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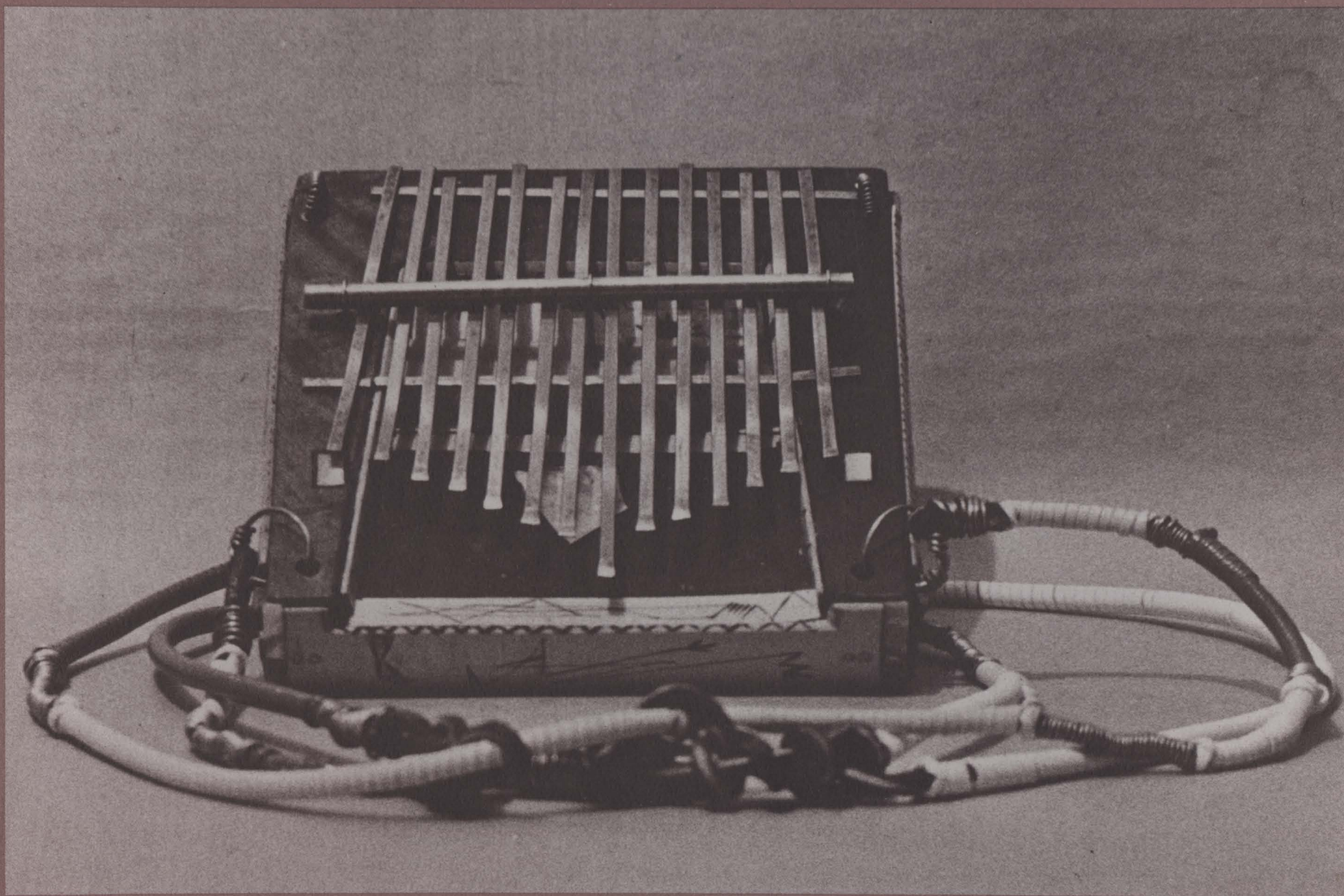
# The Mama-Likembi Instruction Record

AND MANUAL

## Nadi Qamar

Specialist of African Musical Instruments and Creator of THE NURU TAA AFRICAN MUSICAL TRADITION

Compiled and written by Nadi Qamar





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**The Mama-Likembi  
Instruction Record  
AND MANUAL**

**Nadi Qamar**

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THE NURU TAA AFRICAN MUSICAL TRADITION  
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DESCRIPTIVE NOTES ARE INSIDE POCKET

COVER DESIGN BY RONALD CLYNE  
COVER PHOTO BY LEONARD BYRD

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Nadi Qamar was born in Cincinnati, Ohio, the grandchild of a freed African slave. He became a self-taught jazz pianist, composer, and orchestrator, at 17 years of age. He is the fourth cousin and former protege of the incomparable pianist, Art Tatum. He has practiced Yoga over 20 years and was assistant to Swami Swanandashram, Yogi Raj, of Shankaracharya, as counselor, accompanist and soloist for Nina Simone, with whom he performed throughout the U.S.A., West Indies, Japan and Australia. He has concertized, lectured, and conducted Chordophone workshops throughout the Brooklyn and New York public schools. He taught for one year at Community Educational Exchange Program on Columbia University Campus. He has made numerous symphonic, radio, and television appearances, plus college concerts and seminars on both East and West coasts.

