pygmy musical life. Some songs are sung by individuals informally such as lullabies and game songs; however, communal singing for collective ceremonies and occasions is considered much more important. Like most aspects of Pygmy life, musical performance is a nonspecialized activity. As in net-hunting, where men and women fulfill different roles, musical participation may be differentiated by gender, depending on the context. For example, men are the primary singers for the molimo ceremony, through which the benign relationship with the sacred—and living—forest is maintained. Women are the primary singers for the elima, a puberty ceremony. On other occasions, for instance, before almost every hunt, men and women sing together.

Except for the ritual occasions, when gender and sometimes age distinctions are made, musical performance involves anyone in the band who wants to sing. Song forms are varied but follow two basic principles that we have already encountered in the Shona mbira music and the Pygmy flute duets—the use of ostinato and interlock. A standard organizational feature found among the BaMbuti Pygmies and in many other African societies is the use of a leader and chorus in call-and-response format. The leader, or one group of people, sings a melodic phrase and is immediately answered by a second group singing another phrase so that the two interlock to create the entire melody. Pygmy vocal practice frequently uses the hocket technique (singers alternating short melodic fragments to create a melody), reproducing the same practice of interlocking parts. Yodeling is also frequently practiced by some Pygmy groups and is often considered a hallmark of their vocal style.

In its simplest form, the call-and-response phrases are simply repeated continually, creating a cyclical ostinato pattern like that described for Shona mbira music. People within an Mbuti chorus help to create a dense, layered sound by simultaneously singing a number of individual variations of the basic melodic parts. Among the Pygmies of the Central African Republic, ostinatos without call-and-response organization constitute a basic structure. On top of the basic ostinato, singers may add a second complementary ostinato, and others will perform variations on both melodies, thereby creating a dense, overlapping contrapuntal texture (a texture consisting of different simultaneous melodic lines). The time span of the basic ostinato serves as the reference point for various clapped and percussion parts. Thus, one percussion part may be a six-beat pattern and another may last eight beats, dividing the overall time span of the song, say of twenty-four beats, into different-length cycles.

Certain individuals may begin or lead a song, just as different individuals are considered to have particular expertise in other realms of life. Once a performance is in motion, however, musical roles and leadership may shift, and different voices may move in and out of the background. Hence, Pygmy musical style and practice grows from, and reflects, the specific
egalitarian nature of Pygmy social and economic life, just as certain features (e.g., ostinatos, density, and interlock) are consistent with African musical practice in other societies.

As in Shona societies, Pygmy musical performances often involve communication with the spiritual world. However, they have different ideas about the nature of the spiritual world and their own interaction with it. According to Colin Turnbull, the Pygmies recognize that they cannot see, truly comprehend, or give a single name to God. Because they view the forest as the benevolent provider of their lives and livelihood, however, they associate divinity with the forest, itself living and divine. They believe that the world and the forest are basically good, and if misfortunes—such as a bad hunting period, sickness, or death—come, it is because the forest is sleeping. Their response is to wake it by singing to it every night during a ceremony known as the molimo, which may last several months. The long, tubular, end-blown trumpet known as molimo is used to create the sounds of the forest and answer the men's singing, thereby realizing, through ritual, the relationship the Pygmies feel with their natural surroundings and the divine.

Unlike the Shona, who use elaborate and varied sung poetry in performances for the ancestors, communicating with the divine occurs among the Pygmies primarily through musical sound alone; song texts are kept to a minimum, even to a single line such as "The forest is good." Because the Pygmy conception of the divine cannot be formulated with words, it may be that music, whose existence and meaning are likewise both concrete and diffuse, provides a more direct mode of relating to and representing God. Nonetheless, it is interesting that the Pygmies emphasize singing much more than instrumental music and yet grant so little attention to sung poetry and the power of the word. In this and other important respects, these people of the forest are very different from the Mande on the savanna in West Africa.

LISTENING GUIDE

LISTEN: BAMBUTI VOCAL MUSIC: "ALIMA GIRLS INITIATION MUSIC"

Recorded by C. Turnbull and F. Chapman

This listening selection is divided into two excerpts (0:00-1:48 and then 1:52-end). In the first song, the "chorus" provides an eight-beat ostinato over which one and later several lead singers provide higher-pitched descending melodic variations (entering at approximately 0:06). The leader/chorus relationship can be heard as an interlocking or call-and-response arrangement, but in illustrating the preference for density, the two parts continually overlap and are offset. The second song is performed in this same way. Note in both performances how individual singers provide slight variations on the chorus and lead parts adding to the density of the whole.
The Mande of West Africa

The Mande represent one of the most important ethnolinguistic groups in sub-Saharan Africa. A number of Mande subgroups, including the Mandinka of Senegal and Gambia, the Maninka of Guinea and Mali, the Bamana (or Bambara) of Mali, and the Dyula of the Ivory Coast, all claim a common descent from the thirteenth-century Mali empire. Connected historically to the Mali state, Mande societies are characterized by a social hierarchy as well as by occupational specialization. Although slavery once existed, the two main social categories in contemporary Mande societies are sula and nyamalo. Sula refers to "ordinary people," farmers, merchants and people in urban occupations, and it includes the aristocracy as well. According to Roderic Knight, who has studied Mande music for many years, the term nyamalo designates those who rely on a specialized craft as a profession. In Mande societies these crafts include metalsmiths, wood and leather workers, and musicians, known by the term jali. The "material" that the musician works with is not the musical instrument (although they do typically make their own), but the word, whether spoken or sung.

In the traditional hierarchy, the craft specialists, as "service providers" to the king and the general population, occupied various slots below the general populace, but as the sole providers of goods and services needed for both agriculture and war, they were at the same time regarded with awe and respect. All the nyamalo, by virtue of their specialized knowledge, were regarded as having access to a special life force (the nyama) that gave them a certain power over others. The jali, with the power to manipulate words, had the greatest power. He or she (women being the prime singers) could praise when praise was due, or criticize if necessary, incorporating oblique commentary and poignant proverbs into their song texts if a public figure exhibited lackluster behavior.

At the present time the distinction between the sula and nyamalo social groups are not as strictly maintained as they once were. Yet the jali (pi., jalolu) still maintains many of his or her traditional roles as oral historian, musician, praise singer, genealogist, announcer for the aristocracy, and diplomat, and they still perform at important social events such as weddings, child-naming ceremonies, religious holidays, and affairs of state.

The Mande case clearly differs in some ways from conceptions about music and musicians within Pygmy society, where music-making is a nonprofessional, largely nonspecialized activity. In contrast, the jali is a hereditary specialist working as a professional musician and verbal artist, whose status position derives from hierarchical rather than egalitarian social relations.
Another distinction between these two societies regards the power of the word and the importance of song texts. Although vocal music is very important in both societies, jali performance often emphasizes verbal artistry and elaborate texts, whereas some of the most important Pygmy music such as singing for the molimo ceremony involves very little text. Nonetheless, certain features of Mande musical style are consistent with the general traits discussed for the Pygmies and the Shona.

