

**kwela** /'kwelə, 'kwe:la/ *n.* Also **khwela**, **quela**, **qwela**, and with initial capital. [Xhosa and Zulu *khwela* climb on.

◇ Several factors led to the use of this word as a name for the music. Firstly, it was used in the fig. senses 'join in', 'get going', as a call to dancers or band members. Secondly, it was used in the slang word *kwela-kwela* (police van), which is to be heard in the spoken introduction to the 1956 recording 'Tom Hark', by Elias Lerole and his Zig-Zag Flutes; it may have been due to the popularity of this record that the term became widely associated with the music. 'Some African informants argue that it was Whites, who by 1956 were buying pennywhistle recordings also., who first picked out the word *kwela* from 'Tom Hark' and used it as a general term for the music.' (D.B. Coplan, *Urbanization of African Performing Arts*, 1980). Thirdly, among speakers of Nguni languages, the use of the word *kwela* was prob. reinforced by association with the Zulu and Xhosa word *ikhwelo* (whistling, a shrill whistle.)]

1. *Music.* A rhythmical, repetitive popular music style in which the lead part is almost invariably played on the penny-whistle, and which developed out of MARABI (sense 3), TSABA-TSABA (sense a), and traditional southern African music; also called PATA-PATA (sense 2). Also *attrib.* See also MBAQANGA, PENNY-WHISTLE.

◇ 'Kwela' music developed in Soweto during the 1940s and 1950s.

1958 *Time* 16 June 37 The haunting sound of penny-whistle jazz has become the favorite music of South Africa's slum-caged blacks - and of a great many white hipsters. In the dusty streets, urchins rock to the penny-whistle's fast *kwela* beat. 1963 K. MACKENZIE *Dragon to Kill* 132 It was *kwela* music, much of it from penny whistle combinations: an insistent, unvarying, endlessly repetitive beat that sounded at first drearily monotonous, but which became hypnotically fascinating after a while. 1965 *Drum* Dec. 19 The Xhosa verb -kwela is in this context used to mean to begin, to get moving. The word, which originally meant to climb, assumed this different meaning during the time of the pennywhistle music. Before the famous pennywhistle group, the Black Mambazo..began playing, their leader..to notify his band that..they should begin playing..would say 'Kwela' meaning begin. From this..the name 'Kwela music' was given to pennywhistle music. 1977 [see MBAQANGA]. 1980 D.B. COPLAN *Urbanization of African Performing Arts*. 343 *Kwela* music consisted of a rhythmic ostinato chord sequence, usually C-F-C-G<sup>7</sup>..on a string bass and guitar, backed by a standard drum set in place of shakers. Above this was a strong melodic line played by several pennywhistles...Above the two parts played by the rhythm section and pennywhistles, a solo pennywhistle plays an improvised third part. 1985 A. GOLDSTUCK in *Frontline* Feb. 21 *Kwela* music, the township rhythm that had its heyday in the fifties, has more in common with boeremusiek than any imported 'white' musical form. It has the same vibrance, the same uninhibited rawness, and a very similar musical structure. 1988 *New Nation* 25 Feb. 11 It was the development of *kwela* music during the mid-1940s which influenced him the most. It was just after this period that people started classifying any music with township rhythms as *kwela*, without realising that it referred specifically to penny whistle music. 1989 *Research News* (H.S.R.C.) Vol.1 No.7, 3 It was..in Sophiatown that the styles of music called 'kwela' and 'mbaqanga' had their origin. 1990, 1991 [see PENNY-WHISTLE]. 1993 B. SUTER in *Natal Mercury* 26 Mar. (Funfinder) 4 The sounds of 1950s Sophiatown, when urban big-band jazz first learned to absorb and accommodate traditional *kwela*-mbaqanga, pata-pata and marabi music. 1994 *Sunday Times* 30 Jan. (*adv*) 34 *Kwela*. Who can forget the Sophiatown buzz of the fifties. And the inimitable sounds of Spokes Mashiyane - the King of *Kwela* himself. Playing probably the simplest wind instrument ever conceived, he and his African pennywhistle are today a legend.

2. *rare.* PENNY-WHISTLE. Also *attrib.*

1958 *Gramophone* Dec. 328 Those addicted to the shrill squawking of the *Kwela* flute will have to hear..Something New From Africa. [1965 P.R. KIRBY *Musical Instruments of Native Races* 276 It is interesting to note that performances upon this instrument, [*sc.* the penny whistle] and indeed the instrument itself, called *Kwela* by the Natives, should be associated with the Xhosa verb *uku-Kwela*, which means 'To hiss or whistle by drawing in the air.' From this verb is derived the noun *i-Kwelo*, which signifies 'a shrill whistling sound, made to incite cattle to run, or to induce cows to give their milk, or - to encourage people to attack!']

3. A dance-style accompanied by *kwela* music. Cf. PATA-PATA sense 1.

1960 *Guardian* (U.K.) 1 Apr. 10 When night falls, she can dance the *kwela*, mambo, or high-life with any or all of them. 1961 T. MATSHIKIZA *Choc. for my Wife* 55 She did half a

shimmy, half a wobble, half a jive. She put her sherry in my hands and said, 'That's what they call the Kwela'. **1970** M. WEITZMAN *Informant, Johannesburg* It is fascinating to watch the Bantu children do the Qwela. **1970** V. JAQUES *Informant, Pietersburg* Kwela. A type of dance. **1971** on Springbok Radio 24 July, The Kwela, you know, being the African dance.