TRADITIONAL MUSIC OF BOTSWANA, AFRICA

A journey with Tape Recorder along Southern Botswana from Mochudi to Kang

MRS. KATHY KGAFLA, WIFE OF CHIEF LINCHWE II, WITH HISTORIC TRIBAL MORDA—IN MOCHUDI

PHOTO BY SANDY GRANT

COVER DESIGN BY RONALD CLYNE
TRADITIONAL MUSIC OF BOTSWANA, AFRICA

SIDE 1  TRIBAL SONGS OF THE BATSWANA
Band 1. "Oh, A Shoe, Oh, A Shoe"  :45
Band 2. "I Am Happy"  :30
Band 3. "I Am The Hare That Stays In The Road"  :55
Band 4. "When They Are Playing Their Whistles, Praise (Ululate) Them"  1:40
Band 5. "Drive Away The Birds!"  1:10
Band 6. "I Have A Pain!"  :45
Band 7. "Yes! Yes! Oh! Oh!"  2:00
Band 8. "At Home, It Rains Heavily"  1:15
Band 9. "We Come From The Forest"  2:00
Band 11. "Mrs. Modise Doesn't Want To Plough"  :40
Band 12. "The Fowl Are Eating The Sorghum"  1:45
Band 13. "It Is In The Tall Grass, The Shy Porcupine"  2:02

SIDE 2  BATSWANA TRIBAL SONGS
Through Band 5—Remainder are: BASARWA (BUSHMEN) SELECTIONS
Band 1. "Let's Go To The River"  1:10
Band 2. "Speak To Us"  1:38
Band 3. "The Hills Of Mourning"  3:02
Band 4. "The Children Of The Lion Have Been Called Up"  2:37
Band 5. "Give Us The Signal To Fight"  1:33
Band 6. Basarwa song  .59
Band 7. Basarwa song  1:30
Band 8. Basarwa song  1:16
Band 9. Basarwa instrumental selection—lengope (mouth bow) :43
Band 10. Basarwa instrumental selection—setinkane (mbira)  1:00
Band 11. Basarwa instrumental selection—setinkane (mbira)  :38
Band 12. Basarwa instrumental selection—setinkane (mbira)  1:34

©1983 FOLKWAYS RECORDS & SERVICE CORP.
43 W. 61st ST., N.Y.C., 10023 N.Y., U.S.A.

TRADITIONAL MUSIC OF BOTSWANA, AFRICA
A Journey with Tape Recorder along Southern Botswana from Mochudi to Kang
RECORDED AND ANNOTATED BY ELIZABETH NELBACH WOOD
DESCRIPTIVE NOTES ARE INSIDE POCKET

ETHNIC FOLKWAYS RECORDS FE 4371
TRADITIONAL MUSIC OF BOTSWANA, AFRICA

A journey with Tape Recorder along Southern Botswana from Mochudi to Kang

RECORDED AND ANNOTATED BY ELIZABETH NELBACH WOOD

1. The Country

Botswana is a land-locked country in the southern part of Africa, about the size of Texas. In climate and appearance, it closely resembles southern Arizona. Its population is small—about 800,000—and a large part of the country to the west consists of the Kalahari Desert, an area of rolling grassland and scrub with little or no surface water.

Most of the population lives in the east and north portions, where there is more water and rainfall, an essential element in their survival, for this is principally an agrarian society. The raising of cattle and grains are an important part of the economy.

The songs and instrumental selections in this study were recorded in several villages of southern Botswana, from Mochudi in the east, central village of the Tswana tribe, to Kang, a village in the Kalahari Desert to the west. For the most part, four tribes and a closely related group are represented.

Since they derive from the same parent stem, the Tswana-Sesto people, their customs and language are very similar, and, therefore, could be considered to be of one culture. In addition, several songs and instrumental pieces were recorded of the Basarwa (local name for the Bushmen). Their language, customs and origin are entirely different from the Batswana (name for the tribal people of the country), and thus may be considered as a separate culture.

