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Yoruba Drums

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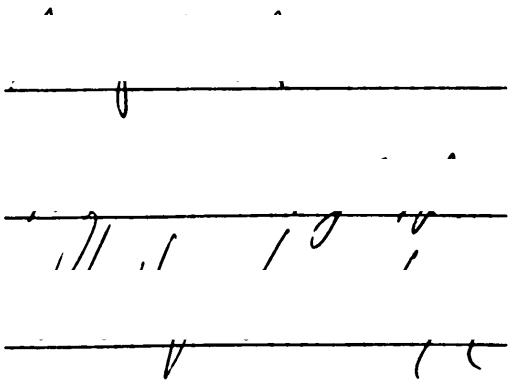

YORUBA DRUMS

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INTRODUCTION

This paper looks at the music of the Yoruba people, an ethnic group from southwestern Nigeria. It examines the Yoruba people and some aspects of their culture in relation to the music they produce.

Throughout this paper I use the present tense, assuming the ethnographic present, that contemporary music resembles traditional music. Traditional Yoruba uses of music are well-documented in the literature; contemporary uses are somewhat less documented, but the literature supports the assumption that some musical forms and their cultural context have been preserved. In the case of exceptions to the above, that is, practices that have not survived, I've made specific mention in the text.whenever possible.

- Notes on the Yoruba language -

Yoruba music is related to the Yoruba language. While this is not a paper on linguistics, a brief mention of spoken Yoruba is necessary.

Yoruba is a tonal language. Each syllable can have a high, mid, or low tone, or can be pronounced on one of several glides. Tone distinguishes words which are otherwise phonetically identical. (Beier 1970:11; Bascom 1953:4)

The significance to music is that spoken words can be drummed on the pressure drums, or "talking drums." This drum language is not based on a code; drums actually talk the melody of the words and the rhythm of the sentence. (Bascom 1953:4) [1]

Bush repeatedly stresses that the Yoruba drummer must be a linguist. "He must find the right phrases and must manipulate words cleverly to make an impression on his listeners. Even more than that, as a poet he searches for the combination of words, melody and imagery that will

reach the hearts of his listeners." (Bush 1975:77) As will be made clear later, this linguistic-musical connection is an important one.

In this text, I have tried to be consistent in the use of diacritical marks and in spelling native Yoruba words. The literature reveals variations in spellings; in these cases I have tried to reproduce the most common version.

People create music within their cultural framework. As a discipline, ethnomusicology seeks to examine music and the culture that produces it. "Ethnomusicology carries within itself the seeds of its own division, for it has always been compounded of two distinct parts, the musicological and the ethnological, and perhaps its major problem is the blending of the two in a unique fashion which emphasizes neither but takes into account both." (Merriam 1964:3) "Ethnomusicology makes its unique contribution in welding together aspects of the social sciences and aspects of the humanities in such a way that each complements the other and leads to a fuller understanding of both. Neither should be considered as an end in itself; the two must be joined into a wider understanding." (1964:7) [2]

The Yoruba use music in all aspects of their lives. A Yoruba person is exposed to music from birth, at his or her birth ceremony, to death, at funeral ceremonies. Music serves to educate, entertain, praise, and abuse. It plays a role in politics, dances, divination and healing, proverbs and poetry, and in religion.

GENERAL CHARACTERISTICS OF THE YORUBA

The Yoruba of southwest Nigeria are a large ethnic group, numbering ten or eleven million in 1962, according to a "controversial" census. (Bascom 1969:1) They are one of the largest ethnic groups south of the Sahara, and as such generalizations are risky. Regional variability may lead to simplification or inaccuracies when attempting to make general statements. Much literature refers to "the Yoruba", which whether talking about music or any other cultural aspect may not be a universally applicable term. Bascom lists twenty-three distinct subgroups, all referred to as "Yoruba." "Originally there was no comprehensive name for the Yoruba as a whole, and people referred to themselves by the name of their subgroup. The largest of these were the Ọyọ, sometimes referred to as 'the Yoruba proper,' and in some areas old men still deny that they are Yoruba since they belong to different subgroups." (1969:5) At the risk of resorting to superficialities, the following statements are substantiated in the literature in reference to the Yoruba.

The origins of Yoruba culture go back at least to the tenth century, when the cities of Ifẹ and Ọyọ are believed to have existed. Some scholars write that these cities, and Yoruba culture, can be traced back to an iron-working civilization, north of present-day Yorubaland, that flourished as early as 300 B.C. (Courlander 1975:4)

The Yoruba have had extensive contact with Europeans. A Yoruba city, Ijẹbu-Ode, is listed on a Portugese map from around the year 1500. (Bascom 1969:4) The Portugese explorer and writer Pereira wrote of the Yoruba between 1505 and 1508.[3] (Law, chap. in Biobaku 1973:9) The Dutch writer Dapper wrote about Ijẹbu-Ode in 1668. (1973:10)[4]

After this time, European references to the Yoruba increase rapidly, incident to the flourishing slave trade, which was firmly established in 1698. (Bascom 1969:12) It is not the scope of this paper to deal with the history of the Yoruba, nor to detail the process and results of the slave trade. The point is that the Yoruba have lived in Yorubaland for centuries, giving rise to a complex culture, which in turn created an elaborate musical form.

The Yoruba economy of today is based on subsistence farming, craft specialization, and trade. (1969:18) Political organization is based on chiefs and councils representing extensively developed cities, and kings, who represent districts within the kingdom. Kings can trace the origin of their authority back to the creation of the earth (in Yoruba cosmology.) In spite of this common origin, the structure of the kingdoms varies. (1969:29; 1953:2) This political organization is relevant to this text because music serves to praise kings, follows their lineage and line of authority back in time, and indirectly supports and maintains their kingly power.

MUSICAL INSTRUMENTS

Since a large part of this paper focuses on music, a brief overview of musical instrumentation is in order. Using the classification system developed by Erich M. von Hornbostel and Curt Sachs in the early part of this century,[5] musical instruments can be divided into four classes, according to their acoustical nature: Idiophones, Membranophones, Aerophones, and Chordophones. (Jenkins 1970b:20; Brindle 1970:3) These classes can further be divided according to their pitch characteristics: 1) tuned instruments 2) instruments of

indefinite pitch 3) instruments which are usually considered to be of indefinite pitch but which can be tuned. (Brindle 1970:3) In this paper I have concentrated on the percussion instruments used by the Yoruba peoples. Consequently, the following examples are more detailed in relation to idiophones and membranophones. The stereotypical view is that African music is "drum music," to the exclusion of other categories of musical instruments. The literature clearly refutes this belief; African music utilizes all four types of musical instruments.

Idiophones are made of resonant materials, and produce sound through the vibration of their entire bodies. Percussion idiophones are divided into: 1) Concussion idiophones - pairs of similar objects which are struck together, such as clappers. 2) Struck idiophones - one or more resonant materials struck with a beater. Examples are: Percussion logs, a board or trough, untuned, which is beaten with the hands or sticks, sometimes played over a hole in the ground for better resonance; Bar idiophones, one or more tuned bars. If made of wood, called xylophone, if made of metal, metallophone, if made of glass, crystallophone, if made of stone, lithophone. Other struck idiophones are gongs, bells, cymbals, and slit-drums, which are hollowed-out logs or pieces of bamboo. Gongs are pieces of metal struck in the center for maximum volume; bells are also made of metal, but are struck on the rim for maximum sound. 3) Stamped idiophones - hollow tubes hit on the ground, on water, or on the player's body. 4) Shaken idiophones - rattles, which enclose the rattling substance inside a hollow gourd or tube, and jingles, in which the rattling substance is strung on cords and then shaken. 5) Scraped idiophones - rasps or notches which

produce sound when scraped. (Blades 1974:36; Jenkins 1970a:9-16)

Plucked idiophones, or Linguaphones produce sound by the bending and release of a flexible material. Resonators are usually attached to amplify the sound. The major instrument in this group is the sansa, otherwise known as mbira, kalimba, or "thumb piano." This is a small wooden box with sound holes for resonance. Attached to the box are iron pieces, laid across a bridge, which act as piano "keys." (Jenkins 1970a:16, 17)

Generally, tuned idiophones combine a definite pitch with indefinite pitches, or "overtones." Most idiophones have a combination of pitches that form a blended, whole sound, without being disonant. (Brindle 1970: 3, 4)

Membranophones produce sound by the vibration of a membrane or skin stretched over a resonating shell or tube. (1970:4)

Drums produce sound when the membrane is beaten. The membrane may be stretched over a drum body or frame. Drums are classified by number of membranes, shape of the drum, the way the membranes are fastened, method of tuning, playing position, and method of playing. (Jenkins 1970b:40)

All drums are either single or double membrane. Drum shape is more varied. Tubular drums are cylinders, barrels, conical, hourglass shaped, or footed. The kettledrum's body is formed by a pot or vessel of some kind. Frame drums have a frame which the membrane is stretched over, rather than a body.

