THE MATEPE MBIRA MUSIC OF RHODESIA

by

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My aim in this article is to introduce the reader to an instrument, the *matepe* or *hera* of Rhodesia, so that he may appreciate something of its music and its musical enjoyment; also that he may be able to make it, if he wishes, and play it himself. The article is accompanied by two records in the International Library of African Music's 'Sound of Africa' Series, Nos. TR. 212 and 213, which I recorded in Rhodesia in June 1969[1]. As a whole it is intended as part of a series on the many types of Rhodesia's national instrument (yet unrecognised!), the mbira, which will serve as material for Rhodesian schools and universities, and for any Rhodesian concerned with the culture of his country.

The three related mbiras, *matepe* (*madebe*), *hera* and *njari huru* (which I have not yet studied), are played in the N.E. border areas of Rhodesia, including the Mt. Darwin and Mtoko districts, and also in the adjacent part of Mozambique down to the Zambezi at Chicoa and Tete. The stronghold of the type called *matepe* is among the Sena/Tonga people of Chief Mkota, in the east of Mtoko district, where the two Saini's, Madera and Murira, are acknowledged to be the leading performers — Madera in particular, whose skill and command of the instrument leaves people gasping. The Tonga also live to the south towards Inyanga and over the Mozambique border towards Changara. The instrument is also played at Mtoko itself by some of the (Shona/Korekore) Budya people, particularly at Charehwa, and here the name is Shona-ised to *madebe*. It is likely that the Budya have borrowed the instrument from their Tonga neighbours.

In Mt. Darwin district among the Korekore and Tavara, and in all the parts of Mozambique where it is played, among the Tavara, Nyungwe and Tonga, the same instrument is called *hera*, with local variations in construction and number of reeds, but little difference in playing technique. Where I refer to "*matepe*" this should be taken to include "*hera*". The indications are that it originally stemmed from the Korekore, as I have gathered from asking many players in its area where they thought the instrument and its songs came from. While some claim it to be their own from long ago, what clues there are, mostly the origin of songs associated with it, point towards the Korekore. In 1932 my father pinpointed its probable origin as Nyombgwe, in Mt. Darwin district[2].

Wherever the *matepe* is played it is associated with the *vadzimu*, the ancestral spirits, and in particular with the clan tutelary spirit of each chiefdom and sub-chiefdom, known as *mbondoro* (Mozambique — *pondoro*), literally "lion". By association I mean that whenever there is any ritual occasion involving the *mbondoro* or the *vadzimu*, be it a beer-party for a sick person, the installation of a chief, praying for rain, or a medium's (*mhiro*) possession ceremony, it is considered highly desirable that one or more mbira players should be present to play the right songs[3], in honour of the particular *mbondoro* concerned. While I have not found that the instrument itself is dedicated to any particular *mbondoro*, the songs very often are. Each chief or sub-chief's own *mbondoro* has, as a general rule, his own sharply defined territory, his own human descendants and also his own song or songs. There are too many to enumerate here, but a study of this would certainly throw light on clan history in Rhodesia.

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1. During the course of a research trip sponsored by the I.L.A.M. The records are obtainable from I.L.A.M., P.O. Box 138, Roodepoort, Transvaal, South Africa, at $(US) 8.85, £3.12.7, R(SA)6.25 each with card index.
2. Hugh Tracey, "The mbira class of African instruments in Rhodesia (1932)", *African Music*, Vol. 4, No. 3, 1969, p. 78.
3. *Chimbo* or *mumbo*, from *kuimba*, to sing, is the word used which means the whole composition, both mbira tune and vocal song. I shall use "song" for both.

When the "right" song is played for a medium, it is said to be impossible for the *mhondoro* to refuse to "come out" in him (or her). However, an interesting sidelight on the people's attitude to the *mhondoro* was shown me by Samsen, a *hera* player at Chief Makuni, Mt. Darwin, who has a speciality — a song called "Ndiro iro" meaning "That's that (little) thing", which he plays when the people have been waiting a long time for the medium to fall possessed and are tired. This is said to be so insulting to the *mhondoro*, who is normally spoken of in laudatory terms, that he is shamed into "coming out" immediately!

The same song, sometimes under a different name, is often shared by more than one *mhondoro*. There are also songs, which while identified with *mhondoro* spirits in general, are not tied to any one. Another body of songs is described as drinking or entertaining songs, for instance for *kutandara*, sitting out by the fire in the evening; these are not identified with any *mhondoro* or other spirit. It should not be thought, however, that these "bodies" of songs are strictly reserved only for their prescribed occasions. Although on important ritual occasions it is certain that the "right" songs will be played, many others may also be played, and similarly the "ritual" songs are often performed on informal occasions for sheer enjoyment.

Musically there is an interesting difference between "ritual" and "non-ritual" songs, which can be looked at in this way: the mbira parts of the non-ritual songs seem to arise from vocal phrases; it is as if the mbira was "singing" those words. Examples in the scores are "Kana mano" and "Rega kurakana". Few other vocal parts are put to the song but the title phrase itself. This type of song seems generally to be of local geographical distribution, and I presume that they are of younger origin than the other type. They may be attributed to known composers or to the player himself, as for instance "Ndozvitawo", composed by Jojo (TR 213.A.3).

The vocal phrases in the "ritual" songs, however, which make up most of the repertoire, seem rather to arise *from* the mbira part. Since these mbira parts are both more complex and variable there are a great number of different ways in which the notes may form themselves in one's ear. Any of these "inherent patterns" may be picked out by a singer and adapted into a vocal phrase, often with special nonsense "sound syllables". While all the songs have what could be called their main vocal tune, which is usually sung by the women, this is only one of the many possible parts. The non-ritual, word-based songs are relatively tied to their words. If one tried to play "Kana mano", for instance, so that the A-G-F-C did not appear (which represents the title phrase) it would not be considered "Kana mano". But most of the "ritual" songs have many different versions or rhythmic configurations, some of which can be seen in the scores. In not all of these can one hear the women's part. But they still follow the same *chord sequence*.

CHORD SEQUENCES

Some of these chord sequences can be discerned in the mbira songs of a very large area, from the northern Transvaal through the eastern half of Rhodesia (excluding the largely hexatonic Ndau) to the Zambezi in the Mozambique pedicle. One sequence in particular is so predominant that I am tempted to call it the "standard" Shona chord sequence. In these *matepe* scores it can be found in "Kari muchipfuwa", "Msengu" and starting at a different point, "Marume ashora mambo."

The chord sequences can be played on these types of mbira, possibly others as well: *matepe/hera* (widespread, esp. Korekore, Tavara, Tonga) and its closest relatives also *dza vadzimu* (Zezuru) and *deza* (Venda); *njari* (widespread from Fort Victoria to Mtoko, also Nyungwe); *karimba* (widespread) and *nyonganyonga* (Barwe).

All these mbiras are closely related structurally and historically, and I think that all are originally descended from one instrument, the *karimba*. The simplest types of

karimba, never with less than an eight-reed basic keyboard, are now played mostly on the north bank of the Zambezi, in large parts of Zambia, Malawi and the Mozambique pedicle. However, the type of music at present played on these small *karimbas*, except where they have been reintroduced south of the Zambezi, is very different from that of the seven big mbiras mentioned above. North of the Zambezi, as a general observation, there is much parallel movement of harmony; to the south the music can be characterised by its chord sequences which rarely use parallel harmony but, quite the opposite, favour contrary movement in vocal, mbira and other types of music, such as panpipe ensembles.

Before discussing the chord sequences themselves I should explain what I mean by a chord. It is possible to divide up this music into a number of harmonic segments in each of which there is a distinct and different harmonic feeling. During the playing of any one segment only a limited number of notes are used. These are primarily a pair of notes, a fifth apart (or any of the inversions or octave transpositions), and a less prominent subsidiary note which is the third between this pair. This is substantially the same as a western "triad", with the reservations that the tuning of the notes is different (see on); that at no time, on any one instrument at least, is a full triad played simultaneously, and that these chords do not function as western triads. The fifth (or fourth) is the only harmonic interval which is regularly sounded.

So one can look at a chord as consisting of two notes a fifth apart, with the occasional addition of the third between them. While both musical systems, the Rhodesian and the western, use "triads", the Rhodesian considers fifths harmonious and thirds discordant, whereas the western is the reverse; thirds are the essence of western harmony and fifths are considered empty or "open". Where a third is sounded on the mbira one often finds it due to the structural or motor requirements of the song or the instrument. Some types of mbira, for instance, do not have enough notes available for each finger in its part of the keyboard to allow it to play the presumably correct note in all harmonic segments. Because of the importance of the motor pattern, something must be played at that point, so the next best alternative is chosen, namely to sound a third. This happens with the left index finger on the *matepe*, which has a choice of only three notes; also on the *karimba* with its lack of bass notes, and on the *njari* where the right index finger has only two, three or four notes.

As regards the chord sequences themselves, they are open to a number of different interpretations. I can only put down my thoughts on the subject and hope that some of them may be right. First to describe the family of songs which I have heard played all over the area in question, from Limpopo to Zambezi, that seem to share the common chord sequence that I call the "standard". If we number the notes of the scale upwards from a supposed tonic: 1-2-3-4-5-6-7, the succession of chords may be written thus: 1 3 5, 1 3 6, 1 4 6, 2 4 6, where 1, for instance, means the chord containing the note 1 and the note 5. This can be written with tonic C, as in "Msengu": C E G, C E A, C F A, D F A, or with tonic G, as in "Kari muchipfuwa": G B D, G B E, G C E, A C E. This represents the essence of the sequence at its simplest as played over the whole area from Venda to Nyungwe. Individual songs, as may be expected, show variations. "Kari muchipfuwa", if one had to pin it down exactly, would probably have this sequence: G B D B, G B G E, G E C E, A C E, and "Msengu": C E G E, C E A, C F A, D F A, i.e. the variations, where present, are in the form of intercalary "passing chords" which do not affect the position or the order of the main structural chords of the sequence.

Now we are faced with the question — what is the logic, the sense of this chord sequence *C E G C E A C F A D F A* ? (For theoretical discussion we shall keep to the sequence written with tonic C, and write it *in italics*. The actual notes of the *matepe* will be written in normal roman letters.) Why do these chords follow one

another in this particular way? It seems to me that each harmonic movement from chord to chord must embody something that is right to the Rhodesian ear. On this principle the first striking fact that emerges is that the only type of chordal movement is to go up by a third or a fourth. There are eight third-movements and four fourth-movements. Over a large part of the sequence, starting from the second chord (as here written), the thirds and fourths alternate:

C E G C E A C F A D F A (C)
3 3 4 3 4 3 4 3 4 3 3 3

This cannot be an accident. This type of harmonic movement and the total pattern created by it must give rise to satisfying patterns and sounds, and as we shall see, it does. Let us first write out the sequence in a way that approximates to its sound when actually played, as for instance in "Msengu".

