

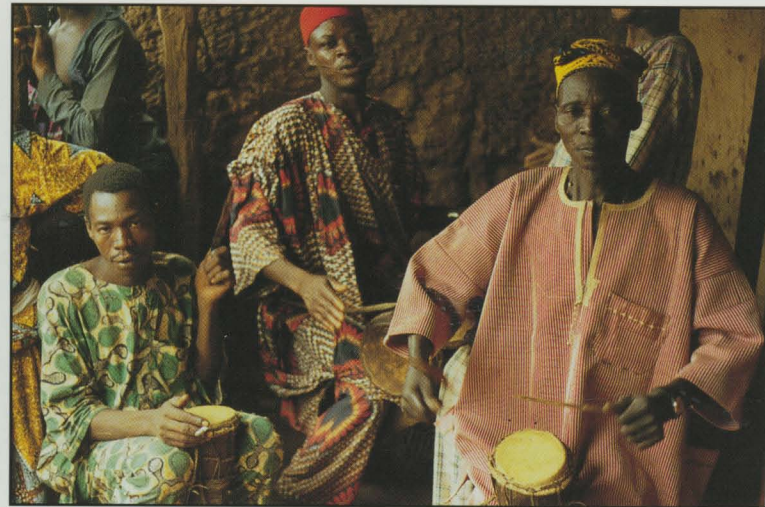


*Dundun ensemble in Adjarra (above); Bata drummers in a ceremony for Shango in Kétou, Benin (front cover).*

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## Yoruba Drums from Benin, West Africa

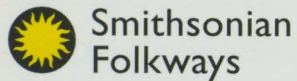


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# Yoruba Drums from Benin, West Africa

## The Bata Repertoire for Egungun in Pobè

1. Ako
2. Alujo
3. Kiriboto
4. Ogogo
5. Potpourri

## Rhythm for Shango in Pobè (Bata ensemble)

6. Aluja

## The Bata Repertoire for Shango in Sakétè

7. Oba Koso
8. Omenega
9. Lade Lade
10. Oke
11. Ajagunan

## Three Rhythms of the Dundun Ensemble from Adjarra

12. Esikesi (for wedding)
13. Olomelekan (for Egungun)
14. Jagun Jagun (for Egungun)

## Two Rhythms of the Dundun Ensemble from Atchoukpa

15. Ale Ile (for Egungun)
16. Okele Ladji Ladji (for Shango)

## Repertoire for Gelede in Kétou

17. Rhythm for the Afternoon
18. Rhythm for the Night

## Repertoire for Oro and Ifa in Kétou

19. Ifa — Oro



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Featured here are the complex rhythms of the *bata* and *dundun* drum ensembles used in Yoruba religious cult worship and divination. These Yoruban roots of urban Africa and Afro-Caribbean music call the divine ancestors (*orisha*) to earth to possess their mediums. These 1987 recordings are extensively annotated in a 32 page illustrated booklet which describes the *orisha* legends, the drums, and presents a detailed analysis of the drumming.



INTERNATIONAL INSTITUTE  
FOR TRADITIONAL MUSIC

*Edited by the International Institute for Traditional Music, Berlin;  
in cooperation with the International Council for Traditional  
Music (UNESCO C)*

*Recordings, commentary, and transcriptions by  
Marcos Branda Lacerda*



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19. Ifa — Oro 5:22

# Yoruba Drums from Benin, West Africa

*Recordings, commentary, and transcriptions  
by Marcos Branda Lacerda*

## INTRODUCTION

We present on this recording some examples of Yoruba cult music from the Republic of Benin that generally have resisted the modern transformational forces impinging on black African cultures. The fact that this country developed differently from its powerful neighbor, Nigeria, allows us to infer a special condition for its music: the music of Benin is still largely untouched by those forces of change that have particularly affected the urban centers of Africa.

Surprisingly, some of the recent works on Yoruba culture overlook the large groups of Yoruba people found today in Benin. This is unfortunate, considering the clear consciousness of Yoruba cultural roots found in some cities of that country. For instance, in Kétou (Benin), religious groups practice cults that are permeated with signs of their Yoruba origins, unmindful of the frontiers imposed by political developments. To be sure, Ife and Oyo in Nigeria are the places of origin of the Yoruba people, but experienced priests and other experts regard Kétou, for example, as an important birthplace of some Yoruba cults, such as that of Oshossi, "the hunter." This deity plays an important role in the Yoruba cults practiced in Latin America and the Caribbean Islands. It is in Benin, not Nigeria, that the Gelede cult has been disseminated, along with other cults that also reflect Yoruba beliefs, such as Egungun (or Egun), Ifa and those of several other orishas (deities). It is perhaps characteristic of Benin that the Egungun cults, whose instrumental music can be heard here, are played not only for entertainment, as in Nigeria. Moreover, the bata drums can be considered ancient in origin in comparison with some Nigerian examples.

Musicology still lacks a good critical view of different types of percussion music in Black Africa. Too much emphasis has been given to a certain homogeneity in the rhythmic aspect of African music; one reason for this lies in the

African-influenced popular music of the Americas and Europe, with its repetitive and similar rhythms. Actually, although some musical elements are regularly repeated, there is a wide expressive variety to the percussive styles of Black Africa.