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### FOREWORD

Truthfully speaking, music expresses thoughts and feelings that words are incapable of, therefore anything written herein must by divine law fall somewhat short of a full explanation. However, I fervently hope that even within this limited scope, I shall be able to better acquaint you, the public with the cultural background, technical and aesthetic aspects of the Nuru Taa African musical idiom in relation to the Likembi-Mbira Finger Percussion instruments. Thanks to my African-American heritage, I have been able to formulate a contemporary black music that is the artistic symbol of my life work.

I believe that Mr. Asch of Folkways Records deserves credit for abetting the international dissemination of an African music that has originated in America. Through this release the world will learn that there are American-born Africans who devote their creative energies to the construction, playing and teaching of African musical instruments other than conga drums!

### INTRODUCTION

The technical aspects of musical science such as scales, omni-lateral rhythms, dynamic shading are as much a part of classic and contemporary African music as they are European and Asiatic music. Therefore, the need of profound study should be as much a recognized prerequisite of discriminative African musical scholars in the western world as they are of any other serious musical students anywhere in the world.



The forthcoming studies do not dictate to the aspiring artist his choice of expressive style, but they do offer a wide area of artistic stimulation to further discriminative evaluation of African musical resources.

Students to whom the Likembi-Mbira instruments are culturally indigenous are thus introduced to another dimension of their own cultural background, while those from other cultures may learn things about the mores of others that are positive, and provocative of mutual respect. Therefore, I consider it my duty to communicate with today's students of African music at a level which encouraged them to understand the cultural value, technical and aesthetic challenge of classic and modern African music.

Since I have been inspired to create the Mama-Likembe as the link between my past - jazz piano activities - and my present involvement with African music, it is necessary that I tell you about the parts of its tradition and history, of which I am aware. Let's consider the raw material of which it is made. The most outstanding of these is iron, which takes us to the Ashantis of Ghana who were reputed to be the first people to discover the bellows for ore smelting, according to historian Carter J. Woodson. Acknowledgment of this makes us realize that the metal keys of the Likembis are symbols of these skilled artisans who knew how to produce music from metal prongs. But even they were following the example of those before them who used bamboo reeds for prongs. Here there was obviously a driving quest to produce music by whatever means possible.

Let's now consider the spiritual and psychological symbolism of the Likembis. Thanks to Mr. Francis Bebey, a self-taught Camervonian concert solo guitarist and ethnomusicologist, we learn that the Lemba people of Transvaal, South Africa use Likembis (called Deza), and that each prong plucked represents the birth of a child, plus a treasury of other information in his recently published book entitled "African Music, a People's Art."

When we also realize the high infant mortality of this South African oppressed Bantustan area, and in addition, the inspirational psychology used by these people to encourage a commensurate birth rate, how then, in the face of this awareness, can anyone dare to decide that traditional African instruments are not good enough to play African music? (I am here referring to Ethiopia's mass importation of European musical instruments and instructors, to attempt to play Ethiopian music, which will destroy the music thus subjected to this technological genocide of vital ethnic nuances.)

Therefore, it is obvious that we African Americans can inspire even Black Africa by our active interest in African music.

#### CONSTRUCTION & NOMENCLATURE

There are a variety of prong set-ups on the eight manuals of the Mama-Likembi. They are:

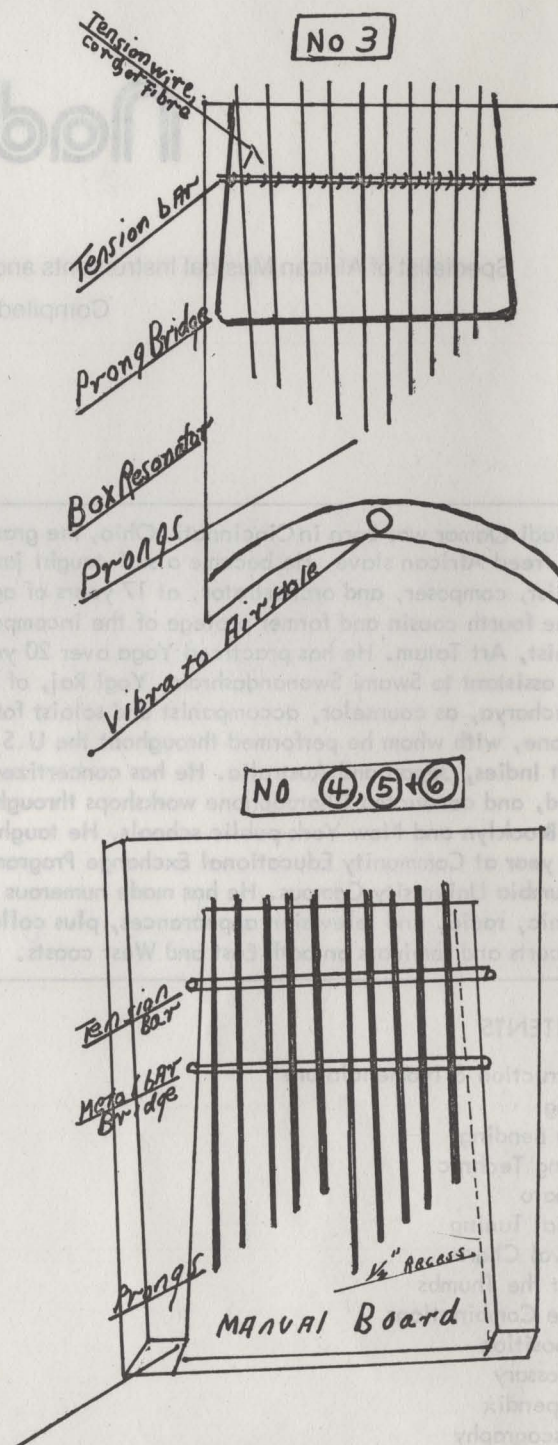
Manual #1 which is structured with the tension wire woven into the wood.

