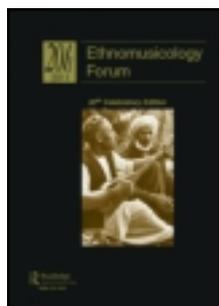


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Ethnomusicology Forum

Publication details, including instructions for authors and subscription information:

<http://www.tandfonline.com/loi/remf20>

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Published online: 18 Jul 2013.

To cite this article: Ethnomusicology Forum (2013): Defending Kakraba: Promoting Intercultural Curiosity, Ethnomusicology Forum, DOI: 10.1080/17411912.2013.812546

To link to this article: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/17411912.2013.812546>

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Defending Kakraba: Promoting Intercultural Curiosity

Peter Cooke

An earlier article of mine introducing the question of how African speakers of tone languages may audit instrumental music played by their own traditional musicians was criticised as a piece of 'colonial essentialism' by the African musicologist Kofi Agawu in his writings on 'Representing African Music'. This response presents more biographical information on the Ghanaian master musician Kakraba Lobi, along with a discussion of the findings of other scholars who researched the music of his instrument, the gyil. Further evidence from Uganda on instrumental representation of music is then provided, lending weight to the argument that Ugandan instrumentalists habitually communicate texts embedded within their musical performances. The final section suggests that there is a consequent need to research not only how composers incorporate texts but also how their listeners experience such instrumental performance. It ends by reiterating the need for enquiry among listeners in partnership with careful analysis and observation of the musicking that they audit.

Keywords: Africa; Kakraba Lobi; Ghana; Uganda; Gyil; Xylophone; Listening; Tone Language; Song

Introduction

This is a belated personal response to two articles by Kofi Agawu on the theme of 'Contesting Difference: A Critique of Africanist Ethnomusicology':¹ their purpose

Peter Cooke's research into African music began while teaching in East Africa during the period 1964–68. From 1969 until 1994, he researched Scottish music and taught ethnomusicology at the University of Edinburgh. He also worked part-time as senior editor for *The New Grove Dictionary of Music* (1980). Upon retirement he moved to Birmingham and for some years taught ethnomusicology at the University of Birmingham and the University of Wolverhampton, and is currently an Honorary Research Associate at both Birmingham University and SOAS, respectively. He is author of numerous articles and also compiler of several CDs and teaching manuals featuring Ugandan music. Correspondence to: Dr Peter Cooke, 29 Shepherds Pool Road, Sutton Coldfield B75 6NB, UK. Email: petercookie@btinternet.com

¹These words form the title of a shorter version of Chapter 7 in Agawu's book *Representing African Music* (2003a), also headed 'Contesting Difference'.

was ‘to develop a critique of notions of difference manifest in writings on African music’, to ‘ask whether difference is real’ and ‘to urge a resistance to difference’ (Agawu 2003b: 228). He argued that ‘a persistent strategy of “differencing” dating back to the European Enlightenment was still alive today’, and he cited my brief contribution to an issue of *The World of Music* as an example of the continued promulgation of ‘Hegelian ideas of difference...in a direct and aggressively essentialist mode’. His critique focused on the article ‘Was Ssempeke Just Being Kind? Listening to Instrumental Music in Africa South of the Sahara’ (Cooke 1999), where I had speculated (and it was no more than speculation) that—because instrumentalists habitually incorporated verbal texts into their playing—some African audiences may have a mode of listening that was different from the way Europeans experience European instrumental music. This possibility was apparently unpalatable to Agawu, bearing in mind his wish to ‘contest difference through an embrace of sameness’ in the constructing of ethnographic reports. Accordingly, he argued, the evidence cited in support of my speculations was ‘questionable’, and I had furthermore undercomplicated European practice in order to demonstrate Africa’s ostensible uniqueness. He concluded: ‘while Africans deserve full recognition for whatever is unique about their critical and cultural practices, they do not need fake or facile attributions’ (Agawu 2003b: 230–1).

When these views appeared in *Representing African Music* (Agawu 2003a) and while I was considering the worth of attempting some defence of my speculations, a review of the book by Veit Erlmann appeared in *Music Theory Spectrum* (2004), in which Erlmann maintained that Agawu’s critique of my work was ‘somewhat hasty’ and opined that another article by me (Cooke 1970) suggested that the ‘construction of African listening practices is more than a simple twentieth-century promulgation of Hegelian ideas about the utter impenetrability of the African character’ (Erlmann 2004). He suspected that

the gist of Agawu’s condemnation was meant, perhaps unconsciously, to serve quite a different agenda: that of preserving as unproblematic and unquestioned a series of key notions routinely held in music theory about the relationship between analysis, listening, and the work of art. (Erlmann 2004: 296–7)

