Kaye, Andrew L.
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Trans. Revista Transcultural de Música, núm. 11, julio, 2007, p. 0
Sociedad de Etnomusicología
Barcelona, España

Available in: http://www.redalyc.org/articulo.oa?id=82201109
The Film Score and the African Musical Experience: Some comments on a work in progress

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Abstract
Zulu warriors, white hunters, war paints, obsessive drums... those are some of the topics used in western film production along the 20th Century that have create, the African imaginary in western society. Filmic representation (including feature films, documentary or short films) has proven to be a fundamental vehicle to convey those African topoi, which actually allude to sub-Saharan Africa. Through a detailed analysis of titles such as West of Zanzibar (1928), Man of two worlds (1946) or Borom Sarret (1963), this paper examines the use of terms like “Cannibal” or “jungle music”, that very often appeared as categories in sheet music publications for early cinema. The paper aims to elucidate the ways in which music has contributed to create a concept of “the African” within western contemporary society.

Key terms: colonialism, Africa, topics, western cinema, film music.

Over the past 10 years I have been studying films with a sub-Saharan African topos—complementing my more general interests in film music and culture-historical approaches in ethnomusicology. I have analyzed some 250 films relating to sub-Saharan Africa, primarily feature films, but also documentaries, ethnographic films, and animation, and I have roughly the same number in partial consideration. [1] About two-thirds of the films in my study are of North American and Western European production, and a third are of African production or co-production. A consideration of Africa-related films in Eastern European, Asian, Latin American, or private archives, must await future scholarship. [2]

The first known Africa-related film title seems to be Os Mergulhadores na África Portuguesa (Divers in Portuguese Africa), from 1897. The film “A Zulu War Dance,” produced by the British Mutoscope & Biograph Company in 1899, featured an “exhibition by Frank Filis's company of Zulu and Swazi warriors in native costume.” [3] This may be the first film specifically
focusing on aspects of African musical performance. The Lumières apparently filmed dance scenes of a similar type in France. A 1905 catalogue from that company lists several dance titles, including *Danse du sabre*, *Danse de jeunes filles*, and *Danse du féticheur*, under the rubric “Nègres Ashantis.” An early dramatic film with an African setting is D. W. Griffith’s “The Zulu’s Heart,” from 1908. It tells the story of a Zulu warrior, played by a white actor in blackface makeup, who is torn between his love for his family and the call to war (Cameron 1994). The Kimberley Diamond Robbery, a South African production from 1910, may be the first narrative film shot in Africa.

Roosevelt in Africa from 1910, and Paul J Rainey's African Hunt from 1912 (also known as Paul J. Rainey's Jungle Pictures) are among the earliest safari-themed films, a type that would continue to enjoy popularity over the next several decades. The film Symbol of Sacrifice, a South African production which only survives in fragments, is noteworthy in our history. An epic expressive of the European colonial viewpoint, it is said to have employed 25,000 Zulu warriors in impressive battle recreations. The first Tarzan film, entitled Tarzan of the Apes, was also released in 1918. The next decade saw the release of over a dozen Tarzan films, including serials. A very interesting Italian production from 1927 was Siliwa the Zulu. Shot in South Africa with a Zulu cast, the film is part ethnographic recreation and part melodrama, in the manner of Flaherty’s Nanook of the North (1922).

What kinds of music can be associated with these films? Since the 1890s, it was common to accompany films with pre-existing music, including both popular and concert-hall types. In the 1910s, to satisfy the growing demand for music that could accompany the moods of cinema, publishers began issuing collections of short character pieces types by mood or place. By this time, we can find examples of music specifically tailored for African cinematic *topoi*. In 1912, for example, the Kalem Company announced the availability of “Special Piano Music” for its film Missionaries in Darkest Africa. The Sam Fox Motion Picture Music volumes, first published in 1913, contain at least one African reference. A piece entitled “Zulu or African dance,” composed by John Stefan Zamecnik, a noted American composer of film music during the silent period, appears in the second of the Fox volumes. This piece may be described as a march-tempo minor key arabesque. With its open fifths and insistent eighth-note rhythm, it is of a type that might equally serve to depict the Middle East, or for that matter, any non-Western locale, in early cinema.

Erno Rapée’s Encyclopedia of Music for Pictures, published in New York in 1925, suggests the continuity of this musical type (Rapée 1925). This book is an index of thousands of music titles organized by mood-categories such as “Emotional” or “Horror,” by genres such as “Reels-Jiggs,” and ethnic- national references such as “Hungarian” or “Arabian.” In my estimation, less than half of one percent of the indexed titles relate to Africa, a figure that seems
to correspond to the frequency of sub-Saharan Africa as a cinematic topos in this period.

In reality, there is probably never going to be a source as exciting, for our subject, as the Rapée Encyclopedia; as it is probably as close as we will ever get to the mind of the culture of the period between the 1910s and the 1920s. The African references are dispersed among a variety of the categories used in the book, including Abyssinia, Liberia, and Zanzibar, Oriental, and “American (Negro).” Under the rubric “Oriental,” for example, we find “Danse Africaine” by Ganne, “Down in Zanzibar” by Anciflê, and “In the Soudan” (“A Dervish Chorus”) by Sebeck (Rapee 1925: 379-80). [14]

When we look for a primary entry for Africa, we do find the rubric “African.” Under this category, however, this is no listing of individual musical titles. Rather, we find a primary cross-reference, to the category “Cannibal.” This reference is a fascinating one. Indeed, it is not merely in Rapée’s book; it is his paradigm example, the one he uses on page 30 to explain to the reader how all the musical entries in this book are to be understood. [15] The cannibal motif has a long history, not specific to Africa, and often associated with the South Seas, the pre-Columbian Caribbean, and the Amazon. It is important for us to understand, that in this book, Africa is but one of four categories so cross-referenced; the others are “South Seas Music,” “Jungle Music” and “Savage Music.” [16]

The “Cannibal” category unites a cluster of motifs, suggesting wild dancing, the barbaric jungle, and violence and war, in an undetermined national setting. [17] Let us consider the titles listed in this category. Rapée gives prominence of place to a composition entitled Cannibal Carnival, credited to a Chicago musician named Sol Levy, who published it in 1920. [18] The musical qualities of this piece, including the use of minor key chromaticism, whole tone scales, and unusual accentual patterns, seem to be iconic for this motif-cluster, and for a musical style that was coming to be known at the time as “jungle music.” According to the New Grove Dictionary of Jazz, the “jungle music” style has its origins in the period around 1900, and is characterized by “pseudo-African musical effects—especially pounding tom-toms, unusual harmonies, “primitive” scales (usually pentatonic and whole tone), and muted, growling brass lines.” [19] By the mid-to-late 1920s, this style was used to illustrate jungle-themed tableaux at the Cotton Club, accompanied by original music from Duke Ellington’s orchestra, and at the Parisian Revue Nègre featuring Josephine Baker’s dancing in a banana leaf skirt. [20] Stylistically, with its use of whole tone scales, descending chromatic lines, and deliberate dissonances, Cannibal Carnival is clearly of this type. [21]

Let us now turn to actual surviving film soundtracks. After the success of The Jazz Singer in 1927, the film industry moved rapidly toward full sound synchronization. Within the first several years of sound synchronization, we have over 20 films that belong to our topic of interest. Tarzan the Tiger, from 1929, was the first of the Tarzan films to be provided with a synchronized orchestral score, although it did not have spoken dialogue. The Golden Dawn, from 1930, has the distinction of being the first filmed musical with an African setting. The action of this Harbach-Hammerstein operetta, originally presented on Broadway in 1927, is set in German Africa during the First World War. Trader Horn, from 1931, was a major Hollywood production, and was advertised as the first sound film to be shot on location in Africa. The following year, 1932, saw the release of Tarzan the Ape Man, the first of the Tarzan talkies, featuring Olympic swimming hero Johnny Weissmuller.

I look forward to commenting on the music in these films in a future publication. Here, I will concentrate on one early sound film, Tod Browning’s West of Zanzibar, released in 1928. [22] Based on a stage play entitled Kongo, West of Zanzibar is a revenge melodrama featuring a deformed protagonist, and thus recalls the operas Rigoletto and Pagliacci. [23] The story begins in England, where Phroso, a music hall magician, becomes crippled in a fight with his rival. Years later he has established himself as a kind of Kurtz in a jungle heart of darkness, where he is known as “Dead Legs.” His plans for revenge involve an innocent young woman named Maizie. Most of the film’s action transpires in Phroso’s jungle encampment.
Like many other films released in the late 1920s, West of Zanzibar has an electrically synchronized musical accompaniment, but intertitles in the place of spoken dialogue. The musical score is a typical one for the period, based on a standard studio orchestra, major and minor keys, and tempos that coordinate with the on-screen action. Additional musical elements are tailored to the particular mis-en-scène, including a piano playing ragtime in a scene of a hectic Zanzibar barroom. At times, we hear the pounding of a low drum, and vague chanting in an unidentifiable language, apparent icons of the music of African natives.

The film opens with the familiar MGM logo. As the words “West of Zanzibar” appears on the screen, we hear a dramatic melodic gesture of a tritone, played forcefully and deliberately by the orchestra. These are the opening notes of “Voodoo Dance,” an unpublished composition attributed to George Richelavie, and what seems to be a textbook example of the “cannibal” type. Minor-key music at a frantic pace, about 180 beats per minute (bpm), ensues. The orchestration includes the sound of a xylophone, drums, and what appear to be bird chirps in the confused mix. Clarinets swoop up a fifth and make a rapid descent to the tonic. After about 20 seconds, we return to a statement of the opening tri-tone, and end with a sustained minor 7th chord. After a pause, the film proper begins, at a magic show in London. The musical score from this point follows familiar silent film musical typologies, not necessarily tied to the idea of Africa.

Let us now consider a scene from the middle of the film. Babe, one of Phroso’s men, is bringing Maizie to the jungle camp, on the pretense that she is to be introduced to her father. A shot of the jungle at night is musically accompanied by a wailing motif by the clarinet in a minor key. We then hear the iteration of an open fifth (which recalls Zamecnik’s “Zulu Dance”) in the key of D minor. The tempo is quick at 140 bpm, and adds to the viewer’s sense of anticipation. The mode shifts to D major when we see Maizie, and this suggests the innocence of this beautiful young blond woman. The music switches back to D minor as we see the goings-on in Phroso’s cabin, where his aide, the drunken and dissolute “Doc,” is dancing with abandon with two black women, while another of Phroso’s men strums vigorously on an acoustic guitar.

A new musical cue is suddenly introduced. With instruments in the lower registers, in the minor key and with a forcefully accented marchlike rhythm at 90 bpm, it suggests a powerful menace at hand. A shot of two Africans drumming on large conical kettledrums on either side of large fetish idols follows the introduction of this cue, followed by a shot of Maizie at the door of Phroso’s cabin. The camera focuses on her reactions; her joyful anticipation has turned to revulsion as she witnesses the barbaric scene. The musical cue continues; it is none other than “Cannibal Carnival,” as if taken directly from Rapée’s catalogue. In the key of G minor, this piece is musically very similar to the “Voodoo Dance” of the title track. Paired with the shots of Doc’s drunken dancing, Maizie’s horrified disgust, and Phroso’s evil leer, this music is clearly meant to complement this torrid jungle universe where values are lost or turned upside down.

