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time a big roar was heard
in the sky, very similar to
the sounds of the big
drum. A flying object was

seen and disappeared into
the cave.

their new country.

Nelson Mukhuba beats
the drum in his yard in

vigour. People arrive
from everywhere at his
place to find out if there
is a celebration in which
they could partake.

Ngoma rolls over the
hills. Of its magic it has
lost nothing. ;

Nelson Mukhuba, who
has a deep insight into the -
Venda history and. |
culture, knows where the

holy drum was eventually
hidden: in a cave deep in
the mountains. At that

The Vhavenda were
sure that the spirits of
their ancestors had fol-
lowed them at least to

true Venda style and

_The mighty sound of

exhibition in Johannesburg. The door is made
an enemy would have to come in h

. a A SES .
Model of a traditional door made by Nelson Mukhuba for |
ead first.
low so that |

TREFWOORDE

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Vhen Cae

fara ste hes
dark drum

speaks the eae
\Vhavenda

Bg sega me New oe
O = cha thnoane o Oe
Text and pictures a, Â© eedeci aps ten
â\200\230 eK \" 7
by . at | 7 pep twews Cae ey fRet
AUGUST SYCHOLT | ip ciephnre docile mand
i Go dedefewes ee dun vee
The enemy were stopped i ccc
in their tracks when they |
heard the rolling thunder of â\200\224 Decne eee ee ee ees
Ngoma .
A huge python holds
the herdboy â\200\230in a 10 staeowsnges os awe
deadly embrace.

Nelson Mukhuba, the
Eraous woodearver = ie a TS 8h eas vite bee oes

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of the Vhavenda

Aistens, unperturbed, .

to the tamtam of the
big drums. Down in
the green valley
another celebration
begins â\200\224 and the
drums which are
used to call the peo-
ple together were
carved by him. He
also carved the
python crushing the
herdboy â\200\224 a very
_ realistic portrayal.

â\200\234This dreadful incident
actually occurred a while
ago nearby, at the Levuvu
River,â\200\231â\200\231 says the wood-
carver.

The river, one of the
three main perennial
streams of Venda,
teemed with hippos in old

days, hence the name. .

There were many of the
holy crocodiles. Snakes

abound in the river to this _
day.

I visited the wood-
carver in his European-
type house in the hills of
Tshakuma. His home is
surrounded by banana,
Pawpaw and mango
trees. The interior is full

of wood carvings of all
kinds. ,

The Venda have a com-
paratively old wood-
carving tradition. The art
was passed on from
father to son. They were
especially good at carved

wooden figures, so that
examples of their figure
work is treasured in some
overseas museums.

Their carvings show a
great attention to
anatomic detail and

definition of volume. It is
a very realistic style. Ad-
ditionally symbolic
meanings are achieved
by the use of colours:
Red, for instance, ap-
pears to symbolise a
woman of child-bearing

Â¥

capacity. Black sym-
bolises an old woman,
and white the virile male.

The drums are made by
specialist carvers. The
carved figures of humans
and animals are widely
used at the Dombas, the

~ > teat L

initiation schools for

â\200\230young girls.

The figures here are used as instructional aids. They are shown to the girls while the meanings are explained.

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These values are mainly concerned with the woman's duties as wife and mother, they

emphasize clearly the difference between the Venda and other groups.

Animal figures are also |
- used in the Domba |

mainly leopard, elephant and python. This is to

show the opposition |

between domestic/cultural values. and the dangers of the wild.

Nelson. Mukhuba's |
work shows many aspects

of Venda life, both historic and contemporary, which he interprets in a realistic way so that anybody can appreciate and enjoy his work. | ,

He uses only indigenous wood for his carvings and walks into the rain forest to select the right stems of marula and

uilboom.

Occasionally, when he has to carve a big drum, he selects wood from a jacaranda tree. These trees, which originated from South America were planted by the early missionaries in Venda.

The .woodcarver showed me his most precious works. They are three drums, which are used in all Venda celebrations: j

Ngoma | the big one
| is made of marula

Dumbulu the
medium one is made of
jacaranda

Murumba = the long
one is made of huilbos.

Normally, :he says,

the drum must acquire
the reddish colour of
Venda soil, the colour of

the dust which is swirled

around when hundreds of

i feet stamp the ground.

So the dark colour of his
Ngoma is not natural. He
has oiled the wood for ex-
hibition purposes.

When. Ngoma speaks.
every Venda listens. The
big drum is a symbol of
the unity of all Vhavenda.
The drum appears on
the crest of the future
new independent state.

The chiefs used the
Ngoma to call together
their tribesmen. when
there was war, work or
celebration.

When the ancestors of |

the Vhavenda migrated:
from central Africa to the
mountains of the Sout-

pansberg, they brought -,
their huge drum with |
them. This ancient holy |

drum has such a frightful
sound that the enemy
were stopped in their:
tracks when they heard
the rolling thunder of the
Ngoma. -°

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A carving of the herdboy locked In the python's deadly embrace.

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Nelson the woodcarver with the three typical Venda drums â\200\224 Ngoma, Dumbula and
; : Murumba. 2 wT 3