

DDD Music Analysis, Praise Names, *Naybieyu*

Overview

Naybieyu and Naani Goo are musical "brothers" as befits the Praise Names of Naa Abudu and Naa Andani, sons of Naa Yakubu. Sharing the same form, they differ in temporal structure--Naybieyu is in ternary time, while Naani Goo is in quaternary time.

Form

Unique among all other Praise Names, Naybieyu and Naani Goo have a two-section musical form that we will dub "verse-chorus." In the verse section, the response drums play a single booming note on the first beat of the lead luja's theme. Carrying the message, "Listen to the lead luja," these recurring strokes mark the downbeat in the recurring cycle of the lead luja part. After the lead luja states a verse of drum language, it plays a "signal" phrase that cues the response drums to play the chorus theme. When the response drums have played the chorus, the verse section returns.

In both pieces the chorus theme is a distinctive and memorable musical "hook" from which the piece gains its musical identity. In Naybieyu, the chorus passage is shaped into two sections.

Meter

Naybieyu provides a very clear instance of rhythm in ternary pulsation (see Rhythm Notation). In ternary time, each beat can be felt in terms of a quicker flow of three pulses. The temporal structure of Naybieyu is ternary-duple, i.e., two beats per bar, each beat being a dotted quarter note that contains three eighth notes (equivalent to 6/8 time signature). The rhythm of Naybieyu, like most Dagomba music with this temporal structure, frequently has 3:2 within bars--that is, three quarter notes in-the-time-of two dotted quarters--giving the meter a multideterminant character (equivalent to 6/8 co-existing with 3/4).

As often happens in Dagomba dance drumming, the listener can feel the tempo at faster or slower rates according to a 1:2 ratio. In terms of staff notation, the motion of beats within measures can be felt as two dotted quarters or one dotted half note.

Phrase Duration

In the verse section of Naybiëyu, the span of time between the booming single strokes of the response drums is eight ternary beats. The lead luja phrases fit within this duration. The chorus section, on the other hand, spans sixteen beats shaped into two eight-beat sub-periods.

Groove

The chorus section of Naybiëyu opens with a long series of evenly timed notes that dramatically seizes the musical spotlight (see Rhythm Notation). The groove is strongly 3:2, with both answer luja and guŋ-gōŋ drums playing quarter notes over the implicit flow of dotted quarter note beats. In the second eight-beat sub-period the guŋ-gōŋ changes to two-note figures that greatly intensify the music's texture, making intense interlock with answer luja.

Compared to the strong sense of forward motion in the chorus section, the verses move in more stately fashion. After the response drums mark the ONE, the lead luja's themes tend to be busy when they begin and then rather spacious over the final two beats that precede the next downbeat.

Answer Luja

If we only attend to timing, the rhythm of the answer luja chorus theme is straightforward three-in-the-time-of-two, or 3:2. In other words, three strokes on the answer luja fit within the time of two implicit dotted quarter note beats (see Rhythm Notation). In staff notation, this can be conceptualized as the simultaneous presence of two time signatures--the 6/8 of the underlying beats and the 3/4 of the sounded strokes from answer luja.

The form of the chorus theme has two sections, with each section having four phrases. Using quarter note time values, the drum strokes in the phrases can be counted as follows (see Table 1).

counts		1	2	3	4	5	6
section 1	phrase 1	one	two	three	four	five	six
	phrase 2	one	two	three	four	five	six
	phrase 3	one	two	three	four		
	phrase 4	one					
section 2	phrase 5	one	two	three	four		
	phrase 6	one	two	three	four		
	phrase 7	one	two	three	four		
Verse	phrase 8	one					

Table 1 Naybieyu answer luja chorus theme--counting strokes

The theme opens dramatically with an insistent series of sixteen strokes. In phrase three the series stops on the fourth count, which matches an underlying ternary beat. The strikingly felt silence is developed further in phrase four, which marks the downbeat with its one and only stroke. The second section echoes phrase three before culminating with a single stroke on the downbeat.

