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MUSIQUES DU VANUATU
Fêtes et mystères

MUSIC OF VANUATU
Celebrations and mysteries

MUSIQUES DU VANUATU | MUSIC OF VANUATU

Fêtes et mystères | Celebrations and mysteries

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Danses pour une grande fête | Celebration in the village

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⊙41. **Pleurs des Esprits / Cries of the Spirits *(newertiang)*** — Merelava ..... 4'37"

Collection fondée par Françoise Gründ et dirigée par Pierre Bois

Enregistrements (Vanuatu, 1997 à 2010), texte et photographies, **Alexandre François** (CNRS–LACITO, ANU) et **Monika Stern** (CNRS, AMU-CNRS-EHESS, CREDO). Illustration de couverture : masques des esprits dans la danse *mag* (Jōlap, Gaua) et carte, **Alexandre François**. Traduction anglaise, **Brenda Prendergast François** et **Alexandre François**. Prémastérisation, mise en page, **Pierre Bois**.
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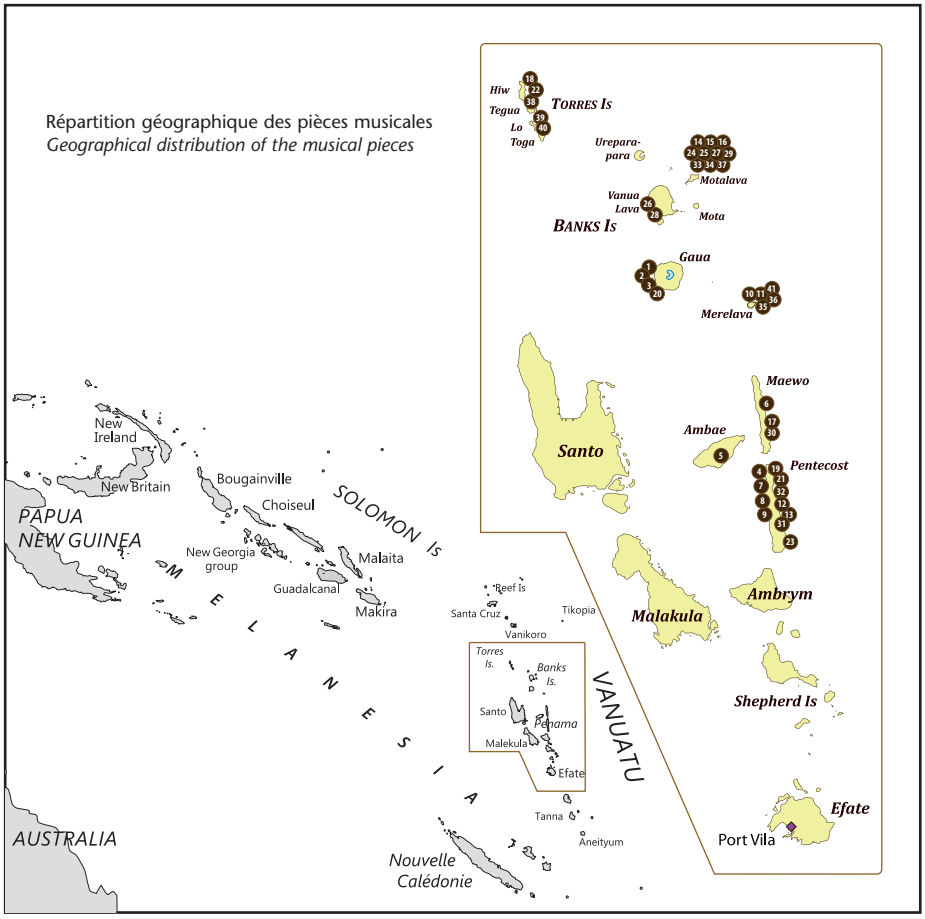


Le regard du *Maraw*, esprit de la danse mag / The eye of the *Maraw*, spirit of the *mag* dance (Jōlap, Gaua) – © AF

Utmag, danse des initiés / dance of initiated men (Merelava) – © MS

Une fête *newēt* / A *newēt* party (Yaqane, Hiw) – © AF

Page 68 : Danse du serpent de mer / Seasnake dance (Lahlap, Motalava) – © AF

MUSIC OF VANUATU
Celebrations and mysteries

Vanuatu's unknown treasures

The Melanesian societies of Vanuatu form a mosaic of languages and cultures that have become quite different, from island to island, over the course of history. Such a diversity is particularly conspicuous in musical arts – through aesthetic and social practices which are highly sophisticated, yet still go largely undocumented. To this day, Vanuatu's Melanesian music has been accessible mostly through recordings by Peter Crowe (1994) in Maewo and Ambae, and a record of a cappella songs produced by the Vanuatu Cultural Centre (Ammann 2000). A recent book describes the musical forms of Vanuatu with a special focus on the world of secrecy and the supernatural (Ammann 2012). However, whether in the detail of instruments, melodies and rhythms, or the poetic forms and styles used in the songs themselves, Vanuatu still harbours treasures worthy of being brought to light.

The diversity of Vanuatu

The 41 pieces presented here encompass nine different islands, covering the two provinces TORBA (Torres–Banks) and PENAMA (Pentecost–Ambae–Maewo), in the northern half of the country. This sample should provide a fair idea of the wealth of the archipelago's overall musical heritage.

Vanuatu societies cherish the diversity of their cultures and languages. The country holds the world record in terms of linguistic density, with 106 different languages – not counting the dialects – for a population of 240,000. No less than 26 languages are still spoken in the TORBA and PENAMA pro-

This CD brings together the best recordings made by two field researchers between 1997 and 2010. Alexandre François, linguist (Langues et Civilisations à Tradition Orale, CNRS; Australian National University), studies the languages and oral literature of Vanuatu, especially those of the Banks and Torres islands in the north of the archipelago. The ethnomusicologist Monika Stern (Centre de Recherche et de Documentation sur l'Océanie) explores the social and musical practices of northern Vanuatu. The two researchers have travelled across the archipelago, separately or together, and have combined their efforts in a research project entitled *Rythmes à danser, poèmes à chanter en Mélanésie: Esthétique, transmission et impact social des arts musicaux au Vanuatu*. This project gave birth to a documentary produced by Éric Wittersheim, *The Poet's Salary*, which was awarded the 2009 Bartók prize by the Société Française d'Ethnomusicologie. Whereas the film was centred on the island of Motalava, the present musical anthology covers a broader area.

vinces alone, and as many distinct micro-communities. The diversity of the musical styles is commensurate with this linguistic variety: certain musical styles, certain dances, certain instruments, are sometimes known to just one village, and unknown elsewhere. This being said, these microdifferences stand out from a shared cultural background. Due to common origins as well as to a long tradition of economic and cultural exchanges, numerous similarities are also found from one island to another.

The present selection of recordings attempts to reflect the richness of Vanuatu's musical arts. Besides geographical scope, emphasis has been put on the diversity of genres, instruments, musical or poetic styles. By giving preference to live performances, we aim to place musical forms in their social and anthropological context. From one piece to another, the listener moves on from one village to another, changing from one universe and atmosphere to another, on a journey that is both aesthetic and cultural.

The present booklet aims to guide the listener through this journey. After touching upon the importance of music in the societies of Vanuatu, we will describe their musical instruments and decipher the art of song poetry. Listeners will be able to follow the album and its 41 recordings in detail as they discover the musical universe of the archipelago.

A coastal village (Yugemëne, Hiw, Torres) © AF

Ocean, village, forest

Vanuatu was first populated about 3200 years ago, when the navigators of the Lapita civilisation, sailing southeast on their large canoes, colonised insular Melanesia – from the Solomon Islands to New Caledonia and Fiji. The first people to settle on the archipelago's islands, most of which are volcanic and fertile, cultivated the land – whilst maintaining a strong link with the sea. The immediate social unit became the village or hamlet, sometimes perched high up in the island's hills, but most often set up along the coasts.

This lay the foundation of the typical landscape of Vanuatu societies. A few dozen family dwellings of bamboo walls and leaf roofs, forming a circle around the central village clearing – the agora for encounters, the focal point of festivities. A few yards downhill, a sandy beach, the coral reef, the

lagoon and finally the ocean – the source of marine food, but also the hub of exchange between islands, the horizon from whence future encounters will be made.

On the other side of the village, walking uphill further inland, one enters the ambiguous world of the forest.

The forest is first and foremost the familiar route to the gardens of yams and taros, known since early childhood, the precise limits of which are transmitted down through the generations. This is where familiar plant resources are to be found: wellliked fruit; firewood; solid tree trunks for making canoes or beams; bamboos that will become rafters, water bottles or sharp blades; but also various leaves that will cover the house, wrap food as it is baked in stone ovens or be plaited into a mat for the bedroom. As we shall see, these same plants will be transformed into musical instruments: a leaf will be made into a Jew's harp or bullroarer; dried fruits will become ankle rattles; a thick root may turn into a percussion board; solid logs will be hollowed and carved into massive slit gongs; the trunk of a sago tree will serve as the body of a headed drum; and bamboos of all sizes will become slit drums, stamping tubes, bamboo flutes or whistles… The sounds of all these instruments are the voices of the forest reaching out to the village.

But should one venture into the dark sloping forests in the night hours, then one enters into a whole new world, unknown and daunting, a green maze haunted by ancestral spirits, where it is so easy to get lost. Stories and poems evoke those ambivalent solitary moments: pleasure of walking through the woods, august respect for the forces of nature – but also fear of the unknown, with this sudden urge to return home to one's village.

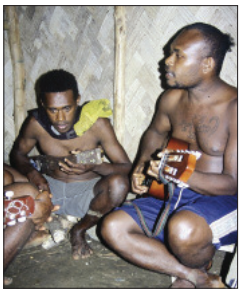
Music and custom

For almost two centuries, Vanuatu islanders have been able to learn about the Western world. The northern part of the archipelago was Christianised by Anglican missionaries; Catholics, Presbyterians and other churches have shared the islands further south. With ships visiting from Australia or New Caledonia, and later through institutions of the Anglo-French Condominium, the people of the New Hebrides – the former name of Vanuatu – became familiar with both English and French, the two languages still taught today in schools. To these colonial languages, they added Bislama – originally an English-based pidgin which spread quickly during the 20th century, and today serves as a lingua franca throughout the archipelago. Now an official language of the country, Bislama is taking over from the vernacular tongues, especially in urban areas.

These last two centuries have given rise to new musical landscapes. Anglican church choirs introduced vocal polyphony which

was previously unknown, and is now widely appreciated in Vanuatu churches. Those who were recruited to work on the sugar plantations of Queensland, at the end of the 19th century, were able to hear guitars and other chordophones. This discovery of new sounds, later renewed with their exposure to American soldiers during the war in the Pacific, gave birth to "Stringbands" which have become so popular today in Vanuatu. In addition, the record industry has developed over the last twenty years. For the young urban generations, music is now largely dominated by reggae – and to a smaller extent, by hiphop, dance music, and R&B.

In spite of these new trends, inherited musical styles still thrive in most of the islands. In the absence of electricity, rural areas of Vanuatu seldom listen to the radio or commercial CD's. Until mobile phone technology was introduced in the late 2000's, they had remained largely cut off from urban music. In most of the archipelago's villages, three main styles are in use today: church songs; *string band* songs; plus everything else, grouped into a vast category referred to as "local music" or "our music" – in contrast to music from afar. In Bislama, one often speaks of *kastom tanis*, literally "custom dances", or *kastom singsing* "custom songs".



A stringband session in the village (Jōlap, Gaua) © AF

All in all, these two musical universes coexist without really mixing. Guitars commonly played in churches or in *string bands* never participate in "custom dances". The contrast is also found in the language: whereas religious or *string band* songs are often in Bislama or English, this is never the case with customary songs: whatever the style, their lyrics are always composed in the local tongue, or sometimes even in an archaic, poetic language. These styles, typical of ancient music, preserve their distinctive identity even in contemporary creations: as we observed in 2005 in Motalava, when a new kastom song is born, it is always composed in the "language of the ancestors".

This contrast between "local" music and music felt to be exogenous, may sound surprising, given the constant circulation of musical styles among communities, which often travel from one island of the archipelago to another. In other words, music referred to as "from here", associated with "custom", are often musical styles coming from some other island across the seas. And yet, people will still draw a contrast between "custom" music and styles which will never really be part of custom (*string band*, church songs).

Women and children during festivities in Bunlap (South Pentecost) © MS

A key element could possibly explain this dichotomy between these two categories of music: namely, the islanders' capacity to control the full chain of production. Customary music – even when it circulates from one island to another, and is thus not "local" strictly speaking – will always involve instruments and techniques that can be readily reproduced from local resources; in these conditions, it is easy for the islanders to learn new styles and enrich their inherited repertoire. By contrast, music of European origin often implies the use of materials (metal, plastic…) and foreign instruments that can be harder to recreate locally.

Taking on the perceptions of the musicians themselves, the present anthology will focus on the category of music styles described as local or customary. Due to space limitations, it does not include church hymns, *string bands*, or reggae songs, all of which would warrant CDs of their own.

In spite of the watertight categories present in popular representations, subtle influences can sometimes be unveiled between styles. For example, in recording ⊙12, the beginnings of polyphony can be heard in the middle of a Sowahavin dance, no doubt influenced by church choirs. Also, certain forms of musical crossings can be observed in urban settings, as songs from the traditional repertoire are occasionally adapted with *string band* or reggae arrangements (Stern 2000, 2007).

Voices and gestures of the Ancestors

In Vanuatu, musical arts form not only a link between past and present, but also, by extension, between the living and the dead, between humans and spirits. This dimension will be apparent in our analysis of song poetry, in both its linguistic and stylistic aspects. But the same notion can be observed in many other aspects of the region's musical experience.

