BANTU
CHORAL FOLK SONGS

THE SONG SWAPPERS,
Pete Seeger, Director

Notes by Dr. Richard A. Waterman
and Pete Seeger
BANTU

CHORAL FOLK SONGS
WITH THE SONG SWAPPERS

FORWARD

by Richard A. Waterman

The songs on this disc are the results of a most interesting experiment in the blending of musical styles. The musical themes, melodies and harmonies of which they are made have come from Africa to the United States in the form of written music. Re-worked and interpreted by Mr. Seeger and by the performers they provide examples of a novel form in Western choral singing, since they maintain many of the characteristics of the adoption of themes of Western music and by others familiar with, and conditioned to, African musical tradition. Much of the dance music and popular music of Latin America falls into this category and so do early forms of jazz and some of the Spirituals. In recent years examples have been recorded of Western themes--usually of popular music--played and sung by African natives. In the context of the study of the dynamics of musical style these instances amount to loosely-controlled experiments in musical change with particular reference to the re-interpretation of foreign themes in terms of the stylistic elements of a well-understood indigenous musical art.

On this record we encounter--perhaps for the first time--the reverse of this process. American high-school youngsters familiar with the musical traditions of the Western world, or at least the American part of it, have been presented the problem of interpreting materials involving tonality, melody and harmony derived from a very different musical environment. They have succeeded in producing a kind of music that, while recognizably Western in many characteristics, has distinctly a flavor of the South African in it.

Some of the songs have been translated into English, others have been kept in the original language as transmitted by phonetic transcription. In both cases the primacy of the rhythmic and harmonic materials over the words has been demonstrated.

It seems probable that the reaction of a South African native musician to these records would be mixed. He would certainly hear enough that was familiar to him to classify it as music he could understand. On the other hand, Western intonation and rhythm patterns seem to predominate, and in spite of the fact that many of the native singers of South Africa have been themselves somewhat influenced by Western music, he might be expected to find the songs in this record most exotic in quality.

Important as authenticity is for many aspects of musicological investigation, the present kind of experiment can provide far more exciting materials for the study of musical change than can "authentic" records of ethnic music.

Perhaps at a later date parallel recordings of South Africans singing these songs will furnish controls for the experiment; comparison of the two could be expected to point out specific mechanisms of re-interpretation stemming from the Western-music conditioning of the performers on the present record. This record, however, has been made more for entertainment than for laboratory research; by providing a fresh and interesting sound and by supplementing the bit of techniques common in Western choral music, it has succeeded very well in its purpose.

BANTU CHORAL FOLK SONGS
sung by THE SONG SWAPPERS
with Peter Seeger, director
and arranger

"What does the average American think of when he hears the word 'Africa'? Jungles? Cannibals? Most of us, raised on a diet of Tarzan movies and comic books actually know little about the traditions of that great continent. Tremendous civilizations there were destroyed by centuries of the slave trade, and wars of conquest. Two thousand years ago they were
BANTU CHORAL FOLK SONGS
Introductory notes by Peter Seeger

While the music of Africa has become justly famous for its complex and exciting drumming, the great variety of other music indigenous to that continent is not so generally known. For example, in East Africa one can find large xylophone orchestras. In West Africa the predecessor of the American banjo is still played. Flutes, bowed instruments, thumb pianos, trumpets, harps, all can be found, not only playing ancient traditional music but contemporary combinations which result from the influence of European music.

In South Africa, the home of the Bantu people, choral music has long been a favorite. The first European explorers heard village choruses singing rich harmonies, with counterpoint and antiphony entirely African in character.

The songs on this record are undoubtedly not sung exactly as they would be by the peoples who created them. I learned them in 1953 from Mrs. Z. K. Mathews, whose husband was at that time teaching at the Union Theological Seminary in New York City. They have now gone back to South Africa, where Dr. Mathews teaches, and is, incidentally, one of the courageous leaders of the African National Congress.

