

## FUSION AT ITS BEST

*From time to time, somebody decides that blending Irish traditional music with so-called "world" rhythms might be a good idea. Usually it isn't, but the idea never seems to disappear entirely. In case you were wondering about how the idea initially came about, peruse the following and consider yourself edified.*

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*Scene: a jungle hut surrounded by palm trees. It is dusk. In front of the hut, a fire, around which are seated several tribesmen in full regalia, all holding objects that are difficult to distinguish in the half-light and smoke. In the distance, the sound of throbbing drums. Eventually we hear the conveniently-translated words of a conversation that has been in progress . . .*

**Lulumu** (*thumb gesturing disgustedly over his shoulder*):

You know, I could never figure out those drummers. Day and night, day and night, the same boring rhythm. No wonder they burn out so fast. I once suggested to N'gonga the foreman, he's a cousin of my wife's, that they try a little 3/4 just for a change. "An old-time waltz now and then won't kill you," I said. You know what he told me? "You've spending too much time with those missionaries." That's exactly what he told me. Wise ass. I'd like to hide that accursed drum of his under a pile of jackal droppings some night.

**Zumango:**

But he's right. . .after all, that drumming is part of our tradition whether we like it or not. Hey Kwamba - you know that better than anybody, right? After all you're the one that raised that big stink when Dzume'ge from the tribe down the road brought that Irish drum to the Lion Ritual last week. You really went after him!

## *FUSION AT ITS BEST*

**Kwamba:**

The nerve of the guy - to the Lion Ritual no less! I don't care if that Dzume'ge has three degrees from the University of Galway - he brings no - what was it called? - to any Lion Ritual I'm in charge of!

**Lulumu:**

It's called a bodhrán. He let me try it and I have to say it kicked ass. You can really get a lot of speed out of that little stick - beats the bejunius out of an antelope shinbone any day.

**Kwamba:**

But if we let the Irish drums into our rituals, what's next? We've got a tradition to maintain, dammit! And need I remind you, Lulumu my friend, that your clan is the one that has supplied us with antelope shinbones since way back in the Watery Time?

**Lulumu:**

I know, I know, it's just . . . Hey, remember last safari season when those other Irish guys showed up here one night with those bagpipes and stringed things and flutes and . . . what was that big bright loud thing called, the box that scared the chimps so badly?

**Kwamba:**

I know the thing you're talking about. It was covered with ivory and shiny stones, like that cheesy head-dress the Chief wore to the "Do Your Best to Befriend a Predator" Ball last year . . . I personally don't need three thousand frightened chimps anywhere over my head, but in this case I can understand why they ran - they thought the Irish guy was torturing the thing when he pulled the two ends of it apart and that sound came out. You know how chimps are, defecate shrieking from a tree first and ask questions later . . .

## *FUSION AT ITS BEST*

**Zumango:**

I wrote down the name on a banana leaf. . .now if I can only find it. Okay, here it is: that thing is called a . . . a pi-a-no ac-cor-di-on. I didn't go too close to it myself - Fangu the witch doctor told me it had to be possessed by an evil spirit to make that kind of noise. And you guys know I have a two wives and six kids to watch out for, can't be too careful these days . . .

**Lulumu:**

Fangu said the same thing about those bagpipes. "The spirit of a dead warrior dwells within," he said. "Yeah, I know," I said. "I can smell him." Jeez, those things were foul. The Irish guy playing them said the noise bag wasn't made to deal with our kind of heat. I was going to tell him it must be pretty damned warm inside a sheep, but I thought that might not be polite.

**Zumango:**

But I thought it was kind of neat the way we all sat around and tried to have a few tunes together.

**Kwamba:**

I admit it - playing together was very enjoyable. And I think they really respected our tradition, even if they didn't understand it too well. And that black stuff they brought to drink wasn't half bad either.

**Lulumu:**

No indeed. Nice head when you poured it slowly down the side of the glass. But still not a match for a good home-made batch of fermented dik-dik milk, in my opinion.

## *FUSION AT ITS BEST*

**Kwamba:**

I couldn't get my ngunka in tune with any of their instruments. But after we had a couple more pints of the black stuff, nobody seemed to care. And they really got into it when I played the "Odwun'ke Dance" for them. One of them said it sounded "fierce". The fat one with the stringed thing even played a few notes of it and said it reminded him of a slide, whatever that is.

**Lulumu:**

Maybe "slide" is the Irish word for "elephant fertility", like "odwun'ke" is in our language.

**Zumango:**

But . . . I mean, really, guys, I'm all for diversity and multiculturalism and all that woke stuff, but didn't their music sound a little . . . weird?

**Kwamba:**

You're right - in the beginning, it all sounded the same. But I started to get into it about the same time M'fat'u did . . . I tell you I never heard him play that x'umdu of his better than he did that night. He had sparks coming out of it. Even the Irish guys were impressed. One of them said something about "kolman" and started to cry . . .

**Lulumu:**

Who or what is a "kolman"?

**Kwamba:**

I never asked, but I guessed it was some deity of theirs that they call to in times of great emotional stress.

## FUSION AT ITS BEST

Zumango:

The guy with the red hair asked M'fat'u what the x'umdu strings were made of, and M'fat'u told him hyena entrails, but Red didn't seem sure what a hyena was . . . poor old M'fat'u kept explaining, until Red finally decided that it was a cross between a dog and a cat and said it would make a lovely pet if you could house-break it. I guess these Irish guys lead sheltered lives.

Lulumu:

And between us, I really don't think M'fat'u had to knock the poor bastard out just for yelling "Up ya boya!" at him. Their language isn't anything like ours . . . it seems to be some phrase of encouragement to them. How could Red have known that he was insulting six generations of M'fat'u's female relatives?

Zumango:

Speaking of their language, I keep forgetting. . .what's that word they use a lot? "Furk", "fupp", "fusk", something like that. It's every other word - maybe it's like a prayer or something.

*(A moment of silence; all drink deeply from wildebeest skulls full of strange liquid, concerning the nature of which we may not wish to speculate. Cries and shrieks emanate ominously from the darkened jungle. The drums are oddly muffled but still present .. but has their rhythm changed slightly? Finally, Kwamba picks up his ngunka and blows a few notes.)*

Kwamba:

Hey, how does "The Lark in the Morning" start again?

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