

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

Overview

Nunda Nyuli and Nyayboli are twins in terms of dance and answer luja. They differ in the internal structure of beats but otherwise are identical. Counts in Nunda Nyuli are ternary, binary in Nyayboli. The talks of leading luja and guŋ-gŋ are different in the two pieces, however.

Like Nyayboli and Tanchili Gŋ, the drum language of Nunda Nyuli teases listeners with a sexy scenario--the buying and selling of yams. The drummers are not really talking about yams.

Place in the Medley

Although it can be placed anywhere, at Tufts we put Nunda Nyuli fourth among Takai's five sections.

The Rhythm of Dance

Note: this section is largely the same as for Nyayboli.

Dancers strike their rods alternatively with their partners in front to the rear. As in Nyayboli, the musical time between strikes covers eight counts. The rhythm of basic dance step of Nunda Nyuli is as follows (see Figure 1).

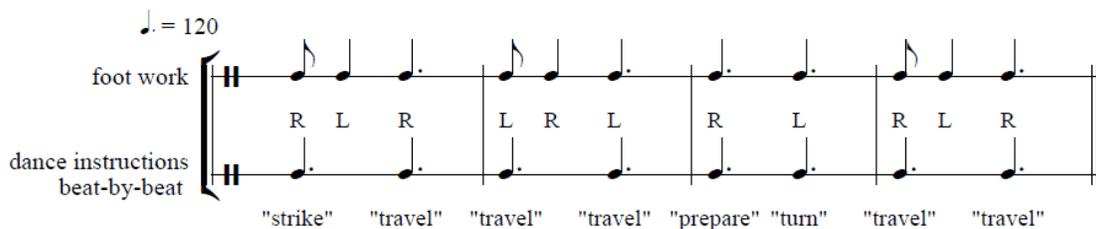


Figure 1 Nunda Nyuli dance step sequence

The journey through one "strike cycle" takes eight counts (four ternary-duple measures, equivalent to four 6-8 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 the same rhythmic phrase that is used in Tanchilii ᠭᠣᠨ--"TI ta ta, TI ta ta, TA TA, TI ta ta." This serves as another element of the total rhythm of Nunda Nyuli (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 dance cycle has an ebb and flow between the knocking of rods. 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 its maximum point 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

In Nunda Nyuli, like Tanchili ᠭᠣᠨ, there is no answer ᠭᠤᠨ-ᠭᠣᠨ part. The two ᠭᠤᠨ-ᠭᠣᠨ 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. In Nunda Nyuli the phrases for ᠭᠤᠨ-ᠭᠣᠨ start on count five, the point in the dancers' sequence when they stop moving forward (see Vocables Notation and Drumming Notation). The drum phrase supports the dancers as they reverse back towards the strike. Interestingly, the cadential ᠭᠤᠨ-ᠭᠣᠨ figure continues beyond the knocking to end with a press stroke on time point 1.3.

Unlike Tanchili ᠭᠣᠨ, the leading lu᠋᠋ and ᠭᠤᠨ-ᠭᠣᠨ drums in Nunda Nyuli do not share drum language and their musical phrases are quite different from each other. Their musical relationship may be characterized as a style of call-and-response that has some

back-and-forth and some overlap (see Rhythm Notation). After each strike, leading luḡa "talks" in measures 1-2 and then guḡ-gḡ enters in measure 3. During measures 3-4 the two drums engages in unison and counterpoint.

The very short duration of the answer luḡa part contrasts with the long phrases of the other two parts. Like Nyayboli, the two-stroke "phrase" is only one beat in duration and, like Tanchili Gḡ, 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" because it does not take pressure technique into account. The overall rhythmic impact of the answer luḡa part is (1) to add power to each onbeat, and (2) to insert a stroke into the brief offbeat span between successive onbeat time points.

Although leading luḡa and guḡ-gḡ phrases can fit into a binary-triple metric scheme, 3:2 rhythms are a less prominent feature of Nḡnda Nyuli than in Tanchili Gḡ. As is true in all three sections of Takai that have short, punchy answer luḡa parts, the themes for leading luḡa and guḡ-gḡ intersect with its onbeat-offbeat figure in complex ways.