Up to now, our knowledge concerning West African rhythm has been based mainly on the studies made on the manifold percussive styles performed by part of the Ewe population in Ghana. The scholarly works concerning these styles were pioneering ones and Ewe music still presents many challenges to researchers due to its complexity and diversity. The wash of sound emanating from the drum ensemble, associated with a distinct conception in rhythmic distribution, creates a barrier for Western ears. Moreover, the load of symbolism—by which the music functions as a form of support to religious practices and messages are conveyed linking it to the work



*Fig. 1: kiriboto drums from Sakete*



with the soil — prevents direct access for outsiders to this kind of music.

Obviously, many types of music in addition to that of the Ewe also convey African feelings and unique features. One need only listen to the timbral aspect of the *bata* and *dundun* ensembles heard in this anthology. The *dundun* drums display a great capacity for imitating the three-tone Yoruba language through the possibility of modulating pitch, while the *bata* drums combine very high and very low pitches through the use of two membranes, defying the convention that pitch variation in African music occurs only in the lower sound region.

The world media have been active in the diffusion of musical styles that originate from the African ones heard here. The commercial success of African urban music both on that continent and abroad is well known. Africa has witnessed the birth and spread of music which is disseminated through concerts, records and radio broadcasting and which is becoming the expression of a pan-African feeling. The Yoruba have been collaborating with the styles of *juju*, *ak-pala* and others, all somewhat similar to one another. These new urban musical styles are impregnated with a Western character. The percussion parts sometimes consist of a mixture of African and Latin American instruments, together with the usual electric and electronic harmony instruments of Western bands. Little by little, the exuberant percussion parts acquire a profile of mild accompaniment to the harmonic and vocal parts. Musicians in African rural regions are also aware of these "improvements." Even when there are no electric instruments available, the musicians appear in new formations for occasions of entertainment and for non-ritual celebrations. These ensembles are highly organized and, curiously, the musicians of traditional ensembles often lead such groups.

Musicology must recognize this relatively new musical development, which is reaching worldwide proportions. However, the idea of this particular production is to present part of the musical underpinnings upon which African popular music is being built. This CD presents a specific repertoire recorded during field research, a repertoire which still requires deeper investigation and analysis. We explore here particularly the *bata* drums, as can be seen in the notes below.

Akin Euba has been studying the music of the *dundun* drums. More detailed information about other repertoires can be found in reference works concerning each particular cult. We hope that this production contributes to the knowledge of a society which has highly developed forms of culture based on oral transmission while being fundamentally open to innovation and the absorption of foreign values.

## NOTES ON YORUBA ETHNOGRAPHY THE RELIGIOUS SYSTEM — SHANGO

Yoruba history is interwoven with its religious mythology. It is said that the Yoruba emerged as a nation when Odudwa tried to unify the people. The formation of cities with large concentrations of Yoruba in West Africa, such as the concentration of population around Ife, began with the conquest of small villages. According to Yoruba mythology, Odudwa sent his relatives to occupy important centers, resulting in the spread of Yoruba communities as far as the Togo territory. The traditions of these outlying groups differ from those of the central region in that they have no cults for *Obatala*, *Shango* or *Yemanja*, but they do have cults for remote *orishas* such as Nana Burucu (Verger 1982a:15).

Most Yoruba deities evolved from a historical person who in turn is associated with some power of nature, to a human activity or to a great power (*ase*) they possess and which is renewed through the cults. An *orisha* is manifested in two ways. In the first, the cult member absorbs traces of the character of his particular *orisha*, which are reflected in his consequent behavior. Secondly, some of the members can be "possessed" by their *orishas* under particular circumstances, during which the music contributes significantly.

For each person, one particular *orisha* is considered a kind of divine ancestor, common to the living and dead members of one's expanded family. His importance to the individual varies widely from city to city in the Yoruba territory. For example, Odudwa is recognized more for his historical role than for his divine one and is worshiped in cults held without trance (Verger 1982:256).

The idea of the *orisha* is often expressed in specific legends. One such legend presents the myth of creation and the relationship between *Obatala* and *Odudwa*: *Olodumare*, an entity not directly worshipped and superior to all *orishas*, has created *Obatala* to carry out the creation. However, *Obatala* does not believe that he has to pay reverence to *Eshu-Elegba* to accomplish his mission. *Eshu*, the guardian of the godly world, decides to punish *Obatala* for his lack of worship and makes him terribly thirsty. When *Obatala* makes a hole in a palm tree, an irresistible juice pours forth, a wine that makes him sleep. *Odudwa*, born after *Obatala*, takes the "creation bag" away from him, reports what happened to *Olodumare* and is told to proceed with the mission of creation. *Odudwa* takes from the bag a dark substance and pours it into the great body of water on the earth, forming a large pile. A chicken then spreads this substance throughout the water, forming the land of all the continents on the oceans. *Obatala* returns to *Olodumare*, who forbids him to drink the palm wine but assigns him to mold the human bodies, to which *Olodumare* then gives life (Verger 1982a:250).

