

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

Overview

The dancers strike three times in Tanchili Gəŋ, making it different from all other sections of Takai. This distinguishing pattern of hits gives this section a nickname, "Dipsa Ata," which literally means "strike thrice." For each set of three strikes, dancers alternate their facing, either looking outward towards the audience or inward toward the other dancers.

The music of the drum ensemble fits closely with the three-strike framework of the dance. Every musical phrase contains three identical short motives that move forward in time towards their last note, which coincides with the strike of the dancers' rods. Each cycle of three strikes covers eight counts.

Tanchili Gəŋ most closely resembles Nunda Nyuli in orchestration, meter, and rhythm. Neither piece has an answer guŋ-gəŋ part, both have ternary-duple temporal structure (equivalent to 6/8 time signature), and the answer luŋa part is identical in both pieces.

Like Nyayboli and Nunda Nyuli, the drum language of Tanchili Gəŋ carries an erotic theme. In this case, drummers simply state the name of the piece, which refers to intimate female clothing.

Place in the Medley

Although it can be placed anywhere, I place Tanchili Gəŋ third among Takai's five sections.

The Rhythm of Dance

The dance is structured into three short motives for the strikes, followed by a slightly longer motive when dancers reverse their facing. The rhythm of basic dance step of Tanchili Gəŋ as taught by Alhaji and Fusena Wombie is as follows (see Figure 1).

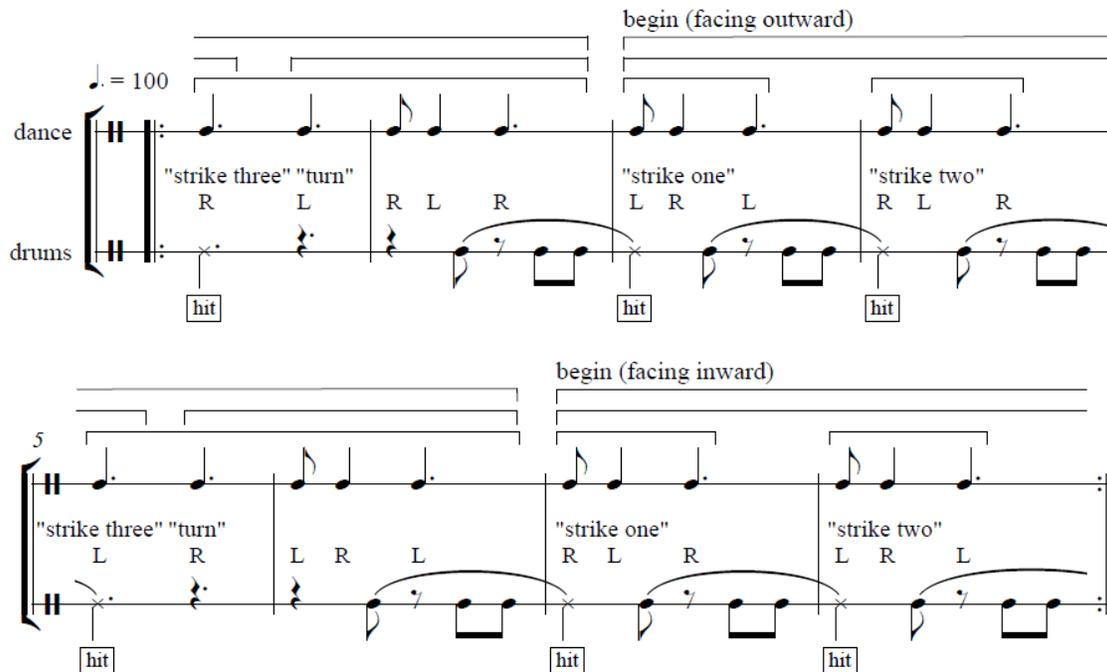


Figure 1 Tanchili Gõᅇ dance step sequence

As I have chosen to notate it, the dance phrase begins in the middle of the musical cycle--notated as measure 3 or count five--and moves to conclusion with the third strike on the downbeat of the next cycle (see top bracket in Figure 1). This metric placement of the music and dance adheres to the over-arching pattern of "goal directed phrasing" in Dagomba dance music. In other words, actions in music and dance tend to move forward towards a cadence at the end of a phrase.

The dance casts several motivic shapes onto the musical cycle, as shown in the brackets above dance staff in Figure 1. The bottom-most bracket groups the eight counts into three symmetrical motives, each begun by a strike--5 6, 7 8, 1 2 3 4. However, when the dancers' three strikes are felt to form a self-contained unit, the cycle gains an asymmetrical 5 + 3 quality--5 6 7 8 1, 2 3 4, as indicated by the middle bracket.

Typical of the dance in all sections of Takai, the sequence of right and left steps reverses itself in alternate cycles. In Tanchili Gõᅇ, after doing a RLR LRL R L RLR footwork sequence in one cycle, the dancer will do LRL RLR L R LRL in the next cycle. Running

counter to the prevailing musical aesthetic preference for end-point cadence, the hit comes on the first of three steps in each dance motive (see bottom bracket in Figure 1).

