The music of Africa as a whole is still largely unknown to science. When discussing its use in education it is necessary to define one’s terms and so avoid popular generalizations which may prejudice rational assessment.

The term “African music” properly includes the genuine folk music of the continent which owes its origin to the innate musical genius of African people alone. Other musics performed by Africans, however commendable, do not fall within this category.

The task of discovering and harnessing items of local folk music for use in education calls for the initiative of gifted persons who are able to recognize the qualities of a genuine performance, and also, by means of recording and careful analysis, to register its characteristics in such a way that it can be reproduced satisfactorily by students and other musicians. This calls for the invention and employment of new techniques suited to the local media. The distinctive qualities of an African music may demand an equally distinctive system of notation unencumbered by the complexities of some unrelated music elsewhere. Standard European notations are quite unsuited for this purpose, however convenient they may be for traditionally trained western musicians. Once this premise is acknowledged, the adoption of a more appropriate system should be no more difficult than learning the grammar of an African language, and offers an immense advantage to those African musicians and students whom it is intended to benefit. Some such techniques and notations have already been devised.

The principle of using their national and local musics for the education and entertainment of indigenous children the world over needs no advocate. However, the problems in Africa of bringing into effect an unwritten music are somewhat unusual in that there are as yet no general text-books to guide musicians and teachers. Research with this purpose in view must first be undertaken and the results carefully codified so that appropriate books can then be compiled. Thereafter the way will gradually become clearer, if present day prejudices can be overcome. A handbook for the guidance of music research students has already been published by the International Library of African Music, “African music Codification and Text-book Project: Practical suggestions for field research”.

THE PRESENT STATE OF AFFAIRS

With minor exceptions only, Education Departments on this continent make no official use of local folk music in their schools. This is a strange commentary upon the state of school music in Africa, a continent which is generally considered to be exceptionally musical, particularly so in rhythm. In school and university where musical education plays a part, the accent is usually placed upon the theory and performance of non-African music, with the ultimate horizon of a diploma or degree in some branch of European technique, such as the training of four-part choirs or of church organists. The unconscious assumption behind this policy seems
to be that the natural evolution of African musical skill must lead inevitably towards a mastery of those kinds of music evolved and practised only in the northern hemisphere. The reasons are regrettably impractical, although understandable in terms of the idealism with which they are associated.

A glance at the history of music in African schools reveals the underlying cause of this commonly accepted prejudice.

The introduction of formal schooling was made in most cases by pioneer Christian missionaries from abroad. It was natural for them both in their worship and in their schools to consider their own music as a "universal" phenomenon, the African versions but a temporary aberration. Their dislike of the apparently discordant sounds and their fear of the probable association of all African compositions with heathen customs were off-set against their genuine belief in the spiritual virtues of the "good old tunes" so familiar to their own youth in far-away Europe or America. There was no suggestion at that time that there might be an adaptation of local music for both church and school, a development which was to begin nearly a century later with the appearance of the 'Missa Katanga' by Joseph Kiwélé in the southern Congo in the 1940s.

The antipathy of the missions towards African music in some cases led to complete prohibition. This was supported, for more mundane reasons, by Whites who had no interest in what appeared to them to be both uninteresting and primitive, objecting particularly to the noise of nightly drumming.

In most institutions this antagonism, sponsored by persons with the highest civilizing motives, developed into an induced sense of guilt and, logically, into a conviction that all homely, indigenous arts signified a barbaric past which was unworthy of literate attention. This attitude has not been the exclusive phenomenon of South African schools but is still the prevailing bias in most groups within Central and Southern Africa except where the musicality of the local people has been strong enough to prevail over it. Unfortunately, few of the more musically conservative African groups are to be found within South Africa itself.

Once the industrial era began to change the composition of the several African communities and children were born to parents of mixed tribal origin, the only musical stimuli available in towns had lost their original folk music foundations and consequently various foreign kinds of entertainment took their place, particularly through the medium of films and records. Well disposed Whites encouraged performances by choirs in the European or Victorian fashion, with dance bands playing adaptations of contemporary American dance tunes on non-African instruments presented to them for the purpose. The social accent was set upon rendering well-known European songs for which one could obtain printed scores, and on adopting the more popular dance styles of the moment. White musicians taught promising pupils whatever was available in teaching methods which were invariably those of the teacher and never African for lack of reliable data.

When this process had gone far enough, commerce found a ready market for recordings of the Africanized versions of current jazz hits and for equally popular town songs sung in the new town patois to a background of the three common chords strummed on plywood guitars. There was easy money to be made by budding singers who imitated the styles of such recordings as the well-known 'Ilanga lashona' or 'Skokiaan', and later of 'The Penny Whistle Blues'. Recordings such as these have set the taste and established the foundation of a slowly evolving style which has had a strong hold on southern town music ever since. This preoccupation has deprived the younger generation of any knowledge of the wealth of their heritage of folksongs unless they manage to keep more than a casual contact with their country relatives.