Mrs. Mathews had heard the recordings made by the Weavers of the popular South African song "Wimoweh", and told me, "Yes, your record of it was quite popular down in Johannesburg. But, you know, you should learn some of our older folk songs, which have been in danger of dying out because of changed conditions in Africa." She then presented me with a rare and remarkable volume, "African Folk Songs", edited by Rev. H. C. N. Williams, and Mr. J. N. Maselwa. It contained forty songs: worksongs, wedding songs, lullabies, songs of the witchdoctor, songs of the initiation ceremony, and miscellaneous songs such as drinking songs, children's songs, and warrior songs. All were written out with full harmony, with two to six parts, but no accompaniment was indicated.

The ten songs on this record have all been learned from this book. Perhaps it would be well to quote at length from the editor's prefacing to it:

"This book is the result of five students of St. Mathews College, members of a choir of eight which broadcast a series of programs of African Folk Songs for the South African Broadcasting Corporation. The five students are Khulukazi Mpali, Norautsi Klass, Joseph Maselwa, Alfred Mangou, and Sabelo Mjali."

"Many have heard Africans singing, and have been impressed with the resonance of the harmonies and the attractiveness of the rhythm, but few have ever regarded these harmonies and rhythmic effects as songs with a clear melody, and still fewer have come to regard the music as being representative of a unique and valuable tradition. Prejudice based on ignorance of the music which these songs, and an undue exaggeration of the lack of "respectability" in their associations in non-Christian customs have been responsible for their rapid disappearance...."

"Most of the songs included in this series are of the ancient and original tradition. This tradition has been characterized by what has been called the Pentatonic scale. No satisfactory theory has been produced to explain the validity of this scale. But a further analysis of these original songs will show that within the Pentatonic scale there is a characteristic melodic phrase peculiar to each tribal group which maintains its traditional song. This phrase we have called the Apollo Phase. The phrase always starts on the 'dominant' of the Pentatonic scale, and works down the scale, and is then repeated, beginning with the next note down from the scale. This similarity of phrases in African songs is noticeable in the more modern folk songs where the octave scale is used. This makes for similarity of harmonization, which is normally in parallel thirds or fifths, and accounts to a large extent for the ease with which Africans are able to harmonize their songs."

"The present arrangement of these songs does not pretend to be final, and indeed it is to be very much hoped that those using this book will use their imagination and make their own arrangements of these songs. Where possible the characteristic and beautiful polyphony of some of the songs has been brought out in the form of "rounds". Others, such as the lullabies, lend themselves to acted games for the very young. Others, such as 'Nomathotholo'... suggest song games for young children...."

"No formal notation can convey the intricacies of rhythm and suspended syncopation. Perhaps it would have been better to have printed them without bars, but this would assume that readers and singers would know the time of each song, whereas many will have never heard the songs at all. It must, however, be strongly emphasized that these bars and note values are only intended as a preliminary guide, and every encouragement should be given to freedom of expression to keep the natural rhythmic flow essential to the attractiveness of the songs."

"Great difficulty has been experienced as a result of the impossibility of conveying the times of the songs as heard, to the formal settings of this book... This is accounted for largely by the recitative effect of disregarding the normal time for two or three bars to crowd in additional words, while the time is 'assumed', and then of returning to strict time values for the completion of the phrase. This is a very characteristic form. A further complication is presented by the fact that in many of the songs as heard the Cantor or 'Umhlabeli' adds a flowing descant which often bears no direct relation to the time of the remaining parts..."

"Great care has been taken to ascertain that all the songs are traditional. It is impossible to guarantee in every case that traditional music has remained unmixed with modern compositions, mainly hymn tunes. This is particularly true of such wedding songs as... "Lo Mfan' Uneangota", where the ecclesiastical environment in which these songs are sung has influenced them. The authors of this book are unaware of having included any composed songs..."

