

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

Overview of Nyayboli

Nyayboli has a very catchy rhythm and sexy meaning that people enjoy. It is found in all the Group Dances presented on this site.

In Baamaaya, the instrumental arrangement is unusually spare, but here in Takai Nyayboli receives a full orchestration in four parts--lead luḡa, lead guḡ-gḡ, answer luḡa and answer guḡ-gḡ.

Place in the Medley

After Takai itself is played, Nyayboli can come at any place in the sequence. At Tufts, we usually place it second.

The Rhythm of Dance

As is true in all sections of Takai, dancers strike their rods alternatively with the partner to the front and their neighbor to the rear. While Takai is danced with some restraint, in Nyayboli audiences expect lots of drama from the dancers. Excellent dancers create fancy steps and surprising ways of turning and moving through space. The rhythm of basic dance step of Nyayboli as taught by Alhaji and Fusena Wombie is as follows (see Figure 1).

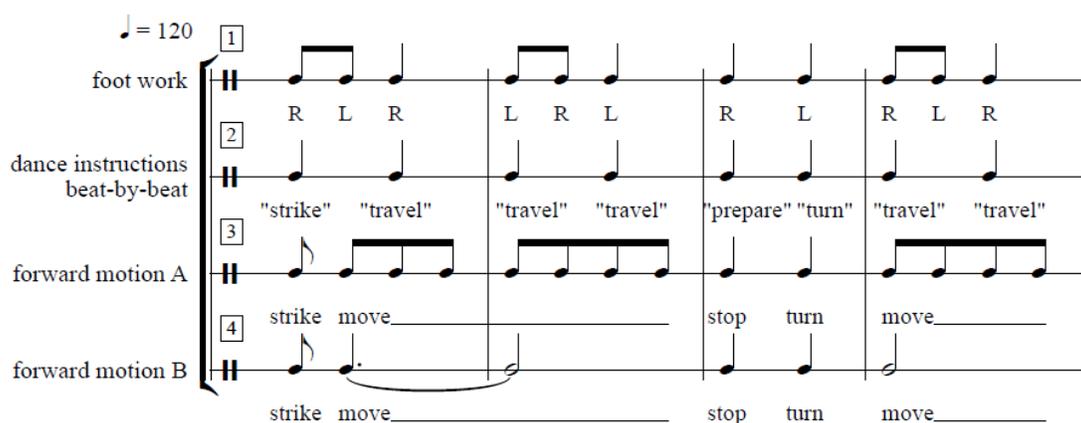


Figure 1 Nyayboli (Takai) dance step sequence

The journey through one "strike cycle" takes eight counts (four quaternary-duple measures, equivalent to four 2/4 bars). After dancers knock their hand-held props together on count one, they travel inward or outward over counts two, three and four. On count five, midway through the cycle, they plant their feet and prepare to reverse direction. The actual turning movement is on count six. Then dancers approach each other over counts seven and eight, before striking on count one of the next eight-count period. On the subsequent eight counts, the steps are repeated on the other side of the body--left substituting for right, and right for left.

Drummers are very aware of the way the dance gives feeling tone to musical time. The dancers' feet mark off their own rhythmic phrase--"one and two, three and four, five six, seven and eight"--that serves as an element of the total rhythm of Nyayboli (see Figure 1, staff 1). Each count has a distinctive quality conferred upon it by the dance--count one has the strike, counts two-four and six-seven are used for forward motion, count six is when the dancer stops in preparation to turn, and count six holds the turn itself (see Figure 1, staff 2). The dancers' forward motion through musical time can be felt in short temporal units, or longer segments (see Figure 1, staff 3 and staff 4).

The dance cycle is an oscillation of building and releasing force. The moment of strike conveys a sense of arrival, momentary stasis, and cadence. Over the next four beats the dance builds its kinetic energy as dancers move away from each other, until it reaches its maximum level on count five. Then the dancers turn and move towards each other, finally consummating the sequence by knocking rods. The music of the drummers not only contributes to this oscillation but also gains power from it.