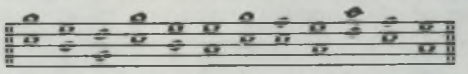


Fig. 1

We notice here that the chord sequence gives rise to a number of favourite melodic movements. On counting them they are: movement to the prime (the same note) — four times; tone up — nine; tone down — 12; third up — 16; third down — 8; fourth up — 8; fourth down — none. The most frequent movements are the tone down and the third up. This coincides with the harmonic movement of perhaps the majority of Shona vocal music, where one of the most common and striking harmonic particles is this:

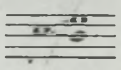


Fig. 2

In fact if you follow almost any melodic line through this sequence you will obtain something that is used, at one time or another, in part or in whole, by some vocal part. The notable omission is the lack of the tone-up movement. This movement, in vocal parts, is sometimes obtained by movement to or from the less important third note in each chord.

If we rewrite the sequence as below this brings to light the long descending scale *E* to *C*, starting here on the second chord and ending on the eleventh, each note being accompanied by another note a fourth or a fifth away, *in alternation*. This scale, or parts of it, is much used in vocal parts with the mbira, although I have never heard more than seven consecutive notes used at any one time — the middle part of the scale from *C* down to *D* (see "Msengu", women's part).

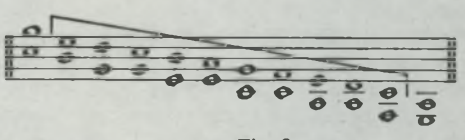


Fig. 3

It is interesting to compare this theoretical diagram of the Shona "standard" mbira chord sequence with the one deduced from the *tshikona* reed-pipe dance of the Venda by Blacking[4]. That has, similarly, a long descending scale, but accompanied by another scale which moves down *in parallel* with it. The only use of parallel harmony I can find in Shona music is the occasional parallel jump of a third or a fourth *up*, but even this is usually only parallel on paper. In practice the parts always try to move in opposite directions, or if they move in the same direction to move by different amounts.

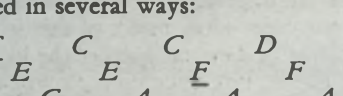
A pattern of chords rising alternatively by thirds and fourths is found also in many, perhaps all other mbira songs. On writing out "Marume ashora mambo" it becomes apparent that its chord sequence, apart from one chord, D replacing B, is the same as the "standard" but starts *at a different point:* C E A, C F A, C E G, D E G. If you now start at the underlined chord E, you have the "standard" sequence, as if with

4. John Blacking, "Venda Children's Songs", Witwatersrand University Press, 1967, p. 177 ff.

tonic E: E G D(B), E G C, E A C, F A C. Other versions of this song as for instance played on the *njari*, use the "standard" B chord in place of the D.[5]

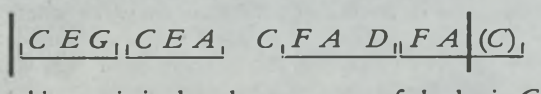
"Siti" could be said to follow this sequence: A C E, A C F, A D B, G B D F, i.e. similar to the "standard" (with tonic A) except for the two chords marked. This song and the next employ all the seven chords possible. "Aroyiwa mwana" has this sequence: A D, F B G, G B E, G C E, where the second half resembles the second and third quarters of the "standard". "Rega kurakana", while the same length as the other songs here, 48 pulses, has a simpler chord sequence: G B, E C, G B, D, which we shall see is one of the building blocks of the complete "standard" sequence.

If we look at the "standard" sequence again to consider now its overall form rather than the chord progression itself we see that it contains an agreeable regularity of form, which can be realised in several ways:

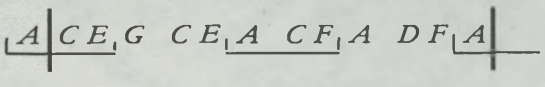


In view of the permanent rhythmic organisation of this music into four repeated rhythmic patterns, which we shall come to, the sequence divides up very handily in three different ways, as the diagram shows. Each way gives a satisfactory form to the starting point of each quarter of the sequence, starting on the underlined chords (as I believe each way is usually felt) — *C C C D*, or *F F E E* or *A A A G*, all of which correspond with the general southern African tendency of harmonic movement to alternate up and down by one step or tone. When I am listening to the *matepe* I usually find my attention is drawn in turn to the inherent patterns made by notes of different pitch ranges, and listening to these they tend to go up and down in ways very similar to these three. Of course other adjacent notes also often intrude into the inherent patterns, as they are meant to. This helps to explain the difficulty one sometimes has in recognising the same tune on a different occasion, by different players, or in different parts of the country. Something about the way they play may bring another inherent framework into prominence and make it seem another song.

Another way of looking at the form of this sequence is this; the repeating sequence *C E G, C E A* is basic to much Shona music. Threshing songs, among many other types of music, use it extensively. It is the *only* sequence on most *karimbas* in central and southern Mashonaland.[6] The "standard" sequence can be considered as a statement of this shorter sequence followed by a contrasting statement of the same sequence *a fourth higher* (and with the two halves reversed). *C E G, C E A* is first stated, then followed by *F A D, F A C*. The final *C* of *F A C* elides with the first *C* of *C E G*, and an extra *C* is inserted to replace it in between the two halves:



A third way of looking at it is that the two parts of the basic *C E G, C E A* are divided, and each used to start each half of the song. This is what happens in the "Marume ashora mambo" type of song. *A C E* and *A C F* — which is the same as *C E G* and *C E A* transposed down a third, but sounding very similar on this near equal-temperament instrument — are found to start two halves of the sequence, if one starts on the last chord, *A*, of the sequence as I have written it up till now.



5. e.g., TR.211.A.4.
6. cf. my article "The mbira music of Jege A Tapera", *African Music*, Vol 2, No. 4, 1961, p. 44.

In terms of actual sound in the "Marume" type of song the *A* is given more prominence and sounds like a tonic. So to give a better comparison with the *C* and *F* versions of the "standard" here they are with the tonics all written as *C*:

C "Standard"	*C E G, C E A, C F A, D F A*
"Marume"	*C E G, B E G, C E A, C F A*
F "Standard"	*C E A, C E G, B D G, B E G*

Armed with an appreciation of these three ways of looking at the same sequence, and expecting to hear them "start" at any point, you will have an important insight into perhaps three-quarters of Shona mbira playing.

The use of "tonic" should be mentioned. I do not mean to say that the Shona have a western concept of a key-note or tonic, or I should expect them to have a word for it. But I feel there is sufficient feeling of repose, return or cadence to justify the use of the term here as a convenience for analysis only. How much of this is my own reaction to the music will have to be seen. The names of different parts of the keyboard of Rhodesian mbiras may be significant here, but I have not done enough work on this yet. I only give some of the names I have recorded for the *matepe*.

MADERA (Chief Mkota, Mtoko)		
1, 2, 3; 14, 16	Ngandamu	a rhythmic sound
4-12	Makota	councillors
13, 15, 17-26	Kwenero	scratchers for, into, as of a flint and tinderbox, where one action immediately follows another
JOSAM (Chief Makuni, E. Darwin)		
1, 2, 3	Mhiningo	interlockers
5, 7	Chenjedza	informers
4, 6, 8-10	Magotokoto	he-goats
11, 12	Madobi	big ones (from the bass *ngororombe* panpipe)
14, 16	Ngandamu	hit hard; sound of the *dandi* drum
13, 15, 17-19	Mishanguro	bringers of the part out clearly (from *ngororombe* panpipe)
20-24	Ufere	collective noun — small ones, as used e.g. for minnows
High E to B (in upper rank)	Udengere	onom. for their high sound; "next to" (the equivalent low notes)
HASHA (Chief Dotito, W. Darwin)		
1, 2, 3	Mapito	whistles
5, 7	Nhundura	lifters, i.e. starters of the song
4, 6, 8-10	Nhevedzera	followers
11, 12	Madobi	(as above)
14, 16	Makotokoto	,,
13, 15, 17-19	Shanguro	,,
20-24	Shauriro	starters (from *ngororombe* panpipe)

How does one know where to "start" one of these chord sequences? The music rolls round and round and in most songs there is no place where the words enter — different phrase, different entry point. So to some extent my deciding the starting point is arbitrary, based on the way I hear the song in question. This is influenced (1) by the building up and relaxing of tension — I usually feel that the part of the sequence with most variation, scale passages, excitement is the end, building up before the relaxation of the beginning; (2) by the player's accentuation; (3) by the entry of vocal phrases, especially the title phrase and (4) not least by observing the points where the player actually starts and stops playing. However, it is only the demands of paper writing that make it necessary to choose *one* starting point.[7] In a very real sense this music has no start nor end. To achieve maximum freedom while playing it, if one is tied down to any one scheme, be it harmonic, metrical or rhythmic, one is missing half the point, which is to appreciate several different conflicting schemes at the same time.

7. cf. David Rycroft, "Nguni vocal polyphony", IFMC Journal, Vol. XIX, 1967, p. 88, where he writes Nguni songs using a single stave.

In general, however, it seems to me that the main starting chord for the "standard" sequence, as played on the *matepe*, *mbira dza vadzimu* and *karimba*, is the C as marked. On the *njari* it may be the C or often the F.[8] For the "Marume" group of songs it is the A. The next thing to note here is that on all the Rhodesian mbiras it is possible to play nearly identical sequences *in several different keys*. We have only three examples here, "Msengu" and "Kari muchipfuwa" with starting chords respectively C and G and "Marume ashora mambo" where the "standard" sequence starts on E, the song itself starting on and sounding in *matepe* C. However, in the whole *matepe* area I have heard the "standard" sequence in no less than *all seven* keys. One player has said to me "This song is like . . . (another song using the "standard" sequence) but we start here (pointing to a different reed on the mbira)". The majority, however, find no need to associate songs with each other in this way, and indeed the rhythmic shape and inherent patterns coming out of each is very different.