St. Mathews College H. C. N. Williams January, 1947 J. N. Maselwa

To this we only need to add a few words to American listeners to this recording. First, while we have tried to be as faithful as we know how to be to the original spirit of the songs, certain changes have purposely been made to bring them more into line with American folk traditions. Why have we done this? Because we are interested in these songs as wonderful to sing, not as museum pieces. There is no reason that African folk songs should not be added to the world's heritage of song. In time we may come to sing them, as we do 'Auld Lang Syne' or 'Silent Night' without bothering to make a big point about the country of their origin. Perhaps it would be worthwhile pointing out, too, that there is much of Africa already in American folk traditions, and these songs can be learned extraordinarily quickly, especially by those familiar with spirituals, blues, and square dance tunes.
For the record, however, let us note exactly what changes have been made. Banjo and guitar accompaniment (popular in South African cities nowadays) has been added. Undoubtedly the African words are not pronounced exactly correctly. And vocal intonation naturally tends to be American rather than African. Let us not forget, too, that our tastes (prejudices?) determine which ten of the book's forty songs to use on the record. For example, almost a third of the book's songs use a harmony strange to our ears - but only one of the ten, "Bayandoyika", has this harmony. For three of the songs English words were composed which are not a literal translation of the original.

Actually, even in translation, many of the African lyrics would still be meaningless. Mr. Henry Ramalla, student at the Union Theological Seminary, who was able to translate some of the songs, gave up on many. "This song is untranslatable; it is felt by Africans," he noted under 'Somagwaza'. Of 'Mananomela', he said, "Don't try to render this song in English. It will make no sense. The idiom has no equivalent to give the exact emotion in English."

So if through the years new words get composed for many of these melodies, let us not be surprised. It will do no injustice to the magnificent folk traditions of a great continent, but can only serve to strengthen the bonds of friendship between peoples.

We wish to express our thanks to Mr. Ramalla for the translations, to Mrs. Mathews for introducing us to the songs. Special thanks to Rev. Williams and Mr. Maselwa, editors of the collection, and to Lovedale Missionary College, owners of the book's copyright. Most especially, thanks to the peoples of South Africa, who created these works of art through the centuries, and who have passed them on to us.

Peter Seeger and the Song Swappers.

SIDE 1, BAND 1

BABEVUYA

Babevuya be tahayela
Kodwana mbulana yincind'ye khala
‘Nto z'ka bawo, ‘Nto z'ka bawo, ‘Nto z'ka bawo, yincind'ye khala

Translation:
They were jolly, they were singing
But today the fiat is sounding*

Sons of my father, sons of my father
Sons of my father, the fiat is sounding*

* (as in fighting)

"It is not considered customary for the bride to show any emotion but sadness during the wedding ceremony. When her party is ready to depart for the wedding, this song is sung to express this ceremonial sadness. It asserts that "they were glad and rejoiced when the bridegroom brought the dowry", but today they are full of sadness, sadness like the bitterness of the juice of aloes."

Changes: The key has been changed from the original A flat, to E flat, necessitating some slight changes in the bass part, and switching the alto and tenor parts. In view of the explanatory note above, it is possible, even likely, that this recorded version is too fast. The singers, however, felt the music too joyous to feel downhearted, no matter how hard they tried. Accompaniment in 12/8 time has been an addition, but one felt in keeping with African counter-rhythmic traditions.

SIDE 1, BAND 2

ISILEYI SAM

Satyibilik Isileyi sam
Satyibilik Isileyi sam

Translation:
My heart melted with joy, my heart melted with joy

"This wedding song is normally sung during the daytime competitions, usually at home, though it has been heard during the night after the wedding ceremony."

Changes: Original key A flat, instead of G. A second verse, 'Yiza ne zembe ndingawule' meaning 'Bring that chopper, let me chop this' has not been included on the recording. Accompaniment added.
MANAMOLELA
(Ha Ho Hlaola)

Manamolela! Manamolela!
Won't you let us take it slow?
You know the day is long

African words:

Manamolela! Manamolela!
Helele re khat'he tsi
Hare khat'he tsi
Ahere khat'he tsi!

