Music of the Jos Plateau and other regions of Nigeria
Recorded by Stanley Diamond / Edited, with notes by Victor Grauer

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MUSIC OF THE
JOS PLATEAU
AND OTHER REGIONS OF NIGERIA

Recorded by STANLEY DIAMOND
Photographs by OLGA DIAMOND
Introduction by STANLEY DIAMOND
Edited, with notes by VICTOR GRAUER, Cantometrics
Project

Introduction And Cultural Background

I recorded the music presented here between August 1958 and July 1959 in Nigeria, during the course of a field trip to the Jos, or High, Plateau of the North Central region of the country, technically known as the Middle Belt. The instrument used was a small (9 x 4 3/4 x 2 1/2) portable, battery powered, transistorized Ficord, weighing three pounds, with a listed frequency range from 60 to 12,000 cycles per second. Recordings were either made in the field, which was inaccessible to elaborate, self generating sound equipment and lacked sources of electricity, or native musicians performed in my compound. In a few of the latter instances, I intervened as a kind of 'concertmaster', grouping musicians in order to achieve maximum fidelity and richness. Virtuoso performances were encouraged, length of several selections was determined beforehand, and, in one instance (the flute orchestra - Side 1, band 1C), the phasing in of each individual flutist was pre-arranged. No foreign techniques were introduced. The purpose was to highlight customary usage, and "conducting" grew out of what the musicians were accustomed to doing.

However, most of the music was recorded under spontaneous field conditions. Here the unobtrusive, sensitive (and temperamental) portable machine was essential, not only because of the lack of facilities, but because mobile professional units, even if capable of being transported over the most difficult terrain at all hours of the day or night, in pursuit of musical occasions, would have altered, by their presence, the character of the situations through which the music was being expressed. These were either traditional rituals or celebrations of modern events, based upon traditional music, - - instrumental, vocal, or gestural, that is, dancing. Nine "tribal" or linguistic groups are represented in these recordings - - Hausa, Fulani, Beri Beri, Tiv, Ibo, Ibibio, Angas, (Side 2); Jarawa and Anaguta (Side 1).

The Ibo and Ibibio selections were taped in Southeastern Nigeria in villages of the respective peoples, while I was touring the region en route to the Cameroons, in search of plantations and artifacts. In Ibibio country, I happened to be wandering through the bush outside of Ikot Ekpene on the look out for secret society masks, which were then being sold, prior, as it turned out, to a mass burning of masks by missionaries, when I happened upon the orchestra, fresh from a funeral ceremony. It deserves note that the Ibibio secret societies played a significant role in the traditional culture of the people, were resisted by missionaries and administrators, and also gave the more martially structured Ibibio a reputation for ferocity among their egalitarian, if not precisely peaceful, Ibo neighbors to the North.

The Ibo drum orchestra traveled from village to village throughout Owerri district, in the Province of the same name, hiring themselves out for special occasions. This sort of enterprise was characteristic of the democratically organized, commercially sophisticated Ibo, who number about 9,000,000, have no centralized political apparatus, yet never lose their identity as Ibo while playing a vanguard role in
the development of Nigeria as a nation. Their vigor is apparent in their national day celebration, which had revolutionary overtones, recorded in Jos (Side 2, band 6B).

The balance of the recordings were made on the territory of the Anaguta, in the Gwong village area, a few miles from the European, and colonially, styled town of Jos, which has developed during the past 50 years as a financial and service center for the tin mines of the High Plateau. Most of the major tribal groups in West Africa, and many of the minor ones, were represented in Jos by laborers or service workers, and it was from that source that the Hausa, Fulani, Tiv and Beri Beri musicians were drawn.

But the Anaguta were the particular subject of my field inquiry. Like the neighboring Jarawa, and the Angas, also on the High Plateau, they are a "pagan", that is, a predominantly non-Christian, non-Islamic but thoroughly religious people, one of some 40 such groups of Plateau Province pagans, with a total population of about 700,000. The High Plateau was, before the discovery of tin, which brought the European administrators and managers, and African laborers to the neighborhood of Jos, an internally marginal area.

The indigenous, primitively organized peoples may well have been refugees, fleeing from slave dealing, archaic, hierarchically structured societies, such as the Fulani of the Sudan, and their predecessors. Until the British mounted the High Plateau in search of tin, neither the Hausa nor the Fulani were present in the area; the Pagans had been able to stand off efforts at occupation and tribute collection. The fiercely, yet subtly, independent Anaguta are, along with many of their congeners on the Plateau, a primitive cultural enclave, speaking an ancient, Bantoid language. They may, therefore, represent an early phase of pan-African cultural development. Like other pagans, they are esteemed neither by the Europeans, nor the Islamized Africans.

