Polynesian Dances of Bellona (Mungiki) Solomon Islands

Recordings by Jane Mink Rossen and Hugo Zemp — Notes and photographs by Jane Mink Rossen
SIDE A:

THE SUIAHONGI
1. (I) Na huatanga 'eha  (17:30)
2. (II) Na ngiba  (6:50)
3. (III) Te hakatamatama  (3:23)

SIDE B:

1-3. Mu'aabaka pati  (2:40)
   1. The taki by Takiika  (1:25)
   2. The introductory pati by Sa'engeika  (1:25)
   3. The introductory pati by Tupuimatangi  (2:10)
   4. Maiko hakapaungo, a - d  (2:50)
5-6. The papa of the deities  (3:27)
   5. The ancient introductory song  (1:25)
   6. Dance songs, a - g  (4:38)
7. Dance [of] heaven, a - e  (2:00)
8. Hakatenge, a - d  (3:45)

A second publication of field recordings from a vital song tradition which makes use of the sounding board. According to oral history, some of this dance music was brought from an ancestral Polynesian island home from whence these people migrated to Bellona at least six centuries ago. Many Polynesian musical traditions were lost at the beginning of the twentieth century, before sound recordings were possible.

Cover photo: Mako ngangi, B7 (the endings, Oohol)
Photo: Bellona, 1974

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ETHNIC FOLKWAYS RECORDS FE 4274
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Solomon Islands

Notes and photographs by Jane Mink Rossen, recordings by Jane Mink Rossen and Hugo Zemp.*

The Solomon Islands became a British Protectorate in 1893 and an independent member of the British Commonwealth in 1978. Bellona is located at the southeastern end of the archipelago. The Solomon Islands as a political entity is a very recent phenomenon. Formerly, the islands had not necessarily any strong ethnic or political unity. Over seventy languages are spoken, most of them Melanesian, by a population of 200,000. A few of the smallest outlying islands, like Bellona, are populated by Polynesians.

Bellona and neighboring Rennell, which share the same language and culture, are raised atolls with steep coral cliffs. Isolated from other islands (Guadalcanal is 130 miles away), Rennell and Bellona are eight hours journey from each other by canoe. This means of transport is still common although the seas can be treacherous.

Bellona, (Mungiki to its own people) was converted to Christianity in 1838 by a Rennellese who had attended a Seventh Day Adventist school on another of the Solomon Islands. (The larger, more accessible and desirable islands of Central Polynesia had been converted a century earlier.) There were less than 450 people on Bellona at that time, living by subsistence agriculture in scattered family homesteads located near their gardening lands. The economic, social and religious aspects of life were integrated in a system which remained relatively stable until after World War II. In 1947 the first outsider came to live on Bellona; a missionary (from the Solomons). According to his concept of a Christian life, the people moved into a single village with a church at its center. But this was not a tolerable situation for them and six villages were established along the 10-kilometer length of the island. These are still the villages of today; some 700 people live in three Seventh Day Adventist (SDA) villages, three villages belonging to the South Sea Evangelical Church (SSEC) and one Baptist village. Another 200 Bellonese live and work in Honiara, on the island of Guadalcanal, for longer or shorter periods.

Traditional singing and dancing was forbidden by the churches from the start; this is a position which they still maintain. Thus people born after 1935 did not hear the songs performed, except upon rare occasions which aroused indignation, and they did not learn them. Many people now realize that their cultural heritage has been denied in this way. But cultural consciousness is growing along with independence, and the government is doing much to encourage traditional music and dance. In 1976 a cultural center was built on Bellona with government aid, which consists of an old-style house with dancing grounds in front, and here a group practices the traditional dances and songs, despite continuing church censure.

