

MCM 3008

Zambia

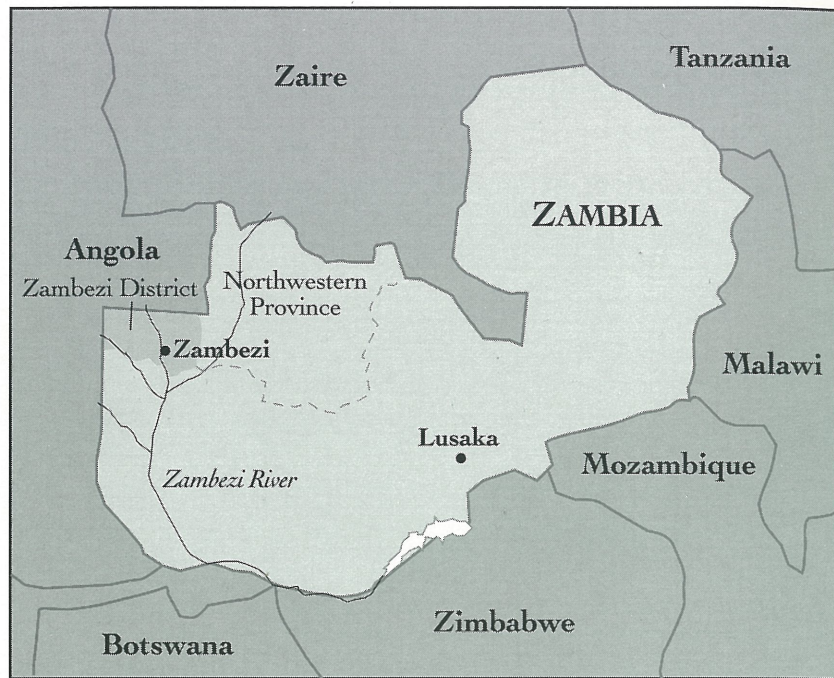
The Songs of Mukanda

*Music of the Secret Society
of the Luvale People of
Central Africa*



MUSIC OF THE EARTH





Zambia

THE SONGS OF MUKANDA

Music of the Secret Society of the Luvale People of Central Africa

Track Listing

1.	<i>Ndumbamwelela</i>	3:01
2.	<i>Lilombola</i> Songs	9:13
3.	Sunrise Songs	1:52
4.	Sunset Songs	3:20
5.	Meal Ritual	2:57
6.	Meal Ritual	4:22
7.	Water-Bearing Songs	2:44
8.	Greeting and Bidding Farewell to Guests	1:18
9.	<i>Kukuwa</i> Songs	20:55
10.	<i>Jingunda</i>	2:14
11.	The Eve of the Purification Ceremony	4:35
12.	Purification Ceremony	1:21
13.	Final Ceremony	3:05

Total Time 61:47

Non-English musical types and styles are indicated by italics.

Titles are in capital letters.

Tracks 3-8, one section of 11, and 12-13 are mono.

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

Field Notes
by Ken'ichi Tsukada

The Luvale People of Central Africa

It was the dry season when I arrived at the airport in Lusaka, the capital of the Republic of Zambia, and it was hot, with the sun glittering brightly in a sky of absolute blue. But the air was dry, and the soft breeze felt refreshing.

I continued my journey by bus, which took three days to reach Zambezi, a small town of the Zambezi District in the Northwestern Province. This is the most remote district from Lusaka, and Angola shares most of its borders. It encompasses the upper reaches of the Zambezi River—the river in which Scottish explorer David Livingston* attempted to work his way upstream over a hundred years ago. Topographically, it is a highland region on the northern border of the Kalahari Desert.

The dry season begins in April. Not a drop of rain falls for six

months, during which time everything dries up, and the landscape turns the color of wheat. But when the rainy season comes, nature regains its greenery. The Zambezi River, which is reduced to a trickle during the dry season, gradually swells until, in February, it becomes a huge flood several kilometers wide. The Luvale, a people who have managed to maintain harmony with their surroundings for several hundred years, live in this harsh environment.

