

DDD Music Analysis, Praise Names, *Zim Taai Kulga*

Overview

Naa Alhassan was the grandson of Naa Yakubu and son of Naa Abudu. Two of his Praise Names are presented in this collection--Tampima Dundɔŋ and Zim Taai Kulga.

Form

The form of Zim Taai Kulga is classic call-and-response--the lead drum plays a phrase that is answered by the theme sounded on answer luŋa and guŋ-gɔŋ. The response theme stretches over seven ternary beats, while the call phrases take nine beats. Unlike Tampima Dundɔŋ, the response theme has no break into which the lead drum may interject a short figure. Here the two parts alternate in turn. During the relatively long period of silence when the lead drum is playing, the guŋ-gɔŋ drum may quietly play two-note, pickup-to-onbeat figures that mark the downbeats of measures three and five.

Meter and Rhythm

The implicit beats in Zim Taai Kulga are ternary. One cycle through the music takes sixteen beats, which we organize in staff notation as eight duple bars.

The rhythm of the drumming themes is very $3:2$ relationships. Three-in-the-time-of-two at a quick pace within individual ternary beats is built into the interaction between answer luŋa and guŋ-gɔŋ parts. Three-in-the-time-of-two at a moderate pace over the frame of two ternary beats is a salient quality of several lead drum talks. As is quite typical in Dagomba dance drumming, the rhythmic surface of the music is multi-determinate.

$3:2$ within one beat with dotted eighth time values, although it can be understood as two duplet eighths in-the-time-of three triplet eighths. Within a frame of two ternary beats, $3:2$ is represented as three quarters "against" two dotted quarters. Typically in drumming phrases, dotted notes fracture into two-note figures--a dotted eighth becoming sixteenth-plus-eighth, and a dotted quarter becoming eighth-plus quarter.

Phrase Length

Although the phrase lengths of call and response in Zim Taai Kulga are unequal ($48 = 27 + 21$), this asymmetry is less dramatic than in Tampima Dundon ($48 = 17 + 31$). The relatively long quiet period in the response theme allows ample opportunity for the lead luḡa to invent variations on its traditional drum talks. For this reason, Zim Taai Kulga was Alhaji's favorite musical piece among all Praise Name drumming compositions.

Groove

The response section generates intense 3:2 interchange between answer luḡa and guḡ-gon that gives the music a powerful quality of density, speed and excitement. This hard-driving passage is followed by lead drum themes that seem to float in their own rhythmic space, with accents placed on offbeat moments and 3:2 timing that can re-orient listeners away from the fundamental ternary temporal structure. In other words, Zim Taai Kulga is characterized by dramatic contrast between the musical affect of the call and its response.

Answer Luḡa and Guḡ-gon

We will consider the two response drums together in one section because they work so closely together. Both parts are based on the same underlying drum language, which is either "Kulpalnim' wolim je" "Fishermen tried [to catch him] in vain" or "Chichaysi wolim je" "Fish trap [was used] in vain." Either version conveys the meaning that rivals could not stop Naa Alhassan from being chosen as king. Each drum renders the language according to its own physical construction.

The most language-like version comes from melodically enabled answer luḡa (see Vocables Notation and Drumming Notation "Kulpalmima . . ."). The melody of the motive rises from low to high and then falls again to low as the drum sound fades out. The phrase begins with a turned-stick rolling stroke on a time point 2.3 that imitates both the unstressed accentuation and also the sound of the tongue on the roof of the mouth in the syllable "kul-." Two strokes follow, each bent towards low pitch, either from below-low and above-low neighboring tones. The pitch bends mimic the prolongation of final consonant sounds in the syllables "-pal-" and "-nim'." The two syllables of the word "wolim" are matched by two strokes in beat two of this measure. The mid-pitch stroke

on time point 2.1 sounds particularly strong because it is the only stroke in the phrase that is not modified by pressure technique. The last tone in the phrase is struck at high pitch but then immediately released to the below-low auxiliary pitch before being bent upward to its final intonation on low pitch. The motive is repeated again in measures three and four.

Although he himself would always play the part as just described, Alhaji usually taught students to play the phrase without the turned stick pickup stroke, thereby cutting off the initiation syllable of the word "kulpalnama." Many drummers in Dagbon also play it this way.