Translation:

Mediator (foreman), Mediator!
Behold, we are tired
Alas, we are tired
Alas, we are tired

"This Sutho song is used during hoeing. It is a song of weariness, in which the singers beg of their employer to be relieved."


SIDE I, BAND 4

ABIYOYO

Abiyo, Abiyo
Abiyo, Abiyo
Abiyooyooyooyooyooyooyooyooyooyooyooyooyooyooyooyooyooyooyooyooyooyooyooyooyooyooyooyooyooyooyooyooyooyooyooyooyooyooyooyooyooyooyooyooyooyooyooyooyooyooyooyooyooyooyooyooyooyooyooyooyooyooyooyooyooyooyooyooyooyooyooyooyooyooyooyooyooyooyooyooyooyooyooyooyooyooyooyooyooyooyooyooyooyooyooyooyooyooyooyooyooyooyooyooyooyooyooyooyooyooyooyooyooyooyooyooyooyooyooyooyooyooyooyooyooyooyooyooyooyooyooyooyooyooyooyooyooyooyooyooyooyooyooyooyooyooyooyooyooyooyooyooyooyooyooyooyooyooyooyooyooyooyooyooyooyooyooyooyooyooyooyooyooyooyooyooyooyooyooyooyooyooyooyooyooyooyooyooyooyooyooyooyooyooyooyooyooyooyooyooyooyooyooyooyooyooyooyooyooyooyooyooyooyooyooyooyooyooyooyooyooyooyooyooyooyooyooyooyooyooyooyooyooyooyooyooyooyooyooyooyooyooyooyooyooyooyooyooyooyooyooyooyooyooyooyooyooyooyooyooyooyooyooyooyooyooyooyooyooyooyooyooyooyooyooyooyooyooyooyooyooyooyooyooyooyooyooyooyooyooyooyooyooyooyooyooyooyooyooyooyooyooyooyooyooyooyooyooyooyooyooyooyooyooyooyooyooyooyooyooyooyooyooyooyooyooyooyooyooyooyooyooyooyooyooyooyooyooyooyooyooyooyooyooyooyooyooyooyooyooyooyooyooyooyooyooyooyooyooyooyooyooyooyooyooyooyooyooyooyooyooyooyooyooyooyooyooyooyooyooyooyooyooyooyooyooyooyooyooyooyooyooyooyooyooyooyooyooyooyooyooyooyooyooyooyooyooyooyooyooyooyooyooyooyooyooyooyooyooyooyooyooyooyooyooyooyooyooyooyooyooyooyooyooyooyooyooyooyooyooyooyooyooyooyooyooyooyooyooyooyooyooyooyooyooyooyooyooyooyooyooyooyooyooyooyooyooyooyooyooyooyooyooyooyooyooyooyooyooyooyooyooyooyooyooyooyooyooyooyooyooyooyooyooyooyooyooyooyooyooyooyooyooyooyooyooyooyooyooyooyooyooyooyooyooyooyooyooyooyooyooyooyooyooyooyooyooyooyooyooyooyooyooyooyooyooyooyooyooyooyooyooyooyooyooyooyooyooyooyooyooyooyooyooyooyooyooyooyooyooyooyooyooyooyooyooyooyooyooyooyooyooyooyooyooyooyooyooyooyooyooyooyooyooyooyooyooyooyooyooyooyooyooyooyooyooyooyooyooyooyooyooyooyooyooyooyooyooyooyooyooyooyooyooyooyooyooyooyooyooyooyooyooyooyooyooyooyooyooyooyooyooyooyooyooyooyooyooyooyooyooyooyooyooyooyooyooyooyooyooyooyooyooyooyooyooyooyooyooyooyooyooyooyooyooyooyooyooyooyooyooyooyooyooyooyooyooyooyooyooyooyooyooyooyooyooyooyooyooyooyooyooyooyooyooyooyooyooyooyooyooyooyooyooyooyooyooyooyooyooyooyooyooyooyooyooyooyooyooyooyooyooyooyooyooyooyooyooyooyooyooyooyooyooyooyooyooyooyooyooyooyooyooyooyooyooyooyooyooyooyooyooyooyooyooyooyooyooyooyooyooyooyooyooyooyooyooyooyooyooyooyooyooyooyooyooyooyooyooyooyooyooyooyooyooyooyooyooyooyooyooyooyooyooyooyooyooyooyooyooyooyooyooyooyooyooyooyooyooyooyooyooyooyooyooyooyooyooyooyooyooyooyooyooyooyooyooyooyooyooyooyooyooyooyooyooyooyooyooyooyooyooyooyooyooyooyooyooyooyooyooyooyooyooyooyooyooyooyooyooyooyooyooyooyooyooyooyooyooyooyooyooyooyooyooyooyooyooyooyooyooyooyooyooyooyooyooyooyooyooyooyooyooyooyooyooyooyooyooyooyooyooyooyooyooyooyooyooyooyooyooyooyooyooyooyooyooyooyooyooyooyooyooyooyooyooyooyooyooyooyooyooyooyooyooyooyooyooyooyooyooyooyooyooyooyooyooyooyooyooyooyooyooyooyooyooyooyooyooyooyooyooyooyooyooyooyooyooyooyooyooyooyooyooyooyooyooyooyooyooyooyooyooyooyooyooyooyooyooyooyooyooyooyooyooyooyooyooyooyooyooyooyooyooyooyooyooyooyooyooyooyooyooyooyooyooyooyooyooyooyooyooyooyooyooyooyooyooyooyooyooyooyooyooyooyooyooyooyooyooyooyooyooyooyooyooyooyooyooyooyooyooyooyooyooyooyooyooyooyooyooyooyooyooyooyooyooyooyooyooyooyooyooyooyooyooyooyooyooyooyooyooyooyooyooyooyooyooyooyooyooyooyooyooyooyooyooyooyooyooyooyoyo
BAYEZA
(Oomnhot'hot'hotlo)