Membranes may be fastened onto the drum with glue, buttons, nails, pegs, or laces. The membrane-fastening method determines how the drum is tuned, either by tightening the pegs or laces, or by directly heating the membrane, which causes it to tighten.

Drums may be free-standing, hung from a strap around the performer's shoulder, held in the arms or between the legs, or suspended from a stand. Drums are beaten with the hands, with sticks, leather thongs, or a combination of any of the above methods. (Jenkins 1970b:40-48)

Friction drums resemble drums, but the membrane vibrates due to a cord or stick which is passed through it. The cord or stick produces friction, hence the sound. (1970b:48)

Many membranophones can be tuned, so they would be classified as having a well-defined pitch. (Brindle 1970:4) The "talking drums" of the Yoruba are constructed in such a way that their tuning is constantly being manipulated and changed while being played. (More on these drums later.)

Aerophones, wind instruments, produce sound by causing air to vibrate in, through, or around an enclosed cavity. Aerophones include flutes, reed instruments, both single and double reed, horns, and outer-air instruments, known as free aerophones, which act directly on the air. (Jenkins 1970a:24; 1970b:50)

Chordophones are tension-held stringed instruments which produce sound by plucking, bowing, or striking the string, or by wind action on the string. (1970b:64)

YORUBA INSTRUMENTS

Let the calabash
Entwined with beads
With blue Aggrey beads
Resound . . .
Mingle with these sounds
The clang of wood on tin:
Kentensekenken
Ken-tse ken ken ken . . .

(Parkes, cited in Thompson 1974:242)[6]

Yoruba music immediately impresses one with its emphasis on rhythm, provided by percussion instruments and handclapping. Other instruments used are brass trumpets, side-blown ivory trumpets, whistles, stringed instruments, and metallophones. (Bascom 1969:99) This section focuses on Yoruba percussion instruments.

Yoruba musicians place instruments into groups thought of as families. Each family has a lead instrument played by the master musician of that group. There are at least ten drum families, each family forming an ensemble. The dundun, or gangan drum ensemble is versatile, popular, and used in much traditional music, both sacred and secular. Other drum sets are more specialized, used for specific religious cults or secular events. (Bush 1975:52)

The primary drum in the dundun set is the iya-ilu, translated "mother drum." This drum is double-membraned, hourglass shaped, and distinctively known as the "talking drum," or pressure drum. It gets this name from the tension-held strings or leather thongs attached to both drum heads, which when tightened or loosened change the pitch of the drum. The drum is held under the performer's left arm, using a shoulder strap, and the thongs are squeezed and pulled by the left hand, while the performer is playing. The drum head is hit with a curved stick held in the right hand. (1975:52) Some iya-ilu have brass bells attached around the drum head, which produce sound as the drum is moved. (Bascom 1969:22)

As was noted previously, spoken Yoruba is a tonal language. "The intimate relationship between spoken Yoruba . . . and music is the essence of Yoruba music." (Bush 1975:52) The iya-ilu "speaks" by creating the various vowel pitches and tones through manipulation of the drum head. Consonants are "spoken" by fingering the drum head with

the left hand. "Talking drums" don't speak in code; they reproduce the exact tonal words of Yoruba speech. Besides tones, glides can also be reproduced on the pressure drum. The average drummer can play an octave on the iya-ilu. (Beier 1970:12)

Iya-ilu are used to accompany singing and dancing, and to speak the oriki, or praise names, of chiefs and kings and other important persons. Trumpets are also used in oriki recitation to provide more of a melody line. (Bascom 1969:99)

Another important drum in the dundun ensemble is the gudugudu, a single-membrane, bowl-shaped drum which is beaten with leather straps. It's known as the "father drum" by some Yoruba. Although not as impressive in looks or sound as the iya-ilu, its status or seniority is revealed by the following proverb: "Size (or stature) is not a measure of seniority; Gudugudu is the eldest (i.e. of older lineage or senior in rank) of the dundun family." (Thieme, cited in Bush 1975:52)

The other drums in the dundun ensemble are sometimes called omele, or "children of the House." Due to their construction, these drums are limited in their "speaking" and playing roles. The Yoruba spoken language has four tones and two glides, but the omele speak only two tones, or two drums may combine to speak entire sentences. (1975:52) The omele set is comprised of the kerikeri, similar to the iya-ilu, but with a string tied around its midsection to maintain one constant pitch. The kerikeri plays the main beats of the piece on one tone, the lowest tone of the ensemble. The kannango is a small tension drum that plays rhythm only, no speaking. The iya-ilu coordinates all the drums in the ensemble, plays its own part, and improvises on the various parts. The improvisation is linguistic, melodic, and rhythmical. (1975:52)

Laoye (1954:8) lists four other drum ensembles besides the dundun, which he calls "native orchestras." They are: 1) Sekere set, which consists of the iya aje, emele, and aro. 2) Bata set, consisting of iya-ilu, emele ako, and emele abo. The ako syncopates, and the abo repeats what the iya-ilu says. 3) The koso set, made up of the iya-ilu and the emele. 4) The apinti set, consisting of the same drums as the koso set. Laoye says the latter two drum sets are rare because of their specialized uses, leading to a lack of demand. Laoye says emele means "accompaniment," ako means "male," and abo means "female." Due to the variability of the Yoruba language, and based on alternate spellings for identical words throughout the literature, I would speculate that Laoye's "emele" and Bush's "omele" refer to the same word, although conceptually they differ; Laoye means a specific drum, Bush means a class of drums.

Laoye gives sparse descriptions of these drums and drum sets. Other references are more specific. Johnson mentions the koso as a "king's drum." (Johnson 1921,1970:121) Bascom describes the bata drums in more detail.

Bata are two-toned drums, used exclusively for religious music. The bata is conical in shape, with a wooden body, and has two heads of different sizes and tones. The drum heads are attached to the drum with leather strips and tuned tightly. The tone has a "metallic, bell-like quality." Small cast brass bells are sometimes attached. (Bascom 1953:5)

Bata drum sets are usually made up of three drums, the iya-ilu, omele, (drum types, rather than specific drums), each with two tones, and the kudi, the smallest in the set, with one tone. (1953:5)

Another major drum is the igbin, an upright open-ended log drum

with one drum head, fastened and tuned with wooden pegs. Igbin are also known as agba and apesi. Igbin drums are short and squat and stand on three legs carved out of the bottom of the drum. An ensemble includes the iya igbin, the largest of the set, the jagba, and the smallest epele. The iya igbin is played with a stick held in the right hand,and the palm, fingers, and fist of the left hand. The two smaller drums are played with two sticks. (1953:3)

Besides these drums, Johnson lists the ogidigbo ceremonial drum, and the "ancient drums" yangede, àyé, sãmi, and siki, with no explanations or descriptions given. (Johnson 1921, 1970:121)

Ogunba says there are three types of Yoruba musical instruments: clappers, two for each person, which produce monotones; pot-like drums, with one membrane, varying from the small gbedu drums to the "huge" oro and igbin drums; and hour-glass, cylindrical drums such as bata and dundun, (described previously.) (Ogunba, chap. in Biobaku 1973:105)

Clappers are the easiest to play, and don't require specialized skill or training. The pot-like drums often have brass gong or bell accompaniment. Ogunba speculates that clappers, due to their simplicity, were "invented" first. Then, much later, gongs and bells were developed, and following them, the pot-like drums were "invented." ". . . it is possible to classify two periods here, namely, the period in which there were just gongs or when the gong was predominant as is still the case in festivals like the Agemo today, and the period when the gong steadily disappeared until it came to the point where in many royal ceremonies only drums are used. The music produced became correspondingly more complex . . ." (1973:106) The pot-like drums have a limited scope of tones, usually two, and the music produced by them has more of a rhythmical than melodic nature. (1973:106)