Like other sections of Takai, the dancers' steps create another rhythmic pattern in the overall texture. In Tanchili Gɔŋ, the crucial rhythm of the dance is a three-note short long long figure that appears three times within one cycle--TI ta ta, TI ta ta, TA TA, TI ta ta. Very significant to the rhythmic design of the piece, these figures in the dance are offset from the three short motives in the drumming. We note that the drum motives begin after the second dance step and that the drums drive to conclusion on the first note of the dancers' next three-note figure.

Interplay among Parts and Relationship to Dance

In Tanchili Gɔŋ there is no answer guŋ-gɔŋ part. The two guŋ-gɔŋ drummers may play pre-composed themes in unison, or, one drummer may stay on the basic phrases while the other inspires the dancers with elaborate improvisation. The phrases for guŋ-gɔŋ musically dramatize the three hits in the dance.

In comparison to all other sections of Takai, the fundamental phrases of lead luŋa quite closely align with guŋ-gɔŋ. This similarity makes sense because the implicit Dagbani texts are the same for both drums. Each type of instrument has its own way of rendering the same drum language--luŋa with melody, guŋ-gɔŋ with timbre. Like the guŋ-gɔŋ, the lead luŋa talks are designed to highlight the dancers' knocking of rods.

The answer luŋa part contrasts with the long phrases of the other two parts. Like Nyayboli, the two-stroke "phrase" is only one beat in duration. Unlike Nyayboli, however, the time values of the two strokes are uneven--the shorter first stroke is onbeat and the longer second stroke follows in an offbeat position. The time values of the two strokes may be understood as an eighth note followed by quarter--this rhythmic interpretation can be regarded as "basic." But the timing of the second stroke can be delayed. Sometimes drummers purposely drag the second stroke onto the mid-point between two ternary beats, thus suggesting modulation to binary time. No matter how the second stroke is timed, the overall rhythmic impact of the answer luŋa part is (1) to add power to each onbeat, and (2) to enrich the brief offbeat span between successive onbeat time points.

As discussed below, one theme for leading luḡa and guḡ-gḡ suggests 3:2 rhythms, while another shifts between ternary and binary treatment of successive beats. These themes work with the answer luḡa part in complex ways. The interaction of drum strokes from the three parts creates a highly contrapuntal texture.

Groove

Compared to the smoothly flowing groove of Nyayboli and Nunda Nyuli, Tanchili Gḡ moves through musical time in a more segmented, chopped-up manner. The phrases of lead luḡa and guḡ-gḡ have a clearly defined internal three-motive design with each short motive targeting its final note. All the while, answer luḡa insistently maintains its two-note figure that literally resembles a pumping heartbeat.

The texture of Tanchili Gḡ is quite dependant on spontaneous decisions of lead luḡa and the two guḡ-gḡ players. When all play the same drum language the result is a powerful unison but if different talks are juxtaposed in counterpoint, a fast, intricate interlock emerges. The second strokes on answer luḡa provide a location for constant offbeat accentuation, or even displacement of the perceived position of the onbeats.

Guḡ-gḡ

Alhaji demonstrated three themes for the guḡ-gḡ part in Tanchili Gḡ--(1) "Tanchili gḡ, tanchili gḡ, tanchili gḡ"(A), (2) "Ka tanchili gḡ, ka tanchili gḡ, ka tanchili gḡ," and (3) "Tanchili gḡ, tanchili gḡ, tanchili gḡ"(B) (see Drum Notation). All three phrases have the same internal motivic shape--one motive is played three times followed by a passage of chahira strokes that fill time until the beginning point comes around again in the cycle. The last note in each motive is a press stroke (ki) that lands in unison with the dancers' strike. Drummers vary the themes by various devices, including double-stick ornaments.

Themes 1 and 2 closely resemble each other. If the time value of the first note in theme 1 is changed from a quarter note to an eighth note, the two become identical. Alhaji distinguished them by a minor language difference--theme two starts with the word "ka," meaning "but" or "and." Rhythmically, the themes fit equally well in either of two

meters--ternary-duple, or binary-triple (equivalent to 6/8 and 3-4). Strokes that are offbeat in ternary-duple time become onbeat in binary-triple time (see Figure 2).