Manding kora player Kunye Saho, of the Gambia.
The main instruments played by the Mande jali to accompany singing are the *balo* (a xylophone), the *kora* (a bridge harp), and the *kontingo* (a five-stringed plucked lute with a skin face like the banjo); male jalolu specialize on one instrument. The kora is unique to the Mande. It has twenty-one strings and a range just over three octaves. Cowhide is stretched over the gourd sound box, and strings come off the neck in two parallel rows perpendicular to the face of the sound box. The scale series alternates for the most part between the two rows and the two hands (right hand—do, left hand—re, right hand—mi, left hand—fa, etc.). The basic playing technique for the kora often involves plucking alternate notes by the right and left hands so that the melody results from the interlocking of these two parts, similar in principle to mbira playing and the principle of interlocking parts in general. Another similarity between the kora and the Shona mbira is the attachment of a metal plate with jangles to the bridge of the kora. This produces the buzzing timbral effect favored in so many sub-Saharan societies.

Mande music performed on the kora consists of several components. Each piece has a basic vocal melody known as *donkilo* and a second kind of improvised, declamatory singing style called *sataro*. Sataro sometimes receives major emphasis in jali performance, as does text improvisation and the insertion of proverbs and sayings appropriate to a given context. It was traditionally through the performance of formulaic praise and proverbs for a given occasion that the jali earned a living—praising a patron, telling a story, or recounting history. The use of songs to fulfill these social functions is widespread throughout West Africa and in other parts of the sub-Saharan region.

The jali accompanies his singing with the kumbengo part—a short ostinato, the most basic organizing feature of a performance—played on the kora. The kumbengo is played for long periods during which subtle variations may gradually be introduced, as in Shona mbira playing. Improvised instrumental interludes known as birimintingo are inserted between the long ostinato sections. The nature of the four components of a jali performance—kumbengo (K), birimintingo (B), donkilo (D), and sataro (S)—will become clearer by listening to "Ala Pa ke" and following along with the text.

### LISTENING GUIDE

**LISTEN: MANDE KORA MUSIC: "ALA L'A KE"**

Kunye Saho, kora, and voice Recorded by Roderic Knight, 1970

The text, designation of parts, and translation were kindly provided by Roderic Knight.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>TIME</th>
<th>KORA</th>
<th>VOICE</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>0:00</td>
<td>K</td>
<td>(Instrumental introduction)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>0:10</td>
<td>Kumbengo</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>0:21</td>
<td>K</td>
<td>D</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>A, Ala Pa ke, silan jon m'a ke</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(Ah, God has done it, now it was not a man)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Kuo bee kari bai, (all things can be delayed.)

Kunfai kuno te baila, (but not the wishes of God.)

Ala ye men ke te baila.
(What God has done can't be delayed.)

Kori bali ku la manso le (The omnipotent king.)

Kun fara kina ngana nin tabisi nani,
(head-splitting celebrity and . . .)

Ala ye men ke te baila.
(What God has done can't be delayed)

Dula be ngana juma fanan kiliila
(This song is calling the other celebrities too)

N’ali be nganalu la la, nganalu man kanyan.
(If you are calling great people, they're not all equal.)

Damansa Wulandin nin Damansa Wulamba
(Damansa Wulan the small, and Damansa Wulan the big)

Moke Musa nin Moke Dantuma
(Moke Musa and Moke Dantuma)

Tarokoto Bulai bangeta. (Tarokoto Bulai was born.)

Birimintingo
(Instrumental interlude, with vocable singing)

Ala ye men ke te baila . . .
(What God has done can't be delayed)

Dula be ngana juma fanan kiliila
(This song is calling the other celebrities too)

Somani Tamba, a Bajo bane.
(Somani Tamba, ah, only child.)

N'ali be nganalu la la, nganalu man kanyan
(If you are calling great people, they're not all equal)

E, nafa a barika. Sidi nuku makoto nin
(Eh, thanks for profit. Sidi the greedy one and buyer of gold, ah, king now.[?])

Dua le jabita, ban in fa dua le jabita.
(Prayers have been answered, mothers and father's prayers have been answered.)

Lun min na nte lota julo da la Wori jula nin sanu jala.
(On the day I stood at the trader's door traders of silver and gold.)

instrumental interlude with singing in parallel

Suoluo, Samban Jime!
(The horses, Samban Jimeh!)

Suoluo, Samban Jime!
(The horses, Samban Jimeh!)

On this recording one can clearly hear the metal jangles buzzing and the relatively soft volume of the kora compared to the voice. As is apparent here, the birimintingo sections provide a greater degree of musical contrast, departing from the basic kumbengo ostinato. This type of instrumental interlude that alternates with the basic ostinato is distinctive from Shona mbira performance or a Pygmy song, where variations and improvisations are added to and over the basic cycle. Nonetheless, the conception of what constitutes a "piece," that is, a series of stock resources that are uniquely arranged and improvised on according to the needs of a given performer and occasion, are similar between the Mande and the Shona.
North Americans often have the general impression that African music primarily consists of drumming. As we have seen, vocal music, strings, and other types of melodic instruments such as the mbira may have equally, or more, prominent positions in certain contexts. One of the most famous sub-Saharan regions for drumming, however, is the West African coast. Among the Anlo-Ewe of Togo and the southeastern coast of Ghana, dance drumming is the most important type of musical activity.

The Anlo-Ewe, who remain musically and socially distinct from other Ewe groups farther north and inland, work primarily as farmers and fishermen. Southern Eweland is divided into autonomous political districts, with the Anlo district having the largest population and cultural influence. This district, which traditionally functioned like an independent state, was ruled by a paramount chief with largely ceremonial and sacred status, although he had the important role of mediating disputes. The chief stands at the pinnacle of a political hierarchy over geographically organized territorial and town chiefs and finally over clan, lineage, and ward (village subdivision) leaders. The clans and lineages (tracing descent to a common male ancestor) and wards thus form an important basis of the social system. Age sets (groups of people of similar age who identify with each other on this basis) are another important feature of social organization. Social organization is often a key to understanding basic aspects of music-making, because the formation of ensembles, the definition of genres, and even the organization of musical events are frequently shaped by local conceptions of social hierarchy as well as according to the groups (e.g., gender, age, lineage) that people use to define their social identity.

