

#19

Song

Unlike most of Agbadza songs, which are dominated by the text and tune sung in the opening and closing portions of the form (A sections), the middle section of this song is quite long and well developed. In section A1, leader and group exchange phrases of equal duration whose tessitura (leader is higher, group is lower) and tonal progression (leader ends on a4, group ends on g4) give a pleasing sense of antecedent-consequent balance. When this material is repeated (A2, mm.4-5), leader and group move their conversation up a perfect fourth (leader ends on d5, group on c5), making for a sense of progression and creating expectation for a new section of material. Capitalizing on this preparation, the composer now (B1, mm.6-9) sets a key image in the song--frogs! Repeating like a drum, the words "frogs, frogs" occur four times to the same rhythm on only one pitch, a4.

In most songs the A section would be reprised at this point but in #19 the middle portion of the song's form is extended to a C section that sets the text's proverb about the man in the termite hill. The tune is static (pendular seconds on g4-a4 with leaps down and back from a4 to d4) but the rhythm of these two phrases is brilliant. The first phrase (m.10) hits strongly on four-beats 2-3-4 but then surprises with a last note that anticipates ONE (pulse 12, bell stroke 7, beat location 4.3). The changes in the second phrase (m.11) may seem insignificant on paper--g4 and a4 (pulses 3, 5) becomes two pulses long, the second g4 is eliminated, the onbeat a4 on four-beat 3 becomes g4--but they have subtle beauty that derives primarily from the song's unisons with strokes in the bell phrase. The second phrase marks for heightened awareness bell strokes 2-3-5-6-7,

encouraging the listener to notice them as an agogic rhythm (♩ ♩. ♩ ♩ ♩) daa-DAH-daa-daa-da) latent within the bell's seven strokes. After this exciting two-phrase rhythm, the A material is quickly reprised and then the whole thing starts again. Because I always look forward to the C section, the song's repetition helps me feel anticipation, fulfillment, and then memory of my satisfaction. Waxing philosophical, we can suggest that giving an aesthetic feeling tone to the experience of time is one of Ewe music's fundamental properties.

Drumming

By accentuating second partials, this composition puts extreme pressure on the four-beat time feel. Kidi plays bounces that precisely match the flam-type figure repeatedly played by the kagan drum; sogo's main drum language begins with a ga stroke on the second partial in beats two and four (2.2, 4.2) and moves to a dzi stroke on the second partial in beats one and three. All this highly syncopated and displaced action--accents on pulses 2, 8 and four-feel beats shifted by one pulse--obliterates ONE. In the recorded performance GFA plays duplets with tsa strokes to mark time between louder strokes, further intensifying the drumming rhythm. In such an offbeat context ga strokes located right on four-beats 1 and 3 are striking in their onbeatness. As we have come to expect, GFA delivers intricate rolling passages, as well.

This drum composition runs parallel to the song, rather than reinforcing the song's rhythm. The combined impact of the singing and drumming creates enormous musical excitement and intensity. Looking at the meaning of the song and the drumming, we see why GFA brought them together: it deals with challenge, defeat, and death.