I accordingly decided against writing my response as I was busy preparing for fresh fieldwork in Uganda, and I was also rounding off the occasional part-time teaching at local universities in the English Midlands, having officially retired a decade previously. However, when Birmingham University library acquired a copy of *The Cultural Study of Music* (Clayton, Herbert and Middleton 2003) as late as 2011, for ‘bought-in’ (part-time) teachers are rarely consulted when deciding what additions should be made to departmental libraries, I read in Agawu’s chapter entitled ‘Contesting Difference’ that, in his repeated need to expose the ‘fragility’ of my speculation, he now dismissed the oral testimony of the Ghanaian musician Kakraba Lobi as that of an ‘illiterate’. Clearly, a response was called for if only to defend a

musician who had no voice in the world of academe, but who was a master musician with perceptions and opinions that were worth some serious consideration.

It is clear, however, from Agawu's protestations that I need to enlarge on the evidence provided in my brief article, so additional reports of how Ugandan musicians regard instrumental music are included, together with references to other writings on the music of Kakraba's instrument, the Lobi *gyil* xylophone. I also argue the need for more research into how music is experienced. I make no attempt to respond to the charge of 'undercomplicating' European music since I was primarily concerned with what musicians—Kakraba in particular—and listeners perceived as important to them. I consider that Kakraba had no need to be acquainted with 'Sturm and Drang' in Mozart's language or Liszt's paraphrases of Schubert (Agawu 2003a: 161) when he remarked that his music was different from European instrumental music because his xylophone usually encoded verbal texts, and that, as far as he could gather, this was not the case for the instrumental music he had heard at an orchestral concert in Cologne the previous night.

Kakraba Lobi

Kakraba Lobi (1939?–2007) was one of Ghana's best known traditional instrumentalists, skilled in performing the musical repertory and rituals associated with the Lobi *gyil* xylophone. His playing and singing earned him fame that extended far beyond his native region. A biographical article on Kakraba by fellow countryman, Ben Aning, relates how the young Kakraba left his occupation as a farmer in his native village, Kalba Saru in Ghana's Upper West Region, and soon discovered that he could make more money as a street musician in Accra. His skill quickly became well known, and in 1957 he gave his first broadcast for the Ghana Broadcasting Corporation at the invitation of A. A. Mensah. In 1966, Professor J. H. Kwabena Nketia appointed him to teach the *gyil* at the School of Music and Drama (now Department of Music, School of Performing Arts) at the University of Ghana in Legon, and during his long career Kakraba also travelled to teach and perform as a concert soloist in Europe, the USA and numerous other countries over a period of several decades after first visiting Israel in the company of Nketia (Aning 1989: 96–7).

Aning also recounts how in 1959 or 1960 Kakraba, still a teenager, first faced the problem of playing for audiences different from those of his own home region while pausing to rest in Osu, a suburb of Accra. Kakraba needed to rest because he was carrying a newly borrowed instrument:

He put the xylophone down under a tree and began to play idle tunes on it. People who heard it invited him to come and play for them. He was reluctant at first because he knew they did not know the Lobi language and therefore would neither understand nor enjoy the music. But as people insisted, he obliged and played something to them first in Lobi musical idiom and then in the popular highlife idiom of the south. They understood the latter and therefore danced to it. (Aning 1989: 96)

Trevor Wiggins informed me that:

In Ghana there is the tradition among many musicians (or, at least, xylophone players) that when you are out of your home territory, you play something for the local people. Either something they recognise, or something of their music etc. This seems to have two functions: first of responding politely to your hosts in showing an interest and admiration for their music, such that it is worth your while copying and learning, as well as performing for them. But the second function is also to prove that you are such a complete musician that you CAN perform their music very well, as well as your 'own'. (T. Wiggins, personal email communication, 18 July 2012)

One can well understand the young Kakraba choosing to perform Highlife for his ethnically-mixed audience in Osu. What is important here is Aning's remark that Kakraba's reluctance to play Lobi music seemed to stem from the fact that he was concerned that they would not know his language. This immediately suggests that an important element in Kakraba's Lobi-Birifor xylophone music involves the presentation of texts: the work of several scholars bears this out.