A hallmark of Alhaji's teaching was to show how the luja drum can sound like Dagbani, the spoken language of the Dagomba people. It goes without saying that he would not be satisfied if his students simply paid attention to the timing of their strokes (as shown in Rhythm Notation). At minimum, he would insist on a basic melody from the answer luja using the three basic pitch classes--low mid and high (see staff one, Figure 1). A better version of the melody would use what I term two "auxiliary pitches"--below-low and above-low. Staff two shows that Alhaji consistently intoned the words "to to to" on the below-low auxiliary pitch class. Staff three shows the way Alhaji himself always played the phrase. We note that the drum represents each of the three syllables in the two words "Nay-bieyu la" with a first tone produced by a drum stroke and then a second tone produced by squeezing or releasing the luja's pressure ropes. In staff notation, a tone produced by a drum stroke is marked with an accent; a tone produced by pressure technique is tied to the prior note and is not marked with an accent. Pressure technique gives the melody a supple contour and increases the density of the musical texture. Tones without a pressure bend stand out as strong and forceful in comparison to the more gentle, graceful tones that do have pressure bends.

♩. = 72

1

with basic pitch classes

Nay - biəyu la to to to

2

with below-low pitch class

Nay - biəyu la to to to

3

with all auxilliary pitch classes

Nay - biəyu la to to to

3

Nay - biəyu la to to to Nay - la to n-nyo o

Nay - biəyu la to to to Nay - biəyu la to n-nyo o

Nay - biəyu la to to to Nay - biəyu la to n-nyo o

Figure 1 Naybiəyu answer luḡa chorus theme, versions of melody for phrase one

During the verse section of Naybiəyu, the answer luḡa strikes a mid-pitch tone on the downbeat of the eight-beat cycle and then lets the drum "breathe," as Alhaji would say, by releasing it to low-pitch tone on the next beat. On cue from the lead luḡa signal, answer luḡa again sounds its chorus theme.

Guḡ-gəḡ

In Naybiəyu guḡ-gəḡ mirrors answer luḡa. This stands to reason since the same drum language underlies both parts. The two drums open the chorus theme in unison but, in the second half, guḡ-gəḡ adds to rhythmic excitement by playing two-note figures that accentuate the flow of ternary beats. This yields 2:3 rhythmic relationship with answer luḡa's accentuation of binary beats and creates intense interlock within each ternary beat between the three strokes of luḡa and the four strokes of guḡ-gəḡ.

The guŋ-gɔŋ drummer often begins the verse section a flourish that sets the stage for the leading luŋa's phrases (see Drum Transcription and Drumming Notation). For his drumming demonstration of Naybieyu Alhaji marks the downbeats of successive measures before settling in to the normal pattern of playing only once every eight beats (see mm. 1-5, marked A). Next, he introduces a musical idea--ka kaka ka ka, ka kaka ka-- that leads up to the accent point on the downbeat of measure 17 (see mm. 13-17 marked B). Then, he uses the same rhythmic idea to make a phrase that connects two successive eight-beat cycles (see mm. 17-25, marked C). This is followed another two cycle phrase that brings back the B phrase (see mm. 25-33, marked D). This display showing how musical ideas are tastefully introduced, varied, and re-used in an extemporaneous fashion.

Lead Luŋa

In his demonstrations in vocables and drumming of the lead luŋa part in Naybieyu, Alhaji presented three drum talks. With repetition and subtle variation this modest amount of material becomes a satisfying lead drum part. A striking aspect of rhythm in the lead luŋa part is the way whole phrases or motives within phrases work back-and-forth between binary and ternary accentuation.

Opening Call

Like all Praise Names, Naybieyu begins with solo drumming from the lead luŋa. A drummer with extensive historical knowledge, like Alhaji, would 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 an essential minimum, what he called "Short play." Solo praise drumming does not need to be disciplined to a steady dance count; in the parlance of staff notation it is in "free rhythm." Typically, the calls have a sense of temporal order that derives from the flow of the implicit Dagbani language. Only at their very end does the lead drummer begin to play according to a steady beat and temporal cycle, a metered style that enables the other members of the ensemble to enter correctly. What Alhaji did for these "short play" introductions was to omit recitation of the grandfathers praise names and simply pick up the opening call from what usually would be its very final phrase.

When heard alone, in terms of its own internal pattern of accentuation, the opening call for Naybiɛyu seems to be in binary-duple time (see Figure 2). After the final note, the ensemble enters and within the first stroke or two establishes the steady temporal feeling that is maintained for the performance.