Among the Anlo-Ewe, voluntary dance clubs, organized by individual villages, wards, or age groups, are the primary institutions through which the all-important dance-drumming traditions are performed. As villagers migrate to the cities, new dance clubs are often created on the basis of hometown identity, and these clubs may serve as the basis for social networks and support systems in the urban environment. According to David Locke, an ethnomusicologist and performer of Ewe music, the organization of some dance clubs traditionally reflected the political structure of the ward and lineage, although European influences have also by now been incorporated.

The dance-drumming clubs are generally led by a committee of men and women consisting of a chairperson, a secretary, and the leaders of different subgroups within the institution (i.e., dance leaders, and leaders of the drummers and the singers). Club organization may be seen as resembling the broader Ewe political hierarchy, which involves a paramount chief who presides over the leaders at the more specific levels of social organization (territorial, village, clan, etc.). Living in a hierarchical society ourselves, this might appear as a normal way to organize things, and yet we must remember that to the egalitarian Pygmies this might seem very strange. Besides the officers already mentioned, another key figure in the club is the
composer, who is responsible for creating the distinctive music and song texts that serve as identity emblems for his institution.

Unlike the Pygmy band, where some kind of music is likely to be performed almost daily, musical performance is less frequent among the Ewe. Occasions for club performance include the welcoming of government officials, the promotion of a political party, the formal presentation of a new club, or occasions for recreation. One of the primary functions of the clubs is to support its members during crises and especially on the death of a family member. Like the Shona, the Anlo-Ewe place great religious importance on the ancestors and the spirits of the dead, who are believed to intervene in the lives of the living. The Ewe thus place major emphasis on providing honorable funerals for the new spirits, and it is considered extremely prestigious to have a dance club perform at these events.

In terms of musical specialization and professionalism, we might think of the Ewe dance clubs as midway on a spectrum between the highly trained, specialized, and professional jali and the nonspecialist, nonprofessional Pygmy musician. For example, rehearsing is an important part of an Ewe club's activities, and learning to perform the dance and music is relatively rigorous, whereas among the Pygmies learning to sing, like learning to talk, is a normal part of
socialization. Where the jali is a full-time musical professional, most members of the Ewe dance clubs can be thought of as semiprofessional at best. That is, except when fulfilling personal obligations to club members—such as performing for a funeral or for recreation—the organizations expect payment for their musical presentations, but the members usually only derive a small portion of their income in this way.

As Alfred and Kobla Ladzekpo have suggested, the drumming, dancing, singing, and hand clapping in an Ewe performance must be thought of as a unified whole. If any individual part is modified, the perception of the whole changes, because each part is heard as relative to and dependent on the others, as in a mbira performance. This characteristic, common to many African musical traditions, is a result of the practice of interlocking multiple parts. The Anlo-Ewe perform a number of different dances. Depending on the specific dance tradition, each club uses various types of music. For example, clubs involved in the takada tradition have different genres for processions, more leisurely types of dancing, and the vigorous styles of dancing that are accompanied by the full drum ensemble. The specific instruments used also depend on the dance traditions performed by a given club, although certain instruments are widespread.
Typically, Ewe drum ensembles include a double-bell (*gankogui*), which often plays a repeated ostinato within a twelve-pulse cycle, serving as the organizational point of reference for the rest of the instrumental parts. A gourd shaker (*axatse*) performs a similar role. In addition, a series of four or more different-sized barrel-shaped drums (made of wooden staves and hoops, ranging from 55 cm to 124 cm in length) may be used for a variety of functions. The large drums (e.g., *atsimevu, gboba*) are used by lead drummers to create music from a repertory of established and improvised patterns. The middle-sized drums (*sogo* and *kidi*) serve the function of a chorus, playing a more limited variety of patterns in call-and-response fashion with the lead drummer, and they interlock their patterns with other percussion parts. In the takada tradition, the smallest drum (*kaganu*) plays a single repeated ostinato, which in combination with the bell and rattles creates the ground of the overall rhythmic organization that consists of the combination of the different parts.

Within these ensembles we thus find musical principles and aesthetic values that have already been discussed for other African societies: call-and-response, interlock, ostinato organization, improvised variation based on stock formulaic patterns, and density in the resulting sound of the entire ensemble. The drum ensemble accompanies both the dancing and the singing, and it is the songs themselves that are considered particularly important to Ewe participants for expressing the distinctive identity of the club. As elsewhere in Africa, the dance steps performed can be considered integral to the polyrhythmic fabric of the total performance.

**LISTENING GUIDE**

**LISTEN:** EWE DANCE DRUMMING: "GADZO," A THEATRICAL DANCE

Two small drums, a middle-sized drum, bell, and several rattles Recorded by S. K. Ladzekpo

The Ewe Gadzo dance, the singers begin the piece, and then the bells and shakers establish the basic time cycle before three drums enter with their interlocking parts to create a rich texture and wonderful rhythmic excitement.

- **0:00** Call/vocal leader begins with speechlike call immediately imitated by chorus; at 0:02 the lead singer then introduces basic lead melodic part (A)
- **0:08** The leader-chorus vocal call-and-response interchange—(B); bells, shakers, and hand clapping enter establishing the basic time cycle and groove. Sparse lead drum patterns begin at 0:12.
- **0:20** Lead vocal melody (A)
- **0:27** Leader/chorus call-and-response interchange (B); supporting drums enter at 0:28 playing interlocking pattern strengthening the rhythmic drive. Once the entire drum ensemble is in, the groove remains constant until the "coda."
- **0:50** Lead vocal section (A)
- **0:56** Lead chorus section (B)
- **1:11** Instrumental drumming section with yodeled-like vocalizations and shouts interjected,
- **1:24** Lead vocalist reenters with a variation on (A)
- **1:27** (B)
- **1:48** (A)
- **1:55** (B)
The Buganda Kingdom

Buganda is the name of the country that was formerly the most powerful independent kingdom in the Lake Victoria region in East Africa; Baganda is the term for its Bantu-speaking people. The kingdom was particularly well off economically thanks to favorable conditions for agriculture, particularly to the raising of bananas, the staple crop. Unlike many African kingdoms, the Ganda king, or kabaka, did not have "divine" or sacred status. His notably strong, centralized power was supported by a system in which the king directly appointed and could remove subordinate chiefs and by his ultimate control over many estates. (This contrasts with other African kingdoms, where middle-level chiefs could appoint their own subordinates, thereby creating an independent power base.) Although individual citizens belonged to clans and other social groups, primary allegiance was to the state and to the kabaka himself.

