#21

Song

This is a short song with rapid, percussive alternation between leader and group. The leader always sings the same incomplete motive d5-c5-a4 set to the powerful underlying 3-4-1 force within the bell phrase. The group's first reply returns the tonal focus to d5 where the leader began, but its second reply moves to a feeling of finality on g4; in both cases the group's motion within the four-feel time is 2-3-4-1.

Let's digress briefly to contemplate whether musical theory of the sort presented in these comments is relevant to the way Ewe musicians experience their own music. After encountering my musical-technical critique newcomers to Ewe music frequently wonder about the status of theory among Ewe musicians, asking, "Do they know what they are doing?" Song #21 provides the answer. The rhythmic design of the group part makes clever use of two identical short-long-long-long figures, the first set within four-beats 2-3 and the second within beats 4-1. The short note on pulse 3 (3.1) flips the tune from onbeat to offbeat, the short note on pulse 10 (4.1) turns it back again from offbeat to onbeat; in other words, the long notes in the first figure accentuate the upbeat six-feel, while those in the second fall on the onbeat six feel. Significantly, the short strokes in the bell phrase have exactly the metric consequence--bell stroke 3 flips the phrase from onbeat six to upbeat six, stroke 7 takes the phrase back the other way from upbeat to onbeat. With this in mind, we can understand why Ewe musicians would say that the composer of song #21 is taking a musical idea from the bell phrase and creatively applying it to song. This situation--where a musical idea recurs in different songs and genres--is the norm in Ewe music, which leads me to conclude that Ewe composers and

performers are very much aware of the systematic nature of their music. The issue is about what they do with this awareness. Rather than theorizing about it in the way I am doing here, they use their knowledge to make music. I contend that the theoretical system explicated in my remarks translates into language and notation a highly developed musical way of knowing.

Drumming

Like composition #19, the idea in #20 is second partial accentuation. The kidi phrase could not be more brief--three pulses in duration. Two quick bounces sound on the second partial, followed by presses on the next two pulses, pickup to onbeat. This "kidi tsi tsi" figure occurs in many genres of Ewe dance drumming, especially the great masterwork called Adzogbo. The sogo part also is found in the lead drum part of Adzogbo: ga strokes match the kidi presses, dzi strokes cue the kidi bounces. GFA teaches handedness for the "gagadzi" figure as strong-weak-weak. The unusually short musical period of this rhythmic design exerts a powerful impact, focusing a listener's attention within single four-feel beats. In his "solo" on the recorded performance GFA works mainly within one-beat frames, often contrasting binary and ternary time (dotted eighths versus eighths and quarters). His timing indicates to me that he knows full well that second kidi bounces mark the binary midpoints of four-feel beats and that the kidi figure has 2:3 imbedded within it. As I hear it, GFA actively designs his sogo playing to draw out this subtle quality of the kidi part. So sophisticated is his mastery of Ewe music that in measure 60 he gives dynamic accent to the upbeats of the upbeats, i.e., second and fourth partials within a quartuplet (represented by dotted sixteenth notes).