Before Westerners arrived, the Luvale Kingdom was one of many kingdoms of various sizes within sub-Saharan Africa. It is said that the

* **David Livingston** (b. 1813): Scottish explorer of Africa, doctor, and missionary, who explored the Zambezi River region from 1838-64. He died of illness in 1873 in Chitambo village, in central eastern Zambia.

Luvale people once belonged to the powerful Linda-Luba Empire, in what is now southern Zaire, but that they broke away and established their own kingdom here approximately three hundred years ago. Today, however, the region is a kingdom in

name only. The colonial rules of the Western powers partitioned the original Luvale Kingdom so that it now straddles the borders of three countries—Zambia, Zaire, and Angola. As a result, the Luvale who live in Zambia (less than 3% of the



Luvale king (left) and his family; palace in the background

Zambian population) are governed by that country's laws and policies. The Luvale King, therefore, no longer has political or religious authority and plays only a symbolic role. Still, he is held in respect and accorded deep reverence by Luvale villagers within the context of their daily lives.

Research in the Luvale Kingdom

I began my research among the Luvale by paying my respects to the King in the royal palace and informing him, through an interpreter, of the purpose for my visit. The King, a large man close to seventy, seemed pleased that a foreign researcher was interested in his people's traditional culture and welcomed me warmly. He invited me to join him for a meal, which led to his designating me the official (unsalaried) foreign researcher of the royal court. I went to the palace to offer greetings every morning, after which the King's retainers guided me to one of the Luvale villages. Within a week, I was given special status within the Luvale Kingdom and was even permitted to walk side-by-side with the King,

despite the fact that ordinary Luvale had to kneel and bow their heads in his presence. Soon, the Luvale called me by a nickname that reflected my good fortune—Kapalu, the hero of one of their traditional tales. The name spread almost instantly throughout the Kingdom.

For my fieldwork to be successful, I had to become familiar with the Luvale's daily customs, beginning with their language. For this, I hired Saputu, a carpenter and former elementary school teacher, to be my research assistant. Every day, we sat under a baobab tree and practiced conversation. The Luvale speak Bantu*, which is completely different from Asian and European languages. With practice, however, it proved easy to learn, and I could speak fairly well after half a year or so.

During this time, I also learned many of the unique Luvale customs. For example, human relationships are

* **Bantu language:** a principal African language group, divided into hundreds of variants, used widely in Cameroon, Zaire, Uganda, Kenya, and other southern African countries.

strictly regulated through a hierarchy of status. When a Luvale greets a superior, he will crouch in a half-sitting position and clap his hands to show respect and humility. If the superior is of vastly higher status, the greeter must kneel. Although the traditional social system is matrilinear and polygamous, these aspects have gradually given way in recent years to Western ideas and values.

One Luvale custom particularly caught my attention, among the many I observed—the traditional school the Luvale call *mukanda*.

The Tradition of Mukanda

All societies require some form of education to transform children into adults, as well as some means of formally distinguishing the immature from the mature. For the Luvale, this function is performed by *mukanda*.

One September night during my first stay in a Luvale village, I heard the sound of men's voices crying out deep in the bush. When I listened more closely, however, I realized the men were actually singing. It was a mystical sound, echoing under a

cloudless sky. The next day, a friend told me that *mukanda* had started. *Mukanda*, he pointedly added, is a secret society for the village men, and outsiders were forbidden. To me, this meant that I'd need to spend a great deal of time and effort building enough trust so that the Luvale would permit me to record the music of *mukanda*.