They constitute a society of subsistence horticulturists who cling to their traditional culture, despite the fact that the artifacts of modern civilization are inexorably shrinking their living space and social stature. They avoid contacts with Europeans, largely neglect to send their children to school, refuse to work in the city or the mines, defiantly insist upon staying on their traditional land, which is rapidly becoming a suburb of Jos, and which the government has already ringed with small forest reserves. Although they pay taxes (a few shillings per year) reluctantly, primarily through the efforts of the women, who sell fire wood, millet beer, and garden vegetables to itinerant Hausa peddlers, or carry the produce on headboards miles into the markets, they have not developed a money or market economy, and they do not consider themselves a part of the government structure. The three thousand or so Anaguta live in their five hamlets, scattered over a hundred square miles of rugged hills and valleys, formerly under the eye of the colonial power, and now under its successor, the neo-feudal Northern Regional government, but they live unto themselves. They remain without secular chiefs, save for the ones they appointed to deal with the British and through whom the British attempted to exercise indirect rule, as the present Northern Nigerian Government is, also, in effect, doing. But their real leaders, the symbolic incarnations of the tribal ethos are their priest-chiefs, who, of course, are not political, but religious, personages.

Among such people, daily life is raised to the level of drama through the celebration of ordinary experiences in the history of the person and the group -- the killing of a big game animal, the reaping of crops, the attainment of sexual maturity, marriage, and so on. Art and life fuse, the ordinary, by virtue of being celebrated and explored to its limits, becomes extraordinary. That is, religion, in its ancient sacramental function of celebrating the common crises of life, and dramatic art, (along with the accompanying artifacts -- the masks, myths, dances) are, in such societies, indistinguishable. Secular and sacred overlap, or rather, the distinctions are not made, so that everything exists -- men, spirits, the ancestors; nature is a person. Society itself may be comprehended as a vast ritual; the sacred is so all pervasive that it is experienced as the mundane; one, for example, relates to spirits in a sacred grove, pragmatically.

Music and the dance, usually either recalling or as an indispensable part of dramatic ritual, is then, a fundamental expression of such people. Through this language, an authentic complementarity of human relationships, and the psychological equality which flows from it, are most pronounced. All may dance to a single broad theme, but that theme serves as the background against which individual variations are subtly and skillfully employed. For these, it must be realized, are cooperative people, but they are not collectivized. Each person learns a great variety of skills; any man may play, or be capable of manufacturing, all the musical instruments available in the tribe, but there are, of course, recognized differences in virtuosity. The specialized task as a life long function does not exist among the Anaguta, such specialization develops later and accelerates with civilization. The complementarity of their social lives is effectively symbolized by the fact, evident throughout these recordings, that men play their flutes and drums, as the women dance; women do not play musical instruments but they sing, while the men dance; men rarely sing in ensemble, women almost always. The relationship between the sexes is not one of identity or exploitation but is reciprocal and equal. Throughout the culture generally, each person, at any given time, discharges a role either uniquely his as a member of a sex, an age group, (e.g. the flute is a young man's instrument) a lineage, a family, or by virtue of training or talent. These roles shift throughout the life cycle; the person grows, through crisis rites, to encompass them; the person is never reduced to the role. And these personal roles fit like the teeth of a gear into the dynamic mechanism of the culture at large. The rhythms and harmonies of the music here recorded, and the social context of the musical performances, reflect the complex cooperation and sophisticated individuality that characterize this primitive culture.

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Notes About The Music

BAND 1(a)

The first selection is a solo, performed by a young Anaguta man known and admired for his virtuosity. Like much of African music, it is built upon the repetition of fragments. Despite the basic simplicity, however, this performance is a marvel of melodic invention. The fragments of melody, hardly ever repeated literally, are juxtaposed in such a way that continuity never breaks down, interest never lags, surprises abound. The rhythms, though intricate, sound remarkably free. One cannot pin down the beat, yet every note is exactly in place. Do not look for direction or climax in this fragile breath-music. Like a fountain, it finds a thousand wonderful ways of falling back upon itself.

