

Recording review

Roberts, Christopher. *Betel Nuts*. Trees Music & Art TMCD 9602 (12-1, Lane 10, Sec. 2, Hsin Yi Rd., Taipei, Taiwan; fax: [886] 2-3972453). Sony Music Entertainment (Taiwan) Ltd. SDD 9622 (6th Fl., No. 35, Lane 11, Kwang-Fu N. Rd., Taipei, Taiwan). 1996. One compact disc and unpaginated booklet.

Between the years 1981 and 1996 the musician Christopher Roberts made a few trips to the Trobriand Islands in Milne Bay Province, Papua New Guinea, with a double bass, a flute and tape recorders. He stayed in Obweria village (close to Yalumgwa village) on Kiriwina Island. He participated in a number of sessions with the local Komwa Komwa stringband—and some of the results of these sessions are published on a compact disc that comes with a full colour booklet. This booklet and the compact disc present seven Trobriand songs and eight songs from Taiwan. The booklet starts with a brief introduction (in English and Chinese), then the texts of the songs are given in English, Kilivila (the Austronesian language of the Trobriand Islanders), Pangcah (or Amis, the language of the Pangcah people in Taiwan), and Chinese, and the tunes are presented in musical notation. It ends with the recording dates for the songs presented, a glossary and a pronunciation guide for Kilivila and for Amis (or Pangcah), references for further exploration, and a number of acknowledgments.

I have been doing field research on the language and culture of the Trobriand Islanders ever since 1982, but I have no competence whatsoever in Chinese or Amis. Thus, in this review I will only deal with the Trobriand songs and with Roberts' comments on Trobriand music and Trobriand culture as well as on his dealings with the Kilivila language. My transcription of the Kilivila language data follows the orthography presented in Senft (1986).

Besides one traditional song all other songs from the Trobriands are songs composed by the Komwa Komwa stringband. Roberts briefly introduces the members of this band—Justin Tokwebasi, Gregory Toguawau, Thomas Uniweni, and Israel and Alani Kaidoga—he presents some information on the band's story and describes very well the tuning of their guitars and ukuleles. There are a few comments with respect to the history and the contents for each song, photos of all members of the band and of the band performing with Roberts, and drawings of a *kauya* (the typical basket woven from a palm leaf that all men on the Trobriands wear as a shoulder bag—Roberts refers to it as a "Betel Purse"), of a *lagim* (the famous canoe prow of Trobriand canoes), and of two traditional drums (a *kesosau* and a small *kupi*—Roberts refers to both these drums as *kasosau*).

The first song presented is called “Kwetalabogi” (‘one night’); it was composed by Tokwebasi. Roberts’ title of this song, “Kwetalabogi”, does not take into account that there is a word boundary between the numeral *kwetala* and the noun *bogi*. The second song “Wapu odabala” (‘on (top of) the wharf’) is a spontaneous composition by Israel Kaidoga and Gregory Toguau. Thomas Uniweni composed the song “Kwaimanumu bukumaisi kulegasi” (‘easy you will come and hear’), the song “Kapisila ulo valu” (‘he feels sorry for my village’) was composed by Tokwebasi in Wagifa, where the band was on a concert tour. Here Roberts’ title, “Kapisila ulovalu”, does not take into account that there is a word boundary between the possessive pronoun *ulo* and the noun *valu*. Gregory Toguau, Israel Kaidoga, and Tokwebasi composed the song “Giyopela o m dou” (‘Giyopela your call’). Again Roberts’ title, “Giyopela Omudou”, is not aware of word boundaries: the *o* has just the function of a binding vowel, *m* is a possessive pronoun, the *u* in the title serves the function of a binding vowel—but it is not to be found in the lyrics of the song—and *dou* is a noun. The next song, “Wabogi wamimi lagisaimu” (‘at night I dreamt I saw you’) was composed by Israel Kaidoga, and the last song “Kauyanuba” is a *milamala* song—a song that is sung during the period of the *milamala* harvest festivals and after the death of a Trobriand Islander during the first mourning ceremonies (this is most probably the reason why Roberts somewhat vaguely characterises it as a “song in memoriam of a deceased person”). These *milamala* songs consist of verses with two or three lines each; they are repeated ad libitum and they have a very characteristic melody. The *milamala* songs are sung in the so-called *Biga Baloma* variety of Kilivila, the ‘language of the spirits of the dead’. This is an archaic variety of Kilivila, and it is sometimes also called *Biga Tommwaya* ‘old people’s language’. Only very few of the elderly still know the semantic content, the meaning of these songs; however, they are still passed on from members of the older to a few interested members of the younger generation (see Senft 1986:124ff; 1996:386f.). “Kauyanuba” (translated by Roberts as ‘memory of the betel nut basket’) is a song that belongs to the *wosi vetoi* cycle of *milamala* songs. It was performed for Roberts by Toilegogula.