There are many interesting details about the musical soundtrack of the 1930s and 1940s, but for the sake of time and comprehension, I would like to summarize what seems to be characteristic for the African topos in early cinema:

1) In terms of the story and visual motifs

- The setting is an unknown and difficult rural jungle world
- There are many wild animals around: lions, hippos, elephants, crocodiles, etc.
- There is often an intrepid white hunter and greedy white exploiters around
- Part of the background setting is a feudal village world of African warriors, chiefs, witch doctors, mothers with babies, and occasional virgins to be sacrificed

2) In terms of film production
• More than 95% of the production seems to be driven by European and American interests

• Some production in British South Africa

• African participation in film production is very limited. [27]

3) In terms of the soundtrack

• Standard Western orchestral and popular styles dominate

• Signature “jungle” or “cannibal” style continues to be used (e.g., minor keys, dissonances, drums, pentatonic and whole tone scales, open fifths, exaggerated sounds: muted trumpets, wailing clarinets)

• Traditional African musical typologies—authentic or ersatz—drums and dancing; warrior chants are used (as for example, in Trader Horn, 1931, and Tarzan the Ape Man, 1932). [28]

• The ambient soundtrack emphasizes wildlife, rustling leaves, rippling water, birds and other animal sounds.

I would like to now turn to 1946, and a film released that year entitled Men of Two Worlds, directed by Thorold Dickinson. This is a British film, and I suppose it could be argued that there is no better example of the colonial apology film than this one. Based on a story by Joyce Cary, it tells of an African musician living in London, who is recruited by the British Colonial Office to return to his native village in Tanganyika, to aid in the colonial endeavor to uplift his people. [29] The film’s drama centers on the struggle between Kisenga, a Western-educated African, and Magoli, the village witch doctor, who fosters superstition among the villagers and leads resistance against colonial projects.

Arthur Bliss, a recognized orchestral composer of the 20th century, provided the film’s musical score. Right from the production logo, we hear Bliss’s music, which emphasizes pentatonicism in an apparent bow to African musical style. Indeed, titles inform us that Bliss’s music was based on Tanganyikan folk music collected in Africa by H. Cory. [30] During the title sequence, we hear a steady rhythm tapped out on a bass drum, also an apparent musical reference to Africa. At 12 seconds, a map of Africa is projected, and we hear the voice of a female mezzo-soprano, singing a solo pentatonic melody in semi-operatic style, over a sustained drone. It is sung in what appears to be an African language; the drum motif continues in alternation with the sung phrases. This is not in the exaggerated musical style we heard in West of Zanzibar, but rather in the more reverent spirit of concert hall folk musical renderings. The folk song interpretation is followed, still in the title sequence, by music for orchestra and piano, prefiguring music that we will hear more fully in the film’s first scene. After the title sequence, we see shots of central London, the capital of the Empire. The year is identified as 1944, making this a drama with a contemporary, rather than historical setting. The camera pans to the National Gallery, and we hear the chimes of Big Ben, an aural reminder of the Empire. The camera zooms to a close-up of the program bill in front of the National Gallery, and we see that scheduled for 11 o’clock, is “Baraza for Pianoforte, Voices and Orchestra by KISEN GA. The Composer at the Piano. First Performance.” The concert has already begun. The camera pans across the mainly white audience, which includes soldiers and nurses in uniform, and then reveals the male choir, the percussion section, the orchestra, and finally, a minute and a half after working its way into the concert hall, the hands of the piano soloist. These are black hands, and this is no doubt meant to be a revelation. [31] The camera pulls back so that we can fully see Kisenga, the black African composer-pianist, dressed in a black suit and bow tie, just in time for his dramatic cadenza. He exchanges meaningful looks with the conductor, and the piece continues with an orchestral tutti, the camera intercutting between attentive audience members (notably white women), the conductor, and Kisenga.

The music is an original piano concerto composed by Bliss for the film, entitled “Baraza,”
which, as Kisenga explains to audience members after the performance, is an African term for a “council meeting” or “heated discussion.” Baraza is in a modernist musical idiom and recalls pieces such as Stravinsky’s Le Sacre du Printemps (1913), Varèse’s Amériques (1921), or Revueltas’ Sensemaya (1937), other pieces which use non-canonical approaches to instrumentation, harmony, and rhythm, in order to evoke exotic tableaux. In a way, these are comparable to “jungle music,” although couched in a more erudite, and arguably more elevated and therefore positive, symphonic idiom.

Men of Two Worlds is particularly interesting to us, because it couches its pro-colonial argument, in large part, in terms of music. Kisenga is shown as the model of the African who has assimilated British values, notably its musical values. The film is careful to point out that as an African, Kisenga has unique resources to contribute to a stronger, revitalized British Empire. After his concert, a (white) female admirer implores him not to return to Africa, but to stay and invigorate English music: “You have a duty to music, Mr. Kisenga, to English music!” When he goes back to his village in Africa, Kisenga organizes a village ensemble featuring vocals and African instruments (including the xylophone, vertical flute, and drum). He prepares sheet music for the musicians, and he conducts them in the European manner. The British commission commends him for the music, and particularly for its retention of African qualities.

As we move forward in time from the mid-century, halcyon colonial viewpoint that Men of Two Worlds (1946) represents, we can note a continuing mix of old stereotypes, colonial motifs, and emergent urban themes, in a transforming African cinematic topos. The musical world of urbanizing South Africa burst forth in a series of films made between 1949 and 1953 in South Africa, including the first film version of Cry the Beloved Country (1951), and four musicals featuring black South African casts: Jim goes to Johannesburg (1949), Zonk! (1950), Pennywhistle Blues (1951; also known as The Magic Garden), and Song of Africa (1953). The UK production Cry the Beloved Country (1951), based on Alan Paton’s famous anti-apartheid novel (first published in 1948), opens with title music featuring South African choral music informed by the mixture of Western and African musical influences that had been evolving in South Africa since the mid-to-late 19th century. In the scene in which the rural Zulu pastor Khumalo arrives by train in the confusing metropolis of Johannesburg, his meeting with a street hoodlum is accompanied by the diegetically placed sounds of urban popular music—the popular 1939 recording of “Mbube” by Solomon Linda and his Nightbirds blares out over the loudspeakers from a nearby bar.

Urban musical styles, notably those modeled after American jazz, swing, and rhythm & blues of the 1940s, performed by South African musicians, as well as the emerging kwela or “pennywhistle” style of township music, highlight the scores of the South African film musicals mentioned above, alongside Christian hymns, and performances of traditional singing, high-stepping dances, and xylophone playing. These films seem to have been among the first to highlight both original music by Africans, and document actual performances by urban African musicians, including the well-known singer Dolly Rathebe.

A discussion of these films will be reserved for a longer publication. would like to briefly remind the audience that the appearance of urban African music in films in the 1950s, corresponds to an apparent initial wave of success of African urban music in the international marketplace. Two modern African songs, Mbube—which became known as Wimoweh—and “Skokiaan,” also known as “Happy, Happy Africa”—scored highly in the American popular music charts in 1952 and 1954 respectively, and Tom Hark, a kwela piece, charted in the UK in 1958. It was in fact the relationship between cinema and popular music that helped launch Miriam Makeba’s career in 1959, when she performed in Lionel Rogosin’s anti-apartheid drama, Come Back, Africa (USA/South Africa, 1959).

Even when we look at the mainline feature films of “Hollywood” of the 1950s, we can perceive what seem to be shifting attitudes toward Africa and its music. Two major productions from the early 1950s, King Solomon’s Mines (1950), and Mogambo (1953, directed by John Ford), eschew older typologies of “jungle music,” and indeed, dispense with any Western music
whatsoever, and choose African vocal and instrumental music—mainly drumming and male choruses—as the sole musical underscore. This music is not only heard as diegetic music, but also as title and end track music.

In the wake of the panic inspired by the Mau-Mau rebellion of the mid-1950s, and the subsequent rapid dissolution of Empire and the transition to independence for most of the British and French African colonies in the late 1950s and early 1960s, filmic storylines and musical usage continued to change. It is also at this point in history when we begin to see the rise of national schools of filmmaking within black Africa itself. A very clear example of the new African cinema is *Borom Sarret* (1963) one of the first films by Ousmane Sembène, the well-known Senegalese author and filmmaker who has been called “the father of African cinema.”

After serving in the French army during World War II, living and working in France, and developing his vocation as a novelist, Sembène studied filmmaking at the Gorkii Studios in Moscow. Upon returning to Senegal in 1963, he completed the short film *Borom Sarret*. The film follows a day in the life of a poor cart-driver in the urban setting of contemporary Dakar, Senegal. He makes his living by taxiing people and goods on a horse-driven cart. The film is an indictment of the former French colonial overlords, the concrete city they have built, foreign to the African poor who inhabit its outskirts, and of the black political and economic elites, heirs to the power and authority of the old colonial masters. In contrast with *Men of Two Worlds* (1946) whose opening image is of the imposing buildings of central London, accompanied by the chiming of Big Ben, *Borom Sarret* begins with a full frame shot of a mosque, and on the soundtrack we hear the traditional Islamic call to prayer. Although these are certainly not the first references to Islam in the context of African-themed films, the placement of this combined sound-image symbol at the very beginning of Sembène’s film constitutes an anti-European statement, an affront to the French and their specifically Catholic colonial apparatus. Establishing shots show us urban Dakar with its paved roads and automobiles, as the titles are projected on the screen. We are introduced to our main character immediately after this title sequence. He is shown to be a pious man—as the call to prayer continues on the soundtrack, we see him kneeling in his daily prayers. We then have a narrative, in the voice of the principle character, rendered in French. On the soundtrack, we hear the sounds of a *xalam*, a West African lute.

In the latter part of this short film (it runs for about 17 minutes), after a series of hardships, the cart-driver decides to accept the promise of extra money from an elite African—the man is dressed in Western fashion, in suit and tie—to take him to the wealthy part of the city, even though he knows this is a risk, as horse-drawn carts are prohibited there. As he enters this section of the city, with its high-rise buildings and luxury apartment, the driver is amazed. The music on the soundtrack is Baroque orchestral music of a generic mid-18th century type, which serves to remind viewers of the elite city’s European heritage. As he nears the destination, he hears traditional African drumming, which here, as much as in earlier films, signals danger. This turns out to be the passing of a group of Islamic adherents, dressed in white, and parading with traditional drummers. Danger manifests itself in reality, with the blowing of a (black) policeman’s whistle. The music on the soundtrack stops. The horse whinnies violently. As the policeman issues him a fine, he also takes possession of the driver’s prized military medallion (no doubt for service in the French army), as well as his cart. The elite passenger abscends into a car without paying the driver. As the cart driver abandons the high city without his cart, he laments the cruelty of the modern world; on the soundtrack, we hear orchestral strains of Mozart’s *Ave Verum Corpus*.

The musical symbols in *Borom Sarret* are in an apparent inversion from their meanings in the African films produced in the West. In *Men of Two Worlds* (1946), made from the British colonial point of view, Western music held the promise of uplifting Africans. In the view presented in Sembène’s film, Western music is just part of a system created to oppress common Africans. It is associated with the pro-Western elites, who are portrayed as thieves, in opposition to the pious and upright working classes.