Brian Hogan, in his thesis *Enemy Music: Blind Birifor Xylophonists of Northwest Ghana* (2011), devotes a chapter to a discussion of the use of speech surrogation in the repertory of *gyil* players, and in it he discusses in detail how Lobi *gyil* music is, in fact, text based and examines the various techniques that enable *gyil* performers to present texts effectively and to weave them into creative musical performances. Writing of funeral rituals in particular: 'These texts gain legitimacy and recognition through performance in ritual context, yet require active attention to decipher' (Hogan 2011: 244; see also Vercelli 2006: 15; Godsey 1984: 104 and 107). Moving outside Ghana, one finds Strand exploring the *baan* xylophone tradition in neighbouring Burkina Faso: the *baan* being a large gourd-resonated 23-key instrument played by three persons. She describes the high degree to which the lead musician makes use of speech surrogacy:

In addition to the lead patterns for each song, which embody the lyrics of the songs themselves, the soloist must be able to improvise variations to the song patterns, and most importantly, insert speech passages into the music that communicate with the dancers. (Strand 2009: 216)

Rather than assuming that his music's *style* would be unfamiliar to his audience, it seems that Kakraba judged that even southern Ghanaians would listen for texts but that they would not understand the texts encoded in his Lobi repertory. Between 1963 and 1977, Kakraba made at least six performing and teaching visits to various foreign countries, including a visit to West Germany in 1966 in the company of J. H. K. Nketia. During this trip, Aning recounts, Kakraba visited a xylophone factory the day after attending an evening concert of orchestral music, and during the visit he was invited to demonstrate his skill on a European xylophone:

After satisfying himself that the tuning was different from that of his own xylophone, he decided not to attempt to play any of the xylophone music that he

knew from his homeland. Instead he decided to improvise. He then quickly recalled his impressions of the previous evening's orchestral music and decided to play in that style. He improvised a melody that was characterized by distinctively slow and very fast moving phrases. The rest of the demonstration was characterized by contrasting *pianissimo* and *fortissimo* as well [as] *accelerando* and *ritardando* sections. He was consciously and intentionally introducing Western musical elements and performance style into his music for the first time. (Aning 1989: 106)

Kakraba later reworked this improvisation into a programmatic concert item and gave it the Ewe title *Gidigidi menyoo*—a description of a fight between two young women—and in Ben Aning's account we read that Krakaba commented on it:

It is like no other Lobi music... It does not speak. It has no words. It is like European music. When you listen to *Gidigidi menyoo* it is played in the Western style, the way they play loud and soft. So I can say it is a very interesting composition. (Aning 1989: 106)

It is because these words resonated so readily with my considerable experience of instrumental music-making in the Ugandan countryside that I quoted them in my article, for here was evidence from West Africa suggesting that a style of instrumental performance, where words are frequently encoded in instrumental playing, was not unique to Uganda.

Other than Hogan's data mentioned above, much of this information about Kakraba was known to Agawu when he dismissed Kakraba's oral comments as the words 'attributed to an illiterate but highly skilled musician' (2003b: 230), and it is somewhat surprising that the illogicality of this remark was not noticed by his editors, nor the equally illogical statement preceding it—namely that Cooke 'sets out to prove that Africans "may well listen in a different way from the way Europeans do"' (Agawu 2003a: 230; also Agawu 2003b: 160). How does one *prove* that something *may* be the case? One can speculate, however, which was the point of the brief article. The sentence I used, which appears in the abstract, is as follows: 'Several statements from African musicians stress the importance of verbal texts in the content of instrumental patterns and suggest that they may well listen in a different way... ' (Cooke 1999: 73).

One wonders also why Agawu chose to ignore Aning's remark in an article he reviewed (Agawu 1990: 460–3) that although Kakraba had not received any formal education, he had 'learned to write, speak English and sign his name with a reasonable degree of fluency' (Aning 1989: 95). It is possible that Kakraba acquired literacy skills after he first discussed his concert piece with Aning but, in any case, if researchers were to avoid working with musicians who were not literate this could surely lead to very skewed accounts of many rural musical traditions.

Kakraba provided further evidence of how he regarded his Lobi repertory while he was visiting Köln University (Germany) in 1977, for there he recorded his first LP (TGS 130, Tangent Records, London, 1978). The record sleeve provides further insights, albeit mediated through the words of his German host, the ethnomusicologist Robert Günther, who compiled the sleeve notes. His note for track 1 entitled

‘Ganda[a] Yina’ (described as traditional funeral music for an old man) begins with: ‘The xylophone “speaks” about the dead body saying that death doesn’t ignore you because you are good’ and ends with ‘Kakraba’s use of his own voice in this recording does not follow the original custom; his spoken words are meant as additional information’. One must keep in mind that the performance context—a European recording studio—is very different from any traditional context, as was the intended audience, so this last observation may have little relevance.

