DDD Music Analysis, Group Dances, *Baamaaya--Baamaaya*

Note

Alone among all the pieces presented on this website, Alhaji insisted on playing in an advanced style when demonstrating the luŋa part for Baamaaya. Although our understanding was that he would play phrases that represented an essential core of the piece, for Baamaaya he only presented what I consider as advanced and challenging luŋa material. For example, I had never before heard him play the phrase he selected as the opening call. As discussed below, its rhythmic relationship with the other luŋa talks and the guŋ-gɔŋ part is quite sophisticated. Even when he moved on to supposedly "basic" phrases he played them with an intensity that is difficult to imitate.

Why did Alhaji insist on this difficult version? He never explained and I never asked. I simply was grateful for his overall willingness to moderate his expertise and virtuosity on the other items of repertory. I think the reason may be due to Baamaaya's popularity. More than any other Dagomba group dance, Baamaaya is widely performed by folkloric groups and in school classes not only all over Ghana but also overseas, as well. Alhaji frequently found fault with these versions, complaining about the degradation of tradition (incorrect rhythms and melodies, lack of knowledge of drum language, and even invented story of origin). Perhaps he figured that Baamaaya likely would be one of the most sought-after sections of his entire presentation. Maybe Alhaji intentionally wanted to hint that there is much more inside the music of Baamaaya than people might think. For Alhaji's version of the Baamaaya medley that is easier to copy, see Warren Jones, *A Study of Baamaaya*, Masters Thesis, Tufts University, 2002.

Overview of Baamaaya

Place in the Medley

The entire dance takes its name from this section of the medley, which is called Baamaaya. Alhaji assumes that originally Naa Daa and Baamaaya were the only sections of the dance. Other sections were added later. In many staged choreographies, Baamaaya comes first after the dancers have formed a circle on the dancing area, returning again at the end of the performance as the "off stage" movement.

Dance and Musical Material

The dominant movement theme for the whole dance, a swiveling shimmy motion of the hips, is established in Baamaaya. As taught by Alhaji, the traditional dance for Baamaaya is based on individual variations done by each dancer according to his/her own creative spirit and intelligence. Dancers and drummers inspire each other, freely responding to familiar favorites or new inventions in motion and music. Most modern choreographies now use time-tested variations as pre-composed sequences to be performed by all dancers in unison. Often, what originally were improvised drum variations have been codified as "cues" for particular dance figures.

Dance and Musical Form

Dance variations may be as short as an eighth note or as long as sixteen beats. It makes sense to designate a two-beat span of quaternary time (roughly equivalent to a 2/4 time signature) as the basic time frame of the dance and then to regard other variations as longer and shorter than this primary duration. Just as the duration of dance phrases may be augmented or diminished by factors of two, the time span of drumming phrases is a multiple of the foundational two-beat unit.

Dancers orient themselves to the press stroke (ki) in the guŋ-gɔŋ phrase "ka KI kara ka." Compared to the guŋ-gɔŋ phrases, which are in rhythmic alignment with the dance phrases, the luŋa phrases Alhaji selected for this presentation are offset from the flow of the dance. In other words, guŋ-gɔŋ and dance move together easily, whereas luŋa and dance create more aesthetic friction.

Phrase Duration

Alhaji presents luŋa phrases of two-beat duration, except for the unusual and distinctive opening phrase (see below). Most guŋ-gɔŋ phrases are four beats in duration.

Interplay among Parts

As mentioned above, the orientation point for the dance and the music is marked by the press stroke (ki) in the guŋ-gɔŋ phrase "ka ki kara ka." Although in the Part-by-Part Sessions Alhai did not play what I would consider the typical alignment of the "basic" phrase for luŋa, guŋ-gɔŋ and luŋa usually interlock in a straight forward manner (see Rhythm Notation). In these recordings, however, he shifted this phrase so that it begins

and ends on an upbeat. In so doing, he demonstrates a basic rhythmic device of Dagomba drumming in quaternary time--accentuation of the upbeats.