In fact, there is some historical background to this legend: for example, *Odudwa* is supposed to have met and triumphed over *Obatala* in an Igbo village that would become the city of Ife. (Verger 1982b:4)

Variations in the creation mythology

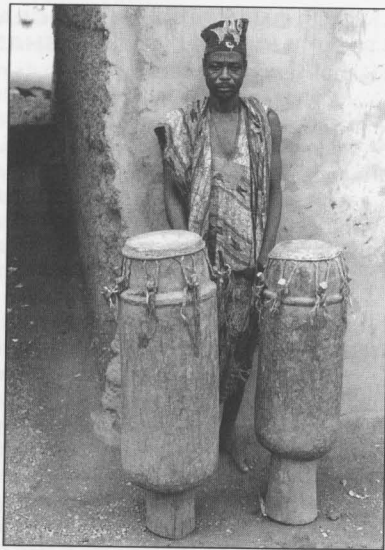


Fig. 2: *Gelede drums (Kétou)*

also exist. According to another version, the creation of the world is attributed to *Oraniyan*, *Odudwa*'s youngest and more powerful son, who founded the *Oyo* dynasty (Verger 1982a:128). Verger observes that both versions are related to the historical foundation of two royal ancestries: Ife with *Odudwa* and *Oyo* with *Oraniyan*. Consequently, both cities dispute the other's importance in the creation of the *Yoruba* people.

In Africa, a cult member dedicates himself to just one *orisha*. Other deities can participate in his religious cult only to strengthen his own *orisha*. Such is the case of *Odudwa*, who appears as a rival to *Obatala*, as well as *Oya*, "the deity of the winds, the storms and the Niger River," who appears for some of the *Shango* initiates as one of *Shango*'s wives. However, it is impossible to establish steady relationships among the deities in the complex *Yoruba* religious system. In addition, some *orishas* are worshiped in certain cities and totally ignored in others.

Before describing *Shango*'s character, whose instrumental music is here presented, we should first introduce *Eshu-Elegba*. Verger includes him among the *orishas*, though actually he is considered the liaison between the earthly world and the *Yoruba* deities. Cult ceremonies begin with references to *Eshu* in order to establish harmony between mankind and the deities. Offerings are made to him to avoid the effects of his evil side, a side that appears in the legend described above. Otherwise, he is able to settle disagreements between men, between men and the *orishas* or between the *orishas*. *Eshu* is the guardian of temples, cities and houses.

The *Shango* cult has been disseminated throughout the *Yoruba* territory, except for in Ife. He has become the focus of attention in *Yoruba* contemporary culture, even as the theme of an opera written by musicians from Lagos, the capital of Nigeria. Historically, *Shango* was the third king of *Oyo*, after his father, *Oraniyan*. He grew up in his mother's land (*Nupe*) and, in keeping with his violent temper, took the kingdom of *Koso* by force. Then he went to *Oyo*, where he founded a district named after *Koso*. Others say that he took over his brother's kingdom in *Oyo*; this brother, *Dada Ajaka*, had an overly sensitive personality that was incompatible with the position of a king (Verger 1982a:132).



*Fig. 3: Eshu figure in Sakété*

Shango is the deity of thunder, which he uses to punish the harmful. He is also virile and vain. In addition to the *bata* drums, two other objects are closely associated with him: the sere calabash, used to call him for the cult ceremony, and the double axe. Rouget (1965:70-4) and Verger (1982a:134-7; 1957:315-25) have described the Shango cults in detail. The following two stories collected by Verger (1982a:133-4) characterize his personality:

Among the elements of Ogun, "the forger", there was Shango, who enjoyed being elegant.

He used to wear braids in his hair as a woman,

he used to make holes in his ears to wear rings.

He used to wear pearl necklaces.

How elegant he was!!!

This man was powerful also for his charm.

He was a professional warrior.

He wouldn't make any prisoners in combat (he killed them all).

For this reason Shango is greeted:

Koso's King, who is independent.

He laughs when visiting Oshun.

He spends a lot of time with Oya.

He wears a red cangue.

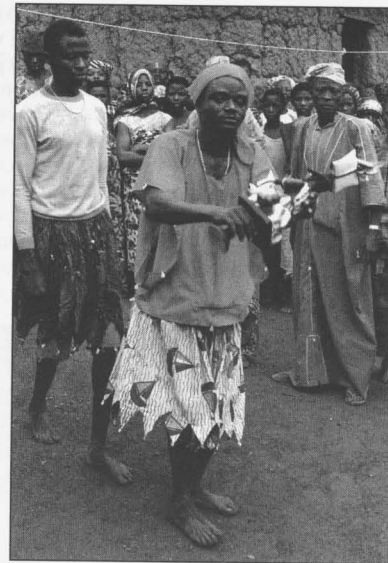
Oh! An elephant that walks with dignity.

My Lord, who cooks the yam with the air blown from his nostrils.

He kills six people with only one stroke.

He wrinkles his nose, the swindler panics and disappears.

Egungun and Oro



*Fig. 4: Shango dancer in the village*

The cult for Egungun (dead spirits) is probably the most widely practiced among the Yorubas. It is a masquerade whose diffusion has given rise to a variation that mixes its ritualistic origin with pure entertainment. In Benin only the ritualistic version is practiced, and it is more widely distributed throughout the communities than the cults for *orisha*, although the Egungun cult belongs to secret societies. Following a secret preparation, the ritual is exhibited to the public in specific places and afterwards it goes to different sites of the city.