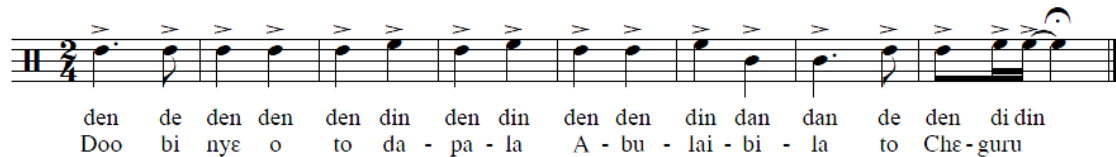


Figure 2 Naybiɛyu lead drum opening call in 2-4

Although this method works efficiently, I do not think this is the best way to theorize the phrase, however. Since Alhaji did not feel the opening call according to steady beat, I arrived at my notation by working backwards from the metered dance drumming to the unmetered introduction. The result looks much more complex than it sounds, but has the advantage of showing the relationship of the solo luja strokes to the steady beats taken up by the full ensemble (see Figure 3). The tempo of the music gets established firmly in the final motive, with the strokes that mean "Chεguru."



Figure 3 Naybiɛyu opening call in 6/8

In the real world of Dagomba drumming, there is no need to theorize in this manner--drummers learn by rote and play according to their engrained feeling for ensemble rhythm.

Signal

The ensemble sounds the chorus theme on cue from the signal phrase of leading luja whose underlying drum language means, "Yes, I am your dangerous enemy--kill me if you can." Interrupting the music's flow with a single bold stroke whose sound is extended with pressure technique--deyahan--the phrase's rhythm accentuates two ternary

beats and then four binary beats that end on a downbeat (see Vocables Notation and Drumming Notation).

Drum Talks

The main praise for Naa Abulai is "Cheguru," which means "He who never runs away." Sounded on drum as a three-note figure--den didin--"Cheguru" becomes the core musical idea in a number of variations. Most commonly it comes first and last in a phrase with a two-note figure in between (see "Cheguru gbam o, Cheguru). As a phrase to close out a passage, Alhaji liked to preface the two-note figure with a pickup note (see "Cheguru to gbam o, Cheguru"). Another variation has three "Cheguru" figures in succession and then the "gbam o" figure at the end. Rhythmically, the "Cheguru" figures strongly accentuates the downbeats of measures, while the "gbam o" figure shifts the accentuation from ternary to binary feel (from measures felt "in two" to measures felt "in three"). Melodically, "Cheguru" always rises from mid to high pitch, but Alhaji creatively varied the "gbam o" figures--either rising from low to mid, or staying on low pitch. Note: in staff notation, there is no accent marks on the high-pitched strokes for "-gu-ru" because Alhaji tossed his stick rather lightly against the drum skin, rather than hitting it forcefully.

Alhaji gave three praise proverbs whose setting on the luja drum requires much more complex playing. The first is "Yel'mañli dañ ziya, ziri zan labira," Truth has sat, lies have turned back. Since the staff notation on the DDD site may obscure the rhythmic core of the music, here we strip the drumming to its rhythmic essence (see Figure 4).

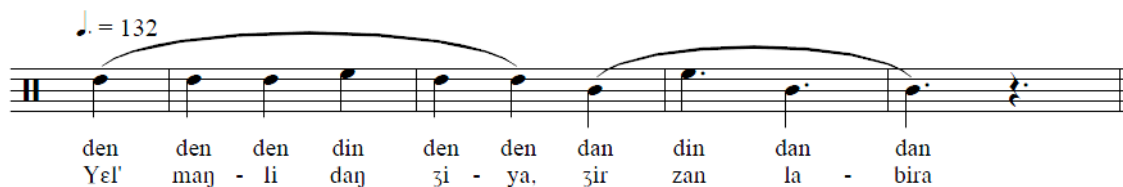


Figure 4 Naybiɛyu lead luja rhythmic essence of Yel'mañli dañ ziya

This style of notation clearly shows that the phrase begins with quarter note motion and closes with three dotted quarters. Unable to resist showing a more sophisticated rhythmic setting for the drum language, Alhaji also played a version that avoids placing an

accented stroke on the downbeat of the phrase (see version B in Vocables and Drumming).

The second and third proverbs can be played as stand alone phrases but in language they are two parts of one proverb (see Table 2)

Baḡnarigu din luri ḡmaḡa, If baḡmarigu can become calabash,
Tuḡ ḡmaḡa din luri salima. Calabash stem can make gold.

