

INSTRUCTION MANUAL

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THE  
HUGH TRACEY



a new  
Musical Instrument  
from Africa

Patents Nos. 22,565, 60/3777 and 900,796.  
68/7040

Other Patents Pending.



## 1. INTRODUCING THE KALIMBA

The **Kalimba** is a new musical instrument with an old history. It is the latest member and direct descendant of the African family of instruments called *Mbira* or *Likembe*, which make their fascinating rippling music by the plucking of the tips of an array of small metal reeds.

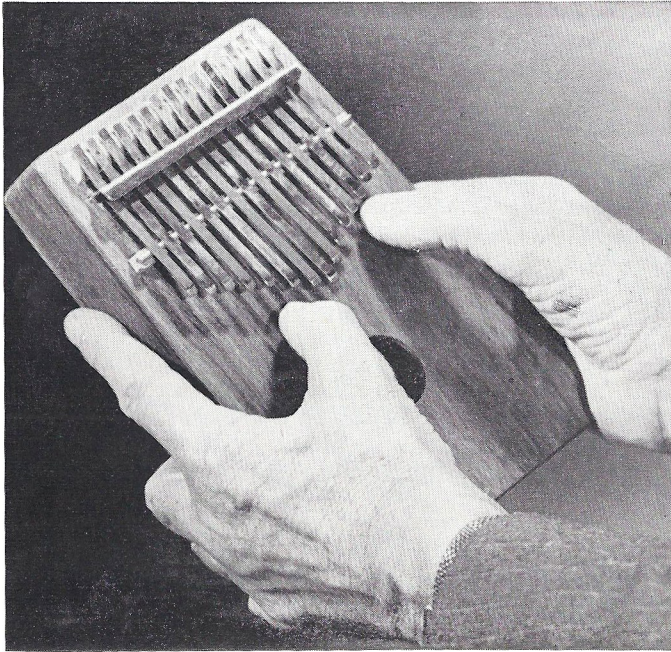
The *Mbira* was first noted by Portuguese explorers in the sixteenth century on the East African Coast, during their early voyages to the Far East around the Cape of Good Hope.

Father Dos Santos, a Portuguese priest and missionary, writing about the *Mbira* from East Africa in the year 1586, said that the Africans on the coast had "*a musical instrument called Ambira . . . It is all made of irons about a palm in length, tempered in the fire so that each has a different sound. There are only nine of these rods placed in a row close together.*" He went on to describe how the instrument was shaped and how it was played. "*They strike the keys as lightly as a good player strikes those of the harpsichord. Thus the iron rods being shaken, and the blows resounding above the hollow of the bowl . . . they produce altogether a sweet and gentle harmony of accordant sounds.*"

It was clear from what Father Dos Santos wrote that the *Mbira* was already a favourite music maker of the Chiefs of that time, for he summed up his description in these words. "*This instrument is much more musical than that made of gourds (the xylophone). It is not so loud, and is generally played in the king's palace, for it is very soft and makes but little noise.*"

The modern **Kalimba**, like its distant ancestor, also produces a sweet and gentle harmony of accordant sounds. The present-day player can produce a wide variety of diatonic melodies with their correct harmonies by lightly plucking the tips of the reeds with the two thumbs only. Three and four note chords can be sounded by playing adjacent reeds simultaneously on either hand.

\*Registered Trade Mark (Patent Nos. 22,565, 60/3777, 900,796)



There are five original types of Mbira or Likembe to be found in Africa, each being distinguished by the shape of its sound-board and the nature of its array of notes or reeds. The **Kalimba** is a box resonated Mbira which embodies several improvements in design and performance, now making it a practical small instrument for anyone either inside or outside Africa. It is the latest example of the truth of the two thousand year old Roman saying "Ex Africa semper aliquid novi." . . . "There is always something new out of Africa."

## 2. HOW TO PLAY YOUR KALIMBA

Most people will prefer to learn the **Kalimba** by ear, so here are a few suggestions for starting this way. If you prefer to learn with music, look ahead to page 8, "Further Instructions".

Hold the **Kalimba** comfortably between the hands like a book, with the reeds pointing downwards. It is best to hold it upright

between the fingers with the lower corners of the sound board touching the base of each little finger, rather than horizontally between the palms of the hands. The second or third fingers of each hand are then in the correct position to open and close the two tone holes on the back of the instrument.