In what follows I will present the lyrics of the seven songs in my own transcription (I indicate in angle brackets [< >] and in italics where Roberts’ transcription is faulty) and in a word by word translation and then confront this translation with Roberts’ free translation presented in the booklet. I do this because it is absolutely impossible for someone who cannot speak Kilivila to parse Roberts’ transcription of the lyrics; moreover, Roberts does not indicate which parts of the lyrics are repeated in the actual performance. I transcribed the lyrics together with my consultants while listening to the songs on the disc (the editor provided me with a copy of the disc on tape), and I checked these transcriptions and the word by word translation with my consultants during my 1997 field trip to the Trobriand Islands. I leave it to the reader to decide how close Roberts’ free translation comes to the actual text of these songs. The line breaks in my Kilivila transcriptions are completely arbitrary.

1. Kwetala bogi

<Kewetalabogi>

one night

kwetala bogi lamimi kidamwa yoku yaigu kaditeyu wa

one night I dreamt as if you and I the two of us only

kam nanamsa o nanogwe ikoigase

your thought in my mind it really attracts me

tubukona o la salili lumalama isiligaga niwavila idam

moon at its going down moonshine it gets brighter calm it is quiet

tommota idagusi wala

people are asleep only

yegu, atokaiye aninanamsa mimi saina isepulokai

I, I am awake I remember the dream very much it tricks me

kam nanamsa o nanogwe ikoigase

your thought in my mind it attracts me (very much)

tuta kumwedona ogu lilola nanogu saina iyeluyelu

<iyeluye>

time always my trip my mind very it runs (streams) out to you (like water)

kam nanamsa o nanogwe ikoigase

your thought in my mind it attracts me

[the last 6 lines are repeated once]

Roberts' free translation (with his line breaks (!)):

one night / I was dreaming / as if you and I were together /

all my mind goes just to you / favorite one /

bright moon going down to the sea / bright light alluring so very quiet /

while all the people are fast asleep /

but suddenly I stand up from my sleep / realizing /

my dreams are tricking me /

all my mind goes just to you / favourite one /

all the time / roaming about inside my head / are thoughts of desire for you /
favorite one

2. Waupu odabala

wa'upu odabala egisi elubaila

wharf on top (of it) he sees his friend

iyomwa we nanola sainela

it is heavy ah his mind very much

[repeated 2x]

boda saina kwaiveaka

<kwaiveaka>

group very big

waga bogwa lekasewa

the boat already it was full

sori wale kukwa'ita oduale (= odavalu)

sorry only you go back to our village

[repeated 2x]

kalasiya isalili koya veaka ikebobu we

<veka>

sun it goes down mountains big it is level oh

ananamsa kammwaleta lubai'igwe

I think you yourself my friend

[repeated 2x]

Wagifa olopolo tubukona iyuwola we

Wagifa village [in the mountains, south of Goodenough Island] inside moon rises oh

ananamsa kammwaleta lubai'igwe

I think you yourself my friend

[repeated 2x + last line repeated once more]