Without the pressure bend technique, the rhythm of the actual drum strokes is duplet motion over two beats leading to cadence on the downbeat of the subsequent measure. With the after-stroke tones produced by pressure technique, rhythm becomes busier (see Figure 1).

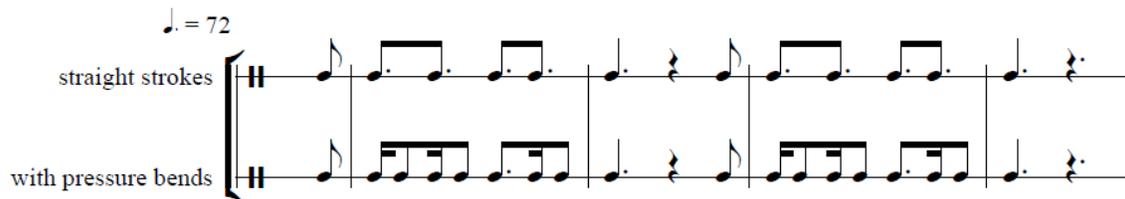


Figure 1 Zim Taai Kulga, rhythm of answer luḡa phrase with and without pressure technique

Guḡ-gḡḡ, which can only change the timbre of its strokes, uses press strokes to mimic the pitch contour of the answer luḡa. Crucially, unlike the answer luḡa's duplet timing in beat one, guḡ-gḡḡ plays three eighths. This puts the two drums into a 3:2 interlock that is among the defining features of the music of Zim Taai Kulga. As demonstrated on vocables, a guḡ-gḡḡ drummer with what Alhaji termed "sharp hand" can play the second of the three eighths as a two-stroke ornament--the added stroke is *after* not *before* the eighth note pulses)--an effect that further heightens the connection between the two drums.

When lead drum is playing its phrase the answer luḡa typically plays nothing but chahira strokes from guḡ-gḡḡ give temporal order to this period of musical time. The drummer's stick sets up a steady two-note, pickup-to-onbeat rhythm that is offset by a stroke of the bare hand on the second time point within each ternary beat (see Figure 2). Drummers who want to emphasize the music's potential for offbeat accentuation can play their hand strokes loudly, thus repeatedly accentuating time points 1.2 and 2.2.

The figure shows three staves of musical notation for a drum piece. At the top left, a quarter note is followed by '= 84'. The first staff, labeled 'stick strokes', shows a steady rhythm of eighth notes. The second staff, labeled 'all strokes', shows the same rhythm with lyrics underneath: 'zi zi gi zi | zi gi zi zi gi ka | ka zi zi gi zi | zi gi zi zi gi ka | ka zi zi gi zi'. The third staff, labeled 'bare hand strokes', shows a pattern of eighth notes with rests, indicating offbeat accents. Vertical bar lines divide the music into measures.

Figure 2 Zim Taai Kulga, rhythm of sticking in guḡ-gḡḡ's chahira strokes

In his drumming demonstration Alhaji showed virtuosic chahira sticking. Bare hand strokes after the two duplet "ki" press strokes divide ternary beats into four even temporal units. On time points 2.1 in mm. 2 and 4-8 two-stroke press rolls add rhythmic flourish to the flowing chahira rhythm.

Quietly struck two-note figures--"ka KA"--give formal structure to the rather long stretch of chahira strokes and help orient members of the ensemble to the music's form.

Lead Luḡa

Alhaji gave three drum talks for the lead luḡa and the opening call.

Opening Call

Like all Praise Names, Zim Taai Kulga begins with solo drumming from the lead luḡa. Drummers with extensive historical knowledge play for a long time--calling the names of ancestors--before arriving at the praises of particular chief for whom the piece is played. However, in these demonstrations, Alhaji reduced the opening call to its essential minimum, what he called "short play." For Zim Taai Kulga, he simply said in drumming,

"Son of Naa Abudu, Alhassan" and then went directly to the first praise proverb. In Dagbon, a drummer of Alhaji's reputation who never perform Zim Taai Kulga without calling the names of Naa Alhassan's forbearers at least back as far as his four grandparents.

Drum Talks

In Zim Taai Kulga drummers use the image of fish in the river to praise Naa Alhassan for rising above his competitors to claim the title of Yaa Naa, or king of the Dagomba state (see History Story and Drum Language). They also compare him to a rarely found tree that is prized for its fine wood by naming him "Tipariga." Finally, they say that he is "Son of Katini," referring both the room in the palace compound where the incoming Yaa Naa must spend a night as part of the investiture process and the female royal who is in charge of that space.

