

MCM 3011

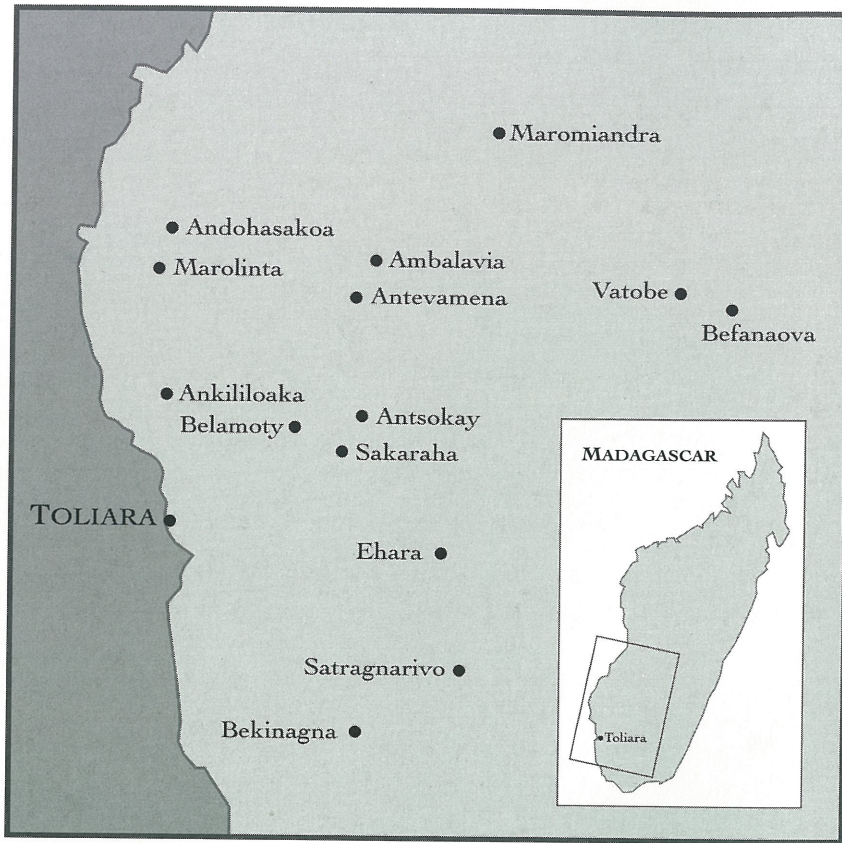
Madagascar

Awakening the Spirits

Music in Tromba and Bilo Trance Rituals

MUSIC OF THE EARTH





Madagascar

AWAKENING THE SPIRITS
Music in Tromba and Bilo Trance Rituals

Track Listing

1. SOLOHO MAHAVELO (Prayer for Healing)	3:12
2. REVORO	4:00
3. SARIBARA (As the Bara)	6:20
4. SEZIMARY (Sitting Still)	2:46
5. EVORONA	4:21
6. VINDA	1:25
7. MARARE (Sick)	2:15
8. MAMOHA BILO (Awakening the Bilo)	1:54
9. ROMBOLAVA (Non-stop Clapping)	2:55
10. MANGALAHOSY (Lose the Cord)	4:30
11. TRAFONY AMIN'NY ATINY (Hump and Liver)	6:07
12. SEZIRINA	4:55
13. FANDIGNISA (Waiting)	2:57
14. TSY ANAMBALIA (There is No Reason to Marry)	2:57
15. TOLIARA TSIMIRORO (Toliara Never Sleeps)	4:29
16. <i>Balan'ny</i>	5:59

Total time..... 61:51

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.

by August Schmödhofer

The Great Island

Madagascar, the fourth largest island on earth, is a paradise famous for its unique flora and fauna. This environment is now threatened by human development, as is the extraordinary Malagasy culture, home to eighteen different ethnic groups. The history of the island's settlement includes Indonesian, African, Arabian and European influences, but the details have scarcely been explored. For that reason the causal relationships of these groups on culture are difficult to prove with any concrete music genre.

Malagasy music can be broadly divided into three major styles: a) music of the high plateau; b) music of the east coast; c) and music of the west and south. Of these three, that of the high plateau has been most strongly influenced by European styles.