In spite of Christianization, ancestral spirits continue to play a central role in the spiritual and cultural landscape of Vanuatu (François 2013). This is especially true of musical arts, many aspects of which recall their sacred origin. The poetic language is called "language of the spirits", "language of the gods", or "language of Qet" (after the name of the mythical creator of the Banks Islands). Likewise, if a poet is in search of inspiration when writing a new composition, he will turn to the spirits: after swallowing the sap of leaves charged with magic powers, he will communicate with the spirits of ancestors, at night or during a solitary walk, and wait to be inspired with the words or the melody of a new song.

Several myths, of great literary and anthropological significance, relate how a particular dance, or a musical instrument, were long ago transmitted to men by ancestral spirits. In Pentecost, Maewo and Ambae, one hears stories of how the sawagoro dance [⊙5–8] was one day stolen from the spirits by men. In Hiw, legend has it that a child, left alone in the village by adults going off to work in their gardens, was visited regularly by a spirit who secretly taught him songs and dances in the *newēt* style [⊙38–40]. A very similar myth in Motalava explains the origin of the *nawha titi* [⊙24–29]. Other similar stories are to be heard in Gaua, Vanua Lava, or Toga, reminding us of the strong ties forever present between music and spirits.

One context in which music also formalises the bond between the living and the dead is that of secret societies (Vienne 1984, 1996). Boys of a same age group gather together, somewhere in the forest, under the aegis of a protective divinity, and learn from their elders a number of songs, dances and instruments reserved to the initiated. At the end of this period of reclusion, these

The spirit of the Urchin, *neqet* dance (Lahlap, Motalava) © AF

young men come and dance on the village ground, their heads covered with sacred headdresses or masks corresponding to their initiation rank. Whether by the shapes and colours of these headdresses, the lyrics, rhythms or choreographies, each aspect of these ceremonies remind the noninitiated of their powerful ties with the ghosts of their ancestors.

Music and graded societies

The sacred dimension is also present in the political system of chiefdom, closely linked to the world of spirits. On the three islands Pentecost-Ambae-Maewo – just as in Malakula or Ambrym, further south – the rank system still rules society today, and everyone is meant to take part in this political competition.

From his early years, a boy is introduced into the system in a small ceremony where he acquires his first grade. The higher the rank, the more the gradetaking ceremonies will be enhanced with dancing, singing and drumming. We recorded some of these rhythms in Pentecost during initiation ceremonies [⊙31–32].

If music plays such an essential role in these ceremonies, it is also because certain grades imply access to a sort of "customary right" over a specific musical rhythm. This rhythmic pattern is an integral part of the attributes specific to this grade, along with certain ornaments – such as curved pig tusks [photo p.74] – certain leaves of sacred plants, patterns of body painting, or designs on mat clothing. A fair proportion of musical forms in Vanuatu are bound by the oath of secrecy and are the exclusive property of a few men, by virtue of their privileged ties with the world of the Ancestors. Some songs, dances, instruments, rhythms or melodies are therefore inaccessible to children or to women, or to any other person who has not acquired the relevant rights.

In sum, the people of Vanuatu strongly associate their heritage music with the ancient world of "custom" – albeit one that is constantly reinvented through encounters and creations. This link with the ancient world takes various forms, which we will now describe. To begin with, material techniques perpetuate the exclusive use of natural materials, as much for making the instruments themselves as for the dance costumes and masks made for special occasions. In addition, the link between traditional music and olden times appears in the poetic form of the songs – an archaic, cryptic language, constantly riddled with nostalgic references to the dream world of yesteryear.

Instruments

All instruments used in traditional music come from the natural environment surrounding the musicians: the forest or the sea.

The ocean supplies the conch shell, which is blown to hail crowds or send out a signal. Also, the islanders of Ureparapara sometimes create ankle rattles using the spines of pencil sea urchins. Apart from these rare examples, almost all other instruments used in traditional music are of vegetal origin.

Three types of instrument can be differentiated. Firstly, musical instruments proper, the use of which is codified, and which are played to accompany singing or dancing. Secondly, various objects which are not instruments, yet are occasionally exploited for their sound properties, for personal entertainment, independently of any sung or danced performance. Lastly, we will see that certain instruments have paramusical, semiotic or mimetic functions.

Following the Hornbostel–Sachs classification of musical instruments, we will distinguish between idiophones (by far the most common), chordophones, aerophones and membranophones.

Idiophones

The percussion board

An idiophone widely used in Vanuatu, especially in the northern islands, is the percussion board. A pit, approximately 50 cm in diameter and 20 cm deep, is dug out of the ground, and will serve as a resonator; a fairly massive, flattish slab of wood is placed over it. Traditionally, this slab was cut out of a broad, flat buttress root from certain trees; nowadays, it can be made of almost any wooden plank.

Between three and twelve musicians stand around the percussion board. Each one holds one or two sticks which are light in weight, measure from 3 to 6 feet long, and are made out of bamboo or wood; sometimes the paddle of a canoe does the job. As the dancing begins, the musicians hit the board in rhythm, producing muffled sounds. The group remains synchronised by following a leader, who decides how the rhythm should progress, and when it's time to stop.

In the Banks Islands, the percussion board is the central piece of musical moments – quite literally in fact, since it is placed in the middle of the village clearing, and forms the central point around which the circles of musicians and dancers evolve. A key element

The percussion board *tiyit rërë* (Hiw, Torres) © AF

of the orchestra (called *nawha* in the language of Motalava), this instrument accompanies village dances [⊙14–16] or *titi* sung poems [⊙25–29]. In the Torres Islands, the percussion board supplies the leading ostinato of *newēt* songs [⊙38–40].

The name of the instrument differs considerably from one language to another: *ne tiyit rērē* (literally "tree root") in Hiw; *ne vën mēlepup* ("thick slab") in Lo-Toga of the Torres Islands; *ntaqap* in Löyöp of Ureparapara; *naqyēñ malbuy* ("thick club") in Mwotlap of Motalava; *lalöbur* in Vurës of Vanua Lava; *diov* in Dorig of Gaua; *mēpli ra* in Lakon, and so on.

The languages also have names for the sticks used to beat the board (generally the same term as "bamboo", even if other wood is used), as well as technical terms for specific actions associated with this instrument. For instance, the person leading a group of percussionists, followed by the others, has a special name (in Mwotlap: *avus*, in Dorig: *rañkrēbō*). Each language has at least one verb for striking the board (*hër* in Lo-Toga, *didi* in Mwotlap, etc.) – often the same verb as the cookery term "to pound". The Hiw language has no less than four verbs – two synonyms (*soř* and *yop*) for the general meaning, and two more specific terms belonging to the *newēt* genre: *puye* "strike the board marking an accent every two beats" and *řug* "strike the board marking three accents every four beats". The precision of these technical terms illustrates, if need be, the local existence of a local "musical theory" (see Zemp 1979).

Large slit wooden gong

By far the most imposing idiophone, both in terms of its dimensions and its social prestige, is a large wooden drum, hollowed out from a tree trunk, and slit lengthwise.

A similar type of carved drum is found in the central islands of Vanuatu, where it is played in an upright position; its celebrity has made it a national emblem. However, in the Banks Islands, as well as in Maewo, Ambae and the north-central areas of Pentecost, the same drum is presented horizontally, laid directly on the ground.

The large drum is often played by several musicians, producing a polyrhythm. Throughout most of the archipelago, it comes in a group with a number of other drums (Crowe 1996), each played by a single musician. In the Banks Islands, by contrast, several musicians beat the same drum – which alone suffices to produce a polyrhythm.

In the islands of Motalava and Gaua, this heavy hollowed tree trunk measures about 5 feet long for a diameter of 18 inches. Placed on the ground, it is played by three seated musicians [photo at the top of p.74]. The man in the middle hits the centre of the drum with thick coconut palm petioles, producing the bass (*bōl* in the Mwotlap language

Slit gong *nokoy* (Motalava) © AF

of Motalava, *tēn* in Lakon); the two drummers each side of him play with hard, lightweight sticks, producing a higher and more powerful sound (*beleg* in Mwotlap, *vuh* in Lakon). The pattern is thus polyrhythmic, with each musician striking a different ostinato.

In the islands of Pentecost, Ambae and Maewo the slit gong has preserved its original tie with graded societies, an institution still very much alive today. Among the attributes associated with certain grades are precisely certain drumming rhythms: these are always played on a group of several wooden drums of varying sizes [photo below]. In the

Grade-taking ceremony in Bunlap (South Pentecost) © MS

Banks Islands, the instrument has become a rare object, but it is brought out on important occasions. As an example, the *nokoy* in Motalava was played in December 1997 at the wedding of the Anglican bishop's son [⊙33–34].

Unlike the percussion board, the name given to the large slit gong is very much the same in most of the northern languages: Hiw *ne kōr̄*, Löyöp *nkoy*, Mwotlap *nokoy*, Lemerig *kër*, Mwesen *wokor*, Mota *kore*, Dorig *wakor duñ*, Lakon *kee*, etc.

Small slit drums

Much more common is the individual slit drum. It measures between 8 and 31 inches, and is made either of bamboo [photo] or of carved wood [photo p.104].

When light enough, the drum is held in one hand by the musician, who strikes it with a stick held in the other hand [photo p.94]. At other times, the drum is played using two sticks, in which case it is stabilised in various ways: placed on the ground and kept in position with the feet; held by a second person; or supported above the ground vertically. This widely used drum instrument can be heard in many of our recordings: ⊙4, ⊙11–16; ⊙25–29, ⊙36–40.

This little slit drum always has its own name in the languages of northern Vanuatu, to differentiate it from its big brother, the large wooden slit drum. For example, the Lakon language of west Gaua calls the large drum

Bamboo slit drum (Motalava) © AF

kee, and the little one *qalē laklake* (literally "bamboo internode for dancing").

Stamping tubes

Generally, the percussion board is struck with bamboos: in many languages, the long percussion tubes are indeed simply called "bamboos". However, they are sometimes replaced by simple wooden sticks, since the part that vibrates is the struck board.

In the absence of a board, the vibrating element is the tube itself as it strikes the ground. In this case, the instrument is necessarily made of bamboo; it is known as a bamboo stamping tube – a common enough instrument in Oceania, particularly in New Caledonia and the Solomon Islands. In the small island of Merelava, bamboo stamping tubes are played in a special genre

Stamping tubes for *nombo* dance (Merelava) © MS

called *nombo* ("bamboo" in the local language). Six women, squatting or sitting in a circle, hold a short bamboo tube in each hand [photo], and strike the ground while they sing [⊙11]. Another type exists in Pentecost. Longer, and played in larger numbers than in Merelava, these bamboos produce the bass sounds during certain performances – as in the *sowahavin* ⊙12.

Other bamboo idiophones

Further south in Pentecost, this providential plant is put to musical use in quite original ways.

Bamboo slit clappers

These are bamboos measuring roughly 3 feet in length, in which the shaft has been slit on all sides. Dancers, two by two, clank the split half of their instruments together, as if fighting with weapons.

Bundle bamboo drum

Another musical use of this plant in Pentecost consists in taking several 6-feet-long bamboos, and tying them together into a large bundle. The resulting instrument is maintained above ground by two men standing at each extremity, while four musicians – two on each side – strike it with wooden sticks. The particular sound of this instrument, which can be heard in ⊙32, mingles the concussion of sticks on the bamboos with that of the bamboos together.

Rattles

Known throughout the Vanuatu archipelago and beyond, rattles are made from the fruit of a specific plant: *Pangium edule*, a kind of nut whose shell is emptied and dried in the sun, before being threaded in bunches. Unlike other instruments, rattles are normally played by the dancers rather than by the musicians: attached to their ankles, the bunch of dried nutshells rattles together with each step. These ankle rattles are used in most men's dances in the islands of Pentecost-Ambae-Maewo [⊙13], as well as in the women's dance *sowahavin* [⊙4, ⊙12]. They are widely used in the Banks islands, especially in masked dancing performed by young initiates – whether the young men's dance called *utmaŋ* in Merelava [⊙36] or the spectacular *neqet* dance [photo] in Motalava [⊙37]. In all these dances, the concussion of the dried nuts together accompanies the sharp striking of the small slit drums and the voices of the soloist singers, in a very characteristic musical soundscape.

Ankle rattles for *neqet* dance (Lahlap, Motalava) © AF

A rarer use of these same rattles is done by filling them into a linen bag, which is then shaken to produce a sound similar to that of maracas. This type of rattle bag can be heard on Motalava, as part of the *nawha titi* orchestra [⊙24–25; 27; 29]. This is the only example of rattles being part of a group of instruments played by musicians.
The name for rattles in the different languages is quite similar: Hiw ne *veřak,* Löyöp *nvayañ*, Mwotlap *nowopyak*, Vurës *wōviriak*, Lakon *väräk*, Maewo *varaĝe,* Raga *vaĝe*, etc. all stem from the same radical **vaRage*, referring to the plant from which the instrument is made.

Chordophones
Until now, no traditional chordophone had ever been observed in Vanuatu – except for a very rare musical bow observed by the ethnologist Speiser around 1910 in Ambrym. While it was believed to have disappeared completely, our investigations were able to prove the instrument was still in use in Ambrym. Better, we discovered the existence of a similar but larger musical bow [photo p.107], in the island of Hiw in the far north of the archipelago [⊙22]. The musician, a man of 86 named Edward Pilis, is aware that he is the last islander to know how to make and play this instrument – one that is fast disappearing – in Vanuatu.
The scarcity of chordophones in customary music vividly contrasts with their everyday use in repertoires of modern-day musical compositions. Indeed, church "chorus" songs, and of course *string band* music, widely use guitars, ukuleles or the "bush bass" (a kind of single-stringed tea-chest bass). In all the islands we visited, self-identified "kastom" music has remained mostly impervious to this strong presence of chordophones in popular modern music. The musical bow is therefore the only chordophone to appear in this album.

