

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

Overview of Maze

Place in the Medley

Maze usually comes between Baamaaya and Dakoli Kutokɔ in the sequence of different sections of the Baamaaya medley.

Dance and Musical Material

In the traditional context of performance, both drummers and dancers creatively work with pre-existing variations. In the setting of staged performances, choreographers arrange popular variations into a prescribed sequence. For this presentation, Alhaji only demonstrated a limited amount of material.

Like Baamaaya, the guŋ-gɔŋ part marks an orientation point around which the dance movements are shaped. The phrases of both the drummers and the dancers can be expanded or contracted but the basic time span of both the guŋ-gɔŋ and the dance is four beats (two duple measures). The basic "talk" of the luŋa is eight beats (four duple measures), structured in two four-beat motives.

Interplay among Parts

The prominent notes of the luŋa phrase are all offset from the basic guŋ-gɔŋ phrase. The guŋ-gɔŋ and the dance move together. As is also true for Tora, Takai and Kondaliya, in Maze it is plausible to hear onbeats in two different positions. As notated on this site, the basic guŋ-gɔŋ phrase is set to the onbeats and the luŋa to the offbeats. But if a listener focuses on the luŋa, the onbeats very likely will be heard on what is the upbeat of the guŋ-gɔŋ part and the dance. This temporal structure--permanently offset accentuation--is a defining feature of Dagomba dance drumming, in my opinion.

Groove

From a dancer's perspective, the groove of Maze arises from the powerful onbeats sounded by guŋ-gɔŋ and the perpetual offbeats sounded by luŋa. The interplay between luŋa and guŋ-gɔŋ is a tight interlock, with each drum's accentuation exerting strong pull on the other.

In my opinion, Maze is among the most non-Western of all the pieces presented on this website. Its distinctive Dagomba-ness, so to speak, arises from the way the music can be felt or perceived in different ways at the same time. I call this "simultaneous multidimensionality." As already mentioned, the music suggests two flows of onbeats, one for guŋ-gɔŋ and the dance and another for luŋa. Moreover, the music can be felt to move either at a moderate pace with the beat as a half note, or at a fast pace with the beat moving at the rate of quarter notes. Furthermore, the luŋa's time values can be felt equally well in triple time or duple time (see notated versions labeled A and B). And, one guŋ-gɔŋ variation inserts a triplet figure as a pickup to the orientation point.

In the hands of an expert virtuoso like Alhaji, Maze is a site for a very advanced style of play. Both drums have phrases with fast sticking, as shown in Alhaji's guŋ-gɔŋ drumming demonstration.

Guŋ-gɔŋ

The simplest, least ornate, version of the basic guŋ-gɔŋ phrase is found in Alhaji's drumming demonstration (see Drumming Transcription). Marked A1, it moves towards the downbeat of the phrase from beat two of the preceding measure--"ka KAki." This is the guŋ-gɔŋ phrase that most theatrical-style groups use. Everyone orients in time to the "ka" stroke on the downbeat.

To a player of Alhaji's stature, this phrase is rather child-like. He shows several more fully developed versions of this basic musical idea that use double-hit strokes, added pickups and after-strokes. I find it revealing that he only briefly gives the simple version in his vocables demonstration. It is likely that for Alhaji, the basic phrase is "kaka KAki."

Note that the simple version of the basic guŋ-gɔŋ phrase in Maze is quite similar to the answer guŋ-gɔŋ part in Kondaliya, one of the Takai dances.

As best seen in the full transcriptions, Alhaji provides a nice sampling of variations in the vocables and drumming demonstrations. When showing vocables, he doubles the phrase length in two ways: (1) with a string of relatively long time values (quarter notes), and (2)

sets of eighth notes that accentuate upbeat (see variations marked B and D). Alhaji showed more variations when demonstrating the drumming, which suggests that inspiration sometimes arises from the physical nature of how a part is played. We might say, "The hand inspires the mind."