Manuals #2, #7, & #8 have a  $\frac{1}{4}$ " to  $\frac{1}{2}$ " metal cuff bridge with from 3 to 10 overlapping sections of tension wire pulled through a series of small holes.

Manuals #4, #5, & #6 are cut from a  $\frac{3}{4}$ " wood block of semi-hardwood with a metal bar bridge & tension bar. The wire is at least  $\frac{1}{2}$ " in thickness, either copper or tin.

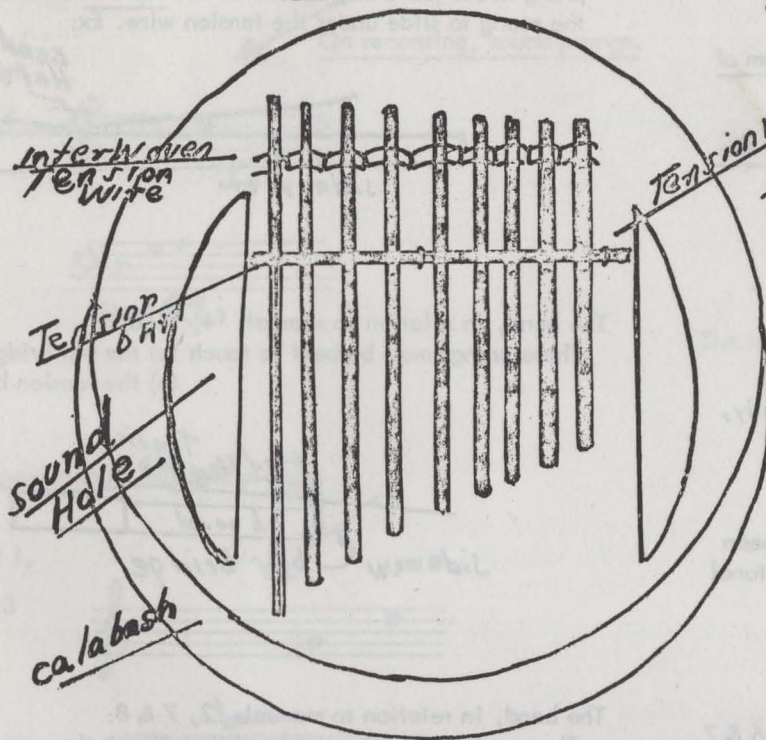
The prongs vary in metal types from flattened nails, coat hanger sections & electrician's fish wire to corrugated tin wire.

The complete Mama Likembi manual set-up is balanced by three calabashes under manuals #1, #2, & #6.

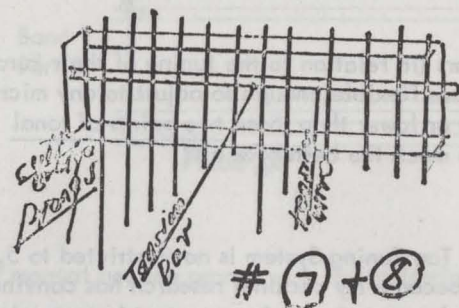
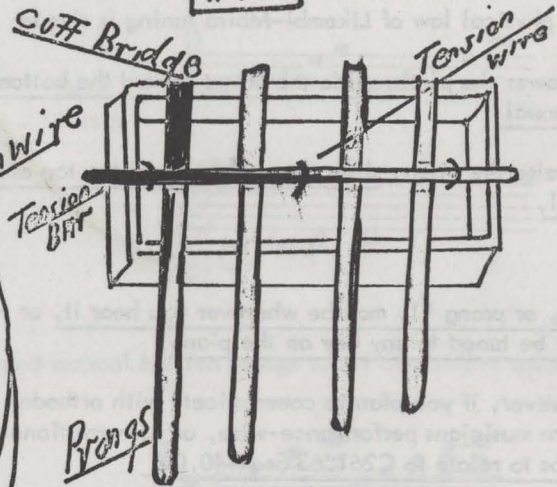




No 1



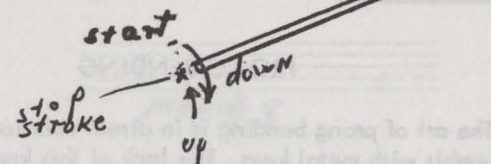
#2



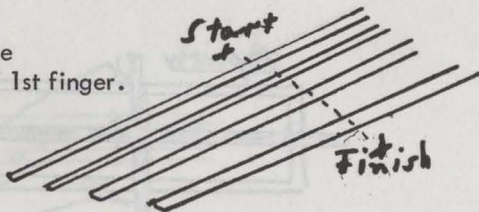
Band 2 Single stroke  
Part 1 with ball of fingertip. brush here



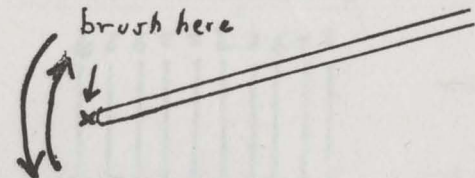
Band 2 Mute stroke  
Part 4 (ball) of finger.



