Polynesian Songs & Games
from Bellona (Mungiki)

Solomon Islands
Recordings, notes and photographs by Jane Mink Rossen
SIDE A
1. Canoe hauling songs (2:35)
2. Mako hakauna (2:00)
3. Singing game a b a (2:45)
4. Singing game, Resurrection (2:06)
5. Women's dance (3:47)
6. Introductory song (0:54)
7. Introductory song (1:29)
8. Tattooing song (5:04)

SIDE B
1. Maghiiti (1:45)
2. Maghiiti (4:22)
Clapping songs (pese)
3. Na hua a na sa'a (8:30)
4. Tau baaloha (2:10)
5. Mako ngenge (2:43)

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DESCRIPTIVE NOTES ARE INSIDE POCKET

COVER DESIGN BY RONALD CLYNE

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Polynesian Songs & Games from Bellona (Mungiki)
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Polynesian Songs & Games from Bellona (Mungiki) Solomon Islands

Recordings, notes and photographs by Jane Mink Rossen, Danish Folklore Archives

INTRODUCTION

Bellona and Rennell are neighboring raised atolls with steep coral cliffs, south of the Solomon Islands chain. They share the same Polynesian language and culture. Bellona is ten miles long and two miles wide, Rennell is fifty miles long. Together they have about 2000 inhabitants.

How did this Polynesian culture come to lie so far from the main Polynesian centers? According to tradition, their ancestors came in two canoes from a mythical homeland, 'Ubea, 24 generations ago. 'Ubea may be Uvea or Wallis Island west of Samoa.

The Solomon Islands have a population of 197,000 (according to the 1976 census), most of whom speak Melanesian languages. A few of the smaller peripheral islands are Polynesian. The official language in the Solomons is English (the vernacular is Pidgin English) as the Solomons have been a British Protectorate since 1893. Rennell and Bellona lie 130 miles south of Guadalcanal Island, where the capital, Honiara, is located. Both the language and other cultural aspects of Bellona and Rennell seem to have been under some Melanesian influence.

These recordings were made on Bellona Island and on Guadalcanal, where Bellonese and Rennellese people come to work for wages. On Rennell and Bellona, people could live self-sufficiently from agriculture and fishing. The traditional economic system depends upon a fine balance of human and natural resources and upon sharing the produce of the land. But the culture has been changing rapidly and money economy is encroaching, with results which cannot be foreseen, least of all by people who have never lived in the capital under a money economy, never experienced its problems of human alienation and cultural disintegration.

Because of their isolated location and inaccessibility, conversion to Christianity took place relatively late compared with the main Polynesian Islands, in 1938. Thus there are still a considerable number of people alive who were brought up within the framework of the traditional culture. The musical traditions of pre-contact time are not forgotten as they are on Hawaii and Tahiti, for example, and provide a glimpse of vanished Polynesian musical culture, albeit with possible Melanesian influence.

However, the performance of traditional songs, and particularly of dances, has been forbidden by the churches (Seventh Day Adventist and South Seas Evangelical Mission) since World War II. For this reason many songs have been forgotten and the musical culture is about to be lost, for the songs have not been practiced and the young people who grew up under Christianity do not learn them. Fortunately the churches are now beginning to realize that people cannot be denied their historical identity and church members were permitted to participate in these recordings.

THE MUSIC

Composing, dancing and singing were valued arts in the traditional culture and individuals were given recognition for these skills. Songs were composed for important events and the composer was remembered, his or her name being part of the song title. There are many song types, most of which were composed and performed by men and thus the songs on this record are sung and composed by men. Women concentrated their artistic creativity in a limited number of song types, for example pese, as one on B, band 5, was composed by a woman. In this song, although there have been particular women in history remembered as outstanding choreographers and composers of dance songs, it is said that the women's dance on side A, band 5, was originally composed and danced by women, but only men perform it now.

Many song texts are ancient and barely understood today. And some songs, like the syllables dances, are in a language which is archaic and totally incomprehensible. In general it is true that the poetry of songs uses many ancient expressions, so the composer or the person who can remember the part for songs is a scholar in the culture. Many middle aged people now keep handwritten books of song texts and stories in which they write down songs learned from others, especially the more learned elders. There is, thus, still an intense local interest in traditional music, and several people own and use cassette tape recorders for this purpose, despite pressing economic needs of every kind. My work was accepted as a contribution to the recording of this historical art, and I would consider it well done if it serves as an incentive for some scholar from Bellona or Rennell to continue the job, in the same way as my colleagues in other fields of anthropology (fortunately, we have the benefit of much related work done here) wish to encourage future local anthropologists to work within their own culture.