The following table summarizes what seems to be characteristic for the African topos in...
the period between the 1940s and 1960s, which we can think of as a transitional period:

1) In terms of story and visual motifs

- Movement from village to city
- Conflicts between old and new values (as in Men of Two Worlds)
- Introduction of modern, urban African characters
- Traditional, rural Africa seems to be more respectfully treated in mainstream cinema

2) In terms of film production

- Production still dominated by the West
- Improved sound recording and color
- African national production begins to develop in the 1950s and 1960s

3) In terms of soundtrack

- Continuing use of Western symphonic and popular idioms
- African traditional music may replace Western music
- African urban musical styles begin to emerge

Since the time of Borom Sarret (1963) and moving forward, I believe we can speak of two main streams of African cinema, each with many substreams. On one side, Africa has continued to appear as a filmic topos in the non-African world cinema. Western films have continued to respond to changing political and musical realities. Older typologies or stock-types, such as Tarzan, the jungle, and the white explorer-adventurer continue, in films such as Jewel of the Nile (1985) and the many new entries in the Tarzan saga, and the Africa-as-wilderness thematic continues in many nature films and even family musicals such as The Lion King (1994). There are many films, however, that address contemporary African problems and realities, even if often from a Western standpoint. In their stories, contemporary Western films seem to demonstrate more complex conceptions of Africa compared to the sometimes one-dimensional viewpoints found in early cinema. There has correspondingly been a revision in the musical scoring. Once again, there is not space in this paper to go into this in detail. But we can make a few salient observations. The dissonant “jungle” or “cannibal” musical typology, common in the early 20th century, is scarcely to be found since the 1950s. It seems to have been largely replaced, in fact, with an approxobatory orchestral style, as we can hear, for example, in the title musics of Born Free (1966) or Out of Africa (1985) (scored by John Barry), or in the Brahmsian orchestral music, augmented by African-sounding drums, that accompany the Italian heroine Kuki Gallman’s arrival in the virgin, animal-rich savannahs of East Africa, in the recent film I Dreamed of Africa (2000) (score by Michel Jarre). Of course, following film music trends of the past 30 years, orchestral music may be replaced altogether, for soundtracks composed of electronic music, diegetically placed African music, and a mixture of Western and African contemporary popular styles. The popular Coming to America (1988), starring Eddie Murphy as an African prince, for its opening musical motif, employs the South African vocal harmonies of Ladysmith Black Mambazo, who sing the opening refrain of Solomon Linda’s Mbube. This film, in which the Tarzan story is reversed—in place of British Lord Greystoke in Africa, we have a noble African prince who make good in the West, ends musically with a fusion of American rock, R&B, and funk, with synthesized echoes of African drums, xylophones and flutes. When authentic African music is referenced in contemporary films, this is usually done neutrally, or with positive
The Film Score and the African Musical Experience: Some comments on a work in ...

overtones. Indeed, several films seem to demonstrate approbation, when the white characters — the good ones, not the dissolute ones— join in the performance, as when Kathleen Turner joins in the circle dance in Jewel of the Nile (1985) when the historical figure Richard Burton joins in African dances in Mountains of the Moon (1989); and when white hunter played by Michael Douglas joins in the dance of the Maasai warriors in The Ghost in the Darkness (1996).

If I had time, I would also address the many sub-schools of Western filmmaking in relation to Africa, especially the different sub-schools of political films, where we find other musical variations, as in the finale to Pier Paolo Pasolini’s Notes for an African Orestes (1970). In that film’s conclusion, over a visual survey of present-day African workers, and a voice-over narration speaking of promises for Africa’s future, the sounds of traditional African drumming on the soundtrack give way to a crescendo of vocal music, sung in Russian by the Soviet Army Chorus.

The other main stream, of course, is made up of the contemporary cinema of Africa itself. The musical resources drawn upon in African cinema since the time of Borom Sarret are quite diverse, ranging from the heavy use of silence, natural sounds, and the sometimes liminal usage of music, as in Cissé’s Yeelen (1987), Saddik Balewa’s Kasarma Ce (1991), and films by Burkinabe director Idrissa Ouédraogo; to the vibrant “Afropop” emphasis of films such as La Vie est Belle (1987), Jit (1990), and Flora Gomes’s musical film Nha Fala (2002; with a score by Manu Dibango); to modernist orchestral stylings in hybrid musical modalities, as in Burkinabe composer René Guirma’s Stravinskian score to Kaboré’s Wend Kuuni (1982). Characteristically, we encounter mixed references to African traditional and urban musical styles, varying by region; diverse Western musical types, including the national anthems of the former colonial powers; and, in musical scores by noted composers such as Francis Bebey, Abdullah Ibrahim, Manu Dibango, Ray Lema, a sophisticated musical mixture drawing on contemporary jazz, popular musics, and aspects of Western concert music.

The rise, since the 1990s, of the direct-to-video, and in the past few years, direct to VCD (video compact disc) industry which in the past few years has gained the tag "Nollywood", adds further complexity to the world of contemporary African cinema and its music. Centered in Lagos, Nigeria, according to some recent sources, this industry represents an annual economy of over $100 million dollars, and produces well over 1,000 films per year. This would make this African movie industry suddenly one of world’s largest—the advent of the term "Nollywood" itself seems to reflect this dramatic change in status. Nollywood films encompass considerable diversity in language, theme, and point of view. English is the major language of production, with Yoruba following, but there are also numerous films in Hausa and Ibo, and we should not forget the considerable production in Asante-Twi in Ghana. The dominant story type seems to be the urban melodrama, frequently with elements of crime, action, family and business conflicts, romance, and famously, the supernatural. Films with Christian themes, surrounding pastor, the churchly community, and elements that threaten these, including the supernatural, are also an important type. Others include action films, period dramas recreating a pre-modern African past, films with rural settings, and films moving between the rural and the urban, and between Africa and the exterior, often Europe, or occasionally America. The wilderness, conservationist, and white hunter/ ecologist motifs prized by Western cinema, are conspicuous by their absence; indeed, it is rare to see any non-black African characters in these films.

The budgets for Nollywood films, up to this point, have been famously small and tight, and production schedules quick. At least in part for these reasons, musical soundtracks tend to be dominated by synthesizer scoring, typically completed in a small studio under the direction of a single musician, or a small team of composer-musicians. I estimate that synthesizer scoring accounts for between 60 to 70% of actual scoring time for these films. The sound of a Rhodes electric piano is quite common, as are synthesized symphonic strings, bass, organ, and jazz-set percussion. Vocals are not uncommon on the soundtrack, including male and female vocals, in English, Yoruba, or other languages. Real or synthesized African instruments, including drums, rattles, bells, xylophones, and flutes are also common sound elements. The harmonies are strongly biased toward the Western system, with the major key often used for moods from neutral to positive, minor for sadness, and atonality and chromaticism for moments of confusion,
violence, or supernatural terror. The most common approach to rhythm is to lay down a moderate-tempo 4/4 highlife rhythm, sometimes mixed with a hip-hop or R&B backbeat. Of course, we also encounter a wide range of traditional African rhythmic praxis, especially in scenes where traditional music has a diegetic role on screen. In terms of melody, the Nollywood creative team certainly is aware of the importance of bestowing your movie, if possible, with a memorable theme, and many of these films do have “theme songs”, where the melody can be repeated at appropriate intervals in the film. A good example is the theme to the popular 2003 production “Mr. Ibu in London,” which has a hummable theme song in a highlife idiom (“Mr. Ibu in London. You are welcome in London.”).

I would estimate that the stylistic breakdown of music on Nollywood films is as follows: 40% is a generic pop-synthesizer mix, biased toward the highlife idiom; 20% is generic mood-underscoring, using the synthesizer, but emulating styles of mood-underscoring common in Hollywood films and television soap operas, from the United States, Mexico, and Brazil; another 20% is a pop musical mix reflective of the local radio playlists in West Africa, from the point of view of urban youth, and this is strongly biased toward North American R&B and hip-hop, and Jamaican reggae and dancehall (or ragga), with some cool jazz and piano bar thrown in for good measure (especially for love scenes). Another 10% should be Christian gospel styles popular in contemporary Nigeria and Ghana. The remaining 10% is variously distributed, and includes traditional-style drum-and-percussion music; traditional African folksongs, used to identify rural and customary settings; familiar Western orchestral or concert music (Handel, Mozart, Vivaldi, Offenbach, Classical Gas), sometimes used to identify a European setting, or sometimes just as an alternative underscore; and other sundry sound effects, including eerie electronics and wind sounds for the many supernatural incidents that these films support.

As opposed to the “art house”-type productions of African cinema since the 1960s, the methods of soundtrack synchronization and choice and placement of musical motifs, sometimes appear crude and heavy-handed in Nollywood films. Two prominent figures of contemporary Nollywood, director Tunde Kelani and sound engineer Tunde Adegbola, have told me that the reasons for this are that the producers keep music budgets to a minimum, and do not consider the potential of music as an important cultural and artistic element to the films. This is confirmed by two Ghanaian film composers I have interviewed, Azonko Simpi and Willie Anku, both of whom suggested that the amount budgeted for the music barely covers their studio costs.

We would be wrong, however, to overestimate the apparent shortcomings of these films. Far more interesting is the remarkable resonance these films are finding among contemporary African audiences, and also a relatively broad appeal in Africa, extending beyond the confines of Nigeria and West Africa, and reaching African expatriate communities in Europe and the United States. Only very recently, at the Hilton of Los Angeles/Universal City, California, the business, artistic, and academic worlds of cinema met to consider, for the first time in such a setting, the theme of “Nollywood Rising: Global Perspectives” (June 13-17, 2005). The worldwide success of Nollywood may not be right around the corner. Nonetheless, these films and their musical soundtracks reflect a complexly evolving symbol system within contemporary urban Africa, and I believe that it will be worth our while to follow its development closely.

As an example of the use of thematic music in Nollywood films, we can consider the film Itohan: Woman Traffik, directed by Chico Ejiro, one of the best known and prolific of the Nollywood directors, released in 2002. It tells the story of a young woman named Itohan, who becomes involved in the international trade in prostitution, especially between West Africa and Europe. In a scene not too long into the film, Itohan decides to travel to Italy to make her fortune, whatever it takes. We see the Murtala Muhammed Airport in Lagos, and we hear theme music performed by male vocals, and a contemporary electric pop ensemble, in a style that can be characterized as a mixture of American R&B and Nigerian urban popular music. The lyrics comment on the evolving drama, “Itohan…Hey oh…You sold your body for money.”

Speaking very generally, in the period since the 1970s, and especially the 1980s, and historically coinciding, musically, with the emergence of “Afropop” after around 1983, as a summary term of recognition of modern, urban African music, we can note the following trends:
The Film Score and the African Musical Experience: Some comments on a work ...

