

MCM 3006

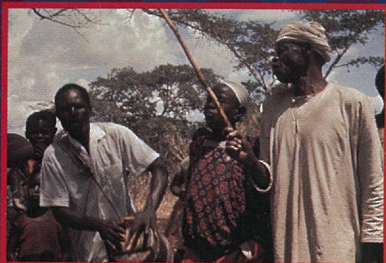
Uganda

and Other African Nations

Feasts of the Savanna

*A Musical Journey Through
East and West Africa*

MUSIC OF THE EARTH





Uganda

and Other African Nations

FEASTS OF THE SAVANNA
A Musical Journey Through East and West Africa

Track Listing

- | | | | |
|--|------|---|-------|
| 1. <i>Sock Selue</i> | 3:31 | 11. <i>Jopadhola Madinda</i> | 3:05 |
| 2. YENTCHABLE | 4:51 | 12. <i>Enanga</i> (Zither) | 3:18 |
| 3. Initiation Dance | 4:08 | 13. <i>Sansa</i> (Trickster's Song) | 1:51 |
| 4. <i>Kbunse</i> (Observance at the
Royal Palace) | 1:48 | 14. <i>Werga</i> | 1:28 |
| 5. <i>Nje</i> (Death Celebration) | 2:44 | 15. Children's Song | 6:10 |
| 6. Ceremonial Drums | 1:19 | 16. Dogon Children's Flute | 1:35 |
| 7. Traditional Doctor's Cure | 0:34 | 17. Dogon Harp | 4:05 |
| 8. Drum Session | 3:47 | 18. Narrative with <i>Kora</i>
Accompaniment | 4:10 |
| 9. <i>Sansa</i> (Trickster's Song) | 4:55 | | |
| 10. <i>Dingidi</i> Song | 2:56 | | |
| | | <i>Total time</i> | 57:25 |

Non-English musical types and styles are indicated by italics. Titles are in capital letters.

Because these are field recordings, there may be some extraneous noise despite the high fidelity utilized.

Field Notes

by Jun Mori

Africa and Me

I first set foot on African land in 1968. It was the beginning of a long association.

I will never forget the first time I arrived at the Nairobi Airport in Kenya. The flight from Bombay to Nairobi skipped its scheduled stop in Aden because a *coup d'état* had occurred there that day. There was growing unease among the passengers who were to have disembarked in Aden; some finally burst into tears and created quite a stir. That was the closest encounter I had ever had with a *coup*. I never imagined then that I would actually be swept into a *coup d'état* three years later.

Soon, the African continent became visible, and the plane flew south along the fierce land. As we descended, I saw reddish-brown earth and small houses scattered among sporadic trees. Suddenly, a modern city appeared, and we were in the Nairobi Airport. Red earth and an infinite, cloudless blue sky were my

very first impressions of Africa.

I arrived in Uganda in 1968 as a newly appointed Visiting Professor at the Uganda Technical College. Due to a housing shortage, the administration placed me in a hotel called Silver Springs, a bungalow of red brick and tin roofing. The windows had fine-grained screens but no glass, so whenever it rained heavily, an attendant ran around lowering canvases that were kept rolled up along the eaves. There was a swimming pool on a lower level behind the hotel and, beyond the thicket enclosing this pool area, an African settlement from which, occasionally, the sound of drums could be heard throughout the night.

One evening, shortly after I had started living at the hotel, I was relaxing at the bar when a man came in playing a musical instrument. It was a small, box-like instrument held in both hands, with a row of several metallic strips on top. When these

strips are snapped with both thumbs, connected metal pieces vibrate together to produce a complex but light, rhythmic sound. This was my introduction to the *sansa*, a sort of finger-piano found throughout Africa.

A Jopadhola student named Onyango from Mulanda village, 20 kilometers west of Tororo near the Kenya border, offered to gather some musicians from area villages. My visit to his home provided my first encounter with various African folk instruments and performances. Onyango's father was a chief in Mulanda, and his summons had convened eight groups of musicians.