When discussing this same piece, Aning commented:

The LobBirifor *Darkpen* player may or may not provide a vocal line to the *kogyil* part. There is no hard and fast rule governing this practice. Notwithstanding this, the writer has witnessed Kakraba perform his *Gandaa yina* on a few occasions without the accompanying line. (Aning 1989: 107)

Meanwhile, Günther’s sleeve note to the Highlife song (track 3) includes the comment:

Among people who play and listen to xylophone music as part of their everyday lives the instrument carries the words—to those who know them—just as the voice does. Thus one may hear Kakraba say, ‘The xylophone says . . .’ or ‘the xylophone sings . . .’

The final track features the concert piece—which ‘has no words’ and to which Ben Aning had referred. Günther also informs us that this was

a xylophone solo specially created by Kakraba Lobi in 1966 as a virtuoso concert piece. Influenced perhaps by his experience of non-African music, this piece is not notated but exists in his mind as a clearly defined and finished work.

However, Agawu asked ‘Does Kakraba have a suasive agenda? What are his referents for “European music” and “western style”?’ and he adds also: ‘I doubt that his understanding was deep enough for his words to be cited as evidence of a “basic difference” between European and African music’ (2003a: 161–2). These seem to be irrelevant questions, for  important was what Kakraba then perceived as a basic difference between his own word-based music and the orchestral music he had experienced.

Promoting Curiosity

When a distinguished instrumentalist explains—perhaps, although not necessarily, through the medium of a translator—that his instrument ‘speaks’ when he plays it, and that his music sounds like words, a curious researcher may wish to know more. What does he mean? And, equally importantly, what are the implications for not only the producers (composer/performers) of such a repertory, but also for the receivers (i.e., their audiences)? Lobi Birifor, like the languages of Uganda, is classed as a tone language so it seems likely that in Kakraba’s xylophone performances, rhythm and

melody were combined into musical patterns that at the same time suggested or were derived from texts. Much has been written by linguists and musicologists about the influence of language tone on song, and about the extent to which it is or is not preserved in the vocal performance of song, but the literature discussing the extent to which such a relationship might affect the production of instrumental music is small. Our knowledge of how listeners decode such music is even smaller.

Semioticians have called for more than an examination of the *niveau neutre* ('neutral level' or 'autonomous level') of any music, and when Agawu frequently argues his case for the autonomy of 'the musical work', he seems to be discounting the need also to enquire into the processes of composing—the aims of the composer/performer and what they say about their way of achieving these aims; the contexts in which the performance occurs; and, not least, how the performances are received by the listeners. Little has been written about this last aspect in relation to music in Africa so that any comments from composers or listeners about musical performance could—for the curious—prompt fruitful enquiry: indeed, my article was intended to do just this.

One may restrict one's research to the etic analysis of a musical item and, for example, simply assess a number of transcriptions of songs performed by speakers of tonal languages. Ewe is classed as a tonal language, and Agawu nevertheless argued that the tonal outlines of the texts of seven Ewe songs which he examined were often not preserved when sung (Agawu 1988: 143). Whether one accepts his particular analysis and its findings or not, one can agree with him that native listeners need not misinterpret the verbal content of the singing of vocalists, for any ambiguity of meaning arising from non-conformity of the melody with the requirements of language tone is often resolved by consideration of semantic context and other clues. Listeners may also enjoy the interplay of tension and de-tension deliberately created by any mixture of conformity and non-conformity of language tone with melody. However, the case of instrumental music, especially that where singing is absent or plays a minor part, is different, and what instrumentalists and their listeners—illiterate or not—*say* about the music must be worth considering.

More 'Fragile' Evidence from Uganda

Over a period of four years while teaching and exploring music making in Uganda (1964–68), I learned that a tiny proportion of the instrumental music which I encountered and recorded in the royal palaces and the rural regions did not consist of solo or ensemble renderings related to song texts; that is, they did not incorporate the melo-rhythms of verbal phrases which initially were very often the 'key texts' of the songs. Simha Arom used the term 'key phrases' (1985: 453) when he wrote of the relationship between instrumental hocket and vocal music in the Central African Republic, a reflection perhaps of a different approach, since he was apparently little concerned with the texts of songs related to the hocketing and the effects that the texts might have on the music making.

There is clearly a need, however, to distinguish rural and conservative musical practices and listening habits from those of the towns. When this writer first arrived in Kampala in 1964, the laconic drawl of the American Country and Western musician Jim Reeves could be heard from the open windows of student hostels; the streets and markets in the city centre were filled with the sound of Congolese *lingala* (elsewhere known as the Congolese dance music genre *soukous*) and other hybrid musical idioms; and singers in school and church choirs were familiar with and usually delighted by the European harmonic style introduced decades earlier by the missionaries, even when they were aware of the linguistic distortion that could and did occur when vernacular texts were fitted to European melodies. Clearly, listening practices could well ing in tandem with the musical changes that were gathering pace throughout Africa, and my piece could well have been faulted for neglecting to refer to the hybridising impact of globalisation and its possible effect on listening habits.

