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THE NYANGA PANPIPE DANCE

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THE NYANGA PANPIPE DANCE

ANDREW TRACEY

Reed pipe dances are popular in Southern Africa, the instruments usually being single-noted, one man — one note. Kirby has described those of the Hottentots, Bushmen, Tswana, Venda, N. Sotho and Ndebele¹, and this has been confirmed, for the Venda, by Blacking 2, and for the Tswana by Ballantine 3. Others are the chimveka boy's dance of the Chopi of southern Mozambique, and the nyele dance of the valley Tonga of southern Zambia. Some of the panpipe ensembles known are the ngororombe of the Tonga, and the nyere of some of the Shona, of Rhodesia, the mishiba of the Luba/Songe of the Congo, and also, exceeding all these in complexity of musical organisation and richness of sound, the magnificent nyanga panpipe ensembles of the Nyungwe people of the region around Tete, on the Zambezi river in Mozambique 4.

I will never forget the first time I heard one. On arriving at Chief Matambo's, about 25km west of Tete, I was immediately surrounded by about 50 men and women singing and playing panpipes, and a richly harmonic sound on all sides, something like being in an organ loft among the pipes. I am not the only one to have been impressed; the Nyungwe are famous for their nyanga over a large part of central Mozambique, Rhodesia and southern Malawi, and rightly so: the music is considered highly difficult to perform by most non-Nyungwe, the steps are very tricky in themselves, and need plenty of experience to be able to perform while playing a panpipe part at the same time, and the best teams are tightly rehearsed.

What follows is a description of the nyanga dance, as performed by the group of Makina Chirenje, who lives at Nsava, about 24km southwest of Tete along the road to Changara. The subchief is Tizola, the chief Matambo 5. The members of the group all live within a relatively short walking distance. Makina is the nkuru we nyanga, the maker and owner of the set, and also acts as the instructor for the pipe parts and the dancing, although he does not take a very active part in performance.

Chief Matambo often calls one or other of the several nyanga groups in his country to play at his place for visitors, or in Tete for some ceremonial government occasion. In June, 1970, for instance seven groups from different parts of Nyungwe were called to Tete airport to play for the reception of the Portuguese Governor-General. They do not play together, however, as the tuning is not standard. Otherwise the playing of nyanga appears to be non-ritual and unconnected with chiefship, usually taking place for private parties, or at weddings or funerals. However, I still have to confirm this.

The same panpipes are also used for chizimu, a dance to exorcise a bad spirit. Here Makina chose seven panpipes from the nyanga set, but six of them used only two notes each. The music has a phrase length of 24 pulses, is very fast, and seems to be related to the panpipe ensemble music of the Tonga and Zezuru of Rhodesia. I hope to be able to deal with this later.

The musical instruments of the native races of South Africa, O.U.P. 1934, reprinted Witwatersrand University Press 1953.

Venda Children's Songs, Witwatersrand University Press, 1967

"The polyrhythmic foundation of Tswana pipe melody", African Music, 111, 4, 1965.

Most of these dances are available on record from the I. L.A.M., P.O. Box 138, Roodepoort, Transvaal, South Africa. The I. L.A.M. expects to bring out shortly a stereo recording of nyanga.

The field work in 1970 and 1971, which produced the present paper was sponsored by the International Library of African Music.



Fig. 1 Makina Chirenje with his set of panpipes, June, 1970.

THE INSTRUMENTS

The instruments (nyanga, meaning literally 'horns') are made of bamboo (nsungwi), or occasionally when bamboo is unobtainable, from river reed (ntete). The bamboo does not grow in the dry, low-lying Nyungwe area, so the maker must collect the money for a trip to the higher areas towards Barwe, Malawi, or Rhodesia in order to cut it. The thickness of the pipes varies from about five eighths of an inch to one and a half inches, and the length from about four inches to 42 inches. They are tied together, after tuning, with a plaited knot, using the leaf of the ground palm (mulala). Makina's set consisted, in 1970 of 29 different panpipes, plus nine duplicates, covering a range of three octaves and a fourth. This is the biggest set I have seen; from 20 to 30 could be considered average.