The featured instruments were *enanga* (harps) and *ndongo* (lyres) resembling those pictured in Egyptian murals. There was a large *sansa* for bass parts, which also served as a rhythm instrument when its back was struck like a drum. I also saw the large xylophone called *madinda* for the first time on this occasion. This instrument consists of 20 or so flat wooden blocks, about 50-60 centimeters in length, lined up on two banana plant trunks laid on the ground. Four people, two seated on

each side, play each instrument. The word "*marimba*," used in the Caribbean, Mexico, and Guatemala may be descended from *madinda*.

The folk music performance began in the morning and did not end until almost sundown. By then, a surprising number of villagers were crowded around the musicians in Onyango's yard. In Africa, where amusements are few, an event like this is a pleasure not to be passed up.

Astonishment and Deep Impressions

Sometime after that I went to Kasao, a village near Lake Kyoga, to hear children sing at the elementary school. A brick school building with glassless windows and three classrooms stood on a spacious site. The classrooms had fixed benches in rows and only a blackboard on the wall. The children wore regulation light green uniforms. Uganda is a nation dedicated to education, and school attendance is extraordinarily high. At the time of my sojourn, illiteracy was 35%.

On that day, the children were

seated and waiting under a large tree on the side of the schoolhouse. The principal directed the singing presented by the various classes. African song generally proceeds with a song leader who first sings a thematic melody; then the chorus follows with a continuation.

The children sang a song called "Enguri" that day. The two-part chorus, divided into lower and higher voices, harmonized beautifully. I was surprised, however, by the content of the song: it proselytized against drinking *enguri*, a strong, hard liquor that is harmful to the body and eventually deranges the mind.

The drum accompaniment, also played by the school children, was truly impressive as well. I continued to encounter such superb rhythmic sense in subsequent fieldwork throughout eastern and western Africa. The most striking example was in Dapaong on the northern edge of Togo, where even in a work situation for a large number of people, rhythm and music arise naturally. A recording from that occasion is included in this collection (track 1).

Bubbling Rhythm

In Dapaong, I went to see work being done in the front yard of a nearby residence. *Sock selue*, done by the agrarian Moba people in northernmost Togo, involves pounding dirt mixed with concrete into the ground to harden it for use as a work area. Every few years, neighborhood women gather for this task as a part of community labor exchange, a custom in which a day of contributed work is always returned in kind. The women line up holding wooden mallets (*solpan*) in their right hands. Placing their left hands on their bent backs, they move forward pounding the ground. When they reach the edge of the yard, they turn around and return pounding until they are back where they started. This is repeated many times.

At first, the pounding seems scattered and random, but soon rhythmic patterns begin to emerge. A leader sings while sprinkling water, then cement powder, in the yard from half-gourd vessels. The pounding provides a wonderful, living, rhythmic accompaniment

When popular African music airs

over the radio, children often begin dancing. Sometimes, even babies who have just begun to take their first steps stand up and move to the music. Infants strapped to their dancing mothers are swung back and forth, left and right, to the sound of drums at ceremonies. These infants do not cry but trust themselves to the rhythm. With such early exposure to, and development of, rhythmic sensibility, it is no wonder that even the smallest child will, upon finding an empty can or small box, tuck it under one arm and begin striking it with a stick. The child's skillful rhythmic improvisations, moreover, are not so different from an adult's.

In the small chiefdom of Bamessing in west Cameroon, I met a group of children playing with drums made by stretching vinyl film across empty cans. I especially admired how they created an ensemble out of large cans, small cans, and cans without vinyl that were simply struck on their bottoms. It was a splendid ensemble. They expressed themselves in their very own way, without instruction and simply by ear from rhythms they had heard on special occasions. Their

musicianship was astonishing.

I also observed two brothers, ages 7 and 4, playing a mock xylophone they had made out of eucalyptus. They carved wooden pieces of graded thickness, arranged them neatly in a scale on two banana trunks, and struck them from both sides while seated on the ground. In this case, the older brother acted as the teacher and took the main melodic part, and the younger brother added an accompaniment. Their simple, repetitive melody was, nonetheless, a proper musical piece.

Doing fieldwork in Africa yields joys such as these. Africa is a great land brimming over with music. At times my heart dances to the sound of drums. At others, I wax nostalgic to the pretty tone of a flute, or—as in Senegal on the western edge of equatorial Africa—I become intoxicated by the brilliant music of the *kora**.