Aerophones
Aerophones are also rarely seen these days in Vanuatu. Among what are locally considered "proper" instruments, the only aerophones found in the region were bamboo flutes of various forms, described in great detail by Ammann (2012). These flutes are mentioned essentially in the writings of the first ethnologists at the beginning of the 20th century (Speiser 1923). A few long flutes were also observed in the Pentecost island in the 1970s (Crowe 1996, Huffmann 1996). Although one can still find Ambrym flutes in tourist shops in town – all more or less the same, a long, straight or oblique notched-end flute with two finger holes – this instrument has almost stopped being used in the northern part of the archipelago. It is said that a man plays it in secret, in the middle of Maewo. Despite this virtual extinction, many people recall the former existence of bamboo flutes of various shapes

in the different islands – not only in Tanna or Ambrym, where they are still played to this day, but also in the Pentecost-Ambae-Maewo area. Edgar Hinge, one of the last men capable of making flutes in Pentecost, can make eight different types. In the olden days, he explains that each type of flute had its specific repertoire: one for love songs, one for songs of praise, another for witchcraft songs ...
Our investigations in the Torres islands brought back memories of panpipes, an instrument also widespread in the neighbouring Solomon Islands (Zemp 1994), but rarely mentioned in northern Vanuatu (cf. Ammann 2012). Here again, this small bamboo panpipe only exists in stories, or in the accounts of a few people who remember seeing one several decades ago. However,

Esta Rotili blowing a *gove* whistle (Maewo) © MS

the fact that specific local names for panpipes exist (*tokak* in the language of Hiw; *n'o ravtepōr* in Lo-Toga, literally "frail bamboo") tends to confirm their existence in the past.
The island of Maewo has a unique type of whistle, called *gove*. Made from bamboo and measuring approximately 6 inches [photo], each whistle only plays a single note. Performing a melody thus requires a set of whistles played by two groups of musicians responding to each other: the first group whistles and sings in alternation, and the other group responds by a whistle only. The musicians are either children [⊙17] or women [⊙30], for reasons we will see later. This type of performance resorts to several musical techniques simultaneously: firstly, a hocket – as the two groups alternate short-lived sound effects, thereby forming a constant melodic line; secondly, an ostinato – defined by the repetition of a particular melodic-rhythmic pattern; thirdly, an alternation between blowing into the instrument and singing on a syllable.
Finally, other aerophones exist in Vanuatu, but are marginal and not considered by practitioners as true musical instruments. Thus, the sea conch is known throughout the archipelago, but never accompanies singing or dancing: it only has a signalling function. Also, although the small coconut leaf bullroarer [⊙35] qualifies as an aerophone, it is merely considered as a child's toy, devoid of the prestige of a true instru-

ment. Conversely, it is possible that larger bullroarers exist in the region, but if this is so, they are considered secret instruments, reserved to the initiated – and cannot be further commented on here.

Membranophones

Membrane instruments are also extremely rare in Vanuatu. We did, however, observe two specimens during our research.

First, the island of Maewo still uses a headed drum, but its manufacture is only known to a handful of individuals. This drum is called *tagūra*, or "sago tree", after the name of the tree from which it is made. This instrument is taboo, and used for an exceptional ceremony, *Gwatu ta Barugu,* after which it must be destroyed.

The northern part of the Banks islands also uses a headed drum made out of a sago tree. Once the pulp has been hollowed out from its trunk, one obtains a tubular shape of about 5 feet long and 16 inches in diameter. One end is covered with plaited sago leaves, stretched taut and fixed in several layers, covered in turn with a pandanus mat. The drum is planted in the soil, and played about 3 feet above the ground.

This drum has a restricted use, but is played in conjunction with other instruments, exclusively as part of a specific musical ensemble called *titi* [p.108]. Striking this drum regularly with the fist or palm produces the bass line, along with the percussion board [⊙24–25; 27; 29]. In the three islands where it is known, the instrument is literally named "slamming of the Spirits" (*natmat-woh* in Mwotlap, *ntamat-wos* in Löyöp, *timiat-wos* in Vurës, *'ama-wos* in Vera'a and Lemerig), thus assigning a supernatural origin to the muffled echoes of this drum.

The dancers' bodies

Among sound-producing devices, one can also mention the clapping of hands and feet, the vibrations of which contribute to

The *natmat-woh* single-headed drum (Motalava) © AF

the soundscape during performances. This dimension is particularly well represented in live recordings, which are the focus of this album: the shouts and gestures of the dancers are just as essential as the musicians' performance itself.

Several recordings of dancing feature the sound of footsteps. These stand out particularly during a cappella singing: thus, the *leng* style in Gaua [⊙3], performed without any instrument, emphasises the dancers' rhythmic steps [photo p.99]. On other occasions, dancers accentuate their steps with ankle rattles, like in *sowahavin* in Pentecost [⊙4] or the *neqet* in Motalava [⊙37].

But it is the *sawagoro* style [⊙5–6, ⊙8] that shows the musical potential of the human body at its best. Whether it is called *sawagoro* or *sawako*, this repertoire belonging to the Pentecost-Ambae-Maewo islands is characterised by the absence of any musical instrument apart from the human voice, and the hands and feet of the dancers. While the feet stamp on the ground on the beat, hands clap on the offbeat, altogether forming a relatively rich collective instrument.

Sounds for entertainment

Vanuatu islanders have only partially mastered their environment, and still see it as ground for exploration. During a hunt in the forest, an expedition into the bush gardens, or a fishing expedition, thousands of sounds can be heard – echoes of the waves, cries of the lorikeets, rustling in the leaves... Such sound sensations are often evoked, as we will see, in song poetry. In such a context, children and adults will naturally find around them excuses to play sound games.

The women on the west coast of Gaua, in the village of Jōlap, play water games [⊙2]. A group of five or six women stand in line or in a circle in the sea or the mouth of the river, with water up to their waist [photo p.98]. At the leader's signal, they slap the surface of the water simultaneously or alternately – to a rhythm either fast and light, or heavy and slow.

Other sound games are present in this album, most of which use leaves or plants. Sometimes, a dried leaf is simply slapped on to a hand [⊙20]. In Merelava, a coastal shrub provides walkers with a leaf that one splits in two and vibrates between the lips, like a kazoo [⊙10]. In Motalava, children love to make whistles or bird calls from a young coconut leaf. In Gaua, the same leaf turns into a Jew's harp [⊙1]: its stem is vibrated against the mouth, which serves as a resonator [photo next page] – following the same principle as the musical bow [⊙22]. In other examples, the leaf becomes a bullroarer that is swirled up in the air [⊙35].

In spite of their sometimes bewitching beauty, these instruments are only given secondary status by the performers themselves.

They are considered mere sound games, devoid of the prestige of "true" instruments.

Signalling function

In addition to their musical value, certain instruments sometimes have a symbolic or signalling function. In Maewo, *gove* whistles act as signals during men's initiation periods. When a group of non-initiated – whether children [⊙17] or women [⊙30] – walk through the forest, they are likely to approach the sacred initiation enclosure, the exact location of which is unknown to them. The non-initiated blow their whistles in order to signal their presence to the hidden men, and make sure they remain in hiding.

A similar signalling function is played by the sea conch (*Charonia tritonis*). It is blown to signal an important event to the population – for example, to gather together an entire village to a celebration or prayer, or announce the death of an important chief. Formerly, this latter role was also fulfilled by the large slit gong, the powerful sound of which was exploited to spread such news to a whole region. Such practice appears still to be in use in Pentecost, Ambae, Maewo and Malakula (Ammann 2012), and remains as a remembrance on the west coast of Gaua. Some people in the village of Jōlap report that a specific drummed rhythm would mimic the intonation of the sentence *Too maranaga ēn māt!* "The chief is dead!" This process recalls the "drum language" observed in certain societies of Central Africa (Arom & Cloarec-Heiss 1976) or of the Solomon Islands (Zemp & Kaufmann 1969).

Susi Rosur playing the Jew's harp (Jōlap, Gaua) © MS

Mimetic function

The death of an important person sometimes brings about quite a different type of sound. In the southern Torres islands, this kind of event, called *tëmrega*, happens five days after the death of the person; it takes the form of a strange and impressive sound phenomenon, which people describe as the "voices of the Dead". While this sacred sound can be heard by anyone, its secrets are known only to male initiates.

The island of Merelava, in the southern Banks, has a similar funeral ceremony, called *newertiang* "Cries of the Spirits" [⊙41]. Although we were authorised to record the ceremony, we respected the taboo surrounding it and therefore did not explore the exact nature of the instruments used. All we know is that the sound phenomenon produced is a series of overlapping layers of sounds, using either aerophones or rubbed idiophones (cf. Codrington 1891:79). The result is a particularly awe-inspiring soundscape, seemingly coming straight from the world of the Dead.

Musical forms

Rhythms and melodies

Most of the instruments we have seen do not lend themselves to melodic variations: whether one considers percussion instruments, headed drums, rattles, whistles or hand clapping, their musical contribution is often limited to a single pitch. Their value lies in their particular timbre, as well as their high potential in terms of rhythmic patterns.

The family of *sawagoro* dances is characterised by the absence of instruments per se, and by an original rhythmic alternation: foot tapping on the beat, handclapping offbeat [⊙5–6, ⊙8].

Percussion groups are often polyrhythmic. Thus, slit drums played in Pentecost, Ambae and Maewo produce multi-part ostinatos; in the Banks islands, this polyrhythm is performed using a single drum [⊙33–34]. The *titi* orchestra [⊙25] also combines distinct rhythms of several instruments: percussion boards, slit drums, headed drums, and rattles.

In the absence of a melodic instrument such as finger-hole flutes, the melody is generally provided solely by the singing.

Songs

While certain pieces are purely instrumental, most include singing. Some genres, such as lullabies [⊙18, ⊙23], nursery rhymes [⊙19, ⊙21] or songs of praise, are generally performed a cappella. But more frequently, a song is meant to take part in an instrumental performance, generally in association with dancing. While they are designed for such a musical performance, it also happens that the same songs are performed unaccompanied [⊙26, 28], either during learning sessions or at other leisure moments.

Some songs are sung by a single person – either an individual, or a soloist in a group. On other occasions, singing may take the form of a choir, where a whole group – often coinciding with the musicians or dancers – sings the same poem simultaneously. Polyphony is quite rare, and the main technique in use is to sing in unison (homophony). This is particularly the case for a "song of praise": on the day of the

inauguration ceremony that finally reveals it to the dignitary who commissioned it, the song is sung a cappella by a choir of about thirty people (Wittersheim 2009).
But the most frequent form in northern Vanuatu is no doubt the responsorial form, involving an alternation between a soloist singer and a choir. This can be observed with the *leng* of Gaua [⊙3], the *sowahavin* [⊙4, 12] and the *sawagoro* of Pentecost, or the *nawha titi* songs of Motalava [⊙25, 27, 29], among others.
The *newēt* style practiced in the Torres Islands [⊙38–40] uses a specific singing technique, a kind of vocal "hocket" that is reminiscent of the technique we described earlier for the gove whistles of Maewo [⊙17, 30]. When singing a *newēt* song, two groups sing and alternately respond to each other: *"O ho, Ohe o – O ho, Ohe o"*... Simultaneously, and with a much lower voice, a soloist bursts into a secret song, barely audible. This is how the melody sung by the *newēt* soloist ends up being muffled by the musicians' panting cries [⊙40] – the seeds of polyphony, rarely found in this region.
Finally, a very unusual technique is the one found with *utmag* dances of Merelava [⊙36] and *neqet* of Motalava [⊙37]. Because knowledge of these masked dances is reserved solely to men belonging to secret societies, non-initiated spectators are strictly forbidden from hearing the words of the songs. These words do exist, but because of their taboo nature, they cannot be uttered out loud. Instead, the song is mentally sung by the dancers, who use it as an aid to synchronise their silent choreography.

Peretin Wokmagëne singing the *newēt* (Lo, Torres) © AF

Scales and melody
Like in many other musical traditions in the world, melodies of Vanuatu do not have an absolute pitch. What the musicologist observes is the relationship between the different sounds, especially the intervals. If we analyse our recordings, we find a large diversity of melodies, despite a small number of notes and intervals. This diversity can largely be accounted for by the high number of scales used.
All the music we have analysed is based on an anhemitonic pentatonic system, which in principle consists of a five-degree scale without semitone interval [⊙5–7, ⊙13, ⊙21]. In fact, the internal structure of a pentatonic scale can be made more complex – by juxtaposing scales, or adding passing notes – or indeed more simple, if certain degrees are omitted. Also, the scale can include semitones through the addition of ornaments, or the substitution of degrees. Overall, the scalar system of Vanuatu shows an impressive wealth of melodic scales, going from chains of thirds [⊙8, ⊙19] to hemitonic scales in which the semitone interval forms integral part of the melodic structure [⊙10–11, ⊙25]. As for intervals, they are mostly conjunct within their particular scale. For example, in a scale such as C–D–E–G–A, the E–G interval is a conjunct interval, because F does not exist in the scale used. The wide range of possibilities accounts for the large number of combinations and melodies observed.