Groove

Although Nḡnda Nyuli has only one strike per cycle, the overall phrase moves in several short motives. The leading luḡa phrases have two identical motives, each spanning four beats. Most guḡ-gḡ phrases are constructed of three similar motives in a manner quite reminiscent of Tanchili Gḡ. While the other two drums work back-and-forth between them, answer luḡa insistently maintains its two-note figure that literally resembles a pumping heartbeat.

Although it uses end-point cadential phrasing so typical of Dagomba dance drumming, a "signature feature" of Nḡnda Nyuli is the cadential figure on guḡ-gḡ that extends beyond the downbeat of the cycle, "kaKA ki." The leading luḡa phrases also tend to end on offbeat time points, which clear an opportunity for the bold entrance of guḡ-gḡ.

Guṅ-gṅ

Alhaji gave three different drum language expressions for guṅ-gṅ in Nṅunda Nyuli that he set to four different musical themes (see Drum Language, Vocables Notation, and Drumming Notation). Talk one--"Ka sampoa zṅlbee, ka dim sa"--carries the seed of talk two, which is based on the cadential gesture "ka dim sa." Important to both phrases is rhythmic motion from pickup to onbeat. When combined with answer luṅa, the two-note figures make tight interlock (see Rhythm Notation).

Although similar to talks one and two, talk three varies their musical ideas just enough to acquire its own distinct musical personality. The entrance of talk three--"Sampoa zṅlbee, sampoa zṅlbee, ka dim sa" (A)--attracts attention because it comes earlier in the cycle than either talk one or talk two. The phrase draws upon the timbral shift from bounce to press stroke that characterizes the strike-point cadence, but the rhythm is faster and the press stroke in talk three comes in the middle of figure rather than the end. The downbeats to measures 1 and 2 are approached by quarter note time values, in contrast to the faster eighth note approach to the strike on time point 1.1 of measure 3. In my notation of talk three I have beamed to the quarter note to show how easily the rhythm can be felt in binary-triple time.

Talk four contrasts eighth-quarter figures that employ different patterns of timbre as they lead up to the cadence on the stroke--BB BP BB BP BB P (B means bounce, P means press). By studying the implicit drum language, we learn that the sixteenth-eighth figures in talk four are not simply to make the phrase musically interesting. They enable the guṅ-gṅ to closely replicate the syllabic structure of the underlying drum language.

Luṅa

Answer Luṅa

Note

Alhaji taught that the answer luṅa part is identical in Nṅunda Nyuli and Tanchili Gṅ. This section closely resembles what I have written for Tanchili Gṅ.

The answer luṅa part of Nṅunda Nyuli is the ternary counterpart 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 Tanchili Gḡḡ 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.

American 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 great difficulty for perception of the proper position of the onbeats. Often, students feel the onbeats 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

Alhaji demonstrated three themes for leading luḡa in Nḡunda Nyuli (see *Vocables Notation and Drumming Notation*). All of them consist of four-beat motives that are played twice over the span of one strike-cycle. In a vividly clear instance of call-and-response between dance and drum, they all end just prior to the moment of strike. As mentioned above, leading luḡa plays its first motive when guḡ-gḡḡ is quiet with chahira strokes. The luḡa motive repeats as guḡ-gḡḡ begins its louder strokes, creating an interesting combination of unison and interlock (see *Rhythm Notation*).

Musical qualities discussed above for guḡ-gḡḡ also appear in the leading luḡa phrases: (1) pickup to onbeat motion at rate of eighth notes and quarter notes (both are found in "Dagbambia la ḡḡ daya" "Nḡunda nyuli, ḡḡunda nyuli," see *Drum Notation*), and (2) combinations of time values that fit equally well into two metric schemes at the same time.

Talk three, "Nḡunda nyuli, -da nyuli, -da nyuli," neatly exemplifies the way a figure from one phrase may be manipulated to create a new phrase that is similar yet distinct (see

Drumming Notation). In this case, the opening gesture of talk 2--"Nunda nyuli"--is shortened to "-da nyuli" and played twice. This creates appearances of the two-stroke high-pitch, mid-pitch "nyuli figure" set to time points 2 and 3 within three successive beats. We see that the drumming in Nunda Nyuli can have two-note figures on time points 1-2 (answer luṅa), 3-1 (guṅ-gṳṅ), and 2-3 (lead luṅa) all at the same time.

END