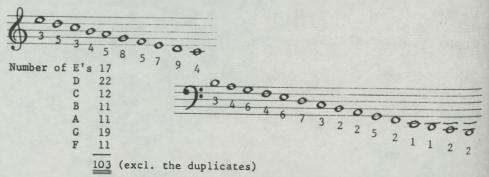


Fig. 2 The range of Makina's nyanga, written about 400 cents lower than it sounds. The numbers show how many pipes are tuned to each note.



Fig. 3 The distribution of notes among the parts.

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Most panpipes consist of four pipes, some of three. Two and five are occasionally found. Pikopiko (Panpipes no. 6 and no. 17) for instance, had five pipes, but I did not hear more than four being used. Siyarena (8), Magunte (10), Mbecho (20) and Papa (27), had three pipes each, but used only two. They are blown flute-style, with the lips only, not with the tongue out, as in some of the previously mentioned reedpipe dances. Sometimes all the panpipes of a set are painted one colour for easy identification. When not in use the set is kept together in a wooden box. Before playing, water is always poured into the pipes to swell the wood and make the pipes airtight, so they sound (also to remove the beetles!).

Individual notes do not have names, but each of the 29 different panpipes is named. Most of the parts are duplicated at the octave, some twice, as can be seen from the names, e.g. Pakira ngono — small pakira; Pakira, or Pakira ya pakati (=inside) or Pakira inango (= another) — pakira in the middle range; Pakira nkuru — big pakira.

The names give only a little clue as to musical function. They vary from place to place, although the parts themselves are relatively fixed.

Kwarira mvuuThere cried a hippoPakira— pakira = to rideKabomboSmall grasshopper

Mbite (or Jiriye) Jiriye is an ideophone for standing

Dadada ?

Pikopiko Ideophone for sticking up through something, e.g. a thorn through

clothing, stubble in a cornfield

Nyabzviruzi The owner of the whistling (a type of singing and whistling with the

tongue partly out and rolled).

Siyarena Leave Rena (a girl's name) (?)

Vore :

Magunte Bass notes, usu. of Sena valimba xylophone and Barwe nyonganyonga

mbira.

Gogoda — gogoda = to tap, knock

Ngandamu The sound of a drum, also used for a group of notes on the matepe/

hera mbira, of the Nyungwe and others

Mbecho ?
Papa ?
Pondoro Lion

The only other instruments used for nyanga are the leg rattles made of a tin can or cans, worn on the back of the right calf by some of the players, mostly the youngest or most active, those who play the middle to high-pitched panpipes. The players of the deep panpipes do very little dancing, as the blowing takes all their energy.

TUNING

The tuning is hard to measure because (1) the pipes sound different when blown cold, and out of the context of the dance, and (2) there is apparently a fairly large degree of latitude tolerated. The following tunings are therefore taken from my recordings and represent the average for each note, as I hear it. Some individual pipes vary considerably from these figures, particularly in older sets. The tuning of Mbakadiane's set at Goba is included for comparison.

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| Written | V.p.s. | Intervals (cents) | Cumulative intervals | V.p.s. | Intervals (cents) | Cumulative intervals |
|---------|--------|----------------------|----------------------|--------|----------------------|----------------------|
| E | 408 | | 1 200 | 332 | | 1 200 |
| D | 372 | 160 | 1 040 | 300 | 175 | 1 025 |
| С | 332 | 197 | 843 | 272 | 170 | 855 |
| В | 304 | 152 | 691 | 252 | 132 | 723 |
| Λ | 276 | 168 | 523 | 232 | 143 | 580 |
| G | 244 | 213 | 310 | 204 | 223 | 357 |
| F | 224 | 148 | 162 | 182 | 197 | 160 |
| E | 204 | 162 | 0 | 166 | 160 | 0 |

Fig. 4 The tuning of Makina's set of nyanga, at Matambo.

Mbakadiane's set, at Goba.

Compare the pitches of E (the final note of the nyanga "tune") with these from five other Nyungwe chiefdoms:

Gusinyu 376 v.p.s.
Gandari 336
Rego 328
Chipanda 320
Marakeza 304

These seven tunings are contained within a range of 378 cents, or about a third. I have not measured any of the nyanga of the Nyungwe on the east of the Zambezi.

