DDD LockeTalk Analysis, Praise Names, *Nantoo Nimdi*

Overview

Nantoo Nimdi is a Praise Name of Naa Yakubu, the father of Naa Abudu (Naɣbiɛɣu) and Naa Andani (Naani Goo), grandfather of Naa Alhassan (Tampima Dundɔŋ and Zim Taai Kulga) and great-grandfather of Naa Abu-bila (Saŋmari Gɔŋ). Given his position in the genealogy of the chiefs of Dagbon, it makes sense to play Nantoo Nimdi at the beginning of a program of Praise Names.

Meter

Nantoo Nimdi provides a very clear instance of rhythm in quaternary pulsation (see Rhythm Notation). Each beat can be felt in terms of a quicker flow of two or four pulses, i.e., quarter notes as two eighth notes or four sixteenth notes. On the DDD site, music in this time feel is notated in duple bars, equivalent to 2-4 time signature. Musical time can also be felt as a slower flow of longer beats, i.e., two half notes or "cut time".

Phrase Duration

Phrases in Nantoo Nimdi are relatively short in comparison to many other items of Praise Name drumming. The basic framework is four beats per phrase, that is, two measures of quaternary-duple time. The four-beat framework establishes a sense of expectation: two-beat phrases feel short, while eight-beat phrases feel long.

Groove

The groove of Nantoo Nimdi is a characterized by the dotted rhythm of the theme stated on the answer luŋa and answer guŋ-gɔŋ drums. In terms of fast pulses, the drums move 3 + 3 + 2 within the quaternary metric grid.

The interlock of offbeat drum strokes in the response parts with implicit onbeats generates the basic groove. As shown in measure 1 of the Rhythm Notation for answer luŋa stroke one is *right on* beat one, stroke two is *just before* beat two, and stroke three is *midway* between beat two and the downbeat of measure 2.

<u>Lead-Response Interplay</u>

Nantoo Nimdi features very clear alternation between lead and response parts. The response drums oscillate between two beats of sound and two beats of silence. When the response drums are quiet, the lead drum fills the gap.

Thinking in term of drum language, after the lead drum says, "Nantoo Nimdi," the response drums reply, "Kaɣili sulisi" ("Poison meat / Vultures seek prey," see Drum Language and History Story).

Answer Luŋa

The answer luŋa phrase has action over the first two beats (m. 1) and silence over the last two beats (m. 2). When the answer luŋa rests, the lead luŋa talks (see Vocables Notation and Drum Notation).

The implicit language is set to drumming in two ways: three strokes in dotted rhythm, or, four strokes of the same time value. Although the three-note phrase may seem like a quarter note triplet, it is better understood as a 3-3-2 grouping of eight sixteenth notes.

The rhythmic force of Nantoo Nimdi comes from the interplay of drum tones and the underlying beats. When played as three tones in dotted rhythm, the answer luŋa notes predictably move among three different relations to the beats: (1) right on, (2) just before, and (3) midway between. In contrast, when played as four equal tones, the answer luŋa notes alternate between onbeat or upbeat positions.

Taken as a short melody, the phrase rises from low to mid pitch. Only the mid-pitch note does not have a pitch bend. In the three-note phrase, the first note begins at below-low pitch and then rises to true low pitch; the second note starts at above-low pitch and then falls to low pitch; the third note is right on mid-pitch. In the four-note phrase, the first two notes bend upwards from below-low to low, the third hit bends downwards from above-low to low, while the fourth stroke is straight on the mid pitch. . Unaccented tones created by pressure on the luŋa ropes enable the drum to imitate the sound of speech

The answer luŋa part in Nantoo Nimdi provides excellent practice for squeeze-release technique on the luŋa ropes. Upward melodic motion requires increased pressure; downward melodic motion requires decreased pressure. A drummer needs only very subtle changes in wrist pressure on the luŋa ropes to move from lower and upper neighbor pitches to the true low pitch tones.

Although in the drumming demonstration Alhaji settles into playing each version of the phrase two times, the number of repetitions is at the discretion of the player. In ensemble playing, a pleasingly clear unison results if the answer luŋa drummers all play the same rhythm but an exciting polyrhythm arises when players juxtapose the two different rhythms.

Guŋ-gɔŋ
Because they both express the same drum talk, the rhythm of the guŋ-gɔŋ is very similar to the answer luŋa rhythm. Lacking the luŋa's ability to change pitch, however, the guŋ-gɔŋ player uses "ki," the turned-stick press stroke, to convey the upward direction of the melody.

The resemblance between the luŋa and guŋ-gɔŋ parts is most obvious in Alhaji's performance of vocables. Subtle differences between the two answer drum parts result from sticking technique on guŋ-gɔŋ. To enliven the basic phrase, Alhaji uses double-hits (kara), anticipatory pick-ups, and quick two-stroke figures.

In vocables, Alhaji shows a variation that extends the basic phrase to eight beats in duration by filling the silence in measure two (kakakaki kaka, kakakaki). On the drum, Alhaji uses this "fill" idea to create another variation (kaka, kaka, kakakaki).

When recording the vocables, Alhaji did not sing the chahira strokes. The notation shows a chahira motive that I have written as "zi zigizi gi," although the last stroke may also be played with the stick (strong hand) rather than the fingers (weak hand). The sixteenth note figure (zigizi) occurs at different locations within the rhythm--either the upbeat of beat one or the onbeat of beat two.

Lead Luŋa

<u>Opening Call</u>

Like all Praise Names, Nantoo Nimdi 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.

The rhythm of the "call" phrase in Nantoo Nimdi is rather easy in comparison to other Praise Names. Controlling the luŋa's pitches, however, is challenging. Alahji's vocables and drumming are almost identical. The drummed version has more pitch contrast, while the vocables version is slightly longer due to repetition of the final motive in the phrase.

<u>Drum Talks</u>

Nantoo Nimdi has very clear call-and-response form. For example, the lead luŋa plays the words "Nantoo Nimdi" when the answer luŋa is not playing and the guŋ-gɔŋ is playing chahira strokes. Although Alhaji seldom uses the essential format without elaboration, the essence of the lead luŋa part is to fill the silence in the response parts.

The principal talk for lead luŋa is "Akul' dapal' Nantoo Nimdi." Alhaji uses the turned-stick roll to render the Dagbani "-kul," thus effectively mimicking with the drum the tongue-rolling "l" sound of the spoken language. The form of the lead luŋa part is to play this phrase, vary it, add other talks, and then come back "home" to this expression.

A nicely syncopated rhythmic quality arises from the talk "Zaŋmi ka nya." The short three-stroke phrase begins and ends on upbeats, which can create the sense that the

location of onbeats has been shifted by one eighth note pulse. Intensifying this "turn around" effect, Alhaji often precedes the phrase with a quick pick-up. Although the sticking for this phrase is simple, each note is bent with upward and downward glisses that are very hard to execute.

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