By contrast, the music of the vast steppe and savanna regions of the

west and south preserved older traditions. This compact disc is dedicated to this region's music. Geographically isolated, the steppes and savannas maintained traditional contexts for their music. Music here is an essential part of rituals such as burial and circumcision, and in trance rituals such as *tromba* and *bilo*, during which contact with the supernatural world is established.

A Diverse Pantheon

In Malagasy traditional society, powerful spirits coexist with human beings. They can have a positive influence, as in healing, but more often, their intentions are viewed as negative. Many psychic and physical maladies are attributed to bad spirits as a result, especially if the symptoms are unclear. It then becomes the task of the diviner-healer, called an *ombiasa*, to identify the responsible spirit.

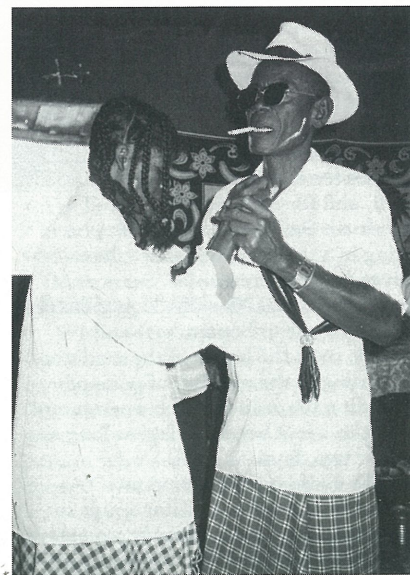
Certain trees, rocks, lakes and other natural sites are regarded in the Bara territory as living places of *belo*, or spirits of nature. Places where *belo* dwell are taboo, and any invasion is thought to have bad consequences. *Angatsy* is the reappearance of the dead, and *lolo* are the spirits of the dead. They are feared and everyone avoids coming too close to graves. From time to time, sacrifices are made to appease the ancestral and nature spirits.

The creator God is *Ndranagnahary* or *Zanahary* in official Malagasy. Although each religious ceremony begins with a prayer directed to him, no one really cares about him, nor is there a cult dedicated to him alone. The main reverence is given to ancestors of the kings called *dady*. The *dady* are considered to be the voice of *Ndranagnahary*.

Facing the Spirits

Tromba is a ritual of spirit possession. It has re-emerged in Madagascar on all social levels, though as recently as the 1960s, it was observed primarily in the royal line of the Sakalava and was otherwise widely rejected, as a relic of ancient times. It is still practiced in the court of Sakalava

kings in the northwest of Madagascar. In this *royal tromba*, special priest mediums, called *saba* and appointed by the monarch, are possessed by deceased Sakalava kings, who speak through the medium to express their will.



Healing dance.

In the southwest, the meaning of *tromba* is broader. First there is the already familiar form in which deified spirits appear as members of the royal line of the Sakalava, called here simply *tromba*. In addition, ceremonies called *tromba doany* or simply *doany* exhibit possession by semi-deified spirits, such as historical personalities of various ethnic groups, including Europeans (Napoleon, for example). *Tromba vorombe* or simply *vorombe* are spirit possessions related to persons who died in the sea.

The term *tromba* stands for the spirit itself, and for the medium, as well as for the ritual. Spirits are assumed to be living in a medium, but show themselves only at ceremonies. Seances of *tromba* take place mostly during the dry season (June to September) and outside or in the house of the medium, according to the number of persons attending the seance. Such a ceremony can take a few hours, or last as long as one or two days.

The ceremony's participants assemble in front of an altar, made in the shape of a boat for *tromba vorombe* or, for a *tromba doany*, in the model of a house on piles. The medium is accom-

panied by a servant (a relative of the medium), musicians, and patients or other people who seek advice. The music begins with the medium facing east. Increased hand-clapping called *rombo* and shouts of encouragement are specially suited to call the spirit out. The medium starts to move with the rhythm of the music and begins to tremble. Suddenly the music stops because the

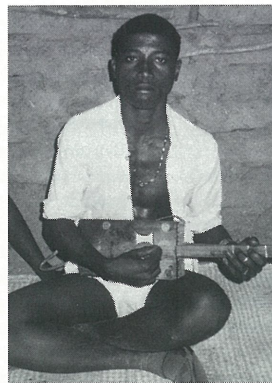


Falling into a trance.

spirit has gained control over the medium. In some cases the trance is signaled by the medium falling down or sliding into the arms of the accompanying servant.

