

DDD Music Analysis, Praise Name: *Jenkuno*

Overview

Phrase Duration

A striking feature of Jenkuno is its length. The composition fills twenty beats of quaternary musical time (ten 2/4 measures).

Lead-Response Interplay

The balance between lead luḡa and response drums is unusual in comparison to the music of other Praise Name Dances presented on the website. The drum talks of lead luḡa cover four beats (two 2/4 measures), while the theme played by answer luḡa and guḡ-guḡ stretches over sixteen beats (eight 2/4 measures). Put simply, a short bit of drumming by the leading luḡa is answered by a long phrase from the response drummers.

Morphology

The response theme is constructed by conjoining five short motives into a long twenty-beat phrase. The proverb that underlies the drumming shapes this musical design. In other words, the drumming mirrors the AABAC structure of the poem (see Table 1).

Form	Dagbani	Vocables	Beats
A	Shela Jenkuno ni	den dehen diyan deden den	4
A	Shela Jenkuno ni	den dehen diyan deden den	3
B	Jenbariga mini	dahan dan dan din den	5
	jenkuno gbihira	diyan deden diyan den	
A	Shela Jenkuno ni	den dehen diyan deden den	3
C	Jenkun' biɛyu	dayan zahan dayan	5

Table 1 Morphology of response theme in Jenkuno

Groove

Jenkuno has a busy, highly syncopated rhythm. The drum stroke action is fast--many short notes come in quick succession--and the response theme features lots of offbeat notes. The response theme ends with three onbeat accents that feel calm and solid after

the rapid motion that preceded them. The Jenkuno groove arises from this distinctive play between offbeats and onbeats.

As is typical of Dagomba dance drumming in quaternary time, accentuation of the fourth pulse within beat one propels the rhythm forward with compelling drive.

Meter

Although I have notated Jenkuno with short time values in a slow-paced 2/4 meter, the rhythmic density of the drumming suggests a double time feel. In other words, instead of marking the tempo as a quarter note at 78 beats per minute, it could be indicated as a half note at 156 beats per minute. If the music is felt at this faster rate, Jenkuno could be written with eighth notes and quarter notes like Naani Goo, whose rhythm is very similar.

Answer Luja

The answer luja theme contains five short motives (see Vocables Notation and Drumming Notation). The three-beat "shela jenkuno ni" motive ("the cat is in the room") appears three times. Its melody, including the important downward high-low glide on the word "jenkuno," and its rhythm--short-long-long-short-long-long--gives Jenkuno its musical identity. The one-beat rest after the first statement of this motive provides an opportunity for the lead luja to interject a short burst of drumming.

Two statements of this motive create the expectation that it will repeat again, so the five-beat "jenbariga mini jenkuno gbihira" motive ("Mice thinking cat is sleeping") is a surprise. The rhythmic setting of the word "jenbariga" defies precise notation and need not be played the same way each time. The eighth note triplet figure shown in the notation seldom occurs Dagomba dance-drumming with quaternary rhythm. Triplets in 2/4 time, in other words, are rare. The high-low release of pressure on the luja ropes that occurs twice is another distinctive feature of this segment of the whole theme. Beginning on a backbeat, it ends on the "and of ONE," leaving one beat silent for the leading luja.

After a reappearance of the "shela" motive, the theme ends with three onbeat notes that descend from mid to low pitch. Each of these notes receives quick wrist action on the

luṅa ropes so that the drum imitates the sound of the nasal and glottal prolongations in the spoken Dagbani--"jɛ-n ku-m biɛ-yu" (literally, "cat bad").

In the Part-by-Part Sessions, Alhaji's vocables and drumming were basically identical. As heard on the Multitrack Sessions, however, drummers frequently render the drum talk with slightly different melodic contour.

Guṅ-gɔŋ

Alhaji gives two primary versions of the guṅ-gɔŋ phrase, plus subtle sticking variations on each. In version A, two long notes (kwao kwao) set the "jɛnkum' biɛyu" text. In version B, each syllable of text gets its own drum note (ka ka ka). Alhaji adds double-stick ornaments and slight changes in chahira that put personality into his playing.

Not always an ornament, double-sticking sometimes helps the drum imitate speech. For example, the two very rapidly spoken syllables "-bari-" in "jɛnbariga" ("mouse") are perfectly mimed by the "kara" stroke in "ka kara ka."

Lead Luṅa

Of all the introductory passages for Praise Names in this collection, the lead luṅa "call" for Jɛnkuno is the longest. The drummer begins by saying the name of the piece four or five times--"deyan zen deyan" ("cat"). Then he drums the "zahan didediyān tata" figure several times, which means, "I am thinking" ("Mani dimi ni"). The vocable "ta" stands for very low-pitched tones without precise intonation that are the luṅa's equivalent of chahira strokes on guṅ-gɔŋ. The insistent reiteration of these two short motives creates expectation for a longer, more musically complete phrase. The drummer can pause naturally between these figures, as if to breathe, but the rhythm has a steady flow. Tension is building, so to speak.

When the lead drummer feels that the moment is right, he launches two longer phrases in precise tempo. The first--"zahan gridediyān zadaden dedadahan"--is a burst of quick notes over four beats whose pitches make an undulating low-high-low-mid-low melody. The second phrase contrasts long and short time values (eighth and sixteenth notes) to

make a strongly syncopated rhythmic shape that grabs attention --long short long short long, long short long, short long long long short long. In order to make the drum sound like the implicit Dagbani text, the player needs very good squeeze-release control of the pressure on the luṅa ropes.

At the completion of this introduction, the ensemble booms out the response theme. From here on out, the lead luṅa just plays short phrases that fit into the four-beat slot between the responses. Alhaji presents three "talks." Ideas stated in the "call" reappear. The "zahan gridediyan zadaden dedadahan" phrase, for example, is simply inserted without musical adjustment, but the "deyan zen deyan" figure is given a tricky, highly syncopated rhythmic setting. The phrase is played twice. The second appearance of the phrase overlaps with the start of the response theme, creating intense polyrhythm and a dense musical texture. Similarly, the second talk extends into the beginning of the answer luṅa and guṅ-gɔṅ part.

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