The few genres of rural Ugandan music that were possibly not derived from verbal texts included flute pieces performed in the south-west by pastoralists among the Bakiga and Banyankore ethnic groups. Some of these pieces were herders' music, and their playing was done for self-delectation to help the day pass while watching over their herds in solitude; other pieces were actually played for the cattle (not for human listeners) and yet other flute playing was done in alternation with stylised speech. More examples of apparently 'wordless' flute playing (unaccompanied by singing) were pieces performed during dancing only after introductory texts had been sung or recited. Examples are the Kiga *kaki-tari* dance and possibly the *ekitaaguriro* dance of the Banyankore),² although Wachsmann commented in connection with the second genre:

The musical structure of the piece depends on the two leaders who clothe speech in melody, first vocally and then instrumentally, and on the group actions of several men . . . The flute and flowery speech melody, whether produced by a singer or a flautist, provides a striking contrast to the halting and spare bass of the chorus. (Wachsmann 1953: 55)

Some of the latter flute playing could be described as the instrumental equivalent of ululation. These particular instrumental genres have to date received little attention from scholars. Similarly, a few musical genres for plucked string instruments may not incorporate text-related melodic phrases, for instance the music of the now rare three-stringed *adungu* (musical bow) played by Acholi women, which the player rhythmically strums while singing,³ and some of the music for the various zithers of northern and western Uganda, which similarly seem to sound short and constantly repeated ostinato phrases that may or may not be related tonally to texts. Again, virtually no research of these zither genres has been attempted so one cannot say more about this.

²Several sound examples may be found online at <http://sounds.bl.uk> by typing *ekinimba* (the name of a Kiga flute) into the search box. The solo item recorded by Cooke may be the sole example of 'wordless' playing.

³For a recorded example, visit <http://sounds.bl.uk> by searching the song title 'Maro ma doye aryo'.

During those years, I was learning to play Kiganda instrumental music (always described as ‘songs’) on the *amadinda* xylophone and the *ndere* (notched flute). My flute teacher, Blasio Busulwa, was a former member of the *abalere ba Kabaka* (‘the king’s flute players’) who had joined me as a colleague on the staff of the National Teachers College to teach Kiganda music and instrument making, and the repertory of the *abalere* consisted of approximately 60 royal songs, many of which were common to the repertory of the king’s harper and other palace ensembles. Once I had learned one basic melody, Busulwa told me: ‘Now you have to learn to play the tricks’. ‘Do you mean this?’ I responded, immediately incorporating some trills and flourishes into the melody. ‘No’, he answered, smiling at my efforts: ‘You have to learn how to play the words’. I was then carefully taught the manner in which different key texts in the song should be represented and he maintained that this was how he was taught. Only then did I begin to comprehend how closely individual notes played on the flute corresponded to the various phonological segments of related verbal phrases. What I had considered to be ornaments or ‘grace’ notes, which I imagined simply helped to maintain the high rhythmic density of the music, clearly served as indicators of phonological features, such as nasals with syllabic (moraic) value, double consonants (voiced and unvoiced) and vowel coalescence.

There is no doubt either about the music of the xylophones of Uganda. For years, Gerhard Kubik had approached and analysed the music of the Ganda *amadinda* xylophone as a purely instrumental tradition, but, as reported by Villepastour (2012) on a recently revised and enlarged publication (Kubik 2010) of an early major article on the topic (Kubik 1969), Kubik now appears to accept my views (see, e.g., Cooke 1970) that the music is derived from a vocal repertory and that the key texts of the songs are incorporated into the complex matrix of sounds that make up the cycles played on the xylophones. Into his revised publication, Kubik added a new section headed ‘The song contained in the Instrumental Version’ (2010: 284), which included comments by Ernest Ssempeebwa (also ‘Sempeebwa’) made during the discussion following Kubik’s presentation of his paper at the Royal Anthropological Institute in London in 1963, but he omitted a telling question posed by Ssempeebwa at the time. It is a pity that Kubik did apparently not allow Ssempeebwa’s question to widen his perspectives on Kiganda xylophone and harp music, also since he could hardly have wished for a more well-informed and articulate Ugandan presence. Ssempeebwa received his later schooling at Kings College Budo, the leading missionary school for young men, and afterwards taught there, becoming deputy headmaster for some time. While there, he sang in the school and chapel choir and became also familiar with European instrumental music. In the early 1960s, he served as a member of the executive committee of the Namirembe Music Festival Organisation, a venture revived by Klaus Wachsmann, which aimed at giving equal importance to both Ugandan and European music, religious and secular. He later became Chief Education Officer in the Uganda Ministry of Education, but also served as personal secretary to the Kabaka (the King of Buganda) and so had much opportunity to experience the music of the Royal Palace. One biographical account tells us that ‘He is