Ogunba reveals his historical orientation, which is much appreciated, as he speculates on the chronology of drum discovery and/or invention, based on the complexity of the instruments. He views the development of the hour-glass cylindrical drums as a "revolutionary change in Yoruba ceremonial music." (1973:106) Ogunba guesses that the early cylindrical drums were the bata drums, which are similar to the pot-like drums in that one drum head is much larger than the other. Ogunba asks, "Can one say that this invention is another aspect of the genius of King Ṣango and also a significant contribution towards his inevitable apotheosis?" He goes on to say that the dundun pressure drum "probably came several centuries later and completed the musical revolution." (1973:106)

Other important percussion instruments include iron rattles, worn on the ankles of dancers, (Thompson 1974:203), an assortment of other rattles, iron gongs, and cymbals. The sekere rattle, also known as the sekeseke or shekere, is a large calabash gourd covered with a net, strung with cowrie shells. When twisted back and forth, the sekere is a rattle; when the bottom is hit with the palm it serves as a drum. (Bascom 1969:22)

DRUM CONSTRUCTION AND CARE

"Until the wild goat dies, its skin cannot be used to make a gbẹdu drum. (Gbẹdu is the state drum of the Ogboni in Yorubaland.)" (Delano 1966:144)

References in the literature to drum construction are sparse. Bush says that "drums are made by full-time specialists." (1975:53) On the other hand, Johnson says that musicians must know how to construct

their instruments so they can later repair them. (Johnson 1921, 1970: 120) My guess is that drummers do know how to repair their instruments, but specialist craftsmen do the actual construction.

Bankole says,[7] "A drum-maker often chooses a tree from the side of a well-traveled road from which to carve a drum, for such a tree will have heard much conversation, and will therefore make a drum that is especially good at talking." (Bankole 1968, Tape I, cited in Bush 1975: 53) The trees used are the iroko, silk-cotton tree, and the apa, African mahogany. (1975:53; Ellis 1894, 1974:115) These trees are believed to be inhabited by spirits, and to behave in human ways, such as walking and talking. Before cutting down these trees, offerings must be made to the tree spirits. (Bush 1975:53) Ellis quotes a proverb referring to the risks involved in cutting down these trees: "The axe that cuts the tree is not afraid, but the woodman covers his head with etu (a magic powder.)" (1894, 1974:115)

Drummers are usually able to assemble the parts of the drum once they have been carved, but this is rarely done. More commonly, the master drummer will give specifications to the drum-maker. (Bush 1975:53)

The tonal range of the iya-ilu should match the master drummer's voice. A tenor-voiced drummer will have a tenor iya-ilu, and a bass-voiced drummer will have a drum of the lowest possible tone. Generally, the iya-ilu has a tenor pitch. (1975:53)

Bascom says that "large standing drums," (specific name not given), used in the worship of Ogboni, the Earth God, are often covered with relief carvings. Smaller drums, (again, not referred to by name), used for the worship of Orishala and other "white deities," are set on carved human figures, incorporated as part of the drum. (Bascom 1969:107)

Ideally, drummers know how to repair and tune the drums. The iya-ilu has a standard tone when played "at rest," (with the strings not tightened), and this tone should approximate the drummer's median vocal range. The drum is regularly put out in the sun to keep this center tone at the correct level. If not done, the tone would gradually lower. The strings must also be maintained at the proper tension. (Bush 1975:53)

Bush says that the master drummer thinks of this drum as his private property, and keeps it inside his house, in contrast to the Yoruba ideal of communal ownership. (1975:53) Bascom gives a different view of Yoruba materialism: "The pecuniary nature of Yoruba culture and the importance of the profit motive are both apparent." (Bascom 1969:28) Regardless of Yoruba material beliefs, clearly drums are carefully kept and maintained.

As mentioned earlier, drums are referred to as "mother," "father," and "children." This is reflected in the care of drums. When drums aren't being played, or set in the sun to tune up, they are hung in the house. This provides a safe and dry storage place. Drums must never be dropped, thrown, stepped over, sat on, or used to curse someone. Dropping a drum accidentally is a serious offense; if done deliberately "it is a grave sin, for which atonement must be made." (Bush 1975:53, 54) The priests of the Ayan cult, (the cult of drummers, dealt with in more depth later), determine the seriousness of the offense and the appropriate punishment or sacrifices that must be made. If a drum breaks, it is wrapped in white cloth and buried in a special ceremony, like human burial ceremonies. (1975:54)

THE USES OF PERCUSSION INSTRUMENTS: POLITICS

When agba drums are sounded in Olufọn's house,
It was always in praise of the Balogun.
When they beat the drums in Ejigbo-Okoro,
It was also in praise of the Balogun.
When kinjin drums are sounded in Ilọrin,
It was in praise of no one else but the Balogun.

(Oriki, cited by Ayọrinde, in Biobaku 1973:71)

Yoruba kings place great emphasis on knowing exactly how their power was handed down to them, originating at the creation of the earth. Drummers are employed by a king, known as the ọba, to recite his lineage and affirm his place in the line of authority. These recitations include listing the ọba's many praise names, known as oriki. Oriki describe the ọba's character and achievements, and in this capacity the drummer acts as historian. Oriki may be quite long. Since the ọba was traditionally thought to be the bond between the people and their ancestors, he had to provide a complete geneology as "proof." The oriki of the ọba serves as his "signature tune." (Ayọrinde, in Biobaku 1973:63) Before starting the oriki, the drummer first praises himself and his own ancestors. (Bush 1975:55, 56)

"The master drummer performs the function of a musical steward to the ọba. He drums at a certain time every morning to wake him, to remind him of daily royal appointments, to warn of impending danger or to tell of approaching visitors to the palace." (1975:55, 56)

Every palace, called the Afin, has a drummer posted at the entrance to announce visitors to the Afin and to announce their departure. Drummers "serve as receptionists and are usually quartered in vantage points in the forecourt of the Afin, where no visitor can pass without being seen by them. By this arrangement, they are the first to see any visitor to the palace, and they announce his approach

to the ọba by reciting his oriki. This is age-old custom, and it serves to prepare the ọba against the arrival of any visiting personality." (Ayọrinde, in Biobaku 1973:64)

Ayọrinde gives other examples of elaborate political festivals which utilize drums, both to proclaim royalty and to set a festive mood. (1973:96)

Drums were used in traditional days in warfare. Delano cites this proverb: "The ogidigbo talking drum is sounded in proverbs, only the wise can dance to it, and only the experienced can understand it. (Ogidigbo is a Yoruba drum used to send messages in time of war.)" (Delano 1966:16)

Courlander includes a folktale called Ogedengbe's Drummers which indicates drums played a role in warfare. Excerpts: "While some said, 'Let us go out and fight,' others said, 'No. Listen to Ogedengbe's drums. They recall his great victories over other cities. They speak only what is true.'" ". . .Ogedengbe's drummers are dear to his heart, for the words their drums speak remind him to be courageous, and his warriors also take courage from the sound." (Courlander 1973: 133, 134)

CEREMONIES

Drums are used extensively in ceremonies and festivals, both secular and sacred. Most ceremonies combine the two functions. "No major achievement in the life of an individual, a group, or a community is considered possible without the active support of the supernatural. Ritual in such a community becomes a constant factor of life as may be shown in Yoruba child-naming, marriage, installation, initiation,

and burial rites and also in the annual festivals of the various communities." (Ogunba, in Biobaku 1973:87) Drums are ritually used to call and gain the support of the supernaturals. (1973:173)

Ellis describes the use of drums in the Oro Doko festival. (Ellis 1894, 1974:111) Beier says that at wedding ceremonies, drummers accompany the bride and her relatives as they proceed through town to the husband's house. (Beier 1970:122)

The Yoruba hold elaborate funeral ceremonies, which involve eating, drinking, singing, and dancing, all to the accompaniment of drums and percussion instruments. After the funeral is completed, drummers escort the family of the deceased out into the streets, where they dance and thank their friends who helped with the funeral. (Bascom 1969:69)

Ellis gives a lengthy description of a Yoruba death ceremony, utilizing drummers, and he details the importance of being able to afford to hire the drummers. (Ellis 1894, 1974:156, 159, 161) Bascom says that the length of time of mourning activities has been shortened in recent years because "chiefs felt that people were spending too much money on funerals; many families had gone into debt, and had had to pawn their children." (Bascom 1969:68)

Besides the above uses, Carrington describes drums' use in calling people to participate in hunting activities. (Carrington 1949, 1969: 60) His reference is to the Yaamba and Nkundo peoples of Central Africa; since no mention is made of the Yoruba, it is unclear if they now, or did at any point in the past, use drums for this purpose.

