

Songs of West Africa

Dan Gorlin

A collection of over 80 traditional West African folk songs and chants in 6 languages with translations, annotations and performance notes. Using the companion audio CD you can learn the songs by singing along, just like young Africans do – or just listen and enjoy. Includes music fundamentals, a pronunciation guide, and helpful introductions to West African society, sensibility, and spirituality.



Presented by

Alokli West African Dance

Songs of West Africa

By Dan Gorlin

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Web: www.alokli.com

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This book began as a 20-year collection of class notes, album jackets, field and basement recordings, scribbled cocktail napkins and the like, exchanged lovingly when students of West African music came together to share discoveries. I first learned many of these songs at California Institute of the Arts in Valencia, California, where Seth Kobla Ladzekpo directs an excellent and enduring African music and dance program. Other songs were first “discovered” in C.K. Ladzekpo’s popular U.C. Berkeley classes and in rehearsals with his African Music and Dance Ensemble.

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might reach a larger audience I have no wish to claim undeserved authorship or ownership.

* * *

Every song in this book represents the sweat and inspiration of a great human composer - someone who lived and probably died, and who somehow managed to leave behind something of lasting value to humanity. No less gifted or prolific than the legendary European song composers of their time, these men and women and the divine forces which inspire them are the true authors of this book. I find it impossible to document or even discover their names in most cases, but the songs continue to inspire generations of poets, philosophers, musicians and social visionaries.

Introduction

Scope and Purpose

This is a practical West African songbook, intended as a fun learning tool that can get students singing immediately. I've used various versions of the material with my own students for many years, refining the format gradually to make it more compelling and effective. In conjunction with the audio CD and a bit of perseverance, students can (albeit crudely) simulate the experience of living among people who sing these songs, gradually learning them and coming to understand the important part they play in African communal life.

In addition, I hope the book will serve as an eye-opening introduction to West African people and society. In spite of hundreds of researchers turning out thousands of books, articles and dissertations during this century, there are few useful introductory books available on the subject of African culture, perhaps because books alone can't adequately convey the most fundamental experiences of African life. This book combines explanation and participation to provide a unique and effective learning experience. The songs of Africa are an excellent window into the minds of her people because so much of their cultural heritage is preserved via song.

West Africa is a region of tremendous cultural diversity, and in fact this book represents songs from just a few of the many ethnic groups in the area. My sources are master *Aɲlɔ-Eve*¹ performing artists and scholars from a large and respected hereditary family of dancers and musicians. Most of the songs come from *Aɲlɔ-Eve* traditions or from others which are closely related culturally or historically - those that don't are seen through the eyes of *Aɲlɔ-Eve* informants. Though this narrow cultural focus has its drawbacks, in this case I think it works in the reader's favor. Books that discuss several disparate cultures can be interesting reading, but it's harder to get a feel for the people because there's less information about each culture. To appreciate the songs of Africa, it's best to understand as much as possible about the people who sing them.

Much as I've tried to convey truthful information, there is seldom one "right" answer or description when it comes to African oral traditions. Many of these dances are practiced by several ethnic groups and/or in several different locations. For example, there are long-established *Agbekɔ* dance clubs in many towns, most notably Aflao, Anyako, Afiadenyigba and Kedzi along the coast of southeastern Ghana. Each town has its own way of doing things – slightly different songs, drum parts, dance movements, sometimes different names for the same style – and yet, the traditions share a common root and are

¹ Pronounced AHNG-loh EH-vay (the word *Eve* is usually written *Ewe* in English text for lack of the special *v* character). Throughout this book, an extended alphabet is used to spell African language passages. Please see Appendix A for help in pronouncing special characters.

mutually recognized as being essentially the same dance. Oral traditions have a build-in tendency towards adaptation and variation, without which the whole process would become quite irrelevant to new generations and eventually die.

Language

In books that require an occasional African word or phrase, it is common practice to change the spelling of African words to fit the English typewriter keyboard - but for a 7-language songbook that just wasn't a practical option. Instead, I use an extended alphabet to write phrases in the *Eve*, *Fɔ̃*, *Gũ*, *Lobi*, *Yevegbe* and *Yoruba* languages. I simplify things greatly by omitting tonal markings (some of these languages are highly tonal; a slight difference in pitch can completely change meaning). Tonal notation might be useful for a native speaker or serious language student, but for the vast majority of readers it would only add confusion. In Appendix A I've included a simple pronunciation guide which readers should find helpful (but which still ignores tonality).