In the Bellonese socio-economic system, a man strives, by diligence in gardening and fishing, to produce abundant harvests in order to distribute them to others. He is accorded prestige for this generosity, whereas stinginess is derided. The distribution ceremony, called the mongi, was at the core of this traditional system. It was performed on the dancing grounds located in front of every house, and was followed by festivities consisting almost entirely of singing and dancing. The dances, performed only on these occasions, were accompanied by a rhythm instrument called the papa (sounding board).

After the distribution ceremony, the dances were performed in a certain order. Among the first dances were the most important ritual dances, the sasaongoi and the papa on this record. If the group decided to continue the dancing further, the sounding board would first be desacralized and the following musical events were secular. A large repertoire of these existed, including the dances on this record, the women's dance and games (FE 4273), tanga lament and many others. (A book on this tradition is to be published by the National Museum of Denmark).

Dancing was a man's art in traditional Bellonese society and prestige was accorded for this skill, as it was for skill in composition of the songs and dances and for other valued skills (such as gardening, fishing, performance of rituals, etc.). Dancing was done by the singers themselves in a kind of combined art form. A large group was and is considered best; most of the guests at a feast would participate in the dancing.

The mu'asaka pati, beginning side B of this record, is one of the exceptions to the rule that only men danced; in it women both dance and sing. This event was held for the wife of a lineage elder or hakahua. Bellona had no single chief, but the firstborn son in each lineage could receive the title hakahua if he possessed the other qualities deemed desirable in the Bellonese scheme of values.

THE MUSIC

According to oral tradition, the ancestors of the people of Bellona and Rennell came in two canoes from a mythical homeland called Ubea, 24 generations ago. ('Ubea may be the Uvea Group of islands west of Samoa). Eight clans were established by the original immigrants, eight couples, only two
of which survived to the present day, the descendants of Taupongi and Kaitu'u.

The settlers from 'Ubea brought their songs and dances with them. The songs are thus a kind of living history, relating events through the generations. This treasure is rapidly being lost because young people do not learn the songs. The Bellonese language is also changing swiftly today, English and Pidgin English words replacing Bellonese, so that the songs become less and less understandable. However, the language of the poetry used in songs is exceedingly difficult to begin with, full of obscure ancient words and expressions, references, and double meanings. Those songs brought from 'Ubea are in an ancient language which is no longer intelligible at all. Persons with especially good memories for the old songs and lore are thus the scholars of this culture. Often such persons also compose songs, even today, and many older people now keep handwritten books of stories and song texts which they learn from others, particularly such learned elders. There is a growing interest and respect for these historic traditions among the Bellonese, to which my work is also a contribution, for these recordings are copied and housed in the Solomon Islands for future generations, (and the Danish Folklore Archives)

Songs are composed in traditional song types for important events, and the composer is remembered, his or her name being part of the song title. For example, the pese by Kaitu'u ('to pese a Kaitu'u) is a song of the type called pese "Clapping." It was composed by Kaitu'u, one of the original immigrants who came to Bellona 24 generations ago; te 'ungu pati a Paul Sa'engeika is an introductory pati song composed by a 'inea elder still living today.

The traditional music of Bellona is vocal music, often accompanied by clapping or entirely unaccompained, the sounding board (papa) being used for dances. A leader and group is the usual configuration, call/response patterns between the two being common. Sometimes this relationship is elaborated into part-singing such as drones, canonic counterpoint, and a special polyphonic form heard in the suahongi on side A of this record, where the leader and group sing entirely different pieces of music simultaneously. Speech-song, common elsewhere in western Polynesia, is also used in this music (e.g. the beginnings of the pieces on side A and B4, and in B as well).

There is also constant variation, implemented by improvisation, where individuals sing different melodic variations simultaneously, a form of polyphony called heterophony. Other types of variation employed are:

-Syllabic ornamentation. Vowels are constantly changed and prolonged, sometimes making the text difficult to follow (e.g. B1 to 3 and many others). The vowels e and a may be prolonged by adding a glide, so that they are changed to a e and a a. More than two vowels of a kind signifies a prolonged tone. At the ends of phrases a may be sung as o (shown in the following texts by the symbol 0 or 0).