Oomnhot'hot'hotlo! Oomnhot'hot'hotlo!
Oomnhot'ho t'ho lo bayeza kusasa

Bayeza kusasa bayeza
Bayeza kusasa bayeza
Bayeza kusasa bayeza
Bayeza kusasa bayeza
Bayeza kusasa bayeza
Bayeza kusasa bayeza

"The craft of the African witchdoctor is built around a number of spirits, each with its own particular function. One of the more mischievous of these is the Nomathothlo, which, among other doubtful habits, hovers over the chimney tops of houses, and reports any useful conversation to the witchdoctor, and is not above running down the chimney from time to time to steal tobacco if it is left laying about. This song is an invocation to this spirit to come with the dawn."

Changes: Key originally A flat, instead of A. Accompaniment added. Otherwise unchanged, even such matters as ritardis and fortissimos being stipulated in the original arrangement, and the order of the voices joining in or dropping out.

Hey, Tswana nehe tipe same tswana
Hey tswana nehe tipe same tswana

"This song is sung by the boys at the end of the initiation ceremony, when they reach their homes. The girls of the village join the 'Bushmane' in this song, which praises the boys for the achievements which have become exaggerated in their minds during the weeks of the initiation."

Changes: Original key F, instead of D. Accompaniment added.
**SIDE II, BAND 4**

**BAYANDOYIKA**

_E we, bayandoyika bantwan_
_E we no ma ma, bayandoyika bantwan_

Bayandoyika bantwanabama ggo boka
Bayandoyika bantwanabama ggo boka

Pronunciation: The letters _gg_ are a clucking noise, made by pulling the tongue down from the back part of the roof of the mouth. It is a sound difficult but not impossible for Americans to make. In the Folkways Record FP60A, 'Millions Of Musicians', one can hear a South African woman pronouncing a tongue-twister full of such clicks. It is a feature of language believed to have been picked up by some of the Bantu peoples from neighboring Hottentot tribes.

"This song is frequently sung by girls whenever they do work of any sort in company. Thus it is often heard during hoeing, stamping of mealies, carrying of water from the river, or gathering wood."

