

DDD Music Analysis, Praise Names, *Dɔɣu Maŋgli*

Overview

The Praise Name called "Dɔɣu" is two separate pieces distinguished by tempo. The slow-paced music is designated in Dagbani as "maŋgli" or the main piece; the fast-paced music is termed "tuli" or the hot piece. Both pieces may be singled out for the prominent way that 3:2 is built into the design of the response theme.

The History Story of Dɔɣu reveals the importance of praise names to the men of Dagbon. A proud prince would rather be tortured to death than relinquish his appellation to an archrival. In contemporary practice, Dɔɣu is played for individuals who have the title and social role of "regent," that is, the eldest son of a deceased chief.

Meter and Tempo

Dɔɣu Maŋgli is in ternary time--beats contain three short pulses. The very slow pace at which Dɔɣu Maŋgli moves makes it special among pieces presented on this site and raises issues as to the best way to represent the music in staff notation. I have decided to use familiar time values to better enable comparison among pieces. This requires that the tempo of Dɔɣu Maŋgli be marked as dotted quarter note = approximately 84 beats per minute. In this framework, the time cycle of Dɔɣu Maŋgli is eight beats organized within four ternary-duple measures.

However, the rhythmic pace of the lead luŋa part regularly is twice as fast as the response drums. As notated, it moves in duplets or sixteenth-eighth two-note figures. The lead drum part, in other words, is within the rhythmic style of pieces like Zim Taai Kulga--forty-eight fast units felt as sixteen beat cycle that is notated in eight duple measures.

Call-and-Response

Dɔɣu Maŋgli has classic, straightforward call-and-response--the lead luŋa plays a "call" theme that receives response from answer luŋa and guŋ-gɔŋ.

Phrase Duration

The balance between call and response is weighted strongly toward the call. In other words, the lead luŋa phrases are much longer than the reply from answer luŋa and guŋ-

gɔŋ. As notated, the response fills one measure plus the downbeat--seven eighth notes in total; the call phrases fill three measures or seventeen eighth notes. The sum is $24 = 17 + 7$.

Rhythm

The response theme is completely built on three-in-the-time-of-two. Six eighth notes, grouped into three quarter notes occur within the span of two ternary beats. The phrasing is 1 2 3 1. Although the mercurial lead drum themes resist being characterized by a simple generalization, we can point to the emphasis on duplet motion within ternary beats, or 2:3 between dotted eighths and eighths.

Groove

Dɔɣu Maŋgli has a regal quality, as befits a piece that is played for regents. The music's grandeur comes from its stately tempo and the decorous manner by which the call and response is handed off between the drums. The double-time rhythm of the leading luŋa suggests power percolating beneath a smooth surface--a musical metaphor for the latent force of the regent should his authority be challenged.

Answer Luŋa

The answer luŋa plays seven even strokes with the same time values that move from the downbeat of measure four to the downbeat of the entire temporal cycle in measure one (see Vocables Notation and Drumming Notation). Although the implicit beats are ternary, drum language, dynamic accents and melodic contour give these strokes a binary rhythmic grouping. This is a clear case of 3:2, phrased 1 2 3 1, at the rate of quarter notes with dotted quarter notes (see Figure 1).

$\text{♩} = 84$ 4
 ternary-duple beats
 fast time units grouped in threes
 binary-triple beats
 fast time units grouped in twos
 answer luja theme without pressure bends

Figure 1 Doyu Maᅅgli, rhythmic grouping of answer luja theme

In order to make the drum more closely resemble the spoken word sound of the underlying Dagbani text, Alhaji taught his students to use pressure technique on the cords that connect the luja's two drum heads (see Vocables and Drum Notation). With proper release and increase in pressure, the rhythm of the answer luja phrase acquires a more articulated shape (see Figure 2).

$\text{♩} = 72$
 rhythm of answer luja theme without pressure bends
 rhythm of answer luja theme with pressure bends
 melody of answer luja theme
 Che - li yu - li ta - yi yul'

Figure 2 Doyu Maᅅgli rhythm of answer luja theme with and without pressure technique

Guṅ-gṅ

Lacking the answer luṅa's flexible ability to change pitch, guṅ-gṅ very clearly presents the core rhythmic design of the response theme. In vocables Alhaji demonstrated two slightly different ways to play the part: in version A, he used only one "ki" stroke--ka ka ki, ka ka ki--and uses double-sticking on the onbeats in the chahira passage; in version B, he put in two "ki" strokes--ka ka ki ki, ka ka ki--and plays the chahira strokes in a simpler way (see Vocables Notation). On the drum itself, a bare hand stroke in chahira rather than a second center press stroke carries the sound of the second syllable in the word "yu-li." At this slow tempo, it makes sense that Alhaji would play the double-stick ornament in the chahira passage (see Drumming Notation).