The kabaka's court was a major center for musical activity. The kabaka supported a number of different ensembles, and the musicians lived as retainers on land granted by the king. One important court ensemble consisted of at least five side-blown trumpets made of bottle-shaped gourds. The different gourd-trumpets each produced different pitches necessary to complete a melody and were thus played strictly in interlocking fashion. Like most of the Buganda instruments, the trumpets were associated with a specific clan. Another court ensemble, of less prestige than the trumpets, consisted of five or six end-notched flutes accompanied by four drums. An instrument specific to the court was the akadinda, a large twenty-two-key xylophone in which the keys were freely set on two supporting logs running perpendicular to them. A single akadinda was played by six different musicians, three sitting on each side of the instrument. The most important royal ensemble of all was the entenga; this consisted primarily of twelve drums carefully graded in size and tuned to the local pentatonic (five-tone) scale, thus actually serving as melodic instruments. These were played by four musicians; they were accompanied by three other drums played by two drummers. The performance of the entenga was strictly limited to the royal enclosure.

The same principles of interlocking parts and ostinato organization that have been described for the Shona, Ewe, Pygmies, and Mande are also basic to entenga and akadinda performance. Each piece contains two distinct melodic rhythmic parts known as okunaga (meaning "to start") and okwawula ("to divide"), each of which is composed of two or more phrases. On the akadinda xylophone, the three players for one of the parts sit across the keys facing the three musicians who play the other. The pitches of the starter and divider parts literally alternate, thereby reproducing the basic hocket or interlocking technique between the players on opposite sides of the keys. The parts themselves involve ostinato patterns. A third part comprising only two pitches, called the okukooner (or "binder"), emphasizes composite
patterns formed by the interaction of the okunaga and okwawula. The okukoonera helps the players orient themselves within the dense ensemble texture.

The political importance of the royal drums is dramatically illustrated by the story of the Buganda kingdom. During the colonial period, African kingdoms were often left in place within the European colonies, because the native political systems could be used to rule African populations indirectly. Under an agreement with the British colonizers, the kabaka of Buganda was officially recognized in 1900 as the ruler of his semiautonomous state, with the provision that he obey the British governor of the Uganda Protectorate. However, after independence, many new African states had to deal with the threat to state sovereignty that independent kingdoms within their boundaries might pose. Although such problems have been handled variously in different African countries, in Uganda violent means were used to suppress the powerful Ganda king. Only a few years after gaining independence in 1962, troops under Uganda's first leader, Apollo Milton Obote, stormed the kabaka's palace and sent him into exile in an effort to stamp out the independent kingdom.

It was no accident that the royal drums were among the things destroyed in the attack on the palace. Traditionally, the drums were such central emblems of the kabakaship that potential heirs to the throne were known as the "Princes of the Drum." In *Desecration of My Kingdom* (London: Constable, 1967), a book written in exile by the last kabaka, Mutesa II, he says that

> Among the sad news of who is dead, who is in prison and what is destroyed comes the confirmation that the Royal Drums are burnt. I saw this work begun and feared that it must have been completed. These drums, of which there are more than fifty, are the heart of Buganda, some of them hundreds of years old, as old as the Kabakaship. To touch them was a terrible offense, to look after them a great honour. A Prince is not a Prince of the Blood but a Prince of the Drum and his status is determined by which Drum. They all had separate names and significance and can never be replaced, (p. 193)

With the destruction of the former political system and way of life in the name of nationalism came the demise of musical traditions that were central symbols of that kingdom. Although often less dramatic in nature, transformations of African musical life have taken place, and are still occurring, throughout the sub-Saharan region under the pressures of capitalism, nationalism, urbanization, and influences of cosmopolitanism.

**A SAMPLING OF INSTRUMENTS**

Judging from the few societies already touched on, we can see that African musical performance includes all the major instrument types (percussion instruments, skin-headed drums, winds, and strings), and the importance of given instruments may vary from one society to another. Vocal music, however, seems to be emphasized by a great majority of African societies, with the sung poetry often considered as important as the musical accompaniment—if not more so.
We have also seen that aspects of the social and economic organization influence the number and types of instruments used within a given society. For example, the Pygmies and the San of the Kalahari Desert have relatively few permanent instruments and a minimal material culture generally because of their nomadic way of life. In societies where the royal court was an important site for musical performance, the number, size, and complexity of instruments may be greater because of both available wealth and a more stable environment for performance. This was the case for the large Ganda drum-chime (entenga) and xylophone (akadinda) ensembles as well as for court traditions of other East and West African kingdoms. The tremendous variety of African musical instruments, either played solo or combined in various types of ensembles, makes even a partial list difficult. It may be useful to highlight some of the most important instrument types as well as some that are less well known.

**Percussion Instruments**

Classified as percussion instruments, lamellaphones (known as mbira, karimba, kisaanj, likembe, and many other names, depending on the region) and xylophones are two of the most widespread and important instrument types in the sub-Saharan region. Although it has diffused to the Americas, lamellaphones like the mbira are instruments uniquely of African origin. Rattles, bells, cymbals, rhythm sticks, stamping tubes (hollow tubes with an open end made to sound when struck against the ground), and scrapers are also among the most common instruments found. For each of these general types, however, there are many different varieties, each with a specific local name. For example, there are rattles with the seeds inside the gourd (the Shona hosho) and those on which beads are sewn into a net stretched around the outside of the gourd (the Ewe axatse and the sekere of the Yoruba of Nigeria). New materials such as soda bottles and cans are becoming increasingly important for the construction of percussion instruments.

Although percussion instruments such as bells, scrapers, and rattles primarily serve rhythmic functions, the aspects of pitch and timbre are important considerations in their construction and incorporation into a given ensemble. The parameters of pitch and timbre allow the given percussion instrument to contrast with and complement the other instruments used. For instance, the clear, high-pitched, metallic bell in Ewe ensembles contrasts in both pitch and tone quality with the drums, and the hosho both provides a timbral contrast and serves to augment the density in mbira performance.

**Drums and "Drum Languages"**

The variety of African drums and their social importance in many societies is striking. In Ghana, for example, the relative status of Akan chiefs of different communities and regions is indicated by the size of their atumpan drums; a subordinate chief cannot have drums larger than his superior's drums. Among the many Yoruba kingdoms of Nigeria, each court was said to have its own dance rhythms provided by a special set of royal drums. The very power of the
drum music—and the styles played—were supposed to express the elevated nature of the aristocracy. Also among the Yoruba, some of the most important orisas (deities) have specific types of drums and repertories associated with them. Drumming is used to call the gods into their mediums during Yoruba spirit-possession ceremonies, much as was described for Shona ceremonies. Thus, in these societies, drums are tied to both political and spiritual sources of power.

