

## BOOK REVIEWS

*African Negro Sculptures*. CARL KJERSMEIER. (A. Zwemmer, London.) 88 pp. illustrated, 18/-.

This is a book of forty excellent photographs of Negro sculptures in the author's own collection. Three-quarters of the examples are from the West Coast, from the Ivory Coast down to Angola; most of the remainder are from the Belgian Congo.

The impact of these works, even in photographic reproduction, is terrific. Two impressions are registered simultaneously—an extraordinary and apparently effortless mastery of plastic composition, of the management of masses and planes, of contrast and repetition; and an intense vitality, an almost shocking sense of inner life. These two qualities pervade all the human sculptures shown, expressing themselves equally in the barbaric crudeness of a clay figurine of the Oath God from the Cameroons, and the fantastic stylization of a mask from the Ivory Coast, built up entirely of curved hornlike protuberances.

These two examples, incidentally, illustrate the extremes of the two strikingly different styles which are yet equally characteristic of Negro sculpture. Both are non-representational, the one through a child-like simplicity of approach, the other through a formalization of the utmost sophistication. Is it fanciful to see in the first the genuine Negroid approach, and in the second the legacy of the great Hamitic civilizations?

I can only touch briefly on some other reflections suggested by this fascinating book. It is odd that people living among, and largely dependent on, the same fauna that inspired Bushman art should show so little feeling for it. The animal carvings reproduced here are on a far lower level artistically, and have none of the burning vitality of the human sculptures. It is odd, too, that a people so devoted to the dance should show no interest in the dynamic aspects of the human body, particularly its lower half, is always very summarily treated; the legs are generally drastically shortened and the feet greatly enlarged to form a base or pedestal of monumental solidity for the torso and head.

Not the least pleasing aspect of this book is that it gives us a more balanced view of the African approach to life than previous collections of the kind. These have dealt mainly with masks and figures used in the cult of spirits and of the dead, which

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convey an atmosphere of horror, grief or anxious resignation. Mr. Kjersmeier has included a number of secular objects—dance sceptres, a pipe-bowl, a hair-comb and the like—in which the natural gaiety and charm of the African temperament have full scope.

M.S.

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*Chopi Musicians (Their music, poetry and instruments)*. HUGH TRACEY (Published for the International African Institute by the Oxford University Press, Amen House, London, E.C. 4. 1948.) xi plus 180 pp. and 2 maps, illustrated, 16/-

The International African Institute is to be congratulated on the publication of *Chopi Musicians* by Hugh Tracey. It is a thoroughly satisfactory book from every point of view, pleasant to handle, with clear type and really illustrative photographs.

Though xylophones are so widely distributed in Africa and elsewhere, Mr. Tracey, when he started to study Chopi music, was astonished to find that "apart from a few paragraphs here and there describing their instruments and a nibble at one or two songs... there was nothing whatever to reveal the extent and meaning of Chopi music, poetry and dancing".

The Chopi live principally in the little district of Zavala just east of the mouth of the Limpopo between long. 34-5 E. and lat. 24-5 S. There are about a quarter of a million of them altogether. They and their music are very well known on the gold mines of the Rand, where the spectacular orchestras consisting of thirteen or more timbila or xylophones, accompanied by drums and rattles and with fourteen or more dancers in attendance are very popular, though the performance is called a "war dance" and there is no real understanding of its significance. Such a combination of orchestra and dancers is called an Ngodo and it is the ambition of every large village in Chopiland to have such an Ngodo.

After Mr. Tracey had heard this music in 1940 he was so impressed by the complexity of the Ngodo and the amazing timing, not only of the various instruments but also of the songs and the dances, that he set to work to study the music and its makers. In his book he tells us of the music makers, of the themes of their composition, of the players and their leaders and



of the dancers and the various dance forms that they use. He tells us of the music as it is found in degenerate form on the gold mines and he analyses for us the construction of the timbila both in the homeland, where the right materials for the instruments are to be found and in the compounds of the gold mines where inferior substitute materials have to be used.

There are composers known through the length and breadth of the land. Their compositions are used by lesser performers, especially on the Rand, and it is revealing to read that these lesser musicians readily state that life on the gold mines is miserably poor in comparison with the rich village life, with wives and children and friends in the homeland. Themes are hard to come by in the daily grind of the work on the mines. It is at home in the villages, under the great trees of the tropical coastal belt, that the music is really at home.

Katini and Gomukomo, the two great composers for the Ngodo, while Mr. Tracey was studying this music, both state that they first compose the theme of the lyric, the *Mzeno*, the great song, which is the core of the whole performance. This theme he tells us may be gay, sad or purely documentary, but it is always topical and reflects the attitude of the common people towards the conditions of their society. "High good humour is a very prominent feature of most of their poems. The songs indeed perform a high social and cathartic function in a society which has no daily press, no publications and no stage other than the village yard to express its feelings or voice its protests against the rub of the times."

The range of the songs is very wide as may be seen from the illustrations given by Mr. Tracey in his analysis of them.

I give only one to two as illustrations:

O- oh listen to the orders

Listen to the orders of the Portuguese

Men! The Portuguese say, "pay your pound", etc.  
Taxes are disliked everywhere!

Listen!

To the mysteries!

At Chingolanini it is said there died Chindodani  
In poverty he died, this Chindodani of Chileni,  
To follow his father.