1) In terms of story and visual motifs

• There is an emphasis on the urban locus and emphasis on modern lifestyles, especially in films by African filmmakers, but also in films produced in the West

• Character types include taxi drivers, business owners, corrupt politicians, preachers, gangsters, drug dealers, and modern city women

• Travel and emigration to Europe and America

• Ecological storylines abundant in Western films

2) In terms of film production

• Age of the African film festival (Ouagadougou, Milan, New York, Zanzibar, South Africa)

• Direct-to-video industry grows in Anglophone West Africa in the 1990s

• The term “Nollywood” becomes increasingly common since 2002

3) In terms of soundtrack

• Western symphonic and popular idioms continue to be used, mainly in Western films, but also in some African films

• Increasing use of synthesizers

• Modern musical idioms, whether symphonic or synthesized, often incorporate African musical motifs

• Contemporary urban African pop idioms common

• Traditional musical idioms continue to be used, but are less common than the urban styles

• Nollywood films rely heavily on synthesizers and popular musical idioms, including highlife, reggae, R&B, and rap/hip-hop

In conclusion, our understanding of music in African film symbology is just beginning, and it would seem that much material is yet to be uncovered and studied. The diachronic method allows us to trace subtle evolutions in African soundtracks and helps us understand the evolving points of view of diverse national and international film communities in relationship to a dynamic and changing Africa. In terms of the Africa topos, that is, in terms of sub-Saharan Africa, we can provisionally see that there is an early period, where production is generated overwhelmingly outside of Africa, and in which the soundtrack is oriented to a primal Africa, often presented as a mystery and a danger. This is a view, in fact, that did not originate with the cinema, but extends back perhaps to antiquity. Then there is a transitional period, from the later 1940s, in which the surviving cinema examples show the beginning of urban musical references, and a revaluation of African music so that it is presented neutrally, or positively, rather than negatively; and, most recently, since the 1960s, a modern period in which the urban African world dominates, and in which Africa itself has an increasingly important role as a generator of new cinema and new music for cinema. As a final note, I’d like to observe that 2005 was the first in which the American film establishment has recognized an African film with an Oscar nomination for best foreign film. That film, Darrell Roodt’s *Yesterday* (2004), which has also been called the first Zulu-language feature, has a musical score by South African musician Madale Kunene [53]. We can expect an increasing number of original film scores from African composers in the 21st century, in what looks like a growing and promising future for African cinema and its music.
Notes

[1] In all, I may have looked at about half of the actual first-run features, at least until the rise of the recent Nigerian video-film phenomenon. In order to locate films with African *topoi*, I have used a variety of resources, including published filmographies, such as that included in the appendix of Cameron (1994); and web filmographies, such as those cross-referenced by the Stanford University libraries at a site devoted to African film and video (http://www.sul.stanford.edu/depts/ssrg/africa/film.html) and the title- and keyword- search facility of the Internet Movie Database (IMDB).


[5] Films were seen in Africa as early as 1895 or 1896, when the new invention was first demonstrated in Johannesburg (Keyan Tomaselli, *The Cinema of Apartheid*, NY, Smyrna Press, 1988). By 1903, films were being shown in Lagos, a British Crown Colony since the 1860s. A cinema house was established in Accra, capital of the Gold Coast, in the first decades of the 20th century, by an African entrepreneur named Ocansey, and certainly by the 1920s and 1930s, cinema was already widely familiar in Africa.


[9] Edgar Rice Burroughs’ *Tarzan* books were first published in the USA in 1914.

[10] Early Tarzan titles include *The Romance of Tarzan* (1918), *The Adventures of Tarzan, The Son of Tarzan*, and *The Revenge of Tarzan*, all from 1920, down to *Tarzan the Mighty*, a 15- part serial from 1928, and *Tarzan the Tiger* from 1929, which survives with a synchronized soundtrack.

[11] This film was apparently provided with a full musical score by Italian opera conductor Carlo Sabajno—there is a credit to “Maestro Sabajno” in the title sequence. Although the film survives, the score has been lost. The film was directed by Attilio Gatti, in cooperation with Italian anthropologist Lidio Cipriani. The score was most certainly in a Western European style, perhaps with certain pentatonic leitmotifs and drums to index the African locale. We will not know until a copy of the score is found. The video is available, in a silent version with English intertitles, from Peter Davis’s Villon Films in Vancouver, BC. In 2005, Davis, working with South African musician Themba Tana, provided a new score for the film, largely consisting of traditional Zulu vocal music recorded in the 1940s and 1950s (Peter Davis, personal communication, October 2005).

[12] Marks 1997:78-79. It is not known whether the music is extant.

cinemaweb.com/silentfilm/bookshelf/21_bio_1.htm (1998); accessed on September 11, 2005.

[14] There is also one “Boer” reference indexed under the category “Holland.” The Liberian entry is “All Hail, Liberia, Hail!” with lyrics in English written by Daniel Bashiel Warner (1815-1880), and music by Olmstead Luca (1836-?). Two titles with the term African, the “African Symphonie” by Losey and “The African 400” by Roberts, are listed under the rubric “American (Negro)” (Rapee 1925:61).

[15] This demands careful consideration, because it suggests much about the psychological depth of this particular motif, to the culture of the period.

[16] The term “cannibal” is not uncommon as a film title, even to the present; a cursory search of the Internet Movie Database (IMDB) in September 2005, returned 101 films with “cannibal” in their title. Sixteen of these were from between 1908 and 1925, the period leading up to the publication of Rapee’s *Encyclopedia.*

[17] Most of the musical compositions listed under the “cannibal” category, in fact, do not offer a specific geographical reference. Five of the 18 titles allude to what appears to be sub-Saharan Africa, two to North Africa, and there are minor references, perhaps included by chance, to Russia and China (Rapée 1925, p. 123).


[20] Tucker (*op. cit.* ) writes: “Although elements of the “jungle style” may be discerned in March of the Caboceers, from In Dahomey (1902) by Will Marion Cook, and in the Original Memphis Five’s recording Africa (1924, Pathe 036117), the genre’s expressive potential was most fully realized by Duke Ellington.” Jungle-themed songs by Ellington include “Jungle Nights in Harlem” (1930) and “Echoes of the Jungle” (1931). A similar “jungle” image is highlighted in the 1942 Afro-American musical revue *Stormy Weather.*

[21] The musical style-type that would come to be used for the evocation of “jungle” themes, shares a number of elements with earlier approaches to musically suggesting “exotic” locales, especially in music of the mid to late 19th century. Another early example of the application of this style to an African thematic, would be the *Three African Dances* by Montague Ring, published in 1913 (these include “The Call to the Feast,” “Luleta's Dance,” and “Dance of the Warriors”). In their use of pulsing open fifths, minor pentatonic modes, and syncopated accents, these pieces are comparable both to the more innocuous style of the Zamecnik “Zulu or African Dance,” and the more lurid “jungle” style we heard in “Cannibal Carnival.” Montague Ring (Amanda Ira Aldridge, 1866 – 1956) was a late 19th and early 20th century concert composer, daughter of the Afro-American Shakespearean actor Ira Aldridge (1807 – 1867) and Countess Amanda von Brandt of Sweden. Rapeé includes a reference to this work under the “Cannibal” category in his *Encyclopedia,* but he mismabeled the last piece as “Dance of the Horrors” (rather than “Dance of the Warriors”).

[22] Indeed, *West of Zanzibar* may be the first synchronized sound film with an African setting.

[23] It was redone as a talkie in 1932 under its original stage title (*Kongo*), and featuring Walter Huston, the actor who interpreted Phroso in the stage version. In *West of Zanzibar,* Lon Chaney plays the twisted magician bent on revenge.

[24] The composer or music director for this films remains unidentified, yet the style is similar to work of prominent music directors of the period, such as William Axt, Louis Silvers, or Rapee himself.

[25] This identification is from Geoff St. Andrews, from his website devoted to Johnny Weissmuller and his Tarzan films (http://www.geostan.ca/music.html). He points out that an unpublished piece entitled “Voodoo Dance,””written by George Richelavie, and arranged by Fritz Stahlberg and P. A. Marquandt,” was used for the first two of the Weissmuller Tarzan films (from 1932 and 1933). This title music is identical to the title music used in *West of Zanzibar*.

[26] Phroso actually is her father, but does not know it, and this misidentification also reminds us of 19th century Italian opera libretti.

[27] Africans were apparently consulted for music used in the 1930s Tarzan films; the British employed Africans in colonial film units by the 1930s; and African entrepreneurs, such as Mr. Ocansey, who founded the Palladium Theatre in Accra (in the Gold Coast), ran movie theatres, since the first decades of the 20th century. These are areas for future research.

[28] The distinction between authentic and ersatz does not seem to be important to the filmmakers.
[29] Cary, the author of *Mister Johnson*, had served in the colonial administration in Nigeria during the 1920s.


[31] It is possible that the idea of a black African concert composer was inspired by actual African musicians living and working in London at the time, as was, for example, the Nigerian composer Fela Sowande. There have of course been other composers of black African origin or descent who took part in modern European musical life, at least since the Renaissance.

[32] For the film’s soundtrack, *Baraza* was performed by the National Symphony Orchestra conducted by Muir Mathieson (who was also responsible for the music for *Sanders of the River*, another British film set in Africa) and featuring Eileen Joyce at the piano.


[34] Nota

[35] This is the song that provided the basis for the well-known “Wimoweh” (a hit parade winner for Pete Seeger’s group, The Weavers, in 1951), and in 1962, “The Lion Sings Tonight.”

[36] Rathebe’s performance in *The Magic Garden* anticipated by eight years the film debut of Miriam Makeba in Lionel Rogosin’s *Come Back, Africa* of 1959, a film which helped launch Makeba’s international career.

[37] Readers are also referred to Peter Davis’s discussion of these films in his history of South African cinema (Davis 1996).

[38] There is no use of orchestral underscore in either of these films, neither in the title or end credit sequences. An exception to the African music, Ava Gardner sings “Comin’ in the Rye” in *Mogambo*.

[39] In contrast to the films of the 1930s, the music heard and seen in these films is well recorded, and respectfully presented. Part of this is no doubt due to improvements in sound technology, but I believe that it also may be attributed to a process of reevaluation of African music. This reevaluation is also nicely suggested in John Huston’s *The African Queen* (1951), starring Humphrey Bogart and Katherine Hepburn. The title sequence, which has us approaching an African village from a distance, along a river, is accompanied sonically only by the sounds of nature. There is no other music. As we get close to the village—it is 1916—there is a gradually rising cacophony. The cause of the cacophony is not native African music, but instead two Christian missionaries—Katherine Hepburn is at the organ—working up a sweat trying to get a native population to sing Protestant hymns. In stark contrast to the harmonic discord in the church, comes Humphrey Bogart sailing up the river, listening with obvious pleasure to the strains of a mellifluous serenade of African music performed on the *sanza* by his African shipmate.

[40] In his book *Black African Cinema*, the Nigerian scholar Frank Ukadike claims that, despite the few examples by black African filmmakers prior to independence, the real take-off of work by African directors was in the 1960s (Ukadike 1994:1).


[42] “Sarret” is an Africanization of the French charret, or carriage.

[43] The first elected president of Senegal (in 1960), Léopold Sedar Senghor, was a Catholic and a Francophile poet. He would become the first African elected to the Académie Française in 1983; we may wonder if this was not also directed at him personally.

[44] Apparently this was compromise by Sembène in order for his film to reach an international audience.

[45] The *Internet Movie Database* (as of September 2005) lists over 90 films with Tarzan as a title motif, since 1960 (it lists 60 titles prior to 1960). Two versions that were widely viewed were Hugh
The soundtrack for *Wend Kuuni* is scored for a chamber ensemble of Western instruments: piano, flute, clarinet, oboe, French horn, trumpets, violin, viola, cello, cymbal, as well as voices. The filmmaker, Gaston Kaboré, has commented on this score: “Les musiques classiques pouvaient faire l'objet de transpositions : c'est ce qu'avait fait un compositeur burkinabé, René Guirma, sur *Wend Kuuni*” (—Afriques 50 : regards singuliers, auteurs singuliers— une recherche esthétique permanente. Rencontre au festival de Cannes 2005,” propos recueillis par Olivier Barlet, publié le 27/05/2005, http://www.africultures.com/.)


The author has personally viewed about 30 complete films from the Nigerian and Ghanaian video-film production of the period 1991 – 2004.

Films are made on budgets between $10,000 and $25,000; production schedules are counted in days and weeks, rather than months. Cfr. “Nollywood or bust Lock, Stock star,” op cit.

