

The Museum of Modern Art

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

AFRICAN MUSIC IN MUSEUM OF MODERN ART GALLERIES

A sampling of the music of Black Africa has been assembled by ethnomusicologist Alan P. Merriam of Indiana University for The Museum of Modern Art's current exhibition AFRICAN TEXTILES AND DECORATIVE ARTS, on view now through January 31, 1973. The 30-minute tape, which plays continuously in the exhibition, consists of 11 musical selections from nine African countries.

"The music of Africa south of the Sahara has long been noted for its great vitality and for its diversity," observes Professor Merriam. "Most often underlain and expressed by powerful and highly complex rhythmic drive, it can nevertheless range as well to soft and subtle musical expression...Despite its diversity, however, the music holds together as one of the great style areas of the world, similar everywhere in rhythmic organization and in certain melodic and formal characteristics."

The singing in these selections is accompanied by a variety of musical instruments uncommon in the West: gongs, basketry rattles, horn whistles, calabash resonators, water drums, a scraped notched stick, a kidongo (a seven-stringed harp), a nose flute, a kora (a 21-stringed harp-lute) and bamboo rattles.

AFRICAN TEXTILES AND DECORATIVE ARTS, the first comprehensive survey of its kind, includes 250 examples of textiles and jewelry from 26 countries. It is presented by the Museum under the auspices of its International Council and is made possible by grants from the National Endowment for the Arts and Standard Oil Company (New Jersey). The music comes from the collection of Alan P. Merriam and from OCORA Records, produced by the Office de Radiodiffusion-Télévision Française.

Notes on the music enclosed. Additional information available from Elizabeth Shaw, Director, and Mark Segal, Assistant, Department of Public Information, The Museum of Modern Art, 11 West 53 Street, New York, N.Y. 10019. Tel: (212) 956-7501 - 7296.

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playing with their own vocal yodeling, and a fifth blows a regularly repeated single pitch on a nose flute. From the record, Musique Centrafricaine, OCR 43.

6. "Hinga Ngime," Burundi. A group of twelve Bahutu women, led by 23-year-old Ntahonkiriye, sings a marriage song. The piece is structured in the short-phrase call-and-response pattern, accompanied by handclapping. From the Merriam collections.

7. "Mansanni," Senegal. Soudioulou Sissoko is a griot, a member of the professional musician caste widespread in the western sudan. He is playing the kora, a 21-stringed harp-lute, and his music commemorates the defeat of King Mansan-Demba. From the record, La Musique des Griots: Senegal, OCR 15.

8. "Obama Ondoua Ebini," Cameroun. This Beti recording group, led by François-Marie Ngoa, consists of five xylophonists, and a sixth musician who plays two bamboo rattles. The xylophones are of different sizes and pitch ranges; each is furnished with calabash resonators. The music is an instrumental version of a praise song for an important old man. Taken from the record, Musiques du Cameroun, OCR 25.

9. "Warushije," Rwanda. An Abatutsi boasting song is sung here by two men, Rusingizandekwa and Ruhanamirindi, who describe their prowess in war. The music style is in the Arabic tradition of northern Africa and the Middle East. Taken from the Merriam collections.

10. "Masango Music," Gabon. The mouth bow is widely distributed in Black Africa. Here a Masango man, Célestin Mondjo, plays a melody for the bwiti secret society, holding the bowstring between his open lips and striking it with a stick. Changes in the vocal cavity and selection of overtones form the melody. Taken from the record, Musiques du Gabon, OCR 41.

11. "Amasuka," Rwanda. Consisting of five big drums and one small leading drum, the Royal Drum ensemble functioned as a visible symbol of the Abatutsi Kingdom; at the time of this recording, in 1951, the king was Charles Rudahigwa, Mutara III. The powerful and stately upright rhythms are likened by the musicians to the sound of hoes chopping into the earth. From the Merriam collections.

NOTE: Professor A. P. Merriam, author of the Anthropology of Music is an eminent ethnomusicologist at Indiana University.

A NOTE ON THE RECORDINGS

Alan P. Merriam

The music of Africa south of the Sahara has long been noted for its great vitality and for its diversity. Most often underlain and expressed by powerful and highly complex rhythmic drive, it can nevertheless range as well to soft and subtle musical expression. The polyphonic, hocketing style of the Pygmies, the pervasive leader-and-chorus form, the thick-textured melodic structures of the Ekonda, the single flute melody of the East African herder, the powerful, upright drumming of the Abatutsi--all these, and many others, are part of the Black African musical scene, as is the great variety of music instruments of all types. Despite its diversity, however, the music holds together as one of the great style areas of the world, similar everywhere in rhythmic organization and in certain melodic and formal characteristics.

The music you are hearing represents a small sample of Black African expression. Materials have been drawn from my own collections, and from OCORA records, produced by the Office de Radiodiffusion-Télévision Française, and made available here through the kind cooperation of M. Charles Duvelle, Chef du Service de la Musique. The master tape was prepared in the Archives of Traditional Music, Indiana University, under the supervision of Mr. Frank Gillis, Associate Director.

1. "Tchenhoukoumen," Dahomey. This music of the Mahi people is performed in the context of the funeral. The orchestra is composed of a simple gong, a double gong, basketry rattles, a horn whistle, a calebash resonator, and two water drums. The sound is tight, controlled, and rhythmically complex. From the record, Musiques Dahoméennes, OCR 17.
2. "Nsi," Zaïre. The Ekonda people of west central Zaïre possess an extraordinary polyphonic song style. In this recording, a group of nine Ekonda men from the village of Mbongo Longale sings a ceremonial song which takes its name from "nsi," or "fish." They are accompanied late in the song by a scraped notched stick. From the Merriam collections.
3. "Ruigi," Uganda-Zaïre. Kiza, a Mugegere man who lives sometimes in Uganda and sometimes in Zaïre, accompanies his singing with the kidongo, a seven-stringed harp which he plucks with the thumbs and one or two fingers of both hands. His phrases are short and repetitive. From the Merriam collections.
4. "Musique Pygmée," Gabon. This song accompanies the kossé festival dance and is an excellent example of the polyphonic, yodeling, and hocketing techniques widely used by African pygmies. The female singers are accompanied by a male drummer. From the record, Musiques du Gabon, OCR 41.
5. "Babinga Music," Central African Republic. The haunting music of this performance is sung and played by another pygmy group, the Babinga, at the conclusion of a successful elephant hunt. Two men sing in unison and clap their hands, two others combine whistle