African drums are usually carved from a single wooden log (e.g., the Ganda entenga, Yoruba dundun and igbin, and Akan atumpan, and the Shona ngoma) but may also be constructed with wooden staves and hoops, as described for the Ewe. Drums are also made from ceramics, gourds, and even tin cans and oil drums. Both double- and single-headed types are found in hourglass, conical, cylindrical, and bowl shapes, among others. Metal jangles, shells, or seeds are attached to drums among West African groups such as the Hausa, Dagbamba, Yoruba, and Akan peoples to create the same type of buzzing effect described for the kora and mbira. The attention paid to the pitch of drums is notable in many African societies, and it may involve the combination of different-sized, fixed-pitch drums in ensemble. Some drums, like the Yoruba dundun and the lunga of the Ghanaian Dagbamba, however, are used to produce multiple pitches. These are hourglass-shaped tension drums; the different pitches are produced by squeezing the lacing that connects the two drumheads under one arm while the other hand beats it with a curved stick. The importance of pitched drums goes beyond merely creating contrasts; as we have seen, it is sometimes extended to making tuned drums serve as melodic instruments (e.g., the entenga). More interesting still, pitched drums are used in many African societies to imitate speech.

Many languages in the Niger-Congo family, including the Bantu languages, are tonal; that is, the meaning of a word depends on the relative pitches applied to given syllables. Drums, lamellaphones, and even instruments such as the guitar are used by the Yoruba of Nigeria to articulate verbal formulas—for example, proverbs or praise names—by imitating the tonal patterns of the words. Longer messages can be played by drumming the tonal contour of different well-known stereotypic verbal formulas. Because many words may share the same number of syllables and tonal contours, the meaning of a given "word" (drummed tonal pattern) can be clarified by following it with a formula of its own (e.g., "cat" might become "cat walks quietly at night"), the tonal patterns of the whole phrase being easier to recognize. The social and "linguistic" contexts are crucial to interpretation. The Akan atumpan, a set of two large tuned drums, are used as speech surrogates, as are the Dagbamba lunga, drums of the Yoruba dundun family, and wooden slit drums and paired skin-headed drums in the Congo region, among other examples.
LISTENING GUIDE

LISTEN: **GREETINGS AND PRAISES PERFORMED ON THE YORUBA DUNDUN DRUM**

Recorded by William Bascom

This excerpt illustrates how the dundun is used as a "talking drum." The drummer first plays a pattern, and then another drummer recites the corresponding verbal phrase. Included are common greetings like "Good morning" as well as brief praises that would have been played in honor of a chief. The dundun is an hourglass-shaped pressure drum; when the player squeezes and pulls the ropes that bind the heads on both ends of the drum, increased tension is created so that the pitch is raised; when the cords are relaxed, the tension lessens, and the pitch drops.

Wind Instruments

In some societies, wind instruments, especially horns, are also used for signaling. Trumpets, made from metal or animal horns and often side blown, are particularly prevalent throughout the sub-Saharan region and are frequently played in interlocking fashion, as was described for the Ganda. Side-blown and vertical flutes are widespread African wind instruments. It is perhaps less well known that panpipes are also found in different parts of Africa, including among the Venda of southern Africa, the Soga of Uganda, the Yombe of Zaire, the Shona, and in Mozambique. Ranging from a single tube closed at one end and blown like a bottle to instruments with multiple tubes and pitches, panpipes are usually played collectively in interlocking fashion, with the tones of the scale divided among the various instruments of the ensemble so that each performer inserts the pitches that he or she has with those of others to create a complete melody.

LISTENING GUIDE

LISTEN: **MUSICAL BOW PLAYED BY A NDAKA MAN**

Recorded by Colin Turnbull

We have already discussed the society and music of the BaMbuti pygmies. One of the most important scholars who studied and recorded their music and way of life was Colin Turnbull. He recorded this BaNdaka pygmy playing his musical bow, in this case made from a bent sapling, with a thin section of vine used for the string. The player holds one end with his toe against the ground, and the other against the edge of his mouth, which serves as a sound resonator. By flexing the bow, he shortens the string and raises the pitch. So pleased was he with his performance that he shouts "Budah!" in the middle of it, an expression of joy.

Stringed Instruments

Although we usually think of the banjo as the most American of instruments, its prototype was brought by slaves during the colonial period. The banjo was modeled on West African lutes, which are known by various names, depending on the linguistic group and region (e.g., tidinit
in Mauritania, halam among the Wolof in the Senegambia area, kontingo among the Mande). The sound box is made from a gourd or a carved wooden back with a stretched skin for the face. A neck is attached, and these instruments have between two and five strings, depending on the region.

A wide variety of harps exist in different African societies. The kora, which we have already discussed, combines features of the lute (with a sound box and neck) and the harp. Instruments of this type with both straight and curved necks are found all over the sub-Saharan region. Single- or multiple-string fiddles made with round sound boxes and skin faces are also important in West Africa (e.g., the goge of the Hausa people of Nigeria) as well as in central and eastern Africa.

The oldest and one of the most widespread stringed instruments of Africa is the musical bow. Like the bows used to shoot arrows, it consists of a single string attached to each end of a curved stick. Depending on the tradition, either a gourd attached to the stick or the mouth cavity of the player serves as a resonator. The string is either plucked or, alternatively, struck with another stick; it is sometimes stopped with a hard implement to raise the pitch. The playing technique results in a percussive and yet beautiful and delicate sound. One of the newest and most widespread stringed instruments is the guitar. Local acoustic guitar traditions exist all over Africa, and electric guitars have become central to the new urban styles.

**POPULAR MUSIC IN THE TWENTIETH CENTURY**

Over the course of the twentieth century, new popular music styles emerged in countries throughout the sub-Saharan region alongside the indigenous musical traditions that continued to be performed. African musicians combined European, North American, and Latin American musical instruments, scales, harmonies, rhythms, and genres with local musical instruments and styles to create their own distinctive forms of popular music. Local elements and musical sensibilities made each emerging style unique, whereas the cosmopolitan elements served as a kind of common denominator among them. During the first half of the twentieth century, European colonialism generated institutions and social attitudes that led to the emergence of new musical styles. Midcentury, African nationalism became a primary force for local musical creativity. By the 1980s, in the context of the "worldbeat" or "world music" phenomenon, African musicians were attracted by international markets and thus shaped their styles to cater to cosmopolitan audiences in Europe, North America, Japan, Australia, and elsewhere. Through military conquest, various European powers colonized the sub-Saharan region to control resources and labor for production and ultimately to expand capitalist markets. Along with the use of force, colonial governments and missionaries also used legislation and education to teach Africans to accept European "civilization" as superior to their own ways of life and thus to accept their own subservient position. Through colonial education, a small African middle class began to emerge in the different colonies. Serving as clerks, teachers,
foremen, and in other low-level administrative positions, this group understood European education as the means to upward social mobility within the colonial order. In the process, middle-class Africans internalized colonial values and aesthetics and became attracted to European and cosmopolitan music and dance styles.