In common with other reedpipe dances that have been described, the maker does not tune according to an abstracted scale. He does not tune each note in turn up or down the scale, and he does not specifically tune together the same notes on different panpipes, or check octaves or fifths. The only method seems to be to play the actual music that belongs to it, on a set that is to be tuned, and see if it fits with what is expected. Then two different panpipes of a similar pitch range are tested together, and so on through the set. For testing any particular panpipe, the one most often chosen to play against it is the one that stands next to it during the dance.

Few of the panpipes sound four consecutive notes of the scale, only Pikopiko (6 and 17), Nyabzviruzi (7) and Vore (9 and 19). Siyarena (8 and 18), Magunte (10), Mbecho (20) and Papa (27) use two adjacent notes only. The majority are gapped, and cover the interval of a fifth or sixth. The players recognise the panpipes when choosing them out of the box by their characteristic shape of long and short pipes. Kabombo (3, 15, 24) for instance, is easily recognised by its shape of long — short, short, short. If there is any doubt, they will pick up a panpipe and play the expected pattern on it, including the vocal notes, to see if it fits. Many players specialise in the playing of one particular panpipe.

Beeswax Sometimes The higher panpipes are tuned only by length, the natural node forming the bottom end. From about 332 v.p.s. (written middle C) downwards they are also tuned with tuning plugs (mhati), cut from bamboo, often from an old discarded pipe. These constrict the aperture, thus deepening the pitch, following the principle of the tuning of resonators. Also, perhaps more important, they reduce the amount of air needed to sound the deep notes. Efficiency is lost, relative to the higher pipes, but only an organ bellows could otherwise puff enough air. In the deepest pipes two mhati are used, a smaller one fitting into the larger one.

THE MUSIC

The performance consists of four main parts — the panpipe parts, together with their voiced notes, the women's choir, the dancing and the lead singer.

To take them in turn — there is only one "tune" played on the panpipes (except chizimu, mentioned above). It has no name; it is just "nyanga", This is the fixed base, together with the women's part, against which are put the variable elements of the dance steps and the lead singer's part. The nyanga tune, or pattern, is remarkably alike in its resultant sound in whatever part of the Nyungwe country it is played, although in actual realisation some of the parts may vary slightly. Some groups of the Shona of Rhodesia, whose music is related to that of the Nyungwe, have a dance with three to five panpipes called ngororombe or nyere, where, by contrast, the fixed element is the rattle playing, dancing and drumming, but there are many panpipe tunes and much variation in the performance. This also seems to have been the case among the Sena near Nsanje at the southern end of Malawi, where there was until recently a type of nyanga playing which used many different tunes.

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The nyanga "tune" is 24 pulses long. It is repeated once, then the lead singer's passage follows for another 24 pulses, making the cycle 3×24 , i.e. 72 pulses long. To start a performance Pikopiko ngono (6) or Nyabzviruzi (7) may play their part through once, upon which everybody enters, or else the lead singer may sing one phrase. A performance ends, by common agreement, at the end of the panpipe tune, when the lead singer does not continue.

Both the panpipes and the voiced notes combine to fill up all 24 pulses of the tune, as can be seen by looking at the condensation of the music (Fig. 7), but the notes are divided among the parts in typical African style. Two types of musical grouping can be discerned, where the blown note occurs at intervals of either three, or two, pulses. The parts in the score are listed in the same order as the players stand in the circle, so, starting from the top, you can first see a three-group standing next to each other, (parts 1 to 4), then a two-group (5 to 9, with the possible exception of 8), then another three-group (10 to 16, of which 13 to 16 are the octave duplicates of the first three-group) another two-group an octave below the first (17 to 19), and the low octave three-group (20 to 29).

Although these groupings were not pointed out to me, it is significant that this, with variations, is the playing order in all the nyanga groups I have heard. Another pointer to the existence of these groupings is that three three-group panpipes, pakira, kabombo and mbite, were thought to be the most important, and were usually the ones chosen to give the minimum nyanga sound when some point such as dancing was being discussed.

The three-group all share the same motor pattern, i.e. SING-BLOW-PAUSE, but each part starting at a different point in this pattern they produce together a continuous stream of both vocal and pipe notes.

| SING Kwarira mvuu Kabombo | (1, 13, 26) (3, 15, 24) | BLOW Mbite (4, 16, 25) Gogoda (11, 22, 29) | PAUSE Pakira (2, 14, 23) Mbecho (20) |
|-----------------------------|----------------------------|--|--------------------------------------|
| Magunte | (10) | | |
| Naandamu | (12 21) | | |

The two bass panpipes Papa (27) and Pondoro (28) play, in a simplified form, parts that are related respectively to Magunte / Mbecho (10, 20) and Gogoda (11, 22, 29).