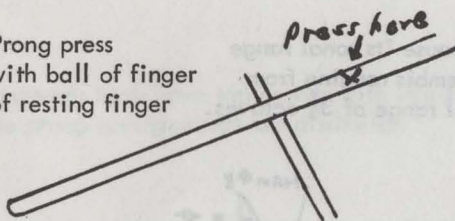
Band 2 Sweep stroke  
Part 5 with nail of 1st finger.



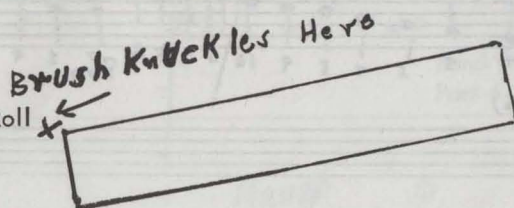
Band 2 Flutter stroke  
Part 6 with tip of 1st finger.



Band 2 Prong press  
Part 7 with ball of finger of resting finger



Band 2 Knuckle Roll  
Part 8



wave palm here while playing with opposite hand



Palm Vibrato



## TUNING TECHNIC

The physical law of Likembi-Mbira tuning is simple:

To lower the pitch, slide the prong toward the bottom of the manual.

To raise the pitch, slide the prong toward the top of the manual.

DO, or prong #1, may be wherever you hear it, or - it may be tuned to any key on the piano.

However, if you plan to communicate with orthodox western musicians performance-wise, or conversationally, it helps to relate to C261.63 or A440.00.

If their ears (in relation to the tuning of their European instrument) are flexible enough to adjust to any microtonal pitch higher or lower than those two points of tonal reference so much the better for all!

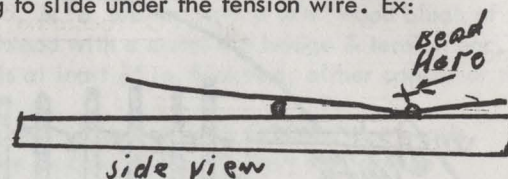
The Nuru Taa Tuning System is not restricted to 5, 6 & 7 note scales because my personal research has convinced me that the tonal range of a modern concert instrument should encompass the widest area of vibrations that are audible to the human ear. Also, A, 440, although necessary in restricted orchestral situations, is not a rigid rule, in tuning the Likembi-Mbira.

## PRONG BENDING

The art of prong bending is in direct relation to tuning of Likembis with metal keys. The lack of this knowledge is responsible for the widespread importation of authentic African Likembis and Mbira that do not function as they should, because they have not been properly adjusted.

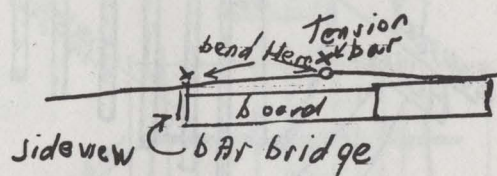
The bend, in relation to manual type #1:

These prongs are quite easy to adjust because a straight prong needs just a slight bend at the top end to allow the prong to slide under the tension wire. Ex:



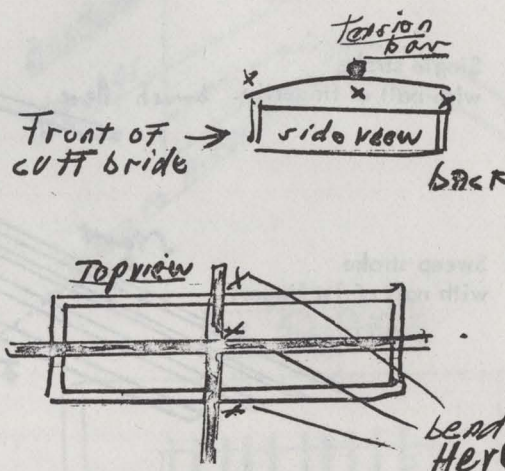
The bend, in relation to manuals #4, 5, & 6:

These prongs must be bent to touch (a) the bar bridge (b) the tension bar



The bend, in relation to manuals #2, 7 & 8:

These prongs must have a bend that allows the prong to touch both sides of the cuff bridge and the tension bar.



## Band 1, Part 1

The Mama-Likembi is so named because its tonal range encompasses the manuals of eight Likembis ranging from 4 to 10 prongs per manual with a total range of  $3\frac{1}{2}$  octaves.





The bottom-range manual has 8 prongs.

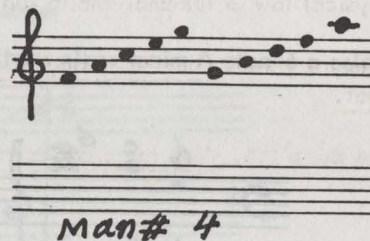
Band 1,  
Part 2



On recording, sound prongs.