The entranced medium puts on a costume appropriate to the spirit, who then greets all persons with a handshake and asks for the reason they are present. The questions are answered by the servant, who acts as a mediator when the patients come forward to present their problems and the spirit gives advice. More music is played in between questions. Since a spirit can possess a number of persons, it is not unusual for attendants of the seance to also fall into a trance. The atmosphere is joyous and celebratory.

Interestingly, the majority of mediums are women, unlike most of the spirits, which are male. In one seance, several spirits can appear in succession, with one medium inhabited by up to twenty spirits. Each



spirit has its own particular gestures, abilities, preferences, clothing and speech. If it concerns a European, for example, the medium might wear sunglasses, drink beer, smoke cigarettes and speak French, while performing couple dances in close embrace with the servant or a patient. When the spirit is about to leave, the medium again shakes hands.

Then under the sound of music, the spirit retires.

Healing With Music

While *tromba* with all its trance variants is present everywhere in Madagascar, *bilo* can only be found in the southwest of the island. It's especially typical of the Bara. A person who suffers from illness caused by a bad spirit is called *bilo*, as is the spirit itself and the special ritual treatment, which causes the spirit to leave its victim.

A person who is sick or does not

feel well will typically consult a traditional healer or doctor. If treatment by conventional methods is unsuccessful, he or she will consult a *mpisikily* or diviner, who will determine a *belo* or natural spirit as the cause of the disease. A *bilo* ceremony is ordered, which takes place on a favorable day under the guidance of the *mpisikily* or an *ombiasa*, a special healer. A large number of people usually attend these ceremonies, as their sympathy and comfort contribute to a favorable outcome.

A *bilo* ceremony is a kind of dance therapy, its music inducing the sick to dance. These dances can last for days. At the end, the patient drinks the blood of a sacrificed zebu, an ox-like animal. The bad spirit will have heard the requests and left the sick person to retreat into a wooden figurine representing a man, if the patient is a woman, or a woman figurine if the patient is a man. The spirit may also enter into a zebu, which from that point on will be seen as a sacred zebu.

The Role of the Music

If mediums are questioned about the significance of the music in a

tromba ceremony, they will usually respond that it serves a sacred role. It is believed that music in certain contexts can facilitate communication with the ancestors and spirits. Lena, a 50-year-old medium from Beravy, underlines this aspect: "*Zabay ataondraba ito an'ie le ty sairy ro tena fanjisiike'ay, ndra masy manao akory taba raty ty sairy'e tsy mahavoa le potra.*" ("The musicians are the ones that induce the trance; even the most competent healer cannot do any good without the musicians.")



Board zither and rattle.

This statement confirms the central role of music in *tromba*. From the beginning, music stimulates the ceremony and creates a solemn anticipation. Dance, incense (*emboke*) and rum (*toaka gasy*), together with the music, produce an emotional state favorable to trance. But the medium will concentrate on the music in order to reach the state of trance. She usually always works with the same musicians, who will use certain variations like abrupt changes in rhythm, occasional breaks, crescendos, increased hand-clapping and emphatic shouts to advance the trance. It is not the repetitions which induce this, but the variations of the pattern, especially changes in the metrical structure.

The medium will follow the rhythm of the music, with her shoulders trembling exactly to the speed of the smallest time units of the piece, her head shaking to the beat, and so on. The music for *tromba* and *bilo* trance rituals has intrinsic emotional properties, but trance normally only occurs in a certain social environment, namely during

these special rituals. The musicians do not go into trance. Nevertheless, there are *tromba* musicians who work alternately as mediums.

Many of the musical pieces that can be heard in possession ceremonies are not exclusively played at these occasions. They can also be played for simple enjoyment. Exceptions are those tunes which specifically refer to the ceremony by their content, and also a few pieces which are signature tunes and therefore cannot be played outside their ritual context. Because *bilo* ceremonies can last for days, they can also be supported by other musical events aside from the religious ritual music at the ceremony. This can include almost any kind of music and serves as entertainment for visitors.