If we define the *orishas* as divinized ancestors, the Egungun spirits do not belong to the Yoruba religious system. Generally speaking, Yoruba tradition can historically localize the origins of *orishas* to a remote time in the past. The Egungun spirits, on the contrary, represent and incorporate ancestors of a more restricted collectivity, like a family or a town.



Fig. 5: Egungun dancing in the village

Egungun cult ceremonies can be performed in a funeral to symbolize the resurrection of the dead, according to the Yoruba belief in the reversibility of death (Olajubu and Ogo 1977:255). The Egungun represent a link between the dead and living beings, symbolizing as well the moral principles to be followed by the community (Elbein dos Santos 1984:20).

Many myths exist which concern the origin of the Egungun. Some myths relate them to the religious system, through association with Orunmila (Olajubu & Ojo 1977:255-6), *Obatala*, Ogun, Oya and Shango (Elbein dos Santos 1984:108-10, 121-3). Of particular interest is the liaison between Egungun and Shango because, as shown in this anthology, both are associated with the unique *bata* drums and share part of their repertoire with *Pobè* and *Sakété*.

Elbein dos Santos relates that Oya was not able to have children with Ogun. She consulted a *balabawo* — “Father of the Secrets,” or priest — who told her that she would be able to give birth only when a man possessed her with violence. This man was Shango, with whom she had eight children, all speechless. At another consultation she was told to make sacrifices. Only after doing so was she able to conceive Egungun, who could talk, but with a husky and distorted voice.

This characteristic of distorted speech has been maintained in the Egungun cults. Members enter in hierarchical order, one after the other, and talk or sing with modified voices. Their luxurious vestments cover their entire bodies in such a way that the initiated cannot be recognized either from his voice or from his physical appearance. Some people participate in the performance with sticks (sometimes using them violently) to prevent the public from being touched by the Egungun, what would imply bad luck for that person. Depending on the city, the *bata* drums can be substituted for others, but this rarely happens in the cults for Shango. In this anthology, we hear the music played also by the *dundun* drums which, similarly to the *bata*, can be carried around throughout the city without interruption. This fact allows the soloist to get closer to the Egungun during the ceremony, creating an impressive communicative link between dance and music.

The Egungun are also related to Oro. While the former, with their luxurious



clothing and distorted voices, incorporate the souls of the dead, Oro represents the ancestors in a non-material way (Olajubu & Oro 1977:256). The cult to Oro is as discreet as possible. The uninitiated must ignore any evidence of Oro's presence, who arises through voices spread in different parts of the village. The women are especially forbidden approach. In Kétou the same Ifa repertoire is played before the cult to announce to the women that the ceremony is going to take place.

## IFA

Ifa is a Yoruba divination system practiced by a *babalawo* (priest). Any person in doubt about some aspect of their life, such as a trip, their health, etc., can consult one. The *babalawo* uses cola nuts especially selected for this purpose, and plays a game with specific rules to draw some figures with them. There are sixteen basic configurations (*odu*) and 240 secondary ones. Corresponding to each configuration are certain legends which, by analogy, can answer the question posed by the person (Verger 1957:568).

The *babalawo* must know all the legends by heart and how to associate them with the situation of the person seeking advice. His apprenticeship is carried out over a long period and is very demanding. The Ifa performance cannot be compared to that of the *orisha* cults. The *orisha* prepares himself to receive the soul of a divinized ancestor who is reborn in himself, while the *babalawo* only adjusts himself to the demands of others. However, the Ifa religious system uses the representation of an ancestor spokesman, Orunmila, who is not a proper *orisha* but who had presided over the Odudwa council when he arrived in Ife (Verger 1982a:124).

## GELEDE

The Gelede cult is a masquerade proper to the western region of the Yoruba territory which is mainly practiced in cities of the Nago people (a Yoruba subgroup), such as the Kétou, Sakété and Pobè. The Gelede ceremonies are performed to prevent the sorceress, the Iyalase, from using her destructive powers. They also function to adapt the Nago harmoniously to their own society. The cult is considered a source of equilibrium between the feminine power and the social organiza-

tion of an essentially patriarchal people (Harper 1970:68; Beier 1966:6).

In this case as well the ritual is related to the religious system. The leader of the cult, a woman, is regarded as the spokesman of Iyanla. Beier (1966:3-8) notes that the explicit reference to a woman is because the female is directly associated with witchcraft. Nevertheless, the initiated also calls the witch "mother," and even the *orishas* and the Egungun must pay their respects to her.

Representations of Iyanla appear in the dances performed during the day, while the important mask of Efe appears at night. This dichotomy explains the existence of two main rhythms in this anthology, one for the day and the other for the night. The mask is removed when Iyanla "possesses" the body of Iyalase. Despite the references to the feminine principle, all the dancers are men.