The Basarwa have for centuries lived in the Kalahari Desert as hunters and gatherers. In recent years, however, many have joined the village life of the tribal populace as help­ers in agriculture. They have maintained their language and many of their customs, including their traditional songs, dances and instruments.

In the villages visited, there is a striking blend of old and new, with tribal customs and local government responsibilities sharing in the life of the people. Some men and women work in the civil service and in the private sector. Many of the men work in the mines of Botswana and South Africa. However, the large proportion of the population is involved in the day-to-day tasks of village life.

For the women, this includes domestic duties of home and family, and when the rainy season begins, there are traditional crop-raising responsibilities at the "lands", the farming areas out beyond the village. The men assist in some of the agricultural activity, home and tool repair and building, but, chiefly, their responsibility is in the care of the cattle—out beyond the lands at the "cattle post".

Children help with all these tasks, and even when of school age, participate on week-ends and during vacation.

The country, formerly a British Protectorate, became independent in 1966, and is now a Parliamentary Democracy, noted for its stability and wise planning in development.

2. The Music

One of the reasons for this study was to help record and preserve the musical heritage. In addition to the taping of the music, several older people, tribal leaders and village historians were interviewed. It is true that some of the old songs are not being passed on, and many of the old instruments are disappearing, but the love of singing is still very evident. Improvisation and composing continue. Those who still own and play an instrument demonstrate great pride in this occupation. One is keenly aware of the vitality of the music and the singing, and feels completely caught up in it.

Traditional Music Of Botswana

(A Journey With Tape Recorder Along Southern Botswana From Mochudi To Kang)

- by Elizabeth Nelbach Wood
in the enthusiasm and love for this art, traditionally an extremely im-
portant element in their lives.

a. Vocal Music: Among the
Basarwa, there are songs for every
occasion, event from birth to death, from childhood to
adulthood. Some of the classifica-
tion of song is as follows: 5 types.

(1) Melodies are fragmented, with
each singer having a "fragment"
within their song. The rhythm
and meter are often different
for each singer, resulting in
a kind of jazzed counterpoint.

(2) Clapping, done by the women
and girls, is extremely important
in starting and ending a song, and
is often repeated throughout.

(3) Three-tone scale.

(4) Song texts seem to employs
a tonal language as a base from
the spoken "click" language of
the people.

b. Instrumental Music: Because
of the changing times and the empha-
sis of present-day development, the
use of the modern instruments is declining. Although
all the instruments appearing in
these cultures were studied,
just those actually recorded are discussed
in the following notes:

Of the idiophones (self-sound-
ing instruments), the laced leg mel-
tines of pebble or seed-filled dried
cocoon, called matsowe, are the
most common. These can be heard as
accompaniment to some of the songs
as the women dances or performs a
ritualistic movement. Knudgen clappers
are heard in the background of a
pre-initiation song, one held in each
hand and struck together.

In the chordophone (string) fam-
ily, the mouth bow, jengone, is heard
as a solo instrument usually played
just by women, it was recorded in
Kang as played by a young Basarwa
woman.

The aerophones (wind instru-
ments) are represented by the jengu-
wele, a long whistle made of a
hollow leg bone of a goat and played
by blowing across the top. A smaller
whistle, made from a hollowed-out
length of wood, the mutulatwa,
and played the same way, is also recorded,
and is the katjana, a horn made from
that of the male antelope. These
three wind instruments accompany
songs.

There are several types of drum
(membranophone) in Botswana. Of the
three observed, the one heard in the
recording was made from a large em-
pty tin with skin stretched tightly
across the top. It was played by
striking the skin with the hand.
Of the other two, one was constructed
from a large, empty milk jug with
a handle, and the other from an empty
stamping block (called kikig) - used
for pounding grain or corn into a
fine meal. The drum throughout Bota-
swana is called murope.