Essentially, *mukanda* comprises the initiation rites that transform immature boys into young men with independent social standing. It is also the Luvale's traditional school, where young boys receive their education. As part of *mukanda*, boys are circumcised in the bush and live isolated from the village in a lodge. During this seclusion period, contact with females and uncircumcised boys is strictly forbidden. *Mukanda* usually begins in August or September, during the dry season. Traditionally the boys ("novices") ranged from sixteen to eighteen years old, but more recently the age has been lowered to from six to twelve due to the widespread adoption of Western elementary school education in Zambia. (Not everyone begins school

at age six, however. Many parents send their sons to *mukanda* at a younger age to avoid conflict with school enrollment.)

The Mukanda Rites

Mukanda begins with all-night singing and dancing, accompanied by four drums, in the village center. Men and women of all ages gather from nearby villages, creating a crowd of several hundred people. The next day, the novices are led into the bush to be circumcised and to begin their period of seclusion. The adults clear a space in the bush and construct a large enclosure of branches and leaves where the boys sleep. During their seclusion, the novices live under a variety of restrictions and taboos. They learn the secrets of *mukanda* from adult guardians (*vilombola*), who also train the novices in the skills they need for daily life. Each boy has his own *chilombola* (singular). There are also *vilombola chika* (junior *vilombola*), youths who recently completed

mukanda and who look after the novices' daily needs. The novices live in seclusion for about one month, the time it takes their circumcision wounds to heal.

When the seclusion period ends, the novices are led to the river, where they undergo a purification ceremony (*kulyachisa* *). After this, they continue their *mukanda* training for several months to two years while leading near-normal lives in the village. The training ends with a final ceremony. The boys officially return from the bush to the village, accompanied by singing and dancing that continues all night. The next day, dressed in their best Western suits, they appear publicly to receive the people's blessing and then return, with their new social status to ordinary village life.

* *Kulyachisa*: In this ceremony, the youths, who were forbidden to bathe during the isolation period, bathe in the river for the first time in nearly a month.



The Selections

Singing, as this collection demonstrates, is an extremely important aspect of *mukanda*. The pieces on this CD were selected mainly to introduce the musical aspects of the novices' lives during the seclusion period. They were recorded between 1982 and 1984 on two fieldwork trips to Chavuma, the Zambezi District of the Northwestern Province of Zambia.

1. *Ndumbamwelela*: About a month before *mukanda* begins, an eerie voice can be heard growling in the nighttime darkness. This is the sound of a "bullroarer," called *ndumbamwelela*. *Ndumba* means lion, and the instrument is said to imitate a lion's growl. It announces to the villagers that *mukanda* will soon begin. In this recording, the women of Solochi Village are practicing their *mukanda* dance when two *vandumbamwelela* (pl.) begin sounding. When they hear it, the women stop dancing and begin to cheer and

make shrill cries. The women don't know how the sound is produced, however, for *ndumbamwelela* is one of *mukanda's* carefully guarded secrets.

Solochi Village, 8/8/85

2. *Lilombola* Songs: *Lilombola* songs and dances are performed at the beginning of the opening ceremony of *mukanda* and tease men about their sexual prowess. The women gather in the village center on the afternoon before the novices are to be circumcised. They form a circle around four drums (played by men) and dance, wearing rattles on their ankles, as they sing. Almost all Luvale songs are performed in call-and-response form, with the response sung in parallel thirds, as this recording clearly demonstrates. From a Western musical perspective, there seem to be two types of parallel third structures—one based on major and one on minor thirds. On the day of this recording, the Luvale sang and danced throughout

the night. The boys were circumcised in the bush on the following day.

Kalukango Village, 8/5/83

3. Sunrise Songs: Selections 3 through 7 were recorded during a *mukanda* at Sakutemba Village in which six boys, ages nine to twelve, participated. Following the circumcisions, the *tundanji* ("newly-circumcised novices") sing a greeting song to the sun at dawn. Just before sunrise, when the surroundings have become clearly visible, the *tundanji* line up before the ritual fire at the front of their enclosure and sing.