About musical genres
The islands of Vanuatu have always sustained economic, cultural and matrimonial relations with each other. They form entangled social networks through which a number of linguistic, mythological and musical forms have been exchanged over the generations, and are today found in several islands. With regard to music, one observes the recurrence, for example, of certain specific songs, certain melodies, passed on from village to village and from island to island, with enough nuances in their detail for them to acquire local anchorage. It is not only individual pieces that are shared, but sometimes entire musical genres, with all their formal complexity.
Each genre combines a specific ensemble of instruments with a precise repertoire of rhythms and melodies. Musical genres are distinct from poetic genres, which are determined by the form of the text itself. However, ties do exist between the two genre systems. For example, on the west coast of Gaua, a poem of the *sārsērbō* genre is normally associated with the musical genre called *leng*. A given musical genre will be associated with certain dance steps, and with certain categories of performers (men, women, young initiates...). Thus the *leng* genre is a women's dance, played especially at weddings, and which involves a soloist, a crier and a group of female dancers [⊙3].
Each community has a repertoire of around

fifteen distinct musical genres. Those on Motalava, for example, include: *noyongyep* [⊙14–15], *namapto* [⊙16], *nalangvēn*, *nawha titi* [⊙24–29], *turbal* [⊙33–34], *namag*, *nemē*, *neqet* [⊙37]... Most of these are also to be found in the other islands of the Banks group, under slightly different names and forms. The further one travels from that area – either north or south, within Vanuatu – the more different the repertoires.

The selection presented in this album emphasises the diversity of musical genres, from both a geographical and aesthetic standpoint. We will discover the *newēt* songs of the Torres islands; the genres *leng*, *nombo, newertiang, mag, qat, noyongyep, namapto, turbal*, as well as the *titi* songs of the Banks islands; and further south, the *sawagoro*, *sowahavin, ka, baraté, gove, bilbilan*, and *mantani* genres in the province of PENAMA. These different styles will be presented in detail in the description of each piece, at the end of the booklet.

Only those genres with a precise name and specific rules are cited here. But this album also includes other musical activities locally endowed with lower prestige, and lacking a specific name or status: this is particularly the case of sound games (water games, Jew's harp, kazoo, bullroarer, musical bow), or lullabies and nursery rhymes... These styles are considered by their performers as mere personal entertainment, and lie outside the formal system of musical genres.

The art of song poetry

Songs are not just music: they are also poems. In fact, there is no poetry in Vanuatu that is not sung. The linguist in our team was able to explore a domain as yet undocumented: the oral poetry of Vanuatu.

The language of the songs

Traditional songs all present an important linguistic characteristic: they are composed in a specific, poetic language distinct from ordinary speech. This "song dialect" differs from one island to another, and does not correspond to any actual spoken language; it is rather a literary register reserved for learned poetry.

In certain areas such as Gaua or the Torres islands, the gap between songs and normal speech is only slight: it is characterised at most by the choice of a literary vocabulary, or various forms of poetic licence – just enough to provide the lyrics with a poetic flavour, but without hindering comprehension. In some islands, however, the difference is so great that the meaning of entire verses, or even of the whole song, is incomprehensible to the non-expert. This is the case in Motalava, where the texts of songs are so cryptic they are perceived as a totally distinct language.

Whether the poem is a dancing song, a lament, a verse sung in the middle of a narrative, or a children's nursery rhyme, the meaning of a song in Motalava is only

partly understood by the ordinary villager, and remains surrounded by mystery. Only a handful of men and women, among the elders and the most knowledgeable, are capable of deciphering a poem in full. As for the highest degree of knowledge, namely the ability to compose a song in this poetic register, this is reserved to the very few poets of the island. They alone, as fledgling poets, were handed down from their elders, over many years of instruction, the very special art of composing in the language of poetry.

For a poet to master the language of songs requires a sound linguistic erudition and a substantial literary culture, enabling him to compose the most appropriate turns of phrase and metaphors. The artist who composes the poem is also the one who chooses the melody: a good poet therefore needs to know the wide range of genres that form his tradition's repertoire.

This talent is seen as a gift of the Spirits, a true magic power (*mana*) capable of providing artistic inspiration and accomplishment. It is a complex knowledge, transmitted from generation to generation by the master poet to the disciple of his choice. This transmission takes place during secret encounters, which associate actual tuition with magic rituals. Similar forms of instruction are sometimes carried out among secret societies, reserved exclusively for male initiates. It is said of a new poet that

Tatley Sekson during the launching of a song of praise (Toglag, Motalava) © AF

he has "anointed his body with poetic talent", and that he is now "clairvoyant in song language".

A journey into time and space

The names given to this song register recall its links with the universe of myth: it is referred to as "the language of the past", "the language of the Spirits", or "the language of Qet" – after the name of the mythical semi-god of the Banks islands who created the world. The very special words of song poetry are thus considered a distant

emanation of the founding Ancestors, the primeval gods. This link with the world of Spirits is not only perceptible in the themes of the songs, but also in the actual form of the words. The poetic language shows a pronounced taste for ancient times, using archaic turns of phrase and grammar, ancient vocabulary or even consonants that have long disappeared from modern-day conversation, yet still subsist in songs. Lyrics also mingle words from neighbouring languages. This is how a single song can harbour words that hail from various islands in the archipelago – in much the same way as Homer's epics, whose verses would always interweave various Greek dialects.

As they combine sounds from the past with words borrowed from neighbouring islands, the poetic registers of northern Vanuatu reveal the two main facets of their beauty: a taste for archaism as well as for exoticism. This twofold journey into time and space constitutes a complete rupture between poetic style and everyday prose – a rupture conducive to an aesthetic reverie.

The lyrics of songs are often cryptic even to the singers themselves, and are only revealed after a thorough exploration into their meaning. In addition to the rarity of the words, the opacity of poems also lies in some unusual metaphors and other literary tropes, which most younger speakers will find enigmatic. But once unveiled, the hidden meaning of songs opens up a whole new universe.

A universe of poetry

As much for its phrasing as for its metaphors, its vocabulary as much as its themes, song poetry has a beauty of its own, distinct both from prose narratives (myths, tales, legends) and from modern "*string band*" songs, which are associated with the topics, languages and instruments. Even though the styles and themes of various song genres display internal diversity, it remains possible to define some sort of aesthetic unity shared across the whole range of styles. A children's nursery rhyme, an old song of war, an ode in honour of a great chief, or a love poem turned into a dance song – despite their many differences, all these literary genres appear to entertain the same relationship to time and space, the same underlying perception of the world.

If one had to illustrate the aesthetics of Vanuatu's song poetry in a few words, one could think of three essential ingredients: nostalgia for yesteryear and for the nobility of the Forefathers; fascination for natural forces and the sensations they provoke; sensitivity to heartfelt emotions.

Nostalgia of a lost world

Song poetry constantly endeavours to transfigure the prosaic reality of worldly matters – those before our eyes – into a dreamlike, legendary universe clouded in mystery, where fantasy wanders freely. Thus in poems, human characters often "fly" (*sal*)

rather than walk. Their bodily presence is sometimes little more than a "voice" that "resounds".

Very often, this transfiguration of reality through poetry calls upon references from the past. The characters encountered in the universe of songs do not resemble the earthly men of today. Rather, they constitute a fantasy version of ourselves, dreamlike shadows evolving in an ancient world, both utopian and legendary. They appear to be naked, or simply clad with leaves. They only eat and drink the plants of olden times – yam, taro, kava. Living off of their gardens, hunting and fishing, they sustain in a wonderland, in which the only social structure is that of chiefdoms of times gone by, and the only known deities are mythological heroes or ancestral spirits.

A great number of songs feature chiefs from the past, endowed with magical powers and sacred leaves, their biceps adorned with prestigious armlets made from pigs' tusks. This ancient world is in fact coherent with the archaistic aspects of the poetic language itself, whether through its sonorities or its literary vocabulary. As an example, the words "man" and "woman", too pedestrian, are replaced in songs by rare, ancient terms, referring originally to high-ranked men (*wegut*) and women (*mōter*) – as if all men were "knights" and all women "dames". Similarly, houses become "palaces" (*gemel*), and wealth is measured in pigs, mats, or strings of shellmoney.

The following song, dedicated by the poet to the important man who commissioned him to compose it, omits none of the Great Man's decorum from ancient times: the ivory armlets of curved pig tusks, symbol of great prestige and wealth, so numerous that they clank together; the long strings of money made of seashells; or the stone platform from where high chiefs would stand before the crowd:

There you stand hearkening
clanking your power
clanking your armlets
clanking the stones of your platform
Your voice has found its way to me
the crowd is gathered around you
my singing will bring you to the sacred money
[Song of praise, Motalava]

Here the song plays the role of a monument – which Mwotlap poets describe with the term *namawlōn* "memorial". The man who commissioned it goes down in posterity with this commemorative song, like a Florentine prince earning fame from a heroic portrait.

Fascination for nature

Many poems glorify the natural elements, with extra fervour in face of nature unleashed. Torrential rain, tidal waves, cyclones, erupting volcanoes, are themes par excellence for songs.

Some of these literary depictions recall actual historic events, witnessed by the poet himself. For example, the poem *Hurricane*, heard in Gaua in 2003, was reportedly composed after the "Wendy" typhoon that hit the region in 1972 [⊙3]. Another example, the song *Earth tremble*, which we transcribed in 2007 in Hiw, relates a memorable earthquake that occurred in 1997:

Dark was the night on the island
Lying I was upon my bed
From afar I could feel the shaking of the ground
shaking afar on the island
shaking all around the island (…)
[*Earth tremble, newēt*, Hiw]

In this society of oral tradition, song poetry plays, once again, the role of a memorial. Without these songs, the recollection of such memorable events would hardly be passed on to future generations.
At other times, songs celebrate the elements as such, like a timeless ode to Nature's powers.

I am lying and listening
hearing sounds all around
The breakers keep roaring
upon the western cape
They shatter on the reef
and pull back to the deep
And as they slam the cliffs and pound
their echo resounds all over the land
[*The roaring breakers*, Motalava]

This celebration of Nature is typical of the poetic genre called "titi" [see p.108]. These short poems, of only a few lines, feature the force and beauty of the elements in a powerful, concise manner – as in the short song Waterfall:

Cascade and vapours of fire
o e a e o e — o e o a e a e
Geyser gushing out of the volcano
O e o e, a e o e o e — ooo
[*Waterfall, titi* song, Motalava]


The great waterfall of Gaua © AF

The reader is here referred to the poems *Rain* [⊙25], or *Volcano* [⊙29] below. Several of these poems feature the same verbal compound *sol duñ*, literally "flow bang" in the poetic language. This expression has no equivalent in the spoken language, but forms a poetic topos in the song language of Motalava: it captures the contrast between the normality of a running liquid (*sol* "flow"), and the surprise caused by the sound of a sudden shock (*duñ* "bang"). For example, in the poem *The roaring breakers* cited above, *sol duñ* conveys the force of the waves shattering loudly onto the reef. In *Volcano* [⊙29], the same term evokes the lava "flowing" and "blasting" as it suddenly cools off in contact with the sea. Elsewhere, the compound *sol duñ* renders the force of torrential rain [⊙25], or the power of a huge cascade. This is just an example, among many, of the way the poetic tradition of northern Vanuatu can make the most of a specific theme or motif, adapting it from one text to another, based on a verbal compound that only exists in song lyrics.
Reference to Nature is made not only to describe its most dramatic aspects – earthquakes, eruptions, floods – but also for its more subtle charms. The *titi* poem *Liana Flower* [⊙27] glorifies a flower's perfume. And numerous songs are dedicated to birds – swallow, heron, albatross…; see the poems *Rail bird* [⊙16]; *The Tattlers* [⊙18]; *Scrubfowl* [⊙28].

From sensation to emotion
Nature's charms and powers are not so much mentioned for themselves as for the sensations – visual, auditory, olfactory or tactile – they induce. Songs teem with sensory impressions: the reflection of the morning sun in a raindrop, an intoxicating smell, a shaking ground, a heavy stone, or the sounds of slapping, rumbling, thundering, rustling in the bushes. These physical sensations are prone to turn into emotions. This is when a poem, often expressed in the first person singular, becomes lyrical, centred around the poet's own feelings.
The *Hurricane song* [see the text of the track ⊙3] interweaves the depiction of the hurricane itself with its impact upon the soul's feelings – particularly, the distress in face of the damage caused by the disaster.
In the Torres islands, people still remember the violent conflicts that used to oppose villages just a few generations ago, as well as the heavy tribute they would inflict on families. This *newēt* song from Toga island recalls the days, at the end of the 19th century, when the villagers of Liqal waged war upon the people of Litew. The poem compares the violence of warfare to the force of an earthquake, but also has the lyric tone of an elegy to the dead:

It was like an earthquake
we were all tremulous
they defied us and up we rose
(…) O youngsters o
proud cockerels now departed
deceased all over the country
dead at the foot of mount Ghuto
dead on the top of mount Litogh
dead all the way to Lēmoro
all dead, all vanished forever!
(…) There's only one echo
it's the sound of sorrow
Wō wē a ē
Poisoned arrows fly away with the Dead

[*A war threnody, newēt*, Toga, Torres]

In a more intimate style, a poem from Gaua mourns the demise of a loved mother. The ocean here becomes a metaphor for death:

And here I stare at the ocean
The tide's pulling into the bay
Mother the sea lies between us
You will be remembered
only through my singing

[*Elegy for a mother, leng*, Gaua]

Certain sentimental poems are said to be autobiographical – even when the identity of their original author has fallen into oblivion. This is the case, for example, of this lament for an unhappy love:

I feel so lonely; I am the odd one out
alone I am, forlorn I am
hadn't I come here to meet you?
(…) but then darling you lied to me
about the gifts you would give me
(…) Now with these words I'm cursing you
straight through to your heart
as long as you refuse
to spend the night with me

[*The missed rendezvous*, Motalava]

At times proud, at times nostalgic, admiring or sad, or enthralled by an overwhelming power, the original poets survive through the emotions of their lyrics. And when their names have been forgotten over time, they become present again, as it were, through the voices of those who sing their songs today.
All in all, the three constituent dimensions of songs plough the same furrow. In its multiple forms, song poetry relentlessly praises the enchantment of a timeless, fantasy world, evading the hazards and trivialities of present-day uncertainty. A few syllables pronounced in the song language, and suddenly we find our minds transported into a mythical golden age, in which the nobility and elegance of the Forefathers is only equalled by the beauty of Nature's elements and the force of sentiments. Poetry brings about the delight of wandering, eyes closed, in such an ideal world, aware of every sensation and heartbeat. This sort of poetry is truly romantic.

