

## IN MEMORIAM

HUGH TRAVERS TRACEY (1903-1977)

All of us who are concerned with African music will have learned with great regret of the death of Dr. Hugh Tracey, whose long and devoted work for the music of Africa deserves the recognition and appreciation of us all. He died on October 23, 1977 and was buried at Saronde Valley Farm near Krugersdorp in South Africa.

Hugh Travers Tracey was born on January 29, 1903 in Willand, in the maritime county of Devonshire in southwest England. Over fifty years ago he was farming in Devonshire, and deciding to farm in what was then Southern Rhodesia, and realizing he would be interested in the music of the Africans, he sought the advice of Ralph Vaughan Williams before leaving England. In those days there were no thermionic valves or tape recorders, but he obtained what apparatus he could. In 1934 he left farming and joined the South African Broadcasting Corporation. It was about this time that I first met him when he came to Livingstone in Northern Rhodesia to collect suitable skins and resonant wood from the Zambesi sawmills, so as to provide the Africans in the mine compounds at Johannesburg with the necessary materials to make their drums and xylophones. "Remember I am not a musician," he said to me. That may be true in the technical sense, but he developed a remarkable expertise in field recording, in his sympathetic dealing with the African musicians, and exhibited a singular capacity for organizing and annotating the vast collection of recordings he made, first under the auspices of Gallo Ltd. of Johannesburg. Later, when funds became available, he was able to be independent, and on his own initiative he established himself in Roodepoort, some twenty miles west of Johannesburg, where, in 1947, he established the African Music Society (with Dr. Winifred Hoernlé) and later the International Library of African Music (ILAM). The former has become the forum for scholarly articles on African music and the exchange of views among research workers. The latter is a monumental collection of twelve-inch long playing discs of African music—well over two hundred of them—containing more than two thousand recordings, accompanied by a very comprehensive set of cross-reference cards, enabling us to know at a glance what we are listening to, the instruments employed, the tribal origin and their circumstantial details. The African Music Society and the ILAM are now in the hands of his son Andrew. They form a permanent and eloquent memorial to Hugh's forty years' work on African music.

But his activities were by no means confined to these two projects. While he travelled far and wide with his recording van, he also gave frequent lectures with a liveliness which is well illustrated by his special flair for re-telling African folk tales in English. I have seen him do this: he could hold an audience spellbound as he told the story, with a flick of the hand or a subtly raised eyebrow at critical moments in the tale. At the same time it is only fair to record that his enthusiasm for the Africans led him to a critical view of missionaries. It is true that some of them discouraged indigenous music among their Christian followers, but Hugh did not allow for the considerable efforts made by the more enlightened missionaries to foster and encourage the use of African music in Christian worship which, though in the 1930's was something new and strange, is now a common-

place all over Africa, with Africans composing Christian music in their own African idiom. Nevertheless it should be added that in his journal, *African Music*, 1(3)(1956), he included five essays dealing with the Africanization of Christian Church music in Africa, about which he commented in his Editorial, “. . . several missionary societies are now taking steps to revise their attitude towards the theory and practice of indigenous music, and amend their hymn books accordingly. We welcome this significant trend, which is reflected in this edition of the Journal, and only hope that mature African musicians with well-founded artistic and analytical ability will respond to their lead. It would be a long-delayed sign of maturity.”

His great interest in the xylophones of the Chopi tribe in southeast Africa led to his most well-known book *Chopi Musicians* (see bibliography), in which he clearly grasped two fundamental points about African xylophones—first, that the Chopi tune them to an equiheptatonic scale, and second, that they tend to tune the notes to the same actual pitches, i.e., the Africans hold in their heads a fixed pitch on which to construct their scale, just as the Westerners construct our scale on A=440 vps.

It was as a result of his knowledge of the music of East, Central and Southern Africa and of his labours to record it and to further interest in it among ethnomusicologists, that the University of Capetown awarded him a well-deserved honorary Doctorate in Music on June 25, 1965.

Living as he did in the restricted political climate of South Africa, Hugh Tracey—to his great credit—simply had none of the spirit of ‘apartheid’ in him. I well remember his telling me—I think in the 1940’s—when things were getting hot for Africans who associated with Europeans and *vice versa*, that he himself used to drive one of his African assistants to the latter’s home for fear that he might be molested if he went home by himself. This was typical of Hugh’s character: sociable and jolly, but he was prepared to stand up for his convictions. During his long and arduous working hours he yet had time for social friendships among both white people and Africans.

Hugh Tracey did much to lay the foundations of the present world-wide interest in African music. It is quite astonishing what a man who admitted “I am not a musician” could and did accomplish in that very specialized field of music. We salute and honour his memory. May the work he started continue in the future so that African music may eventually take its rightful place among the great musics of the world.

A. M. JONES

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Abbreviations: AM=*African Music*

AMSN=*African Music Society Newsletter*

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[N.B. For Hugh Tracey's recordings, see Alan P. Merriam, *African Music on LP: An Annotated Discography*. Evanston: Northwestern University Press. 1970, Index IV, p. 134.]