also a great entertainer who used to entertain the Kabaka through Balere band [the King's flute band], and that at the time of Kubik's presentation in London he was serving duty as the Uganda students' adviser.⁴ The relevant parts of Ssempeebwa's comments are taken from Kubik's early article:

I am sure Mr Kubik will agree with me that what is played on the *madinda* [xylophone] is what must have been at one time a sound produced by the voice. The primary instrument is the voice. The melody as produced by the voice is then played by the harpist on the bow harp with the four fingers. This can then be broken up into two parts and each part is allocated to one of the (two) players of the *madinda*. The *madinda* players then produce the same song as played on the bow harp, and the idea is that that should be recognizable as the song which was produced in the first instance by the voice. *The question is this, can you recognize the melody when you listen to the bow harp or to the madinda?* . . . Mr Kubik may feel that this would require a quite different sort of research. (1964: 154. Reprinted in Kubik 2010: 280–1; italics identify the question omitted from the new publication [2010: 284])⁵

The point of this seeming digression is that there is little reason to doubt that Ssempeebwa felt it unnecessary to add that if the melody was recognised then so would be its associated text. The Ugandan habit of recalling texts from tunes was one of the problems that from the very outset troubled European Christian missionaries who first arrived in Uganda in 1877. They found that teaching European heptatonic hymn tunes to the Baganda and their neighbours was difficult, firstly because the indigenous musical pitch systems were anhemitonic–pentatonic (i.e., contained no semitone intervals). One possible solution could have been to use local tunes and set Christian texts to them. On 25 November 1903, the medical missionary Albert Cook noted that during his visit to Buggala Island near the mainland of Buganda,

small children in school sang very sweetly a number of native hymns composed by Gordon [the Anglican missionary] before he left the islands, and which had been set by him or his wife to native canoe songs and drumbeats. (Cook 1945: 186)

But three pages earlier, he had also remarked:

The Baganda found a real difficulty, without careful training, in singing our English hymns with their sharps and flats. It was proposed at one time to get over this difficulty by adapting native tunes, canoe songs, and the like, to the translated hymns . . . but the natives themselves were against this on a large scale, as many of their best tunes were associated in their minds with undesirable dances and could hardly be set to sacred themes. (Cook 1945: 183)

⁴See the official website of the Buganda Kingdom: http://www.buganda.or.ug/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=345&Itemid=718&limitstart=5.

⁵In this same article, Kubik himself admitted: 'There can be many such cases traced in Buganda where an abstract melody acquired a "meaning" through involuntary verbal associations' (2010: 284). Here, however, he was referring to the phenomenon of 'inherent rhythms' and not to the key texts of the songs.

Since song and dance were usually inseparable, Cook's comments may well comprise the earliest historical evidence of the close relationship pertaining between tune and text in Uganda. That this was a continuing problem for missionaries throughout the decades that followed is evident in one of the several accounts sent to *The Musical Times* by Rev. J. M. Duncan, precentor at Namirembe, the Anglican Cathedral in Kampala during the period 1922–36:

From the first it has been the policy of the Church Missionary Society in Uganda to teach its converts English tunes. If folk-song enthusiasts shake their heads, and ask why African native melodies cannot be converted to Christian uses, it may be answered that it would be difficult to dissociate native vocal music from the undesirable words to which it is nearly always set. (Duncan 1927: 924)

Let me briefly return to instrumental music and the performances of the *abalere ba Kabaka*, which were so familiar to Ssempeebwa. In the Kabaka's palace, this ensemble customarily began each performance with the consort of up to six different sized flutes sounding a number of cycles of the song line before the drummers entered to be followed still later by the singing of the leader (who also was one of the drummers). There was clearly a period of time (often approximately a minute into performances of around three minutes' duration) when listeners unfamiliar with the repertory may have pondered about the song and about what texts were being presented by the flautists. Such questions may have been partly answered only after the singer began to sing when he would usually utter one or more of the key texts before presenting other traditional texts connected with the song or combining them with his own poetry (often dealing with topical themes), thus demonstrating his artistry as a creative poet/singer. Sadly, it was necessary to use the past tense here when discussing the *abalere* because the ensemble has been effectively defunct since 1966. However, an analysis of one performance (Katamba and Cooke 1987) discussed many of the features mentioned above.