To return briefly to the alternation of rising thirds and fourths, which constitute the major part of our "standard" sequence, one might question why this is not carried to its logical conclusion like this (starting from the second chord): *E G C E A C F A D F B D G B* (*E G C* . . . etc.). I suppose that the only answer could be that this would not give such a satisfactory and regular form, appreciable in so many ways, as the one we have been discussing.

A final harmonic point — the third note of the scale (*E*), seems to have an important function as a mediator between the four quarters of many songs, either associated with *B* in the first half of the "standard", or with *A* in the second half, or often on its own. A chord with an *E* in it is the most common form of "passing chord", one that does not affect the main chordal structure of the song, and it can often be put in even where it does not strictly belong (if my analysis is correct!). See the 12th pulse of "Kari muchipfuwa" 1 for one example, and my examples from the *karimba*.[9] Connected with this may be the common use of the third note of the triad as the intervening note before the next triad, in which it will be the tonic in the 8 cases out of 12 in the "standard" where the chord moves up a third. Where the chord moves up a fourth, a common intervening note is the third of the second triad (i.e. the sixth of the first triad).

MAKING A MATEPE

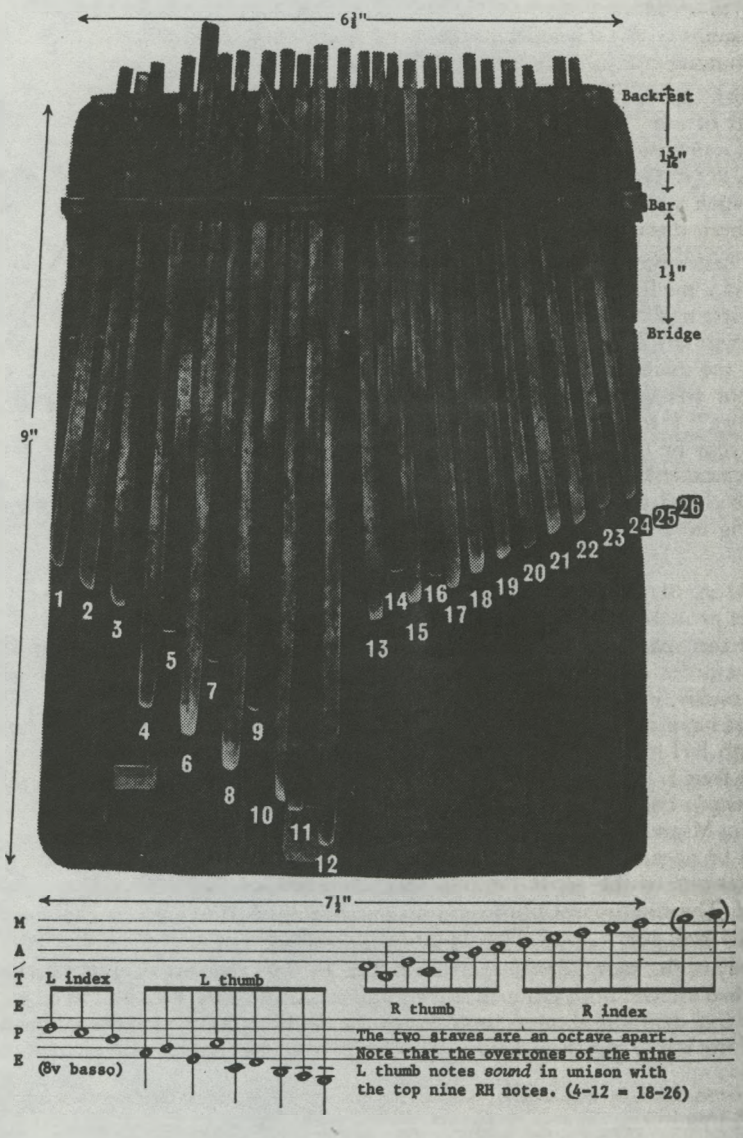
There is probably no such thing as a standard *matepe*, or any other kind of Rhodesian mbira for that matter. Every maker is individual, and the players often add, remove or change the order of reeds as they please. Having seen many examples, however, I take Kadori's *madebe*, in the photograph, as representative of the basic *matepe*. Other types in other areas have various other additions; in the E. of Mt. Darwin there is an extra 4- or 5-note high RH manual (high EFGAB) used for special solo passages; some Nyungwe *hwas* have four L index reeds (DCBA) and four in the upper R manual (low CBAG); in central Darwin the upper L thumb manual has 2 more higher reeds (DE); modern instruments from Mkota have 2 extra reeds (GA) at the top end of the RH manual. These two reeds will be necessary to play the transcriptions of Saini Madera's music that follow. Kadori was one of the most famous mbira players of N.E. Rhodesia; his skill is still spoken of. The instrument photographed was bought from him in 1932, and the body was already well worn then. The diagrams give the shape as it should actually be made.

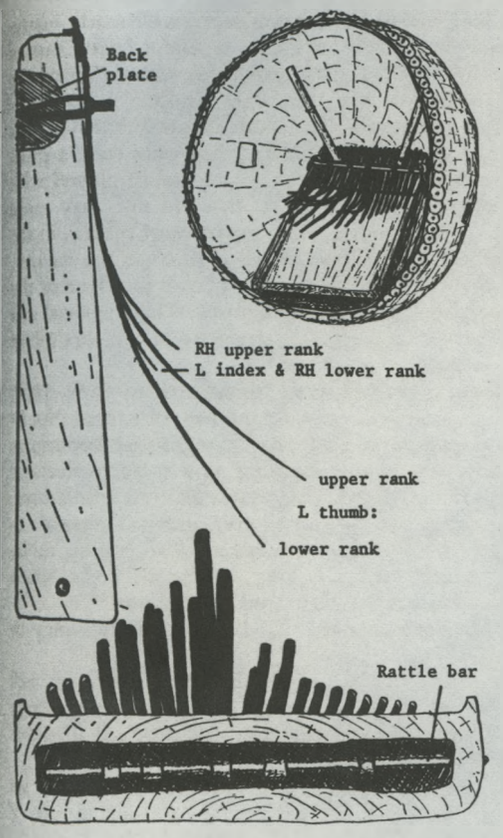
The body of the *matepe* (*gomero*) is about 9 in. by 7 in. or 8 in., slightly tapering towards the top when viewed both from the front and from the side, and hollowed out from the lower end to a depth of about 6 in. to form the "bell" type of resonator that is typical of mbiras of the lower Zambezi valley. This hollowing out is probably essential to get the

8. Listen to "Biza rashe", by Simon Mashoko, on TR.211.B.2.
9. Andrew Tracey 1961.

loud volume and resonance of the deep notes for which the *matepe* is notable. On some instruments the hollowing extends slightly beyond the bridge, in which case two or three small pillars are left for support. The wood is medium-soft and resonant, usually *mutondo* (Julbernardia globifora) or *mupepe* (? — a large succulent tree). I believe pine would work as well, though being softer would be more prone to damage. There are two low "walls" running down each side of the top face of the instrument.

The five transverse metal parts are the backrest (*mutsago* = headrest; *piro*, prob. = "pillow"), the bar (*mtanda*), the bridge (*fhekuro*), the back plate and the rattle bar. The *backrest* in this case was a thin strip of metal put in over the normal bamboo or wooden





backrest to avoid the scratching caused by taking the reeds out repeatedly. Metal is not normally used here.

The *bar* is made of a piece of heavy wire of square cross-section about $\frac{1}{4}$" in diameter. The two ends are heated, beaten flat, and curled up into a scroll as in wrought iron work. It is tied down to the body with stiff wire, attached first to the scroll at one end, then around the back, up in turn through each of four or five holes across the back and around the bar, and finally fixed to the scroll at the other end. The tying down is best done with four or five reeds in position spaced across the instrument (and the bridge in position of course), in order to avoid pulling the bar down too close to get the reeds in subsequently.

The *bridge* is made of a strong flat piece of metal about $\frac{1}{2}$" × $\frac{1}{8}$" in cross-section. The top side is filed flat and smooth so that the reeds rest squarely on it. Its function is to transmit the vibrations from the reeds to the body. It is usually burned in so as to sit firmly and solidly in place.

A *back plate*, consisting of a rectangular piece of thin tin, is used to prevent the straining wires from digging into the wood. It is usually decorated with small punched holes.

All these parts are made and assembled first. Without this it is not possible to test and tune the reeds (*mbira*, sing; *mbira*, plur. = the instrument), which is the most skilled part of the operation. I gave some instructions for making and tuning reeds in an article in the previous number of this journal,[10] and these apply here, particularly as regards the tuning together of the fundamentals and overtones of the deep notes. However, few present-day *matepes* have their bass fundamentals all in tune. The overtones of the nine bass notes, on the other hand, must be very carefully tuned to the required scale by making them sound accurately *in unison* woth the shorter, higher reeds of the right manual. This gives the result that the left and right manuals sound effectively *at the same pitch*, although technically separated by two octaves. The music is composed to make use of the effect of combining the two hands — the resultant melodies perceived by the listener (and by the singers, see on) appear to be played as if by one hand in the limited range of an octave or so, but from watching the instrument being played it can be seen that the two hands combine more or less equally to create them.

10. Andrew Tracey, "The tuning of mbira reeds", *African Music*, Vol. 4, No. 3, 1969, p. 96.

Meanwhile the deep fundamentals, which except in outstandingly well-made instruments are often up to a fourth flat of their true pitch, drone away like a bass drum of indeterminate depth and give the *matepe* its characteristic powerful sound, so unlike the delicate, personal quality of most other members of the mbira family.

The overall pitch of *matepe/hera* tuning is remarkably constant; I found that Kadoti's *madebe*, which had not been retuned since it was bought in 1932, was only such a small degree flat of modern instruments that it could be, and was, comfortably played with them. Geographically I found that the overall pitch of the *matepe* did not vary more than about a third over its whole region. Similarly with different types of mbiras in the same districts: the *karimbas* at Mkota were substantially at the same pitch as the *matepes*, and could be played together with them.[11] At Mtoko, the *madebe* played by some of the Budya is at the same pitch as the *njari* played by other Budya groups. This regional and historical pitch constancy argues the presence of a degree of perfect pitch in this mbira area.