The majority of the two-group blow two notes at this interval, then leave out one, in such a way that, as in the three-group, all the pulses are filled.

| | | | Pulses | | | |
|---------------------|------------|---|--------|----|---|---|
| Pikopiko | (6, 17) | | | 3 | 5 | |
| Nyabzviruzi | (7) | | | 4 | 6 | 5 |
| Nyabzviruzi (dupl.) | (7) | | 2 | | 6 | 5 |
| Siparena | (8, 18) | 1 | | 4 | | |
| Dedada | (5) | 1 | | 3 | 5 | |
| l'ore | (9, 19) | | 2 | 4 | | |
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Then they fill in some of the remaining pulses with interlocking vocal parts, some of which allow for considerable musical expression.

Although Siyarena (8, 18) blows at three-pulse intervals I prefer to group him with the two-group as (a) his vocal style is different from the three-group, (b) he stands with the two-group, and (c) at some other chiefdoms he actually blows a two-pulse pattern.

The voiced notes are less fixed than the blown notes, and depend on at least three factors—the natural voice range of the player, the way in which he hears and reacts to the total pattern around him, and finds a note to fit, and thirdly on the desire to produce satisfactory conflict with the voiced notes of the players standing next to him. Look for instance at panpipes 20, 21 and 22, who form their own trio inside the total organisation, and often stood close together playing right into one another's ears. Their panpipe and vocal parts interlock in a most satisfactory way.



Fig. 6 The resultant pattern of parts 20, 21 and 22.

Some of the voice parts resemble fairly closely other blown parts that are occurring at the same moments, e.g. compare:

these VOICE PARTS

Mbite

(4, 16)

Kwarira mvuu

(1, 13, 26)

Kabombo nkuru

(24)

with these BLOWN PARTS

Pakira

(2, 14, 23)

Siyarena

(8, 18)

There are many other correspondences, revealing this as a coherent, organised system. It is apparent from the condensations that the choice of both blown and voiced notes at any one moment is limited to a certain number of notes. When one considers what these notes are, and the way in which the chords which they form follow each other, it becomes evident that this music is closely related to that of the mbira and other instruments played by the chord-sequence using peoples of the Zambesi valley area and Rhodesia, i.e. Shona (Korekore, Tavara, Zezuru, Manyika, Karanga), Venda, Tonga, Nyungwe, Barwe, Teve, Gorongozi, Sena, etc.

I would class this particular chord sequence as an "A" standard, or "Marume" mandard, as described in my article "The matepe mbira music of Rhodesia". Some of the songs that use this sequence are "Tambura kwa nyasa" (Nyungwe, played on mbira), "Kwambura" (Barwe, mbira and bangwe zither), "Wandisunungula" (Sena, valimba sylophone), "Marume ashora mambo" (Tonga, mbira and ngororombe panpipes), "Marume arm dare", (Korekore, mbira and ngororombe panpipes), "Mudande" (Zezuru, mbira) and many others.

African Music IV, 4, 1970.
"How to play the mbira dza vadzimu", Andrew Tracey, I. L.A.M. 1970.

I have written it as:

1 3 6 1 4 6 1 3 5 7 3 5 or C E A C F A C E G B E G

each of these letters or numbers being taken to represent a chord of the note mentioned plus the fifth above. In the case of nyanga, for various reasons I have decided to write this up a third 8, i.e.:

EGCEACEGB DGB or more accurately, as in fact played in nyanga:
EGCEACEGB D(B) E

E G C E A C E G B D B E

O = blown note = voice note

Fig. 7 Condensation of the pipe and voice parts.

The nyanga chord sequence is slightly abbreviated from the full sequence in that it leave out, or perhaps hurries over, its last two chords, G and B, in order, presumably, to return to the final chord E at the end of the pattern. In the more strictly cyclical mbin music, this chord is only reached again at the beginning of the next cycle.