Azonko Simpi, a Ghanaian who has scored over 40 films, told me that the directors sometimes specify that they want the “Afriko” beat, a term referring to a traditional 12/8 African rhythmic style.

They have been exported, I have been told, beyond West Africa, to audiences as far as Kenya and South Africa.

Subsequent to the writing of this text, a South African urban drama called *Tsotsi* (2005), which features a soundtrack highlighted by the contemporary South African sounds of Kwaito music, became the first African film to win an Oscar in the Best Foreign Film category.

References


The Film Score and the African Musical Experience: Some comments on a work in progress

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Abstract
Zulu warriors, white hunters, war paints, obsessive drums... those are some of the topics used in western film production along the 20th Century that have create, the African imaginary in western society. Filmic representation (including feature films, documentary or short films) has proven to be a fundamental vehicle to convey those African topoi, which actually allude to sub-Saharan Africa. Through a detailed analysis of titles such as West of Zanzibar (1928), Man of two worlds (1946) or Borom Sarret (1963), this paper examines the use of terms like “Cannibal” or “jungle music”, that very often appeared as categories in sheet music publications for early cinema. The paper aims to elucidate the ways in which music has contributed to create a concept of “the African” within western contemporary society.

Key terms: colonialism, Africa, topics, western cinema, film music.

Over the past 10 years I have been studying films with a sub-Saharan African topos—complementing my more general interests in film music and culture-historical approaches in ethnomusicology. I have analyzed some 250 films relating to sub-Saharan Africa, primarily feature films, but also documentaries, ethnographic films, and animation, and I have roughly the same number in partial consideration. About two-thirds of the films in my study are of North American and Western European production, and a third are of African production or co-production. A consideration of Africa-related films in Eastern European, Asian, Latin American, or private archives, must await future scholarship.

The first known Africa-related film title seems to be Os Mergulhadores na África Portuguesa (Divers in Portuguese Africa), from 1897. The film “A Zulu War Dance,” produced by the British Mutoscope & Biograph Company in 1899, featured an “exhibition by Frank Filis’s company of Zulu and Swazi warriors in native costume.” This may be the first film specifically...
focusing on aspects of African musical performance. The Lumières apparently filmed dance scenes of a similar type in France. A 1905 catalogue from that company lists several dance titles, including *Danse du sabre*, *Danse de jeunes filles*, and *Danse du féticheur*, under the rubric “Nègres Ashantis.” An early dramatic film with an African setting is D. W. Griffith’s “The Zulu’s Heart,” from 1908. It tells the story of a Zulu warrior, played by a white actor in blackface makeup, who is torn between his love for his family and the call to war (Cameron 1994).

An early dramatic film with an African setting is D. W. Griffith’s *The Zulu’s Heart*, from 1908. It tells the story of a Zulu warrior, played by a white actor in blackface makeup, who is torn between his love for his family and the call to war (Cameron 1994).

The Kimberley Diamond Robbery, a South African production from 1910, may be the first narrative film shot in Africa. Roosevelt in Africa from 1910, and Paul J Rainey's *African Hunt* from 1912 (also known as Paul J. Rainey's *Jungle Pictures*) are among the earliest safari-themed films, a type that would continue to enjoy popularity over the next several decades.

The film *Symbol of Sacrifice*, a South African production which only survives in fragments, is noteworthy in our history. An epic expressive of the European colonial viewpoint, it is said to have employed 25,000 Zulu warriors in impressive battle recreations. The first Tarzan film, entitled *Tarzan of the Apes*, was also released in 1918. The next decade saw the release of over a dozen Tarzan films, including serials. A very interesting Italian production from 1927 was *Siliwa the Zulu*. Shot in South Africa with a Zulu cast, the film is part ethnographic recreation and part melodrama, in the manner of Flaherty’s *Nanook of the North* (1922).

What kinds of music can be associated with these films? Since the 1890s, it was common to accompany films with pre-existing music, including both popular and concert-hall types. In the 1910s, to satisfy the growing demand for music that could accompany the moods of cinema, publishers began issuing collections of short character pieces types by mood or place. By this time, we can find examples of music specifically tailored for African cinematic *topoi*. In 1912, for example, the Kalem Company announced the availability of “Special Piano Music” for its film *Missionaries in Darkest Africa*. The *Sam Fox Motion Picture Music* volumes, first published in 1913, contain at least one African reference. A piece entitled “Zulu or African dance,” composed by John Stefan Zamecnik, a noted American composer of film music during the silent period, appears in the second of the Fox volumes. This piece may be described as a march-tempo minor key arabesque. With its open fifths and insistent eighth-note rhythm, it is of a type that might equally serve to depict the Middle East, or for that matter, any non-Western locale, in early cinema.

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Erno Rapée’s *Encyclopedia of Music for Pictures*, published in New York in 1925, suggests the continuity of this musical type (Rapée 1925). This book is an index of thousands of music titles organized by mood-categories such as “Emotional” or “Horror,” by genres such as “Reels-Jiggs,” and ethnic-national references such as “Hungarian” or “Arabian.” In my estimation, less than half of one percent of the indexed titles relate to Africa, a figure that seems...
to correspond to the frequency of sub-Saharan Africa as a cinematic topos in this period.

In reality, there is probably never going to be a source as exciting, for our subject, as the Rapée Encyclopedia; as it is probably as close as we will ever get to the mind of the culture of the period between the 1910s and the 1920s. The African references are dispersed among a variety of the categories used in the book, including Abyssinia, Liberia, and Zanzibar, Oriental, and “American (Negro).” Under the rubric “Oriental,” for example, we find “Danse Africaine” by Ganne, “Down in Zanzibar” by Anclifte, and “In the Soudan” (“A Dervish Chorus”) by Sebeck (Rapee 1925: 379-80).

When we look for a primary entry for Africa, we do find the rubric “African.” Under this category, however, this is no listing of individual musical titles. Rather, we find a primary cross-reference, to the category “Cannibal.” This reference is a fascinating one. Indeed, it is not merely in Rapée’s book; it is his paradigm example, the one he uses on page 30 to explain to the reader how all the musical entries in this book are to be understood. The cannibal motif has a long history, not specific to Africa, and often associated with the South Seas, the pre-Columbian Caribbean, and the Amazon. It is important for us to understand, that in this book, Africa is but one of four categories so cross-referenced; the others are “South Seas Music,” “Jungle Music” and “Savage Music.”

The “Cannibal” category unites a cluster of motifs, suggesting wild dancing, the barbaric jungle, and violence and war, in an undetermined national setting. Let us consider the titles listed in this category. Rapée gives prominence of place to a composition entitled Cannibal Carnival, credited to a Chicago musician named Sol Levy, who published it in 1920. The musical qualities of this piece, including the use of minor key chromaticism, whole tone scales, and unusual accentual patterns, seem to be iconic for this motif-cluster, and for a musical style that was coming to be known at the time as “jungle music.” According to the New Grove Dictionary of Jazz, the “jungle music” style has its origins in the period around 1900, and is characterized by “pseudo-African musical effects—especially pounding tom-toms, unusual harmonies, “primitive” scales (usually pentatonic and whole tone), and muted, growling brass lines.” By the mid-to-late 1920s, this style was used to illustrate jungle-themed tableaux at the Cotton Club, accompanied by original music from Duke Ellington’s orchestra, and at the Parisian Revue Nègre featuring Josephine Baker’s dancing in a banana leaf skirt. Stylistically, with its use of whole tone scales, descending chromatic lines, and deliberate dissonances, Cannibal Carnival is clearly of this type.

Let us now turn to actual surviving film soundtracks. After the success of The Jazz Singer in 1927, the film industry moved rapidly toward full sound synchronization. Within the first several years of sound synchronization, we have over 20 films that belong to our topic of interest. Tarzan the Tiger, from 1929, was the first of the Tarzan films to be provided with a synchronized orchestral score, although it did not have spoken dialogue. The Golden Dawn, from 1930, has the distinction of being the first filmed musical with an African setting. The action of this Harbach-Hammerstein operetta, originally presented on Broadway in 1927, is set in German Africa during the First World War. Trader Horn, from 1931, was a major Hollywood production, and was advertised as the first sound film to be shot on location in Africa. The following year, 1932, saw the release of Tarzan the Ape Man, the first of the Tarzan talkies, featuring Olympic swimming hero Johnny Weissmuller.

I look forward to commenting on the music in these films in a future publication. Here, I will concentrate on one early sound film, Tod Browning’s West of Zanzibar, released in 1928. Based on a stage play entitled Kongo, West of Zanzibar is a revenge melodrama featuring a deformed protagonist, and thus recalls the operas Rigoletto and Pagliacci. The story begins in England, where Phroso, a music hall magician, becomes crippled in a fight with his rival. Years later he has established himself as a kind of Kurtz in a jungle heart of darkness, where he is known as “Dead Legs.” His plans for revenge involve an innocent young woman named Maizie. Most of the film’s action transpires in Phroso’s jungle encampment.
Like many other films released in the late 1920s, *West of Zanzibar* has an electrically synchronized musical accompaniment, but intertitles in the place of spoken dialogue. The musical score is a typical one for the period, based on a standard studio orchestra, major and minor keys, and tempos that coordinate with the on-screen action. Additional musical elements are tailored to the particular *mis-en-scène*, including a piano playing ragtime in a scene of a hectic Zanzibar barroom. At times, we hear the pounding of a low drum, and vague chanting in an unidentifiable language, apparent icons of the music of African natives.

The film opens with the familiar MGM logo. As the words “West of Zanzibar” appears on the screen, we hear a dramatic melodic gesture of a tritone, played forcefully and deliberately by the orchestra. These are the opening notes of “Voodoo Dance,” an unpublished composition attributed to George Richelavie, and what seems to be a textbook example of the “cannibal” type. Minor-key music at a frantic pace, about 180 beats per minute (bpm), ensues. The orchestration includes the sound of a xylophone, drums, and what appear to be bird chirps in the confused mix. Clarinets swoop up a fifth and make a rapid descent to the tonic. After about 20 seconds, we return to a statement of the opening tri-tone, and end with a sustained minor 7th chord. After a pause, the film proper begins, at a magic show in London. The musical score from this point follows familiar silent film musical typologies, not necessarily tied to the idea of Africa.

Let us now consider a scene from the middle of the film. Babe, one of Phroso’s men, is bringing Maizie to the jungle camp, on the pretense that she is to be introduced to her father. A shot of the jungle at night is musically accompanied by a wailing motif by the clarinet in a minor key. We then hear the iteration of an open fifth (which recalls Zamecnik’s “Zulu Dance”) in the key of D minor. The tempo is quick at 140 bpm, and adds to the viewer’s sense of anticipation. The mode shifts to D major when we see Maizie, and this suggests the innocence of this beautiful young blond woman. The music switches back to D minor as we see the goings-on in Phroso’s cabin, where his aide, the drunken and dissolute “Doc,” is dancing with abandon with two black women, while another of Phroso’s men strums vigorously on an acoustic guitar.

A new musical cue is suddenly introduced, with instruments in the lower registers, in the minor key and with a forcefully accented marchlike rhythm at 90 bpm, it suggests a powerful menace at hand. A shot of two Africans drumming on large conical kettledrums on either side of large fetish idols follows the introduction of this cue, followed by a shot of Maizie at the door of Phroso’s cabin. The camera focuses on her reactions; her joyful anticipation has turned to revulsion as she witnesses the barbaric scene. The musical cue continues; it is none other than “Cannibal Carnival,” as if taken directly from Rapée’s catalogue. In the key of G minor, this piece is musically very similar to the “Voodoo Dance” of the title track. Paired with the shots of Doc’s drunken dancing, Maizie’s horrified disgust, and Phroso’s evil leer, this music is clearly meant to complement this torrid jungle universe where values are lost or turned upside down.