The scale of the *matepe*, as measured from Saini Madera's instrument in June, 1969, is given on p. 47. If you have no means of finding these exact pitches, tune reed No. 14 to G below middle C, and then create as nearly as you can an equitonal heptatonic scale, that is a scale of seven different notes (the same number as a western diatonic scale) but where every interval is *the same size*, i.e. about $\frac{7}{8}$ths of a tempered whole tone. Of course it is not easy if this kind of tuning is not natural to you, but it is possible to get somewhere near by guesswork. One must realise, however, that Shona mbira players do not tune by guesswork; this tuning, which is very similar over the whole area where chord sequences are played, is for them the right and proper one.[12]

The second table gives a tuning for practical purposes. All B's for instance may be tuned to 392 v.p.s. and its octaves, etc.

The reed lengths are given; they are relatively thin and flexible, and curve up well away from the body. The tips of the reeds on the extreme left and right, respectively three and seven, are polished smooth on the *underside*, for they are plucked upwards with the index fingers. The other tips are polished on top.

A *rattle bar* consisting of a length of stiff wire, surrounded loosely by five or six light rings (*masarima*) cut from flat sheet copper, is fixed just inside the open mouth of the hollowed part of the body.

The instrument, which weighs just under 2 lbs., is placed inside a large resonator calabash (*dende*) of about 12" to 16" diam. through a hole that is cut amply large enough to hold the instrument while playing, i.e. about 12" or 13". It is placed so that the back of the instrument, in the area of the straining wires, rests on the small natural "hillock" that exists at the centre bottom of most calabashes. The lower end is held just inside the lower rim of the calabash. It is held firmly in place by two short props (*tsigiri*) of river reed which are placed against the top side of the bar (often with a V-notch in them to hold more securely) and then, using the natural flexibility of the calabash, wedged against its inside upper rim.

The calabash itself is decorated around its outer rim with small pieces of the shell of the big land snail (*bozhwe*), which also serve the function of additional buzzers. These are ground circular to a diameter of from 1" to 2", a hole made in the centre, and tied loosely to the calabash using two pieces of light string. One of these travels unknotted round the outside of both shells and calabash, and the other is threaded, "Singer" style, from the inside through a hole in the calabash, through the shell, round the first string, back to the inside through the two holes, on to the next hole and so on. Another method, as in the diagram, is to use beads instead of the outside string. Town mbira players often use crown bottle tops if snail shell is unavailable.

11. See TR.213.A.1 and 2.
12. See e.g., Hugh Tracey, "Towards an assessment of African scales", *African Music*, Vol 2, No 1, 1958, p 15.

SAINI MADERA'S TUNING, JUNE 1969
(Overtones in italics)

	Reeds, L to R	Written as	V.p.s.	Bass fund. should be (v.p.s.)	Length to bridge, ins.
L hand	1	D	240		4 1/8
	2	C	212		4 3/8
	3	B	194		4 9/16
	4	F	*576*	144	5 3/4
	5	G	*640*	160	5 1/4
	6	E	*532*	133	6 1/16
	7	A	*712*	178	5 1/2
	8	C	*432*	108	6 1/2
	9	D	*480*	120	6 1/8
	10	B	*392*	98	6 13/16
	11	A	*352*	88	7 1/4
	12	G	*320*	80	7 3/8
R hand	13	D	240		4 3/4
	14	B	194		4 1/2
	15	E	266		4 9/16
	16	C	212		4 3/8
	17	F	288		4 3/8
	18	G	320		4 5/16
	19	A	352		4
	20	B	392		3 7/8
	21	C	432		3 3/4
	22	D	480		3 5/8
	23	E	532		3 1/2
	24	F	576		3 3/8
	25	G	640		3 1/4
	26	A	712		3 1/8

FOR PRACTICAL PURPOSES
(the bottom eight notes of the R hand)

V.p.s.	Intervals (cents)	Scale on G (cents)	Scale on C (cents)	Comparison with tempered scale
B 392		352	1032	G above middle C
	186			
A 352		166	846	F + 14 (cents)
	166			
G 320		0	680	D♯ + 49
	182			
F 288		1018	498	D — 34
	138			
E 266		880	360	C + 29
	178			
D 240		702	182	B — 49
	182			
C 216		520	0	A — 32
	168			
B 196		352	1032	G below middle C

100 cents — 1 tempered semitone 1200 cents — 1 octave

PLAYING THE MATEPE

The *matepe* is held between the hands so that the index fingers can comfortably pluck upwards on their reeds, and the thumbs downwards on theirs. The fingers, in Madeni's style, generally play in octave unison with their respective thumbs, a fact which has caused me a lot of stiffness while learning, because of the stretch. The little fingers are generally hooked, from the top, around the upper lip of the bell opening; the other two fingers of each hand rest against the sides of the body. The calabash is usually rested on the ground or the knees while playing, and often leant against something as well for extra support. It is a difficult instrument to hold, and only rarely played while walking.

Starting to play, one has to get accustomed to playing the three left index reeds together with their lower octaves, Nos. 8, 9, and 10. Similarly in the right hand — all seven index reeds are often played in octave unison with, or immediately after the thumb reeds. The next thing is to find out and practise all the unisons between the hands, e.g. playing LH reeds 1 and 9 followed by RH reeds 13 and 22, and all the others. The consecutive playing of these unisons is an important part of the technique, sometimes the left hand leading, sometimes the right. One must realise that these really *do* sound like unisons, when heard in the full swing of performance, although the reeds are so different in length. The bass reeds of the left hand also have their own deep notes of course, which add their own rhythm to the complex, but the ear tends to hear these distinctly from the unison effect of their over-tones with the notes of the RH manual.

I discovered visually very soon, and later aurally, that many tunes are simply played with alternating beats in the left and right hand. One would not always suspect this from the sound itself, because of the way the notes of a song are arranged — so that the unison effect between the hands comes now L-R, now R-L (e.g. "Siti" 1), also because, the two hands sounding effectively *at the same pitch*, as already mentioned, the notes jump around in one's head and tend to form themselves into groups of 2, 3 or 4 pulses, or irregular phrasings that do not necessarily give any indication of the left-right motor construction of the playing. The best way to hear this motor construction is to concentrate only on the bass fundamentals — not easy in view of the welter of other sounds — when one discovers that there are only three left thumb patterns — every two pulses, either "on" or "off" the first beat, or every three pulses: 1 2 –, 1 2 –. Whatever the interval at which they occur they provide an excellent and regular cross-rhythm to the higher parts, in whatever rhythmic modes one happens to be hearing them.

Following on this is the fact that the left and right hand parts of some songs are composed almost entirely of the same notes, in the same order, one hand following one pulse behind the other (e.g. "Aroyiwa mwana" 1). The interesting thing is that unless you listen carefully for it, you will not be aware of it because the regular effect of similar notes following each other is broken up by (1) the different direction of movement of the two parts, (2) the unpredictability of the higher overtones (the bass reeds are tuned only to their *first* overtone; the higher overtones also have their part in creating irregular patterns) and (3) the three left index reeds. These reeds, even when playing *with* their three companion reeds an octave lower, as in Madera's style, produce their own patterns, particularly when one of them is preceded or followed by one of the three right-hand reeds of the same pitch, as for instance at pulses 7, 8 and 9 of "Aroyiwa mwana" 1.

Sometimes the left hand leads these doubled notes, sometimes the right. This is used as part of the technique of *kuwirirana* (to become soft together, to agree) which means "to add a second, properly synchronised varying part" (or a third, fourth part, etc.). If

Madera plays version 1 of "Msengu" for instance, with its L-R fingering, Murira comes in with version 4, which has R-L fingering.

Music on all Rhodesian mbiras shows a remarkable similarity in respect of metrical length. Virtually *all* songs are the same number of pulses long — 48, and consist of a motor pattern of 12 pulses repeated four times. If you look at the scores you will see that the motor patterns consist of rhythmic patterns of finger movement up and down the reeds. To take an example: "Msengu" 1 has a duple up-down movement in the L thumb, with a triple pattern in the low notes of "middle-low-high": C–B–D, C–B–E, C–C–E, D–C–E. This goes against a faster triple pattern in the RH of "low-high, middle, middle, low, middle, middle": GG–E–E–G–D–E, etc. You can find the same opposition of motor patterns of different lengths and speeds in almost every song played on the *matepe*, always repeating four times to the phrase. One of the fascinations of playing is that your fingers, galloping on in the same repeating movement patterns, can produce such different sounds in the four quarters. As already mentioned, the importance of repeating a motor pattern may lead to notes being played in certain parts of the music which otherwise would probably not belong there. Basic drum, clapping and rattle parts are also 12 pulses long and repeat four times per phrase. Of course when a drummer is improvising his phrases will often extend outside the 12 pulses.[13] The only exceptions to the 48-pulse, 4-pattern rule that I have heard are (1) towards the Zezuru country where 24-pulse phrases are more common, as in a typical Zezuru song, "Gumbukumbu"[14], (2) humorous adaptations of *ngororombe* panpipe ensemble tunes (24 pulses) and (3) in a few Karanga and Zezuru songs on *njari* and *karimba*, which have four patterns of 10 pulses each.

It is interesting to compare the means whereby the different Rhodesian mbiras obtain the doubled or repeated notes which are so characteristic of their sound. There are three ways. One, as used on the *njari*, *karimba* and *nyonganyonga*, is to have many notes of the same pitch in both the L and R manuals. By playing these alternately with L and R hand it is easy to get this fast repeated sound. Another is the *mbira dza vadzimu*, where the notes of the two hands are completely separated in pitch and there would be no doubling effect on only one instrument, so it is normally played in duet. This gives the effect in all registers, particularly the (high) right hand.[15] Thirdly, the *matepe*, which as we have seen, makes use of the high overtones of its bass reeds to intermingle with the nine highest notes of the right hand. I have often been told by *matepe* players that their instrument is the best of all the types known because "One *matepe* is enough. With the others you must have two or three to get the same (full) sound". And, of course, the volume and richness of sound coming out of three or four *matepes*, as is often heard, is incomparable.

Another reason given for the special sound of the *matepe* is the use of the left index. If you look at Murira's scores you will see how he hardly ever plays it *together* with his left thumb, but always in a 4-pulse or a 3-pulse pattern that conflicts with his left thumb part and indeed with all the other parts. I have found this characteristic of all playing on the *matepe*; even beginners play this basic cross-rhythm in the left hand correctly, and gradually learn to add good right-hand parts. Madera is the only exception to this I know. His left index is nearly always *with* his left thumb, which is a technique typical of the *njari*. Most *matepe* players are able to change without hesitation from the 4-pulse to the 3-pulse pattern; this is one of those means whereby one's whole rhythmic orientation to the music can suddenly be changed and you wonder how you were hearing it before.