The chords can be followed plainly in the condensation, with an occasional doubt as to the exact point where the chord changes. Where there is doubt, it usually seems to be because of anticipation of the next chord, in one or two parts only, or because of the melodic demands of a vocal part, such as Pakura ngono (2), or even because someone has put in one or two notes in the style of the lead singer, whose part sometimes has a certain relationship with the nyanga tune.

The type of chord sequences used in this part of Africa can be characterised by their unique choice of chord movement — only to the chord a third or a fourth up, as I have previously described. An interesting feature of the chord movements in nyanga is the prominent use of the third note of the chord as the passing note towards the next chord. It is found in almost every chord change, e.g. in the 4th pulse, the G after the E chord in the 6th pulse, the B after the G chord etc. This is also found in mbira music, but probably to a lesser extent. Further, the interval of a third is sounded frequently in nyanga, whereas it is rare on the mbira or in other types of vocal music.

THE WOMEN'S CHOIR

The women, who generally stand in a group just outside the circle of panpipe players,

I have chosen this pitch as being an average of the pitches of the syangs groups from seven Nyungwe chiefdoms to the west of the Zambezi which I have recorded. It also conveys a better impression in terms of staff notation of the syangs scale, which sounds most 'minor' than 'major' to me. Rego and Chipanda, however, sound more 'major' to me. Note that this is only my subjective reaction. As can be seen from the tuning figures, these scales are neither 'major' nor 'minor'.
African Music IV, 4, 1970.

have a certain small number of fixed parts to sing, sometimes solo voice and response, but more often in unison. Their high, brilliant tone adds a piercing top part to the otherwise rather mellow sound of pipes and men's voices. Sometimes they sing the name of the dance step being performed, Kachaire, Mutwetwe, etc. Their part tends to reinforce some of the melodies inherent in the panpipe parts.



Fig. 8 Part of Makina's group, May, 1971.

THE DANCING

The panpipe players dance fixed, named steps in unison, while continuing to play their own parts on the panpipes. This is no mean feat, as will be appreciated. The step falls in a different relationship with each of the panpipe parts, staggered as they are, so that the motor pattern for each player's combination of step, blowing and singing is quite different. Most steps consist of 24 pulses, and are then repeated once. Some are different the first and second times through. Two steps that I noted, Masau and Tsawatsawa, fall in between the pulses of the panpipe music, in the relationship of three against two.

The beats notated represent the audible part of the dancing, a stamp on the ground with the right leg, the one carrying the rattle. There is more to it than this though — movements such as shifting the weight onto the other foot, swinging the stamping leg back and forth, turning in and out of the circle and so on. The position is slightly crouched; the more enthusiastic, the lower. During the lead singer's phrase the dancers usually walk around the circle anti-clockwise, in the rhythm of the "waiting step", sometimes with one hand on the shoulder of the man in front. When the dancing starts again, turn in and put right foot forward. Or else they step on the spot with the right foot in this rhythm.

One dance step may last anything from four to fifteen or more repeats; perhaps an

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B/E

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o the west of the ich sounds more ojective reaction average would be from five to eight. The choice of dance step is up to the lead singer. By introducing the name of another step into one of his phrases, the dancers are warned to change step next time, as you can see in some of the phrases transcribed. (The name of the step is underlined.)

"Nyungu agona" (= white man sleeps), may be performed during any dance step. The panpipes are not played, leaving only the sound of the dancing "so as not to wake the white man". At the normal rate he would be lucky to snatch more than a couple of minutes' sleep!

THE LEAD SINGER

The lead singer (mureketeri) changes frequently during the course of a performance. It usually seems to be the older men, the "characters", who have something amusing to say, that take this part. Every man knows a certain number of 'kureketera' parts, and when his supply is exhausted, someone else takes over. Sometimes two men start to sing at the same time, when one of them will stop. If they both stop, this may cause a brief hiatus, and some amusement, before one of them picks up again in time to get a few words in before the panpipes come in again at the end of the allotted 24 pulses. See line six for an example of a fill-in part.

The words may be topical, praising, moralising, humorous, or dance step instructions, as can be seen from the few examples I am able to give here.

THE NOTATION

I first learned to play the *nyanga* parts from Mbakadiane, the leader of the Goba team. Subsequently, I chose Makina's team for further study, and the panpipe parts given here are transcriptions of a particular recording I made for the purpose. As for the dance steps and the other parts, some I have learned myself on the spot, some are from my recordings.