The religious principles upon which the Gelede dance and the Egungun cult ceremonies are based are ignored by some members of contemporary cult societies. Unlike members of the cults to *orishas*, these cult members are not always conscious of the Gelede mystic dimension and associate the ceremonies with the powerful people of the society. In this anthology, the Gelede musicians — the same performers of the Ifa ceremonies — are Catholics. In Widah, for example, the members of the Egungun society were also Catholics, which is even more meaningful. Beier (1966:21) observed the same phenomenon in Porto Novo in the 1960s, where the Iyalase was Moslem and her partner, Baba Egbe, was Christian. The absorption of foreign religions can bring about the disappearance of the traditional *orisha* cults. However in the case of the Gelede and Egungun syncretism has occurred, thus making their survival possible, although as "folklore."

## ASPECTS OF YORUBA CULT MUSIC

One musical aspect defines the Yoruba percussive style as different from many other West African styles: the homogeneity of timbre in the drum ensembles. For example, among the Ewe-style rattles, both metal and wooden idiophones are associated with drums. In the Yoruba style, cult drum ensembles are exclusively composed of membranophones, with the exception of the cult for Ogun, "the deity of metals,"

in which the *agogo* — an iron bell — is added. Sometimes the *sere* — a gourd rattle — is used in the Shango cults for reasons more related to religious symbolism than to the musical conception itself. Next we will discuss some of the technical elements used in Yoruba music as they appear more specifically in the *bata* repertoire, studied in detail in Branda-Lacerda 1988.

## THE BATA DRUMS

The *bata* ensemble is divided into two instrumental sections. The first one, composed of the support drums *omele ako* (male small drum), *omele abo* (female small drum) and *eki*, establishes the musical texture that is structurally maintained throughout the piece. The support drums are characterized by the continuous repetition of one segment, with some variations that do not interfere with the original status of that one segment in the texture. The second section is composed of the mother drum, the *iya ilu*, which interacts with the support drums, and which is characterized by diverse and soloistic configurations. The two instrumental sections are interconnected by the performance of the *ako* drum. This drum, in contrast to other support drums, can break up the repetition of its pattern to interact directly with the *iya ilu* at some predictable moments.










Denying what seems to be a rule in the drumming arrangement of the Western African cult ensembles, the *iya ilu bata* ranges from the highest to the lowest region of the tonal spectrum. Its small membrane in both ensembles produces sounds from 1000 to 1250 Hz, while the acute sound of the *ako* membrane ranges from 780 and 880 Hz. Then come the smaller support drums, which vary from 220 to 400 Hz. The *eki* is an exception, presenting the musical characteristics of a support drum, but lying in the bass region; it is often acoustically confused with the sound produced by the *iya ilu*.

The physical and acoustic characteristics of the instruments in the Pobè ensemble are represented in the chart below. The Sakété ensemble shows little variation in relation to the absolute pitch of the membranes.

Notice that the *bata* ensembles of Sakété and Pobè are different from those found today in Nigeria or in Cuba. The relationships between the pitches in these countries is basically similar to those described above, but with the membranes of the *iya ilu* and *ako* producing much lower pitches. Besides, the “Nigerian” ensembles do not use the *eki* drum and can use small drums (*omele*) displayed as a set for the performance of only one player. These observations, in addition to other factors, make us wonder if the orchestras shown here are the oldest in their category (Branda-Lacerda 1988:25-7).



Fig. 6: *bata* drum ensemble from Pobè

	Length	Diameter		Pitch	
		Deep Membrane	High Membrane		
Omele Ako	28 cm	14 cm	7 cm	392 Hz	
Omele Abo	25 cm	15 cm	7,5 cm	>293,66 Hz	
Eki	45 cm	20 cm	10 cm	>123,47 Hz	
				>164,81 Hz	
Ako	55 cm	18 cm	8 cm	783,99 Hz	
				233,08 Hz	
Iya Ilu	57 cm	21 cm	7 cm	>1244,50 Hz	
				<97,99 Hz	
				>116,54 Hz	





Note: Ako and Iya Ilu use both membranes, the other drums use only the deep one.

Chart 1

## BASIC MUSICAL CONCEPTS

Pieces are characterized by a binary or ternary division of a given rhythmic value of reference (beat). This beat is consciously or unconsciously shared by all musicians and dancers and corresponds to the up-and-down movement of feet and/or the movements of the dancers' torsos. Values longer than the beat occur exclusively at the most abstract level, for example, as the length of time of a spe-

cific pattern or as the pause length. Smallest values are equally distributed according to the rhythmic base used. (See Chart 2.)

It is important to emphasize that such values correspond not only to the audible units of meaningful length that are played, but also to the smaller units, composed of parts of the rhythmic segments. For instance, the segment  is formed from the alternation of the values  and  but is composed of the value  on the lower level. If this segment is linked in binary rhythm, it is articulated to coincide with the reference length. If the rhythmic base is ternary, the length of this pattern is in opposition to the rhythmic reference that corresponds to the ternary rhythm:











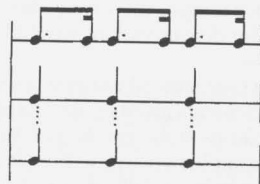
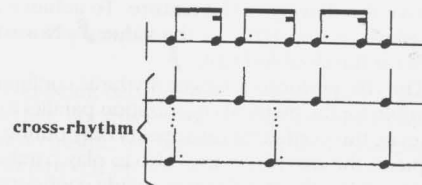
Binary		Ternary
	duration of reference (beat)	
	duration of contrast	
		
	duration of division (puls)	
		

Chart 2

### Binary



### Ternary

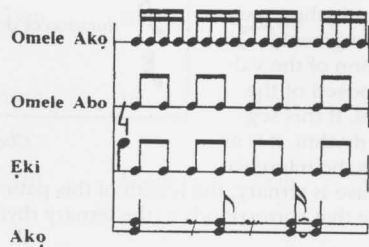


Musical example 1

The metrical organization of a specific piece is set by one small drum or by the *ako* drum. This is done through an asymmetrical rhythmic pattern which lasts four or eight beats and is normally played without interruption.