In fact here, I think, is one of the important approaches to the aesthetics of hearing

13. Hear TR.85 and 91, recorded in 1958, with Saini Madera on *murumbi* drum.
14. See Andrew Tracey, 1961.
15. Andrew Tracey, "Three tunes for 'mbira dza vadzimu'," *African Music*, Vol. 3, No. 2, 1963, p. 23.

this music — the presence, either in succession or at the same time, of several different organisational frameworks which the listener may project onto the music as he likes or as he is led to do by the performers. Whether we distinguish these frameworks as mainly rhythmic, harmonic or melodic, for practical purposes these categories meld together. It is as if, by finding and appreciating different starting points and following the patterns from there at different speeds, there were many different "tunes" contained in the one song. A comparison springs to my mind with the kaleidoscope — the same bits of glass, looked at in different ways, can produce quite different pictures. So with this music, which I call "kaleidophonic". The very same 48 notes of an mbira part can stimulate all sorts of different and enjoyable musical lines, if one can train one's ear and mind to it.

Arising out of this we come to the vocal parts sung to the *matepe*. These are, by and large, vocal representations of patterns that have been heard and recognised in the mbira parts, as you may see from comparing the few I give with their respective accompaniments, or by listening to the records. The male singers, or sometimes female, usually sit very near the mbira players, often just behind on one side, and listen intently to the music, reproducing the different inherent patterns that they hear, and fitting them in with what other singers are doing so as to get the maximum density of sound, both in terms of filling up all available rhythmic space and of covering as much of the vocal range as possible. The words used are mostly nonsense "sound syllables", although a few meaningful phrases are used such as "*mukakuyi*" (in "Msengu") and "*aumai dekau kuya*" ("Siti") which both refer to grinding (*kuya*). Much use is also made of yodelling, especially by those with high voices. This does not necessarily follow any

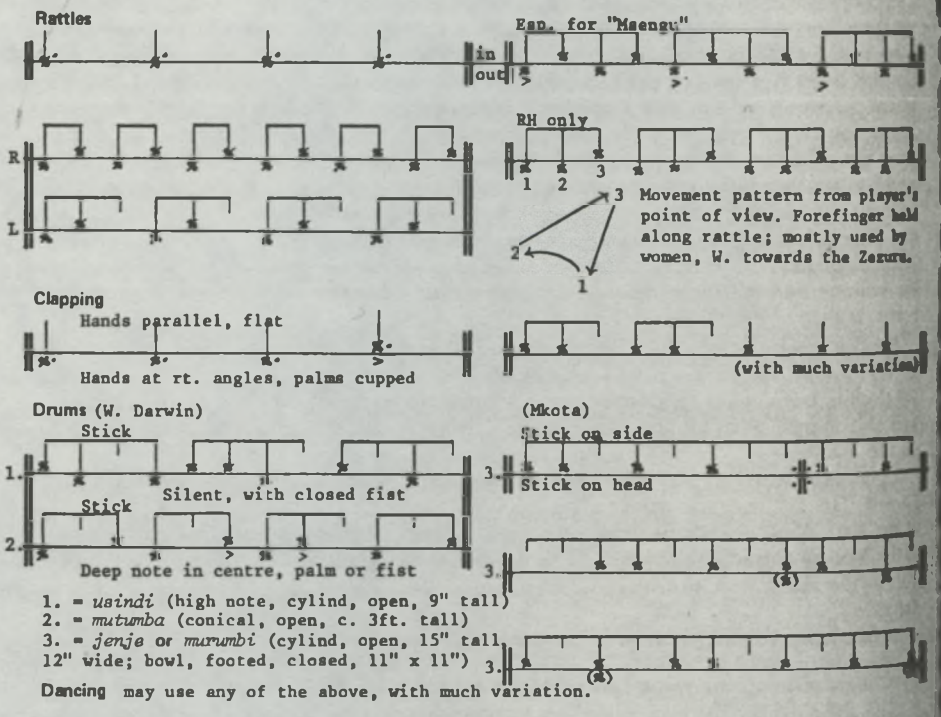


Fig. 4

particular inherent patterns in the mbira parts, but sticks fairly closely at key points to the notes of the chord sequence.

The main group of female singers may sit anywhere near, and generally have a longer, more legato line, with meaningful words — often the title of the song — and less tied to any one player's version of the song. I have found some substantially similar female vocal parts over almost the whole area.

To complete the picture of a *matepe* session, the remaining parts are rattles, clapping, drums and dancing, a few common examples of which are shown in Fig. 4. The usage varies quite widely over the area.

NOTES ON THE TRANSCRIPTIONS

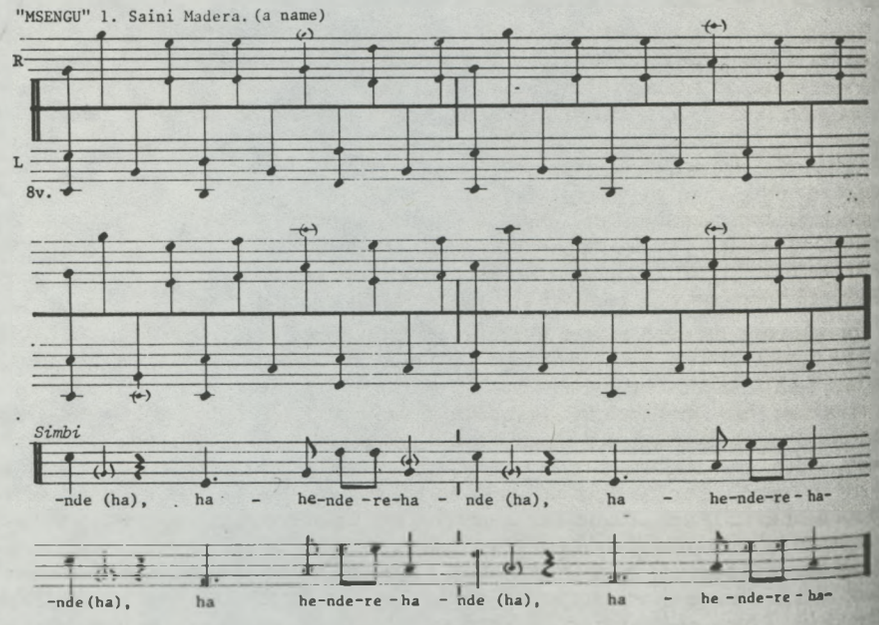
The reader must excuse me for making yet another adaptation of the five-line stave. It seems to suit the nature of the mbira family and, having referred to the key in each case, such as the one beneath the photograph, it is clear on first glance what is intended, a prime attribute of any notation. Note only that the two staves are not to be read as a treble and bass clef system with its concomitant spacing of an octave and a sixth between staves. For some of the other mbiras I write the staves at the same pitch; for the *matepe* they are to be read exactly *one octave apart* (also for its cousin the *mbira dza nzwimu*). This is because of the large range of the *matepe* and its convenient separation of pitch — deep notes in the L, high notes in the R hand. The player, of course, does not necessarily conceive his music as two independent lines for L and R hand, as the two staves might make it appear, but probably aims at a specific total image resulting from the combination of both hands. Madera, however, and some other players, is able to play some songs with either L or R hand alone.

For note names I use those of the treble clef. The male and female vocal parts should be read as if in double treble or treble clef respectively, transposed down about a third. The note stems go through the middle of the heads in order to make plain the equidistant pulse system. This is for simplification and to avoid covering the whole transcription with pulse lines. A short line across the heavy time-axis line represents an empty pulse. A round bracket indicates variant notes that may be put in *ad lib*. They replace any other note written for *that* finger or thumb only. An arrow shows where a variation follows a certain line. A square bracket indicates a choice of notes, with no apparent preference. I will welcome comments on this notation; its test, of course, will be its practicability to Rhodesian mbira players, and to you, the reader, should you decide, as I hope you will, to make and play a *matepe* yourself.

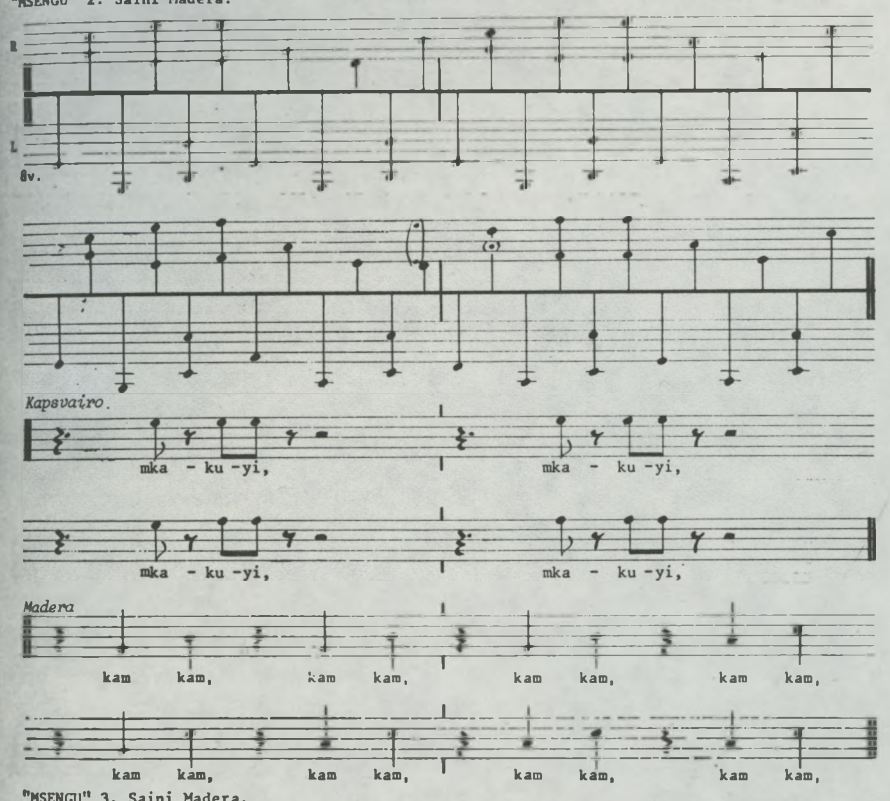
The difference between motor image and sound image in the *matepe* is particularly striking because of two features of its tone quality, the overtones of the deep reeds, as we have seen, and the ever-present rattling devices, which have several musical effects — to increase the overall volume, particularly of the deep notes, to give the notes more rhythmic bite, to prolong the sound of a note, to resonate some notes louder than others, which gives rise to inherent rhythmic effects, or as one mbira player said to me, to give an "echo" after the note has been played, and not least to annoy foreigners who are not used to it! If one attempts to transcribe the heard image from a recording alone one gets no indication at all of how it was played on the mbira. In fact, on looking at the notation and listening to the recordings, I often find it hard to believe it is the same music. But on learning to play some of these songs myself and listening to myself played back, I have realised that the ear does not hear the music, nor is it meant to, in the same way as the mind and the fingers compose it. I have tried writing the bass notes at the pitch of their (musically important) overtones; this gives a better sound-picture from which it may sometimes be easier to follow the music with one's ear, but not to reproduce with one's fingers, which I consider more important. If you want to hear

this music, listen to the records. If you want to play it, read the music. Far better still, go to Mkota, Mt. Darwin or Chioco and learn from the artists themselves!

