

DDD Music Analysis, Praise Name, *Zambalantօղ*

Overview

Phrase Duration

Zambalantօղ has a relatively short duration, like Nantoo Nimdi and Damba. The basic temporal framework spans four quaternary beats, notated within two duple measures (equivalent to two measures of 2/4 time).

In the Part-by-Part teaching demonstrations, Alhaji disciplines himself to work within this duration. In the Multi-Track Sessions, however, he shows how the ցոյ-ցօղ part sometimes breaks out of this short temporal frame with longer passages that extend time in an uninterrupted flow. (Listen at 2:10, for example.)

Meter

Like most pieces in quaternary time, listeners may perceive the steady underlying flow of time at slower or faster rates. In other words, Zambalantօղ's recurring loop of time can be felt in two, four, eight, or sixteen temporal units. The design of the drumming phrases highlight this variability: leading *լսյա* draws attention to quickly moving pulsations (sixteenth notes), ցոյ-ցօղ accentuates a slow feel (half notes), and answer *լսյա* moves at moderate pace (quarter notes and eighth notes)

Groove

The groove in Zambalantօղ develops from the interplay of three different parts--lead *լսյա*, answer *լսյա*, and ցոյ-ցօղ. In this regard, the music of Zambalantօղ resembles a Group Dance more than a Praise Name.

In most other Praise Names the response drums play in rhythmic unison but in Zambalantօղ the phrases of answer *լսյա* and ցոյ-ցօղ have distinctly different musical qualities. Thus, instead of a two-part interaction between lead and response drums, lead *լսյա*, answer *լսյա* and ցոյ-ցօղ each contributes its own special feature to the composite musical texture.

Working with the second and fourth sixteenth note positions within beats, lead *լսյա* is forcefully syncopated. The leader's "offbeatness" contrasts with the "onbeatness" of the

response drummers. Answer luḡa pumps out a steady stream of eighth notes, while strategically located pauses in the guḡ-gḡḡ part set up quickly moving sixteenth-eighth figures that are reminiscent of Brazilian samba.

Unlike the response themes of other Praise Names in quaternary time, Zambalantḡḡ does not emphasize the fourth sixteenth position within beats. Its musical power does not derive from this "dotted" type of accentuation. This is an important element of difference that distinguishes Zambalantḡḡ among compositions in this collection.

Lead-Response Interplay

Overlap among the three parts is a crucial dimension of Zambalantḡḡ's music. Like a snake eating its tail, the response phrases begin when the lead luḡa ends.

Zambalantḡḡ has a very dense interlocked texture. Alternation between lead and answer luḡa drums has a physical dimension--when the lead drummer's stick is moving toward the drum skin, the answer drummers' sticks are rebounding off their skins.

Answer Luḡa

Alhaji gives two ways of playing the drum talk for answer luḡa. The complete version ("Ḥuni bari gbago o bia") has five strokes of equal time value (notated as eighth notes). The variation simply leaves out the first hit, an omission that draws attention towards the upbeats. The five-stroke version confers slightly stronger accentuation to the onbeats.

Except for the third stroke, every onset is quickly followed by change in pressure on the luḡa ropes (zahan dayan den diyan dahan). This action after the stick hits the skin shortens the time values of the answer luḡa notes from eighths to sixteenths, intensifying Zambalantḡḡ's rhythmic effect. The unmodified third note feels particularly strong, putting accentuation on a backbeat (beat two in a 2/4 measure).

The answer luḡa melody begins on low pitch, rises to briefly touch high pitch, and then returns to low. In its longer version, I hear a dialectical conversation between the strokes one and two, which approach low pitch from below and above, and strokes three and four, which move from mid to high pitch. Physically, high-pitched notes require a lot of

effort so when the phrase is played repeatedly the second note in each pair feels accentuated from a player's point of view. Thus, there is a pleasing push-and-pull between onbeats and upbeats in these four strokes. The fifth stroke, like the first, accentuates the downbeat.

The drum language explains the use of the luṇa ropes. In the pronunciation of spoken Dagbani, the second syllable of "ṇuni" and "bari" is very quiet. The drummer's slight squeeze after stroke one (dahan) and release after stroke two (dayan) accurately mimic the sound of the human voice. I find it particularly interesting to realize that the release to low pitch after the high note (diyan) correlates to the possessive pronoun "o" ("his"). In other words, Alhaji is not simply making his drumming beautiful but actually is aligning drumming to speech. In the notation the beginning of the slur indicates this detail of phrasing.