Held in this way you will find that the tips of the reeds are all within easy reach of the two thumbs. You should try to play the **Kalimba** with a light stroking action of the top joint of the thumb rather than a hard plucking one. In fact the softer the action the more silver the tone. The most mellow tone can be produced by stroking the reeds with the tip of the thumb itself, rather than with the thumb nail which will produce a rather harder, louder and crisper tone.

One should think of the **Kalimba** as a maker of sensitive sound. A great range of tone can be achieved by varying the pressure on the tips of the reeds, from a sharp, clear, bell-like tone to a mere whisper

In this way the melody notes can be made to sound out beyond the accompanying chords, solely by a judicious modification of the stroke.

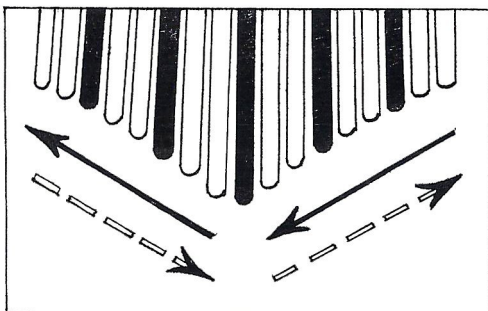
There is no need to worry that the sound of the **Kalimba** is too soft. Its true and pleasing voice has already been heard to great advantage when accompanied on the stage, without microphone, by such instruments as the guitar.

In the home, unlike some louder instruments, its gentle music when you are practising is an offence to no one, which is why it is found to be so attractive even in the hands of a beginner who soon learns the technique of playing softly.

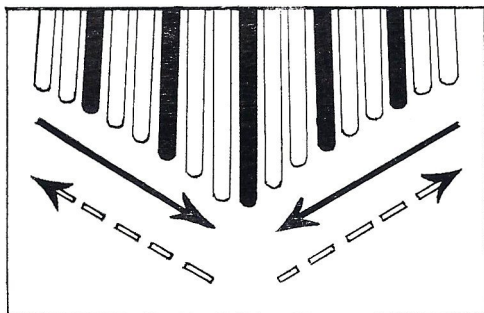
You will find that by making, at random, regular patterns of strokes on different reeds alternatively on either hand, melodic sequences will emerge and unexpected tunes present themselves. This is largely due to the novel arrangement of the reeds only found on the **Kalimba** which encourages improvisation.

On first acquaintance it is sometimes thought that the tips of the reeds are too close together. This is not so. Their nearness is an asset as one can play adjacent notes together on either hand to create two, three, and four-note chords.

Just one suggestion. Try to get out of the simple, tune picking stage as quickly as possible by using both thumbs together to make harmonies. While the one thumb is playing the melody note, the other on the opposite side of the array should be playing an accompanying harmony. There are two basic methods of playing harmonies (1) . . . by the simple action of moving the two thumbs simultaneously to left and right, as if they were tied together by an invisible string. You will find that they will automatically make true harmonies for you which you will soon learn to employ at will.



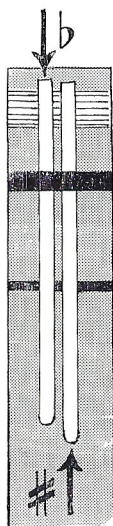
And (2) by playing the reeds with both thumbs simultaneously, moving them both inwards or outwards. You will thus obtain falling or rising unisons or sequences of notes in parallel intervals.



A few minutes experimenting with these two actions, particularly if it is done with a rhythmic pulse, will soon show you the harmonic possibilities of the instrument. Once you have mastered the feel of the "keyboard", you will find your **Kalimba** full of surprise and delight, in spite of its small size and gentle tone.

The function of the two finger holes on the back of the **Kalimba** is to round the tone of the instrument with a mild vibrato such as that produced by a violinist with a movement of the left hand. Only a slight wavering of the fingers which cover these holes is necessary, rather than a deliberate opening and closing.

Many handicapped children are already playing the **Kalimba** as it is the one small instrument which you can master with a minimum of physical effort and the maximum of musical satisfaction. If you are unable to hold up the **Kalimba** between your hands in the usual way, you can also play it with the tips of two fingers (instead of the thumbs) with the instrument lying flat on your knees or on a table.



### How to Tune your Kalimba

The reeds of the **Kalimba** can be tuned by the player. Each reed is a small spring which is not fixed in one position only to the sound board but is held in place by its own tension. This means that you can tune each note separately exactly as you wish (remembering that this is essentially a diatonic, not a chromatic instrument). The **Kalimba** will not go out of tune of its own accord; but should it be accidentally knocked, or if you want to re-tune it to accompany some other instrument such as a guitar, the method of tuning is this:

In order to *flatten* a note, push the reed down very slightly so that its playing end is *longer*.