DANCE

The literature on Yoruba music makes many references to the rela-

tionship between music and dance. Thompson refers to the "unity of the arts in African performance." (Thompson 1974:xii) Philip Gbeho says,[8] "May I make it clear that when I talk about music I am referring to drumming, dancing, and singing? They are all the same thing and must not be separated." (1974:242) Reverend A.M. Jones says,[9] "The norm of African music is the full ensemble of the dance; all other forms of music are secondary . . . This consists of the instruments of the orchestra, the hand-clapping, the song, and the dance." (1974: 242) The literature repeatedly stresses the integration of music, especially percussive music, and dance.

Drummers and dancers maintain a close relationship. "Drums tell the dancer what to do; if he dances with the drummer exactly, he is called aiyejo, the finest dancer. An alaiye mojo is someone who does not know how to obey the drums. The ankle rattles of iron the dancers wear must make the same sound as the drum. If he makes a mistake it will be audible.

"The dancer has to end the phrase exactly when the senior drum ends it. They must balance (dogba). A thousand dresses, it does not matter, if you compromise the drum speech you are not a good dancer!" (Adensayan Adegbami, dancer, cited in Thompson 1974:203) "The senior bata drum sounds the phrase titiketike, which the junior drum repeats, and suddenly the Egungun image is whirling with all his might, the cloths about his body blowing like the wind." (Ajao, dancer, cited in Thompson 1974:219)

Thompson provides numerous quotes of dancers and how they feel about their relationship with drums. More examples follow: "The feet say what the drum says." (1974:256) "We identify good Agbo dancers in this manner; we watch to see if when the drummers are drumming, if the

person will have to watch the drums carefully, or whether he will miss the beat; whether he follows the drums with his hands, his head, and his body; whether he dances immediately according to the changing of the rhythm; whether he knows that when the drums go up high in pitch that he is supposed to dance up high (almost on tiptoe.)" (1974:259) "If a person wishes to dance this dance for the Iron God in a beautiful manner, he must get himself prepared for the particular drum phrases sounded by the drum, the pleasure and praise that exist within this dance tradition." (1974:259) "She comprehends the drum, she dances with her entire body." (1974:260) "When the drum is beautifully strong, the dance must be strong, and the dancer must dance with all his might." (1974:261)

These quotes should make it apparent that drums and drummers are an integral part of the dance. The drummer must be good, or dancers will abandon him. Conversely, the dancer must be good, or he or she will lose their accompanist. "The arrogant dancer, no matter how gifted or imaginative, may find that he dances to drums and handclaps of decreasing strength and fervor. He may find, and this is damaging to his reputation, that the chorus will crystallize around another person. . ." (1974:28)

In folk dances, where the dance steps are not as structured as in sacred dances, the drummer has freedom to improvise. The drummer's main goal is to insure that the dance flows smoothly. This means the master drummer must coordinate all the drums in the ensemble and establish a good relationship with the dancers. The master drummer must be sensitive to the mood changes of the dancers: "If the dancer is responding well to the rhythm and talking of his (the drummer's) drum, or shows the drummer that he is putting every effort into the

dance to complement the drumming, the drummer will quicken the tempo and heighten the pitch of excitement, giving the dancer a chance to further show off his talent and skills. If the dancer does not show any particular effort, the master drummer will not bother to put more into his own music. Conversely, if the drummer continues to drum in an ordinary manner, the dancer will have no impetus for improvisation. It is a flexible performance, dependent for its success on the actions and feelings of all the participants." (Bush 1975:77)

DIVINATION AND HEALING

Ifa divination is a Yoruba divination system. In this system, the babalawo, "father of mysteries," or priest to Ifa, the god of divination, prepares charms and medicines, counsels his followers, and practices divination by manipulating sixteen palm nuts or cowrie shells. The methods of divination are complex and varied.[10] (Bascom 1969:70) The relevance to this paper is that references to musical instruments, specifically shekeres, gongs, cymbals, and bata drums, appear in the Ifa system. The following quotes appear in the "Sixteen Cowries" system, related to Ifa but simpler. (Bascom 1980:3)

> "I offered two hundred cowries,
> "Things are hard for me.
> "I offered two thousand brass beads,
> "Things are easy for me."
> The diviner of Shekere Rattle,
> Was the one who cast for Rattle.
> "I offered two hundred cowries"
> The diviner of Gong,
> Was the one who cast for Gong.
> Gong sounds.
> They said that both of them should offer a sacrifice.
> What should they offer as a sacrifice?
> They said they should each offer two thousand cowries.
> When Gong offered the sacrifice, he offered two hundred cowries.
> When Rattle offered, he offered two thousand cowries,
> He offered a skein of thread, he offered a calabash;
> And Gong offered a stick.
>
> (1980:193)

. . .The diviner of Shekere Rattle was the one who cast for Rattle.
"I deceived and deceived, and I took it;
"I took the gown he was wearing"
The diviner of Cymbal was the one who cast for Cymbal.
Both of them were going to the king,
And Cymbal had a gown, Cymbal was the one who had a gown,
Cymbal had a gown.
Afterward, the elders,
They gave the gown to Rattle.
Rattle put on the gown,
And when Rattle put on the gown of cowries,
They were going along, they were going along.
Cymbal said Rattle should go ahead, that he was coming.
Rattle did not wait for Cymbal any more . . .

(1980:309)

. . .Cast for Bata drum
On the day he was going to be Shango's representative.
There was Shango, and there was Bata;
They were friends, they had been friends from childhood.
Shango said, "What should I do so that I will become wealthy?"
They said, "One of your friends will make you wealthy."
He said, "What should I do so that my friend will make me wealthy?"
They said an entire bata drum was what he should offer as a sacrifice. . .

(1980:739)

. . "Whether to eat, or to drink is a vital matter"
Was the one who cast for Bata who was Shango's representative.
This is why Bata cannot leave Shango today. . .

(1980:741)

I have found only two references in the literature relating music and healing. Raymond Prince says,[11] "Song is also a part of the Ifa healing system. During healing sessions, the songs are sung by the healer, his assistants, and the patient himself." (Prince 1964:112)

The second mention of healing and music is made by Thompson: "The drum choir changes patterning. An edge of coolness, slight but decisive, has been added. There is space between pulsations. This is ipesi, the beat of the herbalist-diviner, Ao. . . Ao is preceded by both dancing men and women, channelled between raised whips of wood. . . The village sings: Ao, Ao, Ao; L'elu igba ojo; Herbalist, Herbalist, Herbalist; Master-Who-Can-Cause-The-Rain." (Thompson 1974:19

PROVERBS AND POETRY

"A proverb is the horse which carries a subject under discussion along; if a subject under discussion goes astray, we use a proverb to track it." (Delano 1966:109)

The Yoruba attach great importance to the knowledge and use of proverbs. "In Yoruba society no one can be considered educated or qualified to take part in communal discussions unless he is able to quote the proverbs relevant to each situation." (1966:ix) Spoken proverbs are often made into songs, and the Yoruba drummer must know the proverbs verbally and musically, and know when to use them. (Bush 1975:77)

Referring to folk-lore and proverbs, Christensen says, ". . .this art form sanctions and validates other aspects of culture such as religious, economic, social, and political institutions." (James Boyd Christensen, chap. in Skinner 1973:509) Christensen's essay focuses on the Fante peoples of Ghana, but his point is applicable to the Yoruba also.