***Kora:** Stringed instrument representative of west Africa, made by stretching a skin over half a gourd and attaching a rod to this resonating body. It has 15-21 strings and is played with both hands.

The Selections

[Note: The selections have been sequenced on the CD to achieve musical flow.]

West Africa

The West African selections have been chosen from fieldwork conducted beginning in 1978 in Cameroon, Togo, Senegal, Mali, and Ghana.

1. *Sock Selue*: A work song. As in many cultures, African people often sing songs while they work. As discussed earlier, this piece evolved naturally from initially random ground pounding. The recording captures the emerging rhythm, followed by the emerging song.

Dapaong, Togo, 12/27/82

2. *YENTCHABLE*: A narrative song sung by a *griot*, a performer in the oral tradition who sings old tales and epics with *kora* or drum accompaniment. This song relates the history of the Dapaong chief, Yentchable. The drum used here is a *long*, an hourglass-shaped instrument held under one arm and struck with an angled stick. An ancestor of the Yentchable led one faction of the Moba tribe, living on the southern

edge of the Sahara, southward until, following wars and hardships, they settled in Dapaong. This history is narrated broadly, evoking the heroic and the tragic.

Dapaong, Togo, 1/13/85

3. Initiation Dance: Danced for villagers by young Moba women after participating in *wankwat*, an initiation rite for girls. At a certain age, young African men and women are initiated into adult society through rites of passage. In this Moba tribe dance, the initiates make their "debut" wearing shell jewelry and adornments handed down from their mothers.

Dapaong, Togo, 1/13/85

4. *Kbunse* (Observance at the Royal Palace): Every December the small chiefdom of Bamessing, on the Bamenda highland in Cameroon, observes *kbunse*. During this month-long festival, the chief celebrates his ancestors and pays respects to royalty. On the final day, the chief

Nje performance in Cameroon

joins the villagers, who turn out in traditional dress to dance in front of the king's palace. Accompanying instruments include many drums and numerous simple flutes and rattles played by men.

Bamessing, Cameroon, 1/51/87

5. *Nje* (Death Celebration): Features the xylophone used for *kwoduo*, or Festival of the Dead. Members of masked societies — mutual support groups — wear their masks and dance around the *nje* to send the deceased off to the next world. All masked societies in this Bamenda highland chiefdom participate in *kwoduo*. The instrumental form and performance method are the same as in east Africa, except that in Bamessing blank shots are occasionally fired to scare away evil.

Bamessing, Cameroon, 2/28/87



East Africa

The east African recordings all date from my three-year stay at the Uganda Technical College. With students from every region of Uganda, every holiday at the College presented an opportunity to visit a homeland. I collected this material with a then newly-marketed compact tape recorder. These recordings are limited to Uganda, but similar musical instruments and pieces are found in Kenya and Tanzania as well. There are also close to 40 tribes in Uganda. The music recorded here from Kampala, Kyangma, and Nkoko is of the Ganda people, and of the



Ugandan musicians

Jopadhola from Mulanda.

The Ganda, an agrarian Bantu-speaking people, are the largest tribe in Uganda and live on the Lake Victoria coast centered around Kampala. The Jopadhola live on the eastern side of Lake Kyoga near the Kenya border and are closely related to the Ruo, a farming tribe inhabiting western Kenya and Tanzania.

6. Ceremonial Drums: Multi-drum performance at burial ceremony. I was astonished when two women collapsed in a trance during this performance.

Mulanda, Uganda, 5/9/70

7. Traditional Doctor's Cure: Recorded at Nkoko, on the western shore of Lake Victoria, where I had an opportunity to see a native doctor attend to a child. The child was laid across the knees of the doctor, who was wrapped in bark cloth and who administered medicine while an assistant shook an *akanyege*, a small gourd filled with sand or pebbles, until the treatment concluded.

Nkoko, Uganda, 10/24/70

8. Ceremonial Drums: Multi-drum performance.

Mulanda, Uganda, 5/9/70

9. *Sansa* (Trickster's Song): The *sansa* is perhaps the musical instrument most representative of east Africa. Both this and track 13 are narrative songs about a Robin Hood-like thief, a crafty and benevolent robber.