### THE BATA REPERTOIRE FOR EGUNGUN IN POBÈ

The *ako* piece for Egungun in Pobè is in binary rhythm, with the reference length around 120 beats per minute. The basic texture is the following:



Musical example 2

The variations of the three first drums, used alternately by the performers, improve the density of the texture. To achieve a faster tempo, the *omele ako* here plays — unusually — the value  $\text{♩}$ . Normally, the denser variant would be based on the doubled value  $\text{♩}$ .

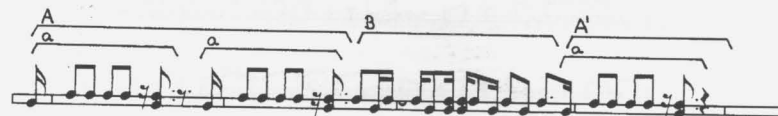
The *Ako* performs a longer rhythmic configuration (see musical example 2), responsible for the metrical organization parallel to the elements given by the *tya ilu*. However, this configuration appears only during the pauses in the *tya ilu* part. In this piece, the *ako* player tries also to play parallel or complementarily to the *tya ilu*.

At its side, the *tya ilu* plays steady configurations which we call "phrases."



Musical example 3

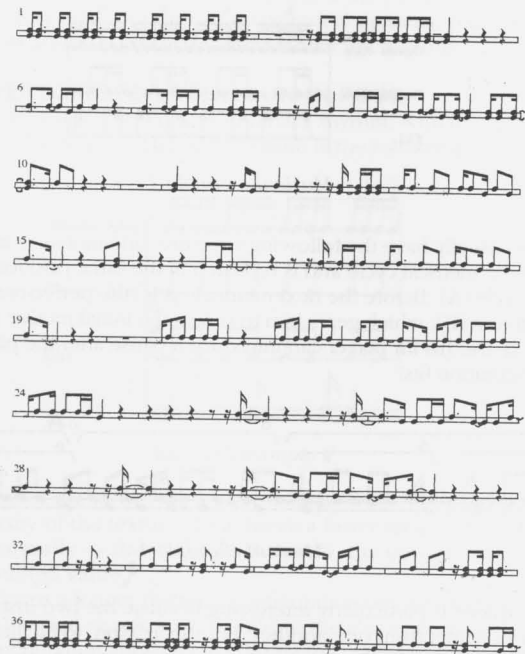
These phrases usually have the following structure: one motive is introduced in the beginning of the metrical cycle and is repeated in the same position of the following metrical cycle (A). Before the next metrical cycle, the performer attaches an improvised segment (B), which gears him to repeat the initial motive (A'). Depending on the context, the *tya ilu* player can introduce a pause after the phrase in which the *ako*-configuration fits.



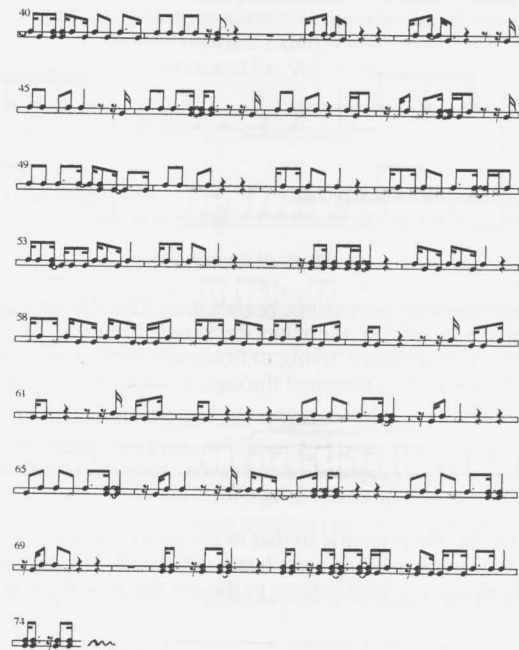
Musical example 4

This *Ako* piece is particularly interesting because the two instrumental sections are very distinct from one another. For this reason, to facilitate the familiarization of the listener with the *bata* orchestra, we present in musical example 5 the entire transcription of the *tya ilu* part (cf. pp. 26, 27).