-Rhythmic displacement. This is less common in dance songs, but can be heard in B2, the introductory pati by P. Sa'engeika, where a deep intermittent drone is sometimes sung by one or more persons in the group, as in the dance songs of 86 and the suahongi, in which other parts are also sung.

-Ornamental vocal technique is most pronounced in songs with free rhythm, such as some ritual songs on FE 4273.

-Special endings are characteristic of this music, such as exclamations or shouts, e.g. ending the suahongi on side A and B7. The songs of B4 each end with a falling tone, the short dance songs of 86 culminate in a shout, and those of B4 have a characteristic sudden ending.

SIDE A: THE SUAHONGI (Figure 1)

Background: Believed to have been brought to Bellona with the first immigrants, the suahongi may already have been a revered old dance on the island of its origin. Thus its age must be more than 600 years. (The history of ballet is considered to be 350 years at most). The text, in the ancient language of 'Ubea, is almost completely unintelligible today, except for occasional words. Suahongi may mean "to circle or hover like sharks, to go around in a circle" (Elbert, 1975).
The suahongi is at the heart of Bellonese culture and is of immense historic significance. Although it has been forbidden for the past forty years by the Christian churches, both the words and the dance are vividly remembered by the old people, and Bellonese who watch a performance today are still moved — old people involuntarily move their arms with the gestures, and children do likewise, delighting in imitation. Laughter can be heard in this recording, because the dance is also amusing, especially in Division II, which contains some of the most spectacular dancing.

Using speech-song and various kinds of polyphony, the suahongi is sung by the dancers with no musical accompaniment, a highly unusual form of polyphony, in which two different pieces of music are performed simultaneously. These are disparate in text as well as in melody, rhythm and form. Musical transcriptions, analysis, and the full text of the suahongi are published in ETHNOMUSICOL OGY (Rossen, 1976).

Composed in structure, the suahongi has three main divisions: the huatanga (danced in a circle), the ngiba and the hakata matama (both danced in lines). The suahongi brought from 'Ubea consisted of only the first two, the third having been added in the fourth generation after the immigration by lho of the Iho or Taupongi clan. (The hakatamatama, which means "to rejuvenate", was performed only by members of that clan.)

The suahongi also contains pese "clapping" songs, six of which were part of the suahongi from 'Ubea. One, the first, was composed by Kaitu'u upon discovery of Rennell and Bellona. It tells of the dangers of the journey and the beheaded landmarks of the new island home. A translation is published in ETHNOMUSICOL OGY (Rossen, 1976).

Four leaders are required for a suahongi performance; a dance leader and assistant (formerly the priest-chief and his assistant), two persons who pese-clap. The dance leader is the person to begin the suahongi, the main musical passages of the first division, and each verse of the final division. These are disparate in text, nganog, for starting and leading group singing in this way.) The persons who clap (pese) lead the pese songs of the first division and the ngiba of Division II.

1. Division I contains 30 huatanga and the pese, which are coordinated with huatanga 3-6 and 8-13. This is, these are sung together, and the phrase sung for the huatanga means "singing", and these are also called huatanga "ehe, ehe meaning "to be many, most", thus being the tongest of the three divisions.

The performance: Honiara, Sept. 12, 1974. Jason Giusanga is the dance leader, Nomoka and Tepuhe lead the pese.

Call and response begins the suahongi in an introduction with speech-song phrases which is sung twice (1:06). Then the pese by Kaitu'u commences and the group joins in, the whole sequence being 3:47 minutes in duration. At this point the "double" singing may sound a bit confusing, but it helps if one keeps in mind that five verses of the pese are followed by a chorus, ole, and this unit is coordinated with one huatanga which is sung twice. The pese is weaker and can be recognized by its accompaniment of steady clapping and the chorus, which trails off in the pause following each huatanga. The chorus, ole, is heard four times. In this performance the Leaders of the pese were asked to stand near the right-hand microphone, instead of within the circle as prescribed, because the spatial organization which would be evident to an observer cannot otherwise be reproduced aurally.