In the traditional culture, distribution feasts were held frequently, and singing and dancing played an all-important role in the ensuing festivities. When a man harvested a large crop he did not keep it for himself, but held a feast where he invited people to whom he had outstanding obligations and gave them each a share of the harvest. If a man held frequent feasts and gave away much food, then his reputation would increase, for he would be considered a man who did much for the people. That fact would be mentioned in songs composed in his honor.

The music of Bellona is vocal music or song, with instruments or clapping used only for accompaniment. The main instrument in the Wendone is a pipe with 12 holes, called Tepuke and the late John Sanga.

I wish to extend my thanks to all the singers and, in addition, to those who prepared the texts and translations (Torben Monberg, Taupongi, Jason Giusanga, Tepuke and the late John Sanga).

The master tape for this record was prepared at the Danish Folklore Archives, Copenhagen, where the collection is preserved.
Ornamental vocal technique: in this tradition there are names for ornamental patterns or vibrations of the voice, such as hakapopoge, ending ee with a shake (used for saka, SIDE A), singing 'straight' or on a level tone (to'o hatootonu), to swing back and forth (okeoke) and many more. But this art is being forgotten today.

Rhythmic displacement between the basic rhythm of the accompaniment and the rhythm of the singing: for example, in mako hakasaunoni (side A, band 3), the clapping is somewhat ahead of the song rhythm and this produces a tension which heightens the interest of the very regular rhythm of the introductory song.

The ritual songs on side B illustrate the ornamental vocal technique. Extra vowels are added constantly to the texts. The hua a na sa'a (side B, band 3) illustrates both polyphonic and ornamental singing style, and shows how both of these increase as the singers warm up in the course of this long song, 8½ minutes in duration. Towards the end even the tonal area tends to increase.

Special endings are characteristic in this musical tradition. On side A, songs on bands 1, 2, 6 and 7 end with shouts, as does the first song on side B. Also on side B, two of the ritual clapping songs (pese) have special endings (side B, bands 4 and 5).

SIDE A presents first two work songs (band 1), then singing games and dances from the feasts (bands 2-5) and finally a tattooing song (band 8).

SIDE A: Songs, games and dances.


These are two of a series of songs which were sung while hauling a canoe from the forest where it had been carved out, down a trail to the sea. The singing is unaccompanied except for the noise of the big canoe dragging through the high grass and bumping over logs laid across the trail to make the pulling easier. Just as the second song begins the sound of an unusually heavy rainfall can be heard.

The ancient tukubaka (te tukubaka tuai) Solo: Takika.

The words of this song are ancient and not understood today. Baka means canoe, tuku to put it into the sea. The song is for lowering the canoe by rope down a cliff, and actually should be sung later. The word hano, heard frequently in the song, means go.

The ngangibaka by Tu'ukiteika (te ngangibaka a Tu'ukiteika)
Solo: Paul Sa'engeika
Ngangibaka means heavenly canoe. The composer, Tu'ukiteika, was a son of the district god, Tehu'aingabenga, and the song was given through a medium.

The sacred canoe has supernatural strength.

(Chorus) Ee unga ee, ee unga ee.
(Repeat)

At its keel the fish are spread (in abundance).

(Chorus) Ee unga ee, ee unga ee.
(Repeat)

Arriving (to swim) under the canoe.

(Chorus) Ee unga ee, ee unga ee.

SIDE A, Bands 2-5. Singing games and dances performed at traditional feasts.

The festivities after traditional feasts included ritual dances followed by a long session of singing games, dances and songs which might continue for several days. This was called saumakinga, which means to continue long. The following songs belong to that part of the program. Many dances are accompanied by the sounding board (papa, meaning flat), as in band 5 (cover photo). Such feasts have not been held since the 1940's.

SIDE A, Band 2.

Mako hakasaunoni (mako means dance, Saunoni may be a place name.) (S.H. Elbert 1975, "Dictionary of the Language of Rennell and Bellona").
12 men dance and sing, led by Paul Sa'engelka. Hand clapping. Bellona, 6 August 1974. (Fig. 1)

The mako hakasaunoni is a gesture dance. Two introductory songs ('ungu) and nine huaa mako were sung at the time, but only one of each is included here.

The leader sits in the center and claps while the men stand in a circle and gesture during the 'ungu. The huaa mako are short circle dances ending with a shout; the men circle, swinging their arms and clapping.

The ancient introductory song (te 'ungu tuai)

This song is ancient and not understood.

The huaa mako from Rennell.

