

Bwerekeni mtondo

(A sack cloth day or night mask from the Mua area)



(night)

Themes

1) Becoming an adult/sexual maturity

Etymology

Bwerekeni mtondo means, 'Lend me a mortar.'

Description

This mask (25 cm.) consists of a head cover made of cloth, jute or skin. The apex takes the shape of a small mortar. The dancer wears rags around his waist; and his body is smeared with mud. He dances at the time of the girls' initiation and sings the following words, voicing his proposal for marriage, even though his sexual powers are in doubt: "*Lend me a mortar. As for the pestle, I have one of my own. I need to inform my relative (of the wedding).*" (The family answers:) *He is impotent!*" As he sings, he moves his hips frenetically and runs after the initiates following the rhythm of the *chisamba*. As he dances during the girls' initiation, the initiates come in a single file to touch the small mortar he carries. Each one has to be rescued with a coin by her tutor (the

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namkungwi). The song, in which the sexual symbolism of the mortar and pestle is clear, proclaims that the girls are now mature and can get married.

Song

"Bwerekeni mtondo. Munsu ndili nawo. Kwathu ndikanene ee ae. N'chiudza!"

Source

Interview in 1991