Performers: 12 men in all.

In other words, the pese is heard mainly on the right channel, both here and in the following.

In the second passage (5:20), called ngononotu, six ancient pese are sung, following a tranquil introduction (1:01). These pese bear the elements of steady clapping accompaniment and speech-song phrases, some are responsive, and some have polyphonic singing.

Exclamations and shouts mark major changes and endings. Excitement rises towards the end of the division, climaxing with a shout, after which the dancers form lines in preparation for the ngiba that follow.

2. Division II (6:50), consists of seven ngiba, each sung twice. The first two of these form a musical unit with antiphonal and polyphonic singing.

Having an unusually long melodic phrase composed of five or six continuous lines of text, each is begun by the pese leaders with clapping, and is then taken up by the group. In the interlocking phrases which result, individuals stop for breath when necessary and come in again with renewed strength. Canonic counterpoint, heterophonic singing, and intermittent drones (in which a deep tone is repeated beneath the melodic line) are heard in the singing. In the last five ngiba the dancing is spectacular and the lines are heard to advance jumping, ending each time with a shout.

3. Division III (3:23). The hakatamatama has nine verses, each beginning with a melodious solo by the dance leader; only the last is repeated. The first four verses are variations forming a continuous musical unit. The fifth verse begins a rhythmic sequence which continues to the end of the suahongi, ending with repetition of the lowest note and the ngiba, a mighty shout of 0000000: The last word is "aue" — "thanks".
This is the only division of the suahongi considered to have sacred qualities, because in it the old deities are named, such as the sky god Tehu'alingabenga. (For information about these deities see "The Religion of Bellona Island", Torben Monberg, 1966).

SIDE B

1 to 3. MU'AABAKA PATI (Figure 2)

The mu'aabaka was an event held in honor of a woman by her husband, when they were well established and mature in years, the wife of a lineage elder (hakahua). It was the honored wife who led the slow, dignified dancing, while a second leader was at the end of the line of dancers. These leaders were called mako mu'a "dance ahead or first" and mako munå "dance behind".

A complex dance event, the mu'aabaka includes six song types, sung in a specific order. (Only three are retained in many of today's performances.) The first two were formerly danced by women only, the men joining in afterwards and the pati might continue all day. In this performance, both men and women participate, but the men are more numerous and dominate the singing.

Only two introductory song types are heard on this record. First the taki mu'aabaka, accompanied by the sounding board, and then the ungulu pati, "introductory pati" songs accompanied by clapping in a fast tempo (pese bingbing). Dancing begins in a line, led from behind the house; when the line proceeds far enough around the dancing grounds, the leader says taka hungi "turn the ring", and the line joins into a ring, continuing to sing and gesture.

First the manga'e distribution would be performed early in the morning, after which the mu'aabaka pati began. The women wear ha'u "breaths" of leaves in their hair as well as other decorations.

White River, Guadalcanal, July 6, 1974. 15 men and 8 women. Leaders: Siko Huri and Noa'pu'a. Monika and Wesley Tooque used the sounding board in the taki.

1. Te taki a Taklita
Teilangong (Mata'ukea) The taki by Taklita (of Mata'ukea lineage)

The composer is buried at Anga'hio, Bellona. In the song he honors a house built at Mata'ukea by his son, Teilau'ungua (who lived in the 18th generation). The song leader beats the papa.

Te hange naka 'oke The house is completed with a hundred leaf panels, i.e. (5) sung 5 times.

Sikitingi te manga'ei A celebration feast completed reflecting splendor as does the house;

atahio ma te hange; (2) and he who built it will be blessed (by the deity).

te a tū'ku haka-tonu.