Readers may also notice that some Western-style conventions for capitalization have been adopted, specifically with regards to proper names and places, and also for the many spiritual deities which inhabit *Eve* mythology. This is done for the sake of clarity, and in the case of deities to show appropriate respect for the subject matter.

Presentation

From my experience as a student and teacher of African traditions, I know there is no easy way to overcome common Western misconceptions about African art and society. Even the highly motivated student needs to encounter new ideas from several different perspectives before they start to make sense. An experience I often have as a teacher is that of explaining something several times and in several ways, being rewarded with a blank stare each time, until one day the student finally gets the idea and exclaims, "Hey, that's important! Why did you wait so long to tell me that?"

With that in mind, the book tries to present especially important ideas in more than one way and at different points in the learning process. Bits of the big picture are distributed throughout the book like eggs at an Easter Egg hunt. Some of the more important and surprising aspects of African culture are summarized in introductory sections preceding the main body of song text. Each section of songs also begins with its own introduction to the dance or religion from which the songs originate, and many of the song translations explain particular ideas in more illuminating detail.

A Word About Song Translations

Folk songs throughout the world have much in common. The good ones have at least two *layers of meaning*: a superficial descriptive layer, which may not even make sense from a language perspective; and a deeper political, ethical or spiritual message that can mean vastly different things to different people. Truly great songs speak to us on many

different levels. New meanings become apparent as we pass through the stages of our own lives.

Folk songs often rely heavily on *imagery and metaphor*. For instance, songs about trains, lemons or rivers require personal experience with these things to be fully understood. Can a person who has never seen or heard a train or who knows nothing of its role in Western civilization appreciate a song that features a train as its main metaphor? Perhaps, but that person will need a lot of insightful help from a translator.

African folk songs are similar to their Western counterparts, but there are some striking differences which make translation even more troublesome:

- The language is often very old and full of ancient historical, cultural and religious references, not all of which are currently understood (like reading Shakespeare or Chaucer without annotations).
- Some African languages have been evolving for a very long time and are interrelated with an elaborate and equally old mythology. As a result, they can be remarkably expressive with very few syllables, so a short phrase may take several lines of English to translate.
- Languages are often mixed within a single song. It may require a translator fluent in several African tongues to give a subtle interpretation. The original words may have been corrupted or lost altogether when adopted and sung by people who didn't know the original language.

There's also the problem of *proverbs*. The *Ewe* language in particular is so rich with proverbs which are commonly understood that they become an important part of the language. We have proverbs in English of course, but we don't have as many, we can't think of them as quickly, and we don't rely heavily on them for daily conversation.

As a simple example, imagine a song that goes like this:

Oh you can lead a horse to water, but you can't make him drink.
I guess every fool has his story.
Yes, and still, still waters, they often run deep.
Oh mama, don't judge a book by its cover.

Now translate this into any other language and watch the meaning melt away before your eyes.

Cool Vibes, Everybody

Does all of this mean you can never appreciate these songs like a native African? Not at all. Given the vast diversity of African cultures and the way in which traditions pass between them, it's quite common for Africans to sing songs in unfamiliar languages and with obscure references, which is exactly what you'll be doing very shortly. They're still great songs or nobody would bother to sing them. So relax and enjoy them in a way that works for you, and you will be doing pretty much as the Africans do.

I do hope that you'll read each translation with enlightened skepticism, allowing your own human sensibilities to add whatever my descriptions lack. The most profound

expressions of art can't be quantified, discussed, analyzed or parsed. They simply wait for an observer who can fill in the blanks.

History and Religion

History of the Anlo-Eve People

The *Eve* people of West Africa live primarily in coastal regions of southeastern Ghana and southern Togo, divided by a border established by Western leaders for political rather than cultural reasons. These regions are collectively known as Eveland. Among the several autonomous districts of southern Eveland, the *Anlo* district is the most populous and influential, often the focus of Western-style research on the *Eve*.

The *Anlo-Eve* came to their present home in southeastern Ghana by a long series of migrations through what is now Nigeria, Benin, and Togo. Oral tradition suggests their original home may have been as far away as the Sudan, but these legends are very old and sometimes contradictory. Each migration seems to have been forced by a sudden turn of events which proved unfavorable to the ancestral *Eve*; wars, persecution, over-population, inadequate land, famine and the quest for adventure are among the probable causes.