To *sharpen* a note, push the reed up to make the playing end *shorter*.

Tuning should be done with a metal object, such as a small key or coin rather than with the bare finger.

When sent out to you, the **Kalimba** is tuned to the major scale of G. However you can re-tune it to any key you like, simply by sharpening or flattening the necessary reeds by one semitone. Do not attempt to tune *all* the reeds right up or down to the key you want, just those few which are necessary for the key signature.

## RE-TUNING CHART FOR KALIMBA

Reed Nos.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Original key of G	G	A	B	C	D	E	F#
New keys							
D	G	A	B	↑ C#	D	E	F#
A	↑ G#	A	B	↑ C#	D	E	F#
C	G	A	B	C	D	E	↓ F
F	G	A	↓ B♭	C	D	E	↓ F
B♭	G	A	↓ B♭	C	D	↓ E♭	↓ F

Here is a chart to show you how to re-tune your instrument to five common keys, starting each time from the original key of G. The first line gives the notes on your **Kalimba** as you received it in the key of G. The following lines show which reeds you must sharpen or flatten to get into the new key. For instance, if you want to go into C, just tune the F-sharp reeds (there are two of them, 7, and 7) slightly down until they are on F-natural. Then play the new scale up from C (4), and check that it sounds correct. Or if you want the key of A, tune all the G and C reeds (the 1's and the 4's) one semitone up.

If you intend to do much re-tuning, remember not to raise or lower the total range of the **Kalimba**. Keep each reed on its own note, or on the sharp or flat of that note. The D reed, for instance, may be tuned to D-flat, D-natural or D-sharp, but should not be tuned as far as C or E.

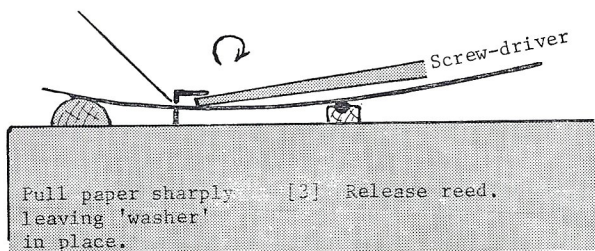
You will find that in several keys the keynote or tonic is on the right-hand side of the array. To help you get used to this, some of the tunes in this booklet have been written in C. Once you are able to play in one left-hand (G), and one right-hand key (C), all the other keys should offer no problem.

## Care of the Kalimba

Always keep your **Kalimba** clean and dry to ensure that the reeds continue to give a clear tone. Should one of them make a slight buzzing sound it is usually caused by a very small bit of grit or roughness between the reed and either the straining bar or the bridge. The tip of a small piece of thin paper inserted firstly between the reed and the bar, or secondly the reed and the bridge will put it right. This can be done by firmly pressing down the reed at the bar, or raising it at the bridge, to allow the insertion of the paper "washer". A tool such as a small screwdriver, will provide the leverage. Release the reed when a sharp tug on the paper will then leave the "washer" in place and invisible.

[2] Insert tip of paper here

[1] Twist screw-driver to press down reed.



Should a reed be taken out of the **Kalimba** it can easily be replaced by sliding it downward from the top end of the instrument while raising its tip over the bridge with the blade of a pocket-knife or similar instrument.

With these few instructions in mind, the **Kalimba** will be found to be a charming companion and music maker for any musically minded person. It is particularly suited to young players, who are not yet equipped to tackle one of the more orthodox instruments; to hikers who want a small pocket instrument to keep them company; to invalids recovering from an illness; to groups of children in schools, as well as to advanced students who wish to appreciate the techniques of African composers who for generations have created, on the several members of the Mbira family, their "sweet and gentle harmonies of accordant sounds".

HUGH TRACEY



## FURTHER INSTRUCTIONS

(These instructions are equally applicable to the seventeen-note Treble or the fifteen-note Alto **Kalimba**.)

Slip the printed card under the reeds of the **Kalimba**. You will see how each reed of the instrument corresponds with a note on the musical staff. All the reeds on the left give notes “on the lines”, and all those on the right give notes “in the spaces”.