The three sunrise songs are all in call-and-response form. The "call" is sung by either a *chilombola chika* ("junior guardian") or by one of the *tundanji*. The "response" is sung in parallel thirds. The young boys, however, had difficulty with the harmony at first and often reverted to singing in unison. All three songs have basically the same meaning: "Sun, bring us light." The final chant is a set phrase

always chanted after sunrise and sunset songs.

Sakutemba Village, 2/17/84

4. Sunset Songs: At sunset, the *tundanji* line up in front of the ritual fire and sing farewell to the sun. During the seclusion period, the *tundanji* face east when they line up at the fire, so that they sing with their backs to the sun. There are more sunset than sunrise songs, and they are more varied in style. However, they all have more or less the same meaning: "The sun has gone. It has disappeared into a cave. It will come again tomorrow." In the first song, triple meter alternates with duple meter, indicating that the polymetric structures characteristic of African music appear even in children's songs.

Sakutemba Village, 2/17/84

- 5 & 6. Meal Rituals: The most striking aspect of the life led by the *tundanji* is the highly stylized set of ritualistic conventions associated with eating. Meals are served twice daily during seclusion, before noon and in the evening,

and there is a song for every step in the process.

First a *chilombola chika* yells toward the bush: "Vulye hawe!" ("Hey, are you going to eat or not?"). The *tundanji* then line up in front of the ritual fire and yell back, "Eh!" ("Yes, we'll eat") in unison. The *chilombola chika*, who delivers the food into the bush, and the *tundanji* engage in a series of uninterrupted call-and-response songs. The first means approximately: "Older brother told us. He says Mother has made this meal. Don't forget your mother." When the *chilombola chika* draws near to the bush, he leads a new song beginning with "mbyangulenu" ("clap your hand") to welcome the meal. The *tundanji* sing in response, clap their hands to the beat, and then stroke the backs of their heads alternately on the left and right sides with their palms. This is said to be an expression of thanks. When the *chilombola chika* finally arrives, the *tundanji* squat. The *chilombola chika* then chants, "Shima yanoko"

("Shima that your mother made") and slaps the *shima*, their main meal of casaba, alternately with both hands before putting it down on the *tundanji's* plates.

After the meal, the *chilombola chika* sings a "Leftover Song" that begins with the word "ndambalwe" ("leftovers") and throws the remaining food away behind the lodge. The Luvale believe that the *tundanji* will be rendered impotent if they hear the thud of the leftovers being thrown away, so the novices cover their ears and yell. The meal ritual ends with the *chilombola chika* and *tundanji* chanting the same set phrases used after the sunrise (track 3) and sunset (track 4) songs. Since this ritual involves call-and-response between people separated by a considerable distance, it was impossible to document the songs in a single recording. They are presented here, therefore, in two parts: first the *chilombola chika* "call" (track 5), then the *tundanji* "response" (track 6).

Sakutemba Village, 2/4 and 2/17/84

7. Water-bearing Songs: At least once a day, a *chilombola chika* draws water from a spring and carries it in gourds to the lodge. This is accompanied by a ritual similar to the first part of the meal ritual (tracks 5, 6), with a call-and-response song between the *tundanji* and the *chilombola chika* far out in the bush. Here, the microphone follows the *chilombola chika* as he carries the water.

2/2/84

8. Greeting and Bidding Farewell to Guests: According to the rules of *mukanda*, the *tundanji* must welcome first-time visitors to their lodge with a song. *Tundanji* and guests also exchange special words when the guests leave. In Part I, the *tundanji* sing, "Let's greet our guest happily" to an actual guest who has arrived. In Part II, they sing, "Go home, you," directing their surprisingly rude words to a senior *chilombola* as he returns to the village. Such rough verbal exchanges seem to signify a particularly close relationship.

2/2/84

9. *Kukuwa** Songs: Two or three nights a week, men from the surrounding villages come to the lodge and sing *kukuwa* ("shouts of jubilation") songs around the ritual fire. These are considered the most important of the *mukanda* songs. Many contain teachings that contribute to the education of the *tundanji*, but they also let the women in the village know that the *tundanji* are recovering well from their circumcisions.

