

The three closely related Bantu languages, Zulu, Swazi and Xhosa (the 'x' represents a 'Click' consonant) are spoken by people living near the extreme south-eastern coast of Africa who are collectively known as the Nguni. Portuguese seamen who were shipwrecked, during the 16th century, in what is now the Eastern Cape Province and Transkei, reported meeting people who resembled some of the Xhosa tribes who still live there today. The Swazi live in Swaziland, between Mocambique and the Transvaal, and the Zulu group live in Natal, where the military leader Shaka, early in the 19th century, amalgamated various Nguni tribes who had migrated there, to build the powerful Zulu nation.

Despite the evidence of their widespread physical and cultural connections with other African peoples, a musical riddle presents itself, in the fact that they have no drums or percussion ensembles. Their communal music is basically vocal. But for individual music-making, flutes and musical bows of several different types were very frequently used, in earlier times, either for solo playing or for song accompaniment.*

+ See: P.R. Kirby: The Musical Instruments of the Native Races of South Africa, Oxford, 1934, (Reprinted by Witwatersrand University Press, Johannesburg, 1953)

Much of their music is polyphonic, either as a result of playing melodies on upper instrumental harmonics above two, or sometimes three fundamentals; or through independent movement between voice and instrumental accompaniment; or by applying stretto to antiphonal vocal parts. Regarding tonal organisation: rather than a single tonal centre, there is a dual system of contrasting tonalities above a principal root and a subsidiary one (or two). Usually, these roots are either a semi-tone or a whole-tone apart, and each has its own related series of notes which may comprise a complete or incomplete triad. The melodic finalis need not be the same as the principal root. Portamento is a strong feature, partly inspired by speech-tone patterns and the pitch-lowering effect of voiced consonants, which are further exaggerated and stylised in song.

Nowadays, traditional Nguni instruments have almost entirely been displaced by Western ones, but the sounds of several surviving varieties of musical bow are presented on this disc.

When recording the sound of these musical bows, the microphone was placed 20 to 30 cm from the resonator, near the player's ear, so as to obtain an impression somewhat like that heard by the players themselves.

I.

Umrubhe



2.

VOICE/VOIX/STIMME



Ugubhu

3.

VOICE/VOIX/STIMME



Ugubhu

4.



Umakhweyana