Performances of "town" music are characterized by a number of recognisable traits .... (1) a short, four-bar ground: (2) an harmonic structure dominated by the use of the three common chords: (3) a faithful adherence to the "anti-folk music" social cult and yet (4) an unconscious adherence to African tonality or modality coupled with (5) an unerring sense of strict tempo, both inherited, no doubt, from the folk music background.

In regard to African modality, recent research has revealed that each language group in Central and Southern Africa adheres to its own kind of scales or modes; about 40 per cent of those measured have a naturally pentatonic preference, about 20 per cent a hexatonic and the remaining 40 per cent
a heptatonic. In Johannesburg it is well-known among African choir-masters that in order to get a really good choir together you must, as far as possible, avoid recruiting members from different linguistic or modal backgrounds as they tend to revert to their innate concepts of pitch. This is even true of two pentatonic peoples who may not conform to each other's modality, but it immediately becomes pronounced when the heptatonic Venda of the northern Transvaal and similar people beyond the Limpopo are required to sing with the pentatonic Zulu or Sotho choirs.

The situation which has to be faced by anyone interested in bringing genuine African music into African institutions and schools contains this complex mixture of historic, social and psychological factors. They all have a background of comparatively recent evangelical, economic and cultural intrusion on the one hand and, on the other, a naïve conviction that by copying the idiosyncrasies of musical fashion and behaviour of the stronger society one is led on towards a greater social and financial success. Imitation rather than originality is the key. Originality in music demands, above all, a special form of genius, coupled with unusual talent and determination, gifts which a folk musician may find thwarted if he ventures into town away from his own home audience and fellow musicians.

This being so, imitation of the semi-western kinds of popular music for the delectation of the townies may spell monetary reward which folk music, appealing only to limited ethnic groups, may not achieve without scholastic backing.

Nevertheless, the rules for eventual maturity in African music lie in the aural prototypes and not in mere imitation of foreign conventions for the wrong, non-musical reasons.

Music in the familiar atmosphere of a preliterate country society, where recreation has not been mechanized, represents a more dynamic element in social life than is found in industrial urban surroundings. There are essential differences between the two. In towns, home language is no longer the sole medium and the calendar is controlled by industrial imperatives. In addition, the correct country raw materials for making familiar musical instruments (suitable trees, reeds, membranes etc.) are no longer ready to hand. If substitutes cannot be found, the use of that particular traditional instrument and its special music would have to be abandoned in favour of what is available; and that usually means music and instruments of foreign origin. In the country the inevitable limitations of both environment and language conventions ensure a certain degree of conservatism, as well as the mastery of a possibly unique kind of music.

Just how much is lost to home music by the change from country to town living can only be appreciated by those who have had first-hand experience of a full year's cycle of rural living, with its seasonal round of seed time and harvest, the full moon dances, the religious ceremonies and the affairs of the district community in which everyone takes part. In town the seasons hardly matter beyond the changes in temperature between summer and winter. The recreation of participating in country crafts also suffers, together with the associated work songs of the craftsmen, for lack of raw material and through the substitution of a limited variety of cheap, factory manufactured articles. So the occasion for social singing disappears and is never fully recovered, except perhaps by laments for a "lost paradise", of a kind which so characterized the Negro songs of America in the second half of the last century. The poetic urge to compose new songs for one's familiar friends is dulled by the polyglot nature of one's new neighbours down the street.

So much could be done by the compilation of a whole repertoire of country songs which would rekindle the delight in singing, for in Africa it is the singing of a song rather than the song itself which is the more important. This would be the backbone of any school song book even if sung out of context with the seasonal country events.

The art of music making in Africa has to follow well understood, if unwritten, rules to be effective. The basis of all songs is the flow of the lyric which of itself suggests its own melody in vernacular stress and tone. This is more so in Bantu languages where tone may have an important semantic connotation. Bantu languages are "tone" languages, which means that a word spoken with the wrong tones can convey a different meaning to the one intended. The direct effect in music is that sung melody must reflect the correct tone pattern of the words as spoken, to convey the correct meaning. A fixed melody repeated exactly, without variation, for each verse is likely to transgress the tone patterns of the succeeding lines of the vernacular poem unless one is unusually lucky. Consequently, the me-
lody must remain fluid or you may sing nonsense. This is equivalent to stress rules in an English song which must also avoid distortion. You have to put the right *emphasis on the right *syllable, and not the wrong *em-phasis is on the wrong *syllable!