Translation: They fear me, O the children of heathen.

Changes: The original key was B flat, not E, and the lead part was taken by the sopranos. Altos took the part here given to the sopranos, and tenors took the part here given to the altos. Accompaniment added.
HEY, MOTSOALA
Hey, motswala, hey, motswala
Hey, motswala, hey, motswala

1. My mother travelled to Pretoria
   To sign the license for the wedding day. (twice)
2. Her father wants to give the bride away
   I think he's waiting for the dowry (twice)
3. And now the time has come I have to go
   I wish perhaps I hadn't hurried so

(English lyrics by P. Seeger)

Original words:
He motswala, he motswala
He motswala, he motswala
Mangoane oile Petoria
O tsabile tsapese panere
Se panere sa e sekele
Ka tempa kaba ka saena

Translation:
O my cousin, O my cousin
O my cousin, O my cousin
My aunt has gone to Pretoria
She has run away from the iron spanner
(wrench - pliers)
The spanner of a bicycle
I stamped and even signed

"This is a Sutho marriage song during the general festivities after the ceremony is over."

Changes: English lyrics. Original key G, instead of E. Four part arrangement in the book has been adapted to three-part version learned from Henry Ramaila, of Zulu background, and a student at Union Theological Seminary, New York City. Accompaniment added.

HERE'S TO THE COUPLE
(Lo Mfan' U sensesgata)

1. Here’s to the couple so valiantly wed
   (basses: 'knotted untorget')
   Here’s to the years that for them lie ahead
   We wish them good fortune and health of the best
   We wish them good fortune and health of the best (Tenors: 'and also... have!')
   Strong children, good neighbors, and all the rest
   (Basses and altos: 'Also good neighbors and all the rest!')

2. Here’s hoping that they never do part
   (Basses: '...never have trouble with the baby!')
   And all their quarrels be patched 'ere they start
   Let love be the teacher and make all the rules
   Let love be the teacher and make all the rules (Tenors: 'Remember!')
   Let love be the doctor and cure the fools
   (Basses and altos: 'Love be the doctor and cure the fools!')

3. They venture now out on life's stormy seas
   (Basses: '...on the waves and the waters of the ocean!')
   May they hold to their course, be it north south or east.
   May they hold to their course though the tempests may blow
   And reach their goal, the goal of us all
   (Tenors: 'Forever!')
   For them and their children, a world at peace
   (Basses and altos: 'And for their children, a world at peace!')

4. Repeat first verse.

(English lyrics by P. Seeger)

Original words:
Lo mfan' unesangota
Lo mfan' unesangota
Ha dovale le ma gqibelaka Nkqo yi

Ndi khokele O Yehova
Ndinumhambi nikosi yami
Una mandla a ndi na wo
Ebu tha tha ke ni bami
O msindi si, O msindi si
Nguwe O li khakala me

Translation: (partial)
This boy has the guts
This boy has the guts

Save me O Jehovah
I am a pilgrim, my Lord
Thou are almighty
I have it in my misery.

"This is a wedding 'competition' song, normally sung during the night following the wedding, or during the signing of the register in church."

Changes: Introduction (Lo mfan' unesangota), which was a bass solo, has been omitted.
English lyrics added. Accompaniment added. Otherwise, parts and key unchanged.
HERE'S TO THE COUPLE

1. Here's to the couple so valiantly wed, and
   wish them good fortune and health of the best.

2. Here's to the couple so valiantly wed, and
   wish them good fortune and health of the best, Strong.

3. Here's to the couple so valiantly wed, and
   wish them good fortune and health of the best, and also

4. Here's to the couple so valiantly knotted together
   children, good neighbors, and all the rest. Strong.

Here's to the years that for them lie a-head. We
also good neighbors, and all the rest.
also good neighbors, and all the rest, and also
also good neighbors, and all the rest.
also good neighbors, and all the rest!
also good neighbors, and all the rest!
also good neighbors, and all the rest!
also good neighbors, and all the rest!