Table 2 Naybieyu proverb "Baḡnarigu"

"Baḡnarigo" moves in a beat-by-beat rhythm, heard and seen most clearly in the vocables demonstration. On drum, Alhaji uses very quick pickup strokes. The duplet timing of the two syllables "-nari" stands out from all other figures in these demonstrations, giving this phrase a special quality. "Tuḡ ḡmaḡa" also treats the second beat in measure one as a duplet but then moves in a manner more typical of Naybieyu-- a quarter note triplet in its second measure before ending with three dotted quarters.

Transcription of Drumming Demonstration

In order to better grasp how the lead drummer creates a flowing musical line, the DDD site has a complete transcription of Alhaji's drumming demonstration (see Table 3).

Although Alhaji did not always play the answer luḡa phrase when demonstrating the lead drum part, he did it in Naybieyu.

mm.	mark	"talk"
1	none	<i>to, to, to . . .</i>
2-3	none	<i>Cheguru</i>
4-9	Call	<i>Do bi nyo . . .</i>
10-23	AL response	<i>Naybieyu la to to to . . .</i>
24-71	Verse 1	
24-47	A1	<i>Cheguru gbam o, Cheguru</i>
48-55	B1	<i>Cheguru, Cheguru, Cheguru, gbam o</i>
56-63	BB	same
64-67	B1	same

68-71	BB	same
72-75	Signal	<i>To Naybieyu ηuni daa ku o</i>
72-89	AL response	<i>Naybieyu la to to to . . .</i>
90-141	Verse 2	
90-97	C	<i>Yel'manli dan ziya, ziri zan labira</i>
98-113	CC	same
114-117	D1	<i>Banarigu din luri ηmana</i>
118-125	D2	same
126-137	E	<i>Tuη ηmana din luri salima</i>
138-141	Signal	<i>To Naybieyu ηuni daa ku o</i>
142-155	AL response	<i>Naybieyu la to to to . . .</i>
156-199	Verse 3	
156-167	A1	<i>Cheguru gbam o, Cheguru</i>
168-175	AA	same
176-179	A1	<i>Cheguru gbam o, Cheguru</i>
180-191	BB	<i>Cheguru, Cheguru, Cheguru, gbam o</i>
192-195	B2	<i>Cheguru, Cheguru, Cheguru, gbam o</i>
196-199	Signal	<i>To Naybieyu ηuni daa ku o</i>
200-213	AL response	<i>Naybieyu la to to to . . .</i>
214-237	Verse 4	
214-221	AA	<i>Cheguru gbam o, Cheguru</i>
222-225	A2	<i>Cheguru to gbam o, Cheguru</i>
226-233	BB	<i>Cheguru, Cheguru, Cheguru, gbam o</i>
234-237	Signal	<i>To Naybieyu ηuni daa ku o</i>
238-251	AL response	<i>Naybieyu la to to to . . .</i>
252-307	Verse 5	
252-275	CC	<i>Yel'manli dan ziya, ziri zan labira</i>
276-287	D	<i>Banarigu din luri ηmana</i>
288-299	E	<i>Tuη ηmana din luri salima</i>
300-303	A2	<i>Cheguru to gbam o, Cheguru</i>
304-307	Signal	<i>To Naybieyu ηuni daa ku o</i>

Table 3 Naybieyu phrases in lead luqa drumming demonstration

He presented the drum talks of Naybiëyu in five verses. In verse one, Alhaji helpfully stays close to the basic "Chëguru" talks. The markings like A1, A2 and B, BB above the staff draw attention to slight but meaningful changes in the luḡa's melody. In verse two, Alhaji moves on to the praise proverbs--"Yel'mañli," "Baḡnarigu" and "Tuḡ ḡmaḡa"--varying them with characteristic changes in melody. For example D1 and D2 give "Baḡnarigu" in what he would term "high voice" and "low voice." In verses three and four, he returns to "Chëguru" phrases with the usual subtle but effectively paced variations. Verse five brings the solo to a close with the praise proverbs.

In my view, Alhaji's artistry lies as much in the design of his line as in the manner in which he plays the phrases. He seems to make the right choices about how many times to repeat a phrase and exactly when to introduce a change in pitch or a nuance of sticking. To my ear, he never plays a wrong note.

END