A musical journey

The 41 pieces presented in this record aim to recreate the various musical atmospheres experienced by Vanuatu people in their lives. Care has been taken to present these pieces in a specific order, following an aesthetic and musical journey that imitates the passage from one place to another in the course of a lifetime.
The first two pieces outline a landscape. We walk through the forest to the sound of a solitary Jew's harp, to which a distant owl hoots in response [⊙1]. Back on the shore, at the river's mouth, the women from Jōlap start smacking the water with their hands [⊙2] as a recreation.

Celebration dances

Now back into the village, they start singing the *song of the Hurricane*, beating the ground with their footsteps. This marks the beginning of village festivities. Whether they celebrate weddings [⊙5, ⊙7–9, ⊙14–16], end-of-mourning ceremonies [⊙6] or other festivities, these moments of singing and dancing enable the whole community to gather on the central village clearing, and together celebrate in joy. It is not a mere coincidence that the term *laklak* "dance", in the languages of the Banks islands, has the same root as the word *malaklak* "be happy, rejoice".
In accordance with the sexual division of labour that prevails in Vanuatu, these village songs and dances are often performed by groups of the same sex: women [⊙3–4, ⊙7, ⊙9, ⊙11–12], or men [⊙5–6, ⊙8, ⊙13–16]. However, the public is always mixed, and it is even common for women and children to join in certain dances by forming a second circle around the male musicians and dancers. This is especially true of the *noyongyep* and *namapto* genres in Motalava, or *sawagoro* in Pentecost, Ambae and Maewo.

Walking in the forest

Festivities are now over, and the journey goes on to a peaceful sequence [⊙17–23] as a group of children follow their mother uphill, on their way to the garden. First we hear the *gove* whistles of Maewo [⊙17]: these small, single-note bamboo flutes are played by a group of women or non-initiated youths whenever they walk through the forest during times of male initiation. The sound of their whistles is meant to signal their presence to the secluded men, whose location must remain strictly secret.
The mother needs to work the land; but first she tries to get her youngest child to sleep by singing a lullaby [⊙18, ⊙23]. Not very far off, the other children are busy playing with a leaf [⊙20], or singing nursery rhymes [⊙19, ⊙21]. An old man, resting in front of his house in the village, plays his musical bow [⊙22].

The women's dance *rurumbë* (Hiw, Torres) © AF

Titi songs: poems for dancing

The next pieces bring us back to the central area of the village, where the *nawha titi* orchestra from Motalava is starting a new performance. The songs of the *titi* musical genre are often short odes about the forces of nature and the beauty of the world – whether an ode to rain [⊙25], to the forest [⊙27], or to the power of volcanoes [⊙29]. The island of Vanua Lava claims the paternity of this musical genre, known locally as *sēwēes'i'i*; this island is represented here by two poems sung a cappella [⊙26, ⊙28].

A tribute to Great Men

The secular world of the village, with men and women of all ages, contrasts with the closed circles of important chiefs and dignitaries – those known as "Great Men", invested with superior prestige and status. The boundary between the two worlds is symbolised here by the whistles from Maewo, this time played by women [⊙30]: it is the last time they will be heard in this record, as they hand over to the imposing and almost sacred world of initiated men.

This is when the grade-taking ceremonies begin, those solemn days in which a handful of men, after displaying their riches by sacrificing a great number of pigs, are publicly invested with a higher rank among the ten or twelve that form the political scale. This rank system, sometimes referred to as suqe, is still very much alive today in central-north Vanuatu. It mobilises a lot of energy in the island of Pentecost – under the names *bolololi* in the north [⊙32], *leleutan* in the central area, *warsangul* in the south [⊙31].

In the Banks islands, this tradition has declined over the last century, and the ancient dance ceremonies survive essentially in remembrance and tales. Motalava has however kept from those olden times the custom of using the slit gong *nokoy* on great occasions, involving important people – for example when celebrating the wedding of the Anglican bishop's son [⊙33–34].

The deep growling of the Ancestors

The mention of Great Men leads naturally to the mysterious world of ancestral spirits. Half-men, half-demons, spirits are present in all aspects of traditional society (François 2013).

The ghosts of our ancestors are never far away: they live on all around us, and guide the lives of mortals. Only the initiated have access to their universe, their secrets, their language. Some men endowed with supernatural power – shamanic healers, soothsayers, sorcerers – can even interact with

A spiritual stele *dule* in the forest (Toga, Torres) © AF

them in their world (*Panoi*). These "wise men" then come back to the world of the living (*Marama*) to display their discoveries. Announced by the humming of a Jew's harp [⊙35], the final part of the album attends to the sounds of these ancestral spirits. Sometimes, they enter the dancing area, dressed in their best attire. Their strange voices, a blend of screams and deep rumbles, reach out to us from beyond the grave. The two main masked dances of the Banks islands are represented here: *mag* (in the Merelava version called *utmag* [⊙36]) and *qat* (in the Motalava version called *neqet* [⊙37]). One can hear the trampling, the jumps, and the high-pitched cries of the dead ancestors who have come to parade in public. Later, the *newēt* songs of the Torres islands bring in the hoarse voices of initiated men, powerful enough to cover the secret melody sung by the soloist [⊙38–40]. Finally, this musical journey ends with a very strange piece – the shrieking, eerie lament of the dead, who briefly come to haunt the living before disappearing again in the night [⊙41].

THE PIECES

⊙1. Jew's harp

MS – 7.9.2005 – Qtevut (Gaua)
Susi Rosur
Jew's harp

A device meant for personal entertainment, this Jew's harp is made out of a coconut leaf and its stem. A leaflet is detached from the palm and adjusted so as to measure roughly 12 cm. It is placed against the mouth, the underside of the leaf facing out, with another fine coconut leaf midrib placed over it, slightly longer than the leaflet. This stem is pinched with one finger [photo p.82] and the mouth serves as a resonator. The instrument has no name in the local language, and is simply referred to as playing with a leaf. The term *susap*, sometimes heard, is a recent borrowing from the English name Jew's harp. Here, the performer, Susi Rosur, is playing a lullaby. She modifies the shape of her mouth while mentally rehearsing the lyrics.

⊙2. Water games

AF – 17.8.2003 – Qtevut (Gaua)
Matauli Rowon, Flore Rovan, Wini Rovalēs, Sera Frenda, Seli Rovalēs, Melin Rotal
hands, water

This is a rhythmic game played by women standing in water, sea or river, up to the waist. No object is used: all the sounds produced result from the different ways hands and bare arms hit the water. Each rhythmic phrase is a combination of different gestures upon the water, each having a precise name in the Lakon language of Gaua's west coast. A hand may "caress" (*häräv*) the surface of

Water games in the river (Qtevut, Gaua) © AF

the water, "slap" it (*wes*), or "smack it sharply" (*vuh tēqēl*). A light sound may be produced by putting just two fingers into the water (*gisgis*) and a heavy sound by suddenly plunging both fists (*wej*). The leader's signal (*puow*) indicates a sequence is about to finish. A sequence may be played twice: the first time together, and the second in two staggered groups – like a canon – resulting in a two-part polyrhythm: this is the case for sequences 2 and 3 in the recording. Referred to on the west coast of Gaua as *wespang*, water games are not considered part of "real" music like other genres. According to Matauli Rowon herself, this activity is a pastime she allegedly (re)invented back in 1983, while she was washing clothes in the river. She took her inspiration from a similar practice (called *ëtëtung* in Mwerlap language) she had observed in her childhood on her native island of Merelava.

These southern Banks Islands water games have roused enthusiasm among foreign visitors. In the past few years, a group of women from Gaua and Merelava have been invited to perform not only in the capital, Port-Vila, but also in international festivals. As they enjoy more and more popularity, these water games also gain in sophistication. The style is developing, and new musical pieces are created each year. If it is to be called a "tradition", as is sometimes heard, it is one that is being (re)born before our very eyes.

CELEBRATION DANCES

⊙3. Leng: "Hurricane"

AF – 15.8.2003 – Jōlap (Gaua)
Susi Rosur + women from Jōlap
vocals, cries, whistling, feet

Throughout the Banks islands, the leng dance is associated with women. In its *nalangvēn* version from Motalava, dances are executed by women, yet the singing and instruments remain the men's domain. In Gaua, however, the *leng* event is entirely feminine, both for the singing and the dancing.
No instrument is used in the performance recorded here. A long verse, sung (*ähäh*) a cappella by a female soloist, is "supported" (*tam)* by the singing dancers, and ends with a long high-pitched cry (*puow*) made by the crier. Upon this signal (at 1'08" in the recording), the dancers begin a step called *räs*, which is typical of *leng* dances: as if running on the spot, each dancer projects her heels backwards [photo]; the heavy thud of the feet on the sand combines with the women's energetic whistling (*wasul*). This frenzied dance ends with a loud cry of joy "I yo yo yo!" before the final dispersal.
The song is a poem of the *sārsērbō* genre composed by Jonathan Wevalēs, father of the soloist Susi Rosur. It commemorates the power of the Wendy cyclone that hit the archipelago on February 3, 1972. Sung in Olrat, an ancient language almost extinct today, the poem mingles epic and elegiac elements:

A cyclone has ravaged our country
our bones are still shaking
and the sorrow
is taking hold of me for my offspring
(…) It rose up to the top of our great volcano
and then it slipped down to the lands
wreaking havoc and ripping our country
and off it fled, behind the clouds


© AF

hooking on to the bones o' the Dead
in the Weresur Hells
drifted down to our Lake and to our Volcano
it's all shaking
it's all shaking in our country
(…) Sorrow has overcome all of us in this world
in a thousand places
o Hurricane
o Rain falling till night
Thunder dashing and bursting in the clouds
the ocean is roaring and crashing on the land
and the ground keeps quaking
we're startled by its jolts
Our land's collapsing all over
a faraway collapse
that keeps coming closer (…)

[*Hurricane*, *sārsērbō,* Jōlap, Gaua]

⊙4. Sowahavin: a women's dance

MS – 18.6.2000 – Melsisi (Pentecost)
women from Laiwori
small bamboo slit drum; rattles, vocals

The *sowahavin* (from *havin* "woman") is a women's dance from the centre of the island of Pentecost. It takes the form of public performances during important events: men's grade-taking ceremony, inauguration of a new men's house (*nakamal*) or church, visit of a politician, ordination of a priest, children's communion, or festivals.
The *sowahavin* song always takes on the same responsorial form, between a female soloist and a choir of other women. The instruments accompanying this dance are two slit drums made from bamboo held by the two dance leaders, and rattles worn around the dancers' ankles. Bamboo stamping poles are also used occasionally [⊙12].
Wearing a red mat in lieu of a skirt, each dancer comes forward in rhythm, holding a long pole with a sculpture carved especially for the occasion, representing a boat, an airplane, a fish etc. The dancers form two or more columns winding, mingling, and crossing back and forth on the dance arena. The shouts heard in this performance are the cheers of the men who dance around the women dancers, raising their arms in excitement.


Vaena, Lesanti, Ruth in their dance outfit (Barunguringi, Maewo) © MS

The sawagoro

The *sawagoro* is a common genre in the islands of Pentecost, Ambae and Maewo which form the PENAMA province. Known locally as *sawagoro, savwagoro* or *sawako*, this musical form has always circulated among these three islands, in the wider context of their social (weddings, economy) and cultural exchange (legends, songs, dances). This explains why the same *sawagoro* pieces are sometimes found in several islands, with just a few changes in the text or the melody. The various communities constantly recreate each other's songs, intermingle their poetic languages, adapt the contexts of their dances, and borrow other elements.

The *sawagoro* is a joyful dance. In Ambae and Pentecost, it is performed at weddings [⊙5, ⊙8], or grade-taking ceremonies. In Maewo, it can be performed to end a mourning period [⊙6]. Another variation, called *sawagoro longo* [⊙7] in northern Pentecost, is performed exclusively by women.

A *sawagoro* sequence generally begins at dusk, and continues until sunrise. Throughout this whole time, no song can be sung twice – which goes to show how rich the repertoire is. The main characteristic of the sawagoro is the total absence of instrument. The song, sung a cappella, is accompanied by feet tapping on the ground on the beat, and hands clapping on the offbeat. This results in particularly energetic and lively performances.

In the middle of the dance, a group of male initiates who know the songs form a small circle facing inwards. Each song takes a responsorial form: two soloists sing the verses alternately, while the other participants respond in chorus with each refrain. A shouted signal marks the end of the song, and another one the start of the following one. As for the outer circle, it is open to everyone – especially to the young boys and girls who want to join in the dance. The crowd of dancers is often so dense that it hides the small group of singers in the centre.

Themes of the songs are varied. They may be mythological stories narrating the noble deeds of Tagaro, the mythical hero common to all three islands; they may refer to historic events such as a cyclone or volcanic eruption; they may celebrate nature or life in the village. In some instances, the words of a song may be partly improvised, in relation with the bride and groom.

⊙5. A wedding sawagoro

MS – 3.5.2005 – Longana (Ambae)
men from the Longana area
hands, feet, vocals

⊙6. End-of-mourning sawagoro

MS – 3.6.2005 – Umulongo (Maewo)
men from Kerebei
hands, feet, vocals

A *sawagoro* night session (Umulongo, Maewo) © MS

⊙7. Sawagoro longo

MS – 12.10.2000 – Asaola (Pentecost)
Nelly Mundoro + women from Loltong
hands, feet, vocals

Generally, the *sawagoro* dance is performed by men: women only participate by dancing around the singers. However, there exists a variation to the *sawagoro* in northern Pentecost reserved for women: the *sawagoro longo*. The *longo* (or *logo*) is a dish made from tubers and prepared especially for wedding ceremonies. During a *sawagoro longo* session, singers must sing the first song standing on the very leaves in which the *longo* was cooked. These leaves must be torn, as a sign of the bride's departure away from her family.