Considered either as an idio-
phone or keyboard instrument is the
shela. In this part of southern Af-
rica, it is called nanka, but
where it was observed and recorded,
it was called satsitake. This partic-
ular instrument consisted of 15 finely
tempered and tuned metal strips,
bars or keys mounted on a metal frame
fastened to a wood soundboard. Under
the soundboard was a small empty tin
container — for resuence. The keys
were tuned to a 4-tone scale and the
instrument played by holding it be-
tween both hands and plucking the keys
with the thumbs (occasionally the fore-
fingers). Strung along a metal hori-
zontal bar on the front edge of the
soundboard were several small metal
rings. These added a light, stacca-
to sound while the instrument was
played. The satsitake is quite prev-
ament among the Basarwa in the area
where the recordings were made. Each
craftsman who constructs this instru-
ment decides which 4-tone scale he
prefers. Each builder may use a dif-
ferent combination, as well as decide
how many keys he wishes to employ.

Throughout the southern portion
of Botswana, where the recordings
were made, there are variations in the names
and spelling of some of these instru-
ments.

3. Dance, Movement and Costume

Among the Basarwa, young
children, from about age 4 to 12,
always have action or dancing in
their songs. This would be in
the form of rhythmic foot and leg
movement or actually a dance pat-
tern performed by a small group
in front of the singers. Adoles-
cents, from about age 13 to 20,
have their songs and dances, more
mature in subject matter. The ac-
tion and dancing is not so vigor-
ous as those of the younger chil-
ren, but more so than those per-
formed by adults. These young
people also enjoy acting out songs.
Men and women usually move rhythm-
ically to their songs, sometimes
in a circle, or act them out - if
dramatization is indicated. Men
take pride in jumping up high and
swinging about during the singing
of particular songs.

Some take a great deal of
interest in making costumes -
reminiscent of earlier days. Women
often wear small skirts or panels
in front and back made of skims, sometimes beaded and with fringes. Tops or halters to
match are often worn. Occasion-
ally, women will wear matching
skirts and bandanas. Men often
wear skins, too, beads around
the chest, and black ostrich
feathers or hair from a wide-
beast on their heads.

In addition to the notes
describing Basarwa dance and move-
ment — dramatization and games
with rhythmic action are a much-
enjoyed pastime. Their tradition-
al costume is of antelope skin,
and they often wear necklaces and
bracelets of ostrich egg shell.
4. The Recordings - (Side 1 - Songs of the Batswana)

Band 1 "Letlhake Ke, Setlhako Ke"
Side 1 1:45
This is a play song recorded in Letlhakeng and sung by a choir of young school children of the Maburu we, Maburu we - ijo.
refrain: Dichankanana, chanankanana chanchang. (x 2)
Setlhako ke, setlhako ke - ijo.
refrain: (refrain)(x 2)
Ko morago we, ko morago we - ijo.
(refrain) (x 2)

Band 2 "Ke Mo Boitimeleng"
Side 1 1:30
This is a hymn, set to a traditional tune, and sung by a group of high school children of the Lea, Lea. All: Iia.
I Am Happy
sung by the same school choir as in Band 1.
I am happy. (x 2)
Because of Jesus Christ.
He has taken them all -
Taken all my sins.
Now I am happy.

Band 3 "Ke Mootia Va Motshewa Tsele"
Side 1 1:55
This is a play song recorded in Mochudi (Bakgatla tribe) and sung by a group of young children. It describes the hare and the mountain reedbuck as such Ke moo boitimeleng. (x 2)
Ka Jesu Keresete.
Ke moo boitimeleng. (x 2)
O di tsele tse tse -
Tso-tlhe dibe tsam.
Jaanon ke moo boitimeleng.
(Repeat entire song)

