

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

Overview of Takai

Place in the Medley

Once the dancers are in place, Takai comes first among all the sections. Typically, it is played for much longer than the other sections.

Dance and Musical Material

Dancers strike their rods alternatively with the partner to the front and their neighbor to the rear. Audiences expect each dancer to develop a sense of personal drama and flair to their movement style. Tradition gives each dancer considerable leeway for personal style, variation, and spontaneity but the basic dance step taught to me by Alhaji and Fusena Wombie has the following pattern (see Figure 1).

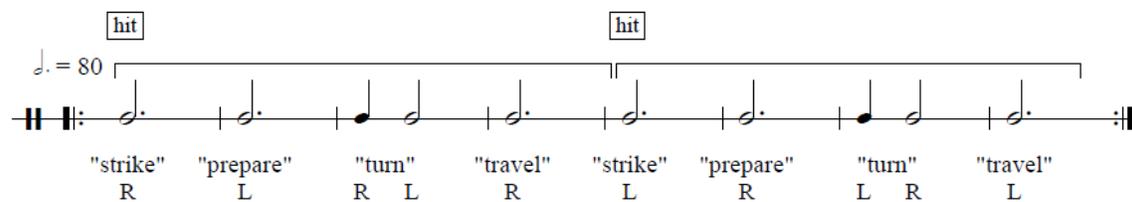


Figure 1 Takai dance step sequence

In terms of underlying steady pulsation, the dancers' counts move at half the speed of the drummers' beats--as notated, there is one dance count per measure. There are four dance counts between each hit, making eight counts for one complete cycle of the dance. The only difference between the stepping of Kondaliya and Takai is the timing of the two "turning steps"--the steps are quicker and uneven in Takai but slower and even in Kondaliya.

The dancers' steps impart a slow cut-time feeling to the drum phrases (see Rhythm Notation). Leading luṅa and guṅ-gōṅ have one basic phrase over the span of one dancer's hit; the answering drums have two phrases over the span period. Although the first stroke of lead luṅa marks the moment of the dancers' strike, all other strokes are offset from the dance. The phrase best suited to be called "basic" for leading guṅ-gōṅ not only marks the strike point but all the other counts in the dance phrase. For answer luṅa, the second

and fourth strokes are "on dance." For answer guṅ-gṳṅ, the first stroke of the first occurrence of the phrase falls right on the "hit," while the first stroke of the second occurrence of the phrase adds energy to the dancers' turning gesture. Answer guṅ-gṳṅ and the dance interlock in a propulsive call-and-response interlock.

Interplay among Parts

In their basic phrases, all drums play a stroke on the instant the dancers strike their rods together (see Rhythm Notation). That is the only time point in the musical cycle when everyone comes together. At other times, the drums variously reinforce certain time points in the cycle by playing at the same time, or create excitement by being offset in distinctive ways. For example, answer guṅ-gṳṅ adds weight to the third stroke of answer luṅa, while lead guṅ-gṳṅ suggests a lilt to answer luṅa phrase of "one TWO three FOUR, one TWO THREE FOUR."

As mentioned, the most noticeable aspect of the interplay among parts is the way that leading luṅa operates in its own slot, while the other three drums move in alignment. Still, leading luṅa and guṅ-gṳṅ do have strokes in unison on what are notated as upbeats in the guṅ-gṳṅ part. If the gestalt of the overall music shifts so that leading luṅa is heard as being onbeat, then those strokes in the guṅ-gṳṅ part become onbeat.

Groove

Frankly, I hesitate to say that Takai even has a groove because the overall texture of the music is so dense, the relationship among the parts is so intricate, and the offbeating is so insistent. But, Dagombas enjoy dancing to the music of Takai, which shows that cultural insiders feel its groove. The "kwao kwa kwao, kwao kwa kwao" of answer guṅ-gṳṅ does impart a solid push to the music. Its recurring call-and-response with leading guṅ-gṳṅ--kwao kwa kwao KA KI--creates a propulsive two-measure motive. The interlocked relationship between the two luṅa drums also can be experienced as having an intensely forward-driving quality.

Guṅ-gṅṅ

Answer Guṅ-gṅṅ

Answer guṅ-gṅṅ has one phrase that it plays steadily and repeatedly throughout the performance. Its phrase acts like the deep heartbeat of Takai's drumming, insistently harkening back to the History Story with its drum language, "Stop the fight, stop the fight." Alhaji shows two ways to play the chahira strokes--one with a fast sixteenth notes and the other with more laid-back eighth notes.

If the drummer wants to edge the musical feel towards ternary time, the timing of the third bounce stroke can be delayed slightly, or "swung," to use jazz parlance (see Figure 2).

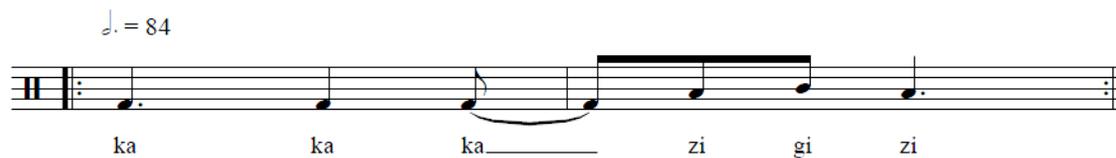


Figure 2 Takai answer guṅ-gṅṅ with swing timing

Leading Guṅ-gṅṅ

The leading guṅ-gṅṅ part in Takai is a topic for significant study. On this site, Alhaji demonstrated only the phrases he selected as essential and fundamental. Restraining himself from displaying more of his knowledge and artistry was a challenge.

The part has a "basic talk" and a set of other phrases that dancers expect to hear. In the basic phrase (see phrases marked C and D), the temporal structure of beats rapidly alternates between ternary and binary feeling. We can label this "heterometric."