Mulanda, Uganda, 5/9/70

10. *Dingidi*: A bowed, one-stringed instrument resembling a Chinese fiddle. The string is held by the left hand and rubbed with a small bow held in the right. The *dingidi* may be especially characteristic of east

Africa. I also observed bowed instruments in Mali, in west Africa, but these had multiple strings and bodies made from half a gourd.

Mulanda, Uganda, 5/9/70

11. *Jopadhola Madinda*: Features the *madinda*, a large xylophone consisting of numerous wooden boards arranged scale-wise on two banana tree trunks laid on the ground. One set is played by multiple musicians on both sides of the instrument. West Africans also use this instrument, which has various tribal names. In western Cameroon, for example, it is called *nje* (see track 5).

Mulanda, Uganda, 5/9/70

12. *Enanga*: Old forms of musical instruments, including the *enanga* and *ndongo* (see above), survive in east Africa. The *enanga* of the Kiga tribe in western Uganda is a 10-stringed, elliptical, boat-shaped zither, 45 centimeters long by 30 wide. The *enanga* of the Ganda tribe has five to eight strings.

Kyangma, Uganda, 10/25/70

13. *Sansa* (Trickster's Song): See track 9. The trickster here is characterized as a rabbit.

Kampala, Uganda, 1969

West Africa:

14. *Werga*: A small, vertical hand-flute common to every region in Africa. The *werga* has holes near either side of the wind hole that are played with the right thumb and forefinger while the pinky plays the hole at the very bottom of the pipe. The whistle in the background is a child who is trying to learn the piece by whistling along with the flute.

Niamtougou, Togo, 1/11/81

15. Children's Song: Sung by Moba children, in Togo, who gathered in front of my lodgings on a daily basis to sing all sorts of songs. Like the adults, the children also have a song leader. The lead role rotated.

Dapaong, Togo, 1/8/85

16. Dogon Children's Flute: Performance by two Dogon tribe children, in Mali, on *sudei*. This is a slight variation of the *werga* (track 14). Amadou, age 7, and Gabriel, 18, live

in Kani-Kombole at the foot of the Bandiagara cliff. Amadou plays the main melody. His skilled performance amazed me; I could not believe it came from a 7 year-old.

Kani-Kombole, Mali, 12/22/86

17. Dogon Harp: Features the two-string Dogon harp, *oumar*. It has a long, boat-shaped wooden body covered with a skin and a perpendicular rod that supports the two strings. The performer is Gind Cheik Lumar.

Ende, Mali, 12/22/86

18. Narrative with *Kora* Accompaniment: Features the instrument most representative of west Africa. The body is made from a large gourd cut in half, and the thick center pole has 10 strings attached on one side and 11 on the other. The performer is Vius Kebe Shissok.

Dakar, Senega, 12/8/86

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Original Japanese Version

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Editor & Translator's Note

These notes have been translated, for the first time, from the original Japanese and edited as judiciously as possible for an English-speaking audience. In translating and editing these notes, we have attempted to preserve the authors' original tone, as well as the essential information. Some references aimed at a Japanese audience have been eliminated but little else. The fieldworkers who recorded these selections represent a variety of disciplines and approaches, and this is reflected in the notes. Some, for example, are more musicologically detailed, while others present the point-of-view of an enthusiastic traveler learning about new cultures and peoples.

Translating always presents challenges, and these are amplified when the material being translated itself contains many terms from yet another language. Often, the Japanese fieldworker attempted to preserve original terms, such as the names of people and musical instruments, through direct transliteration into Japanese. Since transliteration involves capturing one language's

sounds in another's alphabet, it is subject to unavoidable inaccuracies. These are compounded when a second transliteration — as here, from Japanese to English — occurs. Some terms can be checked by using recognized authorities and references, and we have done this wherever possible by following spellings used in *The New Grove Dictionary of Music and Musicians* (1980 edition) and the *New Harvard Dictionary of Music* (1986 edition). We also appreciate the assistance of Mr. Yuji Ichihashi, at the Victor Company of Japan, and the original writers in reviewing our work and making suggestions.

Some spellings, however, have remained problematic, especially the names of people and some places. In those cases we have followed standard Japanese-English transliteration practice and have attempted to be as consistent as possible. We have also followed Western practice, rather than Japanese, by placing surnames second.

Non-English terms are in italics.

— MG and TN