

Zambian Radio Reels

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One of the most pressing challenges for Africa's newly independent nations of the 1960s was to create a sense of 'national' identity, to bind their citizens to a national polity whose authority took precedence over regional or ethnic affiliations and political systems. These young nations, had to find ways to unite, politically and socially, ethnically diverse populations who- in ways their pre-colonial ancestors did not have to- were now forced to shared resources and territory (whose boundaries too often did not correspond to any pre-colonial historical relationships or social realities, but rather reflected colonial power dynamics).

Radio was a pillar of the 'nation-building' efforts of many young African nations, and music programming was one of the vehicles they used to bring these cultural/political campaigns into the homes and hearts of millions of listeners. Throughout the continent national radio stations were often responsible for the first quality recordings of traditional/regional music styles, as well as of the new generation of young 'modern' musicians. For example, Radio Mali made the first recordings of Ali Farka Toure, Radio Tanzania were the first to record the Mlimani Park Orchestra, while Radio Senegal, Radio Haute Volta, Radio Djibouti, and Radio Ethiopia made concerted efforts to document all of their country's regional styles. This was also true in Zambia, where the director of the Zambia Broadcasting Service, Mr. Alick Nkhata, was himself a talented singer-songwriter.

When the colony of Northern Rhodesia became the independent Republic of Zambia on October 24, 1964, the Northern Rhodesia Broadcasting Service-which was re-named the Zambia National Broadcasting Corporation-had already been recording and broadcasting 'African' musicians since the 1950s. Under Alick Nkhata's supervision (he became the director in 1966) the ZNBC continued to feature the country's most talented musicians. In the late 1960s and early 1970s, the Zambia Broadcasting Services (the name changed again in 1966) sent us a series of reels for our VOA Music Time in Africa archive.

TAPE No.		67/7/437	
PLEASE RETURN TO			
ZAMBIA BROADCASTING SERVICES			
P.O. BOX R.W.15, LUSAKA			
REPUBLIC OF ZAMBIA			
		Recorded at 7 ³⁰ / ₁₅ i.p.s. Full Track C.C.I.R.	
		NOV 16 1967	
Programme title	ZAMBIA AND HER MUSICIAN		
Language	ENGLISH	Service	General
Duration	14' 35"		
Broadcast Date	9th November 1967	Time	11.00am - 12.00pm
Re-broadcast Date			
Producer	E.C. Chelako.		
Disposal	Hold		
Instructions	Scripts ENCLOSED.		
			

The earliest reel we received was of a program called 'Zambia and Her Musicians', which was recorded on November 9, 1967. This fifteen-minute program features three songs by the Lusaka Radio Band (which the host of the program introduces as the Zambian Radio Band), who were formed in 1957, by Dick Sapsted, a British radio engineer, to back Alick Nkhata. Singing in the Nsenga, Bemba, Tumbuka, Nyanja, Kaonde, Swaka and Lunda languages, the group were the musical embodiment of the Zambian national motto; 'One Zambia, One Nation'. (For more music by, and information about, the Lusaka Radio Band, who in 1968 became the 'Big Gold Six' check out SWP records great compilation 'Zambush Vol. 2'.) As recording artists for the national radio the Lusaka Radio Band helped educate Zambians about government policy. These next two tracks were both recorded in the ZBS radio studio.

This first song, in the Chinyanja language, is called 'Ti Chose Smith Bampando'. The host of 'Zambia and Her Musicians' explains that this song refers to the 'struggle against the illegal Smith regime' in neighboring Rhodesia, and encourages the world to 'remove Smith from the ruling chair and have a Zimbabwe government'. This song was re-recorded in 1970 as 'Antu onse tingwilizane' (again check out 'Zambush Vol. 2'), and features a wonderful melodic guitar solo by Bestin Mwanza.

[↩️ Lusaka Radio Band 'Ti Chose Smith Bampando'](#)

This second song, in the Bemba language, by the Lusaka Radio Band praises the four-year plan that the Zambian government launched in 1966 'under the motto One Zambia, One Nation, to improve the government's management of agricultural, educational, economic and cultural development'. This track is a great example of how the Lusaka Radio Band digested influences as disparate as the Beatles and Afro-Cuban music. Politics never sounded so good!!

