

THOMAS F. JOHNSTON

## The Secret Music of Nhangas Rites

my # = 15

**Abstract.** — Among the approximately 2,000,000 Shangani-Tsonga of Mozambique and the Northern Transvaal, the nhangas is the guarded women's hut of the highly secret initiation rites. Following two years of cooperation with village elders in various projects, the author was permitted to document the rites. The young women of the tribe are assembled and taught series of mimes and dances which symbolize women's role in society, particularly in marriage. This includes sexual pleaser of the husband, bearer of many children, tiller of the soil, keeper of the home. The initiation is a conservative institution concentrating power in the hands of elders and ensuring, for chiefs, the continued allegiance of constituents. The initiation is also a fertility rite ensuring the psychological health of about-to-marry women in a society which, for ecological reasons, possesses a high sterility rate. Study of the rites widens our knowledge of the powerful social and psychological concomitants of learned musical behavior. It also reveals the social complementarity of such divergent psychological forces as hallucinogenic drug-use, color-music synesthesia, hyper-suggestibility, auditory driving, and heavily prescribed group kinesthetic activity. [ South Africa, Music, Initiation Rites ]

The nhangas is the guarded women's initiation hut of the Shangani-Tsonga of Mozambique and the Northern Transvaal, where secret, musical rites of passage render young girls eligible for lobolo, bride-price negotiation. Through song, mime, and mild forms of physical mutilation, the old women overseers of the nhangas teach initiates how to please the husband sexually, and rehearse them in the duties of a junior wife: carry water long distances, clear village fireplaces of ashes, gather firewood, tend the fields, pound maize in the mortar, and show humility to senior co-wives.

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Thomas F. Johnston, Professor of Music at University of Alaska. M.A. in Music, 1968. Ph.D. in Ethnomusicology, parative Circumpolar Study (Uttawa 1970); "Tsonga Music in Cultural Perspective (South Africa)" (Anthropos 1975); see also present volume, pp. 897ff. Current research: Eskimo music (National Endowment for the Humanities). Address: Music Dept., Univ. of Alaska, Fairbanks, Alaska 99701.

U For three months of each year the *nhanga* is the scene of considerable symbolic indoctrination, including the use of music-color synesthesia, hallucinogenic drug-use, and the memorization of about 90 minutes of continuous, incomprehensible verbal formulae. Essentially, this is a fertility rite, "guaranteeing" eventual motherhood in a society where infertility due to subtropical disease and malnutrition is over 40%, and where shame and servitude sometimes face a barren bride. If her *lobolo* has to be returned, her brother's marriage may be broken, for he in turn *lobolos* the cattle she brought to her father. *Nhanga* songs are, ultimately, a Shangana-Tsonga stress reaction to regional ecology, and their believed supernatural power a survival mechanism. To undergo the rites is called to *khomba*, to become mature, but a prime *raison d'être* is the instillation of positive thought toward life's vicissitudes.

The writer spent two years with the Shangana-Tsonga, under a grant from the Wenner-Gren Foundation for Anthropological Research. A large part of this period was spent in gaining the trust of the *nhanga* supervisors, in performing services for the tribal elders concerned, and in establishing a kind of 'neutral' identity which would eventually permit the taping and photographing of the initiation rites. The tapes and pictures are thus unique.

On experiencing her first menses, a novice formally reports her condition to her mother's sister, whereupon she is issued with a special *xidege* staunching cloth. The three months following the harvest are the only months when women have leisure, so the *nhanga* is held between May and October, depending on economic circumstances. The novices put on calico salem pores dyed blue, and a blue headcloth. Faces are painted blue, and the assembled women start for the river in long lines, bearing drums and tall poles to which are affixed blue banners.