We hear this death is hushed up,  
It is an affairs of the chiefs, etc.

This song is a lament for the death of Katini's great friend and the music is one of Kinini's best compositions.

"Be quiet while we older people explain to you about the German war. But really when the people are gathered the *mzeno* is 'full of chatter, humour and local gossip.'" This Mr. Tracey tells us is an Ngodo outstanding for its musical intensity and virility, its surging dances and its keenly humorous and pointed lyrics. It has established Gomukomo's position as one of the most gifted of living Chopi musicians.

But there is far more to an Ngodo than the *mzeno*. The whole performance lasts up to forty-five minutes and is in ten or more parts. First there is an orchestral introduction which may have as many as five, but more usually three, different themes. The dancers then enter with orchestral accompaniment. There is a vigorous call by the dancers and then their dance, both to the music of the orchestra. Then comes the great song, with gentle swaying movements on the part of the dancers and soft music by the *timbila*. In the next movement the dancers divide themselves into two groups and represent the councillors of the village in a way which is not altogether clear from the analysis so far made. It is especially this section of the performance which has led to the Ngodo being called a war dance, but the relationship between the two parties is probably different from Ngodo to Ngodo. There is a final performance by the dancers as one group after which they disband and the orchestra ends the Ngodo with a finale which usually a repetition of the opening first movement.

It is obvious that it is an accomplishment of a high order to keep thirteen or more *timbila*, ranging from double bass to treble, in time together, and when it is realized that the leader of the orchestra not only does this but gives the signals to the dancers to commence their song and their dance, some conception of the artistic achievement of these Chopi musicians can be grasped. Often, too, the leader of the orchestra has composed the songs and the music, has made not only his own instrument but some of the others and has tuned them before the commencement of the Ngodo. Some of the many variations played on the xylophones are composed by other players and for the dances



the leader is of course dependent upon his friends of the village.

Mr. Tracey has promised us gramophone records of some of the best examples of this music. He is also continuing his study of Chopi music as well as the music of the other tribes in Southern Africa. It is a great satisfaction to know that with the modern techniques which will shortly be at his disposal he will be able to analyse this music as well as properly to record it, and he will also be in a position to help the players even on the Rand, to get the proper materials for their instruments.

Mr. Tracey has come just in time to record probably one of the highest achievements of the Africans in artistic expression, and to help them to understand scientifically what they have been doing, so that they are less likely to have their musical values disturbed by contact with the different musical modes of the European world.

It is a great pleasure to congratulate Mr. Tracey on this work and to encourage him to go forward with his studies of African music.

A. W. HOERNLE.

*Ngoma (An Introduction to Music for Southern Africans).*

HUGH TRACEY. (Longmans, Green & Co. Ltd., Cape Town.)  
xxi plus 91 pp., illustrated, 9/6.

Although the author in the opening sentence in this book declared uncompromisingly that "this is a book about African Music for Africans" I feel certain that it contains much of interest not only to the European music student but also to those who have at heart the preservation of Native culture in any of its forms. Mr. Tracey within the confines of his slender volume ranges over a wide field.

The sub-titles of the six chapters give some indication of this. Chapter I deals with such philosophical aspects as "Emotions and Moods", "Music and Magic", "Religion and Dancing".

The Second Chapter discusses purely physical phenomena. "The Speed of Sound" and "Resonance" for instance; the third is devoted to the voice and vocal music, the fourth to problems of language and the "Flow of Words". Chapter V briefly refers to African Musical instruments and their effect upon African Music, and in the sixth and last chapter the author offers advice

on such practical matters as "Keeping a Note Book", "Patronage" and the "Arranging of Performances".

Although these are all subjects which have been exhaustively treated by many writers before this book, *Ngoma* is undoubtedly a pioneer work for it is written against a background of purely African musical tradition—it is in fact an attempt to confer upon that tradition the benefits of the knowledge and experience of European musical practice and theory. One forgives the pioneer many things and if, at times, one feels that Mr. Tracey pays insufficient tribute to the achievements of European music, one realizes that it is due to the same excess of zeal which made Cecil Sharp (the great collector of British Folk-Songs) declare that the melodies of Mozart and the other great masters were not to be compared to the rural ditties he had discovered in the country districts of Britain. This same excessive enthusiasm leads Mr. Tracey to make such a statement as this "Even the greatest and most complicated of European music is generally based upon the simple melodies of the people . . .", a eulogising of folk-music which is not supported by a study of the works of the greatest masters of European music. However, this is a mere side issue, of little importance compared with the great and difficult task the author has set himself. What that task is may be gathered from this quotation from the Foreword. "African music", writes Mr. Tracey, "is far from dead. With careful guidance and a real understanding of their own genius, their musicians may yet have the opportunity of bringing to light one of the last untouched folk-musics of the world, a music which should have wide significance beyond their borders, and grow into an established culture as easily recognized for example as the Hungarian, Hebridean, Georgian or South American musics".

In an effort to supply that careful guidance Mr. Tracey has produced a book which is of real value not only because of its idiomatic presentation of basic theoretical principles, but because of its stimulating effect upon other workers in this field. It very forcibly makes one realize how much is waiting to be done for African musical culture, a culture which in many ways has arrived at a stage comparable to that achieved by European music a thousand years ago. Mr. Tracey's enthusiasm is infectious and I can only hope it will stimulate European musicians to provide their African colleagues with detailed text books on