

Extract of a Letter from Philip Gbeho of the Gold Coast, who writes regularly for the West African Review.

... "On this work of African music. I am certain we shall win in the end, though this may not happen in one life-time. My only fear is that the youths of Africa are quickly throwing away all that is good in their culture, and unless something is done quickly to remedy it, we shall soon lose everything. You have only to see what happens to an African when he learns to play the piano or the wretched harmonium. He cannot enjoy his own music again. His taste for music is unconsciously directed towards western music. That is why people in the Gold Coast fail miserably to distinguish between the real indigenous music and westernised African music. It is great pity that it is so. And I blame the white men in authority who back them in this kind of music. But I am a native and I know that that is not the correct thing in our music. Besides I was born in a place which was then very remote from any western music. I practised this music with the natives before I saw any school. I became a music master for many years and worked in distinguished schools and colleges including Achimota. I am now studying music in London, and only yesterday three different diplomas were awarded to me by the Royal Academy of Music, not to mention those of Trinity where I am studying. But I still think seriously that the music of our country must be practised by our own people. I am therefore in a position to know what I am talking about. The white man in authority whom we are all out to please for the sake of our jobs, is not in a position to know what is what in these matters. He is therefore sometimes misled to back the wrong horses. But I am determined to break the barrier not by quarelling with anybody. I am going to break it by taking all the possible qualifications here in western music, and when I go home, I shall go to that sacred river called the Volta and there I shall drown all my Diplomas, then go to the nearest village and borrow a drum to present to Achimota.

Strangely enough all the Africans I have met here in London studying music also seem to know nothing about their own music. Of course, I waged a terrific war against all of them here in London and drove them all away from the platform. Nobody wants to hear them any longer on African music. In fact, they have left and gone to their respective centres and I hope to follow them until they stop their evil ideas about their music.

The influence of western music is indeed too strong on the African. He loses his brain as soon as it gets hold of him. But do you know, their musicianship as far as western music is concerned is poor. I suppose they wish to prey upon the ignorance of their own countrymen. "In the kingdom of the blind, the one-eyed man is king!"

PHILIP GBEHO,

at Trinity College, London.

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(Philip Gbeho and a group of West African musicians appeared at the Cambridge Theatre on the 1st March for Katherine Dunham, the famous American Negro dancer. At the end of the performance Katherine Dunham herself appeared on the stage and made an enthusiastic speech in which she said that African music and drumming must not be allowed to die.—Ed.)

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Possible Origin of the Chopi Timbila Xylophone

Some time in 1934 or '35, Hornell writing about outrigger canoes in East Africa . . . gave an account which I used in a Swahili grammar and this is what I wrote :

"From Chinese records we learn that African slaves were amongst the tribute sent to China by Sumatran and Javanese potentates in the 8th and 9th centuries; and from other sources we learn that in 945 A.D. an armada of 1,000 Sumatran ships attacked Kanbaloh, thought to be in Mozambique, in order to make it a base for commercial operations. Kanbaloh was probably an early Arab settlement, because the context shows that the inhabitants were not black. Indonesian trade existed on the African coast as late as the middle of the 12th Century."

My guess is that the Timbila and your whole (Chopi) concert party is Indonesian whether the Chopi came from Monomotapa and brought it with them or found it where they now live is not material if the Timbila originates from Indonesia.

I wish you had recorded the Madinda (xylophones) in Uganda . . . they are really lovely. It looks to me as if the Timbila was carried North to Uganda, where it rests, and it is odd because it has gone against the stream of Bantu. But the Madinda is an attenuated form of your elaborate (Chopi) opera, as would be expected. This is an interesting line of research here.

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Cambridge.

(Mr. Haddon is well known in East Africa, particularly in Uganda, where for many years he was in the Colonial service as Provincial Commissioner and in several other capacities.

His theory is most interesting. The Chopi mode to which their **Timbila** xylophones are tuned is composed of evenly spaced minor tones of approximately $1\frac{1}{4}$ of a semitone each, i.e., 171 cents. This is understood to be the same as the Silendru scale of Siam employed for the tuning of the xylophones of that country.

Incidentally, I have recorded the loose note xylophones, **Madinda**, both of Uganda and the north eastern Congo. The performances by the Zande people on this instrument produce some of the most attractive dance music in Africa.—Ed.)

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