The next manual has ten prongs.

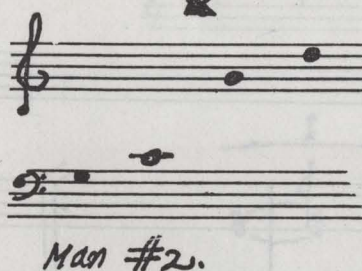
Band 1  
Part 5



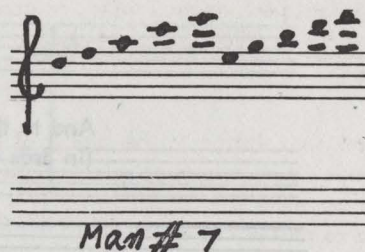
The next manual has ten prongs tuned one octave above #6.

The next manual has four prongs.

Band 1,  
Part 3



Band 1  
Part 8



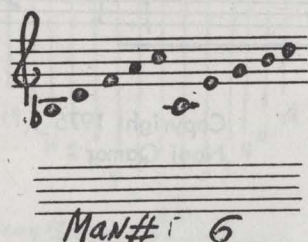
The next manual has ten prongs with the following layout:

Band 1  
Part 9



The next manual has ten prongs.

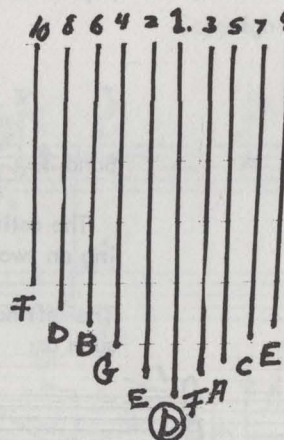
Band 1,  
Part 7



There are always several very definite key centers available within each tuning:

On manual #3

Example from a Dmi tuning



ie:

The next two manuals both have ten prongs with identical ranges, but the prong arrangements are dissimilar:



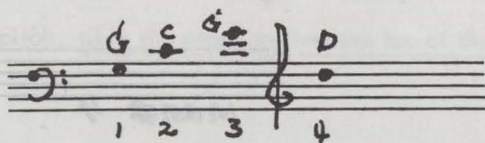
There is a 7-note Gma tuning with a flat b seventh starting up from #4 to #10.



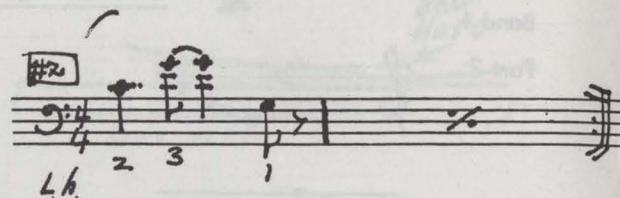
There is also an 8-note F major scale starting on #3 to #10.

Now to compose a simple West Indian motif, in C major, we play #2, #3, & #1, in the following rhythm:

There is also a 6-note A minor scale starting on #5 to #10.



MM. 88 = J

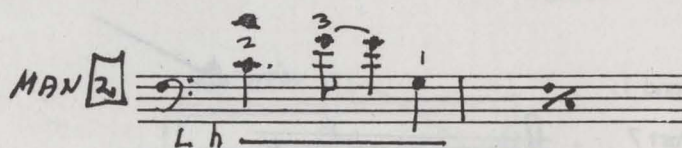
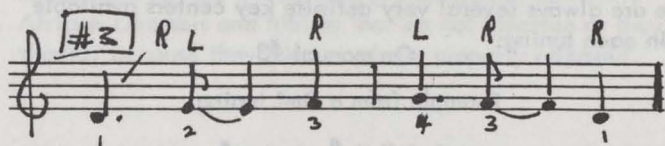


Now to extend the range we will add manual #2 which gives us the following four notes:

And to this, on manual #3 (right hand) we play (in 3rds with 1st and 3rd finger) the following melody:



And then to complete the thought, we add:

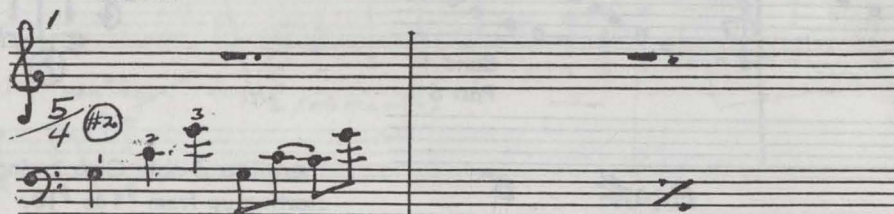


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### Band 3: THE OSTINATO

The ostinato (bass rhythm) is best functional when performing on two manuals simultaneously.