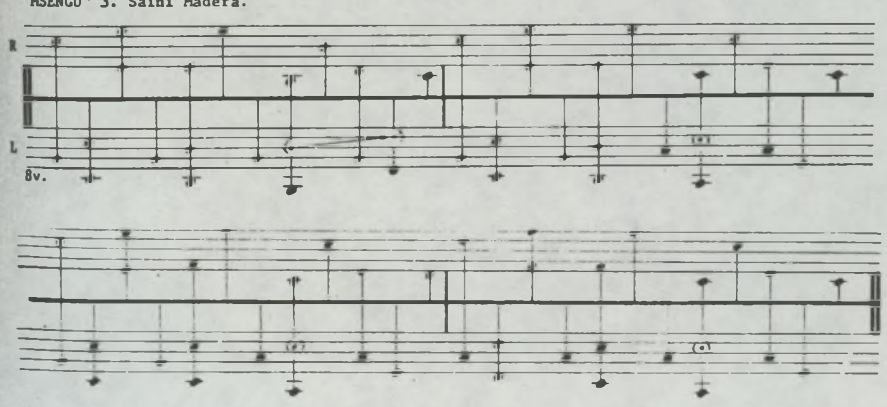
All the notation was taken down from watching the players' fingers on their mbiras as they repeated the songs for me, and not revised in any way on listening to the recording, except in the matter of deciding where to "start". It was often difficult to know whether to treat the first or second note of each repeated pair as the more important beat (see the first two notes of "Aroyiwa mwana" 1, 2, and 4). As one needs *something* to show one the place, I refer all these songs to the main rattle beat, which is mostly once every three pulses, and make the first note in each case coincide with one of these. The difficulty is compounded by the enormous speed at which the *matepe* is played (pulse = from MM 300 to 800, average 600 — it tends to be slower towards the west), and by the players' amazing ability to change their playing and/or their mental rhythmic framework instantaneously to fit any beat that I or a rattle player gave them. There are many ways in which the same song can be played, as can be heard from the records. As each player comes up in turn you can hear that his sound is quite different from the next man's. In fact he is playing as best he can for the maximum contrast with his neighbour. I have checked the coordination by playing myself, by playing the recordings back to the musicians, and by carefully observing two people play together. But they do not *always* make the same notes of a pattern coincide with the rattle beat. There is a freedom here, a certain openness to accept whatever another player does as "right", or "right enough" (providing he is playing correctly in every other respect of course!).



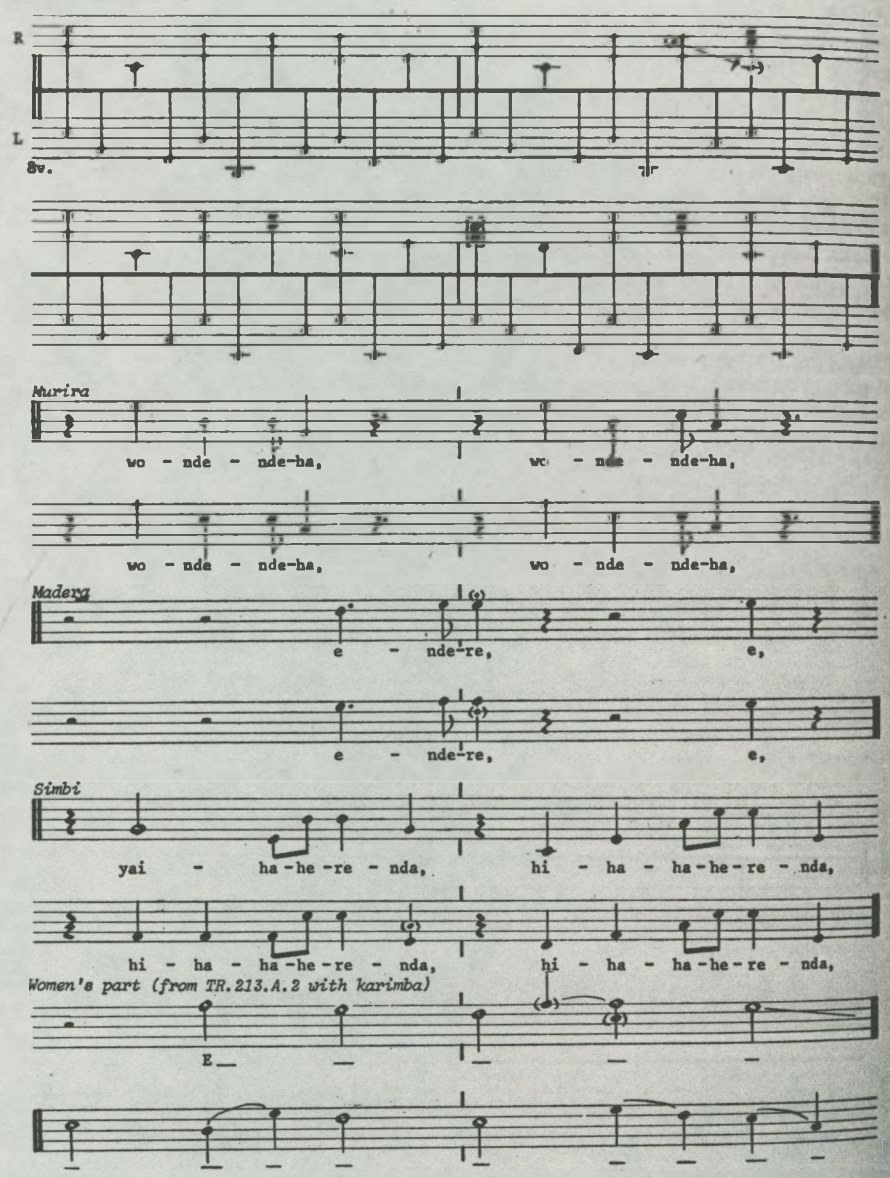
"MSENGU" 2. Saini Madera.

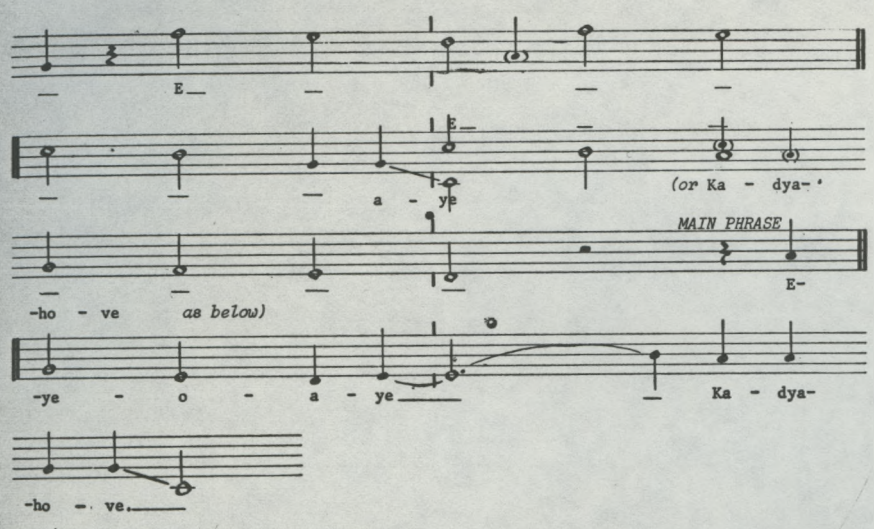


"MSENGU" 3. Saini Madera.

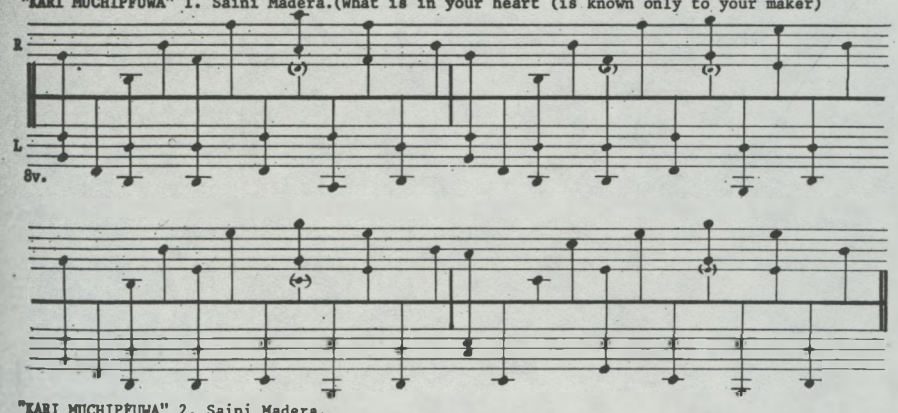


"MSENGU" 4. Saini Murira.