BAND 1(b)

The second selection, for two flutes, is interesting mostly for the manner in which the two performers interplay. At any given moment one flute is in the foreground while the other sets it off with a rhythmically contrastive motive. The structure is a good deal simpler than in the previous solo. There is much more repetition, and the variations are merely incidental, though subtle, inflections of the basic patterns. Here is a transcription of a small segment of this performance, a "joint", one might call it, in which one repeated segment is followed by another.

Note how smoothly this shift is accomplished: the second flute begins its new motive while the first flute is playing the last part of its old one. After only two beats, the first flute has already adapted itself to the new pattern. (Since there is so much part crossing in this passage, it is difficult to say with certainty whether the interplay between the flutes as given in the transcription is completely accurate).
formed only one, two or three notes. The organization of the whistle playing in Europe. This band three. Each whistle player and each singer uses Anaguta. The same additive principle as the flute ensemble heard on band two. This kind of organization is common to the performance of flute and trumpet ensembles throughout Africa south of the Sahara. It is eminently informal. Almost any number of players may join in, so long as each one makes an independent contribution. This additive principle is well illustrated by the present recording—especially since the performers enter one at a time.

**BAND 1(c)**

Eight of these flutes are heard in the third selection. The organization is based on the same principle as that of the duet, expanded to eight parts. Instead of all the flutes playing in unison, or grouping themselves into sections, so that some instruments are always accompanying others, each flute has its own repeated fragment, melodically and rhythmically independent of, yet strongly coordinated with, the others. The result, to the ear, is a dazzling play of color in which individual melodic lines, are lost, like threads, in the fabric of the whole.

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**BAND 1(d)**

The fourth selection, made surreptitiously, takes us into the middle of a sacred Anaguta ritual. The whistles heard are special instruments, given to men upon their initiation; the playing of these whistles generates tremendous excitement, perhaps because they may be considered voices of the spirits by the Anaguta. They are very small, only a few inches in length, with one or two finger holes.

While the men play the whistles, they move in a slow, rocking manner, dancing and playing together. The women sway singing in a circle enclosing the dancing men. The organization of the whistle playing and the singing are quite similar, being based upon the same additive principle as the flute ensemble heard on band three. Each whistle player and each singer uses only one, two or three notes. Quasi-melodies are formed when players and singers interlock parts in the manner that church bell melodies are often played in Europe. This technique, called "hocketing", is common in many kinds of instrumental ensemble playing throughout Africa. Its use in vocal ensembles, however, is not common, and has a very special distribution. While several Bantu speaking tribes sing this way on special occasions, often for funerals, the style is especially characteristic of the primitive Pygmies and Bushman tribes of Africa, who sing this way much of the time. In other parts of the world, similar styles can be found among primitive peoples who, like the Pygmies and Bushmen, are strongly group oriented, with a political structure which is basically acephalous. Since the Anaguta are primitive, and acephalous, it is not surprising that all of their group singing is done in this manner. (see band 6).

**BAND 2 Reed "Harp"**

Two solos on a reed "harp" played by an Anaguta man. This remarkable instrument is common among the most primitive peoples of the Jos plateau. Though often referred to as a harp, it is more like a zither. Resembling a small mat, it is made of guinea corn stalks closely woven together. Tones are produced by plucking the protruding stalks with the first 3 fingers of each hand. Unlikely as it may seem, this tiny instrument is extraordinarily resonant and capable of precise tuning.

Note that the interplay between right and left hand, in this performance, is strikingly similar to the interplay between the two flutes on band two. This kind of coordination of the hands is common in the performance of zithers, harps, mbiras and xylophones in many parts of Africa.

**BAND 3(a) - Anaguta man singing and playing the molo.**

The molo, a small, three stringed Hausa lute, may be the ancestor of the five-string banjo. Its third string (producing the highest tone on this recording), like the fifth string of the banjo, is fastened at a point so high on the fingerboard that the left hand cannot reach it. Consequently, it plays only one note. The plucking technique used by this performer has some resemblance to five-string banjo technique.

Contrast the sound of the instrument as performed by this Anaguta man with its sound in the hands of an Islamized Tiv musician on side two, band 3(b).

**BAND 3(b) - An Anaguta man, singing a traditional story and accompanying himself on the bourma.**

This old man was well known for his ability to play the bourma, a traditional type of plucked lute which few can still play. As is the case with much narrative singing throughout the world, both the vocal part and the accompaniment are highly repetitive, almost hypnotic. The real interest lies in the text. Nevertheless, the rhythm of the bourma (12/16/16) casts a spell of its own, underlining the meaning of the text.