Riddles are oriented towards children, but proverbs are for both adults and children. A boy must ask permission before citing a proverb in front of adults. Proverbs relate Yoruba morals and ethics, express social approval and disapproval, praise, ridicule, advise, and warn. Proverbs are valued because of their expressed wisdom. " . . . it is significant that although even sacred myths have been questioned in the post-contact period, educated Yoruba have retained their respect for proverbs." (Bascom 1969:99)

Proverbs, wise sayings, and riddles are full of plays on words and figures of speech. The drummer must be a linguist to manipulate

them appropriately. When drumming oriki praise names, the drummer must tell their origins, philosophize about them, and, to be a great drummer, he must give them "his own personal flavor." (Bush 1975:77)

Bush cites Echezona,[12] who says that all Ibo poetry has melody and all melody has words. Bush says this is true of Yoruba poetry also, with the additional fact that Yoruba can be sung or drummed. (1975:77) Beier says, "Most Yoruba poetry is chanted or sung, much is accompanied by drumming; some is played by the talking drum across a dance rhythm." (Beier 1970:15, 16)

One final quote by a Yoruba dancer, giving his perspective after observing Agbeke, a renowned female dancer: "She is soneone who has a great deal of power, more than anyone else. In addition, she knows how to interpret (in her dancing) the proverbs that the master drummer directs to her." (Thompson 1974:260)

RELIGION

A large part of Yoruba religion involves music, especially drums. This section examines Yoruba religion, particularly those aspects relating to music.

Bascom says that the 1962 "controversial" census in Nigeria estimated that approximately 40 percent or more Yoruba believe in Islam, approximately 40 percent or less believe in Christianity, and the remaining 20 percent believe in the traditional religion. Bascom says that not all converts to Islam and Christianity have forsaken their traditional beliefs. (Bascom 1969:2) Booth says that in 1972 he was told that 95 percent of the Yoruba professed either Islam or Christianity. When he asked how many practiced the traditional

religion, he was told 95 percent again. (Booth 1977:160) The point is that although Islam and Christianity have made many converts, traditional religion is an active force among those converts.

Some writers have emphasized the importance of religion in Yoruba life. E. Bọlaji Idowu says, "The keystone of their life is their religion. In all things they are religious. Religion forms the foundation and all-governing principle of life for them. As far as they are concerned, the full responsibility of all the affairs of life belongs to the Deity . . ." (Idowu, cited in Biobaku 1973: 90) [13] Frobenius gives much the same impression in his writings. (Frobenius 1913, 1968:186) Oyin Ogunba takes issue with these extreme statements, and says, "The Yoruba are hardly pietistic in their religious practice. . ." (Ogunba, in Biobaku 1973:90) Regardless of the degree to which individuals are religious, "music plays an indispensable role in Yoruba religion." (Bush 1975:54) For every deity, there are corresponding songs, dances, rhythms, and musical instruments. Except for Olorun, the Sky God, each deity has its own initiation rites and annual festival, utilizing music, which lasts about a week. In former times these festivals lasted up to a month. At these festivals, participants sing, dance, feast, drink, and offer sacrifices. (Bascom 1969:97)

A brief examination of the traditional Yoruba belief system follows, to facilitate a better understanding of the religious-musical connection.

Bascom says that Yoruba religion "represents a high point in African polytheistic belief." (Bascom 1953:2) Booth takes exception to this assertion, and offers the view that the terms monotheism and polytheism are not entirely applicable to the Yoruba. No matter how

it is classified, it seems clear that Yoruba religion is associated with music.

Olorun, or Olodumare is acknowledged as the "high god," or Sky God. Belief in Olorun, with its "monotheistic implications, make(s) it acceptable to Islam and Christianity." (Booth 1977:160) There are hundreds of other deities, known as orisha, created by Olorun.

Yoruba religion has been compared to that of ancient Greece and Rome, (Bascom 1953:2), with its pantheon of deities and elaborate mythology explaining their origins, history, relationships among deities, and their eventual incorporation into the world of mortals. Some deities have turned into rocks or rivers or other natural manifestations; others have not.

Beier says that a comparison to the Greek pantheon is "misleading," because a Yoruba deity is "an historical figure, an ancestor, war leader, hunter or city founder; an animal, a tree or a rock; a 'Jungian' archetype." (Beier 1975:34)

The literature on Yoruba religion is comprehensive. It is beyond the scope of this paper to present a detailed analysis of Yoruba deities, but brief mention is given to some of the major deities who are also closely associated with music.

Shango, or Ṣango is the god of thunder and lightning. He throws thunderbolts from the sky when he causes lightning to strike. Shango can punish people who steal or who practice "bad magic" by igniting their houses by means of lightning. Shango worshippers may become possessed by him when he returns to earth during the Shango festival. At this time, Shango enters their bodies and they dance, wearing red and white constumes decorated with cowrie shells, which whirl out from the dancers' bodies during the dance. (Bascom 1953:5, 6; 1969:84)

In the Shango cult, "drums are the most important musical instruments." (Simpson 1962:1208) Bata are the primary drums used during Shango worship, but other drums are also used, along with gourd rattles and handclapping. (Bascom 1953:5; Simpson 1962:1208) Alaka, a Yoruba master bata drummer, says, "When the drum beats hard, Shango will be greatly encouraged to dance hard; he will surrender himself to dance a dance that is beautiful. The thundergod will then be greeting the dancing members, 'I thank you! I thank you!'" (Alaka, cited in Thompson 1974:261)

Shango's "relatives" figure prominently in the religious and musical life of the Yoruba. Each has corresponding drums and specific drum rhythms associated with it. Oya is the "favorite" wife of Shango. She is the goddess of the Niger River, and is also associated with the strong winds that introduce a thunder storm. (Bascom 1953:6; 1969:87) Egungun is Shango's younger brother. Bascom differentiates four different "classes" of Egungun, with corresponding rituals, dress, and dances. Bata and dundun drums are played for Egungun. (Bascom 1953:6; 1969:93, 95)

Shǫpǫna, or Shapana, the god of smallpox, is the elder brother of Shango. Shǫpǫna is seen in this world as a whirlwind, particularly during the dry season, when smallpox outbreaks are more common. Drums of all kinds are used to worship Shǫpǫna. Drumming may be banned during smallpox epidemics so he will not be attracted to the afflicted area. The government of Nigeria has prohibited this cult for many years due to the belief that Shǫpǫna priests spread smallpox. Actually, these priests try to prevent smallpox, although they do care for those with the disease and in this way may be responsible for spreading the disease. Traditional belief regards smallpox not as a disease

but as punishment by Shọpọna for offending him, or breaking one of his taboos. (Bascom 1953:6; 1969:91)

Orishala, or Orishanla, is the "great deity." He is also known as Obatala, "king of the white cloth." Orishala created the first man and woman. Today, albinos, cripples, and dwarfs are sacred to him; he creates them to remind people to be diligent in worshipping him. Many objects used in Orishala rituals are white. Cult members wear white beads and white clothing. Igbin drums are sacred to Orishala, and are used for rituals in his temples. Outside the temples, in street festivals, bata and dundun drums are used. (Bascom 1953:6; 1969:81)

The following poem illustrates the relationship between several deities and percussion instruments. Beier notes that "the full meaning of this poem is lost." (Beier 1970:124)

Woru

Woru oh, Woru oh, on the farm.
Woru oh, Woru oh, on the river.
Woru who feeds birds with maize.
When I returned home I complained to my father.
Father beat Woru hard.
Under the banana tree, under the orange tree,
How did you get under the pepper shrub?
Woru bells belong to Oshun.
Oroguegba bells belong to Orisha.
Sekeseke is for Ogun.
Ask the chief for flour
To strew on the market place.
We are all children of Ogun.

(1970:98, 100)

Ellis describes the practice of pouring human blood, obtained from a sacrificed slave, over the gbẹdu drum, which is used in religious ceremonies. (Ellis 1894, 1974:100, 284) This may or may not have been a practice; chances are it is not done today. Ellis' book abounds with sensational, suspect statements; Herskovits offers this criticism:

"(Ellis) is notorious among Africanists for his uncritical borrowing from other authors. . . Today specialists in the field hold him outmoded and of but negligible value - the dates of publication of his

RECRUITMENT AND TRAINING OF DRUMMERS AND THEIR ROLE IN SOCIETY

After examining the various drums and percussion instruments used in Yorubaland, a logical question might be: Who plays these instruments? In this section I would like to explore that question, beginning with some general statements on the recruitment of musicians, then focusing on Yoruba drummers' recruitment and education, and concluding with the role of the drummer and musician in society, for Africa in general and specifically in Yorubaland.

