

DDD Music Analysis, Praise Name: Naani Goo

Overview

Form

Unlike all other Praise Name dances except Naybiɛɣu , Naani Goo has a two-section musical form that resembles a "verse-chorus" arrangement. In the verse section, the response drums play a single booming note on the first beat of the lead luɲa's phrases, or "drum talks," as Alhaji would say. With their recurring accents, the response drums literally are saying, "Listen to the lead luɲa." After the lead luɲa has played its verse phrases for a short while, it plays a "signal" figure that cues the response drums to play the chorus theme. When the response drums have played the chorus, the verse returns. The lead luɲa plays more "talks" until it decides the time is right to signal for the chorus once again.

The chorus theme, which is distinctive and memorable, gives the piece its musical identity. In Naani Goo, the chorus has one phrase that occurs four times.

Meter

Naani Goo is in quaternary time (2/4), while Naybiɛɣu is in ternary time (6/8). Thus they rather neatly represent the two predominate time feels of Dagomba dance drumming.

Like other pieces in quaternary time, the underlying beat of Naani Goo can be felt at different speeds. In other words, you can feel time at faster tempo, which I represent as a quarter note, or slower tempo, represented by a half note. At faster tempo the recurring beats help drummers get the timing of notes. The progression of the beats at slower tempo helps drummers recognize the form of whole phrases. In staff notation, the two-beat meter (2/4 time) calls attention to quarter beats, but the half note tempo marking suggests the cut time feel.

I have notated the rhythm of Naani Goo with eighth notes and quarter notes. In actual performance, however, the quick pace of time suggests that sixteenth notes and eighth notes would yield a more appropriate notated image of the rhythm. The longer time

values in cut time (half note as the timing guide) facilitate comparison among all quaternary pieces.

Phrase Duration

Duration of musical periods--the re-cycling loops, so to speak--is a key element of Naani Goo's musical design. The chorus loop is four times longer than the verse.

The "hook" of the Naani Goo chorus extends over four slower beats, or eight faster beats. In notation this is equivalent to four measures of two-beat time. Thus, the duration of the whole chorus section may be understood as sixteen slower beats, thirty-two faster beats, and/or sixteen duple measures.

The duration of musical phrases in the verse section, on the other hand, are much shorter duration--two slower beats, four faster beats, and/or two measures.

Groove

Naani Goo gets much of its musical excitement from strong articulation of the slower half note beat. Each of the four chorus phrases opens with emphasis on offbeat timing that leads to prominent onbeat accentuation. As if drawing upon the main idea in the chorus section, the verse section continues the musical idea of powerfully marking the onbeat. Musically, the lead drum phrases in the verse section explore ways to dramaticize the recurring single note of the response drums.

Lead-Response Interplay

The lead luña part works in polyrhythmic interplay with the recurring onbeat accent that is sounded by the response drums. In the verse section the call-and-response exchange happens quickly, giving it a dramatic effect. The booming reiteration of "the one" marks time into short units. When the chorus section returns on cue from the leader's signal, musical time suddenly stretches out.

In contrast to the exciting back-and-forth exchange between leader and group in the verse section, during the chorus the leader recedes into the background while the response drums take over.

Answer Luja

Rising melodic contour is a salient feature of the chorus theme (see Vocables and Drumming Notation). The first low-pitched onbeat stroke, which sets the Dagbani word "to" ("yes" or "indeed") is optional and often omitted by veteran Dagomba drummers. The next two notes approach low-pitch from different directions (dahan dayan)--the first note rises from below-low to low, the second note falls from above-low to low. Then follow two accented notes directly on mid-pitch without pitch bends (den deden). The final note towards which the prior notes have been moving begins on high pitch but then drops to low pitch as the luja ropes are released (diyanhan).

Over the course of each phrase, the drum is progressively squeezed tighter and tighter until maximum tension occurs on the last note after which the drum inhales in preparation for the next repetition. The subtle pitch bends created by pressure on the luja ropes--dahan dayan den deden diyahan---add beauty to the melody of the Naani Goo chorus phrase. As Alhaji would want me to add, he uses these melodic nuances to make the drum clearly sound like the underlying Dagbani text.

Timing is another significant factor in the effectiveness of the phrase. There are six notes. The timing of the first three notes is reminiscent of Nantoo Nimdi--first note is onbeat, second note is just before beat two, third note is in on the upbeat of beat two. The Nantoo Nimdi phrase ends here, but Naani Goo continues on. While the first three notes move from an onbeat towards an upbeat, notes four and five return to onbeat accentuation through pickup-to-onbeat motion. Landing directly on a downbeat, note six confirms the sense of rhythmic closure. In other words, the phrase opens with energetic offbeat syncopation and ends with sturdy onbeat accentuation. Over its eight-beat duration the phrase moves away from and then back to its onbeat starting point.