2. Te 'ungulu pati a Paul The introductory pati by
Sa'engoika (Rotoba) Paul Sa'engoika (of Rotoba lineage)

Sa'engoika composed this song about his beach settlement at Uma. After he had prepared, levelled and completed it, as cyclone destroyed everything knocked down the house and the coconut trees after all his work.

There is a double meaning in verse 3 (which is a common occurrence in poetry as well as in other formalized communication), hakapange meaning both lying down as branches touching the ground, and a place waiting for "presents" of fish, etc.

The group sings polyphonically, intervals of a minor third and major second predominate, and both of these are heard together at the ends of verses 2 and 3. The singing is slower in tempo than the clapping, particularly at verse endings.

Te matangi mouto'o The wind is so cunning (hakahoki) na mamata, hina, eei
ki toku aba tiingi, na eei. (Repeat)

(uotingi e au, Na'outoingi e au, ki oku niu ohape, eei
ki toku aba hakapange, eei
(hakahoki) (Repeat)

Tangi aiki te 'ao, (hakahoki)

Toku aba hakapange, eei

Mourning at the break of dawn, my area, waiting to be active, eei.
ma toku okiokinga, ee. and my resting place, ee. (hakahokii)
3 - Te 'ungu pati a. The introductory pati by Togilmatangi. (The deity) Togilmatangi
The composer being a deity, the song was given through a medium. This translation is only tentative, as the words are ancient.
Toku baka te takuaa ngenga te peau tu'u o te moana
eie ea ei
to Renell, ee. (Chorus)
(hakahokii)
O hoe mungi e au toku baka I'm steering at the stern of my canoe, hetengeni 'unga i katea o, lightning stretches (over the horizon) on the right (the side with no outrigger),
eie ea ei
eie ea ei. (Chorus)
(hakahokii)
0 hakauta ngu oku ngaa 'eha I put my two big sails afloat, teengaa 'ua e tu'uta iba o, the one called "rain" with nine overlapping (panels)
eie ea ei
eie ea ei. (Chorus)
(hakahokii)
B4 MAKO HAKAPAUNGO DANCE IN THE STYLE OF PAUKO (with Fighting Clubs)
(Figure 3)
Leader: Jason Clusanga.
This was the only dance to be performed before the mungamite distribution. Pauno is an ancient place name, probably for San Cristobal Island. It is an energetic dance performed with fighting clubs in hand, and with no accompaniment other than the singing.
The introductory song ('ungu) begins with a leader - group response, and it ends with a speech-song phrase and a shout.
The dance songs (huua mako) are each repeated and have endings which stop short with a falling note on the word neit, "here, now." The sound of the dancers' feet may be heard as they advance in lines, with a vigorous step, hop, while swinging their clubs. The singing in c) begins with the polyphonic interval of a major second, an interval which may sound unfamiliar to listeners with a musical background exclusively in Western European art music.
a) Te 'ungu The introductory song
Ninga looi11, tuku teenei ninga looi11, tuku teenei ko tangi te noonga noimnei ko tangi ki nouto noimnei nui pango pango tangi te noonga noimnei
ol 'angausa, ol kesi bi. 'ia, boke.
b) Te huua mako The dance song
(Umengi:) Tono ma, tukua (Chorus)
Tukua tanga taga taa.

//: Ika ma sikasika ai
Unuhi niu tongonga (2)
te ika ki tou hena o,
te ika babange ki tou hena.
// (Repeat from Ika)

Te mano...

(Umengi:) Tono ma, tukua,
Tukua tanga taga taa.

//: Te mano ku he'e kai na nei
The thousands of fruits were not eaten here,
but just blown to the sky,
ku manga seii ki te ngaoni
ku manga seii ki te ngaoni
but just blown to the sky, eea.

maalu hanga; nei.

Figure 3 Mako hakapaungo, B4.
Noko kake ko te ika te sennua, tui kunga, a te bolai nginsee, tui kunga ääą,  
(Repeat) au tui kunga.