First play the keynote of the **Kalimba**, or reed No. **1**. It is on the left side, and is one of the coloured reeds. Here it is in music:



Now play in turn the next three reeds to the left, Nos. **3**, **5**, and **7**. Here they are:



Next find **A** or reed No. **2**, the coloured one opposite the keynote, —and play after it the next three reeds to the right, Nos. **4**, **6**, and **1'**.

This is their music:



Note that the coloured reeds are shown by black notes. Now you already know the position of all the notes needed to play the first easy tune on the **Kalimba**, the bell-ringers' chimes:

1' 7 6 5 4 3 2 1 1' 6 4 2 7 5 3 1 1' 7 6 5 4 3 2 1

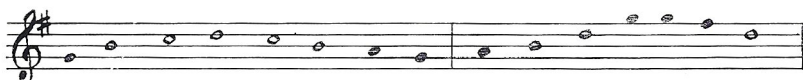


You will see that in order to play a scale on the **Kalimba** you have to play alternately left-right-left-right; and to play a simple arpeggio you keep to the same side—R-R-R-R and L-L-L-L.

**Note:** You can also play in a minor key if you start the scale on E, (No. 6,) or if you retune the necessary reeds for the purpose.

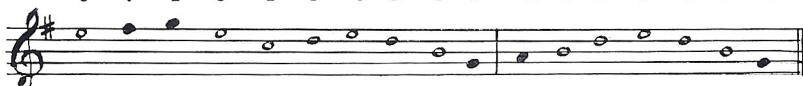
Here is another tune, "Barbara Allen", using the same eight notes. Play it first without harmony, like this:

1 3 4 5 4 3 2 1 2 3 5 1' 1' 7 5



In Scar-let Town where I was born There was a fair maid dwelling,

6 7 1' 6 4 5 6 5 3 1 2 3 5 6 5 3 1



Ma-de ev-ry lad cry — 'Well-a-day', Her name was Barb'ra Allen.

Now you know where the notes are located, try experimenting with other tunes you know to get the feel of the left-right-left-right arrangement of the **Kalimba**. Try the top melody lines of the tunes in this booklet. When you are picking out melodies smoothly, come back to the next paragraph and learn about **Kalimba** harmony, a special feature of this little instrument which doubles its fascination.

### **Kalimba Harmony**

Simple harmony is very easy on the **Kalimba**. When your left thumb is playing the tune on the *left* side, your right thumb finds the harmony note by playing any reed on the *right* side about two or three down from the melody note. The same when the right thumb has a note of the tune—you then play the accompany-

ing harmony with your left thumb a few reeds down on the left side. For example: suppose you want to play the harmony with the keynote **G** (No. 1). That is on the **left** side, so you look for a reed two or three down nearer the centre of the board on the **right** side, and find that **B**, (No. 3), sounds the most melodious when sounded with the keynote.

If you want a harmony for left-hand **D** (No. 5) you could play either **F#**, (No. 7), **A** (No. 2), or even **C** (No. 4), with your right thumb.

Again, with right-hand **E** (No. 6), you could play **C**, (No. 4), **E**, (No. 6), or **G** (No. 1) with your left thumb.

This is what these harmonies look like.

1	5	5	5	6	6	6
3,	7,	2	4	4,	6,	1

Follow the same principle all over the instrument. Here is the tune of "Barbara Allen" again, with a few harmonies added to show you how to find them. (The black notes still indicate the coloured reeds.)

1	3	4	5	4	3	2	1	2	3	5	1'	1'	7	5
5,	3,	6,	5,	3,	5,	5	5	5	4	7	7	7	7	7

In Scar-let Town where I was born There was a fair maid dwelling

6	7	4	6	4	5	6	5	3	1	2	3	5	6	5	3	1
6,	6,	3,	5,	4,	5	4,	7,	3,	3,	5,	4,	5	4,	7,	3,	1

Ma-de ev-ry lad cry — 'Well - a - day', Her name was Barb'ra Allen

You can also play three and four note chords on the **Kalimba**. To do this, one or both thumbs must play two adjacent reeds at the same time. Try it on **G** and **B** (Nos. **1** and **3**), until you get both the notes sounding out clearly.

Another method is to play one reed, sliding your thumb quickly upward or downward on to the next two reeds above or below, making a three-note chord of adjacent reeds.

On occasion you can also reach over with one thumb on to the other side. In this way you can play two reeds that are far apart on the same side, e.g. Nos. **5** and **6**, or Nos. **5** and **4**.

There are many kinds of harmonic intervals which you can play on the **Kalimba**.