Lead Luṅa

Alhaji presented three drum talks for Dṅyu Maṅgli, introduced by a short introductory cue. Played at slow tempo, which puts a premium of the drum's sound, Dṅyu Maṅgli requires of the lead drummer great physical control of the stick and the pressure cords. Although many of its rhythms are based on duplet motion across ternary beats, the dotted eighth time values usually appear as two-note, sixteenth-eighth figures. Staff notation hardly does justice to the nuances of Alhaji's control of his instrument. Tremolo bars signify brief drum rolls, usually using a turned-stick technique. A combination of an onbeat note without an accent mark followed quickly by an afterbeat note with an accent mark signifies a quiet turned-stick stroke followed by a louder straight-on hit.

Opening Call

Like all Praise Names, Dṅyu Maṅgli begins with solo drumming from the lead luṅa. 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." In this case, the opening call simply is the drum talk that alludes to the origin story of the piece (see History Story and Table 1).

To to to,

Nuni borimi ṅṅ tilgi,

Nuni cheli zuu yuli la.

Listen,

He who wants to be alive,

He should leave the regent's title.

Table 1 Dɔyɔ Maŋgli drum language of opening call

Drum Talks

The main drum talk, "N̄uni borimi ɲɔ tilgi," begins with pickup-to-onbeat figures that move towards the backbeat of measure one and the downbeat of measure two (see Vocables Notation and Drumming Notation). Then follow duplet figures that carry the phrase over four beats to its end on beat two of measure three. One suspenseful beat of rest gives drama to the powerful entrance of the response theme. Reducing the notation to drum strokes may clarify the phrase's rhythm (see Figure 3). In measure three, Alhaji uses turned-stick technique to place accentuation just after the duplet time points. To me, this is a drummer's inside joke that says, in effect, "Look at how I can toy with the music and the drum to beautifully render the Dagbani text."

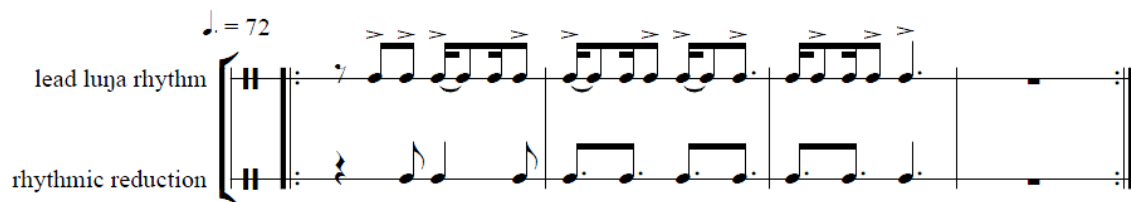


Figure 3 Dɔyɔ Maŋgli, rhythm outline of lead luɲa drum talk "N̄un' borimi"

Alhaji gave two different drum language texts for the same drumming phrase. After first giving the meaning as "Chɛli zuu yuli la" he reconsidered and said it would be better to record the meaning as "Ku n-zu buyli dapala." The first meaning stems from the history of Dɔyɔ but the second makes reference to the most revered of all kings of Dagbon, Naa Zangina, who is credited with introducing many long-lasting features of civilization into the kingdom (see History Story, "Story of Naa Zangina"). Unlike the continuous flow in "N̄uni borimi," this drum talk consists of a short motive that is played twice. Note that Alhaji sustains the sound of the final stroke, articulating two notes using pressure technique.

The third drum talk retains the motive from "Ku n-zu buyli dapala" but instead of repeating, it adds a new proverb that implies that the chief being praised will be like sweet food for his followers--"Ziri kɔpɛlim ku suyiri noli" (see Drum Language). Although the drumming of the two expressions is similar, the differences are enough to convey totally separate language expressions (see Figure 4).

♩ = 84

drum talk 2
excerpt

Ku n - zam buy - li da pal'

drum talk 3
excerpt

ko - pe - lim ku - suy - ri noli

Figure 4 Dəyü Maᅅgli, comparison of drum talks 2 and 3 (excerpt)

This example helps explain why for an expert like Alhaji it is crucial for those who would play the leading luᅅa part to know and be thinking of drum language.

END