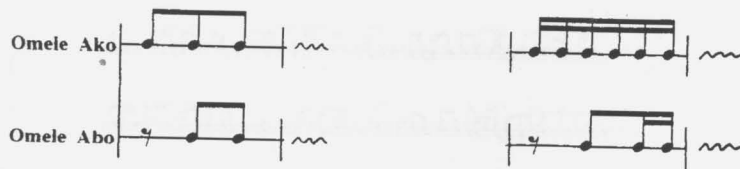


*Musical example 5*



*Musical example 5*

The next piece, "Alujo," is more complex. The rhythm is ternary. The *omele* configurations are as follows:



Musical example 6

The *eki* performance is particularly elaborate. The following example shows the moment when the player alternates the simple timing — his basic function — with a denser performance, trying to finish this section in a soloistic manner. The timing function is then resumed through a variation of the initial mode.



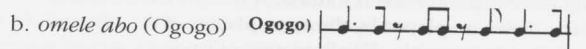
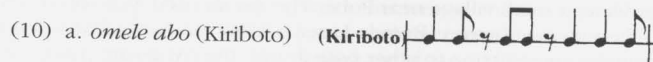
The part of the *ako* is similar to that in the previous piece. It has the function of defining the metrical cycle of eight beats. Alternately the player introduces parallel or complementary configurations to the *iya ilu*, as in the following example.



The *iya ilu* is presented in a more varied way compared to the previous piece. One of its particular segments shows a cross rhythm (Ex. 9a) resulting from the ternary rhythm and the metrical extension of eight beats. Moreover, the player can either use previous phrases (Ex. 9b) or improvise (Ex. 9c).



The following pieces, "Kiriboto" and "Ogogo," do not show any theoretical novelty. However, the *ako* function of defining the metrical cycle in the above pieces is transferred to the *omele abo*. The rhythm used is the well-known standard pattern that is present in several styles of the African music. Note that this rhythm is presented in its usual ternary version (Ex. 10a) and in a binary version (Ex. 10b).



The “Ogogo” piece can be compared to “Alujo,” despite its distinct rhythmic base. The *iya ilu* performs predictable structures based on the previous phrases (Ex. 11a), alternated with moments of pure improvisation of assorted extensions (Ex. 11b).



The musicians of this ensemble can play their entire repertoire without interruption, performing one piece directly after the other. For this reason, it is not difficult for them to present a condensed version, which concludes the *bata* repertoire of Pobè heard in this anthology. It is interesting to note the way they link one piece to the next, getting the signal from the *iya ilu* to adjust their parts to the new piece.

### THE BATA ENSEMBLE FOR SHANGO IN POBÈ

In Pobè, the Shango cult is accompanied by a *bata* ensemble that differs from the *bata* ensembles for Egungun in the same city and for Shango and Egungun in Sakété. We present here the piece “Alujo” from the Shango repertoire in Pobè, which is included in the repertoire for Egungun. Rouget (1965) recorded this *bata* music in Adja Were, a small village near Pobè. The *iya ilu* used to be played with the hands on the two membranes (Branda-Lacerda 1988:20). Nowadays in Pobè, despite their similar construction to other *bata* drums, the *iya ilu* are played only on the bass membrane — a development whose origin we cannot explain.

The group for Shango in Pobè is formed by the *iya ilu*, the *ako* and one *omele*. The *ako* and the *omele* are played by the same players of the *ako* and *eki*, respectively, in the Egungun cult ensemble. This formation of having a second player on the

*omele* is similar to the Gelede ensemble in Pobè, and has a repertoire similar to that of Shango, despite the different drums.

### THE BATA REPERTOIRE FOR SHANGO IN SAKÉTÉ

In Sakété, the Shango and Egungun cults are accompanied by the *bata* orchestra with the same players. We omitted the Egungun repertoire in Sakété because its first piece — “*Ako*” (male) — shows the same characteristics of “Alujo” from the Pobè repertoire, and the second piece — “*Kete*” (female) — corresponds to the piece “*Lade Lade*” for Shango in Sakété. Maybe this fact can be understood as an approach between Egungun and Shango. The title “Alujo” for the Egungun piece in Pobè coincides with the title of one piece for Shango in the same city.

The Sakété ensemble presents the same fundamental characteristics as those of the Pobè ensemble. However, one notes that the Sakété ensemble is less precise and detailed in its performance. Among the support drums, only the *ako* plays the denser variant. The elaborateness of the *eki* part in Pobè is absent in Sakété, and the player resumes his basic function of maintaining the tempo through the continuous beating of the reference length. Long structures, comparable to the phrases described above, are not found in the *iya ilu* parts; the player follows the elements integrated in the texture of a specific piece.

Nevertheless, the ensemble is perfectly capable in the accompaniment of the cult. Maybe this simplification in the style of the performance occurs partially for symbolic reasons. For example, the lengths described in Chart 2 are valid only when the time of reference is between the average metronomical limits from 80 to 120 beats per minute. For the faster or slower tempos, they respectively subtract or add shorter values. This is the case of the *bata* repertoire for Shango cults in Sakété, in which the speed and the effect of the *accelerando* may help the symbolic characterization of the *orisha*. In this respect, Pierre Verger has observed the following in a Shango ceremony somewhere in Yoruba land:

The *elegun* (initiated) start dancing in the beginning of the afternoon. They

appear around the tree under which three *bata* drum players are placed. Men and women are in different groups: the men in the outer circle and the women in the inner circle. The dance follows the broken rhythm of the drumming, beginning slowly and becoming faster. The women dance with marked small steps, the bodies leaning forward and the arms down. From time to time they raise their chests slightly and let them fall again. The men take longer steps, leaning and raising the bodies energetically; the flexible arms are raised, the hands touch each other for a while above the heads, are separated, and the arms fall down violently, noisily slapping the bodies of the *elegun*. Sometimes they take more acrobatic steps, squatting and standing up, running in place and suddenly stopping sharply with the *bata* drumming. This rhythm is really peculiar: nervous and strident, sharp and short, to emphasize the vivid and exciting character of the Shango *elegun* dance, eliciting the public to clap their hands (Verger 1982a:135).