Poaka ee, poaka kae poaka
Poaka ee, poaka kae poaka
Iae poaka mai te, iee poaka mai moano,
Iee poaka mai basa. (Repeat)

Poaka means pig in other Polynesian languages but this meaning is not recognized on Bellona, where there are no pigs. The song is considered unintelligible but may be ancient or refer to a one time introduction of one or more pigs to Rennell by other Polynesians.

SIDE A, Bands 3-4. Singing games.

In the days before contact with the outside world singing games were played by children or by adults and children. Foreign games have gained popularity in more recent times and the old games are seldom played by children today. On these recordings four of the old games are performed by eight men and two children.

These games are ancient, said to date back to the earliest generations on Bellona, the time of the culture heroes. The words are not understood with certainty today by the Bellonese. All translations are tentative. The translations are from a longer article about games on Bellona written by Rolf Kuschel, "Games on a Polynesian Outlier Island" (1975, Journal of the Polynesian Society 84:25-66).

SIDE A, Band 3. (Three games).

a) Ant pinching (kubikubi ngoo'ata) (Fig. 2)

Solo: Haman Songo'ungi

The players stand and kneel in a circle, each with one hand in the center; the bottom hand lies closed upon the ground (or on the sounding board). Each hand in the pile 'pinches' the hand below with thumb and index finger, that is, holding the skin on the back of the hand. All sing the following, sometimes pinching the underlying hand a little harder than necessary at the last word:

Pinching ant,
Pass up, how many times?
Pass up, three times!
Spread out, spread out!

Kubikubi ngoo'ata
'Aabake hia!
'Aabake tongu!
Hohonga, hohonga!
(Kuschel, opus cit.p.38)

On the last word (hohonga) the bottom hand is spread out flat upon the ground. The song is sung eight times as each hand is spread out in turn, until all the hands lie flattened in a heap. From the fourth verse on, members of the group begin singing melodic variations and the song becomes polyphonic. Gusts of wind can be heard in the microphone in verse two, at the end and also in the two following games.

b) Pounding (tuki)

This game follows immediately after the last and is much the same. The players now have their fists on top of each other, the bottom fist on the ground.

Using his own fist as a pounder, Taupongi (who also leads the song) pounds upon the pile of fists to flatten the others, one by one. The verse is sung once for each fist to be flattened. At the last word of the verse, hohonga (or memeku at the end) the bottom fist opens upon the ground. When the song is repeated the next lowest fist is flattened and so on until all hands lie open, palm down in a pile.

c) Tap your faces (kini ou ta'e)

This game, played just after the preceding, was said to entail mock battles of the culture heroes with the crab and the spider. The players now turn to face each other in pairs and 'fight' by pointing and shaking their fingers at each other, first the thumbs, while singing:

Tap your faces, Kini ou ta'e;
Tap your faces! Kini ou ta'e.

The song is sung five times in all, first for thumbs, then index fingers, middle fingers, ring fingers and little fingers. In this way each finger in turn 'fights' with that of the opponent, amid much laughter from players and spectators alike. (For a slightly different account see Kuschel, opus cited, page 39.)

SIDE A, Band 4. The resurrection (te tingo mate) (Fig.3)

Solo by Haman Songo'ungi, acting the role of an 'invisible spirit'. He runs half crouching and holds a piece of cloth over his head to signify his invisibility. The theme of the game is resuscitation of a recently dead person by a 'god' who blows life into his ear. The song expresses sorrow about the dead person.

Another person lies curled up on the ground playing 'ta'e. In the game the 'spirit' first crouches behind a house and sings; then runs quietly up to the 'dead person' and pulls one of his legs out straight. Then he repeats the song. The following translation is only a suggestion as the song is almost incomprehensible to the Bellonese (Kuschel, opus cited, page 50).

The bones [of the dead Aaboi, aabo sua, 'oee; person] lie neatly, 'oee!

Figure 2 ‘ant pinching'
The bones of the dead person lie neatly, 'oe!
The bones, 'oe,
the real bones!

This is sung four times in all, twice before the legs are straightened and twice for the arms. After each song footsteps are heard and then one of the limbs being pulled out. But finally the 'deceased' is pulled up to a sitting position and the 'spirit' blows audibly into his ear, causing him to awaken. He sniffs and looks about in surprise, causing much laughter. Cicadas and birds sing in the background.

SIDE A, Band 5.
Women's dance (tau'asonga o na haahine)
10 men led by Momoka who beats the sounding board.

