

Tsonga Musical Performance in Cultural Perspective (South Africa)

THOMAS F. JOHNSTON

The Tsonga, or Shangana-Tsonga, are a Bantu-speaking people numbering about 1,200,000 in Mozambique and 700,000 in the Northern Transvaal. They grow maize and, to a certain extent, keep cattle, practise polygyny, and worship ancestor-spirits. I studied their musical system 1968-70 in order to fill gaps in the southern African ethnomusicological chart. Previous studies were, in time order, PERCIVAL KIRBY's study of the instruments 1934, HUGH TRACEY's study of Chopi xylophone orchestras 1948, DAVID RYCROFT's study of Swazi and Zulu music 1954, YVONNE HUSKISSON's study of Pedi music 1958, ANDREW TRACEY's study of Rhodesian mbiras 1961, JOHN BLACKING's study of Venda music 1962, CHRISTOPHER BALLANTINE's study of Tswana reed-pipe melody 1965, NICHOLAS ENGLAND's study of Bushman music 1967, DIEDRE HANSEN's study of Xhosa music 1968, and ROBERT KAUFFMAN's study of Shona harmony in 1971.

It is necessary to study the music of a southern African group for at least one horticultural year, because the music is seasonal. A correct cultural perspective can only be obtained if the music is heard and observed in context at the appropriate time. Herding songs do not occur after the harvest when the cattle are brought in to graze freely on the razed gardens; children's story-songs occur mostly around the hearth on long winter evenings. The musical calendar of the Tsonga is as follows.

The Seasonal Occurrence of Different Musical Substyles for Adults

Oct-Dec	hoeing songs (<i>tinsimu ta kurima</i>)
Dec-Mar	weeding songs (<i>tinsimu ta kuhlakula</i>)
Apr-Jun	reaping songs (<i>tinsimu ta kutshovela</i>)
Dec-Mar	exorcism music (<i>mancomane</i>)
Oct-Sep	pounding songs (<i>tinsimu to handza</i>)
Oct-Sep	beersongs (<i>tinsimu nta le byalweni</i>)
Oct-Sep	the national dance <i>muchongolo</i>
Oct-Sep	solo instrumental music (<i>xichaya</i>)
Oct-Sep	Christian church music (<i>tinsimu ta kereke</i>)
Oct-Sep	mine-dance <i>makwaya</i> in the urban environment