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Mozambique

One of the last African countries to become independent, Mozambique suffers from its close proximity to South Africa, which dominates it economically and, therefore, influences popular culture to a great extent. Historically the Mozambique coast was a trading base where Bantu Africans met and dealt with Arab traders from the Indian Ocean. Portuguese settlers arrived in the sixteenth century to set up plantations and profit from the slave trade. It was not until 1951 that Portugal declared the country an overseas province and in 1972 it became a 'state' of Portugal. Independence was achieved in 1975 under the late Samora Michel. As the country is such an elongated shape it contains many different ethnic groups, from the Shangan in the south to the Makonde in the north. Each region displays the expected variety of traditional music forms, but the most impressive national music is probably that of the 'timbila' orchestras with their massed xylophones. These were first recorded in the Xopi (Chopi) and Tswa regions during the 1940s by Hugh Tracey.

LPL0133

Rhythms and Dances of Mozambique
Traditional Music and Songs of
Mozambique (Anthology of first folk music
festival.)

Contemporary Music

As a result of continuing political difficulties which overshadow daily life in Mozambique, there has been no real synthesis of rural music with contemporary styles. Most of the pop music available is from South Africa and, although the Mozambiquean variant has subtle differences, to the uninitiated it closely resembles mbaqanga. Popular urban music forms are the marabenta, majika and shigubu, first brought to light in the 1950s by such stars as Orchestre Djambu, Ontonio Williams and Rosa Tembe. Others who are still current include Alexandre Langa, Daniel Langa and Pedro Langa, Fani Pfumo, saxophonist Chico da Conceição, Wazimbo, Jose Barata and Ghorwani, one of the top groups.

Ben Mandelson, who visited the country in January 1987 collecting

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material for Globestyle, reports that before the revolution there were two record labels, a studio and a pressing plant in operation, but nowadays records are put out under the auspices of the national radio station. Apparently the industry is waiting to be revived by the delivery of pressing equipment held in South Africa. The Zairean singer Sam Mangwana recorded a short but impressive album there in 1982 which conveys much of the marabenta flavour. The radio house band, Orchestre Marabenta Star da Mozambique, one of the most popular units in the country, was due to tour Germany in 1987. While there is a plentiful supply of recording artistes and a national hit parade, almost all the discs are singles, with the few albums available in the country being compilations of recent hits. Mandelson reported the record shops to be empty with no record players in sight. But there is a ready market and he talks of plans to manufacture local Tiger record players to run on 6 volt car batteries. It seems things can only get better for the Mozambique music industry. In 1986 Elsa Mangue Felipe was voted Best Young Singer in Radio France International's 'Discovery' awards.

LPL 0131

Parado de Sucessos: Eyuphuro (A selection of pop and traditional recordings.)

Graham, Ronnie
Stern's Guide to Contemporary
African Music.
London: Zwan Publications, 1988
315 pp ; foto + makes ;