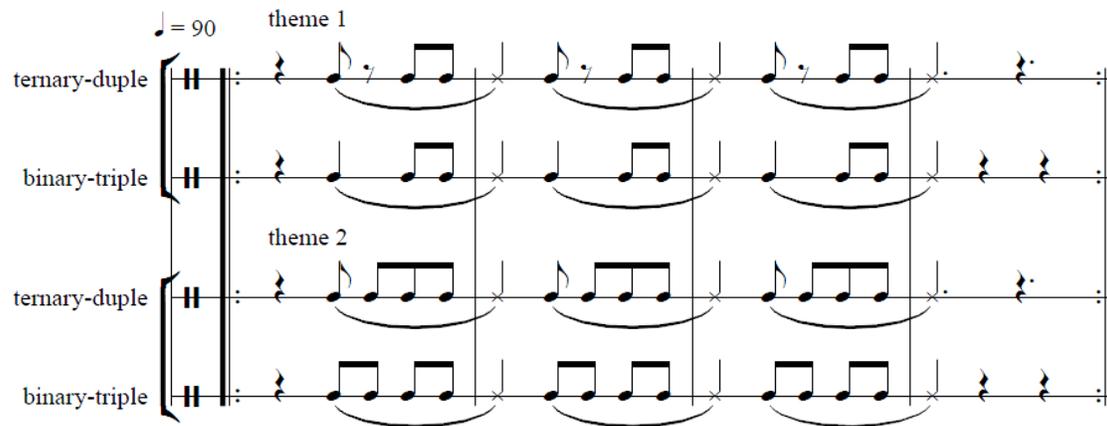


Figure 2 Tanchili Gəṅ, guṅ-gəṅ themes in two meters

Significantly, themes 1 and 2 consistently place strokes on time points 1.3 and 2.3 of ternary-duple time. We note this time point never receives an answer luṅa stroke. In other words, guṅ-gəṅ themes 1 and 2 always have a powerful bounce tone when answer luṅa is silent. This is an example of the careful interweaving of notes among parts in Tanchili Gəṅ.

Theme 3 of the guṅ-gəṅ drums treats the second of each measure as binary-duple, not ternary-duple. Put differently, in theme 3 two accented strokes evenly bisect the second beat of each measure. The downbeat that follows this duplet accentuation always is treated as ternary--"ki gi zi"--with a center press stroke and two chahira strokes. Thus, we can analyze this theme as 2:3 in elapsing time--"one two, one two three." In these demonstrations Alhaji always played a double bounce on the second stroke in the duplet figure but it often is played more simply with one bounce. Most likely, Alhaji insisted on using the double hit stroke to better replicate the "-chi-li" of the underlying drum language, "Tanchili," wants three drum strokes. Theme 3 sounds like the kick drum figure in Rock 'n Roll--BUM bum DAT!

The duplet figures in theme 3 create tight interlock with answer luṅa. Answer luṅa drummers who want to emphasize the duplet nature of this guṅ-gəṅ phrase can chose to delay their second notes so that they land in unison with guṅ-gəṅ.

Luḡa

Answer Luḡa

The identical answer luḡa parts of Tanchili Ḡḡ and Nḡnda Nyuli are ternary counterparts to the binary figure in Nyayboli. Without pitch-bending technique on the pressure cords, the melody of the two-note figure is L M. When timed in a "straight" or "square" manner, the first note is onbeat and the second note is on the second ternary time point with the beat. The figure accentuates every onbeat and sets up quick-moving composite rhythms with the other drums. The answer luḡa figures reinforce the rhythm of the dancers' footwork, as well.

Alhaji urged his students to use a downward pitch bend on the first stroke, as he also did for Nḡnda Nyuli and Nyayboli (see Vocables Notation and Drumming Notation). The release of the cords is precisely timed, making the drum's "true" rhythm a three-note figure--sixteenth sixteenth quarter.

In my classes at Tufts, students tend to feel onbeats on the second, rather than the first of the answer luḡa's two strokes--deyan DEN, deyan DEN. This "iambic" predilection often causes students to have great difficulty maintaining correct perception of the proper position of the onbeats. Often, they feel the onbeats one eighth note late, that is, on time points 1.2 and 2.2. This problem seems to be a function of the stress patterns of the English language and the musical rhythm of Euro-American folk and popular music.

Leading Luḡa

The two themes for leading luḡa have the same drum language--"Tanchili ḡḡ, tanchili ḡḡ, tanchili ḡḡ." Theme A resembles the second theme of ḡḡ-ḡḡ, while theme B is like the first theme of ḡḡ-ḡḡ (see Drumming Notation). As was the case with ḡḡ-ḡḡ, the leading luḡa rhythms fit equally well within ternary-duple and binary-triple meters and, like ḡḡ-ḡḡ, leading luḡa has polyrhythmic relations with answer luḡa. Melody makes the leading luḡa sound very different from ḡḡ-ḡḡ, however. Because of pressure technique and its second stroke right on beat two, phrase A creates a much busier musical effect than Phrase B.

In phrase A, the first and third accented strokes on mid-pitch are followed by a pressure release to low-pitch. This has two consequences on rhythm. Because they sound alike, the two strokes with pitch bend easily are grouped into a binary-triple feel--DEYAN zen DEYAN zen DEN, or "TWO and THREE and ONE." Furthermore, the three strokes without pitch bend also tend to form a group with ternary-duple rhythm--deyan ZEN deyan ZEN DEN, or "y TWO y a ONE." This is an excellent example of the chameleon-like quality of Dagomba rhythm, that is, the rhythm of a musical object can change depending on its surroundings.

In phrase B, Alhaji consistently struck the lowest-pitched notes on what I term the upper neighbor to the "basic" low-pitched tone. He did this in vocables and drumming, which indicates that it was not random or inadvertent. His ringing high-pitch tone is in unison with the guŋ-gɔŋ's press stroke, right on the three dancers' strikes.

END