By 1600 the *Eve* had settled in the city of Ijotsie in what is now southern Togo, where they were treated well and prospered for about seventy years. But a change in the local leadership brought more persecution, and eventually the *Eve* were forced to stage a daring escape from the walled city of Ijotsie. Legends of the *Eve* ordeal at Ijotsie are strikingly similar to Biblical accounts of the Jews in Egypt; both tell of a short period of prosperity, a new king who inflicted hardships, a heroic leader who managed to intimidate the hostile king, a daring escape, and a long journey to a new home.

From Ijotsie the *Eve* split into several groups and traveled west. By the late 17th century they had come to settle the coastal territory of Eveland. They were never again forced to flee from oppression, but their struggles were far from over. Their new home was situated along the Gold Coast, a region of West Africa where the natural balance of power between ethnic groups had been seriously disrupted by the presence of European settlement, trade and colonization. In particular, the human slave trade had already introduced economic forces which would devastate inter-tribal relations in the region, not to mention millions of human lives.

Of the several tribes of *Eve* who settled in the Gold Coast, the *Anlo* were regarded as the most war-like during this period of history. They had settled near the coast where slave raiding and trading were heaviest. The *Anlo* found themselves drawn into continuous wars, skirmishes and petty disputes with their new African neighbors, and later with Danish and British traders and military forces in the area. They fought for territory, plunder, slaves, fishing grounds, and in defense of their settlements. At one point even north and south Eveland were drawn into opposing camps, resulting in an *Eve* civil war.

For the next 200 years, their struggle continued until the *Aɲlɔ* were finally defeated and resigned themselves to British rule in the late 19th century. After becoming a crown colony in 1874, the Gold Coast remained relatively peaceful and prosperous. The *Aɲlɔ* warriors set aside their weapons of war to become fishermen, weavers, farmers, and traders; they had finally found a peaceful home. In 1957, the Gold Coast gained independence from British rule and became the modern state of Ghana.

Aɲlɔ Towns and Military Divisions

For the *Aɲlɔ*, the 250 or so years preceding the 20th century were a time of constant danger and military confrontation. This war-like past is reflected strongly in their contemporary communities and traditions.

As the *Aɲlɔ* settled new territory they would always do so with military expediency in mind. In every major *Aɲlɔ* township, three fighting divisions are represented: *Lashibi*, *Adotri*, and *Woe*. These hereditary divisions were originally established for purposes of military precision, representing the right (or east), center, and left (or west) wings of the battlefield. They enabled any town to be instantly mobilized and coordinated for war. Each division was a distinct community with its own sense of identity. Each carried out its duties with a fierce sense of determination and pride. If a battle was lost because a flank gave way, the responsible division would be deeply humiliated by the defeat.

Today the *Aɲlɔ* live in peace with their neighbors, so the nature of these divisions has become political rather than military. Although modern *Aɲlɔ* no longer engage in tribal warfare, the same sort of patriotic competition between neighboring divisions still exists and plays a vital role in *Aɲlɔ* society. This competition is now expressed primarily through participation in community *dance-drumming* activities.

Religion in West Africa

African songs can't be discussed without some understanding of traditional African religious practice, because virtually all aspects of life in Africa are imbued with spirituality. Our Western concept of religion is so very different (and in some cases so inflexible) that I'll start with a discussion of what African religion is *not* in order to address some common misconceptions:

- Religion in Africa is *not* something reserved for a certain time or place, or a last resort to engage only in times of crisis. In fact, there is often no formal distinction drawn between sacred and secular, religious and non-religious, spiritual and material. In many African languages there is no word for religion, because a person's life is a total embodiment of his or her philosophy.
- Traditional African religious practices are *not* exclusive in the way we are used to in the West (although it is true that some sects are secretive to non-initiates). Individuals commonly participate in several distinct forms of worship, and they are not thought to conflict in any way - rather they are considered cumulative means of achieving the same result, which is a better quality of life.