Many villages participate, the long lines converging at the water's edge. Each *nhanga* supervisor blows a long, twisted *mhalamhala* (kudu) horn, her means of deflowering the initiates in the *nhanga*. Each line is in gerontocratic order, showing descending tribal authority among the women: the supervisor, old women assistants, last year's *nhanga* graduates, and novices. At each annual rite, with the passing of years a novice gradually moves up the line. Among the Shangana-Tsonga, power and prestige rest with the old. It is they who know all of the various classes of song, dance, magic, incantation, and ancestor-spirit propitiation which reduce witchcraft and keep the social world intact. They also control the cattle with which marriage is effected. Through initiation rites the old manipulate the minds of the young; through cattle they manipulate bride-purchase power. We will see that, through a lengthy process of cultural evolution, the Shangana-Tsonga have created a rite in which many subtle psychological forces complement each other to shape the motivations, expectations, and attitudes of the initiates: auditory driving, exhaustive dance, hypersuggestibility, and a drug-induced

altered state of consciousness in which initiates all report identical supernatural voices, and identical visions of the blue, snakelike fertility god *Xihundze*. It is no coincidence that the eaves of Tsonga huts are inhabited by a blue snake (*Dendrophis subcarinatus*) which is revered for its fertility symbolism. Initiates' visions are culturally patterned, but it is an additional happy circumstance that the *Datura fastuosa* hallucinogenic plant-drug makes amenable to perception the various cones, spheres, and other geometrics of the human optical system, all snakelike. The Tsonga customarily communicate with the gods in dreams, thus the vision-inducing drug sets the stage for the hearing of voices.

Water is a prominent symbol in the *nhanga*, and some of the secret songs concern "crossing the river." This signifies purification, separation, transition, and finally "the other side," womanhood. In one *nhanga* mime, initiates stretch a skin taut across an upturned drum filled with water, while old women puncture it savagely with poles, symbolizing the flow of amniotic fluid at parturition. The Tsonga word for river-mouth, *nyanzwa*, also means uterus.

There is considerable phallic symbolism. Initiates squat suggestively on upturned drums named after male genitals, and tightly clasp the trunks of trees containing white sap ('semen').

Early travellers in southern Africa reported an unusual physical feature of local inhabitants—the Hottentot apron, or extended *labia minora* of women. Study of the *nhanga* rites reveals that Tsonga girls sit in pairs through their teenage years, stretching each other's *labia minora*. Insufficiency in this endeavor would make them unacceptable to Tsonga men. Special songs accompany this task.

Initiates must first be separated from the old. They lie on a mat which separates them from "the dust they knew as a child." Head and pubic hair is shaved, clothing is burned, and they cease to use their childhood name. Later, fresh clothing and an amulet bangle is issued to each girl. The bangle protects them from witchcraft which brings sterility. Later, clay squares into which bunches of straw have been stuck are inserted between the legs of initiates, symbolizing regrowth of hair and eligibility for intercourse.

The first dance of the rites is called *nanayila*. Seated women beat three drums while uniformed girls circle them and wave carved and painted wooden hatchets. The latter as a dance accessory have diffused southward from the Shona of Rhodesia. In the second dance, two girls don grass skirts and wave chiffon kerchiefs, while an elder sprinkles black powder to consecrate the ground. Black is associated with fertility (black rainclouds).

We give here the transcription of the main initiation or khomba songs with an English translation and explanation:

1. *Nhwanyana xo managa xi nga khombangi hoza cawo*

The Girl Wore a Headcloth Before Initiation

♩ = 126

Cycle: 16 ♩

Transposition: 5th up

call response

Mha-na Sa- a- ra- ah mha-

drum leg-rattles

: 16

na Sa- a- ra- ah a Xi-ri- ndzi- ni ho-

call response

za ca- a- wo xi- nga kho- mba- ngi- i mha-

- Call: The mother of Sarah  
 Response: The mother of Sarah at Xirindzini, come sing  
 Call: The girl who has tied her forehead  
 Response: The girl who has tied her forehead before initiation  
 Call: The year of my death  
 Response: The year of my death all will mourn for me  
 Call: You tied for me  
 Response: You tied the headcloth before I am initiated

A red cloth is generally used for headwear in the first stages of the rites, red signifying blood, the red clay earth, sun (Tsonga symbols have many meanings). Death refers to an end of the old and a birth of the new. Mother refers to the novice's 'schoolmaster' or escort for the duration of the rites; she is a graduate from the previous year and teaches the songs and dances.