There are many interesting details about the musical soundtrack of the 1930s and 1940s, but for the sake of time and comprehension, I would like to summarize what seems to be characteristic for the African topos in early cinema:

1) **In terms of the story and visual motifs**

   - The setting is an unknown and difficult rural jungle world
   - There are many wild animals around: lions, hippos, elephants, crocodiles, etc.
   - There is often an intrepid white hunter and greedy white exploiters around
   - Part of the background setting is a feudal village world of African warriors, chiefs, witch doctors, mothers with babies, and occasional virgins to be sacrificed

2) **In terms of film production**
• More than 95% of the production seems to be driven by European and American interests

• Some production in British South Africa

• African participation in film production is very limited. [27]

3) In terms of the soundtrack

• Standard Western orchestral and popular styles dominate

• Signature “jungle” or “cannibal” style continues to be used (e.g., minor keys, dissonances, drums, pentatonic and whole tone scales, open fifths, exaggerated sounds: muted trumpets, wailing clarinets)

• Traditional African musical typologies—authentic or ersatz—drums and dancing; warrior chants are used (as for example, in Trader Horn, 1931, and Tarzan the Ape Man, 1932). [28]

• The ambient sound track emphasizes wildlife, rustling leaves, rippling water, birds and other animal sounds.

I would like to now turn to 1946, and a film released that year entitled Men of Two Worlds, directed by Thorold Dickinson. This is a British film, and I suppose it could be argued that there is no better example of the colonial apology film than this one. Based on a story by Joyce Cary, it tells of an African musician living in London, who is recruited by the British Colonial Office to return to his native village in Tanganyika, to aid in the colonial endeavor to uplift his people. [29] The film’s drama centers on the struggle between Kisenga, a Western-educated African, and Magoli, the village witch doctor, who fosters superstition among the villagers and leads resistance against colonial projects.

Arthur Bliss, a recognized orchestral composer of the 20th century, provided the film’s musical score. Right from the production logo, we hear Bliss’s music, which emphasizes pentatonicism in an apparent bow to African musical style. Indeed, titles inform us that Bliss’s music was based on Tanganyikan folk music collected in Africa by H. Cory. [30] During the title sequence, we hear a steady rhythm tapped out on a bass drum, also an apparent musical reference to Africa. At 12 seconds, a map of Africa is projected, and we hear the voice of a female mezzo-soprano, singing a solo pentatonic melody in semi-operatic style, over a sustained drone. It is sung in what appears to be an African language; the drum motif continues in alternation with the sung phrases. This is not in the exaggerated musical style we heard in West of Zanzibar, but rather in the more reverent spirit of concert hall folk musical renderings. The folk song interpretation is followed, still in the title sequence, by music for orchestra and piano, prefiguring music that we will hear more fully in the film’s first scene. After the title sequence, we see shots of central London, the capital of the Empire. The year is identified as 1944, making this a drama with a contemporary, rather than historical setting. The camera pans to the National Gallery, and we hear the chimes of Big Ben, an aural reminder of the Empire. The camera zooms to a close-up of the program bill in front of the National Gallery, and we see that scheduled for 11 o’clock, is “Baraza for Pianoforte, Voices and Orchestra by KISEN GA. The Composer at the Piano. First Performance.” The concert has already begun. The camera pans across the mainly white audience, which includes soldiers and nurses in uniform, and then reveals the male choir, the percussion section, the orchestra, and finally, a minute and a half after working its way into the concert hall, the hands of the piano soloist. These are black hands, and this is no doubt meant to be a revelation. [31] The camera pulls back so that we can fully see Kisenga, the black African composer-pianist, dressed in a black suit and bow tie, just in time for his dramatic cadenza. He exchanges meaningful looks with the conductor, and the piece continues with an orchestral tutti, the camera intercutting between attentive audience members (notably white women), the conductor, and Kisenga.

The music is an original piano concerto composed by Bliss for the film, entitled “Baraza,”
which, as Kisenga explains to audience members after the performance, is an African term for a “council meeting” or “heated discussion.” Baraza is in a modernist musical idiom and recalls pieces such as Stravinsky’s Le Sacre du Printemps (1913), Varèse’s Amériques (1921), or Revueltas’ Sensemaya (1937), other pieces which use non-canonical approaches to instrumentation, harmony, and rhythm, in order to evoke exotic tableaux. In a way, these are comparable to “jungle music,” although couched in a more erudite, and arguably more elevated and therefore positive, symphonic idiom.

Men of Two Worlds is particularly interesting to us, because it couches its pro-colonial argument, in large part, in terms of music. Kisenga is shown as the model of the African who has assimilated British values, notably its musical values. The film is careful to point out that as an African, Kisenga has unique resources to contribute to a stronger, revitalized British Empire. After his concert, a (white) female admirer implores him not to return to Africa, but to stay and invigorate English music: “You have a duty to music, Mr. Kisenga, to English music!” When he goes back to his village in Africa, Kisenga organizes a village ensemble featuring vocals and African instruments (including the xylophone, vertical flute, and drum). He prepares sheet music for the musicians, and he conducts them in the European manner. The British commission commends him for the music, and particularly for its retention of African qualities.

As we move forward in time from the mid-century, halcyon colonial viewpoint that Men of Two Worlds (1946) represents, we can note a continuing mix of old stereotypes, colonial motifs, and emergent urban themes, in a transforming African cinematic topos. The musical world of urbanizing South Africa burst forth in a series of films made between 1949 and 1953 in South Africa, including the first film version of Cry the Beloved Country (1951), and four musicals featuring black South African casts: Jim goes to Johannesburg (1949), Zonk! (1950), Pennywhistle Blues (1951; also known as The Magic Garden), and Song of Africa (1953). The UK production Cry the Beloved Country (1951), based on Alan Paton’s famous anti-apartheid novel (first published in 1948), opens with title music featuring South African choral music informed by the mixture of Western and African musical influences that had been evolving in South Africa since the mid-to-late 19th century. In the scene in which the rural Zulu pastor Khumalo arrives by train in the confusing metropolis of Johannesburg, his meeting with a street hoodlum is accompaniment by the diegetically placed sounds of urban popular music—the popular 1939 recording of “Mbube” by Solomon Linda and his Nightbirds blares out over the loudspeakers from a nearby bar.

Urban musical styles, notably those modeled after American jazz, swing, and rhythm & blues of the 1940s, performed by South African musicians, as well as the emerging kwela or “pennywhistle” style of township music, highlight the scores of the South African film musicals mentioned above, alongside Christian hymns, and performances of traditional singing, high-stepping dances, and xylophone playing. These films seem to have been among the first to highlight both original music by Africans, and document actual performances by urban African musicians, including the well-known singer Dolly Rathebe.

A discussion of these films will be reserved for a longer publication. Would like to briefly remind the audience that the appearance of urban African music in films in the 1950s, corresponds to an apparent initial wave of success of African urban music in the international marketplace. Two modern African songs, Mbube—which became known as Wimoweh—and “Skokiaan,” also known as “Happy, Happy Africa”—scored highly in the American popular music charts in 1952 and 1954 respectively, and Tom Hark, a kwela piece, charted in the UK in 1958. It was in fact the relationship between cinema and popular music that helped launch Miriam Makeba’s career in 1959, when she performed in Lionel Rogosin’s anti-apartheid drama, Come Back, Africa (USA/South Africa, 1959).

Even when we look at the mainline feature films of “Hollywood” of the 1950s, we can perceive what seem to be shifting attitudes toward Africa and its music. Two major productions from the early 1950s, King Solomon’s Mines (1950), and Mogambo (1953, directed by John Ford), eschew older typologies of “jungle music,” and indeed, dispense with any Western music
whatsoever, and choose African vocal and instrumental music—mainly drumming and male choruses—as the sole musical underscore. This music is not only heard as diegetic music, but also as title and end track music.

In the wake of the panic inspired by the Mau-Mau rebellion of the mid-1950s, and the subsequent rapid dissolution of Empire and the transition to independence for most of the British and French African colonies in the late 1950s and early 1960s, filmic storylines and musical usage continued to change. It is also at this point in history when we begin to see the rise of national schools of filmmaking within black Africa itself. A very clear example of the new African cinema is *Borom Sarret* (1963) one of the first films by Ousmane Sembène, the well-known Senegalese author and filmmaker who has been called “the father of African cinema.”

After serving in the French army during World War II, living and working in France, and developing his vocation as a novelist, Sembène studied filmmaking at the Gorkii Studios in Moscow. Upon returning to Senegal in 1963, he completed the short film *Borom Sarret*. The film follows a day in the life of a poor cart-driver in the urban setting of contemporary Dakar, Senegal. He makes his living by taxiing people and goods on a horse-driven cart. The film is an indictment of the former French colonial overlords, the concrete city they have built, foreign to the African poor who inhabit its outskirts, and of the black political and economic elites, heirs to the power and authority of the old colonial masters. In contrast with *Men of Two Worlds* (1946) whose opening image is of the imposing buildings of central London, accompanied by the chiming of Big Ben, *Borom Sarret* begins with a full frame shot of a mosque, and on the soundtrack we hear the traditional Islamic call to prayer. Although these are certainly not the first references to Islam in the context of African-themed films, the placement of this combined sound-image symbol at the very beginning of Sembène’s film constitutes an anti-European statement, an affront to the French and their specifically Catholic colonial apparatus. Establishing shots show us urban Dakar with its paved roads and automobiles, as the titles are projected on the screen. We are introduced to our main character immediately after this title sequence. He is shown to be a pious man—as the call to prayer continues on the soundtrack, we see him kneeling in his daily prayers. We then have a narrative, in the voice of the principle character, rendered in French. On the soundtrack, we hear the sounds of a *xalam*, a West African lute.

In the latter part of this short film (it runs for about 17 minutes), after a series of hardships, the cart-driver decides to accept the promise of extra money from an elite African—the man is dressed in Western fashion, in suit and tie—to take him to the wealthy part of the city, even though he knows this is a risk, as horse-drawn carts are prohibited there. As he enters this section of the city, with its high-rise buildings and luxury apartment, the driver is amazed. The music on the soundtrack is Baroque orchestral music of a generic mid-18th century type, which serves to remind viewers of the elite city’s European heritage. As he nears the destination, he hears traditional African drumming, which here, as much as in earlier films, signals danger. This turns out to be the passing of a group of Islamic adherents, dressed in white, and parading with traditional drummers. Danger manifests itself in reality, with the blowing of a (black) policeman’s whistle. The music on the soundtrack stops. The horse whinnies violently. As the policeman issues him a fine, he also takes possession of the driver’s prized military medallion (no doubt for service in the French army), as well as his cart. The elite passenger abscends into a car without paying the driver. As the cart driver abandons the high city without his cart, he laments the cruelty of the modern world; on the soundtrack, we hear orchestral strains of Mozart’s *Ave Verum Corpus*.

The musical symbols in *Borom Sarret* are in an apparent inversion from their meanings in the African films produced in the West. In *Men of Two Worlds* (1946), made from the British colonial point of view, Western music held the promise of uplifting Africans. In the view presented in Sembène’s film, Western music is just part of a system created to oppress common Africans. It is associated with the pro-Western elites, who are portrayed as thieves, in opposition to the pious and upright working classes.

