

were characterized by a use of sombre colours suggesting to us a kind of a lost and dead world. Rezant's forest sunset has some of the fieriness of our sunsets but the general weakness of the picture is due to uncontrolled brush work. A. C. Mashngane's pencil drawings showed a studious purpose on the part of the artist to master line technique. Although the two pieces are just sketches they were obviously done with feeling. Then there was Tom Ngwenya whose use of colour is his own as shown in his huge peacocks of many colours. Very charming was his church with a steeple that has all sides shown on one plane!

The beadwork pieces were made on old Zulu and Shangaan lines adapted for the modern wearer (especially the Shangaan ones). Some of the Zulu pieces were good even by old Zulu standards especially the married man's girdle and a snuff-box cover. But most interesting were Mrs. T. C. Bengu's notes accompanying some of the specimens. It is quite obvious that Mrs. Bengu knows well what she was writing about. Her notes were very illuminating on all matters of significance of colours of beads and patterns. She only omitted to add that the significance of these things changes with places. Although there are generally accepted symbols used, it seems, clans even localities evolve their own system of symbolism. For instance I remember a member of the Makhanya clan somewhere along the Natal coast saying that red beads stand for love "for they flame like love itself", and I have been told that elsewhere red beads are merely decorative and of no other significance. Also, while it seems generally accepted that when a woman presents her husband with a "phasi" that has a design in juxtaposition she is gently "pulling him up" about drinking too much, other women use this as a means of just being different.

The Polly Street Adult Education Centre now holds a unique place in the art life of Johannesburg. A Centre where a new kind of artist is being developed who brings to the forms of the West a rich inheritance of the art of Africa. To the Africans themselves Polly Street Centre is an important place for it is where the new type of African—the town born and bred African may find guidance and practical help in the handling of an art-form that he means to adopt as his own too for the expression of those emotions that he finds rising within his soul in his new life and environment.

139

RECORDING TOUR 1949

H. T. TRACEY

DURING the past five months, May to October 1949, I have been on tour recording African music. The countries visited included Portuguese East Africa, Belgian Congo, Northern and Southern Rhodesia and Nyasaland. To do this we had to travel nearly 8000 miles much of which was very rough. The recording apparatus used was a modern English tape recorder, which being a studio rather than a portable model was given a severe testing. It was carried in the recording van bolted down to the floor. A small petrol driven motor of 220 volts A.C. provided the power for recording and was towed behind the recording van in a light trailer. The records taken during this tour will be made available to members of the Society and others during the next few months as soon as they are processed and printed.

The area covered this year was too vast to allow us to do more than a brief survey, to sample what was offering and to become acquainted at first hand with the many problems which face the musicians of the five territories.

Portuguese West Africa

We arrived in Lourenço Marques in the third week in May *en route* for the Chopi district of Zavala, recording Shangaan songs *en route*, only to be dismayed by three weeks of intermittent rain, most unusual during this month. The Shangaan villages we visited were otherwise preoccupied and our recordings in the Xinavane and Bilene Macia districts were on the whole disappointing. In one village we found half a dozen old Shangaan fighters of Gungunyana's days and they sang us some of the regimental songs of their youth, about 1890. The singers were well over seventy years old.

On arrival at the borders of Zavala, we were quickly made to feel at home and started recording in real earnest. This was made the easier both by the welcome we were afforded by the administrative officials, and also by the many kindnesses we experienced at the hands of the many personnel of the W.N.L.A., the large recruiting organization which has camps dotted all over the south of the territory.

I was not surprised to find that during the last four years nearly all the music of the large Chopi *timbila* (xylophone) orchestras had been changed and new songs and tunes had replaced those I heard on my last visit. The outstanding orchestra this year was found at

Canda's village. The instruments here had a roundness of tone and trueness of tuning which were a delight to hear. But brilliant playing was not confined to one orchestra. In nearly every one of the eleven orchestras recorded we found brilliant movements, how splendid will be appreciated when the records are released. It seems clear that this extraordinary little tribe, the Chopi, is many centuries ahead of the rest of Southern African peoples in musical ability.

A side of Chopi music not usually met was sung by women only. It appears that the women have a set of songs and laments composed and sung by themselves. Crowded into the small confines of a round hut a score or more women sit around on the floor leaving a few square feet clear for the soloist. They then get up in turn and sing and dance their laments. They concern the loss of their husbands (we heard several by the widows of chief Mahlatini), the absence of their sons at the mines, the minor or major tragedies of their lives. It is an art quite apart from the more dramatic xylophone music but nevertheless full of poetry and a most important outlet for the expression of their feelings.

Farther east at the corner of the territory near Cape Corrientes, and the historic little town of Inhambane, we met the Tswana and Tonga tribes. Quite the most deafening din of the whole tour was recorded under the title of Tonga dancing. Here an ensemble of four or five drums backed up by the beating of a sheet of flat iron and singing through horns made of metal made an almost impossible cacophony, to which attractively dressed young men and women performed a hip shaking dance.

The breakdown of one of our vehicles and the continual rain curtailed our work in this southern end of the Mozambique colony as the coast road north to the Buzi River was closed by the floods. This made it necessary for us to go up to the Congo via Beit Bridge. We had an appointment at Elizabethville on July 1st to hear the famous native choir, "The Singers of the Copper Cross" and so we hurried north to start recording there and then to work our way south.

Belgian Congo

We arrived on the afternoon of 1st July after a rough passage across ungraded gravel roads only to find we were late for the Choir's performance in the Cathedral. But Father Lamoral, the Choir's gifted master, arranged for a recording session a few days later, in one of the large halls of the Benedictine school which teaches over 3000 African pupils near the native city. Two hundred small boys

and youths were brought into the hall and grouped. In looks they were very much like any other assembly of small Africans and, frankly, I was quite unprepared for what happened when Ba Joseph Kiwele, their conductor and the composer of the music they were about to sing stood up on the rostrum and called for silence.

He started them in the Kyrie, the first part of his own composition—the “Missa Katanga”, and the atmosphere was electric. Never in all my experience of Native singing have I heard its like. An African mass, with all the dignity and maturity of great cathedral singing, yet unmistakably African in conception. The Mass, which is the work of a sensitive musical mind, has managed in no small degree to bring the natural talent of the African singer into harmony with the Christian tradition and yet lose nothing in the process. In fact, the opposite. Sung in Latin the words also seemed to suit the natural vowel sounds of the Luba, Lunda and other Kasai boys who made up the choir.

The Mass was followed by two hymns, one to “Our Lady” and the other to “The Martyrs of Uganda”. They were both accompanied by drums. The result was original and authentic, and at once gave one the conviction that here at last was a channel for religious music immediately acceptable to both traditions, the African musical genius and the Christian ethic. Both hymns were recorded and it will be interesting to hear in what way they compare with a similar experiment undertaken further north at Brazzaville by M. Herbert Pepper.

The remainder of our recordings in the Congo were restricted to the south eastern corner of the Katanga province, although many of our singers had come from central and northern Congo as well. Xylophones, “pianinos” and drums were the main instruments, with a single example of the Nilotic harp.

Northern Rhodesia

We entered Northern Rhodesia by means of the ferry at Kasenga across the Luapula River and found first of all the large Luunda tribe along its right bank. Here the influence of the Congo was paramount as their tradition and musical loyalties still look across the river towards the west from whence they came some two hundred years ago. In addition to their music they have brought with them their message drums, the *mondo* slit drums. This is perhaps the farthest south the “talking” drums have penetrated. We made a