2. *Xangula*

Prepare Her!

♩. = 106

Cycle: 24 ♩.

Transposition: min 7th up

The musical score consists of four systems of staves. The first system is labeled 'call' and 'drum' and is in 2/4 time. The lyrics are: "I- mi xa-ngu- xa-ngu wo xa-ngu-la kho-mba". The second system is a vocal line with lyrics: "ayi ye xa- ngu- le na" and includes a 'call' bracket over the final notes. The third system is a vocal line with lyrics: "va ma kha- na-ni va xa-ngu- le" and includes a dashed box labeled "response sometimes" over the final notes. The fourth system is labeled 'resp.' and has lyrics: "ayi ye xa- ngu- le".

- Call: Prepare, prepare, prepare the novice
- Response: *Ayi ye* prepare
- Call: Makhanani and the others are being prepared
- Tsatsawani and the others are being prepared

The novices are prepared by being undressed to the accompaniment of drumming and calls on the *mhalamhala* (kudu) horn (musical signals are discreet for each stage or mime). The preparation involves posturing and contorting the trunk in humility before the female elders—*ku losa*, to humble oneself. This song and the next three songs are used also in the neighboring Venda *vhusha* initiation school, an instance of diffusion.

3. Rila rila khomba

Cry, Cry, Novice!

♩ = 216

Cycle: 16 ♩

Transposition: min 3rd up

The musical score consists of four systems. The first system shows a vocal line with a 'call' (Ri-) and a 'response' (la ri-la kho-mba he hi-ya he-e-e). The second system includes a 'drum' part with a 16-measure cycle and a 'changing to' instruction, along with a vocal line for 'ha ri-la ri-la kho-mba he hi-ya he-e-e'. The third system continues the vocal line with 'lo-ko'nga ri-la kho-mba ye he-e-e'. The fourth system shows a vocal line with 'yo-o' and a corresponding drum accompaniment.

Call: Cry, cry, novice  
 Response: Hiya he

Call: If you do not cry you cannot be initiated  
 Little novice, cry  
 Cry, cry, child

During this song, the novice crouches with head bowed near her adoptive mother, and weeps. The long, snakelike kudu horn is filled with water, emptied, and then blown in long signals on the fundamental and the fifth of the harmonic series. The horn spews its 'seed' on the ground near the novice, who then squats on an upended drum. The novice's tears are flushing and purification of her *lunyo*, insubordination.

4. *Mavala*

Colour!

♩ = 208

Cycle: 40 ♩

Transposition: min 7th up

call response

40

Ri- a ro- na ri- a rona mpi-di ma- va-la i-

maronge leg-rattle held in hand

40

1 drum (2 hands)

40

i- i-i-i-i-i i- i ri- i- i-

Call: *Ria rona ria rona mpidi colour*  
 Response: *I-i-i-i-i*

Tsonga novices state that they do not know what the words mean, but the neighboring Venda explain them as meaning “We are smearing on the zebra’s stripes,” a reference to the ochre coloring of novices. In these rites, the participants associate different drum rhythms with different colors. The drumming for the vision, for instance, is *rihlaza* “blue” drumming. Among the griots of West Africa, there are two manners of performance, white and black. The latter, *lekhal*, uses longer notes and spans a wider range. Among the Tsonga, drumming associated with the darker arc of the spectrum—blues and greens—is more intense.

5. *Doba, doba*

Pick up, Pick up!