**BAND 4 - Solo played on a double reed instrument, by an Anaguta man.**

The performer was widely known for his ability to play this oboe-like instrument in a truly virtuoso manner. Although he made it himself, the instrument
is of a type found throughout the moslem world and was undoubtedly modeled on similar instruments used by moslem musicians. Intake of air is through the nose; it is stored in the cheeks, which puff out enormously. Since the performer does not have to open his mouth, one continuous, uninterrupted thread of melody is produced, as on bagpipes.

BAND 5(a) - Anaguta women working with mortar and pestle.

The sounds of grinding, breathing and laughing—a very special, and ancient, music.

BAND 5(b) - Two Anaguta drummers.

This recording is typical of standard Anaguta practice, in that there are two drums, one larger than the other, the smaller drum subordinate to the larger. Each drum is slung over the performer's shoulder, so that he may carry the drum while playing, sometimes with a curved stick in one hand, the other free.

Unlike the flute duet on band 1(b), there is little interplay between the two instruments. The smaller drum, usually played by the younger man, lays down a basic pattern, over which the larger drum improvises. The results are deceptively simple. Whereas some African drumming gives the impression of highly controlled fury, this drumming can be decidedly restrained. The lead drummer seems to choose lengths of time as a tailor chooses lengths of cloth. Each time unit is articulated by a rhythmic pattern, which is often repeated and varied. The juxtaposition of time units is as much a factor in the overall composition as is the play of rhythms. "Flashy" passages are rare. The subtle beauty of this recording can be appreciated only through the most concentrated attention from beginning to end.

BAND 6(a) - Drumming heard in the context of a Gwong village area, celebration near Jos, the occasion was the completion of a water pipe-line between the city and a reservoir. Most of the workers, and most of the dancers, were Jarawa.

The drumming heard on the previous band was recorded out of context; as a result, we can hear it clearly and appreciate the subtleties more fully. This recording complements the former by allowing us to hear all the drama and excitement of a large celebration in which much of the subtlety of the drumming is necessarily lost. Since drum music is so intimately connected with the dance (as is much of African music in general), it is at its best when the drummers are actually performing for dancers, as they are here. Unfortunately, the music cannot be fully appreciated without actually witnessing, or participating in, the dancing.

In this performance, all the dancing is being done by the women who, characteristically, sing as they dance. The singing style is essentially the same as that heard on Band 1(d): additive, with hocketing, in a manner resembling the singing of the pygmies and bushmen. At times, however, a simpler kind of leader-chorus alternation is used.

The drumming is more aggressive than that heard on the previous band, perhaps because of the excitement of the celebration.

A remarkable feature of this recording is the wonderful feeling of movement it conveys. As the dancers and drummers move about, we can hear certain melodic patterns and rhythmic tattoos coming in and out of focus. "Background" noises, such as speaking, and the high, loud shrieking of the women are part of the excitement, and belong to the recording as much as the sound of the drums.

BAND 6(b)

The end of the celebration is marked by the playing of cattle horns by a nucleus of men arranging themselves in single file. As is typical of horn ensembles throughout Africa, each instrument plays only one or two notes. Melodic effects are created when different performers play in sequence.
SIDE B BAND 1 - Ibibio—two selections played by a trumpet orchestra.

This fascinating and delightful music was performed by an ensemble consisting of four wooden "trumpets", a slit-drum (a drum made of a hollowed out log), and an inverted clay pot. It was recorded in Ibibio country just outside of the village of Ikot Ekpene, in the aftermath of a funeral celebration for which they had performed. In the first selection, the slit-drum and clay pot, at the request of Dr. Diamond, did not play. This effected a slight change of style which pleased the musicians themselves. The second selection contains the slit-drum and pot, playing a simple, unchanging pattern of seven beats.

The style of playing can hardly be called typically African. Instead of the hocketing style which is characteristic of African horn and trumpet ensembles (see the final selection of side 1) this Ibibio group plays in block chords. The harmonic approach, coupled with the rhythmic patterns and special effects such as flutter-tonguing and the long, drawn out final chord of the first selection remind one of jazz bands, possibly early Duke Ellington. The only aspect of their playing which is obviously African is the reiterated single note played by one of the trumpets.

Although the musicians claimed that they were performing in traditional Ibibio style, it seems more likely that their music is an agglomeration of African and European traits. In any case, the final result is quite arresting, very cool indeed.