The left hand, by using 2 or more prongs in a related sequence, such as:





can maintain a rhythm pattern, over which the right hand, playing preferably a split triangle prong arrangement, can articulate either ascending or descending melodic passages such as:



After the ostinato and melody have matured, the basic rhythm may be moved from the bass to the melody in this fashion:

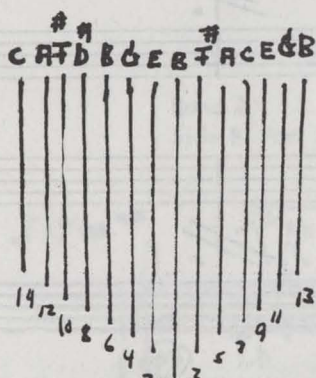


without disrupting the rhythmic flow.

#### Band 4:

#### SPECIAL TUNINGS

There are many special tunings which make a variety of scales, modes, and harmonic changes possible. This is a B Major Tuning on an auxiliary Likembi with 14 prongs. (The extra prongs may be added if you have the metal and an instrument without prong-slots.)



The interval characteristic is: 1 4 5 5# 6# 8 8# ascending, which is a far eastern mood melodically sounding like:

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Band 7  
Part 1

The next composition, "Sifa Kwa Tatu," is another example of what can be done on the Mama-Likembi. It may be quite a challenge to beginners but it is really quite simple once you apply yourself to the seriousness of this music, and practice.

**MANUAL** #5  $\text{♩} = 120 \text{ M.M.}$

**SIFA KWA TATU**  
**Tribute to three**

salute to M/A/col/mx  
composed by EL Hall Malik  
Jadi Gamar Shv Bazz  
Kwame Nkrumah  
Amora Cebra

Band 7  
Part 2

**MANUAL** #1

**LIK. 4**

**MAN** #2

$\text{♩} = 104 \text{ M.M.}$

progs - 1 2 3

**EXtend**

**# 1**

**Finis**



Band 5:

Triads	5 6 7 8 9 10 11 12 13 14 15
	3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 11 12 13
	1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 11

Major & Minor 7ths	7 8 9 10 11 12 13 14 15
	5 6 7 8 9 10 11 12 13
	3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 11
	1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9

Major & Minor 9ths	9 10 11 12 13 14 15
	7 8 9 10 11 12 13
	5 6 7 8 9 10 11
	3 4 5 6 7 8 9
	1 2 3 4 5 6 7

These chordal resources are more practical when used sparingly, rather than block progressions. The small intervals (two and three note chords) are more adaptable to rhythmic and melodic diversity.

There are many possible intervals on a 15 prong manual tuned diatonically, i.e.: do, re, mi, fa, sol, la, ti, do & etc. Also tremolando fillagree against pedal tones can create many ethereal effects, especially with small intervals.

Maj & Min Intervals →	2nds	3rds	4ths	5ths	6ths	7ths	8ths	9ths	10ths
	1&2	1&3	1&4	1&5	1&6	1&7	1&8	1&9	1&10
	2&3	2&4	2&5	2&6	2&7	2&8	2&9	2&10	2&11
	3&4	3&5	3&6	3&7	3&8	3&9	3&10	3&11	3&12
	4&5	4&6	4&7	4&8	4&9	4&10	4&11	4&12	4&13
Prongs →	5&6	5&7	5&8	5&9	5&10	5&11	5&12	5&13	5&14
	6&7	6&8	6&9	6&10	6&11	6&12	6&13	6&14	6&15
	7&8	7&9	7&10	7&11	7&12	7&13	7&14	7&15	
	8&9	8&10	8&11	8&12	8&13	8&14	8&15		
	9&10	9&11	9&12	9&13	9&14	9&15			
	10&11	10&12	10&13	10&14	10&15				
	11&12	11&13	11&14	11&15					
	12&13	12&14	12&15						
		13&15							

Band 2

Side B Part 1:

COMPOSITIONAL ANALYSIS



The first staff shows a melodic line starting with a circled #5, followed by a series of eighth and sixteenth notes, ending with a circled #6. The second staff continues the melodic line with similar notation, including a circled #4 and #5. The third staff shows a melodic line with a circled #6, a measure marked '6', and a measure marked 'Lik'.

Note: This is a general Movement Feeling, not representative scoring.

#### Band 6: SOME LOGICAL STROKE COMBINATIONS

Single stroke L.,  
& Sweep stroke R.  
Triple stops

Manual #5 only. The notation shows a single stroke in the left hand (Lh) and a sweep stroke in the right hand (Rh) with fingerings 3, 5, 7. A circled 'A' is above the sweep stroke. The notation ends with a double bar line and a slash.

Single stroke (L.H.) x triple  
stroke (R.H.) playing ascending  
melodic chords.

Manual #5 only. The notation shows a single stroke in the left hand (Lh) and a triple stroke in the right hand (Rh) with fingerings 2, 4, 6. A circled 'B' is above the triple stroke. The notation ends with a double bar line and a slash.

Triple stroke descending  
thirds (L.H.) x double stroke  
ascending or descending thirds.

Manual #5 only. The notation shows a triple stroke in the left hand (Lh) with fingerings 10, 8, 6 and a double stroke in the right hand (Rh) with fingerings 7, 9. A circled 'C' is above the triple stroke. The notation ends with a double bar line and a slash.