In the verse the answer luja plays only one note over-and-over. Alhaji always teaches students to control the luja ropes so that tone sustains as long as possible. The quiet "after sound" (the -yan of deyan) equates to the downward gliding pitch of "To," the Dagbani word for "Yes, listen."

In Alhaji's part-by-part demonstrations, vocables and drumming closely resemble each other.

Guṇ-gṇ

The sticking rhythm of center strokes on guṇ-gṇ is in unison with answer luṇa's rhythm. The "ki" strokes of guṇ-gṇ mirror the upward melodic contour of the luṇa phrase. This is typical of Dagomba dance drumming.

In the guṇ-gṇ "fill" between the four chorus phrases, the rhythm of the chahira strokes is variable. The notation of the vocables transcribes Alhaji's performance, "zizi zizi," which gives the stick strokes a catchy, asymmetric rhythm. On the other hand, the notation of the drumming shows steady alternation between stick and hand strokes, "zigizigizi," which may be easier for some learners.

During the verse section the guṇ-gṇ primarily plays a single center bounce stroke followed by a "fill" motive in chahira. When inspired, however, the player may interject rhythmic energy with variations and improvisation. One such "lick" occurs in Alhaji's drumming demonstration (see Drumming Notation). Like other verse variations it not only adds more center stroke action, it also multiplies the duration of the response phrase.

Lead Luṇa

The introductory "call" consists of four phrases (see Vocables Notation and Drumming Notation). In each phrase, four notes with virtually the same rhythm have a slightly different set of pitches. The rhythm, which is four beats in duration, begins on the upbeat of beat two and moves towards cadence on beat one--long short long LONG. Taken as a one passage, the "call" is an eight-measure melody with a logical pitch sequence in four short rhythms (see Table 1).

mid	mid	high	MID
high	mid	mid	MID
low	mid	low	MID
high	low	low	LOW

Table 1 Pitch sequence in "call" of Naani Goo

To realize the underlying text as vocables or drumming, subtle pitch bends and rhythmic nuances are needed, especially in phrases one ("Salaga limam") and three ("Limam, limam"). After the final low-pitch note, two notes timed on the upbeat signal the chorus theme from the response drums.

The lead drummer decides how long each verse section lasts. When he plays the two offbeat signal notes, the chorus theme returns with familiar, satisfying power. The alternation of verse and chorus continues for several minutes until the lead drummer decides to stop Naani Goo and call another Praise Name.

Call-and-response shapes the musical design of the "drum talks" in the verse section. The lead drum plays two-measure motives that draw attention to the response drums' note on first beat of every other measure. In other words, the lead drum phrases approach the downbeat but stop just before it arrives. The lead drum creates a musical space. The response drums fill that gap.

A lead drum talk in Naani Goo usually consists of two, two-measure phrases. In other words, one lead drum phrase spans two hits from the response drums. In some cases the same short motive comes twice but the pitch of the last note in each "lick" changes from mid to low. In other cases two different two-measure motives combine into one longer four-measure phrase. Like a chef improvising on a familiar recipe, the lead drummer spontaneously decides how to combine these pre-composed ingredients.

The lead drum rhythmically accentuates the second beat within measures, giving Naani Goo an enjoyable back-and-forth play between downbeats and backbeats. In lead drum talks with "Goo beri pam" and "Gohi beri pam," the phrase begins on a backbeat in one measure, flows through the downbeat of the next measure, and ends on backbeat. In talks that use the "Mira mira" words, the lead drum rhythm feels choppy. (Musicians familiar with Ewe dance-drumming from southern Ghana will notice a resemblance to the rhythm played on the high-pitched response drum called kaganu.) Because of the expectation created by repeated backbeat accentuation, the entrance of the words "Naani Goo" feels delayed. With this figure the lead drummer gives the music a sense of spaciousness.

In Naani Goo downward melodic contour conveys a sense of musical motion towards a cadence. Typically, the first motive ends on a mid-pitch note while the second motive ends on a low-pitch note. The lead drummer uses the aesthetic impact of musical density to sustain the excitement of his verse. Often, the first two-measure motive has more musical space--more silence--in contrast to greater activity in the second two-measure phrase.

Vocables and drumming are mirror images of each other in Alhaji's Part-by-Part demonstrations. The vocable "kren" indicates the turned-stick stroke that helps the drum realistically imitate the long vowel sound in the spoken word, "Naani." Notes created by releasing the luja ropes also help the drum sound speech-like, as in the word "beri" (painful), which is played "diyan." Interestingly, a single drum stroke means "goo" (thorn), while two strokes change it to plural--"gohi" (thorns).

Naani Goo illustrates a general principle in Dagomba dance drumming: the musical beauty of drumming derives from the structure of the underlying Dagbani.

END