Roberts' free translation:

on the wharf / how she looks at him! / so much sorrow in her mind /

a big crowd gathered there / but the boat is already full /

sorry, as you / go back to our place alone /

the sun goes down / where the big mountains form / a perfect line /

we! I'm thinking of you only, my friend /

while here in Wagifa village a bright moon rising / and I'm thinking of you only

3. Kwaimanumu bukumaisi kulegasi

kwaimanumu bukumaisi kulegase—pilavau

easy you will come you will hear new song

mu pilawena yoka kapise—lubaigwe mu bigatona bwaina

this song you feel sorry my friend your speech good

besa yaigwe okawamu mwada—o m biga kamwa gala bapakaimwe

from me in your speech but in your speech you only not I will forget you

o m biga kamwa gala bapakaimwe—ulo bigwe uwodogu la'iwa

in your speech you only not I will forget you my speech from my mouth it will come

bilega ke o taigamu mwala

she will hear well to your ear only

ulo nakusi baisa yoku aluluwa'e—oisala boikwanela bigatona

my memories here you I remember oh good speech speech

[the line **oisala boikwanela bigatona** is repeated twice]

[the following lines are missing in Roberts' transcription:]

kwemanum bukumaisi bukulegasi pilavau mpilawena o kakapisi lubaigu

slowly we will come you will hear new song this one oh our feeling sorry my friend

bigatona bwaina o m biga kavam gala bapakaim o isala boikwanela bigatona

speech good your speech you said not I will forget oh good speech speech

Roberts' free translation:

Quietly you come / you listen / to this new lament /

my dear one / chorus: what you say is sweet ... / ... to me /

chorus: but its just your talking /

your words, / what you've said, / no, I don't want this /

remaining words only / my words ... / chorus: from my mouth come to you... /

to hear... / chorus: reaching your ears, perhaps /

tell my anticipation / so remember my reply /

to the fondness in the words you spoke

4. Kapisila ulo valu

<Kapisila Ulovalu>

kapisila ulo valu lasilai lama babanevi

<banevi>

his feeling of sorrow my village I left I came I will look for

ulo keda bake'ibata baloki inagu tamagu o mavaluse

<bake'iba oki>

my road I will go back I will come to my mother and my father in my village

[repeated 2x]

besatuta latamaisi ibitamasawasi

now we came we will play

leyomosali nona komaidodasi mamasila ninadasi tamasawasi

<yomosali ... komaidodas>

it made happy the mind (of us) all happiness our minds we play

[repeated 2x]

Roberts' free translation:

so sorry to leave / my home / leaving to come here /

trying to find my way / back home / to my mother /

my father / our home /

now we're back to play / our concert / to bring all the people /

to a familiar happiness / and together all / we play

5. Giyopela-o mu dou

<Giyopela Omudou>

kwevila wiki apikwakuyamu

how many weeks I dream of the future

tuta kumwedo e lagaila tutabaisa lakamai'aisi o m valu

<tuya ... tuta baisa ... om va>

time all and today now we came to your village

[repeated 2x]

adoki kusepulokaigwe pela sena omitibwo

I think you tricked me for very old times

e lagaila tutabaisa lakamai'aisi o m valu

<tuta baisa ... om va>

and today now we came to your village

[repeated 2x]

Giyopela o m dou iyomosalimasi

<omdou iomosailaima>

Giyopela (male) your call it make us feel good

gala kagisaisi valu e laga'aila kagisaisi

<kagisai>

not we see village and today we see

[repeated 2x + last line repeated once more]

Roberts' free translation:

how many more weeks / of hoping / all these days, all this / time /

! today we come to your / place /

we thought you were / deceiving us / a word of promise / so long ago /

such a long time ago /

Giyopela's invitation / makes us happy / we had not seen your /

place before / ! until today

6. Wabogi wamimi lagisaimu

waboge wamimi lagisaimu

at night I dreamt I saw you

kuyala (= koyala) kuyaveka kai itabodi matam

mountain big trees it blocks your eye

koyala itabode [repeated 2x]—veimaiasela

mountains it blocks [repeated 2x] my relatives

e lagaila lakamaisi bitamwasawasi

<gaila>

and now we came we will play

lagaila bwena boge

today good night

lagaila bwena boge

today good night

[last line repeated 2x + whole song repeated once more + last line repeated once more]