In the transcription of Alhaji's drumming demonstration notice the way he varies the time span of his phrases--switching among durations of two beats, four beats and eight beats (see Drumming Transcription, phrases marked D, B and C, for example). Another musical factor that Alhaji varies is the length of the figures that lead toward the orientation point; he moves the starting point of his phrases within the measure that precedes the cadence point. Alhaji also likes to change the density of variations, contrasting phrases of sparse and dense texture (see phrases marked A1 and B, respectively). He enjoys moving between phrases that create highly offbeat accentuation with those that are strongly onbeat (see phrases marked B and D). Because the luṣa part typically is offset from the guṣ-gṣ, when guṣ-gṣ shifts to playing on the upbeats this means it will be together with luṣa. Of course, if the luṣa player has shifted from onbeat accentuation to the upbeats then the two parts will still be offset from each other, but with reversed relations to the dancers' basic groove. (Dancers also can play with going to the upbeat.) The variation that uses triplet figures is quite rare in Dagomba music (see phrase C). Depending on what is going on with the luṣa part, the triplets in guṣ-gṣ can either create fast 3:2 or 3:4 combinations or unisons in triple time.

Luṣa

Alhaji gave two "talks" for luṣa (see Drum Language for Maza). Talk one--"Mani n-kpim buwa dan pani yebile"--jokingly raises the topic of sex by unfavorably comparing men to goats, while talk two--"Zuṣṣ, zuṣṣ, ba m-bala gba"--simply draws attention to the dancers as the "men of the hour."

As mentioned above, one important feature of both phrases is their offset positioning in relation to the basic guṣ-gṣ phrase. The luṣa's pattern of accentuation is so strong and so consistent that listeners are likely to hear it as being onbeat (see Figure 1). In other words, the luṣa talks can "flip" the listener's perception of the music's overall gestalt. This is an onbeat-upbeat inversion.



Figure 1 Maze luja talks in flipped configuration

A second crucial aspect of talk one is that it articulates a rhythm that is absolutely at the core of Dagomba musical style. In its unadorned form the phrase appears as the answer luja part for Damba Manḡli, Takai and Kondaliya, but in Maze the phrase is given a more complex presentation. In its basic condition, the phrase has four strokes. The four strokes may be grouped in several ways. Strokes one and two group together as a pair, and strokes three and four group together as a second pair. Crucially, strokes one and two are slightly closer together in time than are strokes three and four. Because equal time value separates notes two, three and four, these three strokes also become a group. In Maze, Damba and Kondaliya, strokes two, three and four all are on the upbeat, while in Takai they are onbeat. In Maze, Damba and Kondaliya, stroke one comes on time point 1.4--a split second *before* beat two--while in Takai stroke one comes on time point 2.2--a split second *after* beat two (see Figure 2). In Maze, this important Dagomba rhythmic pattern is rendered with grace notes, press strokes, and rests.

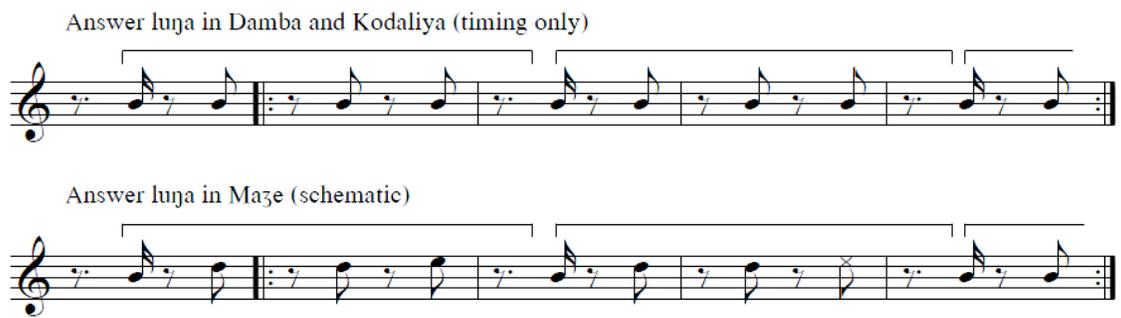


Figure 2 Maze, rhythm of luja talk one

Knowing that talk one is closely related to Damba and Kondaliya does not help us pin down the "correct" location for the flow of onbeats in Maze because the same set of

temporal values is used in its "flipped" version in Takai. All evidence points to a musical condition of multidimensionality, that is, the position of onbeats can be felt (1) in one or the other position, (2) in both positions at the same time, or (3) without reference to an underlying flow of beats whatsoever. In the latter condition, players are aware of when strokes occur and the proper relationship among strokes but they do not use a steady beat as a basis for timing. Instead it is the relationship between patterns--and strokes within patterns--that guides their timing.

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