Band 4 "He Ba Tsekeke ka Diphain"
Side 1 1:40
This is a school song recorded in Moakgodi (the Bakuru tribe). The children are older than the preceding groups. The entire village is present, and one can hear exclamations and the sound of a thunderstorm in the background.
I Am The Hare That Stays In The Road
fast runners that they can outrun all foes, even on the straightaway! While singing, the children performed a longways dance similar to the Virginia Reel.
I am the hare that stays in the road.
I am the mountain reedbuck that stays in the road.
(Repeat song twice more)

Band 5 "Boragane, Bo Kgolamele!"
Side 1 1:10
This is an occupation song, sometimes used in play, and sung by a group of high school girls, members of the Girl Guides. It is recorded in Molepolole, central village of the Bakwana tribe.

Leader: Boragane, boragane we!
Group: Boragane we boragane, bo re jela mabele. (x 2)
Leader: Boragane, bo kgolamele!
Group: Boragane we, boragane, bo re jela mabele. (x 2)
(Repeat song twice more)

Band 6 "I'm Na Le Setlhabi!"
Side 1 1:45
This is a play song recorded in Mopopole and sung by a group of high school girls as in Band 5.

Leader: Ke na le setlhabi.
Group: Se nthaba mo maleng.
Leader: Setlhabi.
Group: Se nthaba mo maleng.

I have a pain.
It pierces me in the stomach. Pain!
It pierces me in the stomach.
(Repeat entire song)

Band 7 "Let Lekwe! Let Lekwe!"
Side 1 2:00
This is an occupation sung, often used in play, sung at the cattle post while acting out the rounding-up of cattle. It was recorded in the village of Gabane (Gasekete tribe) and sung by a group of older women.

Leader: Ee!
Group: Ee! Ee! Ee!
Leader: Ee!
Group: Ee! Ee! Ee!
Leader: O ija weel
group: Ee! Owe! Owe!

"Yes! Yes! Oh! Oh!"
Leader: Kgosi Ntshabele, o ye, re tsofela.
Group: Kgosi Ntshabele, o ye, re namze tsofela.
Chiefs: Kgosi Ntshabele, let it rain heavily.
We are now growing white hairs prematurely, we are now growing white hairs prematurely.

The rain, hey, it is raining
sung by the same group of women as in Band 9.

Leader: Pula wee e a na.
Group: Ee a e ne.
Leader: Pula wee e a na.
Group: Ee a e na.
Group: Ee a e ne.
Group: Ee, a e ne.
Leader: Pula wee, pula wee.
Group: Ee, a e ne.
Leader: Pula wee, pula wee.
Group: Ee, a e ne.
Leader: A inu ne dugogo.
Group: Ee, a e ne mogorogo.

The young women, yes, yes, oh yes, oh yes; we are coming from the forest.
Chief Ntshabele, oh yes, we are becoming old (tired of waiting).
Chief Ntshabele, oh yes, we are becoming old.

Chief Ntshabele, oh yes, we are growing the breasts.
Chief Ntshabele, oh yes, we are growing the breasts.

Chief Ntshabele, oh yes, we are growing the breasts.

The rain, hey, it is raining
sung by the same group of women as in Band 9.

Leader: Pula wee e a na.
Group: Ee a e ne.
Leader: Pula wee e a na.
Group: Ee a e na.
Group: Ee a e ne.
Group: Ee, a e ne.
Leader: Pula wee, pula wee.
Group: Ee, a e ne.
Leader: Pula wee, pula wee.
Group: Ee, a e ne.
Leader: A inu ne dugogo.
Group: Ee, a e ne mogorogo.

"Mrs. Modise doesn't want to plough"

A song about a woman who is moving around in a circle, demonstrating that the song could be used for threshing or hoeing, or other occupations.

The young woman, yes, yes, oh yes, oh yes; we are coming from the forest.
Chief Ntshabele, oh yes, we are becoming old (tired of waiting).
Chief Ntshabele, oh yes, we are becoming old.