♩ = 107

Cycle: 12 ♩

Transposition: maj 2nd up



mi do-bi do-bi wa ndzi ko- mba

ha- yi hayi xi m- be- ke

- Call: Hayi, pick up, pick up!
- Response: You there, lift it up
- Call: Pick up, pick up, she shows me how to do it
- Response: Move around a lot

Here the novices must crouch on their haunches and mime planting seeds, gathering firewood, clearing ashes from fireplaces, cleaning pots, and other tasks which women perform on the ground. They are also required, at this point, to dance in a squatting position. This is called *rhwala tingoma*, to carry the ceremonial drums, although, in fact, they do not carry the drums, but listen to the rhythms.

6. *Lunyo, lunya*

Check, Check

♩ = 172

Cycle: 4 ♩

Transposition: min 2nd up

call  
Lu- nyo lu-  
response  
nya Ha ma- vu-layis Ha ma- vu-layis  
drum

Call: Insubordination, insubordination!  
 Response: Will cause your death

Although Tsonga women occupy a low position on the social scale, they have evolved for themselves some recourse through voluntary associations. Through their possession cults they can bring pressure to bear against oppressors, such as wife-beaters. Ill-treated wives develop evil spirits which necessitate costly exorcism ceremonies to expel, and for which the wife abandons her work for a period. Men do not fear women, but they fear evil spirits, particularly alien ones. Possessed Tsonga women speak in tongues. Besides women's social role, this song refers also to the drug rite. Novices failing to report the required voices and visions may receive a second portion from the ceremonial shell, ending their doubts forever.

### 7. *Fela madambi*

#### Bewitched Snuff

♩ = 164

Cycle: 24 ♩

Transposition: min 3rd up

The musical notation consists of two systems. Each system has a 'call' part (treble clef) and a 'drum' part (bass clef). The first system is labeled 'response' and contains the lyrics: "O, fe-la ma-da-mbi yo-we-e e ha hi-ya he ha ye-e-e". The second system is also labeled 'response' and contains the lyrics: "ho, ka-sa-ka sa-ni yo-we-e e ha hi-ya we-e-e". The drum part features a steady 2/4 rhythm with accents. A 'DC' (Da Capo) marking is present at the end of the second system.

Call: Snuff that has been bewitched!  
 Response: *Yowe-e, haye-e*  
 Call: Crawl ye about

There is a danger that the fertility granted by initiation rites may be countered by an evil spell from a social enemy; all sterility is thought to originate thus. Snuff is currently quite popular among the rural Tsonga, but this song teaches that one must be discriminating about the donor. "Crawl

ye about" refers to the first of nine important mimes wherein the body rises higher from the ground at each stage—a series of ever more elevated postures symbolizing fertility and growth. The novices are required to crawl across the riverbed, keeping the trunk low on the ground, like infants crawling.

8. *Wa yi vona ngwenya*

You See the Crocodile?

♩ = 152      Cycle: 36 ♩      Transposition: nil  
(note the interesting clap-pattern)

call

36  
clap      *Wa yi vo ni na wa yi vo ni*

36  
*wa yi vo ni na wa yi vo ni*

*wa yi vo ni le-ngwe nya nk e-le nga*

response

*wa yi ya a ayi ayi*

*ayi ayi ya a-yi ya-ayi*

1 drum  
(varied pitch)

*ya a ma ngwe ya nke-le nga*

Call: You see it, you see it, the crocodile  
 Response: You see it, you see it, the crocodile  
 Call: The crocodile has devoured people

Women are the main work-force in Tsonga society, even more so since migrant labor took most of the men. One of their repetitive chores is the daily washing of clothes in the Limpopo River, which is crocodile infested. Some Tsonga are missing a limb on this account. The song has further meanings. The great urban center of Johannesburg is sometimes referred to as "the Crocodile," and it is thought to devour the village menfolk, many of whom never return. This includes the husbands-to-be of the girl initiates. It is hoped that the future grooms, who left to seek cash with which to buy cattle for *lobolo*, will not get sucked into the jaws of "Crocodile," and perhaps even marry Swazi, Zulu, Pedi, Tswana, or Khosa.