The songs are extremely interesting musically. Most are sung in parallel triads, producing rich harmonic textures. Each singer beats time with a pair of sticks, creating polyrhythmic structures by combining duple and triple meters. The sticks are called *mingwengwe* ("bones"), and the village women and uninitiated boys believe the men are beating human bones together.

Unfortunately, the performance recorded here is not ideal. There

* *Kukuwa*: this category is properly called *Myan yakuwa bamkanda* – "song of rejoicing sung in Mukanda huts."

were too many singers, and many of them were drunk. One singer had exchanged the traditional *mingwengwe* for a frying pan, which he beat to great effect. Songs I-IV and V-VI were recorded in different villages and contain different song types, perhaps because the villages were far apart.

Chiwakalala Village, 9/25/82 (I-IV)

Katende Village, 9/15/82 (V-VI)

10. *Jingunda*: While the men sing *kukuwa* songs in the bush, the women sit around a fire in the village center and occasionally emit shrill cries while very quickly moving their tongues from side to side. The cry, "*jingunda*," is an expression of joy and a shout of encouragement for the singing men. The women and men hear each other in the distance, creating a special communicative space between the village and the bush.

Mize Village, 9/9/82

11. The Eve of the Purification Ceremony: On the night before the *tundanji* are purified, the men gather in the bush to sing *kukuwa* songs

(track 9) while some women in the village center call out "*jingunda*" (track 10) and others sing and dance with joy. When dawn approaches, the women suddenly start running towards the *mukanda* lodge. Since it is strictly taboo for women to approach the lodge, the men struggle with all their might to keep them away. During the ensuing jostling, women overcome with ecstasy dance wildly. This is a standard ritualistic pattern for the night before the purification ceremony and is the most dramatic and moving event in the entire *mukanda* process.

Chiwakalala Village, 9/25/82 (I and II)

Sakutemba Village, 2/19/84 (III)

12. Purification Ceremony: When the *tundanji*'s wounds have completely healed, they go to a nearby river for a ritual bath. This is the purification ceremony known as *kulyachisa*. The *tundanji* wear special kilts (*jizombo*) and make their way, protected by the *vilombola* (see above), through a crowd of onlookers. As they walk, the men chant a song called "*Ndonji*" (a man's name).

Sakutemba Village, February 19, 1984

13. The Final Ceremony: Several months to two years after the purification ceremony, *mukanda* actually ends, and the boys are officially reinstated in village life. This, too, is marked by a ceremony. The first part of this recording features *fwifwi*, a song and dance performed with four drums lined up in the village center. Three masked dancers (*makishi*) perform before

several hundred spectators, matching their movements to the energetic rhythm of the drums. Afterwards, the boys return to the village, the lodge is burned, and the singing and dancing continue through the night. The next day, the boys appear before the villagers in their best clothes to receive everyone's blessing, and *mukanda* comes to an end.

Sakochi Village, 9/24/83



Credits:

Original Japanese Version

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Ken'ichi Tsukada received his Ph.D. in Social Anthropology from Queen's University of Belfast, Northern Ireland. He also holds Master's Degrees in Musicology from Tokyo University of Fine Arts and Music and Anthropology from Indiana University. He has taught at Tokyo University of Fine Arts and Music and Keio University and is currently a Professor in the Faculty of International Studies of Hiroshima City University.

David Crandall has studied and performed the traditional Japanese stage art of *noh* since 1979. He currently resides in Seattle, Washington, where he writes songs and instrumental music, performs in traditional and experimental stage works, and continues his career as a translator.

Mark Greenberg teaches Humanities and Cultural Studies at Goddard College and is President of Upstreet Productions, specializing in radio, video, and audio projects involving traditional folk music and oral history. He was the text editor and a writer for *The JVC-Smithsonian/Folkways Video Anthologies of Music and Dance of the Americas, Europe, and Africa* (available from Multicultural Media).

Editor'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