Chief Ntshabele, oh yes, we are growing the breasts.
Chief Ntshabele, oh yes, we are growing the breasts.

Chief Ntshabele, oh yes, we are growing the breasts.

The young woman, yes, yes, oh yes, oh yes; we are coming from the forest.
Chief Ntshabele, oh yes, we are becoming old (tired of waiting).
Chief Ntshabele, oh yes, we are becoming old.

Chief Ntshabele, oh yes, we are growing the breasts.
Chief Ntshabele, oh yes, we are growing the breasts.

Chief Ntshabele, oh yes, we are growing the breasts.

The young woman, yes, yes, oh yes, oh yes; we are coming from the forest.
Chief Ntshabele, oh yes, we are becoming old (tired of waiting).
Chief Ntshabele, oh yes, we are becoming old.

Chief Ntshabele, oh yes, we are growing the breasts.
Chief Ntshabele, oh yes, we are growing the breasts.

Chief Ntshabele, oh yes, we are growing the breasts.

The young woman, yes, yes, oh yes, oh yes; we are coming from the forest.
Chief Ntshabele, oh yes, we are becoming old (tired of waiting).
Chief Ntshabele, oh yes, we are becoming old.

Chief Ntshabele, oh yes, we are growing the breasts.
Chief Ntshabele, oh yes, we are growing the breasts.
Group: Go lema ijoo. Leader: Go tshajwe ke ijoo lema.
Group: Go lema ijoo. Leader: Go tshajwe ke ijoo lema.
Group: Go lema ijoo. Leader: Go tshajwe ke ijoo lema.

Ploughing is hard work. Does not want to plough.
Ploughing is hard work. Does not want to plough.
Ploughing is hard work. Does not want to plough.

"The Fowl Are Eating The Sorghum" a circle, demonstrating that the song could be used for threshing.

The fowl are eating the sorghum at our place in Molopo lole. Go away, hey, yes, (x2) Yes, go away, hey, go away, hey. Go away, hey, yes, (x2) Go away, hey, hey, hey, Go away, hey, yes, (x2) Go away, hey, yes, (x2)

mathowa (leg rattles)

"It is In The Tall Grass, The Shy Porcupine" women are moving in a circle.

It is in the tall grass (porcupine). It is in the tall grass, hiding.


Leader: Bare sentse me le rona to be senye we. Group: Le kwa, le kwa dira we, and etc. Etc.


Leader: Bare sentse me le rona to be senye we. Group: Le kwa, le kwa dira we, and etc. Etc.


Leader: Bare sentse me le rona to be senye we. Group: Le kwa, le kwa dira we, and etc. Etc.


Leader: Bare sentse me le rona to be senye we. Group: Le kwa, le kwa dira we, and etc. Etc.


Leader: Bare sentse me le rona to be senye we. Group: Le kwa, le kwa dira we, and etc. Etc.


Leader: Bare sentse me le rona to be senye we. Group: Le kwa, le kwa dira we, and etc. Etc.


Leader: Bare sentse me le rona to be senye we. Group: Le kwa, le kwa dira we, and etc. Etc.


Leader: Bare sentse me le rona to be senye we. Group: Le kwa, le kwa dira we, and etc. Etc.


Leader: Bare sentse me le rona to be senye we. Group: Le kwa, le kwa dira we, and etc. Etc.


Leader: Bare sentse me le rona to be senye we. Group: Le kwa, le kwa dira we, and etc. Etc.


Leader: Bare sentse me le rona to be senye we. Group: Le kwa, le kwa dira we, and etc. Etc.


Leader: Bare sentse me le rona to be senye we. Group: Le kwa, le kwa dira we, and etc. Etc.


