

**The lion in which the spirits of the royal ancestors make their home:
vernacular sounds of Zimbabwe, Africa**
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Liner notes by David Dunn

While the legacy of British colonialism is everywhere evident within independent Zimbabwe, the sounds of an older African fabric of mind seep through the modern socialist and industrialized veneer. It is a fabric of integrated mentality where the persistence of spirit is understood to be an intrinsic component of daily ecological dynamics. This collage is not an attempt to document the natural world of Africa, its tribal remnants nor its modern counterparts. It is simply an aural description of the network of sound that communicates between these components that an outside traveler might be fortunate to hear.

Such an activity is at best problematic and at worst an act of exploitation. Just as the photographer cannot escape the patina of voyeurism neither can the phonographer. My only defense is to be as "up front" as possible. I offer these sounds as evidence of something worth listening to, not as just another digitally displaced entertainment nor as another highly dubious example of global cultural consciousness raising. My interest has been in composing an articulation of those patterns of the sacred which emerge or persist within (and despite) the contradictions and conundrums of rapid cultural change. By use of the word sacred I am specifically invoking a definition posited by Gregory Bateson: "the integrated fabric of mind which envelops us."

While these sounds can be heard as further evidence of an environment, nation and world undergoing mutation and threat of annihilation, they also can be heard as evidence or processes of dynamical adaptation where the tribal and wilderness voices speak not only as something under siege but as phenomena capable of survival in a way that may inform our collective survival here on Earth. These are some of the sounds of one place in the world undergoing transition.

1. The dawn chorus at Lake Mcllwaine with children from Besa Village singing and playing a home made string instrument. The children in many rural villages of Zimbabwe are taught in public schools modeled after the British colonial system. They wear uniforms and sit in orderly rows of desks where they learn arithmetic and missionary songs. Outside the classroom they learn the local traditions necessary for survival. Here they sing both traditional songs from the Shona and Ndebele and songs from school in English. Between and during the songs some children were plucking flying termites from the air and popping the buttery flavored insects into their mouths.

2. Night sounds from Masuma Pan, Hwange Game Park fading into morning sounds at the same location. The sounds of crickets and frogs transition into a dawn chorus of birds, assorted insects and the low pitched drone of scarab beetles.

The sam elioin punctuates both the night and day. The attentive listener can barely discern the sound of running water bubbling up from the aquifer to the watering hole by a kerosene driven pump. Such pumps are a standard feature in many game parks: a human maintenance tool for winlderness as a global park without which an estimated eighty percent of the wildlife would perish.

3. Singing and glossolalia of the Apostolic Church, Kalanga people. Recorded at the border of Zimbabwe and Botswana near Plumtree. This village at the edge of the desert was gracious enough to allow me to record their church service in a large and exquisitely decorated mud hut. In exchange we consented to be healed. Like apostolics everywhere they have melded the Holy Spirit with local ones to reveal the universality of speaking-in-tongues. Many of the same congregation participate in traditional ceremonies to heal male impotency where elderly women enter into extended trances, becoming lionesses in order to gather necessary herbs over periods of up to two weeks long.

4. Morning sounds from Ngweshla Pan, Hwange Game Park with Enoch Stoole telling a story about going to the Rain God in the Matopos. Enoch is an engineer who lives in the Bulawayo. He was born, in the Kalanga village of the previous segment, from a relationship between a white Rhodesian landholder and a black Kalanga woman. While raised as a child within the traditional village life, he was educated in South Africa through his own initiative. Due to the constraints of colonial society before the war for independence, Enoch was not allowed to know his father who lived within walking distance of his village.

5. Night sounds near Besa Village recorded from the edge of a major trucking route (two lane paved highway). The length of this cut is just about the average time between passing vehicles.

6. Drumming and singing of the Ndau people recorded at Victoria Falls. Some of the finest traditional musicians and dancers of Zimbabwe and Zambia are brought to tourist shows near the four star hotel in Victoria Falls. The backdrop is an artificial village of thatched huts reminiscent of Disneyland from which emerge spectacularly costumed dancers and drumming. The performers often come from very far away and stay “in residence” for extended periods of time. The combination of brilliant displays of traditional culture and merciless capitalism was, to say the least, disorienting.

7. Lions, elephants and other night sounds at Ngweshla Pan. Earlier in the evening our small band of campers tracked a group of ten lions from the safe distance of a Landrover. With a small spotlight we watched them bring down a Cape buffalo. The distant sounds of the carcass being devoured, along with the nervous interjections of elephants neighbors, were recorded from the edge of our campsite. All that remained of the evening meal the next morning was the buffalo’s lower jaw bone.

The title of this sound collage comes from a line in David Lan's book, *Guns and Rain*, about the role of spirit mediums during Zimbabwe's war for independence.

The sounds were recorded with a Sony TCD-D10 portable DAT recorder using Sennheiser MKH series condense microphones in a MS-stereo pattern (omni and figure eight) and matrix decoded to stereo in post-production. All assembly and editing was done in the digital domain with a Spectral Synthesis digital audio workstation.