The first drum talk says, "Nyema nyema zim pali kulga ni," "See, see many fish are in the river." Alhaji's demonstration of this phrase in vocables and drumming exemplifies many essential characteristics of lead luḡa playing. Without melodic nuances of pressure technique, a simplified version of the melody would move in two- or three-stroke units between low-mid and high-mid pitches before ending with three consecutive mid-pitch tones--LM LM HMH MMM, LM LM HMH MMM. This puts the phrase's rhythmic accentuation on a flow of quarter note time values that are in 3:2 with the flow of implicit ternary beats. Re-beaming the site's notation of Alhaji's vocables and drumming demonstrations shows the flow of quarter note accents clearly--2 3 1, 2 3 1, 2 3 1, 2 3 1 (see Figure 3).

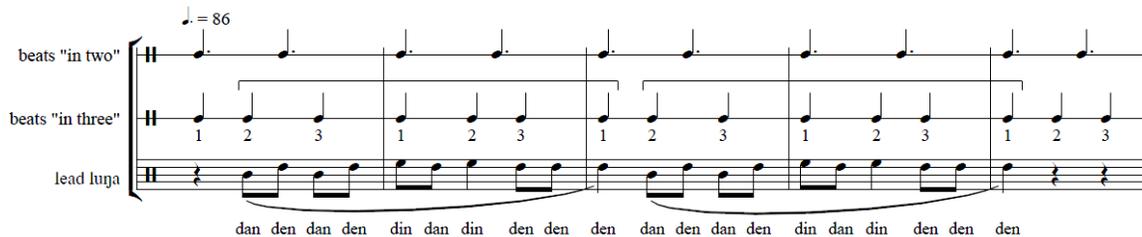


Figure 3 Zim Taai Kulga, lead luḡa "Nyema nyema" beamed to quarter notes

Alhaji would accept this style of performance from his students but he himself always played with sophisticated pressure releases that enabled his drum to have a very full breathe-like sound. When releasing the drum's cords for the "-m" sound of the word "zim" (fish, pl.), he achieved an amazingly full bass sound (listen to Drumming Audio).

A very similar 3:2 rhythmic structure occurs in the drum talk "Tipariga." Since the site's notation is already beamed to the quarter note (see Vocables Notation and Drumming Notation), here I re-beam to show the setting of this phrase in the fundamental ternary temporal structure (see Figure 4).

The figure displays a musical score for the lead luja phrase "Tipariga". It consists of five staves. The top staff shows ternary beats "in two" with a 3:2 ratio. The second staff shows binary beats "in three". The third staff is the lead luja, with lyrics: "Ti - pari - ga", "Ti - pari - ga", "A - laa - sa - ni", "Ti - pari - ga", "Ti - pari - ga", "A - laa - sa - ni". The fourth staff shows a drum pattern with accents labeled "1 2 3 - 1 2" in a "displaced" position. The bottom staff shows the same drum pattern in a "normal position".

Figure 4 Zim Taai Kulga, lead luja, "Tipariga" beamed to dotted quarter notes

The pattern of accentuation in this talk bears an interesting relationship to what we can term the "linear" manifestation of 3:2 between quarters and dotted quarters. Commonly in West African music, a time span of four ternary beats is felt according to a rhythmic pattern I nickname "one two three, one two," i.e. one set of three quarters followed by one set of two dotted quarters. For example, spectators often will spontaneously join the instrumentalists by clapping this pattern. As shown in the bottom-most staves in Figure 4, the drum phrase "Tipariga" accentuates a displaced position of this widespread metric rhythm.

The third talk for lead luja uses the linear 3:2 rhythm just mentioned, above, but with faster time values time values. The rhythmic pattern is located so that the "1 2 3" falls in beat two and the "1 2" comes on beat one (see Figure 5).

♩ = 84

1 2, 1 2 3

lead luḡa

Ka-ti-ni da-pal' Ti - pari ga Ka-ti-ni da-pal' Ti - pari ga

Figure 5 Zim Taai Kulga, lead luḡa, "Katini" as 1 2 3, 1 2

The lead drum part in Zim Taai Kulga reveals how familiar features of Dagomba musical rhythm are creative resources for the composition of themes that set praise poetry.

END