Merriam states that, in reference to musicians, "there must be ways in which society assures that the requisite number of people is recruited to fill the role." (Merriam 1964:130) Merriam then quotes Ralph Linton's definitions of ascribed and achieved statuses,[14] and concludes that the role of musician is more often ascribed than achieved. (1964:131) This might lead one to believe that music is a specialized activity, performed by a select few who were ascribed "musician" due to circumstances of birth or other factors. Most writers refute this belief, stressing the integration of music and art into the mainstream of life. The following quotes deal with this topic; the first quote makes a general statement, and the ones that follow deal with African music.

"The typical primitive group has no specialization or professionalization; its division of labor depends almost exclusively on sex

and occasionally on age; and only rarely are certain individuals proficient in any technique to a distinctive degree. All women do the same things each day, possess approximately the same skills, have the same interests; and the men's activities are equally common to all. Accordingly, the same songs are known by all the members of the group, and there is little specialization in compostion, performance, or instrument-making." (Nettl 1956:10) [15]

"The stress placed upon musical activity as an integral and functioning part of the society is a feature that music shares with other aesthetic aspects of culture in Africa and one which is emphasized in almost all non-literate societies. In Euroamerican society, in contrast, there is a tendency to compartmentalize the arts and to divorce them from aspects of everyday life." (Merriam, in Bascom and Herskovits, ed. 1959:49) ". . .the central point remains that, compared to Western societies, African societies have many more people who participate in making music, and they do so within specific groups and specific situations." (Chernoff 1979:34) "One feature which African musical traditions seem to have in common, therefore, is the depth of their integration into the various patterns of social, economic, and political life. In its own way the astounding diversity of musical situations and musical activity seems to offer support for a unified conception of African music." (1979:35) "The neat separation of amateurs and professionals, a pillar of modern musical life, presents a concept not applicable in truly primitive culture." (Sachs 1962:200)

What do these quotes tell us? Do musicians occupy an ascribed, specialized role, or is music such an integral part of African society that almost anyone can become a musician? Is everyone a musician?

It's really impossible to generalize about an area as vast as Africa. Even the Yoruba are diverse enough that generalizations are difficult, if not unwanted, but the literature on them is more specific and gives a clearer picture of the drummer's role within his society.

In Bush's article, she says that since music is so pervasive in Yoruba culture, all members of the culture are exposed to it from an early age and receive some musical training. Children hear songs in the home and at festivals. Children make their own musical instruments and form ensembles, imitating adult behavior. These activities are done on an informal basis. Everyone learns and participates in songs and dances at their own rate. This informal learning is essential for a Yoruba to participate in cultural life. There are no formal schools for the teaching of music. (Bush 1975:48, 49)

Both amateur and professional musicians exist in Yorubaland. Bush focuses on "master drummers," who are professionals. Very sparse information is provided in the literature on amateurs, so the following discussion relates to professional master drummers only.

Most drummers are born into drumming families, and have fathers who are drummers. These families are collectively known as the House of Ayan. Ayan is the Yoruba drum deity. Drumming families usually incorporate "Ayan" into their own names, such as Ayaniji, Ayanwunmi, and Ayanwola. (These names respectively mean: the god of drum can protect; the child is born to the family because he wants to belong to the god of the drum; the god of drum has been elevated to a high position of authority.) [16] "The best master drummers by Yoruba standards come from the House of Ayan for the simple reason that only they can receive the continual daily exposure to the rich musical heritage of the drummer's family. The children learn the

details of the worship of Ayan, which gives them a sense of belonging to a very special traditional family whose origin is with the deity. An outsider has little chance to acquire such intimacy with the drummer's culture." (1975:49)

Membership in this profession is restricted to males. The assumption is that sons of master drummers will also become master drummers, the exception being if, at adulthood, they don't want to be a drummer, or they realize their talents aren't sufficient. Until adulthood, all boys in the House of Ayan are trained as prospective drummers. There is only one master drummer at a time per family; the senior son assumes the title "master drummer" when his father dies. Other sons may drum in ensembles, but without the title and accompanying prestige. (1975:49)

Boys who aren't from the House of Ayan, but who show exceptional talent, may be apprenticed to a master drummer. Bush says, "He will receive the same technical training as a male born into the drumming family, but it would be difficult, if not impossible, for him to absorb all of the cultural, especially religious, knowledge that would be picked up naturally by the son of a master drummer. If the outsider succeeds in attaining this title, his emphasis will be on the technical side, while a master drummer from the House of Ayan will emphasize matters of traditional importance, such as how to please the gods and his elders, and how to communicate more to his listeners than the message his drum speaks." (1975:49, 50)

Before I proceed with a description of the drummer's training, I must mention that there are conflicting reports as to how widespread this training is today. Bush, published in 1975, writes in the present tense, and derives her material from a contemporary

Yoruba, Ayo Bankole, Visiting Professor of Music, School of Music, Ohio University, 1971-1972. Bush, citing Bankole, gives the impression that Yoruba master drummers are still trained in the traditional way. Laoye, published in 1954, says, ". . .many drumming families became converted to Christianity or to Mohammedanism, and these families stopped drumming at ceremonies which they then regarded as being idolatrous. Those who kept on playing their drums only did so for dances and for enjoyment. The art of drumming began to be lost. Today it is all but completely lost, except in very few places like Ede, where every effort is being made to keep it alive as an art." (Laoye 1954:4) Laoye comes from a family of drummers, and learned the art from his maternal uncle. He expresses the hope that "young Yorubas of today" will begin to learn the drums again, to retain their cultural heritage. My sense from the literature and the state of popular arts today leads me to believe that a renewed appreciation for traditional ways is flourishing in Yorubaland. I am assuming that Bush's more recent description is accurate, and that the training practices she describes are in current use.

The student drummer learns by doing. He attends his father's performances, and may be given a small drum, as a child, and told to play a simple part. The smallest and easiest drum to play is the kannango. Its primary function is as a learning instrument, not in ensemble use. The kannango is a tension drum, so it provides good practice for the iya-ilu, but it is easier to change its pitch, hence more suited for a child. The child is taught a variety of stopped, muted, and left-hand strokes. When he has learned all these techniques, the student is ready to advance to the omele drums,

then the iya-ilu, and finally to the gudugudu, which requires difficult wrist action and is the hardest to master. (1975:50)

Besides learning the progressively more difficult rhythm patterns and techniques, the drum student learns the "cultural information" that he will later be expected to communicate through his drumming. As has been indicated, the drummer takes an active part in many areas of Yoruba life, and he must memorize complex geneologies, proverbs, and religious lore as part of his training. He is "a composer, the ensemble conductor, a poet, a historian, a repository of religious knowledge, a philosopher, the coordinator of dance and song in some music, and a psychologist par excellence." (1975:50, 51)

The drum student is motivated by social factors: he wants to be accepted as an accomplished drummer. Formal "tests" do not exist, (nor, as has been mentioned, do formal schools for the study of music.) The drummer is constantly being informally tested when other drummers listen to him perform. He may be corrected or instructed at any time. Verbal praise is not often given, for some adults believe that encouragement and praise would spoil him. Bush notes the function of ridicule in Nigerian society[17] and concludes that drummers are subject to ridicule much more than they are offered praise. (1975:51)

A Yoruba drummer never "completes" his musical education, nor does he graduate in the Western sense. "He is always being tested by older drummers, and as he himself grows older, he will continually test his juniors. Thus an unbroken line of constant teaching, learning, practicing and testing is sustained in the House of Ayan." (1975:51)

Competition and rivalry between master drummers exists. Specially-

prepared medicine and charms protect the drummer so he can drum phrases to his rivals without fear. (Note: drums are never supposed to be used to curse someone.) Ogun, the god of iron, is addressed by drummers because it is believed he protects them and gives them courage and confidence. On the outside bottom of a gudugudu drum is an iron ring, around which the tension strings are strung. In the center of the ring is a sacrificial mark, significant during Ayan ceremonies. Kola nuts, palm wine, and animal blood may be poured on this center place, and prayers offered to Ayan. (1975:54) (Perhaps this is a survival of the blood-pouring practice described by Ellis, page 27 of this text.)

