

A SHORT STUDY ON ZULU MUSIC.

By Rev. Father FRANZ MAYR.

*Reprinted from 'Annals of the Natal Government Museum,' Vol. I,
Part 3, May, 1908.*





A Short Study on Zulu Music.

By

Rev. Father Franz Mayr.

With Plates XLIII and XLIV.

THE Zulus have a great liking and a certain natural ability for music, which rejoices the hearts of old and young alike of both sexes.

In spite, however, of the good musical ear which most Zulus possess, and their great fondness for playing musical instruments and for singing, it cannot be said that they have reached any proficiency in either instrumental or vocal music.

At the end of this article there will be given some eight examples of Zulu songs. These have been taken down with care, and may be regarded as fairly accurate transcriptions; they will clearly show the absence of art, or at least what Europeans would call art. Nevertheless, the study of native music should prove of interest, and it discloses a considerable variety of strange airs and rhythms, especially in the direction of dances. It is certainly high time for such a study, as European music is rapidly penetrating into every part of the country, and harmonicas, concertinas, etc., are taking the place of the original primitive instruments.

I. INSTRUMENTAL MUSIC.

The native musical instruments will now be described.

(1) Umqangala, or stringed bow (Pl. XLIII, figs. 1-3). It is made of a bent stick or reed with a string of ox-tendon stretched tightly across. The bows vary considerably in size,

and sometimes they may be ornamented; in the specimen shown in fig. 3 the surface of the reed is covered with engravings. In using the instrument, one end of the bow is held by the lips of the player, and the other end with the left hand. The string is twanged with the thumb of the right hand, and notes of different pitch are produced by means of the fingers of the left hand pressing on the string. It would appear that the mouth of the performer acts as a resonator (vide Pl. XLIV).

(2) Ugubu, or ugumbu, is a stringed bow with a calabash attached towards one end (fig. 10). A small portion of the calabash is cut off square at the free end. The bow is held vertically, and the opening of the calabash is pressed against the chest with the left hand, while with the right hand the string is struck with a small stick. The pitch is altered by the fingers of the left hand pressing on the string, while the tone is varied by the varying pressure of the calabash against the chest.

(3) Uqwabe is a stringed bow with the string tied down at the middle towards the bow, and at this place a large calabash is fixed (fig. 11). The opening of the calabash is slightly pressed against the chest of the player as in the ugubu, but the bow is sometimes held horizontally instead of upright. With a small stick the player strikes the string alternately on each side of the calabash, and the pitch is changed by pressing the string with the first finger of the left hand.

(4) Ugwala is in form and size like the umqangala, except that at one end the string of ox-tendon is attached to the split quill of a feather. The other end of the quill is either bound down to the end of the bow by a thin strip of skin, with a piece of quill projecting freely beyond, or it is passed through a hole in the wood, in which it is tightly wedged by a peg of wood. Figs. 4 and 5 give side and front view of this instrument; the split quill is seen at the bottom of the string.

The instrument appears to be a difficult one to use, and women are the chief performers. The mouth is placed over