- the octave for example Nos. **1** and **1**, or **5** and **5**.
- the seventh „ Nos. **5** and **6**, or **5**, and **4**.
- the sixth „ Nos. **5** and **3**, or **2'** and **4**.
- the fifth „ Nos. **1** and **4**, or **7**, and **3**..
- the fourth „ Nos. **1** and **4** or **4** and **7**.
- the third „ Nos. **1** and **3** or **6** and **1'**.
- the second „ Nos. **5** and **4** or **1** and **2**.

In addition you have all the harmonies of the three and-four note chords. Here are some useful ones that you will need in the key of G.



Once you know where to find all the notes of a tune on the instrument, you can go ahead with these harmonies and make up your own accompaniments to tunes you know. Sometimes you can put in countermelodies, fill in gaps in the tune, or put passing notes into the harmony that do not really belong there but make a pleasant

effect. The next illustration shows another way of playing “Barbara Allen” using some more possibilities of **Kalimba** harmony.

(Here we start writing the music with proper time values):

“BARBARA ALLEN”

Traditional



Here is another simple tune with **Kalimba** harmonies.

“LAVENDER BLUE”

Traditional



**VIBRATO**

The two small holes on the back of the **Kalimba** are the two “tone holes”. They are there to give you a quiet vibrato, or wavering sound. Cover them both with the second or middle finger of each hand and then, as you play **G** or **A** (No. 1 or No. 2), slightly open and close one of them rapidly. Now try leaving one hole open while opening and closing the other one and see for yourself which notes respond best. It should be around **B** or **C**,

Nos. 3 and 4. You can use the tone holes with good effect for very quiet or slow tunes, like this carol "On Christmas Night". You can play this as a duet for two **Kalimbas**, the one taking the notes with up-tails, the other the notes with down-tails.

"ON CHRISTMAS NIGHT"

Traditional

The musical score for "On Christmas Night" is presented on three staves. The first staff contains the melody in treble clef, G major, 4/4 time, with a key signature of one sharp (F#) and a common time signature. The second and third staves provide harmonic accompaniment, with the third staff including a "Fine" marking and a "D.C." (Da Capo) instruction at the end.

The **Kalimba** is especially suited for fast playing. That is one reason for the left-right-left arrangement of notes in the scale. Try this Irish jig, playing the tune only to start with. Then, when you have your thumbs moving easily up and down on the tune, you will find that most of the extra harmony will fall naturally into place. This can also be played as a duet for two **Kalimbas**.

"IRISH JIG"

Traditional

The musical score for "Irish Jig" is presented on four staves. The first staff contains the melody in treble clef, G major, 6/8 time, with a key signature of one sharp (F#). The subsequent three staves provide a complex harmonic accompaniment, featuring many beamed eighth and sixteenth notes.

The next illustration is a **Kalimba** setting of “Masanga”, an African guitar song from Jadotville, Congo. The words are in the Swahili language. This is a condensed version of part of the song. Each vocal phrase should repeat a few times in any order you like.

African *mbira* style is to repeat a short phrase continuously behind the voice (in this case bars 3 and 4, between the repeat signs), and then to improvise round this phrase in between the verses of the song. This **Kalimba** version shows you how you can keep a bass line and a tune going at the same time, in African style. It also gives your right thumb plenty of fast movement from the treble to the bass. Start by playing the tune (up-tails) and the bass line (down-tails) of the repeated bars 3 and 4 separately, then piece the two parts together note by note so that they flow evenly, in strict tempo. Then keep the **Kalimba** part going while you sing the vocal phrases in any order you like.

The next three pieces are written for the tuning in C. (See the paragraph “How to Tune your Kalimba”). First play the melody alone; then add your own “natural” **Kalimba** harmonies (as explained in the paragraph “**Kalimba** Harmony”); then look at the harmonies written here for further ideas (p. 16).

Both “Foyo” and “Pretty Little Baby” are from the show “Wait a Minim”, in which the **Kalimba** was played for the first time on theatre stages in Africa, Europe and America. The chord symbols in these examples are for guitar which give an indication of the accompaniment that goes very well with the **Kalimba**, or alternatively you could use a second Treble or an Alto **Kalimba** for duets.

The last piece for Alto **Kalimba** is based on an African *mbira* tune from Kinshasa, Congo. The notes in brackets are variations that you slip in unexpectedly once you have the first line flowing smoothly. Then you can play the other lines, in any order, returning every now and then to the theme of the first line.

From here on, with a spirit of inventiveness and an open mind, you will find there is no end to the fun and musical companionship that your **Kalimba** could give you.