The following table summarizes what seems to be characteristic for the African topos in...
the period between the 1940s and 1960s, which we can think of as a transitional period:

1) In terms of story and visual motifs
   
   • Movement from village to city
   
   • Conflicts between old and new values (as in *Men of Two Worlds*)
   
   • Introduction of modern, urban African characters
   
   • Traditional, rural Africa seems to be more respectfully treated in mainstream cinema

2) In terms of film production
   
   • Production still dominated by the West
   
   • Improved sound recording and color
   
   • African national production begins to develop in the 1950s and 1960s

3) In terms of soundtrack
   
   • Continuing use of Western symphonic and popular idioms
   
   • African traditional music may replace Western music
   
   • African urban musical styles begin to emerge

Since the time of *Borom Sarret* (1963) and moving forward, I believe we can speak of two main streams of African cinema, each with many substreams. On one side, Africa has continued to appear as a filmic *topos* in the non-African world cinema. Western films have continued to respond to changing political and musical realities. Older typologies or stock-types, such as Tarzan, the jungle, and the white explorer-adventurer continue, in films such as *Jewel of the Nile* (1985) and the many new entries in the Tarzan saga, and the Africa-as-wilderness thematic continues in many nature films and even family musicals such as *The Lion King* (1994). There are many films, however, that address contemporary African problems and realities, even if often from a Western standpoint. In their stories, contemporary Western films seem to demonstrate more complex conceptions of Africa compared to the sometimes one-dimensional viewpoints found in early cinema. There has correspondingly been a revision in the musical scoring. Once again, there is not space in this paper to go into this in detail. But we can make a few salient observations. The dissonant “jungle” or “cannibal” musical typology, common in the early 20th century, is scarcely to be found since the 1950s. It seems to have been largely replaced, in fact, with an approbatory orchestral style, as we can hear, for example, in the title musics of *Born Free* (1966) or *Out of Africa* (1985) (scored by John Barry), or in the Brahmsian orchestral music, augmented by African-sounding drums, that accompany the Italian heroine Kuki Gallman’s arrival in the virgin, animal-rich savannahs of East Africa, in the recent film *I Dreamed of Africa* (2000) (score by Michel Jarre). Of course, following film music trends of the past 30 years, orchestral music may be replaced altogether, for soundtracks composed of electronic music, diegetically placed African music, and a mixture of Western and African contemporary popular styles. The popular *Coming to America* (1988), starring Eddie Murphy as an African prince, for its opening musical motif, employs the South African vocal harmonies of Ladysmith Black Mambazo, who sing the opening refrain of Solomon Linda’s *Mbube*. This film, in which the Tarzan story is reversed—in place of British Lord Greystoke in Africa, we have a noble African prince who make good in the West, ends musically with a fusion of American rock, R&B, and funk, with synthesized echoes of African drums, xylophones and flutes. When authentic African music is referenced in contemporary films, this is usually done neutrally, or with positive
overtones. Indeed, several films seem to demonstrate approbation, when the white characters — the good ones, not the dissolute ones— join in the performance, as when Kathleen Turner joins in the circle dance in *Jewel of the Nile* (1985) when the historical figure Richard Burton joins in African dances in *Mountains of the Moon* (1989); and when white hunter played by Michael Douglas joins in the dance of the Maasai warriors in *The Ghost in the Darkness* (1996).

If I had time, I would also address the many sub-schools of Western filmmaking in relation to Africa, especially the different sub-schools of political films, where we find other musical variations, as in the finale to Pier Paolo Pasolini’s *Notes for an African Orestes* (1970). In that film’s conclusion, over a visual survey of present-day African workers, and a voice-over narration speaking of promises for Africa’s future, the sounds of traditional African drumming on the soundtrack give way to a crescendo of vocal music, sung in Russian by the Soviet Army Chorus.

The other main stream, of course, is made up of the contemporary cinema of Africa itself. The musical resources drawn upon in African cinema since the time of *Borom Sarret* are quite diverse, ranging from the heavy use of silence, natural sounds, and the sometimes liminal usage of music, as in Cissé’s *Yeelen* (1987), Saddik Balewa’s *Kasarma Ce* (1991), and films by Burkina Faso director Idrissa Ouédraogo; to the vibrant “Afropop” emphasis of films such as *La Vie est Belle* (1987), *Jit* (1990), and Flora Gomes’s musical film *Nha Fala* (2002; with a score by Manu Dibango); to modernist orchestral stylings in hybrid musical modalities, as in Burkina Faso composer René Guirma’s Stravinskian score to Kaboré’s *Wend Kuuni* (1982). Characteristically, we encounter mixed references to African traditional and urban musical styles, varying by region; diverse Western musical types, including the national anthems of the former colonial powers; and, in musical scores by noted composers such as Francis Bebey, Abdullah Ibrahim, Manu Dibango, Ray Lema, a sophisticated musical mixture drawing on contemporary jazz, popular musics, and aspects of Western concert music.

The rise, since the 1990s, of the direct-to-video, and in the past few years, direct to VCD (video compact disc) industry which in the past few years has gained the tag "Nollywood", adds further complexity to the world of contemporary African cinema and its music. Centered in Lagos, Nigeria, according to some recent sources, this industry represents an annual economy of over $100 million dollars, and produces well over 1,000 films per year. This would make this African movie industry suddenly one of world’s largest—the advent of the term "Nollywood" itself seems to reflect this dramatic change in status. Nollywood films encompass considerable diversity in language, theme, and point of view. English is the major language of production, with Yoruba following, but there are also numerous films in Hausa and Ibo, and we should not forget the considerable production in Asante-Twi in Ghana. The dominant story type seems to be the urban melodrama, frequently with elements of crime, action, family and business conflicts, romance, and famously, the supernatural. Films with Christian themes, surrounding pastor, the churchly community, and elements that threaten these, including the supernatural, are also an important type. Others include action films, period dramas recreating a pre-modern African past, films with rural settings, and films moving between the rural and the urban, and between Africa and the exterior, often Europe, or occasionally America. The wilderness, conservationist, and white hunter/ ecologist motifs prized by Western cinema, are conspicuous by their absence; indeed, it is rare to see any non-black African characters in these films.

The budgets for Nollywood films, up to this point, have been famously small and tight, and production schedules quick. At least in part for these reasons, musical soundtracks tend to be dominated by synthesizer scoring, typically completed in a small studio under the direction of a single musician, or a small team of composer-musicians. I estimate that synthesizer scoring accounts for between 60 to 70% of actual scoring time for these films. The sound of a Rhodes electric piano is quite common, as are synthesized symphonic strings, bass, organ, and jazz-set percussion. Vocals are not uncommon on the soundtrack, including male and female vocals, in English, Yoruba, or other languages. Real or synthesized African instruments, including drums, rattles, bells, xylophones, and flutes are also common sound elements. The harmonies are strongly biased toward the Western system, with the major key often used for moods from neutral to positive, minor for sadness, and atonality and chromaticism for moments of confusion,
violence, or supernatural terror. The most common approach to rhythm is to lay down a moderate-tempo 4/4 highlife rhythm, sometimes mixed with a hip-hop or R&B backbeat. Of course, we also encounter a wide range of traditional African rhythmic praxis, especially in scenes where traditional music has a diegetic role on screen. In terms of melody, the Nollywood creative team certainly is aware of the importance of bestowing your movie, if possible, with a memorable theme, and many of these films do have “theme songs”, where the melody can be repeated at appropriate intervals in the film. A good example is the theme to the popular 2003 production “Mr. Ibu in London,” which has a hummable theme song in a highlife idiom (“Mr. Ibu in London. You are welcome in London.”).

I would estimate that the stylistic breakdown of music on Nollywood films is as follows: 40% is a generic pop-synthesizer mix, biased toward the highlife idiom; 20% is generic mood-underscoring, using the synthesizer, but emulating styles of mood-underscoring common in Hollywood films and television soap operas, from the United States, Mexico, and Brazil; another 20% is a pop musical mix reflective of the local radio playlists in West Africa, from the point of view of urban youth, and this is strongly biased toward North American R&B and hip-hop, and Jamaican reggae and dancehall (or ragga), with some cool jazz and piano bar thrown in for good measure (especially for love scenes). Another 10% should be Christian gospel styles popular in contemporary Nigeria and Ghana. The remaining 10% is variously distributed, and includes traditional-style drum-and-percussion music; traditional African folksongs, used to identify rural and customary settings; familiar Western orchestral or concert music (Handel, Mozart, Vivaldi, Offenbach, Classical Gas), sometimes used to identify a European setting, or sometimes just as an alternative underscore; and other sundry sound effects, including eerie electronics and wind sounds for the many supernatural incidents that these films support.

As opposed to the “art house”-type productions of African cinema since the 1960s, the methods of soundtrack synchronization and choice and placement of musical motifs, sometimes appear crude and heavy-handed in Nollywood films. Two prominent figures of contemporary Nollywood, director Tunde Kelani and sound engineer Tunde Adegbola, have told me that the reasons for this are that the producers keep music budgets to a minimum, and do not consider the potential of music as an important cultural and artistic element to the films. This is confirmed by two Ghanaian film composers I have interviewed, Azonko Simpi and Willie Anku, both of whom suggested that the amount budgeted for the music barely covers their studio costs.

We would be wrong, however, to overestimate the apparent shortcomings of these films. Far more interesting is the remarkable resonance these films are finding among contemporary African audiences, and also a relatively broad appeal in Africa, extending beyond the confines of Nigeria and West Africa, and reaching African expatriate communities in Europe and the United States. Only very recently, at the Hilton of Los Angeles/Universal City, California, the business, artistic, and academic worlds of cinema met to consider, for the first time in such a setting, the theme of “Nollywood Rising: Global Perspectives” (June 13-17, 2005). The worldwide success of Nollywood may not be right around the corner. Nonetheless, these films and their musical soundtracks reflect a complexly evolving symbol system within contemporary urban Africa, and I believe that it will be worth our while to follow its development closely.

As an example of the use of thematic music in Nollywood films, we can consider the film Itohan: Woman Traffik, directed by Chico Ejiro, one of the best known and prolific of the Nollywood directors, released in 2002. It tells the story of a young woman named Itohan, who becomes involved in the international trade in prostitution, especially between West Africa and Europe. In a scene not too long into the film, Itohan decides to travel to Italy to make her fortune, whatever it takes. We see the Murtala Muhammed Airport in Lagos, and we hear theme music performed by male vocals, and a contemporary electric pop ensemble, in a style that can be characterized as a mixture of American R&B and Nigerian urban popular music. The lyrics comment on the evolving drama, “Itohan…Hey oh…You sold your body for money.”

Speaking very generally, in the period since the 1970s, and especially the 1980s, and historically coinciding, musically, with the emergence of “Afropop” after around 1983, as a summary term of recognition of modern, urban African music, we can note the following trends:
1) In terms of story and visual motifs

- There is an emphasis on the urban locus and emphasis on modern lifestyles, especially in films by African filmmakers, but also in films produced in the West.

- Character types include taxi drivers, business owners, corrupt politicians, preachers, gangsters, drug dealers, and modern city women.

- Travel and emigration to Europe and America.

- Ecological storylines abundant in Western films.

2) In terms of film production


- Direct-to-video industry grows in Anglophone West Africa in the 1990s.

- The term “Nollywood” becomes increasingly common since 2002.