Tempo depends partly on the situation; at the reception at Tete airport, where seven teams were performing in an atmosphere of excitement and noise, the tempo was mostly around crotchet (i.e. two pulses) = 140, with one team, Marakeza, as fast as 160. At home, however, the tempo tends to be slower, around 130, or sometimes even as slow as 120.

Note that the vocal parts are written one octave higher than they sound. One reason is ease of writing; many of the parts can be combined on one stave this way. Another is connected with the sound of the voice and the effort needed to sing these high notes, most of which lie near the top end of the vocal register. If a pipe note, say the top E, is played, and then one attempts to sing the same note, what sounds the same is usually found to be actually an octave lower. It certainly seems wrong, or upside down, in reading any of these parties the voice part is written at its correct lower pitch.

A key to the few special signs used will be found below. The few notes that do not coincide with the pulse lines are to be read as exactly half way between, e.g. in Nyabeviruzi (7).

- a variation where a particular note is delayed (or advanced) by one pulse or a half pulse

 () denotes an alternative note, variation not regularly played

 encloses two notes or sequences

 a variation where a particular note is delayed (or advanced) by one pulse or a half pulse

 hold the note longer than one pulse a variation consisting of a sequence of notes

 a yodelled note
- encloses two notes or sequences either of which may be played at discretion; there is no preference

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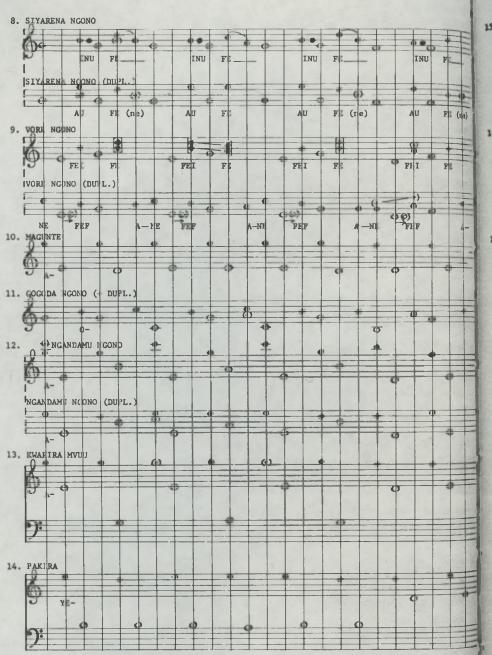
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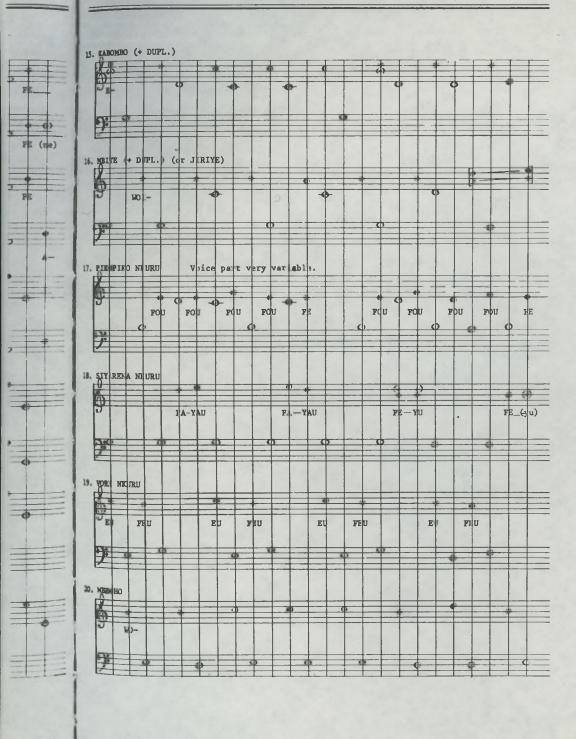
one pulse

PANPIPE PARTS 1. KHARIRA MVUU NGONO 2. PAKIRA NGONO (basic part) PAKIRA NGONO (ALT. PAKTRA NGONO 3. KABOMBO NGONO 6. PIKOPIKO NGONO (indefinite pitch) Pikopiko ngono from Goba, to give a voice part. THOU THOU THOU THOU 7. NYABZVIRUZI 0 (0) FOU FOU FOU FOU YABZVIRUZI (DUPL. FEI FEI FEI FEI (wei) FEI



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27.