The following is a story of Ayan, from whom all drummers in the House of Ayan are believed to have descended (according to Bankole, cited by Bush.) This story was drummed by a master drummer in a solo iya-ilu dundun piece.

"A long time ago, Ayan, a lady musician, lived in Ọyọ. During one of the court celebrations the Alafin (king) invited all of the important drums in Ọyọland to the palace to perform. The bata, bembe, and other drums were brought. Ayan had gone to the spiritual leaders to see how she could win the day at the palace. She was told to slaughter two rams, the hides of which should be used to make a drum which she should put around her shoulders and beat at the palace. It turned out to be a rainy day, and all of the drums that went early to the palace were drenched, and failed to impress the Alafin. Ayan showed up after the rain had stopped. When the Alafin noticed her, he invited her to play her drum. The little drum solo which Ayan beat that day has since been accepted by all drummers as the opening prayer to be played before any drum is

sounded for any purpose. The Alafin was very impressed and commanded Ayan to live in his palace, and since that day, succeeding generations of dundun drummers have always lived in palaces all over Yorubaland. And since that time, dundun players have been called the 'wife' of the ọba and are not requested to remove their hats in the palaces, which is a very special privilege." (Bankole 1968, Tape II, cited in Bush 1975:56) It is interesting that Ayan, the originator of the House of Ayan, was female, yet today all master drummers are exclusively male.

In analyzing the role of the Yoruba drummer in society, some contradictions emerge. The drummer occupies a high position among musicians. Within the royal palace he enjoys special status. Yet, within Yoruba society as a whole, his dependence on the king gives him low status. "He is sometimes called alagbe, meaning 'beggar,' or literally, 'one who shouts.' If he is refused compensation by the ọba, he must drum for anyone who will give him money. The master drummer holds himself in the same ambiguous concept of his position. He sees himself set above others by his age, wisdom, and skills, and to some extent by his place in the palace, but he also regards himself as having a rather low rank economically and socially." (1975:56, 77)[18]

Song Abusing Drummers

If it were not for the sake of the king
I would have torn your drum!
I am speaking now and you come
beating your drum ke ke ke.
If it were not for the sake of the king
I could have destoyed your drum!

(Beier 1970:103)

Blacking refers to Venda musicians as "social misfits." (Blacking, cited in Merriam 1964:132) [19] The Yoruba drummer also inhabits an uncertain role. Whether born into a master drummer's family or talented enough to join the drummers' ranks, he must train long and hard, yet the results of his efforts may leave him in social and economic limbo. Is this due to culture change? If the power of kings has diminished in the contemporary political realm, the kings'drummers may have also been displaced. Or, if Laoye is more accurate in maintaining that drummers are disappearing due to religious conversions, possibly the fact that the remaining drummers are in a minority causes them to feel alienated and powerless.

Two recent articles shed more light on the situation among the Yoruba today. [20] Waterman's article, published in 1982, focuses on the statuses and roles of a band leader and his band-member employees. These people play juju music, a popular (in West Africa and the West) contemporary blend of traditional Yoruba music and Western influences. Collins' article, published in 1977, takes a detailed look at the history of popular band music in Ghana and Nigeria since World War II, and the changes it has undergone due to Western forces. Although today's Yoruba musician may enjoy more fame and monetary reward than was possible in more traditional days, ultimately these articles support the contention that the Yoruba musician occupies a nebulous role within a changing society.

A MUSICAL ANALYSIS

This musical analysis begins by looking at some general characteristics of West African music. As has been pointed out previously, but which bears repeating, African music uses a variety of sounds

from all four types of musical instruments; "African music" is not exclusively drum music. The other caution that must be made is that even within the Yoruba culture area, the music is diverse and generalizations are apt to be non-inclusive or misleading.

Percussion sounds are generally the most striking and predominant in West African music. Drums and percussion may be featured in a primary role, they may be secondary, or in the background, but they tend to make the music complex in texture and exciting to the listener. (Nketia, in Skinner 1973:588)

An understanding of African music and rhythm may be facilitated by comparing it to Western music. This section assumes some basic familiarity with music theory terms. I have tried to keep the technical side to a minimum for easier understanding; some theoretical nomenclature is unavoidable.

"Broadly speaking, the difference between African and European rhythms is that whereas any piece of European music has at any one moment one rhythm in command, a piece of African music has always two or three, sometimes as many as four." (Ward, cited in Merriam, in Bascom and Herskovits, ed. 1959:58)[21] ". . .in its use of percussion instruments and complex rhythms as a basis for a musical idiom, instead of harmony as in the Western world, West African music differs most markedly from the European musical concept although the basic idea of drumming is common to both cultures and thus provides some familiar ground for comparison." (Merriam, in Bascom and Herskovits, ed. 1959:58)[22]

The Western sense of rhythm divides music into standard units of time. Western rhythm marks time evenly, with a recurring main beat that links the notes together. Western musicians count

together from the same starting point; all musicians in an ensemble know where the "one" or downbeat is. As Ward stated, in African music there are at least two rhythms going on simultaneously. Each instrument may have its own meter. Musicians don't count in relation to the "one," the main beat. Instead, they keep track of their own part, or count in relation to other instruments. (Chernoff 1979:41)

The organization of African rhythm is generally more complex than the organization of melody. Rhythm provides the framework for a melody. When two or more rhythmic parts are played together, each part is not required to have the same degree of complexity. Some parts may play a steady, dominant rhythm pattern, which serves as a point of reference for the other musicians in the ensemble. Other more complex patterns alternate at varying speeds. The changes in rhythms usually occur at different times for contrast. (Nketia, in Skinner 1973:594) Although African music has a set tempo, a regular pulse within this tempo may or may not be present. Musical and rhythmical phrases may be organized in a way which sounds confusing to the Western listener who is accustomed to strict regularity in rhythm. (1973:592)

Conflicting rhythms and accents are called cross-rhythms, or polyrhythms. They are always changing in relation to each other. Polyrhythmical music may sound strange to the Western listener because as soon as the listener identifies and follows one beat, it is "lost," and another, different beat enters.

The use of staggered, independent entrances is another aspect of cross-rhythm that emphasizes the separate beats. Each musician plays a different part, entering and exiting at different times, to form the "fabric" of the polymeter. The layers within the musical piece

may be seen as horizontal layers, rather than vertical; each horizontal layer exists independently, not relying on any other layer for its place in the rhythmical weave.

Chernoff gives an example of the differences between Western and African rhythmic orientations. "Asked to supply a second rhythm to a piece of music in either 3/4 or 4/4 time, a Westerner and an African would respond in quite different manners:

Generally, in African musical idioms most of the notes seem to fall on what we would call the 'off-beat.'" (Chernoff 1979:48) One may say that Africans play on the off-beat, but they must know where the beat is in order to play "around" it.

Sachs defines another aspect of cross-rhythm, which he terms "hemiola." Hemiola, or "one and a half," changes from measure to measure to measure. For example, six beats may be divided into 2 x 3 or 3 x 2; in other words, two measures of three beats or three measures of two beats. The same notes may be interpreted or heard as 6/8 or 3/4 time. The following diagram illustrates a basic hemiola pattern:

```
3/4  x . x . x . x . x . x . x
     |           |           |
6/8  x . . x . . x . . x . . x
```

The common beats are joined by a line. (Sachs 1961:195)

The "metronome sense" is another aspect of African music. In addition to all the different rhythms going on in a musical piece,

the performer and/or listener must be able to hear the "hidden beat," a constant meter which is made up of all the various parts. The metronome sense is explained by Waterman as follows: "From the point of view of the listener, it entails habits of conceiving any music as structured along a theoretical framework of beats regularly spaced in time . . ." ". . .it is assumed without question or consideration to be part of the perceptual equipment of both musicians and listeners . . .When the beat is actually sounded, it serves as a confirmation of this subjective beat." (Waterman, cited in Merriam, Bascom and Herskovits, ed. 1959:61)[23] Chernoff elaborates on this point by saying, "Those people who have said that drummers dance while they play were right in the sense that the drummers keep the beat in this way so that their off-beat drumming will be precise." (Chernoff 1979: 50) Waterman has also come up with the concept of "hot rhythm," which refers to the driving, emotional nature of many of the rhythmical forms in African music;[24] the more exciting the drumming, the "hotter."