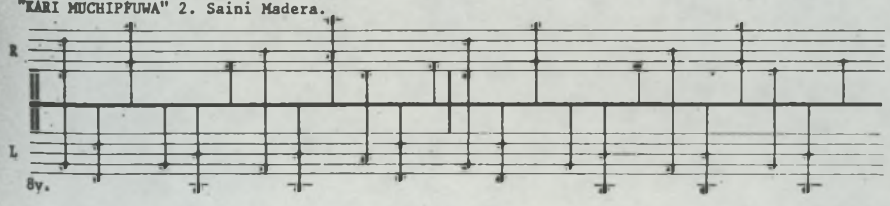


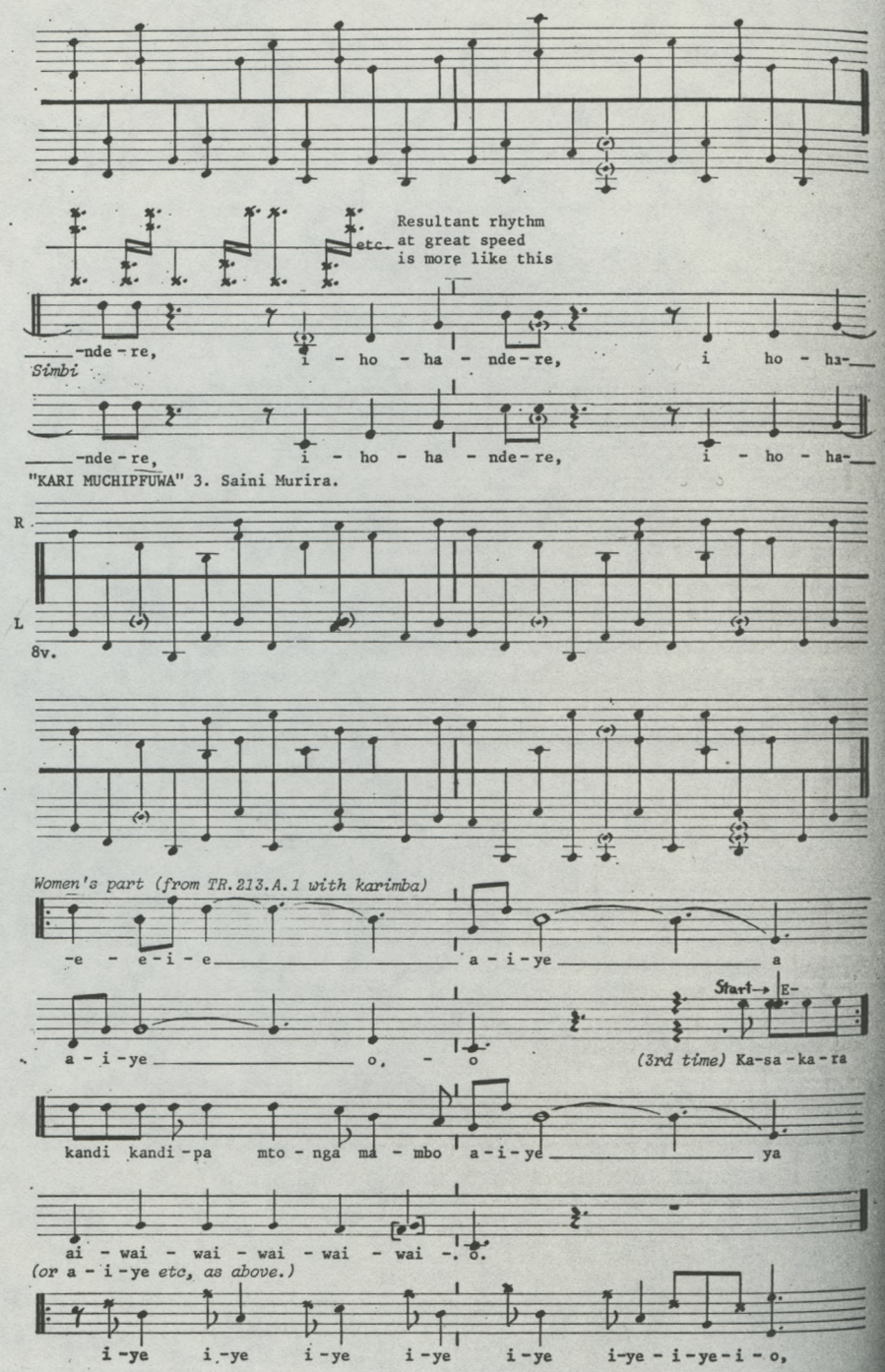


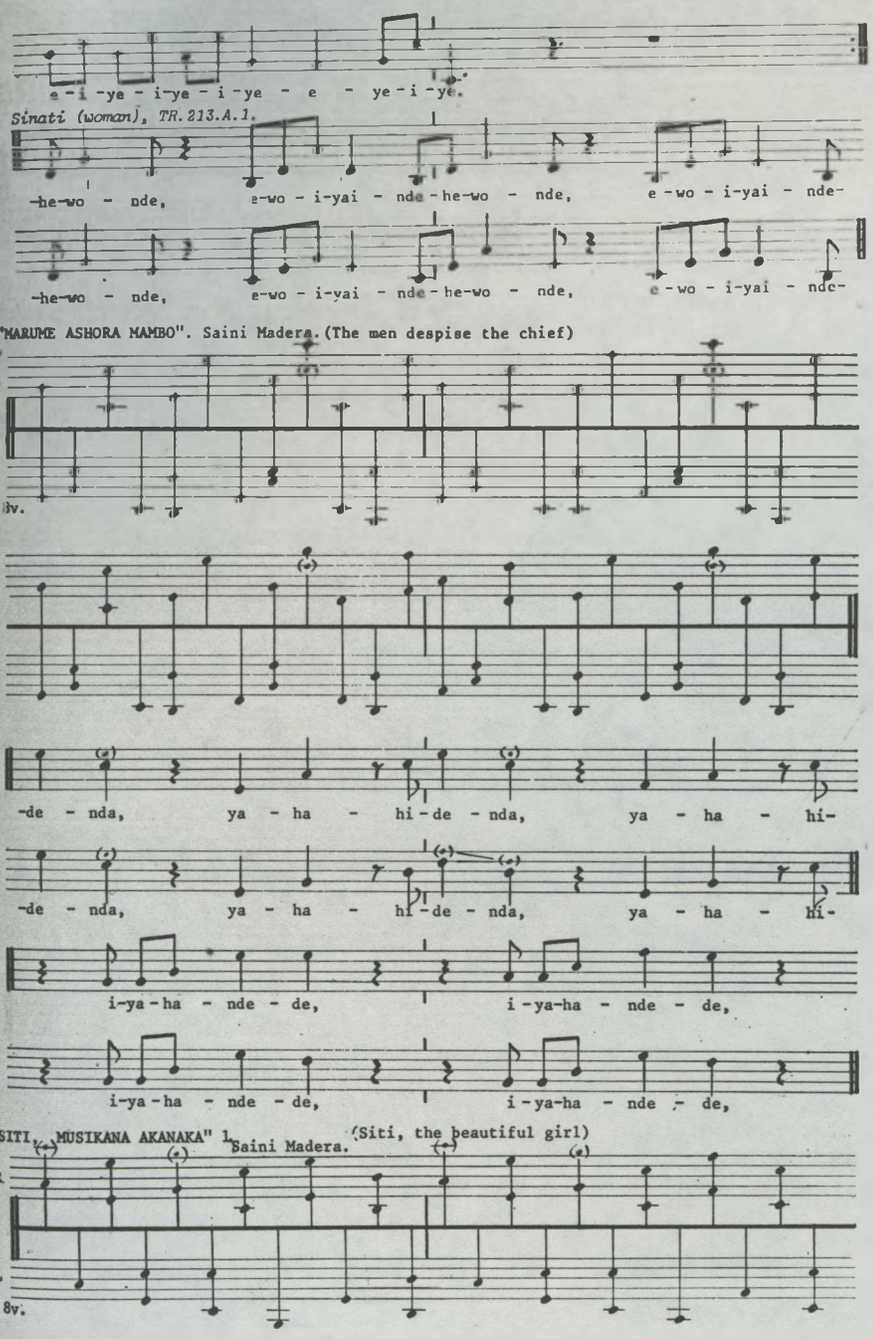
"KARI MUCHIPFUWA" 1. Saini Madera.(What is in your heart (is known only to your maker)

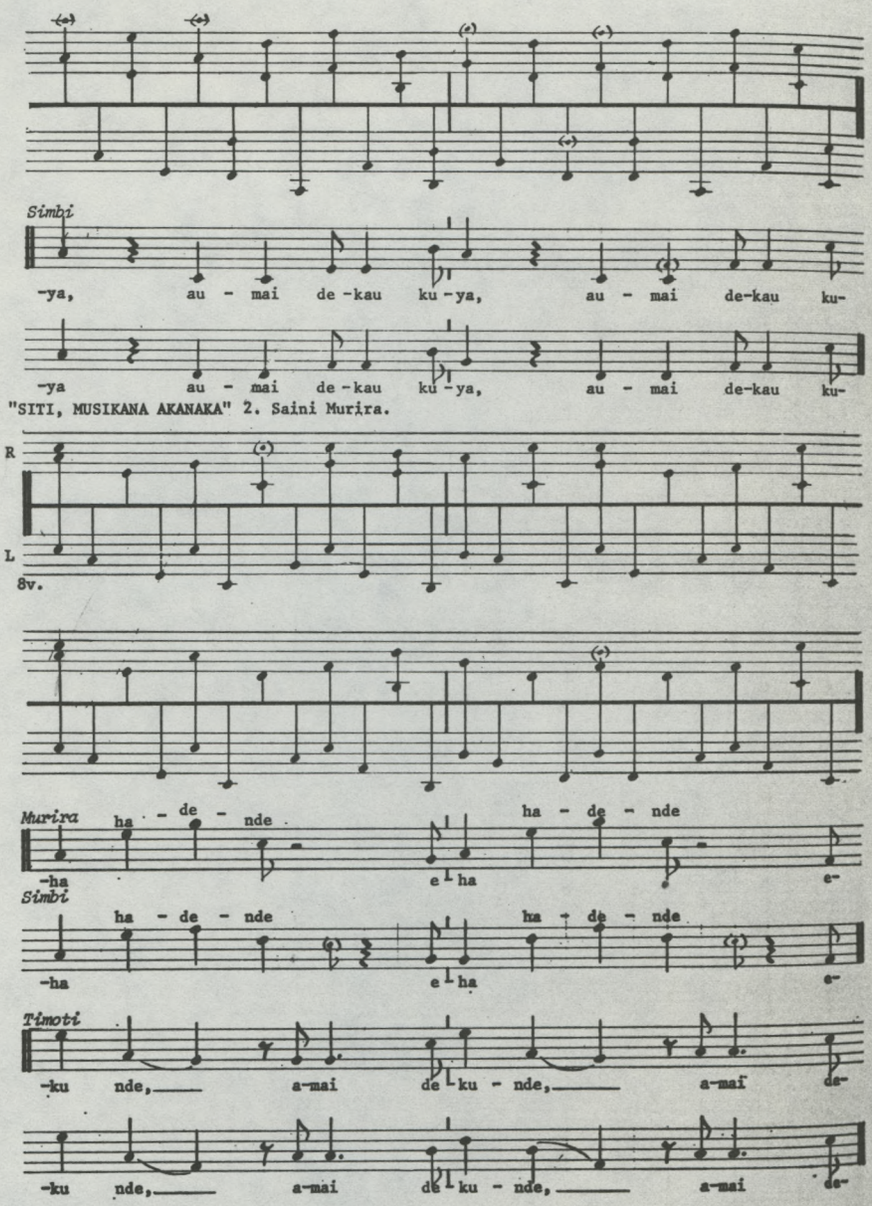


"KARI MUCHIPFUWA" 2. Saini Madera.