European musical instruments and styles were first taught to Africans through two colonial institutions—military bands and schools. Particularly in the British colonies, Africans were trained in military band music, and these musicians often went on to form dance bands that played cosmopolitan styles such as European popular music and jazz; it was often these musicians who also created new local popular styles. In the process of Christian conversion, missionaries taught schoolchildren religious songs and hymns, which were sometimes translated into their own languages. Through singing in school and church, Africans learned how to read music, and they became accustomed to European diatonic melodies (i.e., melodies based on the standard do-re-mi scale) and harmonies with basic Western chords (I, IV, V). They also learned very different aesthetic values. For instance, instead of the dense overlapping sounds typical of indigenous performance, schoolchildren were taught to value clear, precise phrasing (e.g., everyone singing the same notes at exactly the same time) and precise vocal diction. These values influenced certain urban popular styles such as highlife in Ghana, and "concert" music in Zimbabwe that especially appealed to the African middle class.

In addition to schools and the military, commercial interests also played a key role in diffusing cosmopolitan instruments and styles in Africa. By the 1920s, a variety of relatively inexpensive instruments such as mass-produced guitars, harmonicas, concertinas, accordions, autoharps, and banjos became available in dry good stores in larger towns, cities, and mining centers. These instruments became popular among the emerging working class who, through wage labor, had some money to spend. Commercial recordings of European popular music, Latin American and Caribbean styles (especially Cuban son, and Trinidadian calypso), and U.S. popular music, including jazz, country and western, and popular groups such as the Mills Brothers, became available by the 1930s and 1940s, as rock 'n' roll, soul, and rap would become later.

By midcentury, local acoustic guitar styles had emerged in many parts of sub-Saharan Africa. Sometimes the guitar was simply adapted to styles formerly played on local indigenous instruments. For example, in Zimbabwe and South Africa, the guitar was used to play mbira and bow music or in West Africa to play music formerly performed on indigenous lutes (e.g., halam, or kontingo). In other cases, African musicians used the guitar to play foreign styles; surprisingly, early American country and western performers such as Jimmie Rodgers and Tex Ritter were popular models for African guitarists in many regions. The acoustic guitar, usually accompanied by percussion instruments, was also used to play new styles that were fusions of foreign and local musical elements. Examples include West African "palmwine" guitar music and various acoustic guitar styles in the Congo region and in southern and eastern Africa. Common to African guitarists in many places, a two-finger (thumb and index) picking style was
used to play independent bass and melody lines within simple chord progressions (e.g., I, IV, V; I, V; I, IV, I, V; I, IV, ii, V) in first position (on the first three frets of the guitar). By the 1960s, electric guitars had begun to replace acoustic instruments in popularity.

**West Africa**

In West Africa, dance-band highlife music originated on the Ghanaian coast, where the training of local African musicians in the brass-band idiom had begun as early as the eighteenth century and where port life had introduced the locals to many international musical styles. By the 1920s, big bands using brass instruments and playing European popular dance genres like the waltz and fox-trot began performing at upper-crust social affairs for the Westernized African elites and Europeans. During this period local Akan melodies and rhythms began to creep into the highlife repertory, thereby Africanizing what was more or less a Western musical style in terms of rhythm and orchestration.

It was not until after World War II, however, that the fusion of Western and African elements became more integral in big-band highlife. According to David Coplan, E. T. Mensah, the "King of Highlife," was the first to orchestrate both traditional themes and indigenous rhythms for dance band in conjunction with the use of North and Latin American genres such as swing, the samba, the Cuban son, and calypso. By this time, the electric guitar had been incorporated, and Mensah's group used that instrument as well as trumpet, trombone, saxophone, string bass, and a Cuban-style percussion section. While these groups were playing for higher-class patrons, a parallel development of "guitar-band" highlife grew up among the lower classes in urban centers. This style fused the techniques and repertories of local Ghanaian instrumental traditions with those of the guitar and songs learned from sailors. The music of West Indian sailors, whose rhythms were originally based in African lamellaphone and string techniques, came full circle and began to influence West African highlife.

"Palm-wine" music, played on acoustic guitar and accompanied by various percussion instruments, spread throughout British West Africa in informal settings. In Lagos, palm-wine and other syncretic urban working-class styles served as a basis for juju music among the Yoruba of Nigeria. During the 1930s performers such as Tunde King performed a small-ensemble style with guitar-banjo (banjo body with a six-string guitar neck) accompanied by a tambourine player and sekere (rattle with beads on the outside of the gourd). Christopher Waterman suggests that after World War II, the use of amplification influenced juju's evolution to increasingly include both more cosmopolitan and indigenous African features simultaneously and to expand the size of the ensembles. With the use of amplified guitars and vocals, it became possible to introduce larger and more complex percussion sections using the Yoruba sekere and the hourglass-shaped "talking drum," as well as other instruments often of Cuban derivation such as bongos, congas, maracas, and claves ("rhythm sticks"). I. K. Dairo was a major juju star of the 1960s. At the height of their popularity, his group, The Blue Spots, included nine members and instrumentation typical of bands at that time: guitar, talking
drum, bongos, congalike drums, claves, maracas, and agogo (double-bell); Dairo also atypically performed single-row button accordion sometimes instead of guitar.

Now associated with the names Ebenezer Obey and King Sunny Ade, juju has become one of the internationally best-known "African-pop" styles. Ade has added the pedal steel guitar to the two or more electric guitars, bass, and large percussion section of his band. The highly polished "studio" sound of contemporary juju bands is also aided by the use of synthesizers. Juju groups combine the traditional functions of praise singing and social-dance drumming and perform both at urban bars and neotraditional Yoruba ceremonies (naming ceremonies, weddings, funerals). Although Western harmonies are used, juju music is organized around a series of interlocking ostinato parts played by the guitars and drummers and leader-chorus call-and-response singing.

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After an accordion introduction, Dairo sings the text followed by a brief accordion solo (A section).

The accordion then drops out for a new section (B). This section involves a percussion break in which the talking drum takes the lead playing verbal phrases that a unison vocal chorus repeats.

At approximately 1:39, the talking drummer plays a short vocal phrase that is immediately repeated by the chorus in call-and-response (X2), making the melodic (speech-song-like) quality of the talking drum particularly apparent. The B section ends with a bongos solo. A shortened accordion introduction and vocal material from the A section then comes back to conclude the piece, creating an overall ABA structure. In addition to the combination of Yoruba and Cuban instruments, the piece incorporates the "clave" rhythmic pattern of the Cuban son (played by the "rhythm sticks"), which has influenced cosmopolitan music around the world. The text itself illustrates a combination of Yoruba and cosmopolitan elements—much of the text that Dairo sings falls squarely within the style of pop love songs. The texts drummed and sung in Section B, however, include Yoruba proverbs.