Syncopation is another feature of African music, related to the metronome sense. Syncopated beats deviate from the regular beat and in so doing actually accent the main beat. Syncopation may also be achieved simply by not playing on the beat, which once again indirectly emphasizes the main beat. (Sachs 1961:196) Chernoff stresses, ". . .the African drummer concerns himself as much with the notes he does not play as with the accents he delivers." (Chernoff 1979:60)

Repetition of a rhythmical unit, and alternating two distinct units, known as call-and-response, is another feature of African music. "The chorus or response is a rhythmic phrase which recurs regularly; the rhythms of a lead singer or musician vary and are cast against the steady repetition of the response. In essence, if the

rhythmic complexity is the African alternative to harmonic complexity, the repetition of responsive rhythms is the African alternative to the development of a melodic line." (1979:55) Waterman is more specific in his analysis, commenting that "the entrance of the solo or the chorus part on the proper beat of the measure is the important thing, not the effects attained through antiphony or polyphony. Examples of call-and-response music in which the solo, for one reason or another, drops out for a time, indicate clearly that the chorus part, rhythmical and repetitive, is the mainstay of the song and the one really inexorable component of their rhythmic structure. The leader, receiving solid rhythmic support from the metrically accurate rolling repetition of phrases by the chorus, is free to embroider as he will." (Waterman, cited in Thompson 1974:27)[25]

A final generalization that can be made about African music is the freedom of the performers to improvise. ". . .the drummers are at complete liberty to extemporize variations, provided only that they keep to the length of time allowed for their figure - in other words they do not take more than one bar for their figure." (Ward, cited by Merriam, in Bascom and Herskovits, ed. 1959:59)[26]

Yoruba drum music exhibits most of the characteristics common in African music described above. This text uses two recordings as primary sources for an analysis of Yoruba drum music.

Drums of the Yoruba of Nigeria was recorded in 1951 by William Bascom in Ọyọ, Nigeria. Side One was recorded during the annual festival of Orishanla at the house of Chief Ashipa of Ọyọ. Bascom says, "During the recording of Band 1, several drumsticks were broken, and better drummers continued to replace those who had originally been playing." (Bascom 1953:3) Side One consists of igbin drums, the iya, jagba, and epele, in descending order of size. The two

smaller drums maintain a driving rhythm, while the deep-toned larger drum plays a rhythm, drops it, begins another, drops that, and so on. ". . .the large drum establishes intermittent rhythmic phrases which are dropped almost as soon as they become clearly established in the listener's mind, leaving him suspended in the middle of the phrase. The intricate interrelationships of the two smaller drums require extreme precision and accuracy, but the timing, subtle variations and choice of the simpler phrases of the large drum are regarded as involving greater artistry." (1953:3)

Side Two, Bands 1, 2, and 3 illustrate the dundun pressure drum. Band 1 is interesting because the drummer beats out a phrase which another drummer then translates into spoken Yoruba. Band 2 illustrates the parts played by five different types of dundun drums in a set, the iya-ilu, kanango, gangan, kerikeri, and the gudugudu. Bascom is criticized by Sachs for recording each part separately, which "fails to indicate whether the five drummers enter on the same beat or, which is more probable, at certain distances." (Sachs 1961:197) Nonetheless, this section gives a good idea of what each drum in the ensemble sounds like.

Band 3 is a social dance song played by dundun dums, shekere rattles, and voice. The remainder of Side Two contains bata drums, which are used only for religious music. Six different songs are recorded, each worshipping a different deity: Shango, Oya, Egungun, Shapana, Orishanla, and Eshu. Egungun is Shango's younger brother, worshipped with carved wooden masks; Eshu is the messenger and trickster god. (The other deities are elaborated on earlier in this text.)

Rhythmically, these songs illustrate contrasting tempos, or cross-

NOTES TO THE TEXT

[1] See: Ekundayo Phillips, Yoruba Music, Fusion of Speech and Music, Johannesburg: African Music Society 1953 (Available at the U.of W. Music Library).

[2] For further discussion of the field of ethnomusicology, see: Mantle Hood, The Ethnomusicologist, New York: McGraw Hill 1971; Jaap Kunst, Ethnomusicology, The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff 1959; Curt Sachs, The Wellsprings of Music, The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff 1961.

[3] Duarte Pacheco Pereira, Esmeraldo de situ orbis, trans. and ed. G.H.T. Kimble, London: 1937. (publisher not given)

[4] For an exhaustive history of the Yoruba and references to other early writers on the subject, see: Samuel Johnson, The History of the Yorubas, Westport, Connecticut: Negro Universities Press 1921, 1970.

[5] Based on the work of Victor Mahillon in 1880: Erich M. von Hornbostel and Curt Sachs, "Systematik der Musikinstrumente," Zeitschrift für Ethnologie. vol. 46, nos. 4-5 (1914); English trans. Anthony Baines and Klaus P. Wachsmann, "Classification of Musical Instruments," Galpin Society Journal, vol. 14 (1961). For a critique of this classification system, see: Mantle Hood, op.cit.,pp. 124-126; Jaap Kunst, op.cit.,p.59.

[6] Francis Ernest Kobina Parkes, "African Heaven," New World Writing Number 15, New York: Mentor 1959.

[7] Ayo Bankole, "Nigerian Folk Music," talk series for the Nigerian

Broadcasting Corporation, Tapes I, II, III, IV, 1968.

8 Philip Gbeho, "The Indigenous Gold Coast Music," Journal of the African Music Society, vol. 1, no. 5 (1952), page 31.

9 Reverend A.M. Jones, Studies in African Music, vol. 1, London: Oxford University Press 1959.

10 This is a brief summary of the Ifa belief system and its practices. For a detailed analysis, see: William Bascom, Ifa Divination: Communication Between Gods and Men in West Africa, Bloomington; Indiana University Press,1969.

11 Prince says "Ifa healing system." All other references to Ifa I've encountered refer to Ifa divination.

12 W.W.C. Echezona, Ibo Musical Instruments in Ibo Culture, unpublished Ph.D. dissertation, Michigan State University 1963.

13 E. Bolaji Idowu, Olodumare, God in Yoruba Belief, publisher not given, London 1962.

14 Ralph Linton, The Study of Man, New York: D. Appleton-Century 1936.

15 The reader will notice I avoid the use of the word "primitive." The debate over its use continues, and is not a part of this paper, but I am compelled to state that I find the word "primitive" objectionable, due to its many subtle implications.

16 From: D.L. Thieme, A Descriptive Catalog of Yoruba Musical Instruments, unpublished Ph.D. dissertation, Catholic University of America 1969.

17 For a discussion of ridicule in Nigerian society, see: T. Lambo,

"Characteristic Features of the Psychology of the Nigerians," West African Medical Journal, 1960, 9:3.

[18] For a discussion of the vague and economically poor role of drummers in other societies, see: Merriam, 1964:127-130.

[19] John Blacking, The role of music amongst the Venda of the Northern Transvaal, Johannesburg: International Library of African Music 1957.

[20] E.J. Collins, "Post-War Popular Band Music in West Africa," African Arts, vol. 10, no. 3, April, 1977.

Christopher A. Waterman, "'I'm a Leader, Not a Boss': Social Identity and Popular Music in Ibadan, Nigeria," Ethnomusicology, vol. 26, no. 1, January,1982.

[21] W.E. Ward, "Music in the Gold Coast," Gold Coast Review, III (July-December,1927).

[22] Alan P. Merriam, "African Music Reexamined in the Light of New Materials from the Belgian Congo and Ruanda-Urundi," Zaïre, VII March, 1953.

[23] Richard A. Waterman, "African Influence on the Music of the Americas," Acculturation in the Americas, ed. Sol Tax ("Proceedings of the Twenty-ninth International Congress of Americanists," Vol.II, Chicago: University of Chicago Press 1952.)

[24] Richard A. Waterman, "'Hot' Rhythm in Negro Music," Journal of the American Musicological Society, I, Spring, 1948,

[25] Ibid.

26
Ward, op. cit.

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