(Verse 2 is repeated).

O noko ake tena ika tenou sunga, e tui kunga,  
a te bolai nginsee, tui kunga ääą,  
(Repeat) au tui kunga.

Da tui kunga soa moe a kopenge hongoa tui  
kunga,  
a te bolai nginsee, tui kunga ääą,  
au tui kunga.

6 a-g Huua mako  Dance songs

The leader begins the song (ngangi) and the  
the group joins in with a shout as they start to dance  
and the accompaniment begins. In these fast,  
vigoruous dances, the men gesture as they run  
(mako) and leap (ngence "fly") around in a circle.  
At the climax of each song one or more of the dan-  
cers may jump onto the sounding board. In these  
songs the sounding board accompaniment acceler-  
ates, and because of this, only the unaccom-  
panied first and last lines of text are slow  
enough to be understood in most of the songs.

Figure 4 The papa (Huua mako, B6)

a) Te huua mako tua!  The ancient dance song

The text of this song is not understood.  
A polyphonic interval of a minor third is  
heard near the end of the song  
A drone is heard in the singing, the outstanding interval being a major third.  

'Angu te ika ni angu te ika, Chase the fish,  
ai ka labu te ika-a. net flying fish, so  
as to grab the fish.  

E ko koe, ko ba'a'anga te ika, nga i te ika-a. You should rouse the  
fish, talk to the fish.  

E ko koe, ko ba'a'anga te ika, You wake the fish,  
kua ki te ika.  

you found the fish:  
(The song is repeated).  

f) Te huua mako tuai  
The ancient dance song  
Leader: Momoka.  

Te baka ee, ma'onu,  
Te baka mai soke, ia,  
Te baka mai Soke, hela.  

Te baka soke, ke ma'onu  
Te baka soke, ke ma'onu  
Te baka mai Soke, ke.  

g) Te huua mako a Tupumatangi  
The dance song by (the deity) Tupumatangi  

The interval of a major third is heard when the group joins the singing.  

Leader: Jason Giusanga.  

Aku baka na tangi a ki hange My kaba offering  
na nglua, kau haka'aue, ee. is carried to the  
house, dedicated to the  

Ngbaua, te papa tau'as. gods, and I shout  
nga'one te papa, ki te koe. (out) thanks, ee.  

the papa tells you a  
lot.  

Closing words of the papa: (leader) Tungou,  
(group) ja.  

B7 MAKO NGANGI  DANCE OF HEAVEN  
(Cover photo: the endings, Ooho'.)  

A circle dance with the sounding board which  
was performed only by elders. The songs are said  
to be from 'Ubea and are not understood. All five  
songs end with a shout, Ooho tuku! The dancers do  
a complex series of gestures as they circle the  
sounding board.  

The first two songs are opening songs ('ungu).  
They begin with an unaccompanied solo by the  
leader, are longer, and have a melodic range which is greater  
that the following songs.  
The last three songs are alike, and follow each  
other without pause. An intermittent drone can be  
heard in two of the songs, and heterophonic sing- 
ing in several.
White River, Guadalcanal, July 6, 1974.
Performers: 12 men. Momoka beats the sounding board.
a) Te maaua koaua tongitongi, 
tennis. (Repeat)
tennis.
'au tupea kea kea, keakea keakea. (3)
Ooo ho tuku. Ooo ho:
b) Te nekau te neko hingau, hiiote:
(Repeat) hiiote:
te nekau oonea, te nekau oonea. (3)
Ooo ho tuku. Ooo ho:
c) Oie, niu tongu onyu, oie niu tongu onyu. (3)
Ooo ho tuku: Ooo ho:
d) Oie aia niinii ba, oie aia niinii ba. (3)
Ooo ho tuku: Ooo ho:
e) Aiaa aia bongo niu, aiaa aia bongo niu (3)
Ooo ho tuku: Ooo ho:

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