

Revisiting the Katanga Guitar Style(s) and the Origins of African Guitar Music

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During the 1940s and '50s, the “Katanga Guitar Style” emerged in the urban mining towns located along the Copperbelt in southeastern Zaire and northern Rhodesia (Zambia), inspiring the first attempts to document, analyze, and interpret early African guitar idioms. As a musical conglomerate, the Katanga guitar style encompasses a multiplicity of influences, techniques, and approaches that provided the basis for subsequent musical developments in which the guitar served as a common denominator. In this essay, I will examine the Katanga guitar style(s) in great detail, focusing upon manual vamping and finger-style techniques. I aim to show the extent to which variants of Copperbelt guitar music can be distinguished from one another, using certain shared features and characteristics such as playing techniques, time line patterns, and cyclical harmonic progressions as a baseline for comparative analysis. Borrowing from cultural anthropologist James Ferguson, who authored the monograph *Expectations of Modernity* (1999) that explored social life on the Copperbelt, I adapt an analytical framework for stylistic variation in which local and cosmopolitan strategies are considered. A model for Copperbelt guitar music should be broadly conceived in order to accommodate multiple localist and cosmopolitan socio-musical characteristics that compete and/or reinforce one another. In the end, the reader will gain valuable insights concerning the degree to which ethnographic and musical analysis can be well integrated, making them mutually reinforcing. While the Katanga guitar style was widely adapted, leading to degrees of stylized variation in guitar playing especially in Kenya and Tanzania, the term Katanga guitar style requires further clarification.