The typical instruments played in *tromba* and *bilo* are the box zither, or *marovany* and the accordion, or *gorodo*. The accordion is now rarely seen because it is difficult to get replacement parts in Madagascar and so the instruments wear out. More and more, it is being supplanted by home-made lutes called *kabôsy* or *mandoliny*.

The Selections

1. SOLOHO MAHAVELO ("Prayer for Healing"): This is the beginning of a *tromba* ceremony that took place upon my request. Nevertheless, some persons seized the opportunity to be advised by the spirit. The medium, a man, enters very quickly into trance. The female spirit then arriving asks for which reason she has been called. The servant answers that there is a foreigner who wishes to see the *doany*. Performers: medium, Andre (ethnic group: Mahafaly, 40 years old); box zither (*marovany*) player, Rapera (ethnic group: Bara, 20 years); rattle (*katsa*), Velogamy (Bara); drums (*aponga be*) and (*aponga*), two girls; small bell (*lakolosy*) (its function is to awaken the spirit), the medium; two pieces of wood struck together (*fandromboa*), two girls; hand-clapping (*rombo*), all female and some male persons. Recorded: Belamoty, 5/17/88
2. REVORO (A Deity): The region of Sakaraha is an Eldorado for ethnomusicologists. A multitude of musical genres can be found, as well as a lot of talented musicians - for example the *marovany* player introduced in this recording. He comes from Manera, near Mahaboboka, and had attended a *bilo* ceremony in Sakaraha. The recordings were made during an intermission. The title of this piece indicates that it is to be used in *tromba* ceremonies of the *vorombe*-type. The spirits of personalities who died in the sea are called "*Revoro*." It is said that they have perished because they were drawn into the depths of the waters by a spirit. Performers: *marovany*, Trahasoa; *katsa*, unknown. Recorded: Sakaraha, 8/3/93.
3. SARIBARA ("As the Bara"): This recording demonstrates very impressively the creative possibilities in the variations of a theme. Performers and recording same as Track 2.
4. SEZIMARY ("Sitting Still"): Today, the best *marovany* players in the south of Madagascar can be found under the Antandroy and the Vezo. This musician, who died in 1987 at the age of 32, was from a small village

near Sakaraha. Performers: *marovany*, Zafitea (Antandroy, 31 years); *katsa*, Dady (Antandroy, 32 years, brother of Zafitea). Recorded: Antsokay, 3/6/86.

5. EVORONA (A Deity): At the arrival and departure of the *tromba* spirit more ecstatic music is played, but during the presence of the spirit pieces with a calming effect on the patient are performed. This is such a piece for *vorombe* ceremonies. Performers: *marovany*, Etsifatike (Mahafaly, 35 years); *katsa*, Rebony (Mahafaly, 40 years). Recorded: Bekinagna, 5/31/88.

Singing to the *Aponga*-drum

6. VINDA (A Grass): Another example of the *tromba* seance of Belamoty (see track 1).
7. MARARE ("Sick"): Often in *tromba* and *bilo* ceremonies instrumental pieces are alternately performed with women singing to drums. This recording is from a *tromba* ceremony which took place in front of the house of the medium. Performers: Unknown. Recorded: Ankililoaka, 4/2/96.

8. MAMOHA BILO ("Awakening the Bilo"): A *bilo* ceremony is a big feast, especially when it is organized by several families of several ill persons. Participants include members of the families, who may travel great distances to attend, as well as anyone curious from the surrounding villages. The *bilo* of Vatobe was such an event. Performers: Unknown. Recorded: Vatobe, 7/8/88.