Although I have chosen to notate the part in ternary-duple bars (equivalent to a 6/8 time signature), the phenomenal rhythm of "talks" also accentuates binary-triple time (notated with quarter notes, equivalent to a 3/4 time signature) and duple-duple time (notated with dotted eighths, equivalent to 2/4). I conclude that one important feature of the part is to maintain an open, multi-determinant metric quality to the music.

The part may be conceived as having a set of pre-composed phrases or "talks" that serve as the source of inspiration for variations. Drummers generate variations through

procedures that conform to stylistic conventions established by tradition. The implicit drum language provides a source of inspiration, as well as a check on a drummer's flights of fancy.

Alhaji's vocable demonstration provides an excellent basis to grasp the nature of the part (see Vocables Score). Alhaji begins (A), with a two-measure phrase that ends on the dancers' hit. He develops this end-cadence idea with a related four-measure phrase (B). Then he dramatically changes the rhythmic flow by bringing out the part's basic phrases (C and D). In its shorter version (C) the part alternates between ternary and binary figures in the chahira area of the drum skin. Thus every other backbeat gets a different treatment. Phrase C creates quick call-and-response with the answer guḥ-gḥ phrase. Phrase D is what I am calling the "basic" phrase for the leading guḥ-gḥ part. Except for the chahira strokes in its first measure, phrase D moves entirely in duplets (hence justifying the way I notated it in the Rhythm Notation figure). Players must be sure to fit the phrase with the dance correctly--the stand-alone "ka" stroke must align with the dancers' hit.

Alhaji simply played the same material for his drumming demonstration. Unlike many of the other items of repertory, there is drum language implicit to the guḥ-gḥ's music (see Drumming Notation).

Luḥa

Answer Luḥa

The answer luḥa phrase in Takai shares its timing with the answer luḥa phrase in Damba and Kondaliya. Although their metric setting is different, the melody of Takai and Kondaliya is identical. The Maze section of the Baamaaya Group Dance also is a member of this family of phrases.

The phrase has four strokes. In Takai, strokes two and four align with dancers' steps. We will say that these notes are onbeat. This holds whether the phrase is felt in quaternary or ternary time.

As shown in the discussion of the guṅ-gṅ part, the meter of Takai is subject to modification and interpretation. Players may shade their timing to make the music feel binary, ternary, or some combination of the two timing feels. Further, phrases on lead guṅ-gṅ explicitly mix ternary and binary figures and moreover, variations may switch between ternary-duple and binary-triple meters. The answer luṅa part also participates in this chameleon-like approach to musical meter and rhythm.

When felt and played in quaternary temporal perspective, the first stroke of answer luṅa comes a split second after beat two; the time value of the note is a dotted eighth note (see Vocables Notation, versions A and B). The time between strokes one and two is less than the time value between strokes two-three and between strokes three-four. Strokes two, three and four are separated by the same amount of time; played in succession they set up a steady flow of beats.

When felt and played in ternary temporal perspective, the timing of the first stroke comes on the second time point within beat two (seen most clearly in Vocables Notation, versions D and E). In physical time, as opposed to musical time, this places the onset of stroke one ever so slightly later than it would be in quaternary time. But given the tempo at which the music is played and the presence of all the other parts, this real time difference is accepted in the culture as equivalent. This temporal position may also be felt right on the third binary beat of a triple measure (see Vocables Notation, version C).

Even if the timing of the first stroke matches the third triple beat, the player may wish to retain the location of stroke three as directly on duple beat two, as usual. Alternatively, the player may use the same timing for strokes three-four as found in strokes one-two (see Vocables Notation, version E). This timing rhythmically affirms that the four strokes in the phrase are grouped into two pairs--strokes one-two and strokes three-four. If the answer luṅa plays version E when other drums also have shifted to binary-ternary feel, the entire texture of Takai can gain this impression (equivalent to modulating from 2/4 to 3/4 time signature).

In order for the drum to sound like the spoken Dagbani phrase that it sets, Alhaji urges his students to use the pressure cords that connect the drum's two heads. The staff notation examples show the several ways this subtle aspect of technique may be done.

Finally, the metric gestalt of the music can flip, especially if the answer luṅa player bonds with the leading luṅa player (see Vocables Notation, versions F and G). To a Dagomba drummer this flipped perspective is totally familiar, since this is the normal relationship between drum phrase and underlying meter that is present in Damba Maṅgli and Kondaliya (see those pieces for notation).

Leading Luṅa

When heard by itself, the lead luṅa phrases appear entirely on-the-beat. Only when placed in the context of the dance and the other drums does the part become insistently offbeat. Listeners have the option of perceiving the musical rhythm according to both positions for the onbeats. Most specialists in music perception assert that it is impossible to hear in several meters, or to hear two streams of onbeats simultaneously. After years of studying Dagomba music, however, I have formed the opinion that it IS humanly possible to feel several metric structures AT THE SAME TIME. It is also important to accept that the music can be felt without steady beat at all, but rather as an intricate interweaving of notes and patterns. From this perspective, the entire issue of onbeats and offbeats becomes irrelevant, replaced by temporal relationships in the ongoing flow of musical time.

Alhaji disciplined himself to show only two phrases for leading luṅa. In talk one, "To nin wum, min wum, nin wum a," the strokes mark a succession of onbeats over three measures--M M M H L M M H. To Alhaji, however, the drum would not sound like language if subtle melodic slides were not present (see Drumming Notation and Vocables Notation). To make the luṅa sing, so to speak, proper understanding of the melodic contour, not to mention the technical ability to play it, is crucial. In talk two, a striking melodic gesture--L H L--appears in the middle of the phrase. As shown in the Drumming Notation, the timing of these three strokes fits equally well in duple or triple measures.

END