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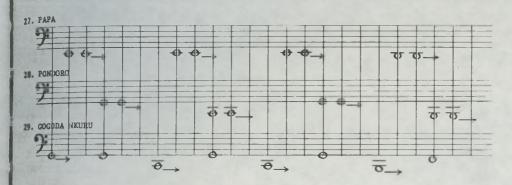
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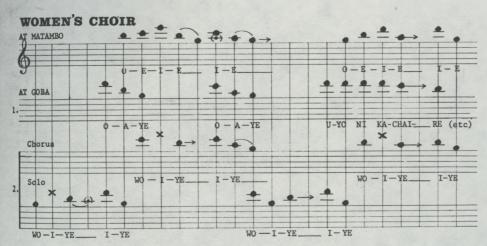
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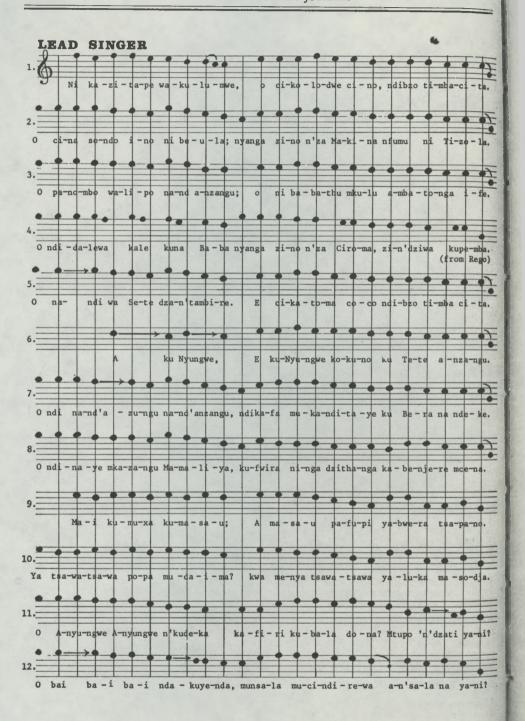


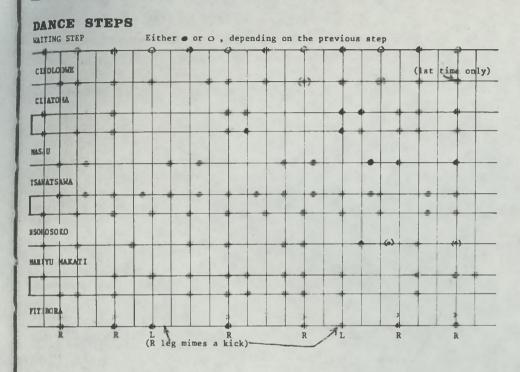
X = yodelled note

Translation of the lead singer's parts on the next page:

- 1. It's become "kazitape"(?), friends, this cikolodwe (a bush fruit), that's what we are doing.
- 2. This Sunday is only a start; these nyanga belong to Makina, of Chief Tizola.
- 3. There are also friends here; but it is our great father who governs us.
- 4. I said to the Padre long ago, these nyanga are Roman Catholics, they know how to pray.
- 5. Oh here's Sete, come and relieve me. This cikatoma (also a bush fruit), that's what we are doing.
- 6. Ah, in Nyungwe, here in Nyungwe, at Tete, friends.
- 7. Oh whites, oh comrades, when I die, take me by plane to Beira to bury me.
- 8. I have my wife, Maria, white as a pumpkin, a white pumpkin.
- 9. Mother, at home there are masau (wild apples); masau time has come.
 10. Do you dance tsawatsawa on your feet like that? Dance tsawatsawa because the soldiers are getting
- 11. Oh you Anyungwe, you Anyungwe, is it good for a black to give birth to a white girl? What surname would you give her?
- 12. Bye bye, now I'm going; you'll stay cursing me. With whom shall I stay?

I am very grateful to Padre Domingos Ferrão of the Missão São Paulo, Tete, for these translations from his own language into Portuguese, and for other help.





e-ni.

a-no.

o-dja.

ya-ni?

a-ni?