Roberts' free translation:

In the night / in a dream / I saw you /

but a big mountain / obstructs my view / of you /

it blocks my eyes / la! it blocks them!

our friends, / today we come / we play our music /

today, / and through the night / today, we say good night

7. Kauyanuba

e e m

[intonation sounds]

vine bige mapute wa wi ye kwaliyoli guvanea

[alternative line—as known by my consultants:

bige mya vivina bigemapu tewau kwalivoli guvana]

the girl speaks they answer the men you put my herb inside your *kwasi* [armband]

bige m a vivino'o

her speech the girl

bigemapu tewau tewa wiye kawalili guvane'e

they answer the men girl put my herb inside your *kwasi*

bige m a vine no'o

her speech the girl

bigemapu ge mapu tewa wi ye kwalili guvane'e

they answer the men girl put my herb inside your *kwasi*

bige a a vivi no'o

her speech the girl

bige bigemapu tewa wi ye kwalili guvaleye

her speech they answer the men girl put my herb inside your *kwasi*

bige m a vivi no'o

her speech the girl

bigemapu tewa wi ye

they answer the men girl

e e m m m

Roberts' free translation:

to the girl's words / the boy replies /

their magic made / through the aroma / of the flowers

In my transcription of the texts I have corrected a number of Roberts' mis-hearings, but I take this as a somewhat irrelevant point—it is very easy to overhear affixes of words in Kilivila songs, because many speakers slur syllables at the beginning and at the end of words. On the whole I think that Roberts managed to more or less transfer the general contents of the Kilivila songs to the readers of his translation—this translation can be criticised, of course, but Roberts does not claim that it is based on sound linguistic and philological research. However, I have to correct a few more errors he made. In connection with the song “Giyopela o m dou” he refers to a village Gumlababa—the name of the village is Gumilababa. Roberts also misspells the name of the village Munuwata as Minuwata. Referring to the *lagim*, the canoe prow, he claims that they “carry the carved motif of the frigate bird”—this is simply wrong. There is a bird motif on the smaller *tabuya* prow in front of the *lagim* (see Senft 1986:437), however, most carvers claim it represents a white heron. Finally, he translates the name of the stringband, *Komwa Komwa*, as ‘truly inside’—my consultants told me that *komwa* refers to the wooden part of an adze that keeps the blade in place, however they also told me—with a broad grin on their faces—that *komwa komwa* indeed refers to ‘something inside a girl’, namely to the hymen. It seems that the Trobriand Islanders played their usual tricks with Roberts, too.

Before I finish my review with a final summary I—as a linguist—cannot refrain from making some comments on Roberts' “Glossary” and his “pronunciation guide” for Kilivila. This section is just hopeless, grammatically wrong, and completely out of date—being based on the first word-list of Kilivila by MacGregor published in 1892 and on some comments on the grammar of Kilivila by Fellows published in 1901. Roberts does not refer to the linguistic notes on Kilivila in the œuvre of Malinowski or in Powell's and Weiner's publications, and it is obvious that he does not know of my Kilivila grammar and dictionary (1986). A brief look at this book would have prevented Roberts from making the most ridiculous mistakes in this glossary.

However, despite all these shortcomings it is to be welcomed that this publication adds interesting information to a slowly growing corpus of indigenous songs and music in Papua New Guinea, although it certainly does not come up with the standards of a collection like, for example, the one by Webb & Niles (1996). Finally, one word to the role Roberts played in all this music: a purist like me would have preferred to listen to the music of the Komwa Komwa stringband without it being accompanied by a bass or a flute—but this is a problem of taste. I can refer purists like the present reviewer to a tape with Trobriand music from Tokwebasi in 1995. The cassette entitled *Tears of the Island* does not come with a transcription and a translation of the lyrics, but I have transcribed and translated these songs together with my consultants on the Trobriands in 1997—after I had finished checking Roberts' transcriptions—and I hope to publish these transcriptions some time in the near future.

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