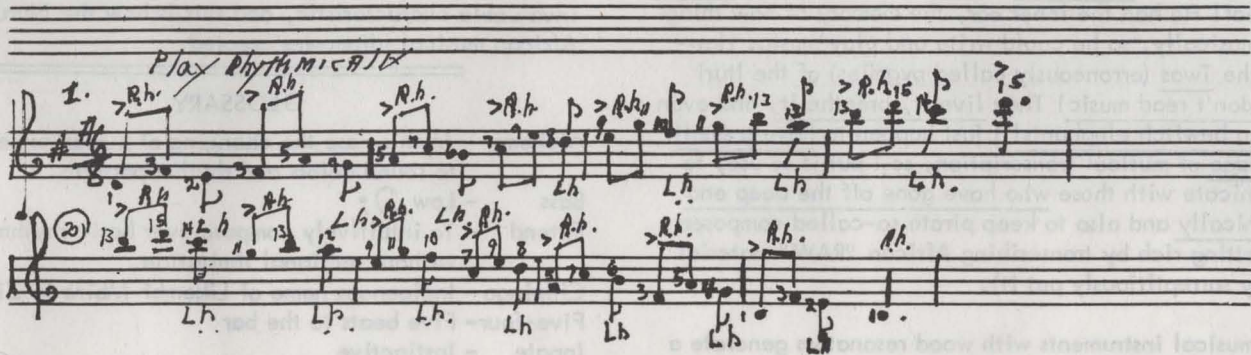


Here are some exercises suitable for the do-re-mi-fa-sol-la-ti-do tuning. The approximate pitch is about D major, the technic is double stroke right and single stroke left in triple, etc.

Practice these exercises slowly first to find the notes. The numbers are for prongs and intervals so you are learning two

things together. Have someone who plays piano, guitar, flute or some light timbre instrument to play with you. M.M. 63.=d. is a good tempo to try for.

Remember, these are delicate instruments not for clawing notes, or punching or pounding. Use restraint at all times. Fingering is 1st and 2nd finger right hand x 1st finger in alternate double then single strokes. - Feel the rhythm as one two



### COMPOSITION

A painter fixes his eyes on the calm sea seated on a hill, with the early morning sunrays dancing on the rippling waters. A musician listens to a stream of rhythms and tones, that form, from varied patterns of finger movements and, thus, composes music. The physical actions may differ, but the alchemy of an art form manifesting from the intuition is the same.

The compositional technic of the Nuru Taa African Musical Idiom is based on intuition. This means that the mind must be completely free of any formulas or word images at the time of composition. In other words, all that I have discussed herein must be momentarily forgotten so that creative intuition can function. Also, there are certain natural laws that exist, by virtue of the characteristic nature of life's phenomena, which includes the creative aspect of compositional performance.

When playing the Likembi, if we continue to move toward the Bass or Treble Extremes of the instrument we soon come to the end of the keyboard. Also, low registers become noise and the high become inaudible. Therefore, to seek an infinite source of Tonal Colours or Motifs, we must go within to the middle register of the instrument. Then when we discover, by rhythmic motion, the seed idea that we wish to develop, we move outward, to find the next plane of the motif which we first discovered. If we continue to play with the mind relaxed, and the ears and consciousness open and alert, the composition will manifest. This is as natural as conversation. However, like words the music must be truly what you feel, or the sensitive listener will know that you are not playing music. I mean, real music that rings with truth. The act of picking up a Likembi, and extending the thumbs (how often have I witnessed this?!!!) and beginning to experiment, does not guarantee that anyone will produce African Music. There is an indispensable ingredient called innate talent that the aspiring performer must have. I stress this point because preconceived misconceptions concerning them are quite numerous. For example, just because you see an African

musician playing a Likembi, imbiru or kalimba with his thumbs does not guarantee that you, whether you are African or European, can do the same. Also, misnaming these instruments thumb pianos, kweli pianos, hand pianos or sanzas does not magically make them musically compatible to you. Your first stumbling block may be that you think of them as something with which to amuse yourself, despite readily available information from African experts, telling the world about the seriousness of African music. This, of course, applies to magazine ads that promise to teach piano or guitar in five days! You also may be confused by the statement, "In Africa, everyone plays music." It is true that in Africa almost everyone dances and sings, but with drums, harps, or other instruments, the situation is quite different. Also, in Africa, most of the people who play some instrument for relaxation, entertainment, or at communal gatherings do so with at least minimum required ability to participate on that occasion. Otherwise, they instantly become objects of ridicule and, in many situations, even expert performers are forbidden by law to play certain instruments or music, except at the traditional time, by those chosen to do so. Also, just as there are language barriers which can be quite formidable, there are also finger and hand movements, which are very subtle, which are definite arts, that must be taught by a skilled instructor, to a talented pupil before any instrument is learned. Yes, there are self-taught musicians, but they are rare individuals.

It may be that you can be no more than a dedicated devotee of African music. If you find this to be true, for the sake of the art and your own self esteem, accept the truth, for African music like any other needs patrons, and even the realization that you tried and failed as a performer will help you to appreciate the artistry of others.