During the performance of this song, the line of novices move on hands and knees, bobbing the head from left to right, and miming the movements of a crocodile on the river bank. The trunk is higher from the ground than in the previous mime.

### 9. *Ku tswala hi vambirhi*

To Conceive Twins

♩ = 160

Cycle: 8♩ + 8♩ + 4♩ Transposition: dim 5th up

The musical score consists of three staves. The top staff is the vocal line, starting with a 'call' and followed by a 'response'. The lyrics are: 'He mhane ndzi na khombo he mhan' ndzi na khombo'. The middle staff shows the drum accompaniment, with a cycle of 8+8+4 beats. The lyrics 'na kho-mbo' are written below the drum line. A note on the right indicates 'drum accents fluctuate'. The bottom staff shows a bass line accompaniment.

Call: Mother, what misfortune befalls me  
 Response: What misfortune!  
 Call: To conceive twins!  
 Solo Shout: 'Tis the decree of the gods

The Tsonga fear twin birth, and have the following proverb:

*Ndzeni ka mhunu a ku nge*  
*Huma tihosi timbirhi*

From the womb cannot emerge  
 Two chiefs

One twin would be junior in rank, causing a disruptive power struggle. Among the neighboring Zulu, one twin would be killed by having a lump of clay inserted into the throat. Twin birth is considered a curse, and it is combatted by the performance of this song, and a mime in which an ochre-smearred novice lies in foetal position on a straw mat while a circle of hunched-over dancers simulates midwifery aid during childbirth.

### 10. *Ndza bela mina mama*

To Suck as a Baby

♩. = 104

Cycle: 8 ♩.

Transposition: dim 5th up

solo

*N' wa ma xa - sa - ni hi ya*

maronge  
leg-rattles  
held in  
the hand

drum

*N' wa ma xa - sa - ni ma hu - wel''*

maronge  
leg-rattles  
held in  
the hand

drum

Solo:

- Enter, mother
- Child-of-Miswazi, mother
- Antelope the father
- To say and to fly
- Child-of-Xixawuli, to fly and
- To lose patience. How many times
- To suck as a baby!

This accompanies a mime performed by the adoptive mother in the *nhanga*, together with her appropriate novice. With hands on womb, the women feel the infant leaping in the womb like an antelope. There is also a reference to nursing. Interestingly, the author observed Tsonga mothers throw a breast to a child tied on the back. The novices mime sucking over the shoulder of the girl in front.

### 11. *Hiya cinela n'wana*

We Are Dancing for the Child

♩ = 150

Cycle: 8 ♩

Transposition: maj 3rd up

The musical score is arranged in three systems. The first system is for the 'leader' and 'chorus'. The leader's part is on a single staff with a treble clef, starting with a rest followed by a melodic line. The chorus part is on a single staff with a treble clef, starting with a rest followed by a melodic line. The lyrics are: *Hiya he ndhu- ma bo- mbi- sa n'wa- na*. The second system is for the 'chorus accompanying the leader' and 'canister'. The accompanying part is on a single staff with a treble clef, starting with a rest followed by a melodic line. The lyrics are: *Hi- ya- a he ndhu- ma bo- mbi- sa n'wa- na*. The canister part is on a single staff with a bass clef, starting with a rest followed by a rhythmic pattern of eighth notes. The lyrics are: *sometimes*. The third system is for the 'canister' and continues the rhythmic pattern.

Chorus: We celebrate! Dress the child!  
We are dancing for the child

The trunks of the novices are now upright. They will rise yet higher, as they ascend a tree, and as they are hoisted on shoulders. During this song a circle of dancers honors each novice, to the accompaniment of fast, loud drumming, and blowing of the long horn.

### 12. *Va ta mi khomba*

Coming to Arrest You

♩ = 252

Cycle: 32 ♩

Transposition: maj 6th up

The musical score is on a single staff with a treble clef. It starts with a box labeled 'opening call' above the first few notes. The lyrics are: *Ma- do- mu- pa- si*.