Leader: Bare sentse me le rona to be senye we. Group: Le kwa, le kwa dira we, and etc. Etc.
Band 4  "Bana Ba Tau Re Te'o Bidwa"  
Side 2  
2:37  
This is a war song, recorded in Mochudi, and sung by the same men's group as in accompanying instruments:

Leader: te'wana.  
Group: Eh - bana ba tau re te'o bidwa.  
(x2)

Leader: Bana ba tau re.  
Group: Eh - bana ba tau re te'o bidwa.  
(x2)

Leader: Ditawana.  
Group: Eh - bana ba tau re te'o bidwa.  
(x2)

Leader: Re tawa go bidwa.  
Group: Eh - bana ba tau re te'o bidwa.  
(x2)

(The song is repeated several times with variations)

Band 5  "Re Neele Re Je"  
Side 2  
1:33  
This is a war song, recorded in Mochudi, and sung by the same men's group as in Band 4. It was performed twice.

Accompanying instruments:

Group: (Re) neele, re neele the signal to fight.  
Leader: Re neele, re neele.  
Group: Re neele, re neele re je.  
Leader: Re makau a go ja -  
Group: Re makau a go ja -  
Leader: Re makau a go ja -  
Group: Re makau a go ja -  
Leader: Re makau a go ja -  
(This pattern is repeated twice more. The "Group"

(Side 2 - Band 6 through Band 12 - Music of the Basarwa)

Band 6  This is an untitled song of the Basarwa. It was recorded in the village of Tsetse, in the Kalahari Desert, and sung by a group of about 20 women. The interpreter mentioned that the song was about a greatly admired animal. The singers were shy at first, then gradually gained confidence.

Band 7  This is an untitled song of the Basarwa. It was recorded in the village of Tsetse and sung by the same group of women as in Band 6. The subject is also about a greatly admired animal, probably an antelope.

Band 8  This is an untitled song of the Basarwa. It was recorded in the village of Tsetse and sung by the same group of women as in Band 6. The subject is also about an antelope.

"The Children Of The Lion Have Been Called Up"  
Band 3  The Chief is represented as the "lion" and the young men, ready to go into battle, as the "lion cubs".  
Lepata and matheke  
Lion cubs.  
Yes - we, the children of the lion, have been called up.  
(x2)

Children of the lion.  
Yes - we, the children of the lion, have been called up.  
(x2)

Lion cubs.  
Yes - we, the children of the lion, have been called up.  
(x2)

We have been called up.  
Yes - we, the children of the lion, have been called up.  
(x2)

This is an instrumental selection played on the mbira of a young Masarwa woman. It was recorded in the village of Kang.  
Band 10  This is an instrumental selection played on the mbira. The name for mbira in this area. It was recorded in the village of Kang.  
Band 11  This is an instrumental selection played on the mbira. The name for mbira in this area. It was recorded in the village of Kang, and is also about the hartebeest.  
Band 12  This is an instrumental selection played on the mbira. The name for mbira in this area. It was recorded in the village of Kang, and is also about the hartebeest.  

(143) l'gonge by a young Masarwa woman. It was recorded in the village of Kang. The piece was about the hartebeest, a much admired antelope.  

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS  
Sponsors of Mrs. Wood's research: Botswana Society, Gaborone, Botswana Institute for the Study of Man in Africa, Johannesburg, South Africa.  
Special gratitude is expressed to all the persons in Botswana who helped make this particular project possible. Assistance in the production of this record: Mr. Art Clark, Tempe, Arizona, U.S.A. — sound; Dr. J. Richard Haefer, Arizona State University, Tempe, Arizona, U.S.A. — consultation; Mr. Greg Horn, Tempe, Arizona, U.S.A. — sound. Complete bibliographical data and the names of all persons helping with the research project may be found in Mrs. Wood's articles for the journal of the Botswana Society: BOTSWANA NOTES AND RECORDS — Volumes 8, 10 and 12 — or by writing to the author: Mrs. Elizabeth N. Wood, 730 E. Granada Dr., Tempe, Arizona, U.S.A. 85281  

LITHO IN U.S.A.