Just like its male version, the *sawagoro longo* dance does not use instruments. However, the rhythmic accompaniment does not form an offbeat as in the case of the men's dance: the women dance on the spot while tapping their feet and clapping hands at the same time. The dance lasts a few hours in the early evening, before the women join the men for the great *sawagoro* dance.

⊙8. A wedding sawako

- MS – 12.5.2000 – Levetlis (Pentecôte)
- men from the east coast of Pentecost
- hands, feet, vocals

This genre is called *sawako* in the language of central Pentecost; this is the exact equivalent of *sawagoro* found elsewhere.

⊙9. Barate: A women's joke song

- MS – 12.5.2000 – Levetlis (Pentecost)
- women from central-eastern Pentecost
- hands, feet, vocals

In central Pentecost, weddings are occasions for celebrations, and include numerous dances. Among them are sung games called *barate* which form an exclusively female repertoire. At the end of the gift-exchanging ceremony between the two families involved in the wedding, the women start to play satirical games. The group of the groom's "aunties" – disguised as men – and those of the bride – still wearing women's clothes – joke and tease each other, symbolically mimicking a sexual act. These playful games are meant to encourage the young couple's future fertility.

These fun games are accompanied by singing and freestyle dancing. After several songs in the village of the bride where the exchange of gifts took place, everyone moves to the bridegroom's village. The women dance and sing as they go along, laughing out loud, to the sound of whistling and clapping feet and hands. These singing games last throughout the journey walking to the village, and continue in the women's house which has been prepared for the occasion. The female relatives of the bride are gathered in this house: this is where they will welcome the groom's female relatives, who come to offer food and presents.

⊙10. Kazoo

- MS – 17.7.2005 – Tesmet-Lëwëtnëk (Merelava)
- Janet Philip
- leaf kazoo

The kazoo is made with a little leaf of the metetagar, a small shrub growing on the rocks by the sea. An opening is created in the leaf without piercing it completely, leaving in place a small transparent membrane. The leaf is then placed against the mouth and vibrates during the song. This is a game the people of Merelava enjoy as they stroll or relax on the beach. Any song may be played this way. The same melody can be heard on the following track, in the context of the *nombo* dance.

⊙11. Nombo: Bamboo stamping tubes

- MS – 24.7.2005 – Tesmet (Merelava)
- Janet Philip + Mot Helen + women from Tesmet
- slit drum (*wokor lap*), small bamboo drum (*wokor wirig*), stamping tubes (*nombo*)

The *nombo* is one of two women's dances from the village of Tesmet, the largest village of the island of Merelava. It was created by a small group of women led by Janet Philip,

for a local festival in September 2002. Since this festival, the women have performed this dance for various occasions. The songs performed may be traditional, or composed especially for the *nombo* dance [photo p.76]. The men encourage the women by dancing and shouting around the musicians. In order to accompany this dance, the right to use a slit drum – generally reserved exclusively to men – is said to have been "bought" from a woman from Motalava living in Merelava, who had previously acquired it from the men of Motalava.

⊙12. Sowahavin: a women's dance

- MS – 18.6.2000 – Melsisi (Pentecost)
- women from Melsisi
- stamping bamboo tubes, rattles

For a presentation of the *sowahavin*, see ⊙4. This piece features the sound of stamping bamboo tubes in the distance. Also, one can hear an attempt at a polyphony in the refrain, in contrast with most traditional songs in Vanuatu which are normally monodic. This is probably an innovation due to the influence of Christian songs, which are often polyphonic, and highly popular among the women of the region.

⊙13. Ka: a men's dance

- MS – 18.6.2000 – Melsisi (Pentecost)
- men from central Pentecost
- large bamboo drum, rattles

The *ka* dance can be described as the male equivalent of the *sowahavin* dance [⊙4, 12]. Taking a responsorial form between a soloist and a chorus, it also comprises a group choreography whose movements are coordinated collectively. The soloist singer strikes a large slit bamboo drum held upright on the ground; the dancers all wear ankle rattles. Sometimes the dances are interrupted by short comic acting interludes.

⊙14. & 15 Noyongyep: A wedding dance

- AF – 29.12.2005 – Toglag (Motalava)
- Richard Woris, Masten Malkikyak, men from Toglag
- percussion board (*naqyēn̄ malbuy*), small slit drums (*nēvētōy*), vocals

Etymologically, *noyongyep* in the Mwotlap language means "hear the evening": this type of song used to typically take place during long festive evenings, sometimes until dawn, in a way similar to the *sawagoro* of islands further south. Nowadays, however, the *noyongyep* has been brought into the dance repertoire performed during the day for various village festivities. These two recordings, together with the following *namapto*, took place during a wedding celebration in the village of Toglag.

A typical wedding in Motalava begins with a religious ceremony at the church, and is followed during the afternoon by an exchange of gifts (mats, coconuts, dishes, money) between the two families. More lighthearted, joyful collective events precede and follow

these solemn moments, punctuated by music: *kastom* dancing in the afternoon, *string band* songs in the evening.

For the morning church ceremony, the bride and groom wear western clothes – suit and tie for the groom, white dress and veil for the bride. The moment they leave the church, the percussions begin to play for the dancers. The small group of musicians and singers, standing around the percussion board and drums, is soon surrounded by a line of dancers. The newlyweds lead the procession, surrounded by their respective families, moving in circles around the musicians. Gradually other villagers, young and old, from all over the island, join in the dance and enlarge the circle. Everyone moves forward in a line, without touching each other, in small steps to the rhythm of the drums [photo]. Sometimes several lines are formed, crossing over on the arena. The male initiates form their own line, and mark their particular status by holding a Cycas palm, a symbol of chiefdom in olden times; little boys imitate them, holding just any branch.

When the place is full of dancers, the rhythm suddenly accelerates (this is very clear in ⊙15, from 0'44"). With great speed, the dancers suddenly turn around, stamping with their heels, dancing in a joyful frenzy shared by everyone.

Noyongyep dances for a wedding © AF

⊙16. Namapto: "Rail bird"

- AF – 29.12.2005 – Toglag (Motalava)
- Richard Woris, Masten Malkikyak, men from Toglag
- percussion board (*naqyēn malbuy*), small slit drums (*nēvētōy*), vocals

The *namapto* is a festive style of dance and music, open to everyone, similar to the *noyongyep* of the previous pieces; in fact, the two genres are often performed during the same wedding celebrations, and bring about similar collective dances.

The song sung here belongs to the poetic genre *namaleng*, and celebrates the *bēlag* bird: the Buff-banded rail (*Gallirallus philippensis*), a kind of wild fowl with striped feathers. The poem depicts the long-legged fowl's characteristic gait as it jumps over the river to escape from the huntsman.

WALKING IN THE FOREST

⊙17. Gove whistles (boys)

- MS – 12.6.2005 – Gaiovo (Maewo)
- young boys from the Gaiovo area
- *gove* whistles

As part of the preparation for the grand grade-taking ceremony *Ḡwatu ta Baruḡu*, the young applicants spend several weeks secluded in the forest. During this period, they are not allowed to be seen by non-initiates such as women or children; infringing this rule results in punishment, going as far as death in some extreme cases. Every time a group of non-initiates moves around in the forest during initiation times, they are absolutely bound to signal their presence. And because the location of the men's seclusion place is unknown to them, the non-initiates must be prepared to make their presence obvious at all times. This social necessity has led to the creation of a special musical genre: group hocket whistling.

The group of non-initiate performers uses small bamboo whistles with no holes, called *ḡove* in the Sungwadaga language. Measuring approximately 6 inches in length and 1 inch in diameter [photo p.79], the instrument has a natural knot on one end. Since the instrument only produces one pitch, it is generally played in an ensemble of at least two whistles, or more, split in two groups. One of the groups alternates between two actions: whistling, then singing the syllable *ḡov* (from the word *ḡove* "to blow"). As for the other group, they respond just by whistling – an action called *soro* "respond". This is known as a hocket technique: the two groups produce a constant sound by alternating on short sound events; simultaneously, they repeat the same melodic and rhythmic formula, thereby forming an ostinato.

⊙18. Lullaby: "The tattlers"

- AF – 5.8.2007 – Yōgevigemēne (Hiw)
- Grace Delight Söryay
- vocals

This lullaby from Hiw was recorded "live", while Grace Delight was trying – successfully – to get her tearful grandson to sleep.

Nök e mon te Yonegövönyö ë / Iw ti r̄ōw na pē Tapana ë / R̄ōw tur̄og metir̄ ne / Tur̄og metir̄ na ë r̄ōw tur̄og metir̄ na ë / R̄ōw tur̄og metir̄ ne

Nök e mon te Yonegövönyö ë / Iw ti r̄ōw na pē Tapana ë / R̄ōw tuyuñ ne tuqe / Tuyuñ ne tuqe ë / R̄ōw tuyuñ ne tuqe.

The poem, entitled *Ne tir̄iwr̄iw* "The tattlers", is about a sea bird, the Wandering Tattler (*Heteroscelus incanus*). This long-legged

Grace Delight Sörÿay and her grandson (Hiw, Torres) © AF

wading bird lives in colonies on the rocks facing the ocean.
The lullaby represents the bird standing on the rocks, tired by the sea wind, with its eyes closed like a child falling asleep.

O my birds on the eastern shore
over there gathered on the bay
over there on the shore, together all asleep
standing asleep, all standing together
over there on the shore, together all asleep
O my birds on the eastern shore
over there gathered on the bay
over there on the shore, scanning the horizon
scanning the horizon
over there on the shore, scanning the horizon
[*The tattlers*, lullaby, Hiw]

⊙19. Rhyme "Tangorere"

MS – 12.3.2002 – Loltong (Pentecost)
Rosalie Sani + Betula Haviha
vocals

This rhyme from Pentecost island is entitled *Tangorere* – from the verb *tango* "touch" in the Raga language. This children's game is a kind of blind man's buff. A circle is formed around a child; all participants must have their eyes closed. Once everyone has sung the nursery rhyme, the child in the middle of the circle must keep his eyes closed and try and touch the other children. The first one to be touched comes into the middle to start the game over again.
The musical scale of this song is composed of four notes forming a chain of thirds – as is often the case for children's songs in northern Vanuatu.

⊙20. Playing a mango leaf

MS – 7.9.2005 – Qtevut (Gaua)
Susi Rosur
mango leaf

This rhythmical game uses a simple dried mango leaf, picked up in the forest. Cut halfway, it is held in one hand, and patted with the other.

⊙21. Rhyme "Tutubwau"

MS – 12.3.2002 – Loltong (Pentecost)
Rosalie Sani + Betula Haviha
vocals

This nursery rhyme with its pentatonic melody is called *Tutubwau*, literally "Poke-knee". Children are seated in a row, their legs stretched out before them. The one who sings the song touches his friends' knees,

Edward Pilis playing the musical bow (Yaqane, Hiw, Torres) © MS

one after the other. The child on whom the last syllable of the nursery rhyme falls must draw up his knees. The game goes on until only one knee is left.
At that point, the children put a little saliva on their knees before getting up one after the other. They all listen hard to hear if a bone is cracking. If so, this means that the person will later marry someone younger; but if no sound can be heard, then this predicts finding a spouse who will be older. This game causes a lot of laughing and joking.

⊙22. Musical bow

MS – 4.9.2010 – Yaqane (Hiw)
Edward Pilis
musical bow (*gövgöv*)

On the island of Hiw, the northernmost point of the archipelago, only one elderly man, Edward Pilis from the village of Yaqane, has preserved the memory of this instrument which his forefathers had passed on to him in the 1930s. This mouth bow, named *ne gövgöv* in the Hiw language, is made from hibiscus wood, and measures

over 3 feet in length. The string – the vibrating part of this chordophone – is made from a long fibre of hibiscus. Holding the bow in one hand, the musician places one end on his half-open mouth. In the other hand he holds a thin, flexible plectrum – the midrib of a coconut leaf. With this, he strikes the bow string on an irregular pulse, as he mentally hums a song (*ne putput*). The string then resonates in a languid, captivating ostinato.
Just like for most musical bows and Jew's harps [⊙1], the resonator is the oral cavity. By modifying its shape, the musician amplifies the overtones and creates the melody.
According to Edward Pilis, this instrument used to be played in the men's house (*nakamal*). Today, the mouth bow has entered a more intimate sphere: Edward plays it in front of his home, as he relaxes in the sunset.

⊙23. Lullaby

MS – 1.10.2000 – Bunlap (Pentecost)
young woman from Bunlap
vocals

This lullaby follows a chorus–verse sequence (CV_1CV_2), and is composed essentially on a chain of thirds. In addition, the chorus is preceded by an ornamentation of three notes separated by one-tone intervals (reminiscent of the pycnon of pentatonic scales). Chains of thirds are common in this region of Vanuatu, particularly in children's songs. The melody is entirely conjunct within the scale used, that is, it never leaps an interval.