This dance was said to have been done by women at the lake on Rennell in the distant past, but only men perform it now. It is so ancient that the words are incomprehensible and is said to be among the dances and songs done by the first immigrants to Bellona, or brought with them from 'Ubea. The dancers wear leaf head decorations.

The introductory song (unu'g) is accompanied by a characteristic rhythm on the sounding board (papa), five beats and a pause. The men stand in a ring around the papa and gesture. The group sings polyphonically in minor thirds.

The following dances (huaa mako) are short and vigorous, the men move in a circle around the papa. (The first two of these were repeated during the actual performance, which is shortened here.)

Passed away in this abode, radiant were the lands with the shining darkness.

SIDE A, Band 6.
The introductory song by Tangokona (te 'ungu a Tangokona).

The soloist (Taupongi) also beats the sounding board. The rhythm is the same as that used in the 'ungu of the women's dance on band 6, five beats and a pause. This is called the tabua beat (taa tabua).

The text expresses the imagery which the tattooed body held for the Bellonese. The blue-black color of tattooed skin is likened to the color of the whale or porpoise and is described as 'shining darkness' which makes the whole island radiant. (See "From the Two Canoes" by Elbert and Monberg, 1965: Text 143.)

My sons are two 'utangei whales, a sort of fish in the vast sea.

SIDE A, Band 7.
The introductory song, hakatu'utu'u, by Baiabe (te 'ungu hakatu'utu'u a Baiabe).

Baiabe arrived in a driftaway canoe from Taumako (Duff Islands) in the 12th generation (12 generations ago). This song is said to be in the language of Taumako and not intelligible to the Bellonese.

Baiabe was welcomed when he arrived and a distribution ceremony was made for him. He composed and taught many songs and these are remembered, particularly by the descendants of families with whom he stayed.

The introductory songs are performed with gestures and the occasional claps in verses 2, 6 and 8 are part of the gestures. In singing the syllables of the text are ornamented.

Fruits are put (on the trees) Uta ki
My two helpers (religious officials) and my two gods (will) blow together towards Matangi, to Tetonusanga (the sky god). kia Tetonusanga.

Prayed for it.
Divided (the harvest) among the people.
Prayed for it, the shared among the people, ee.
Heard that his coconuts made much noise.
(not translatable) and they made a big noise.
Its fruit made a big noise
It is fruiting, it is fruiting.
It is coming! Ooho!
(UTA: the god puts the fruits on the trees. Ta'otu'a: religious official who assumes the role of a god or ancestor in religious rituals.)

SIDE A, Band 8. Tattooing song.
The saka by MAUTIKITIKI [Te saka a MAUTIKITIKI]
Solo by Joshua Kaipu, Solomon Teleka beats the tattoo.
Saka were sung while a person was being tattooed to divert his mind from the pain. The accompaniment heard is the tapping of the tattooing needle with a stick in imitation of actual tattooing, a practice which was discontinued in the 1940's.
This ancient song is by the culture hero, MAUTIKITIKI.
In the song he is lashing a canoe together with Sina, who appears in tales as his mother or his sister.
Some of the expressions are so ancient that the song is hardly understood today. Translations of two versions of this song are published in Elbert and Monberg, opus cited, texts 42 A and B, U1, used in the song is a short form for the name MAUTIKITIKI.

1. 0 Tabai a kau noho ao, hoaee, UI.
(Chorus) Eee no i teee ongo, kaa ongo e nga ongo
E no nako sii, UI. (UI will go there, eee.)
E nii ngenge I Sina no
toku bakaau. UI, eee.

2. Ko Tupoki, kau manabaaka, UI.
(Chorus)

3. O taghahia he anga ke mo abo, UI.
(Chorus)

4. O tu'ungia he tao manu he ngo, UI.
(Chorus)

5. O Tabai kaa takutia ee, UI.

SIDE B: Songs from rituals.
Bands 1 and 2, maghiti.
These are unaccompanied religious songs with long series of repeated tones. The singing style is ornamental and almost without rests. The first song is from the harvest ritual for ngemungi fruits (Napolobus floribundus and Santiria). The small black olive-like fruits are rich in oil. (S. Christiansen 1975, "Subsistence on Bellona Island.") The second maghiti is from the kaba ki hange ritual, a distribution of food for the district gods.

SIDE B, Band 1. The maghiti by Tekehu, (te maghiti a Tekehu)
Tekehu and his son were the only people left in his settlement, all others having died out. In this song he asks Tehu'aingabenga, the god of the district, to supply children. Tekehu lived in the 21st generation, three generations ago. The song was used in the kaba ki hange ritual. Several names for the district god are used in this song, three in the first verse.