Tromba and *bilo* music with *gorodo*

9. ROMBOLAVA ("Non-stop Clapping"): In addition to the *marovany*, the accordion is especially associated with healing. During the 19th century great quantities of diatonic accordions were imported to the island, mainly from Germany. A unique style of playing the instrument has developed. This recording is from a *tromba* seance. Performers: medium, Lazasoa (Mahafaly); spirit, Raleva Ralahiasy; *gorodo*, Mahaisoa (Mahafaly); two *katsa*, Mahatomotse and Niriso Pauline. Recorded: Satragnarivo, 6/15/88.
10. MANGALAHOSY ("Lose the Cord"): The title of this piece refers to a situation during a *bilo* ceremony. A zebu is fetched to be

sacrificed. The animal succeeds in loosening its leash and escapes. This recording is from a *bilo* ceremony at a village near Beroroha. Performers: *gorodo*, Tsangamana (Bara, 42 years); drum (*karataky*), Sely (ca. 18 years); rattle (*katra*), Parigny (ca. 18 years); conch shell (*antsiva*), Jules (ca. 18 years); little bell (*karikary*), the *bilo* woman. Recorded: Maromiandra, 8/11/89.

11. TRAFONY AMIN'NY ATINY ("Hump and Liver"): Hump and liver are those parts of the sacrificed zebu that are given to the leader of the ceremony (*ombiasa*). The accordion player in this recording, which was made at a *bilo* ceremony, is Rene Justin. He was a well known *marovany* player until he received a diatonic Hohner accordion as a present. Today, he is known as one of the best musicians of the South and is called especially to *bilo* ceremonies. The highlight of his career was an appearance at a festival in Paris in 1985. Rene lives in Ankazoabo-Sud. Performers: *gorodo*, Rene Justin (Tagnalana, 38 years); *katsa*, unknown. Recorded: Antevamena, 7/28/93.

Ensembles with *kabôsy*

12. SEZIRINA (Name of a Woman): In the south of the island, the *kabôsy* is considered a typical instrument of the Bara, but is popular everywhere today. This piece is played by musicians of the Antandroy people. Performers: lute (*kabôsy*), Dady (see track 4); *aponga*, Marcelline; *katsa*, a boy. Recorded: Antsokay, 3/4/86.

13. FANDIGNISA ("Waiting"): Aside from the name *kabôsy*, the name *mandoliny* is also used in some regions. In the south, arrangements consisting mostly of three *mandoliny* (solo, accompaniment, and bass) are very popular. The pattern of electric guitar music is prominent. Performers: group, "*Raedy*" with three *mandoliny* (*solo*, Raedy; *deuxieme solo*, Tsimiova; *beso*, Mahavonjy; all Antanosy). Recorded: Ehara, 8/11/93.

14. TSY ANAMBALIA ("There is no reason to marry"): The *kabôsy* recorded here has three strings and a wooden stick glued on the soundboard. When this stick is struck, it produces a drum-like

sound. Performer: Famantara (Masikoro, 22 years). Recorded: Andohasakoa, 5/23/88.

15. TOLIARA TSIMIRORO ("Toliara Never Sleeps"): The title of this piece refers to the nightlife of the coastal city of Toliara. The *kabôsy* is considered an instrument for the male youth. The dream of many *kabôsy* players is to one day exchange their self-built instrument for an electric guitar and to play at big events or in one of the many discotheques. Most of them abandon their goal as they grow up. Performers: two *kabôsy*, Dauphin and Tsitera (Masikoro and Antaisaka, both 20 years old). Recorded: Marolinta, 5/23/88.

16. BALANTSY (A Dance): At my arrival in Ambalavia it just happened that there was a *bilo* ceremony. Two young women were the patients. I introduced myself to the *ombiasa* and was allowed to make this recording. Performers: *kabôsy*, Realy (Bara, 22); rattle (*kantaa*), Fagnaraha (Bara, 16); *aponga*, Ratsiafaky (Bara, 20). Recorded: Ambalavia, 6/30/88.

Note: Tracks 4, 8, and 12 are Mono

Acknowledgements

Funding for my fieldwork in Madagascar was provided by the Austrian Ministry of Science and Research and the University of Vienna. I would further like to extend my sincerest thanks to the Sound Archives of the Austrian Academy of Sciences, where the original tapes of my field trips are preserved, and to the Institute of Musicology at the University of Vienna. Warmest thanks to all performers, to Emil Lubej, and especially to Sheila for her constant assistance. (August Schmidhofer)

Contributors

August Schmidhofer is assistant professor at the Institute of Musicology, University of Vienna. He has been engaged in musicological studies of Madagascar since 1986.

Credits:

Producer: Stephen McArthur
Co-Producers: Andrew Sloan & Chris Mills
Booklet Design: Tim Newcomb