Interplay among Parts and Relationship to Dance

The steadily recurring phrase of answer guᅇ-gᅇᅇ serves as the backbone of the ensemble. In Nyayboli, the answer guᅇ-gᅇᅇ plays its phrase four times over the span of one cycle--"kwao kwao, kwao kwao, kwao kwao, kwao kwao." The answer luᅇa part is unique to Nyayboli--it pumps out a steady stream of eighth notes that are shaped by pressure technique into LH pairs. The answer guᅇ-gᅇᅇ part moves from pickup to onbeat--"and one, and two, and one"--while the answer luᅇa moves from onbeat to upbeat--"one and, two and." Thus, although the phrases of both instruments are symmetrical in shape and

"square" in terms of time values, together they effectively create a musical foundation with terrific forward-moving drive.

Alhaji limited himself to only two talks for lead luḡa. (Listen to his performance on the Multitrack Sessions for a better sense of his knowledge and artistry.) Both lead luḡa talks span four beats, positioned to end either on the dancers' count five, the mid-point in the cycle when they prepare to turn back towards their strike mates, or count one, the moment of strike. Compared to the steady eighths in the answer drums, the leading luḡa use of sixteenths and dotted eighths is striking. Playing on the second and fourth time points within quaternary beats, leading luḡa creates intense interlock with the answer parts.

The site presents five talks for leading guḡ-gḡḡ. All five phrases cover the full eight-beat time span, making them longer than the phrases of other instruments, but their internal design into shorter motives gives the guḡ-gḡḡ phrases a sense of internal repetition. In addition to stroke-to-stroke relationships among the drums, the interplay of short motives provides another source of rhythmic power to Nyayboli.

Groove

Nyayboli generates an infectious groove. Compared to Takai, for example, with its permanent offset accentuation and complex meter and rhythm, Nyayboli's patterning of accentuation is relatively simple and direct. Answer luḡa marks every pulse and beat, answer guḡ-gḡḡ marks every downbeat, leading luḡa marks the ONE of the whole cycle and its mid-point, and leading guḡ-gḡḡ cleverly moves through the eight-beat span before powerfully landing on its first time point. The musical action of the drum ensemble nicely complements the rhythmic shapes and motion of the dancers. Brilliantly designed music, I say!

Guḡ-gḡḡ

Answer Guḡ-gḡḡ

The answer guḡ-gḡḡ phrase spans two beats. Two bounces move in pickup-to-onbeat motion from the upbeat of beat two to the downbeat of the subsequent measure. Three

strokes in chahira move towards beat two from the upbeat of beat one--"zigiZI." The phrase strongly moves forward in time.

Over the course of one cycle, the symmetrical phrases of answer guḡ-gḡ create polyrhythm with the asymmetrical shape of the dance but the two parts come together at the strike.

Leading Guḡ-gḡ

Alhaji demonstrated five talks for leading guḡ-gḡ. They can be discussed in three groups: (1) "Ti bē zabira, ti bē zabira, gbam o" and "Gbam o zali ma, gbam o zali ma, ka n-kanna"; (2) "Mani bōri o, mani bōri o, gbam o" and "To, to, to, to, ka n-kanna"; and (3) "Ti bē zabira, mani bōri o, gbam o." Groups 1 and 2 are discussed for the Nyayboli section in the Group Dance Baamaaya (see Music Analysis, Baamaaya Nyayboli, Figures 1 and 2).

The two phrases in Group 1 shape the cycle's 16 fast-pulses into three motives--6 + 6 + 4. The timing of strokes in the two talks of Group 1 is identical but "Gbam o zali ma" uses a press stroke where "Ti bē zabira" uses a bounce. Because the bounce strokes are louder and more resonant, this small timbral change results in a different rhythm. This exemplifies a musical procedure found in many types of African music, especially on instruments of definite pitch like balophon, mbira, or kora: steadily maintain a kinesthetic, physical pattern of the body while varying the way the instrument is struck (timbre) or the place where the instrument is struck (string, key, zone of a drum skin).