The musical score consists of five systems, each with a vocal line and a piano accompaniment. The piano part includes a drum line. The lyrics are written below the vocal lines.

System 1: *he lo- kou n- ga te- ki e- ya* (response)

System 2: *ye ya hayi a- yi ye- e ye* (drum)

System 3: *ayi h- o ya- a- a- a*

System 4: *mhan' ni kwal' ti- ma- nge- ni* (call)

System 5: *mhan' ni kwala n'wa ma na- na xa* (response)

- Call: The passbook!  
Beware, if you do not take it, mother
- Response: *Eya, hayi*
- Call: The whites will get you in the groundnut field  
Coming to arrest you  
I weep for Child-of-Manara

This song has strong political connotations. Every Tsonga must carry a government passbook recording residence and race, and this is used to restrict labor opportunities and to control the movements of Bantu-speaking peoples in South Africa. If you even step as far as the village groundnut field, says the song, the apartheid police will arrest you. Manara was arrested and taken away. During the author's stay a police-van overloaded with Africans who had committed only a minor passbook violation, was locked during extreme hot weather, and numerous arrestees suffocated to death. In the song, the novices are warned to always carry their passbook, and they mime being handcuffed and later chained together.

13. *Va ta dlaya ndaheni*

To Squeeze the Tree

♩ = 280                      Cycle: 16 ♩                      Transposition: 5th up

The musical score is presented in three systems. The first system shows an 'opening call' on a single staff with lyrics 'Ha va- na ve- la nda he- ni'. The second system features a vocal line with lyrics 'mana n'wi- na o va ta dlaya- a- ya' and a 'drum' accompaniment on a second staff. The third system shows a 'response' and a 'call' on a single staff with lyrics 'ha va- na vel' n- da- he- ni'. The drum accompaniment continues in the bass line of this system.

Call:                      Child, to carry on one's back, Ndaheni  
 Response:              They will kill Ndaheni  
 Call:                      To squeeze the *nhlonhlo* tree

The mime with this song is performed by three novices at a time, one climbing the tree with white sap (male 'semen', mother's 'milk'), one lying in foetal position, the third striking the first with a wooden rod as she recites mandatory secret formulae which are incomprehensible to the novices. This is called *ku hlaya wa le khombeni*, to recite the law to the novice. The tree is



referred to as *xipingwana*, hammered-in drum-peg, a reference to copulation. In the mime following this, each novice is hoisted in the air by the others; she holds two sticks with which she demonstrates the length of her stretched *labia minora*, affirming compliance with Tsonga custom. Following this, in the *nhanga*, the novices are cut across the thighs with knives and deflowered with the horn.

The foregoing songs, mimes, dances, and rites are held to be highly secret among the Tsonga. Men, boys, and under-age girls are forbidden to witness or even know about them. One result might be that the following year's harvest would fail. At Samarie, in the Northern Transvaal, the author developed a close acquaintance with the village women elders, and after two years was permitted to observe the rites, including the following hallucinogenic plant-drug ceremony.

Outside the *nhanga*, the aged bone-thrower took her fruitshell leg-rattle, and hyena-tail whisk. After throwing her sixty-four bones (human, monkey, etc.) onto the ceremonial mat, she pointed to a particular area of the riverbank. A shrieking, disguised, garbed officiant appeared out of the bush carrying a large shell containing a dark brown liquid. Around her trunk were hung the dried leaves, seeds, and roots of the *Datura fastuosa* plant, which grows locally. To the accompaniment of fast drumming, novices were cocooned in colored blankets and administered the drug one at a time. Officiants talked to and stroked each girl, who was encircled by peers who sang and danced energetically. Several drums were being used, at about 8 1/2 c.p.s. (human alpha waves encompass 8-13 c.p.s.). Novices rolled their eyes, spoke in tongues, and some broke out in sweat, but none vomited. At intervals they rose and danced as if in trance, singing reports of visions and voices. Those slow to rise were beaten with sticks by old women. After several hours at fast, loud drumming and energetic dancing, water was imbibed from the *mhalamhala* horn, and the final "going home" songs were performed.

