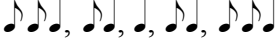#2

Song

The composer of an Agbadza song must decide how to arrange the tune for call-and-response; the song text can be sung by leader alone, group alone, and leader/group together. The call-and-response in song #3 is simple alternation--L-G-L-G--but the each segment makes a different contribution to the tune's three phrases. The first phrase (mm.1-2) is shared between leader and group; the second phrase belongs entirely to the leader (mm.2-4); the third phrase is sung by the group (mm.3-4). The musical contributions of leader and group differ each time they sing: in phrase one the leader's part is incomplete and the group's role is to confirm c5 as the tonal goal of the phrase. The leader becomes the center of musical attention in the second phrase, however, with a complete melodic idea that spans a full bell phrase in a dramatic arc that uses the song's entire pitch set and places what seems like the song's tonal center, g4, firmly on ONE. The group reply seems to recapitulate the melodic and tonal logic of the first two phrases up until its very final note on F♯4, which stands out in this collection for being lower in pitch than the tonal center. Despite the finalis, I feel the tonality of this song as 1-3-4-5-7, g4-b4-c5-d5-f5 (see #1). Given that Agbadza songs repeat many times in performance, the leader's opening b4 functions to resolve the group's final f4, which has an unstable position in the song's tonality.

Another crucial dimension of a song's design is melodic rhythm, which includes not only the durational values and melodic figures in the tune but its polyrhythmic interactions with other instruments, especially the tune's duet with the bell, and its setting within the metric matrix. For a musician well versed in Ewe music, the leader's opening

1

motive will spark a rapid series of effects: a mark on four-beat 3, a shift to the upbeat six

flow in unison with bell strokes 5-6-7-1, a reconnection to the four feel on bell stroke 6,

and a strong sense of cadence on ONE. The time values in the group's reply (short-short-

long or ♪♪♩) draw power from the way they articulate 3:2 (quarter:dotted quarter) in the

2-3-1 phrasing. The leader's first five notes in phrase two all have the same time value,

which leaves them open to more than one rhythmic interpretation; after two short-long

figures (eighth-quarter) set on four-beats 2 and 3 that cut strongly against the timing of

the bell's strokes, the rhythmic excitement resolves with notes that lie together with bell

(strokes 6-7-1) and four-beats 4-1. Speaking of clever musical design, I especially

admire the palindrome in the five rhythmic figures within the group's next response

♪♪♩, ♪♩, ♩, ♪♩, ♪♪♩.

Drumming

Compared to the bland morphology of the kidi phrase in item #1, the kidi in #2

has a forcefully shaped design that sits astride two bell phrases. It opens and closes with

a two-bounce figure set on four-beat 3. Like a boxer's three-punch combination, the

bounce tone on four-beat 2 prepares for the concluding figure, as if the kidi is saying,

"Here, take this, 'kidi,' and if that is not sufficient, here take it again, 'ki kidi.'" The

rhythmic counterpoint between the tune and the kidi phrase are essential to the musical

effectiveness of #2. Obviously, the kidi phrase overlaps the phrases in the tune. In item

#2 kidi and song usually match precisely on four-beat 3 but sometimes their timing is

strategically offset; the moments when the two parts share rhythmic unison occur either

at the beginning or at the end of the kidi phrase. As a result of this clever balance of synchrony and interlock, the music stays fresh even as it repeats.

Sogo "talks" to kidi in typical Agbadza style: dzi strokes outline the kidi phrase, while ga and de strokes anticipate and lead up to kidi bounces. As we hear throughout the recorded performance, the sogo fluidly and rapidly moves between two presentations of 2:3, specifically, two dotted eighths within one dotted quarter, and three quarters over the span of two dotted quarters. Although I have written it all in the same ternary-quadruple meter (12/8), the basic rhythm of the drum language could be represented in staff notation as a shift between 2/4 in the first half of the bell phrase (four-beats 1-2) and 3/4 in the second half of the bell phrase (four-beats 3-4). As shown in the score, GFA often renders entire measures with six quarters. Sogo's rolling phrases come towards the beginning of song occurrences 2, 6, 9, and 14, usually timed to the start of another repeat. The score shows that GFA takes care to always begin the drum language during the group's first response, that is, on four-beat 2. Clearly, he is listening to the progress of the song so that he can properly align the drumming to the singing.

The tune and text support each other. The tune's most dramatic musical phrase sets the crucial line in the lyric; the drum language also is most active at this point. For listeners who understand both the sung poetry and the drum language, the two modes of conveying semantic information enrich each other: when the song asks the brave ones to go open the gate, the drums commands them to move.