Guṇ-gṇṇ

Pickup-to-onbeat figures on guṇ-gṇṇ give its rhythm a more punchy quality in comparison to the evenly flowing rhythm of answer luṇa. These sixteenth-eighth figures accentuate the two downbeats within each response theme. As most clearly seen in the Rhythm Notation, the longer duration of guṇ-gṇṇ's ki stroke (dotted eighth versus an eighth on answer luṇa) creates a slightly delay that highlights the subsequent lead-in to the downbeat (kaKA).

The press stroke (ki) enables the guṇ-gṇṇ to mimic the rising pitch of the answer luṇa melody. Both drums share the same underlying drum language.

Chahira strokes fill in between center strokes. After the press, an anticipatory stroke with the bare hand enhances the crescendo-like effect of the pickup-to-onbeat figure (tikaka). In the longer fill between iterations of the theme, Alhaji uses an offbeat syncopated rhythm. His vocalization marks only the stick strokes (zizi zi), while the drumming demonstration adds finger strokes on the eighth note pulse (zizigizigi). This pattern of chahira notes can be used in any quaternary piece instead of simple alternation between strong and weak hands.

Lead Luḡa

The "licks" for lead luḡa are short but full of energy. Not only is the sticking a rhythmic challenge but the pressure technique on the luḡa ropes is demanding, as well. Although Alhaji shows only two drum talks, one talk has three different melodies.

The call to the ensemble opens with two short motives that lead into a longer third phrase that is a variant of the main drum talk, "Nuni bari gbago o bia."

The filler notes (ti ta ta) hold a key to the rhythm of lead luḡa in Zambalantḡ. They are timed to offbeat pulsations within quaternary beats, that is, the second and fourth sixteenth notes within quarter notes. The louder notes that flow on from the unaccented figure continue this syncopated temporal placement.

This kind of rhythmic patterning may be called displacement or consistent offbeat timing, i.e., the lead drum shifts the main beats one fast pulse later in the flow of time. It also can be termed "phrasing over the bar-line" because, as the drum talk repeats, the filler notes flow smoothly over the ONE. The objective reality is that the first accented note occurs a split second after the downbeat; the phrase starts in an offbeat location.

Two strongly struck offbeat notes at low pitch begin this drum talk. In version A (see Part-by-Part Drumming), the melody reaches high pitch on the third stroke and then ends with two strokes at mid pitch. In version B, the melody reaches high pitch on the fourth stroke and then drops down to end on low pitch. Alhaji says the melody in version A "stays up," while it "goes down" in version B. He combines both melodic ideas in a third version in which "first you make the talk go up, and then you bring it down." Note that Alhaji consistently plays the third drum stroke without strong accent, even when it has high pitch.

If we reduce the phrase to four accented notes, strokes one and two begin off the beat in highly syncopated metric location and then strokes three and four move from upbeat to downbeat. Immediately after this onbeat rhythmic cadence, however, the displaced filler notes return. This is a brilliant design of rhythm and melody.

The other drum talk introduces rhythmic pressure into the multipart texture of Zambalantəŋ. The drum language is set on four, two-stroke figures with identical short-long time values (sixteenth-eighth). Unlike "N̄uni bari gbago o bia," which is followed by three filler notes (ti ta ta), "Gbungbiri l̄eli m-bala la" has only two (ta ta).

The accented notes outline a four-in-the-time-of-three temporal structure (4:3) against the underlying beats; the filler notes interrupt this suggestion of polymeter. In other words, four accented drum strokes occur over the span of three beats (four dotted eighths within three quarters). Measured by fast-moving pulses (sixteenths), the duration of each language-bearing figure is three pulses, each filler note is two pulses, and each underlying beat is four pulses. The algebraic formula sums to sixteen, since the phrase stretches over four beats (see Table 1).

total fast pulses	underlying beats	drum phrase
16	4 + 4 + 4 + 4	(3 + 3 + 3 + 3) + (2 + 2)

Table 1 Algebraic formula of lead drum phrase in Zambalantəŋ

Each accented note happens on a different moment within the underlying beats (see Table 2). In other words, the phrase begins on the pickup to a downbeat, moves through the subsequent measure, and reaches conclusion on the next downbeat.

accented note	position within beat by sixteenth note
1	fourth
2	third
3	second
4	first

Table 2 Metric location of accented notes in Zambalantəŋ

The genius of the rhythm lies in the way the 4:3 structure is phrased so that the moment of simultaneity between sounded notes and tacit beats falls on a downbeat. After the two quiet notes, this wonderful rhythmic countdown blasts off again--Four, three, two, ONE! END