#### 14. *I khombile n'wananga*

She Is Mature, my Child

♩. = 116

Cycle: 32 ♩.

Transposition: min 6th up

The musical score consists of two staves. The upper staff is in treble clef and contains a melody with a 'response' bracket above it. The lower staff is in bass clef and contains a drum pattern. The lyrics 'He- e- ya' and 'he- e- ya' are written below the melody. The drum pattern is indicated by 'r l r l r l' and 'r l r l r l' above the notes. The tempo is marked as ♩. = 116 and the cycle length is 32 measures.

he- e- e- ya a mo ka nga hu- me- e- e

call  
i khobile n'wananga i khobile n'wana- nga he xi-

ke- pe ma-na-ne xi- le ntsu-nge- ni ka Mu-la-mu- le sometimes

Call: She is mature, my child.  
The ship lies on the far bank of the river  
At Mulamula

Response: Iye, iye, go home

Call: Go home, go home, Mthavine

15. *N'wananga u khobile*

My Daughter Is Mature

♩ = 100

Cycle: 12 ♩ Transposition: min 2nd up  
(note the bimetric formula 8-against 12 and  
16-against -12)

caller opens with the response

response, chorus

Nwa- na- nga u kho-

mbi- le- e- e ho yi sei ngo- ma 'nga u kho-

clap starts as a dotted crotchet but they correct it

DC

Call:	My daughter is mature
Response:	My daughter is mature
Call:	This is the song of the novice
Solo Shout:	Be of age, Child-of-Gavaza, come back with your lover!
Unison Shout:	Of age, of age!

The initiate has now "crossed the river"; she has been separated, purified, and received a new name, new clothing, and a re-definition of her social status. In the song her new name is assigned, and she is told that she may resume sexual intercourse, which among unmarried Tsonga is without intromission. The songs and secret formulae she has memorized serve as credentials of womanhood should she enter a strange village. Fifty years later she will remember them exactly as taught (the author's recording by aged urban domestics show this).

#### Summary of Musical Characteristics of *nhang*a Songs

- 1) All exhibit preference for the intervals of the descending major 2nd, descending minor 3rd, and ascending major 2nd.
- 2) All utilize exclusively pentatonic melodic patterns.
- 3) All observe an overall melodic descent from an initial peak.
- 4) Most use a rhythmic accompaniment consisting of drumming or hand-clapping, or both.
- 5) Half of the songs use either a 16-unit or an 8-unit metrical length.
- 6) All but a few employ call-and-response alternation (some are sung in unison chorus, and some solo).
- 7) All but a few are monodic rather than harmonized.
- 8) When a song is shared with a neighboring South African culture, the Tsonga version usually omits those passing tones which in the neighbors version render the music heptatonic or in some way deviant. This is an instance of cultural selectivity.

9) Where a song is shared with a neighboring South African culture and comparison of versions is possible, the Tsonga version often appears to have been transposed a 5th or inverted 4th lower. This is accounted for by the Tsonga musical principle of harmonic equivalence, where the notes of a descending pentatonic scale may be substituted for by the notes of that scale which lie a 4th or 5th away, and they are regarded as identical in musical meaning.

10) Where a song is shared with a neighboring South African culture, the Tsonga version may appear to commence in the middle of the song, or at its end section. This is accounted for by the Tsonga concept of circular form, wherein songs possess no absolute beginning or end.

Tsonga music, with its strong rhythms and important social imperatives, strongly complements other cultural forces brought to bear during life-cycle crises, to bring about social cohesion and integration following the fragmentation (by the transition of a member) of the basic kin group labor units of which Tsonga society largely consists.

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