#25

Song

The final song in the collection is among its most distinctive and complex. Put in idiomatic American English, the collection goes out with a bang! Noteworthy features of song #20 include: a) form--a subordinate song B is interpolated into the main song A, which itself has a special form (compare to song #20); b) pitch--the pitch set has seven classes within it and the melody does not always conform to pentatonic patterns; c) tonality--the first occurrence of the finalis only comes at the end of the last phrase of song A, giving an unresolved multideterminant feeling to the song's overall tonality; d) harmony--the male and female singers consistently take different paths through the tune; and e) rhythm--the melodic rhythm in the main tune scrupulously avoids ONE, creating musical tension only firmly resolved in song B. Let us look more closely.

The table below charts the way the singers repeat songs A and B in the recorded performance. It shows that after the main tune is sung three or four times, the singers switch to the shorter song; after they sing this percussive chant six to ten times, they go back to the main tune.

song	occurrences	measure
A	4	3-27
B	6	27-33
A	3	33-51
B	6	51-57
A	3	57-75
B	6	75-81
A	3	81-99
B	10	99-109
A	3	109-127
B	8	127-135
A	1	135-141

The text of song A guides its musical form: the leader's call consists of four comparatively short phrases (mm.1-4) that are answered by a longer two-measure phrase from the group. Each of the leader's first two phrases starts on bell stroke 2 and moves over four-beats 2-3-4 to surprising conclusion on bell stroke 7, which falls on the third partial of beat 4 and normally functions as the pickup to ONE. Time values in the first phrase are uniformly one pulse in duration, but the melody's contour confers a sense that the melody is in six (rest-2-3-4-5-6). The tune begins with an upward leap of a perfect fifth (g4-d5) and then works around d5 with pendular seconds (c5-d5-e5), ending on c5. The second phrase also begins with an upward leap, this time a perfect fourth to c5 rather than a perfect fifth to d5. The longer time value of c5 holds our attention momentarily by its accentuation of the four-feel and prepares the ear for the melody's descent back to g4, approached from above a4-g4. After toggling, so to speak, between d5-c5, the leader's third phrase ends early on the third partial of beat 3 (pulse 9, 3.3) thus enabling the fourth and final phrase to begin on pulse 12. As its opening gambit, phrase four uses the short-long rhythmic figure from phrase 2 to draw a listener's attention to the momentary match between the rhythms of song and bell on bell strokes 7-1; melodically, the tune works within the e5-c5 pitch area before falling back to g4, approached this time with a minor third leap (b♭4-g4) rather than the major second step used in the second phrase.

After this unusually extended set of phrases from the leader, the group comes in with a long phrase (mm.5-6) built from two shorter phrases, each the same duration as one of the leader's first two phrases. The group's first sub-phrase echoes the leader's second phrase but the pendular motion on c5-b♭4 rather than the d5-c5 of leader's phrase two prepares the ear for a descending move. The premonition of descent is confirmed by

the group's second sub-phrase, which plunges below g4 to d4 (c5-b♭4-g4-f4-d4). The melodic rhythm of the group's first phrase causes the music's flow to pause on four-beat 2 (m.5, 2.1, pulse 4) but the song's notes in unison with bell tones 4-5-6-7 bring out an upbeat six feel. The group's second phrase (m.6), however, starts in six (six counts 2-3-4) and ends on bell strokes 6-7, which can be heard to accentuate the first and third partials of four-beat 4 or the counts 5-6 of the upbeat six-feel.

In light of the leader's use of both b♭4 and a4 and the group's unexpectedly low phrase final on d4, what is going on tonally? The leader's first two phrases seem to fit easily within the pentatonic scale g4-a4-c5-d5-e5 (1-2-4-5-6) and with only two pitch classes, phrase two prolongs this tonal quality. Phrase three, however, substitutes b♭4 for a4 as an approach to g4; the four consecutive steps e5-d5-c5-b♭4 jump out to a listener's ear since they are atypical in the Ewe pentatonic music system. I theorize that the b♭4 signals a modulation between two pentatonic modes--from 1-2-4-5-6 (g4-a4-c5-d5-e5) to 1-3♭-4-5-7♭ (g4-b♭4-c5-d5-f5). The group's melody, which uses the pitches in the new mode, confirms the modulation. I hear the song's finalis on d4 as modal degree 5, not 1.