3) In terms of soundtrack

- Western symphonic and popular idioms continue to be used, mainly in Western films, but also in some African films.

- Increasing use of synthesizers.

- Modern musical idioms, whether symphonic or synthesized, often incorporate African musical motifs.

- Contemporary urban African pop idioms common.

- Traditional musical idioms continue to be used, but are less common than the urban styles.

- Nollywood films rely heavily on synthesizers and popular musical idioms, including highlife, reggae, R&B, and rap/hip-hop.

In conclusion, our understanding of music in African film symbology is just beginning, and it would seem that much material is yet to be uncovered and studied. The diachronic method allows us to trace subtle evolutions in African soundtracks and helps us understand the evolving points of view of diverse national and international film communities in relationship to a dynamic and changing Africa. In terms of the Africa topos, that is, in terms of sub-Saharan Africa, we can provisionally see that there is an early period, where production is generated overwhelmingly outside of Africa, and in which the soundtrack is oriented to a primal Africa, often presented as a mystery and a danger. This is a view, in fact, that did not originate with the cinema, but extends back perhaps to antiquity. Then there is a transitional period, from the later 1940s, in which the surviving cinema examples show the beginning of urban musical references, and a revaluation of African music so that it is presented neutrally, or positively, rather than negatively; and, most recently, since the 1960s, a modern period in which the urban African world dominates, and in which Africa itself has an increasingly important role as a generator of new cinema and new music for cinema. As a final note, I’d like to observe that 2005 was the first in which the American film establishment has recognized an African film with an Oscar nomination for best foreign film. That film, Darrell Roodt’s *Yesterday* (2004), which has also been called the first Zulu-language feature, has a musical score by South African musician Madale Kunene [53]. We can expect an increasing number of original film scores from African composers in the 21st century, in what looks like a growing and promising future for African cinema and its music.
Notes

[1] In all, I may have looked at about half of the actual first-run features, at least until the rise of the recent Nigerian video-film phenomenon. In order to locate films with African *topoi*, I have used a variety of resources, including published filmographies, such as that included in the appendix of Cameron (1994); and web filmographies, such as those cross-referenced by the Stanford University libraries at a site devoted to African film and video (http://wwwsul.stanford.edu/depts/ssrg/africa/film.html) and the title- and keyword- search facility of the Internet Movie Database (IMDB).


[5] Films were seen in Africa as early as 1895 or 1896, when the new invention was first demonstrated in Johannesburg (Keyan Tomaselli, *The Cinema of Apartheid*, NY, Smyrna Press, 1988). By 1903, films were being shown in Lagos, a British Crown Colony since the 1860s. A cinema house was established in Accra, capital of the Gold Coast, in the first decades of the 20th century, by an African entrepreneur named Ocansey, and certainly by the 1920s and 1930s, cinema was already widely familiar in Africa.


[9] Edgar Rice Burroughs’ *Tarzan* books were first published in the USA in 1914.

[10] Early Tarzan titles include *The Romance of Tarzan* (1918), *The Adventures of Tarzan, The Son of Tarzan*, and *The Revenge of Tarzan*, all from 1920, down to *Tarzan the Mighty*, a 15- part serial from 1928, and *Tarzan the Tiger* from 1929, which survives with a synchronized soundtrack.

[11] This film was apparently provided with a full musical score by Italian opera conductor Carlo Sabajno—there is a credit to “Maestro Sabajno” in the title sequence. Although the film survives, the score has been lost. The film was directed by Attilio Gatti, in cooperation with Italian anthropologist Lidio Cipriani. The score was most certainly in a Western European style, perhaps with certain pentatonic leitmotifs and drums to index the African locale. We will not know until a copy of the score is found. The video is available, in a silent version with English intertitles, from Peter Davis’s Villon Films in Vancouver, BC. In 2005, Davis, working with South African musician Themba Tana, provided a new score for the film, largely consisting of traditional Zulu vocal music recorded in the 1940s and 1950s (Peter Davis, personal communication, October 2005).

[12] Marks 1997:78-79. It is not known whether the music is extant.


There is also one “Boer” reference indexed under the category “Holland.” The Liberian entry is “All Hail, Liberia, Hail!” with lyrics in English written by Daniel Bashiel Warner (1815-1880), and music by Olmstead Luca (1836-?). Two titles with the term African, the “African Symphonie” by Losey and the “African 400” by Roberts, are listed under the rubric “American (Negro)” (Rapée 1925:61).

This demands careful consideration, because it suggests much about the psychological depth of this particular motif, to the culture of the period.

The term “cannibal” is not uncommon as a film title, even to the present; a cursory search of the Internet Movie Database (IMDB) in September 2005, returned 101 films with “cannibal” in their title. Sixteen of these were from between 1908 and 1925, the period leading up to the publication of Rapée’s Encyclopedia.

Most of the musical compositions listed under the “cannibal” category, in fact, do not offer a specific geographical reference. Five of the 18 titles allude to what appears to be sub-Saharan Africa, two to North Africa, and there are minor references, perhaps included by chance, to Russia and China (Rapée 1925, p. 123).


Tucker (op. cit.) writes: “Although elements of the “jungle style” may be discerned in March of the Caboceros, from In Dahomey (1902) by Will Marion Cook, and in the Original Memphis Five’s recording Africa (1924, Pathe 036117), the genre's expressive potential was most fully realized by Duke Ellington.” Jungle-themed songs by Ellington include “Jungle Nights in Harlem” (1930) and “Echoes of the Jungle” (1931). A similar “jungle” image is highlighted in the 1942 Afro-American musical revue Stormy Weather.

The musical style-type that would come to be used for the evocation of “jungle” themes, shares a number of elements with earlier approaches to musically suggesting “exotic” locales, especially in music of the mid to late 19th century. Another early example of the application of this style to an African thematic, would be the Three African Dances by Montague Ring, published in 1913 (these include “The Call to the Feast,” “Luleta's Dance,” and “Dance of the Warriors”). In their use of pulsing open fifths, minor pentatonic modes, and syncopated accents, these pieces are comparable both to the more innocuous style of the Zamecnik “Zulu or African Dance,” and the more lurid “jungle” style we heard in “Cannibal Carnival.” Montague Ring (Amanda Ira Aldridge, 1866 – 1956) was a late 19th and early 20th century concert composer, daughter of the Afro-American Shakespearean actor Ira Aldridge (1807 – 1867) and Countess Amanda von Brandt of Sweden. Rapée includes a reference to this work under the “Cannibal” category in his Encyclopedia, but he mislabeled the last piece as “Dance of the Horrors” (rather than “Dance of the Warriors”).

Indeed, West of Zanzibar may be the first synchronized sound film with an African setting.

It was redone as a talkie in 1932 under its original stage title (Kongo), and featuring Walter Huston, the actor who interpreted Phroso in the stage version. In West of Zanzibar, Lon Chaney plays the twisted magician bent on revenge.

The composer or music director for this films remains unidentified, yet the style is similar to work of prominent music directors of the period, such as William Axt, Louis Silvers, or Rapee himself.

This identification is from Geoff St. Andrews, from his website devoted to Johnny Weissmuller and his Tarzan films (http://www.geostan.ca/music.html). He points out that an unpublished piece entitled “Voodoo Dance,” “written by George Richelavie, and arranged by Fritz Stahlberg and P. A. Marquandt,” was used for the first two of the Weissmuller Tarzan films (from 1932 and 1933). This title music is identical to the title music used in West of Zanzibar.

Phroso actually is her father, but does not know it, and this misidentification also reminds us of 19th century Italian opera libretti.

Africans were apparently consulted for music in the 1930s Tarzan films; the British employed Africans in colonial film units by the 1930s; and African entrepreneurs, such as Mr. Ocansey, who founded the Palladium Theatre in Accra (in the Gold Coast), ran movie theatres, since the first decades of the 20th century. These are areas for future research.

The distinction between authentic and ersatz does not seem to be important to the filmmakers.
Cary, the author of *Mister Johnson*, had served in the colonial administration in Nigeria during the 1920s.

“Based in part on themes collected in Tanganyika Territory by H. Cory [and] recorded by Al Rhind.”

It is possible that the idea of a black African concert composer was inspired by actual African musicians living and working in London at the time, as was, for example, the Nigerian composer Fela Sowande. There have of course been other composers of black African origin or descent who took part in modern European musical life, at least since the Renaissance.

For the film’s soundtrack, *Baraza* was performed by the National Symphony Orchestra conducted by Muir Mathieson (who was also responsible for the music for *Sanders of the River*, another British film set in Africa) and featuring Eileen Joyce at the piano.


Nota

This is the song that provided the basis for the well-known “Wimoweh” (a hit parade winner for Pete Seeger’s group, The Weavers, in 1951), and in 1962, “The Lion Sings Tonight.”

Rathebe’s performance in *The Magic Garden* anticipated by eight years the film debut of Miriam Makeba in Lionel Rogosin’s *Come Back, Africa* of 1959, a film which helped launch Makeba’s international career.

Readers are also referred to Peter Davis’s discussion of these films in his history of South African cinema (Davis 1996).

There is no use of orchestral underscore in either of these films, neither in the title or end credit sequences. An exception to the African music, Ava Gardner sings “Comin’ in the Rye” in *Mogambo*.

In contrast to the films of the 1930s, the music heard and seen in these films is well recorded, and respectfully presented. Part of this is no doubt due to improvements in sound technology, but I believe that it also may be attributed to a process of reevaluation of African music. This reevaluation is also nicely suggested in John Huston’s *The African Queen* (1951), starring Humphrey Bogart and Katherine Hepburn. The title sequence, which has us approaching an African village from a distance, along a river, is accompanied sonically only by the sounds of nature. There is no other music. As we get close to the village—it is 1916—there is a gradually rising cacophony. The cause of the cacophony is not native African music, but instead two Christian missionaries—Katherine Hepburn is at the organ—working up a sweat trying to get a native population to sing Protestant hymns. In stark contrast to the harmonic discord in the church, comes Humphrey Bogart sailing up the river, listening with obvious pleasure to the strains of a mellifluous serenade of African music performed on the *sanza* by his African shipmate.

In his book *Black African Cinema*, the Nigerian scholar Frank Ukadike claims that, despite the few examples by black African filmmakers prior to independence, the real take-off of work by African directors was in the 1960s (Ukadike 1994:1).


“Sarret” is an Africanization of the French charret, or carriage.

The first elected president of Senegal (in 1960), Léopold Sedar Senghor, was a Catholic and a Francophile poet. He would become the first African elected to the Académie Française in 1983; we may wonder if this was not also directed at him personally.

Apparently this was compromise by Sembène in order for his film to reach an international audience.

The *Internet Movie Database* (as of September 2005) lists over 90 films with Tarzan as a title motif, since 1960 (it lists 60 titles prior to 1960). Two versions that were widely viewed were Hugh


[50] Films are made on budgets between $10,000 and $25,000; production schedules are counted in days and weeks, rather than months. Cfr. “Nollywood or bust Lock, Stock star,” *op cit.*

[51] Azonko Simpi, a Ghanaian who has scored over 40 films, told me that the directors sometimes specify that they want the “Afriko” beat, a term referring to a traditional 12/8 African rhythmic style.

[52] They have been exported, I have been told, beyond West Africa, to audiences as far as Kenya and South Africa.

[53] Subsequent to the writing of this text, a South African urban drama called *Tsotsi* (2005), which features a soundtrack highlighted by the contemporary South African sounds of Kwaito music, became the first South African film to win an Oscar in the Best Foreign Film category.

References