TITI SONGS: DANCING TO POETRY

The three islands of the northern Banks share a musical genre called *titi* – or more precisely, *elñe titi* in the south of Vanua Lava, *sēwēes'i'i* in the western part of the same island, *nawha titi* in Motalava, *nsawa jiji* in Ureparapara. The *titi* songs, for a while abandoned in Motalava, regained popularity after 2000, thanks to chief Ken Freza and a group of young villagers from Toglag who set out to learn various songs from the elders, and have passed on the torch.
This musical genre features a specific ensemble of instruments: percussion board, individual slit drums, but also a rare headed drum, as well as rattles, exceptionally shaken inside a bag. Another characteristic of this style is its poetic form: contrary to other songs that can often be long and complex, *titi* songs are always short, with three to six verses, repeated in a loop by the soloist and chorus. Each poem forms a kind of haiku, capable of evoking an atmosphere in just a few words – the force of a cyclone or earthquake, the beauty of a landscape, the melancholy of a saunter. Appreciated for their poetic and melodic quality, these songs can be sung a cappella, aside from any dance performance [⊙26, ⊙28]. But most of the time, they form another occasion for villagers to celebrate and dance.
Titi sessions take place during important celebrations, such as weddings or New Year festivities, when each village on the island

goes to perform in the next village. The session always begins with an introductory piece, or prelude [⊙24]. Its form is minimal, with wood instruments beating the rhythm to the voice of a soloist. Then follows the series of *titi* songs proper. A bamboo drum plays a rhythm, first alone and later joined by the percussion board, the headed drum and the bag of rattles. The crescendo reaches its climax with the soloist appearing and launching into a poem. On the second repetition of the main verse, he launches a cry "O– e–, o– e", the signal for the musicians to join him [⊙25, ⊙27].
At this point a long alternation ensues, in responsorial form, between the soloist and the other musicians. This is when the *titi* orchestra, with all its instruments and voices, is at its strongest. In fact, the term *titi* is derived from this responsorial form – from an old verb *ti* or *titi* "respond". This alternation between the soloist and the chorus obeys relatively regular patterns, clearly heard in the recording and analysed below, in the description of each piece.
In each *titi* piece, there is always a fleeting moment when the instruments suddenly stop (*yak* in Mwotlap), before starting up again with even more fervour: this is heard at 0'56", 1'39" and 2'35" in the *song of the Rain* [⊙25], at 1'26" and 2'26" in *Liana flower* [⊙27], at 1'04" and 2'46" in *Volcano* [⊙29]. This technique emphasises the group's cohesion and strength.

The single-headed drum during a *nawha titi* session (Toglag, Motalava) © MS

The musicians form a tiny circle in the middle of the dance area. The dancers surround them, both men and women, in a long winding procession.
The *titi* genre plays such an important role that its origin is the object of a number of myths. On the island of Motalava, the origin of the *nawha titi* is attributed to the encounter between a child and the spirits. But it is in the custom of Vera'a, in Vanua Lava, that

one finds the most elaborate myths – confirming the hypothesis that the musical genre comes originally from the small villages of Lemerig, on the island's northwest area. The myth, narrated by Eli Field, relates that a high-ranked chief one day arranged to meet his loved one near the great waterfall in Lemerig. Losing patience after waiting for hours, and vexed at having been forgotten, the man stamped his feet on the ground, in harmony with the powerful sound of the waterfall that was striking the trunks of sago palm trees (from which headed drums are made today). To the sound of his chiefly armlets clanking on his arms – the forerunner of future rattles – he began to sing in earnest. Such was the first *titi* song to be created, a blend of amorous yearning and communion with the forces of nature.

⊙24. Prelude to titi songs

- AF – 4.7.2003 – Toglag (Motalava)
- Serel Qalqit + men from Toglag
- percussion board (*naqyēñ malbuy*), smaller slit drum (*nēvētōy*), vocals

A *nawha titi* session begins with a prelude, called in Mwotlap *nawha yoñ* "music of awe". This piece mobilises only some of the *nawha titi* orchestra's instruments: percussion board and small slit drum – without the rattles nor headed drum. It is a solo, and does not take the responsorial form so typical of proper *nawha titi*. Only after this prelude can the series of titi songs truly begin.

⊙25. Nawha titi: "Rain"

- AF – 23.7.2004 – Toglag (Motalava)
- Ken Freza + men from Toglag
- percussion board (*naqyēñ malbuy*), small slit drums (*nēvētōy*), headed drum (*natmatwoh*), rattle bag (*nowopyak*), vocals

This *titi* song celebrates rain – a spectacular, tropical rain typical of these regions. The poet, sheltering under his roof, conveys the power of the downfall through sensory impressions:

Rain o burst in yonder jungle
o flow and pound o rain o
drip drop upon my roof
Rain pour and drill o drill
o o e o, o e
o rain ey

[*Rain*, *titi* song, Motalava]

Here is the original text of the poem, in Mwotlap's song language:

<a> *ne wen ē rōl me ē le mōt e*
e sol duñ ē ēn wen ē
tir e tir bē kēle ēmī e
<b> *wen me ser gil gil e*
<c> *o– ē ō, o– e*
<d> *io ēn wen ē*

In terms of performance, this recording is typical of the *titi* structure described above. The instruments enter one after the other, to the sound of a striking instrumental crescendo. The song begins with a soloist,

who later sends a signal (at 0'54") for the chorus of singers to start singing their part. In accordance with the canons of the *titi* genre, the song then takes the form of a call-and-reponse alternation between the soloist and the chorus.
If we attribute codes a b c d to each part of the poem, spell in lower case the verses sung by the soloist, and in upper case those sung by the chorus, this recorded performance had the following structure: { a b a b c || B c B c B d B d B d B d B d B c B || A B A B c B c B d B d B d B c B || A B A B }. The sign 'II' symbolises the moments (at 0'56", 1'39" and 2'35") when the instruments stop briefly (*yak*) before starting again.

⊙26. Sēwēes'i'i: "Husking coconuts"

- AF – 27.7.2003 – Vera'a (Vanua Lava)
- Harold Tomson
- vocals

This *titi* song from Vanua Lava alludes to the husking of coconuts – a daily activity linked with cooking, and carried out by impaling the coconuts on a solid, sharp pointed stake.

Husking coconuts
You got a hundred? I got a hundred!
You see, my dear widow?
Don't you agree, my dear widow?

[*Husking coconuts, titi* song, Vanua Lava]

The poem has two levels of reading. At first sight, this is an innocent physical competition between two men as to the number of coconuts they can husk ("You got a hundred? I got a hundred!"). In reality, the initiates capable of deciphering the language of poems, and who are familiar with these semantic games, realise it is in fact a bawdy song. In the last verse, the singer turns to a pretty widow whom he sees in secret, and flippantly takes her as witness to his own exploits.


Coconut husking © AF

⊙27. Nawha titi: "Liana flower"

- AF – 23.7.2004 – Toglag (Motalava)
- Ken Freza + men from Toglag
- percussion board (*naqyēñ malbuy*), small slit drums (*nēvētōy*), headed drum (*natmatwoh*), rattle bag (*nowopyak*), vocals

In line with *titi* poetry's constant attention to senses, this song praises the special smell of a giant liana, and brings together two worlds: forest and sea.

Flowers of the great vine
they smell lovely, o so lovely
And what do they smell of?
They smell of seashells on the shore
O e o o o e
a e a e a e — o–

[*Liana flower*, *titi* song, Motalava]

The poem can be divided into five units:
<a> *Tewes gaverur ē ge bōnbōn ē*
<b> *ge bōn (ē) bōn e*
<c> *bōne sav e? bōne ses row ē la ē*
<d> *o– ē ō, o– e*
<e> *a e a e a e — ooo*

According to the notation proposed in ⊙25, we find the following structure { a b a b c c a b d || A d A b A b A b A b A d A B || C C A B C C A d A d A b A b A b A b A d A B || C C A B C C A E }.

⊙28. Sēwēes'i'i: "Scrubfowl"

AF – 27.7.2003 – Vera'a (Vanua Lava)
Harold Tomson
vocals

This *titi* song from Vanua Lava is in celebration of the Scrubfowl or Megapode bird (*Megapodius freycinet*) that lives in the forest.

The leaves are rustling:
what is it? what is it?
It's the scrubfowl again,
cackling and digging
It scratches and scratches
at the top o' the hill

[*Scrubfowl*, *titi* song,, Vanua Lava]

The poem consists of three verses (a b c):
<a> *Lēr lē nas dedero en sap men sap men?*
<b> *wō mala ōlōl wō mala gil e rō e*
<c> *Res e res le qeseñ tōw e*

In the absence of the chorus, the singer Harold Tomson spontaneously creates his own call-and-response structure, as follows: { a / a b a b / c b c b / a b a b / c b c b / a b }.

⊙29. Nawha titi: "Volcano"

AF – 23.7.2004 – Toglag (Motalava)
Ken Freza + men from Toglag
percussion board (*naqyēñ malbuy*), small slit drums (*nēvētōy*), headed drum (*natmatwoh*), rattle bag (*nowopyak*), vocals

This poem glorifies the power of volcanoes – in this case, the famous active volcano of Ambrym, an island south of Pentecost.

The Ambrym volcano
is flowing and blasting
Swirling around the land
it shapes a new island
The lava keeps swirling
and shapes a new island
O– e o, o– e
Keeps flowing and blasting
on the shores of Ambrym
a e a e a e – o–

[*Volcano*, *titi* song, Motalava]

Here is the original text, in song language:
<a> *Ne vur e sol duñ e Amērēm e*
<b> *ie o e lē tan tiñ gōlgōl wē vōnō e*
<c> *ne vur e tiñ gōlgōl wē vōnō e*
<d> *o– ē ō, o– e*
<e> *o e sol duñ e Amērēm e la e*
<f> *a e a e a e — ooo*

Once again, the listener can discern the structure of this performance: { a b a b c c a b d || A d A E A E A e A e A d A B C C A B C C e A E A E A E A d A B || C C A B C C }. Compared with the other examples ⊙25 and 27, we have here a longer introduction by the soloist; meanwhile in the background, the musicians and chorus casually chatter as they await their turn to perform. Once the chorus begins, it sings not only its own part but also that of the soloist (hence the many capital letters in the notation). This performance takes some liberties with the standard pattern – as often happens in casual moments at the end of a long session of dancing, as the sun is setting.

A TRIBUTE TO GREAT MEN

⊙30. Gove whistles (women)

MS – 10.6.2005 – Barunguringi (Maewo)
Vaena Vanity, Lesanti Roling Viti, Ruth Vane, Ruth Merelin, Rosenta Vay, Esta Rotili
group of whistlers *gōve*

See explanations ⊙17.

⊙31. Bilbilan: Grade-taking ceremony

MS – 30.9.2000 – Bunlap (Pentecôte)
men from the Sa community
ensemble of wooden drums, vocals

Grade-taking ceremonies used to be among the most important in central and northern parts of the Vanuatu archipelago. Although no longer widely practiced in the Banks islands, the grade system has remained central to the social life of other Vanuatu islands – Ambrym, Malakula, Pentecost, Ambae, Maewo.
When a man wants to pass on to a higher grade, he must organise a major ceremony for which he and his family have to prepare for several years. This admittance to a higher grade gives rise to abundant exchange of food and presents. Sometimes, a single celebration may concern several candidates.
These ceremonies always involve dancing, accompanied by wooden drum ensembles. A given rhythm often corresponds to a specific rank on the grade hierarchy. For example, the present piece was recorded during the grade-taking ceremony of two men, for admission to grades Arkon and Meleun – two of the highest grades in the local hierarchy. The ceremony, in presence of a large gathering of southern Pentecost islanders, took place in Bunlap – a community that identifies itself as being ruled by *kastom*, and impervious to foreign influence. Bunlap is where the famous gol "land

diving" ceremony takes place every year during yam season, when young men throw themselves from the top of an immense wooden tower, with one foot bound with just a liana.
In this dance called *bilbilan*, men dance in a circle around drums, while women dance around them, a little further away, yelling and whistling at the same time. The music is reminiscent of the dancing performed during the *gol* jump ceremony.

⊙32. Mantani: Grade-taking ceremony

- MS – 23.1.2002 – Loltong (Pentecôte)
- men from Loltong
- bundle bamboo drum

This dance, by the name of *mantani*, also accompanies a grade-taking ceremony – but this time in the north of Pentecost. Its specificity is to be accompanied by a very rare instrument – a drum made of bamboos tied into a bundle.
Several bamboos measuring at least 6 feet are put together and held horizontally by two men at each extremity. Four men – two on each side of the bamboo drum – beat a rhythmic ostinato with sticks. Other men dance around the instrument, accompanying the men's singing.

⊙33. Drumming for a great man

- AF – 30.12.1997 – Avay (Motalava)
- Chief Railey, Richard Woris, Ata Evenis
- large slit gong (*nokoy*)

⊙34. A song for a great man

- AF – 30.12.1997 – Avay (Motalava)
- Chief Railey, Richard Woris, Ata Evenis
- large slit gong (*nokoy*)

The large wooden slit gongs of Vanuatu are associated with the world of "Great men", high-profile personalities of chiefdoms and communities. While other islands maintain ties with the old grade system [photo p.74], the use of this drum has evolved in islands such as Motalava, where the former political system has disappeared.
Nowadays, the large slit gong, called *nokoy* in Mwotlap, no longer accompanies grade-taking, but important moments associated with the new faces of authority: national politicians, leading figures of the Anglican church, religious celebrations. For the anniversary of the island's main church, for instance, the muffled beats of this large drum were played throughout the Eucharist.
The end of 1997 saw the wedding of the son of a Great man: the Anglican bishop of the Banks islands, Charles Ling (on the left in the photo, holding a Cycas palm as a symbol of prestige). This was an occasion for the island's musicians to beat the powerful *nokoy*. All participants – singers, dancers, musicians – were initiated men.
After a brief prelude ⊙33 called *turbal*, the piece ⊙34 combines the percussion of the *nokoy* gong with a rousing song to encourage the dancers. Four vocal and instrumental layers are here superposed, and can

be heard in the recording: the main song ("E ale..."); the joyful cries of the dancers; a fast-tempo, continuous beat (called *beleg* in Mwotlap) played with fine wooden sticks by the two percussionists seated on both ends of the drum; finally, a discontinuous, more muffled rhythm (*bōl*) beaten by the main drummer, the one who is seated facing the middle of the instrument.