1. I praise Hakamangukai, Temangukaiha ko Tukutuentenga.
The eastern abodes became like Bellona in this way, The (gods) arrive over the ocean,
The [island] Henuatai was laid bare.
(Chorus)

2. All your splendor put in a sacred canoe (Bellona).
The gods arrive over the ocean,
The procession of gods arrive at Mangani.
(Chorus)

3. I pray for two things, To Tehu'aingabenga: for life
My counting (of good things) pass from me (To the god) for my ancestor to return it.
(Chorus)

4. Two of my prayers go eastward
To make the ancestors my pathway (to the gods) To arrive at Tehu'aingabenga To pray for renewal of the house destroyed.
(Chorus)

Noko taku ai ngaa.
Tuha mi nga.
Noko taku ai ngaa, kao tuha mi nga, ee.
Ngongo ko iku niu nga'i mai.
Ne ahea mai ngaa, kao ngengeo, oo.
E ngangana tona ba E hua, e hua,
E sioa, 'Ooho.'

Kau oho Hakamangukai.
Kau oho Temangukaiha ko Tukutuentenga.
Kau oho Ngongongo e Ngato i 'Ubea
Ute ko Mungiki ke ng'o ngus.
Utako tematou ngasungu,
Uee aa eii aia, tuku hakana, alaa.

Ko soana nei hakase ai
Ko Henutai kua so'a.

Ngaa sa'a e Ngato i 'Ubea
E noko te haka tapu
Ko Mungiki nei ngotus mai.
Ko soana nei hakase ai

Tu'u ki Mangani te ahenga

Ngaa sa'a e Ngato i 'Ubea
Ko Mungiki nei ngotus mai.
Ko soana nei hakase ai

Ke hakahoki ai toku sa'a.

Ke hakahoki ai toku sa'a.

Ke tako ki Tehu'aingabenga

Ke tako te hange kua 'ohe...
6. I made seven kaba rituals, Tehu'aingabenga.
I set a portion aside from it (the rite)
(Also) my artifacts from Rennell.
My turbans in baskets taken here aboard a canoe.
(Chorus)

7. Pass the message to Tehu'aingabenga
To make it sacred for Tehu'aingabenga
To extract some fertility (life) for me
Because my line is about to die out
I pray for mercy for myself and my island.
(Chorus)

Ghaataungaa ghaataungaa; ghaataunga ka ghaataungaa ee
ghataunga ka ghaataungaa, tuku te ngongongo ka No'apai
ghataungaa, alaa.

SIDE B, Bands 3-5. Pese kanonyoto.
These are clapping songs (pese) from the kanonoto harvest ritual.
Pese were performed all night long (prior to Christianization) by men seated in two lines facing each other. The leader sat between the lines. Several different kinds of pese were performed in a specific order, many songs of each type being sung.
There were three main divisions of pese during the course of the night: introductory pese, hua tanga 'ehe, and pese to summon dawn. One song from each division is presented here.

SIDE B, Band 3. Introductory pese.
Songs of the clans (na hua a na sa'a).
10 men, Joshua Kaipua leads. Band clapping.
Bellona, 20 August 1974.

These verses were composed by the seven original settlers who came to Bellona in the beginning, according to tradition. Each composed one verse, and each founder of one of the original seven clans, only two of which survive today. Half of the words are non-Bellonese and the text is a symbolic picture of the past rather than directly understandable. Part of the text is translated in Elbert and Monberg 1965, opus cited, text 71, and we see images of the voyage and landmarks of the new islands to which the settlers found their way in two canoes.
In this recording the cicadas in the background are unusually strong.

(First chorus:)
E uoie, e uoie
Ae hinangango hina. Ie ieeiaa ah
hai pe se ngupe taua hina ngango he.

1. Kau huatia te baa ke 'ati pana
na's au e hua ki Sanibaghe
Kau huatia te nuku hotu ho'ou
o Ngatonga ma Sina hototaina.
(Chorus:)
Giaoeoa, seboa
Ae hinangango hina. Ie ieeiaa ah
hai pe se ngupe taua hingango he.

2. Te anga i Sanibaghi e matanga ki te tae ngohie.
Uia. Motu i sanguangu e noe Sanabaghi
ma te hakase.
(Chorus)

3. Tengetenge iho, tuu ki te 'one
maomaota te ongo i Soghoqeno. E 'aohia
ma maaseke.
(Chorus)

4. 'Utusia kai kauhi ka tokoa sokeke
mo'oto tongo na. Te bai ka hunganei sua
makanginj pe se bai tongo.
(Chorus)
Figure 4

mako ngenge

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