Song B is very short. It moves from stroke 2 in one bell phrase through the subsequent stroke 1 of the next; over the 12-pulse span of one bell cycle the leader's call fills seven pulses (3-9), the group's response uses five (10-2). The melody contrasts the leader's ascending minor third motion (g4-b♭3) with descending major second motion by the group (e4-d4). Rhythmically, the leader's part draws upon the figure made by bell tones 2-3-4 (♩ ♪♩), while the group uses the bell's familiar 6-7-1 motive (♩ ♪♩) that recurs frequently in Agbadza. By designing motives that point out the identity of these

two portions of the bell phrase's rhythm we again find evidence of the theoretical awareness of Ewe musicians. Tonally, song B confers to D a significant sense of resolution or gravity, thus suggesting yet another pentatonic mode: d4-e-4-g4-b♭4-c5, 1-2-4-6♭-7♭.

Considered as a whole, each section of this song has its own distinctive array of musical features so that as it progresses along singers and listeners experience these changes in form, rhythm, tune, and tonality. Listeners who understand the language of the song and drums and who are knowledgeable of Ewe history will have culturally specific artistic edification, yet any musically sensitive person can feel the aesthetic force that comes from experiencing a well-composed musical work.

Drumming

Matching the song in sophistication, composition #25 is the most highly polymetric of all twenty five compositions in this collection. Furthermore, the drumming changes when the singers alternate between songs A and B.

For song A, the kidi phrase consists of three occurrences of an eight-pulse motive (two bounce strokes followed by six press strokes) over the span of two bell phrases; the rhythmic algebra is 24 = (2+6) x 3. If one's metric awareness flows along the six-beat feel, the kidi phrase will be felt in terms of four binary beats (quarter notes) so that we can represent the kidi in 4/4 and the bell in 6/4, yielding a metrics of three measures of 4/4 time set within two measures of 6/4 time, or algebraically as (4 x 2) x 3 = (6 x 2) x 2. But since the bell is rooted in a feeling of four ternary beats, a more polymetric musical feeling always is also present, that is, (4 x 2) x 3 = (4 x 3) x 2.

As determined by the drum language of the sogo part, the kidi part begins on four-beat 3. Each pair of bounce strokes lies differently on the four-feel time and has its own contrapuntal interaction with the strokes in bell phrase. However, when you feel the time "in six" and allow the bell phrase to recede in your musical concentration, each of the kidi's three motives feels like the others. Although this sort of rhythmical structure occurs in other genres of Ewe music and is not unusual, drummers recognize its special power to disorient. Adzogbo, for example, may be played with a bell phrase of this polymetric type but some musicians prefer using the Agbadza bell phrase in Adzogbo because they do not want to become confused.

GFA presents two drum language expressions that fit this kidi phrase. In both drum languages one motive recurs three times; strokes in the motive fit differently within the bell phrase and metric matrix in each occurrence. The shapelier drum language A forcefully undercuts the metric and rhythmic foundations of Agbadza's instrumental music; put simply, it is one of those sogo phrases that obliterates ONE. In contrast, drum language B has a more simple rhythmic surface that flows easily "in six" and has strongly accentuated ga strokes right on ONE. In the recorded performance GFA uses drum language A to create periods of musical intensity that he contrasts with the more flowing character of drum language B. Drum language C goes with the percussive interpolated song B. Kidi does not change but sogo uses very rapid runs that lead up to the two kidi bounces. The music really flies forward during these passages. If my ear is correct, in measure 113 GFA plays three strokes over the span of two six-feel beats (notated simply as quarter note triplets). If this figure was repeated it would result in "nine-feel" time within the span of the bell phrase, which would be extremely rare in Ewe music.

Coming last in the batch of twenty-five song-drum compositions, #25 makes me feel as if the musicians are celebrating the inexhaustible energy of Agbadza. It is as if they are saying to themselves and to listeners, "Look at all the music we have just played. It is wonderful. But there is more where that came from!"