[↩️ Lusaka Radio Band 'Four-Year Plan'](#)

Next up, a reel that was sent to the Voice of America on December 16, 1968 and features three songs by Alick Nkhata and his long-time musical companion, and fellow broadcaster, James Shitumba.

[↩️ Alick Nkhata introduction](#)

Alick Nkhata first started working in radio in 1950, when the Northern Rhodesia Broadcasting Corporation hired him as a radio announcer. Around the same time that Alick started his radio career, he also started to record the songs that made him Zambia's first music star (for more information about his life consult the notes to the Retroafric CD 'Shalapo', a compilation of Alick's 1950s singles). In 1963, Alick Nkhata came to Washington D.C. to work with the Voice of America, and was one of the first hosts of the program 'African Panorama', on the VOA's English to Africa service.

Here are Alick and James Shitumba in a version of 'Uluse Lwaliile Nkwale', a song that they first recorded back in 1956 (this earlier version is included on the Retroafric release). This song, based on a well-known Zambian proverb, tells the story of the partridge and the python. A great fire was destroying the world, and as the fire drew near the python felt increasingly helpless. Desperate to escape the flames, the python cut a deal with his neighbor the partridge. The python promised that if the partridge flew him away to safety, he would never eat another partridge. So, the python coiled his body around the partridge and the two flew out away from the flames. As soon as they were safely away from the flames, however, the python started to get hunger pains, forgot about his promise, and ate the partridge. The moral of the story, Alick explains, is, 'do not be careless with your kindness, or you will find yourself in trouble one day'.

[↩️ Alick Nkhata & James Shitumba 'Uluse Lwaliile Nkwale'](#)

This next song, sung in Bemba, is a child's plea to his parents. The young man says to his parents if 'you send me to school I will be an asset to the family, and when I finish I will make enough money to pay for my brothers and sisters to finish their schooling'.

[↩️ Alick Nkhata & James Shitumba](#)

Our final reel features eight tracks of 'Zambian Town music'. All of the information we have on this reel is what you see printed on the label below. I am not sure when this reel was sent to us, but based on the little I have learned about these tracks, I would guess we received it sometime in the mid-1970s.

TAPE No.
ZBS/7/2/44

PLEASE RETURN TO
ZAMBIA BROADCASTING SERVICES
P.O. BOX R.W.15, LUSAKA
REPUBLIC OF ZAMBIA

Tape

Recorded at $\frac{3\frac{1}{2}}{15}$ i.p.s. Full Track C.C.I.R.

Programme Title	<i>ZAMBIA TOWN MUSIC (1.0)</i>	
Language	<i>VARIOUS</i>	Service
Duration		
Broadcast	Date	Time
Re-broadcast	Date	Time
Producer		
Disposal Instructions		

Sm A907 12/74

First up, are two wonderful cuts by the 'Kasama Bantu Actors', a group from the town of Kasama in the Northern Province of Zambia. The group was formed in 1970-1971, and broke up sometime in the late 1970s or early 1980s. These recordings were made in 1971 in the ZBS studios in the town of Kitwe, in Northern Zambia. This first song 'Mwa Ombe ni Kaunda' praises Kenneth Kaunda, the first president of Zambia, for liberating his countrymen from the British colonial regime.

↪ [Kasama Bantu Actors 'Mwa Ombe ni Kaunda'](#)

In 'Chombawalenga', sung in the Bemba language, the 'Kasama Bantu Actors' tell the story of a young man who gets confused by his love for two women who are both called 'Chomba'.

↪ [Kasama Bantu Actors 'Chombawalenga'](#)

There are several great guitar players on this reel. The most impressive cut is 'Umfuiti' by 'Ananiya Mwale'. He sings, in Chinyanja, about the perils of traditional medicine.

↪ [Ananiya Mwale 'Umfuiti'](#)

Our final track off this reel is a dub of a commercial release that may have been recorded in the studios of the ZBS. Lazarus Tembo was one of Zambia's most popular 'folk' singers. He was born in the Eastern province of Zambia, went blind at the age of eight, and eventually, under President Kaunda, became Zambia's Junior Minister of Culture. In 'Mtandezeni' he asks all Zambians to help each other.

↪ [Lazarus Tembo 'Mtandezeni'](#)

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