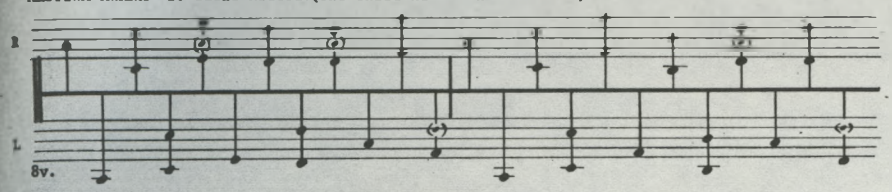

Resultant rhythm
at great speed
is more like this
etc.
-nde - re, i - ho - ha - nde - re, i ho - ha-
Simbi
-nde - re, i - ho - ha - nde - re, i - ho - ha-
"KARI MUCHIPFUWA" 3. Saini Murira.
R
L
8v.
Women's part (from TR.213.A.1 with karimba)
-e - e - i - e a - i - ye a
Start
E-
a - i - ye o, - o (3rd time) Ka-sa - ka - ra
kandi kandi - pa mto - nga ma - mbo a - i - ye ya
ai - wai - wai - wai - wai - wai -. o.
(or a - i - ye etc, as above.)
i - ye i - ye i - ye i - ye i - ye i - ye - i - ye - i - o,

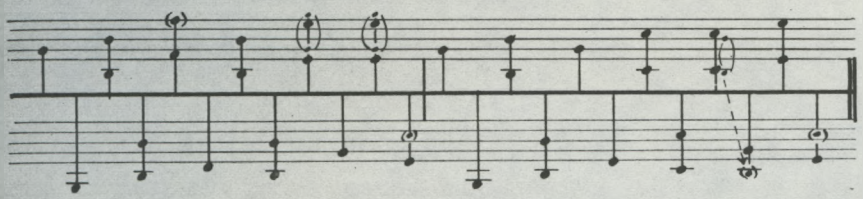

e-i-ye-i-ye-i-ye-e-ye-i-ye.
Sinati (woman), TR.213.A.1.
-he-wo-nde, e-wo-i-yai-nde-he-wo-nde, e-wo-i-yai-nde-
-he-wo-nde, e-wo-i-yai-nde-he-wo-nde, e-wo-i-yai-nde-
"MARUME ASHORA MAMBO". Saini Madera. (The men despise the chief)
R
L
8v.
-de-nda, ya-ha-hi-de-nda, ya-ha-hi-
-de-nda, ya-ha-hi-de-nda, ya-ha-hi-
i-ya-ha-nde-de, i-ya-ha-nde-de,
i-ya-ha-nde-de, i-ya-ha-nde-de,
"SITI, MUSIKANA AKANAKA" 1. Saini Madera. (Siti, the beautiful girl)
R
L
8v.



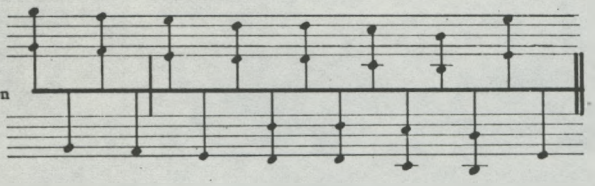
"SITI, MUSIKANA AKANAKA" 2. Saini Murira.

"AROYIWA MWANA" 1. Saini Madera.(The child has been bewitched)

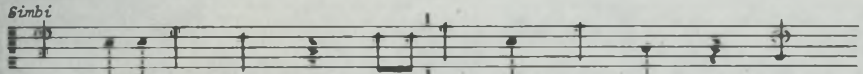


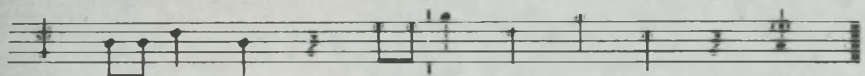


Variation

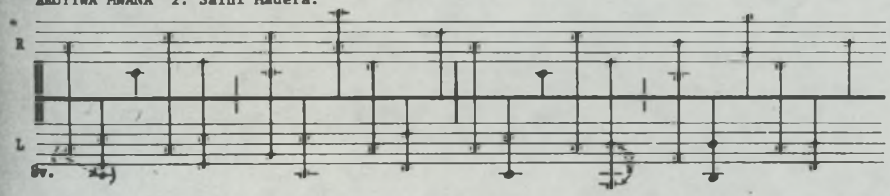


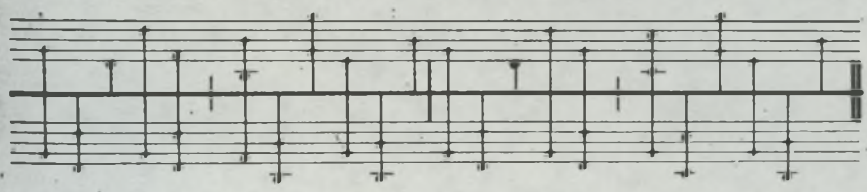
Simbi



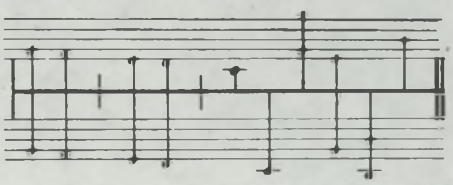


"AROYIWA MWANA" 2. Saini Madera.

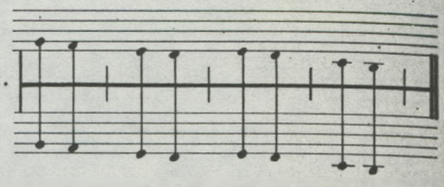




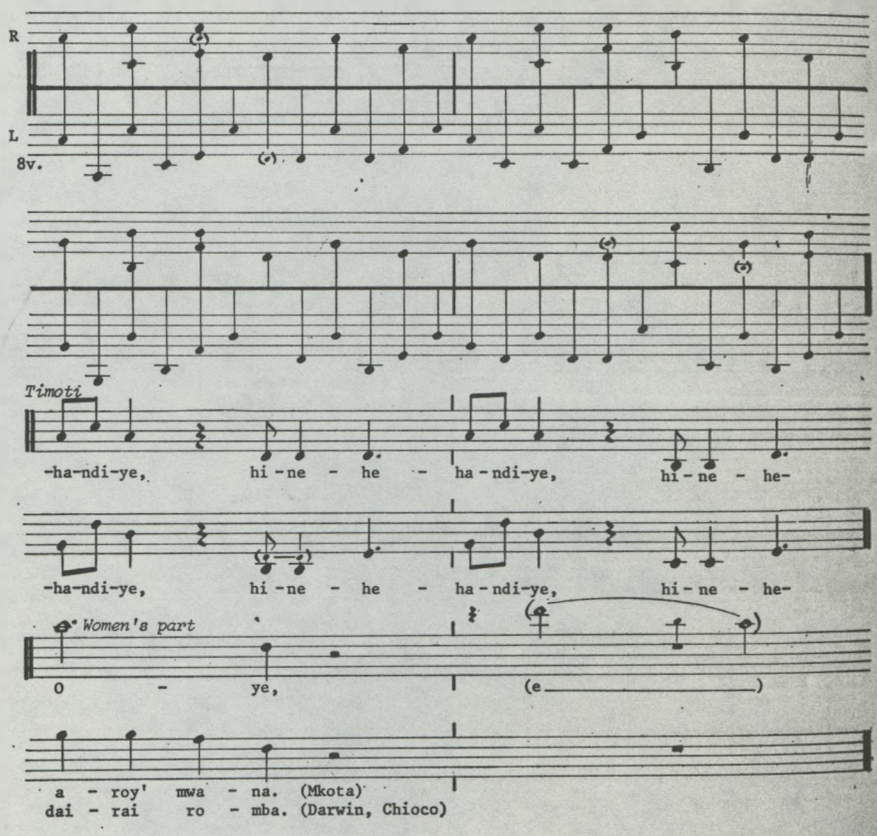
Variation 1.



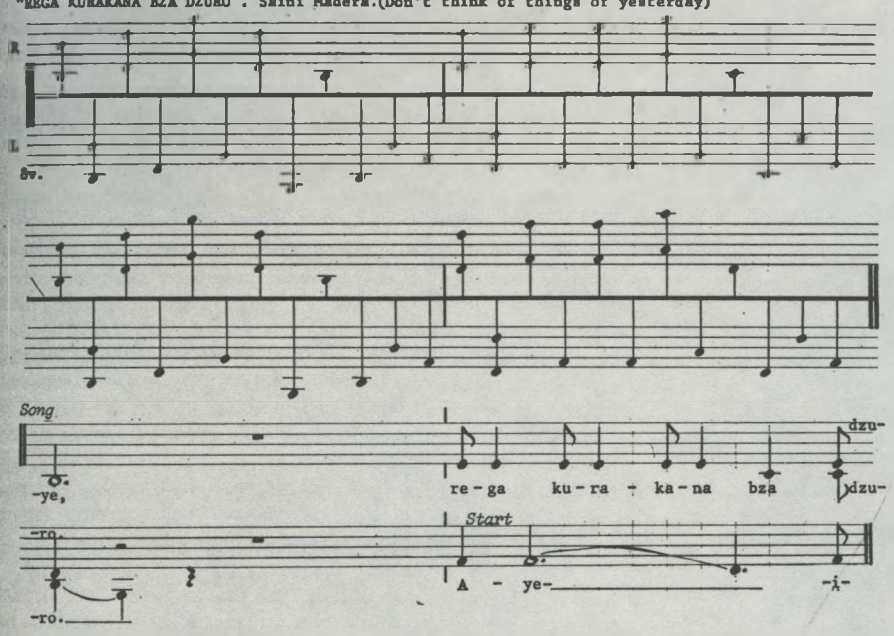
Variation 2.



"AROYIWA MWANA" 3. Saini Murira.



"REGA KURAKANA BZA DZURO". Saini Madera.(Don't think of things of yesterday)



"KANA MANO". Saini Madera. (It is clever)