A
00:0 Accordion introduction
0:16 Dairo singing:

Sii su su bebi-o (Shoo, shoo, shoo baby)
Bebi Salome mi-o (My baby Salome)
Mo fe lo ri bebi-o Salome mi (I want to go see my baby Salome)
Mama Bekun mi (Mother of Bekun)
Salome 6 wun mi-o (Salome, she attracts me)
T' 6 ba je t' owo, (If it is a matter of money)
maa tepa mo se owo mi-o, (I will work hard to make money)
Salome
Salome 6 dara P obinrin iwa re
(Salome, she is a fine woman, it is her character
that attracts me)

I'o wun mi-o
Salome
Eleyin'ju ege
(She has [egg] eyes that can trap)
Eyin fan j'owo Salome,
(Teeth whiter than cowries, Salome)
Eyin m'enu gun-o
(Teeth that shape the mouth)
Oymbo Salo, Salome
(Light-skinned Salo, Salome)
Salome, Salome, Salome, etc.

0:49   Accordion solo
1:07   Section B, percussionists' break
1:14   Dundun talking drum:
       Emi 6 ni si nibe, emi 6 m si mbe
       (I will not be there, X2)
       Nibi wob gbe son burukii emi 6 ni si nibe
       (Where they have bad destiny, I will not be there.)
1:22   Vocal chorus:
       Emi 6 m si nibe, emi 6 m si nibe Nibi wob gbe son buruku emi 6 m si nibe
       (Where they have bad destiny, I will not be there.)
1:32   Dundun talking drum:
       Ire gbogbo ko ni s'eyin mi, m le aye aye
       (All the good luck will not happen when I am not present, in this life)
1:36   Vocal chorus:
       Ire gbogbo ko ni s'eyin mi, ni le aye aye
       (All the good luck will not happen when I am not present, in this life)
1:39   Dundun talking drum:
       Yes, ke, o berefe
       (Yes, you start to love)
1:41   Vocal Chorus:
       Yes, ke, o berefe
       (Yes, you start to love)
1:43   Dundun talking drum:
       Yes, ke, o berefe;
       (Yes, you start to joke)
1:45   Vocal Chorus:
       Yes, ke, o berefe
       (Yes, you start to joke)
1:48   O berefe O berefe O berefe
       (You start to joke) (You start to joke) (You start to joke)
1:53   Bongo solo
2:00   Section A', Accordion reenters
2:04   Dairo sings:
       Su su bebi Salo,
       (Shoo, Shoo, baby, Salo) (Baby Salome, my baby, etc.)
       Bebi Salome mi-o, bebi-o, bebi, bebi-o,
       Salo, Salome-o.
Congoese Guitar Music

Within sub-Saharan Africa, the urban-popular guitar music of the Congo region has had a more profound impact than any other single African style. Leading exponents of the style include Franco and his band O.K. Jazz, Docteur Nico, and Kanda Bongo Man, among others. Local likembe (lamellaphone) dance music (accompanied by struck bottles and a drum) and Afro-Cuban music, especially the Cuban son, served as the foundations of the Congolese style. By the mid-1950s, some musicians replaced the role of the likembe with acoustic guitar, and by the late 1950s Caribbean music became a primary model, with electric guitars as well as saxophones, trumpets, clarinets, and flutes sometimes being used. Different international "dance crazes" involving Afro-Cuban music were fueled throughout the Americas, Europe, Asia, and Africa by the recording and movie industries. The Afro-Cuban son, often referred to internationally as rumba, and the distinctive Cuban son clave pattern (heard in the I. K. Dairo example) took hold in the Congo region.

At first, Congolese "rumba" groups copied the Cuban recordings to the extent that some even imitated the original Spanish texts. As time went on, however, the Congolese bands began to develop their own distinctive sound as well as to incorporate new foreign influences such as riffs from North American soul music. Less rhythmically complex than juju, the Congolese style is organized around one or more guitar ostinatos, which serve to accompany the high, sweet singing style of performers like Franco. This style is now known internationally as soukous. A performance usually includes long improvised guitar solos as well as the sparse, orchestrated entrances of the horn section over a danceable rhythm in duple meter. Perhaps inspired by the Congolese "rumba" sound, the use of Cuban-style rhythms and rhythm sections can be heard in East and West Africa as well as in the modern music of Mali where, as in the music of the Super-Rail Band, such elements are fused with electric guitar ostinatos and solos that are clearly based on kora music.

South Africa

The urban-popular music of South Africa—a particularly early European settlement—differs in various ways from the styles created in other countries. The traditional music of the Nguni (Zulu-, Swazi-, Sotho-, Xhosa-speaking) peoples of the region is itself stylistically distinct from the music of other African areas. For example, in contrast to all the African musical styles that we have discussed so far, Nguni music is a predominantly choral-vocal style using slower tempos and lacking the polyrhythmic percussion accompaniments found in, say, West Africa. The music taught by Christian missionaries, also a choral tradition, had a particularly strong impact in South Africa, as did North American urban-popular music.

Various related syncretic choral styles were created using these sources in the context of the dismal living conditions of rural African migrant workers, who were forced by harsh circumstances to seek employment in the mines and cities. Within the workers' compounds, vocal-dance groups formed and participated in competitions, which became a primary social
outlet. The competition song-dance genre known as isicathamiya blended the harmonies taught by missionaries with the slow Zulu choral style characterized by multiple overlapping ostinatos and an emphasis on the outer voices (low and high). The music of Ladysmith Black Mambazo and the earlier 1939 hit of Solomon Linda, popularized internationally by Pete Seeger, "Mbube" ("Lion," or "The Lion Sleeps Tonight") are examples that came from this line of development.

In addition to Christian vocal traditions, urban-Black South African music was also highly influenced by American popular styles, including that of minstrel shows, ragtime, jazz, and more recently soul, rock, and hip-hop artists. In the 1960s and 1970s, Zulu "jive" or mbaq'anga bands blended electric guitars, traps, and a particularly prominent electric bass line variably with accordions, violins, pennywhistles, and saxophones for a straight ahead, driving dance beat in 4/4 time. These bands also backed up vocal groups, such as the Mahotella Queens, with a male singer ("growler") and female singer-dancers. Black jazz, rock, and hip-hop groups continue to flourish in South African cities, and Capetown still celebrates carnival with a performance tradition directly based on the American minstrel show of the nineteenth century.

**Zimbabwe**

Like elsewhere in Africa, Congolese rumba has been popular in Zimbabwe since the late 1950s, and South African styles such as mbaq'anga have also been very influential among local musicians as have North American rock and soul and Jamaican reggae. Two urban-popular guitar genres, however, stand out as unique to Zimbabwe. The most famous of these involves the performance of classical mbira and dance-drumming music by electric dance bands; the second genre, known as jit or jiti, is associated with dance drumming and songs performed in informal gatherings in Shona villages. Both mbira music and jit were played by solo itinerant acoustic guitarists by at least the late 1940s (at the time jit was called marabi, tsaba, and by other South African names). Similar to much Shona village music (but unlike mbira music), jit has a two-phrase ostinato, each phrase being twelve quick pulses with beats 1, 4, 7, and 10 receiving equal accents. These characteristics remain regardless of whether jit is performed by village drummers and singers, solo acoustic guitarists, or electric dance bands.