BAND 2 -- Angas

This man was recorded in an Anaguta compound to which he had come, on foot, over a distance of more than seventy five miles, to visit a friend. Such journeys are not rare in Africa.

In the first selection, he plays a whistle capable of producing only three tones. In the second selection he sings in a hoarse, husky Louis Armstrong voice. Finally, he is heard playing a tiny double reed instrument, which, judging from the absence of breath pauses, he must have played in the same manner as the Anaguta "oboe" heard on side 1, band 4. He can be heard, now and then, "hoot ing" out a note not available on the instrument.

The rattling sound heard in the background is produced by shells fastened to his arms and legs; these shells rattle as he plays or sings and dances. Though all three pieces are quite simple, they are performed with a verve that makes them special.

BAND 3 (a) -- Tiv drummers, singing and playing.

These two musicians live on the outskirts of the Europeanized tin mining city of Jos and probably play in the little "palm wine dives" on the edge of the city.

They alternate in singing a strophic song over their own very simple and totally unvaried drum accompaniment. The descending sequence which forms the last half of the tune suggests the possibility of European or even Arab influence.

BAND 3 (b) -- Tiv--male, singing and accompanying himself on the molo.

The performer is an itinerant professional who played in and around Jos. Although the Tiv people are not Islamic, this man's style betrays much Islamic influence: he slaps the strings, attacks each note with a slide, and sings in a throaty, embellished manner very similar to that of the Islamic Hausa-Fulani singers on band 5. The molo is a Hausa three stringed "guitar", described in the notes to band 3 (a), side 1.

BAND 3 (c) -- Tiv--the same man as above, this time playing the goga, a Hausa one-stringed fiddle, and singing. Note how he employs bugle calls, introduced by English troops in the area. The style is essentially Arab-oriented, as in the previous selection.

BAND 4--Beri-Beri--xylophone with three drums; singing in background.

These musicians are itinerant workers who traveled from their tribal home in French Equatorial Africa to work in the tin mines and other installations near Jos. They became very popular as beer hall entertainers in Jos and participated in the celebration in Gwong following the completion of the water pipe line, mentioned in the notes to Side 1. The characteristic ululations of the Jarawa can be heard in the background.
BAND 5--Hausa-Fulani

(a) This is an interesting example of what is known in parts of the United States as "lining out" the words of a song. One man recites the words of each line immediately before the other sings the line with, of course, the same words.

There are three musicians in all, one playing the dumbo, a small, two stringed plucked lute, another striking a calabash with a large ring on his finger, the third "lining out" the words. Most of the time only one man sings, but another occasionally joins him in rough unison. Note the harsh, nasal, throaty voice quality and use of embellishment, both characteristically Islamic traits.

BAND 5(b) -- Solo on the gourmi, a two stringed lute.

The Hausa-Fulani of this area are highly Islamized and the sound of the gourmi reflects the influence of Arab music. Contrast the harsh, nasal, tone quality of this instrument, so rich in overtones, with the bright, pure sound of the Anaguta reed "harp" on side 1, band 2(a) and the molo on band 3(a). Other characteristics of this performance which suggest Arab music are: the technique of slapping the body of the instrument for rhythmic emphasis; the use of embellishments and slides; the use of a drone (from the sound of the recording, it would seem that the bulk of the melody is fingered on one string while the other is left unfingered, so that it always plays the same tone--at one point both strings are fingered simultaneously). The structure of the piece, however, is the typically African varied repetition of fragments.

BAND 5(c) -- Hausa butcher's drum, the kalangu.

This instrument, used during cattle slaughter, resembles a certain type of "talking drum." It is shaped like an hourglass, with each end connected by thongs. Held under the performer's arm, the thongs are squeezed to tighten the heads, thus producing different pitches. The technique of "talking" with these drums is to match the pitches of speech (usually in a "tonal" language) with the pitches of the drum. We do not know whether the drum is "talking" in this particular selection.

BAND 6(a) -- Ibo-Drummers and Dancers, recorded in Owerri Province, Southeast Nigeria.

This travelling orchestra consists of five musicians, four playing membranophones (drums with skin heads), one playing a slit drum (hollowed out log). The drums are precisely tuned and are played melodically in a manner much different from the Anaguta drums heard on side 1 or the Ibo drums heard in the following selection. The speed and virtuosity of this performance are almost incredible.
OTHER RECORDS OF INTEREST ON FOLKWAYS

MUSIC OF MANY LANDS - 12"