It will not be difficult for the listener to find the musical elements of this description in the repertoire of the Sakété ensemble. Unity in Yoruba style is also present here, where strong musical elements such as the sudden change of timing and the accelerando are introduced for symbolic reasons.

An increase in tempo is present in four out of five pieces for Shango (and none in the two pieces for Egungun). In "Oba Koso," the music is played from 140 to almost 160 beats per minute. Then the orchestra introduces a decrease in tempo and stabilizes the tempo to about 132 beats per minute. In "Omenega" the performance starts in a very slow tempo (♩ = ca. 46, accelerating to ♩ = ca. 120. "Oke" starts also in very slow tempo (♩ = 50-52), accelerating periodically until exactly the doubled speed is reached and suddenly returning to the same tempo of the beginning. "Oke" is an outstanding example of the intuitive capacity of African musicians to exert control over their tempos. Finally, the "Ajagunan" piece starts at a very slow tempo, to accelerate slightly to ♩ = ca. 60.

Probably due to the symbolism conferred to the constant changes in the tempo of a piece, something unusual occurs in the organization of the ensemble texture within Shango's repertoire in Sakété. As we have already mentioned, the

texture is structurally maintained during the piece. However, when a piece begins with an extremely slow tempo, it is possible to create denser musical structures. In the accelerating process, some changes are necessary because it becomes impossible for the players to perform the initial rhythms.

For example, in Oke four different versions of the *Ako* part were observed. There is not only a tempo adjustment, but also a detailed relocation of the introductory motive.



### THE DUNDUN ORCHESTRA

The organization of the other groups that complete this recording is closer to what is supposedly the general rule in West African cult music. All of them contain a solo bass drum — the *iya ilu* — which is played against the other instruments, and together these instruments construct the invariable texture of a given piece.

The *dundun* ensemble (in Benin these drums are called *gangan*), has been disseminated more intensely in the Western world due to its wide use in the Yoruba territory and its peculiar acoustic characteristics. The *dundun* is an hour-



glass-shaped drum with two membranes fixed with a leather string. This string pierces both membranes around their rims, making it possible to adjust the tension of those membranes. On the support drums a second string is used to tie up the string that connects the membranes, fixing a single pitch. On the *iya ilu*, this connecting string is totally free, allowing the player to press it and thereby produce several pitches. Only one membrane is regularly hit with the drum stick. The support drum *keri keri* is normally pitched a little higher to allow the player to touch the membrane with the hand and the drum stick. This same technique is sometimes used by the *iya ilu* player as well.

Due to its peculiar construction, the *iya ilu dundun* is in the privileged position of being able to reproduce the sounds of the Yoruba language. The player tries to produce only three pitches and, through distinct hits with the drum stick, imitates the lateral sound "l" and the retroflexive "r," according to Yoruba phonetics. To achieve this, both the player and the interpreter must work inside the same context, as in a cult. The repertoire on this CD shows clear references to the spoken language. Unfortunately, we cannot transcribe these references satisfactorily, but we can say that a strong connection between music and language is exemplified here.

The ensemble is normally composed of five drums: *iya ilu*, *keri keri*, *omele*, *omele* or *asasu*, and *gudugudu*. This last drum has only one membrane and is played with two small leather drum sticks. We have also included the piece "Esike-si," performed by the *adjarra* ensemble, which is not performed in any cult ceremony but rather at social events such as weddings.

### THE BATA IGBA ENSEMBLE

The *bata igba* drums are played in the Ifa ceremony and as preparation to the oro cult in Kétou. *Bata* is one of the names for drum and *igba* means "gourd." This ensemble survives apparently only in Kétou and has its own unique characteristics. It is composed of one *gudugudu*, one *akpala* and the *bata igba*, after which the group is named. The *akpala* is simply a *dundun* drum in the size of an *omele* but with all the strings free, as the *iya ilu*. However, instead of holding it at his waist,

the player puts it under his arm, pressing it against his body.

The *bata igba* is a *sui generis* instrument, for its body is constructed from two superposed gourds. The upper one has a lid substituting for a membrane, which is tied up with leather strings around the two gourds.

### THE GELEDE ENSEMBLE

The *bata igba* and the *Gelede* ensembles contain the same players. The *bata igba*, the *gudugudu* and the *iya ilu* players change respectively to one *ako* support drum, one *omele* and one *akpala*. A fourth musician is called to play a second *omele*.

The two rhythms presented here are played respectively during the day and at night in the ceremony, according to the cult rituals. In the same way, as in the *bata* and *bata igba* ensembles, the *ako* player can leave his fixed part to begin a synchronic performance with the *iya ilu*.

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