By the mid-1960s, young Zimbabwean rock bands began to add a few Shona village songs to their typical repertoires of Congolese rumba, South African mbaq'anga, and North American rock and soul. It was in the 1970s, however, during a period of heightened African nationalism and the violent war to end white rule, that urban audiences began responding to electric band renditions of Shona village music. Inspired by positive audience reactions, a number of Zimbabwean guitar bands increasingly began to play more local Shona music, including dance-drumming genres, mbira-based songs, and jit, in response to the social climate of the time. This original "neoindigenous" Zimbabwean guitar style continued to be refined throughout the 1980s by artists such as Thomas Mapfumo.
Mapfumo's music is a wonderful example of the blending of indigenous African and cosmopolitan-popular musical elements. He began his professional career in the 1960s playing cover versions of English and American rock and soul music, as well as some Shona village songs. He recorded his first song based on classical mbira music in 1974. On this recording and throughout the 1970s, his bands played mbira, dance-drumming, and jik songs, as well as other genres, with electric guitars, bass, drums, and horns. In the mid-1980s, when he began to tour abroad, however, Mapfumo added an actual mbira player to pique the interest of cosmopolitan audiences; by the early 1990s he had three mbira players in the band.

Classical mbira pieces like "Nhemamusasa" are used as the basis for some of Mapfumo's pieces. Electric guitars might play the basic four-phrase kushaura ostinato as well as melodic lines that would be on the higher mbira keys; the electric bass plays the part of the lower mbira keys of the kushaura. In recent recordings, according to Mapfumo, the keyboard often plays the kutsinhira mbira part, and the mbiras divide these parts as they normally would. The drummer plays a rhythm on the hi-hat that sounds like the hosho (gourd shakers) used to accompany the mbira, and Shona hand-clapping patterns and an actual hosho are also added. Mapfumo sings in Shona village style, including the high yodeling technique and low-pitched singing of vocables; he also sings traditional lyrics as well as texts of his own composition. Although Shona people who remain in the villages and who have migrated to the cities still play mbira and hosho, or drums, at spirit-possession ceremonies, Mapfumo's music, like that of urban-popular bands all over Africa, illustrates the creativity and adaptability of African musicians in the context of ever-changing social conditions.
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LISTEN: "CHITIMA NDIKATURE" (EXCERPT)

Performed by Thomas Mapfumo and The Blacks Unlimited

This track is an example of Mapfumo's mature style, which features one electrified mbira (bottle caps removed) along with electric guitar, keyboards, bass, drums, hosho, and congas along with two female vocalists. This piece is based in the classical mbira repertory using a forty-eight-beat cycle (four twelve-beat phrases) and is related to the "Nymaropa tune family." Mapfumo performs with a softer, smoother vocal style here, as compared to his earlier recordings, but still uses indigenous Shona vocal techniques such as the singing of vocables with the lower lines of the mbira part. The allusive imagery of the sung poetry and its mosaic quality are also typical of indigenous Shona songs.

0:00 Solo mbira plays the entire 48-beat mbira kushaura cycle.

0:06 Trap drummer leads the rest of the band in beginning on the fourth phrase of the mbira cycle.

0:10 Full band enters on the second phrase of the cycle, the electric guitar taking the lead.

0:28 Mapufumo enters singing:
Ho yarira amai vemwana
Ho yarira mucherechere
Ho yarira ndisina kudya
Ho yarira mucherechere (stanza X2)

(0:28) (It has now started my wife)
(0:28) (It has sounded now)
(0:28) (It has started before I've eaten)
(0:28) (It has started now)

1:00 Guitar solo

1:07 Iye zvandanga ndaona—Haa-a (X3)
Hona bhurukwa remwana rabvaruka
Hona mazuva angu asare mana
Hona vakomana mandiregerea—I yaa hoo
Hona ndofa zvangu ndimire kani—Iya hoo

(1:07) (What I had observed—vocables)
(1:07) (The child's shorts are now torn)
(1:07) (I'm now left with four days)
(1:07) (You have let me down—vocables)
(1:07) (I am going to die without dignity —vocables)

2:02 Hona musikana ndanga ndichikuda—Iya hoo
Hona ndakurarmbira mai varoyo

(2:02) (Girl I loved you—vocables)
(2:02) (I've changed my mind because your mother is a witch)

2:04 Hona vanofamba nezizi mutswanda—Haa o
Hona vane mhungu inobika sadza—Haa o

(2:04) (She goes about with an owl in a basket)
(2:04) (She has a mamba [snake] that cooks food)

2:34 Hona nyamafmgu ichiuhenekera—Haa o
Hona kwedu kure handingakusvike—Haa o
Hona ndotosvika mvura yanaya—Haa o Hona

(2:34) (While a viper holds a torch for it)
(2:34) (I come from afar, I can't reach it)
(2:34) (I can only reach it after the rains)
chitima nditakurewo—Haa o Haa o, Haa o (Train carry me)

3:06  Women singers enter with vocables:
       A ye iye ye (X2)
       Haa owoye o vakuru woye (X4)

4:01  Mapfumo enters singing:
       Ho chitima nditakurewo (X 5) (Train carry me)
       Fade

**SUMMARY**

- Sub-Saharan Africa is a huge area with many different societies, each with their own distinctive music; however, we can identify some common general musical characteristics and approaches that pertain to many African societies.
- African music favors ostinatos (repeated rhythmic and melodic cycles), polyphony (multiple melodic parts performing at once), and interlocking parts.
- Musical performance is often a communal participatory activity, and pieces often comprise a collection of melodic or rhythmic formulas that are subject to group variation and thus differ from one performance to another.
- Many musical performances accompany religious or civic rituals.
- Social structure and conditions influence music and performance; for example, the nomadic BaMbuti pygmies use fewer instruments and favor vocal performance. Those instruments that they do use tend to be smaller and lighter, fitting their traveling lifestyle. On the other hand, the Buganda kingdom, with a highly organized, centralized government, developed elaborate court music ensembles.
- Key instruments include lamellaphones (for example, the mbira), strings (the kora and kontingo), xylophones, trumpets, flutes, musical bows, and drums.
- During the twentieth century, cosmopolitan musical influences from the United States, Latin America, the Caribbean, and Europe, have been incorporated into the African musical scene and have been combined with local styles and practices for the creation of new, vital African musical styles.