It has been said that of all the ways of appreciating music only one is concerned with the structure of the work as music. The rest are largely associative. Most music in Africa is closely associated with social occasions for which certain items are appropriate (as our carols with Christmas) or with evoking a state of mind suited to the objective in hand. The beauty of an item lies for them not so much in the contemplation of its structure as in its effectiveness for purpose.

If African music is to be used in education there must be a clear conception of its exact purpose, in addition to the more mundane considerations of correct structure.

Is the purpose to be moral, religious, aesthetic, patriotic or recreational? It might even be disciplinary in the case of choir singing; diverting in children’s singing games so common in village communities; or “indoctrinating” towards some political or social objective.

Indoctrination has been so effective in the past through the exclusive use of music in European styles that whole communities have now accepted the foreign assumption that indigenous folk music is “primitive”, “bucolic” and “socially degrading”, associated only with heathendom. The attempt to introduce local folk music into some mission schools has often been described to me as an attempt to “drive them back” to paganism, so strong is the relationship in their ducile minds between foreignness and socio-economic progress! To sing a folk song would be equivalent to conniving with the powers of darkness or reaction. In one country the word for foreignness is “wechikoro” — “of the school!”. Music that is non-African is considered to be more socially potent and fashionable than the home-made varieties. Proof of this attitude of mind may not be found in books but can be tested in almost any African institution or school. It is a form of delusion possibly induced in the first place by a sense of inadequacy in contact with White material culture and ethics and continually reinforced by White prejudice.

In the face of this complex and pathological set of circumstances which have evolved from misguided teaching and understandable anxiety to acquire social merit, what can be done to normalize the situation and ensure that original African music of real merit is to play its proper part in education?

It is clear that nothing can be done overnight but rather, by gradually establishing a clearly defined policy of musical integrity which can be implemented within the next few years, the whole gamut of indigenous musical ability must be brought into its right perspective and profoundly enrich the musical life of the country. This would not at first be a country-wide movement but rather a musical revival spreading outwards from a few talented musicians, supported and encouraged by cultural and official recognition at all stages of development. Official recognition from the start is essential or the prevalent snobbism associated with non-African musics will frustrate all endeavours. This does not mean forbidding the practice of the usual run of present-day “popular” music but, rather, ensuring that sheer musical merit of items of indigenous composition is given proper recognition. It is common practice, for example, to start a concert with a few items of pseudo-folk music and then to proceed with renderings of popular or foreign items as a climax of the performance. This order might soon be reversed as the movement gets under way and items of indigenous merit are added to the repertoire.

From a personnel aspect, it means selecting a few, a very few, talented musicians, with proven interest in the music of their own language or ethnic group and giving them a course in the fundamentals of international folk musics with special reference to local African conditions. During this preliminary period careful selection would have to be made which would eliminate unsuitable candidates, concentrating on outstanding talent, for it will be by merit alone that the project will succeed.

The second stage would entail practical experience in the field, collecting data which would be processed, analyzed in detail, and added to a national archive of items which would form the nucleus of teaching material for future music teachers. It would not necessarily be a collection of items to be set as standard works for schools but rather it would be a compilation of examples of musical or poetical significance from which future composers and teachers would glean threads of inspiration for future work. Occasionally there would be an item which
would catch the imagination and, like many folk songs throughout the world, retain its artistic validity for many generations, a kind of African "Greensleeves".

The third stage would consist of deduction; analyzing the qualities which genuinely African musical items and techniques possess and so laying the foundation for the codification of the theories which lie behind them, the very stuff of musical education.

Once this has reached the stage of discrimination of what is truly representative of musical practices in any one community, comparisons become possible and lead on to valid generalizations which may be found to apply to a number of folk musics within the continent. In this way, step by step, a body of reasonably accurate guidelines can be formulated and the process of musical education can begin, backed by proven knowledge and with the detailed support of the recorded evidence which is available on tape or disc.

It is fortunate that as a result of over 20 years of research already undertaken and housed in the archive of the International Library of African Music near Johannesburg much of the background to several styles of African music in Central and Southern Africa is already at hand for the first students to experience aurally.

The first text-books on Southern African music as a subject of practical education should result from the groundwork implied in these three stages. Teacher training with preliminary courses for promising musicians would follow naturally and in a very few years African music would have become as accepted a subject as any national musics in the rest of the world.

The success of the undertaking would depend upon the genius of a small band of gifted musicians adequately supported and encouraged by administrators and music educators when the quality of their work and inspiration must be seen to overcome all obstacles, including the possible indifference or prejudice of the populace. Quality and integrity in musical matters would override all other considerations and the local Bantu communities would have an added treasure in their cultural armoury for this and future generations which would be an example to the rest of Africa.