

## **DDD Music Analysis, Praise Name, *Suligu***

To me, Suligu conveys an image of mature but vital power. As detailed in the History Story of Diari-lan' Bukali, these qualities aptly characterize his forceful personality.

### **Overview**

#### Groove

Suligu has a majestic, regal musical feeling. In the response theme, motives separated by pauses create a spacious quality. The rhythm begins and ends with compelling offbeat syncopation balanced by solid onbeat accents in the middle portion of the theme.

Gaps in the response theme are dramatically filled by lead luṇa, giving Suligu a very effective back-and-forth quality between the two sections of the ensemble.

As is typical of Dagomba dance drumming in quaternary time, the rhythmic propulsion is generated by accentuation of the fourth pulse within a beat. Compared to other pieces in this time feel, however, Suligu prominently features squarely onbeat notes, as well.

#### Phrase Duration

Suligu has a long temporal cycle. The composition extends over thirty-two beats of quaternary musical time (sixteen 2/4 measures).

#### Morphology

The response theme consists of an offbeat musical gesture that is stated at the outset and then recapped at the end. Linking this syncopated idea are two onbeat figures that move the rhythm forward. The phrase structure can be represented as ABCA.

In Suligu, the guṇ-gṇ has its own way of playing the figures that connect the main motive but otherwise is in unison with answer luṇa.

Silence is a subtle feature of Suligu's rhythmic design. The brief musical emptiness between the end of a lead luṇa phrase and the start of the response part creates suspense in anticipation of the booming entrance of the answer luṇa and guṇ-gṇ drums.

### Meter

Each tacit beat is felt to contain two or four faster pulses, which means that musical time in Suligu is quaternary. For consistency, I write the music using sixteenths, eighths, and quarters but indicate tempo with a half note to convey the stately quality of temporal motion.

### Lead-Response Interplay

Unlike Jenkuno, another piece with a long temporal cycle in which very short calls cue long answers, Suligu's lead and response phrases are more equal in duration (12 beats + 20 beats = 32 beats). With more time to play with, so to speak, the lead luja part has more underlying texts set to more complex melodies.

In addition to playing during the relatively long, uninterrupted silence between statements of the response theme, the lead luja also slots into the short gaps within the theme itself.

### **Answer Luja**

The crucial feature of the response theme is the timing of the first stroke (see Vocables Notation and Drumming Notation). Coming just before an onbeat, it imparts tremendous rhythmic propulsion to the motive. Three notes follow on the midpoint between successive beats. A fifth note placed on the beat brings closure to the motive. As a short melodic motif, the first three notes rise from low to high pitch (dan den din), creating a sense of tonal motion that is countered by the final two low-pitched notes (dan dan) that return the brief tune to its tonal base.

Thinking of squeeze-release technique on the luja ropes, only the short note four is played straight. For the first note, Alhaji presses up from below-low to low and then releases pressure for notes two, three and five. He does this consistently in both vocables and drumming.

The first of the two linking motives is simply one note (den). This stark single hit, which echoes the final note of the opening motive, serves to slow down the rhythmic pace. The busier second linking motive (den den dedan din) ends with high pitch on a backbeat,

giving the rhythm an unresolved quality that nicely sets up the return of the "mani mini o n-kpoi" theme. Alhaji's vocables and drumming are almost identical, save for the fancier way he uses the drumstick to render the "ku o kpoi" (de zan din) portion of the second fill motive.

### **Guṇ-gṇ**

The rhythm of the opening and closing motive is identical on both answer luṇa and guṇ-gṇ. A turned stick press stroke (ki) on guṇ-gṇ imitates the luṇa's higher pitched notes. The guṇ-gṇ part differs slightly from the answer luṇa in the middle portion of the response theme, however.

Alhaji recorded a lot of different ways to play the two linking motives B and C (see Table 1). Subtle changes like these demonstrate the drummer's skill, aesthetic taste, and musical vitality.

Variation	Motive B	Motive C
vocables A	one note	- "kakakaka" rhythm - double hits in m.6
vocables B	one note	- "kakakaka" rhythm - double hits in mm.6 and 7
vocables C	one note	- "kakaka kakaka" rhythm - double hit in m. 6
vocables D	one note	- "kakaka kakaka" rhythm - no ornamentation
vocables E	two notes	- "kakaka kakaka" rhythm - no ornamentation
drumming A (see vocables E)	two notes	- "kakaka kakaka" rhythm - no ornamentation
drumming B (see vocables A and B)	two notes	- "kakakaka" rhythm
drumming C	one note	- "ka ka kakaka" rhythm - reverse of drumming D
drumming D	one note	- "kakaka ka ka" rhythm - reverse of drumming C

**Table 1 Guṇ-gṇ variations on Suligu in Part-by-Part Sessions**

When the lead luṇa is playing, the guṇ-gōṇ either plays all notes in the chahira zone of the drum skin, or marks every other onbeat moment with lightly hit notes (see drumming B, C, D).

### **Lead Luṇa**

Alhaji presents the introductory call and three drum talks. Although the sticking in first two talks is not very hard, the melody requires good control of the pressure ropes. The rhythm of the drum talks presents a metric situation that may prove challenging--"flipping" the beat.

The opening phrase of the call--"To zam buyli dapala" (son of Naa Zangina)--can be used for many chiefs since Naa Zangina is held in highest respect (see Drumming Notation). Alhaji uses the turned stick roll (den gren) to imitate the glottal sound of the spoken Dagbani, "buyli." The next phrase (zen diyan diyan gran da), which reappears as a drum talk when the ensemble kicks in, places great accentuation on the upbeats. Without the context of the full ensemble, the phrase's two high-pitched notes may seem to be onbeat. The metric conditions are clarified by the last motive in the call, den den de zan din.

The Dagbani phrase, "Ma mini mini ṇuni kpuri," underlies the main lead drum phrase in Suligu. In addition to the way its accented high pitch notes seem to be onbeat, this phrase requires controlled release of pressure on the luṇa ropes from high to mid pitch. This difficult technique happens twice in rapid succession.

The drum talk "Bi yeri ma jɔyujɔyɔ" also needs advanced drumming technique. To sound the word "ma," the drummer must strike a low note and then immediately squeeze the luṇa ropes so that the listener hears high pitch. Then, the drummer must release the ropes back to low pitch and twice play two-note rolls to pronounce the word "jɔyujɔyɔ." To make the word "tiṇa" the high note must be strongly struck and then released from high to low. Easier done in vocables than on the drum itself!

Finally, "Baa ku nyɔmsi nɔṇa" really challenges the musical ability to maintain steady sense of metric orientation. By starting strongly on the backbeat, this drum talk seems to

shift the bar line, so to speak, by one beat. If one is not focused, the whole gestalt of the rhythm can appear to shift. Thus, Suligu has two types of rhythmic challenge--(1) shifting the beat to the upbeat, that is, the "ands" of the time, (2) shifting the beat to the backbeat, that is the "two" of every "one two" pair of beats in 2/4 measure.

During the response theme, the lead luja plays short figures ("kaya buni") that create a pleasant alternation between sections of the ensemble. Significantly, when he plays the "ka-" of "kaya" Alhaji consistently sounds what I consider to be an auxiliary pitch--a major second above low pitch. This is evidence that challenges my classification of pitches in Dagomba drumming, i.e., three main pitches with variants. Further research may show that what I now regard as secondary pitches ("upper and lower neighbor pitches") are better taken to be primary.

END