ANDREW TRACEY

# "MASANGA"

Mwenda Jean Bosco

*Flowing easily, not too fast*

**KALUMBA**

**VOICE**

HA-NI NA MWENDA YE-TU JADOT-VILLE, WENDE UMWA-MBITE YULE MUPIKA WA-  
PDIYA

- ZE - NZE, WENDE UMWAMBIYE ENDE YANA-LALE KWABO.

O, I-LU - NYA WE, KA ZO - NGA WE - TU.

KANA MU KE KA-SI-PO NABWA TUMBA - NI KAMA NKINGA YA-SI-PO NA LANTEM



“FOYO”

Tune to C

Traditional, Haiti.

Musical score for "FOYO" in 4/4 time, key of C major. The score consists of four staves. The first two staves show the melody with notes and rests. The last two staves show the accompaniment with chords and rhythmic patterns. Chord symbols above the notes include C, Dmi, F, G7, and C7.

“PRETTY LITTLE BABY”

Tune to C

Traditional, U.S.A.

Musical score for "PRETTY LITTLE BABY" in 4/4 time, key of C major. The score consists of two staves. The first staff shows the melody with notes and rests. The second staff shows the accompaniment with chords and rhythmic patterns. Chord symbols above the notes include Ami, F, Dmi7, G7, E7, and Ami.

“ANNA”

Tune to C

R. Vatro

Musical score for "ANNA" in 4/4 time, key of C major. The score consists of four staves. The first two staves show the melody with notes and rests. The last two staves show the accompaniment with chords and rhythmic patterns. Chord symbols above the notes include C, Dmi7, G7, Ebdim, and C.

(By permission of Redi Ponti de Laurentiis, Rome)

"MWANA ABOYI MAMA"

AltoKalimba piece

Musical score for AltoKalimba piece "MWANA ABOYI MAMA". The score is written in treble clef with a key signature of one sharp (F#) and a 6/8 time signature. It consists of four staves of music, with the first staff starting with a treble clef and a key signature of one sharp. The music is a single melodic line with some chords and rests.

All arrangements by Andrew Tracey

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Diagram showing the notes of the treble Kalimba when tuned to the Key of G. The notes are arranged in a descending sequence from left to right, with fingerings indicated by circled numbers 1 through 7. The notes are: C (4), A (2), F# (7), D (5), B (3), G (1), E (6), C (4), B (3), D (5), F# (7), A (2), C (4), E (6), G (1), B (3), D (5). Below the notes is a musical staff showing the notes in a treble clef, with a key signature of one sharp (F#) and a 6/8 time signature.

The notes of the treble Kalimba when tuned to the Key of G.

**Some well known tunes which can be played on the Kalimba by a beginner:**

ENGLISH	Oranges and Lemons. Drink to me only. British Grenadiers. The first Nowel. I'll go no more a-roving. Raggle Taggle Gipsies ( <i>minor</i> ).
IRISH	Danny Boy. The Mountains of Mourne.
SCOTTISH	Scotland the Brave. Annie Laurie. Loch Lomond. Will ye no come back again.
WELSH	All through the night. Men of Harlech.
AMERICAN	On top of Old Smokey. Clementine. Coming round the mountain. Home on the Range. Moon River. Yankee Doodle. Oh Suzanna. Shenandoah. John Brown's body. When Johnny comes marching home. Kisses sweeter than wine ( <i>minor</i> ).
CANADIAN	Alouette.
AUSTRALIAN	Waltzing Matilda.
FRENCH	Sur le pont d'Avignon. Frere Jacques. Au clair de la lune.
GERMAN	Brahms' Lullaby. Roslein auf der Heide. Silent night.
LATIN	Gloria in Excelsis ( <i>Carol</i> ).
SOUTH AFRICAN	Sarie Marais. Vat jou goed en trek, Ferreira.



The Kalimba played on the West End and Broadway stages in the musical show "Wait a Minim" by Paul Tracey, accompanied on guitars by Andrew Tracey (*left*) and Jeremy Taylor. This photograph was taken while they were appearing on British television.

*This is the original 1968 kalimba instructional booklet written by Hugh Tracey and Andrew Tracey. In 2011, Kalimba Magic digitized and cleaned up an old copy of the booklet and posted the PDF online for free. For other instructional material for the kalimba, visit:*

[www.kalimbamagic.com](http://www.kalimbamagic.com)

**—Kalimba—**

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