## TIPS FOR ASPIRING COMPOSERS

Don't get the idea that because I have written out a few things that writing is more important than playing! The music comes from the cosmos to your heart, through your fingers, and it will never be on the paper!!! Yes, writing is good, to get a general idea of the rhythmic and tonal dimensions of something you hear, but the ear is the most vital thing! Without it you or anyone would be in heavy trouble trying to play music. Remember, Beethoven was not born deaf! He had the inner ear, the memory of how things sound musically, so he could write and play music. However, the Twas (erroneously called pygmies) of the Ituri Forest don't read music! They live it, breathe it, and even use it to bewitch elephants! I just happen to have a small knowledge of musical transcription, so I put it to use, to communicate with those who have gone off the deep end academically and also to keep pirate so-called composers from getting rich by transcribing African "RAW" material (as they surreptitiously put it).

All musical instruments with wood resonators generate a bigger sound when they are placed on a table. This position also allows you to use 8 fingers instead of just 2 thumbs. Yes, I know you want to walk with your instrument, and that's alright if it has a big sound, and if you are in a quiet spot. Remember, as a student, you are striving to develop a true musical touch. Also remember that hard playing on ethnic Likembis will cause them to go out of tune, and don't forget, this is a tuned instrument that you are studying so the longer it stays in tune, the more control you will have over the sound. Also remember that when you get a buzzing sound or a note that just simply won't conform in timbre with the others, that African instruments have personality! They have character! They do not conform with academic strictures!!! Now, here is another important point: when you get strong enough rhythmically, and know your instrument well enough, everything will start to sound good - buzzes, twangs, flats or sharps, because you'll know what to do with them!!!



## LIKEMBI MUSIC AS A STRESS THERAPY

### About "Time"

Man creates time, by measuring the number of human acts that are performed between dawn and sunset, summer and winter, childhood and adulthood, birth and death. When he allows his mind to conjure a feeling of extreme urgency, to be at a given place at a pre-chosen time, or do a certain number of things, etc., he runs the risk of experiencing stress (or hypertension), which drastically alters his metabolism and which instantly and adversely affects vital organic functions such as respiration and heartbeat. Therefore, if the need is not critical enough to make such measurement seem necessary, then the alternate attitude should be a feeling of timelessness. This need not slow one's actions to an impractical pace, but with it you will find that many things can be done with an added measure of artanship and, above all, with a relaxed mind and body.

Likembi music, being considerably quiet, is usually played in Africa when people want to relax and allow the phenomena of life to continue, as it will, without strong feelings of urgency to do anything that cannot be done in a relaxed manner. Therefore, when the composer booby-traps his music with too many ultimatums such as bar lines, intricate forms, and rigid scale procedure, he unknowingly destroys the priceless thing that music was meant to create. Accordingly, music that is first played, then recorded, and scored (to whatever extent necessary) retains its most invaluable characteristic, and this is how the Nuru Taa African musical idiom was created.

## GLOSSARY

- Alchemy - In this case the changing of human experience to sound colors and rhythm patterns.
- Bass - Low 
- Extend - To intuitively compose over basic rhythm, without sectional limitation.
- Chipinga - Indigenous name of Likembi-Mbira in Zimbaline.
- Five-four - Five beats to the bar
- Innate - Instinctive
- Minor - Musically referring to a scale or chord having a minor 3rd. Also referring to musical intervals lowered  $\frac{1}{2}$  step.
- Misnomer - False name
- Njari - Indigenous name of Likembi-Mbira in Karanga.
- Nuru Taa - Lamplight (in Kiswahili - a concept that illuminates)
- Octave - Two musical tones 8 diatonic steps apart
- |    |    |    |    |     |    |    |    |
|----|----|----|----|-----|----|----|----|
| Do | Re | Me | Fa | Sol | La | Ti | Do |
| 1  | 2  | 3  | 4  | 5   | 6  | 7  | 8  |
- Ostinato - Bass Rhythm
- Treble -  High

## DISCOGRAPHY OF PERSONAL PERFORMANCES WITH THE MAMA-LIKEMBI

- The Nuru Taa Archives of Nadi Qamar Mama-Likembi and Talviha compositions in an extensive collection. Tape and Cassettes
- Isiko Muziki (Night Music) Nuru Taa Records  
Saba Nne (Seven-Four) 45 rpm Release
- Kings & Queens. Rufus Harley Bagpipes  
acc. by Mama-Likembi and Talviha. Atlantic Records
- Compulsion. Andrew Hill Orch. Blue Note Records
- Unity Suite. Andrew Hill Orch. Blue Note Records
- "It's Finished" - Nina Simone Trio RCA  
Live at Avery Fisher Hall
- "Ganga and Hess" - Motion Picture Soundtrack  
Sam Waymon, composer-conductor of main score  
Nadi Qamar, incidental music
- Muzik. Stanley Cowell, Musical Director (orch. & Likembi)  
Billy Higgins, Moroccan & Korem strings  
Ed Blackwell, Logdrums  
Marion Brown, Woodwinds  
Nadi Qamar, Mama-Likembi, Talviha  
composer of Strata East Records
- The Nuru Taa African Musical Idiom, collection of solo performances by Nadi Qamar. Folkways Records



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Flutter Stroke; Prong Press  
Knuckle Roll; Wrist Tremolo  
Finger Vibrato
- Band 3 - Ostinato
- Band 4 - Special Tuning  
Far Eastern Mood
- Band 5 - The Interval Chart
- Band 6 - Stroke Combinations
- Band 7 - Sifa Kwa Tatu
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