Fortunately, many other rural musical traditions continue to flourish in Uganda and so are more amenable to investigation. A very recent informal email exchange with James Isabirye, a Musoga musician from eastern Uganda who teaches at Kyambogo University, contains interesting responses to my questions concerning this issue. For example:

- PC: You ask me: 'What is the meaning of instrumental music if it has no power to convey message?' Of course I agree with you—there must be a message—but there can be non-verbal (purely musical) messages such as sadness or peacefulness or excitement or beauty itself, or heroism etc. It certainly applies to our 'elite' classical European music.
- Jl: The focus is essentially on the textual sense of the message. If for example one tried to play a song that is not known to the listeners, they would ask which song was that? Mainly to find out what is the textual content of the song . . . You might have missed meeting musicians that give human names to their instruments—mainly to bring out the fact that they relate with those instruments at the level of human beings in respect of what they say in the

process of music making—the player dialogues with the instrument . . . When we meet with Haruna whether at my home or his, I pick the lamellaphone and he does the same. Then he says play song a or b or c. We always aim to use the instrument to sing and can go through a number of songs listening to ourselves and how far we are able to play the songs portraying every detail of the texts. When they—texts/tunes etc—change, we do this on the instruments and any of us is in position to know which part of the song the other is trying to move on to.

The corollary to considering the intention that lies behind the instrumental patterns produced by men like Kakraba, Busulwa, Isabirye and the unknown harp and *amadinda* composers of the past is to consider how such performances are received by listeners. The paper ‘Listening to African Music . . .’ (Cooke 1999) was intended to stimulate further enquiry—research that could grow beyond studying the intention of performers and the musical structures they created—towards considering how their audiences listen to their performances.

Exploring Listening

Clearly, musical perception and reception of instrumental performances can and should be fruitful areas of enquiry both for African scholars and others, and recently scholars have turned to the problems of considering the cognitive, psychological and other approaches involved in studying differing kinds of listening to music (e.g., the 12 papers by Bacht et al. 2010). My speculation about the potential of this field of enquiry may have led some readers to consider that I was over-generalising, but given that the great majority of languages spoken in Africa south of the Sahara are tone languages, we may well discover that such text/music relationships in instrumental music are—or at least were—far more widespread than the examples given in the article. After reading Agawu’s criticisms, it is with some relief that one finds encouragement in the words of a Ghanaian elder scholar. Professor J. H. Kwabena Nketia, interviewed by Trevor Wiggins, made a very general point about the attitude of some African scholars to the findings of others:

Unfortunately, I see that . . . Africans becoming aware of the problems in their musical culture and wanting to explain seem to be bothered by the explanations of other people and they are annoyed about it. Perhaps they feel challenged in terms of scholarly authority; they must be the authority in their own culture and not somebody else, but scholarly authority is established not by membership, but by what you do with the culture. So I hope that African musicology will continue as an interesting field for all scholars because it is a learning experience, it is a discovery process, and it is a way of sharing. (Wiggins and Nketia 2005: 73)

Equally important is Nketia’s widely ranging article ‘Musicology and Linguistics: Integrating the Phraseology of Text and Tune in the Creative Process’ (2002), in which he presents a wide-ranging survey of text–tune relationships, summing it up with:

The study of phraseology in songs may also have a bearing on our analytical approaches to the study of the instrumental music of Africa, because the relationship between text and tune and the use of structures and rhetorical features of speech often extend to this area, a relationship also found in other cultures. (Nketia 2002: 160)

Significantly, he continues:

Phraseology can also be approached in practical terms as a creative process handled by song makers and performers who learn not only how to integrate the elements of speech and music, such as tone-tune correlations that clarify verbal communication in song, but also how to give coherence to its overall form and create specific focal points of aesthetic interest. It is on the level of phraseology that bridges are built between poetry and music as well as between verbal and music texts that accompany or combine the dance forms. (Nketia 2002: 161)

So how do the musicians' audiences appreciate such instrumental artistry as I have discussed in this and the previous article? From a European perspective, curiosity about the 'Otherness' of sub-Saharan African music would certainly include admiration for the way in which African musicians integrate text–tune relationships with other more purely musical and creative features in their performances such as motivic development and ornamentation. Linguistic tone—as distinct from expressive use of intonation—is not a feature of European languages and is therefore not a parameter that European musicians may exploit creatively. Western psychologists such as Diana Deutsch and Trevor Henthorn find linguistic tone an important subject for psychological research which includes exploring the hypothesis: 'If pitches and pitch contours are associated with meaningful words in infancy, these are later processed by the dominant hemisphere and are associated with words and verbal labeling' (Deutsch and Henthorn 2004: 345). This suggests at least one intriguing possibility for research amongst musicians and listeners not only in Africa, but among any tone-language speakers, making use of electroencephalography to determine how each hemisphere of the brain responds when subjects are presented with instrumental music of various kinds.