Groove
Baamaaya feels fast, hard driving, and intense. Both drums have ample opportunity for phrases with dense stroking and striking musical design. The piece is a showcase for a drummer's technical skill and musical virtuosity.

The main idea in the basic four-beat guŋ-gɔŋ phrase is accentuation of time-point 1.1, followed by accents on and around time-point 2.1. Guŋ-gɔŋ phrases often accentuate the dotted offbeat in beat one (time point 1.4) or the upbeat of beat two (time point 2.3). These loud center strokes are typically followed by a figure of quieter chahira strokes that open sonic space for the luŋa.

Like the dance, the luŋa part orients to the "ki" stroke of the guŋ-gɔŋ part. Luŋa phrases toy with overlapping or offset relationships in its duet with guŋ-gɔŋ.

Guŋ-gɔŋ
In vocables, Alhaji showed three "talks" but added a fourth on the drum itself (see Vocables Notation). What deserves to be called "the basic" guŋ-gɔŋ phrase moves from pickup to downbeat with a bounce-press figure (ka ki). This is followed by a special two-stroke double stroke, "kara," whose louder first stroke accents time-point 1.4. This is another instance in Dagomba drumming when that point in the cycle is emphasized. The phrase ends with a strong stroke on the "and of two," or the upbeat of the backbeat.

Using the "kara ka" figure as its seed idea, the second "talk" augments the duration of the basic phrase (see letter B in Vocables Transcription and Drumming Transcription). This phrase pleasantly contrasts figures that are "phrased over the bar-line" with those that clearly mark it with a "ki" stroke.

The third "talk" firmly and rather squarely puts accented strokes on beat two and its upbeat (see letter C in Vocables Transcription and Drumming Transcription). In staff notation this phrase may appear quite similar to the basic "talk" but it sounds quite

different. Unlike the basic phrase, "kakaki kaka" leads toward the orienting "ki" stroke with two pickup bounce strokes. This change powerfully marks the backbeat of every measure.

On drum, Alhaji played a fourth phrase that may be heard as a development of "kakaki kaka"(see letter D in Drumming Transcription). As if inspired by rhythmic motion in eighth note time values, "kakakakaka" sounds the pickup of the basic phrase and then simply follows with four bounce strokes. The fact that there is no orienting "ki" stroke on the downbeat is an important aspect of this phrase's musical personality. Responding to its flow of even eighth notes, dancers often execute a "running step" when drummers play this phrase.

As the transcriptions of Alhaji's demonstrations show, he usually returns to the basic phrase before bringing out another variation. He would want me to state that this presentation barely scratches the surface of the very large number of variations with which he is familiar, not to mention his infinite resources for inventing new ones.

Luŋa
As mentioned above, Alhaji really "let loose" on the luŋa part for Baamaaya. Over the years, he developed a keen awareness of the capabilities of his students. Usually patient with our limitations, from time to time he would enjoy playing closer to his true level of musical concept and technical skill. He knew very well the looks of amazement and frustration these glimpses of the "real thing" would elicit from us. In Africa itself, I have witnessed the respect he was accorded by experienced Dagomba drummers. In the case of the luŋa part for Baamaaya, he decided to have some fun!

The phrases Alhaji played may be grouped into two categories--phrases that conform to Baamaaya's basic quaternary-duple temporal nature and those timed in a three-in-the-time-two (3:2) relation to the main groove. The 3:2 phrases either flow lyrically over four measures (see "Shiya dim gurugulana chɛl' lari ka nya o tiya," letter A in Vocables Transcription and Drumming Transcription) or exert powerful offbeat pressure with short, choppier design (see "Ba m-bala," letter C in Vocables Transcription and letter B in Drumming Transcription). The phrases in quaternary time, which are densely offbeat,

are very, very demanding technically in terms of sticking endurance and control of pitch (See "To zuŋɔ"). Frankly, I do not recommend these luŋa phrases to players without a great deal of experience.

A much more doable phrase for luŋa in Baamaaya is shown in the Rhythm Notation. Here, we have a simple call-and-response relationship between luŋa and guŋ-gɔŋ that uses only eighth note and quarter note time values on low and mid pitch--"dan deden." END