Singers and drummers around the wooden slit gong *nokoy* (Avay, Motalava) © AF

THE DEEP GROWLING OF ANCESTORS

⊙35. Bullroarer

- MS – 28.7.2005 – Tesmet (Merelava)
- Philip Gan + Gresline + Colinette
- bullroarer (*naborbor*)

This instrument of the bullroarer family – called here *naborbor* – is considered as a mere toy rather than a genuine instrument, and is used "just for entertainment". To make this instrument, a leaflet is plucked from a coconut frond; its midrib is removed to make it more supple, and the leaflet is bent in two lengthwise. The removed midrib is then tied to each end of the leaflet. Finally, a long stem, also from a coconut leaf, is tied to the whole device: this string is held firmly as one swirls the bullroarer above one's head.
The double rotation of the instrument – simultaneously above one's head and on its own axis – results in a loud, deep humming sound. This recording features not just one, but three bullroarers – which together produce a truly powerful effect.

Bullroarer made out of a coconut leaf © AF

Masked dances

Two dances of the Banks islands, the *mag* and the *qat*, are reserved for men who have passed the initiation rites.

The first is called *nma* in Löyöp, *namag* in Mwotlap, *mago* in Mota, *mag* in the languages of Vanua Lava and Gaua, *namag* and *utmag* in Merelava. The word is linked to the verb *mako* "dance" of Polynesian languages. This dance is performed by young adolescents, at the start of their initiatory career.

The second dance, quite similar, is called *qat* (pronounced [kpwat]) – or more precisely: *qat* in Mota, Dorig and Lakon, *qet* in Vurës, *neqet* in Mwotlap and in Mwerlap. This name is historically linked with the name of Qat or Qet, the divinity of origins (François 2013). Just like the *mag*, the *qat* is for male initiates only, but from a higher grade.

Headdress from the *mag* dance, in the shape of a cooked dish (Jôlap, Gaua) © AF

The two genres have many similarities. In both cases, the dancers wear headdresses that they will have made in their secret initiation enclosure (Vienne 1996). These highly intricate, and often spectacular headdresses, are sometimes called "spirits" (Mota *tamate*, Mwotlap *natmat*, Lakon *maraw*…); they represent divinities, plants, fish [photo of sea urchin p.70 (*qat*)], birds… and sometimes surprising items, like a cooked dish [photo (*mag*)], a canoe, a plane, etc.

On the island of Merelava, a distinction is made between two versions of the *mag* dance. The *namag* belongs to young initiates – often adolescents – and is danced without masks. As for the so-called *utmag* form [⊙36], it is reserved for adult men who have acquired the right to wear sacred headdresses.

One of the differences between *mag* and *qat* lies in the choreography. In the *mag*, the young dancers progress as a group, often in Indian file or in a circle around a central musician, and coordinate their movements. The *qat* is a more complex dance, more fragmented, in which the dancers, disseminated across the dancing area, perform separately, one after the other [photo p.77].

Musically speaking, only two instruments accompany the *qat* and the *mag*: the small slit drum – played by a musician standing in the centre – and the ankle rattles worn by the dancers.

Melodic songs are rare: because poems associated with these genres are secret, they can

Dance of the spirits, the *neqet* (Lahlap, Motalava) © AF

only be sung silently by the dancers, in their heart of hearts. The only sounds heard are not articulated words, but some form of shouts – either signals thrown by the key drummer (*"Hiy sito!"*), or the growling of the ancestors themselves.

Indeed, the masked dancers represent the spirits of deceased ancestors who have come to dance in the midst of the village. The sharp cries and deep growling heard in ⊙36 (*utmag* from Merelava) and in ⊙37 (*neqet* from Motalava) are none other than the

voices of the dead themselves, come to haunt the living for the duration of the dance. The jerking rattles, the irregular rhythms of bamboos being struck, the sudden, unexpected silences, create a strange, spellbinding atmosphere, tinted with awe.

The *utmag* dance of initiated men (Leqeal, Merelava) © MS

⊙36. Utmag: Dance of the Spirits

- MS – 28.7.2005 – Tesmet (Merelava)
- men from the Tesmet community
- bamboo drum (*wokor wirig*) ; ankle rattles (*nevereak*), vocals

On the island of Merelava, whereas the *namag* dance is reserved for beginners, its variant *utmag* is for adult initiates only. The dancers' headdresses and their strange growling remind everyone of their true nature: they are the Spirits of the Ancestors, come to impress the mortals.
In the olden days, the *utmag* dance used to be performed during funeral or grade taking ceremonies. Today, the *utmag* is danced on various occasions – weddings, Christmas festivities, independence day, and other festivals.

⊙37. Neqet: Dance of the Spirits

- AF – 25.12.2005 – Lahlap (Motalava)
- Fred Nixon + male initiates from Lahlap
- small slit drums (*nēvētōy*), ankle rattles (*nowopyak*), vocals

This representation of the *neqet* dance – the local name, pronounced [nekpwet], of the *qat* genre described above – was a major event of 2005 on Motalava. This particularly prestigious and solemn dance is performed only very rarely. Christmas, a holiday closely associated with customary dancing, was an ideal context. The most conspicuous aspect of this spectacular ceremony was no doubt the impressive display of sacred headdresses called *natmat* "spirits of the dead". In addition, the *neqet* gives rise to a mysterious choreography

during which the dancers, dispersed around the village clearing, alternate moments of stillness with sudden, small jerky steps. The nervous beats on the small bamboo drums add to the sounds of the rattles. Combined with the cries of the spirits, devoid of any melody, they create together a strange, awe-inspiring atmosphere.

The newēt genre

The prevailing genre in the Torres islands is the *newēt* [⊙38–40]. This is, in principle, a poetic genre – illustrated above with the songs *Earth tremble* (p.90) and *A war threnody* (p.92). By extension, the term *newēt* designates not only the poem itself, but also the specific musical style accompanying it and, even more broadly, the whole festivities that surround it.
Seven or eight musicians stand around the percussion board, in the middle of the village. Sometimes, they are sheltered under a small booth of leaves (*veroqëtlēñwe* in Lo-Toga) built for the occasion. Two drummers sitting behind them beat their bamboo drum to signal the start. The leader then cries out *"Hi– wa?"* to which the other musicians respond in unison *"Hi wow!"* – before suddenly striking the board with their bamboo sticks [⊙39].
At this point, a long collective ostinato begins, one that is both vocal and instrumental. While stamping the board, the musicians sing a hocket *"O ho, Ohé o – O ho, Ohé-o"*... Once this setting is created, the soloist can finally begin to sing the *newēt* song proper. Its melody and rhythm seem independent from the main rhythm, and is largely drowned out by the latter. This is in fact deliberate: most *newēt* poems are secret (*toq* "sacred"), and must remain inaudible to the non-initiated crowd – for fear that the song, which belongs to the singer and his family, be stolen from him. In the Lo-Toga language, the verb *gupe* "hide" designates the way in which the choristers, with their loud panting ("O ho, Ohé-o"), conceal the voice of the soloist.
The foremost occasion for carrying out a *newēt* event is the public festival (in Lo-Toga *ne vetgë*) associated with the system of grades (*ne huqe*). In this particular context, similar to the *mag* or *qat* dances of the neighbouring Banks islands [⊙36–37], young initiates dance and exhibit the ritual headdresses (*ne qegar*) they have just carved in secret. The celebration may last between five and ten days, during which the *newēt* is in full swing day and night, until dawn of the last day.
This being said, the *newēt* has become so popular that it has been secularised, as it were, and equated with collective rejoicing: it is played at weddings, holidays and festivals. The national holiday on July 30 [photo], which celebrates the independence of Vanuatu since 1980, is a perfect occasion for a *newēt* afternoon – as was the case for pieces ⊙39–40 of this album.

⊙38. Newêt: Song of the Spirits

AF – 22.1.2006 – Hiw (Torres)
Sisil Howard + boys from Hiw
planche à percussion (*ne tiyit rërë*), tambour à fente (*n'örë*), vocals

⊙39. et 40. Newêt: Song of the Spirits

AF – 30.7.2004 – Lungharegi, Lo (Torrès)
Livai, Peretin Wokmagêne, Brian Mark
percussion board (*ne vën mëlepup*), slit drum (*n'ere*), vocals

⊙41. Newertiang: Cries of the Spirits

MS – 25.7.2005 – Leqeal (Merelava)
men from Leqeal
secret instruments

In Vanuatu, expressions of mourning include ceremonies on the 5th and 10th day following the death of the person. On the small island of Merelava, the death of an important individual gives rise to a spectacular event: the "Cries of the Spirits", called *newertiang* in Mwerlap. This event may be followed by a *namag* dance [⊙36], which is public and takes place on the dance ground; but the *newertiang* itself has a very specific status, quite different from any other musical form currently known.

Neither song nor dance, the *newertiang* is not visual at all. For us mere mortals, it is a sound-only phenomenon: the powerful cries of the dead, in the darkness of the night. These eerie moans recall how creepy ghosts can be, and different from mortals – enough to inspire awe and respect in us all towards our ever-present ancestors.

Naturally, only initiated men have access to the world of the spirits, and to the secrets of their manifestations in the world of the living. They alone may know the true nature of these sounds, and how to produce them; we shall reveal nothing here. The men performing the cries of the Spirits must be seen by no one: the moment the first sounds can be heard, women, children and other non-initiated witnesses must hurry away to a house or shelter.

Recording ⊙41 presents a noteworthy structure, consisting of a crescendo that culminates roughly around 2'10", followed by a long decrescendo. Several layers of sound overlap. One such layer is the continuous sound of crickets, due to the *newertiang* taking place at night. This forms the background upon which the cries of the Spirits are superposed. Low-pitched sounds are described as the "voice of the mother", while high-pitched sounds are the "children".

Finally, the spirits disappear just as they appeared. After a long moment of intense presence, their cries vanish in the silence of the night.

Alexandre François & Monika Stern

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MUSIK BLONG VANUATU
Taem blong lafet, taem blong kastom

CD ia hemi wan seleksen blong ol best rikoding blong musik we mitufala i bin mekem long Vanuatu. Mitufala blong Franis: Monika Stern hemi wan ethnomusicologist, hemi spesalaes long ol defren kaen musik long wol mo espeseli blong Vanuatu. Alex François hemi wan linguist, hem i lanem ol lanwis blong Bankis mo Torres, mo hemi promotem ol save blong kastom olsem ol stori mo singsing blong bifo.

Stat long 1997 kasem 2011, mitufala i bin stap longtaem long ol difren aelan long Vanuatu – espeseli long provens TORBA mo PENAMA – blong mekem risej long saed blong lanwis mo musik. Since taem ia, mitufala i bin wishim blong mekem wan projek blong promotem mo holem taet ol kastom musik blong Vanuatu, blong mekem se ol art forms ia i no save lus.

Mifala i laekem sipos CD ia i save mekem wan kaen witness blong ol biutiful musik blong yumi, mo shoem long ol man ovasi, mo long evriwan long kantri, se Vanuatu igat plante musikol treasures we i shud laef i stap, mo i shud divelop moa i go. Maet CD ia bae i helpem blong rivaevem sam pat blong kastom musik we klosap i lus. I tru se samfala musik ia oli no isi blong lanem from mas folem fulap ol had rule blong go insaed long kastom. Be sipos ol yangfala oli save musikal roots blong olgeta, maet bae oli wantem statem niufala projek, olsem mekem narafala CD long kastom stret, o miksim ol singsing o instrumen blong bifo wetem ol niufala musik blong tedei.

Buk ia i kam wetem CD blong givim ol explenesen abaot ol musik we oli stap insaed. Evri infomesen long buk ia i kam long olgeta man mo woman long aelan we oli bin tok save long mitufala hao nao blong mekem ol instrumen, hao nao blong komposem singsing, mo wanem kaen situesen long kastom i fit blong singsing o tanis long ol defren stael ia.

Mitufala i wantem talem tankyu bigwan long evri man blong PENAMA mo TORBA we oli bin welkamem mitufala long ol haus mo vilij blong olgeta, samfala long wan wik, samfala i kasem wan yia. CD ia i gat wan spesel dedikesen long †Moses Meiwelgen, wan waes mo kaen man we hemi bin helpem evri projek long saed blong kalja mo kastom, mo ikam olsem wan tru papa blong Alex long Motalava aelan. *Imam, nalēk tit qōñ vēhte nēk, nololmeyen tiwag mi natamtam nōnōm.*

Mitufala i talem tankyu tu long Richard Woris, Edgar Howard, Mak mo Raouley Woleg, Eli Field, Jacob Elison, Mama Jimmy Tiwyoy, Edward Pilis, Janet Philip mo Philip Gan, John Star, Moffet Lini, Jeffry Uliboe mo Diana Rolin, Alfreda Mabonlala wetem famili, Maurice Tanmonok wetem famili, Nelly Mundoro, Laisa mo Patrick, Richard Leona, Wano Olev wetem famili. Be ol pipol we oli contribute moa bigwan long CD hemi espeseli ol man blong singsing mo tanis we oli sherem musik blong olgeta wetem mitufala: nem blong olgeta evriwan istap insaed long buk ia. Naenti pasent blong ol vatu we bae i kamaot long CD ia, bae i go long Vanuatu Kaljoral Senta long Vila, blong oli save bildimap ol kaljoral projek long fyuja we i save benefitim evri pipol blong TORBA, PENAMA mo narafala aelan blong Vanuatu. Tankyu tumas.

Newēt pour la Fête de l'Indépendance
A *newēt* session for the Independance Day (Hiw, Torres) © AF

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Alexandre François et Monika Stern

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