This kind of objective research into experiencing music can only take one so far and, like it or not, one needs also to resort to verbal dialogue with musicians and audiences in partnership with careful analysis of musical events they have been party to. Sometimes what can cue a new direction to take in research is a happenstance remark like Albert Ssempeke's: 'they can hear him talking through his instrument', the remark that prompted my earlier contribution (Cooke 1999: 74). Similarly, I cannot forget the response of a Ugandan teacher attending an In-Service course and following her group's visit to Makerere University in 1966 to hear a concert of music by Mozart, Ravel and Dvorak given by a visiting French string quartet.⁶ When I asked

⁶The Margand Quartet performed on 16 March 1966 at Makerere University under the auspices of the French Embassy and in association with Air France for The Uganda Music Society.

the group what they thought of the evening performance, she frowned, paused and replied: ‘Why did no-one sing?’. How does one evaluate such a remark? Was it simply that the student, totally unfamiliar with European concerts and regardless of the content of her printed programme, expected some vocal items to be included, or was she expecting some use of the voice (speech or song) to draw attention to possible text-bearing melodies suggested during the string playing? Unfortunately, at the time I did not follow up her question and ask if or why she thought that members of a string quartet should sing, as Kakraba and many Ugandan musicians do when they play their instruments. Perhaps if, like Kofi Agawu, she had attended Achimota School, a missionary boarding school proud of its annual Cambridge-style ‘Ceremony of Nine Lessons and Carols’, its large western-style orchestra and the school emblem (a shield framing a set of black and white piano keys), she would not have asked that question. Like most of her colleagues, she was educated and worked in rural Uganda where a piano was very rarely encountered and violins virtually unknown, but she probably would have been well acquainted with the music of her own village where musicians incorporated texts into their musicking, whether by singing or by making their instruments clothe words in melody.

What is the value of such anecdotal evidence? Very little on its own, it must be admitted, but such remarks, taken together with the more informed testimony of musicians and their audiences and combined with close examination of individual instrumental performances, may help one understand better the range of different meanings communicated and levels of experience encountered. One of the most recent papers on the topic of tone languages and music confidently opens with the statement that ‘language is not a determinant of music in tone languages, but rather that music accommodates language when it is convenient but is perfectly willing and able to override linguistic requirements’ (Schellenberg 2012: 266). However, it ends with rather less certainty and with quotes from Herzog (1934) and Stock (1999), leaving the last word with Herzog: ‘the melodic element which is strong in tone languages, intrudes upon the music of the peoples speaking such languages’ (1934: 466). Schellenberg focused on vocal music only, drawing mainly on published work on four African vocal genres (papers dated between 1928 and 1979), his own preliminary examination of Shona music (Schellenberg 2009), as well as including comments by Agawu on the composing activity of the western-trained Ghanaian musician Ephraim Amu (Agawu 1984; Agawu and Amu 1987). ‘Armchair analysis’ has its uses, even in this particular field of enquiry, but alone it is not enough. The various listening strategies of attentive audiences as decoders of text-related tunes and as appreciators of the artistry of the performers remain still to be explored and more fully understood. In our rapidly changing world the opportunities to learn through dialogue with the village musicians who serve their local communities—especially those tradition bearers like Kakraba who might be uncharitably dismissed as ‘illiterate’—should be cherished, for they are becoming all too few in number, and the rapid globalisation of music making in Africa brings with it new musical instruments, new techniques, new styles and, possibly, new ways of listening.

Concluding Remarks

Agawu's vigorous critique of my earlier speculations on how African audiences may experience instrumental music has caused me to enlarge on my brief article in several areas. I found it necessary to provide more biographical information on one non-Ugandan musician discussed in my earlier paper, namely Kakraba Lobi, and to supplement this with data from recent studies of the Lobi *gyil* xylophone tradition of which he was such a master. I have presented additional data concerning the harp, xylophone, flute and lamellaphone repertoires of Ugandan musicians, all of which contribute to the notion that, like Kakraba, such instrumentalists are habitually concerned to 'clothe speech in melody' not only vocally but also with their instruments, sometimes doing both simultaneously. It follows, as I argued, here and in the previous article, that researching how their audiences experience and evaluate such activity can hopefully enhance our understanding of such music making.

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