Group 2 phrases accentuate the first and last element in the two six-pulse sets, creating rhythms that use 2:3 and 4:3 ratios with the underlying beats. Over the span of one cycle, the internal motives of the lead guḡ-gḡ and the dance contrast strongly. The rhythmic excitement generated by the interplay between the dance and answer drums is climaxed when the phrases all come into alignment on the strike point of the cycle.

The one talk in Group 3 is unique. The phrase begins with a series of chahira strokes that open "space" for the other parts. Then, just as the dancers prepare and turn, the guḡ-gḡ dramatically enters with an offbeat flurry, moves to two "ki" strokes, and then the normal "gbam o" cadence. At Tufts, this talk invariably energizes the dancers.

Luṇa

Answer Luṇa

The answer luṇa "phrase" really is just a two-note figure within one binary beat. Ignoring the pitch bends for a moment, we can say that the figure puts a low-pitch tone on the onbeat, followed by a mid-pitch tone on the upbeat. Through flexion in knees and ankles, the dance echoes the steady rise-and fall of answer luṇa with gentle downward and upward movements of each dancer's center of gravity. If a listener tracks low tones, the part steadily accentuates onbeats but if a listener attends to mid tones, the part steadily accentuates upbeats. Since all time values are equal, the mind's ear can group the even flow of strokes in many different patterns.

Alhaji was never satisfied if students just played simple low tones. To him, the result would not sound like the implicit Dagbani language that underlies the part, "Gbam o" ("Catch her"). Instead, he insisted that the first stroke of each pair should begin at mid-pitch and quickly glide downward to low-pitch in imitation of the descending sound of the vowel "ah," followed by a nasal "m." The drummer, having released the cords to their low-pitch state, then increases the pressure back to their mid-pitch condition. Technically, this is much easier to do in vocables than on a drum. Rhythmically, this pressure technique changes the answer luṇa rhythm from two eighth notes to a sixteenth-sixteenth-eighth figure that doubles the rate at which the answer luṇa moves. Note the way both answer guṇ-gōṇ and answer luṇa use the same three-note figure but place it differently within the meter.

Leading Luṇa

Both talks for leading luṇa span four beats, conferring their phrase-ending accents to the dancers' counts of one and five. The timing of strokes in both talks is quite similar-- starting just before beat two (time point 1.4) and moving to the onbeat cadence with an sixteenth-eighth pickup figure (time points 2.2 and 2.3). Their main rhythmic difference is that "Azemma guya" phrases over beat two, while "Nɔ bie la lariga" marks that onbeat with a stroke (see Figure 2).

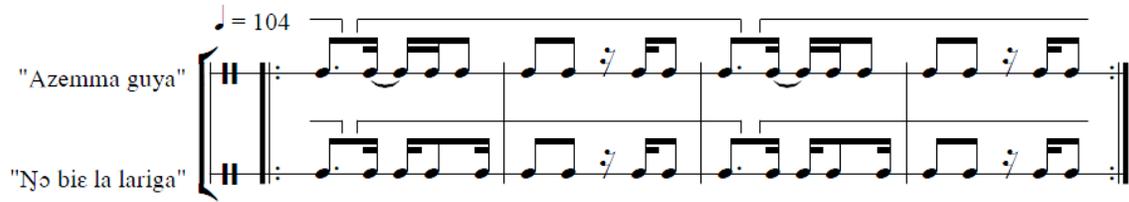


Figure 2 Nyayboli (Takai) Lead Luṅa Timing

The main difference between the phrases is melody (see Drumming Notation). Without the sliding effects, the pitches of "Azemma guya" are L MM L L, MM M, while the pitches of "Nɔ bie la lariga" are LLH LM L MM M. Of course, the pitch bends shown in the staff notation are crucial to playing the part in Dagomba style.

END