- In Judeo-Christian theology, it is assumed that the same spiritual connection with one God will work for everybody, but African religions don't work that way. Africans call on various deities in an attempt to influence their lives, sometimes successfully, sometimes not. The methods of worship which work for one individual may not work for another, because results depend on building personal relationships with particular deities over time.
- When people grow old and die in our part of the world, it is a process of gradual detachment and finally leaving forever. The dead are believed to move on to a distant place where we no longer can reach them; they cease to interact with the physical world and in time we forget them. In Africa, quite the opposite is true. As people age they are accorded more and more deference and respect. The deceased continue to play an active role in family and community life, and if anything become *more* respected and influential because of their deceased status.

Ritual and Cosmology

Sacred rituals are an integral part of daily African life. They are interwoven with every aspect of human endeavor, from the profound to the mundane. From birth to death, every transition in a individual's life is marked by some form of ritual observance. In a practical sense, these ubiquitous rituals are at the heart of religious practice in Africa. They are the means by which individuals nurture relationships with ancestors and other divinities.

What motivates this extreme devotion to ritual in daily life? How do people maintain a high level of integration between the spiritual and material, the sacred and practical? The answer lies largely in the West African concept of how the natural world works, the physical and spiritual relationship between man and the universe.

In this view, the universe consists of dynamic forces which are constantly influencing each other. Humans (both living and dead), animals, vegetables and minerals all possess this vital force in varying amounts. The supernatural entities which can benefit or hinder the endeavors of mankind are also composed of these natural forces, but to enlist their aid the human component is considered especially vital. In a sense, each divinity is created and empowered by the concentration and devotion of the worshiper, whose own life force combines with that of, say, an animal or a river to bring the deity into power. If there is no human effort, there is no god, and thus no chance to improve the quality of life.

In *Eve* mythology there is a supreme God called *Mawuga Kitikata*, the Great and Overall God. This entity is too remote and inaccessible to be of practical importance in daily life and so is not worshipped directly. There are numerous other spirits, deities and agents which act as intermediaries on behalf of mankind, and which are worshipped directly because they have direct influence over the affairs of man. Sometimes these agents are worshipped symbolically in the form of natural objects such as a stones or rivers; in light of the previous paragraph, however, you can see that the Hollywood notion of a simple-minded native praying to a statue or a rock tells us more about our own misconceptions than about the way Africans experience the world.

So to an African, everything in this world and beyond is explained in spiritual terms; consequently, nothing happens that is not interpreted as some form of divine intervention. Gods and deceased ancestors require the proper respectful observances in order that they might maintain a benevolent interest in the affairs of mankind, and thus lend a helping hand when called upon to do so. The more divinities that a person can call upon in prayer, the better his or her chances of success. For example, imagine yourself running into trouble and asking around for help. If you approach a person you've kept in touch with and who knows you quite well, aren't you more likely to get help than if you ask a stranger? The divine world is thought to work in the same way.

This outlook leads individuals to a relentless pursuit of the knowledge and proper use of these natural forces, learning to manifest the supernatural agents which can prevent sickness, improve harvests, ward off danger or death, build a happy marriage, bless children, and so forth. This ancient, immutable way of life motivates respectful attitudes towards traditional values and fellow human beings in ways that no legal or educational system can hope to match.

Ancestor Worship and Respect for Elders

Ancestor worship is common in West Africa and is an important part of *Aṅlɔ-Eve* religious practice. Among the *Aṅlɔ*, the dead are believed to live on in the world of spirits. In this form, they possess supernatural powers of various sorts. They watch over their living descendants with a kindly interest, but have the ability to cause trouble if they are neglected or dishonored. Proper attention to the ancestors, especially at funerals and memorial services, results in helpful intervention on behalf of the living. It also ensures that the pious individual receives favorable treatment when he or she inevitably joins the ancestors in the spirit world.

In light of these beliefs, it's easy to understand why the elderly are treated with great respect in African societies. Among people who worship ancestors hundreds of years after their death, reverence for age takes on a mystical quality, as though the living were slowly becoming gods. Individuals of advanced age are identified with some of the awe and fear normally associated with the dead. They will soon join their forefathers in the spirit world to become divinities and wield supernatural powers over the living; it would be foolish to treat them poorly now.

Mystical beliefs aside, each old man or woman is regarded as a storehouse of priceless, irreplaceable knowledge and secrets to success in life. Because they have witnessed and participated in historical times, each is appreciated as a bearer of unusual wisdom and experience in a society where custom and tradition are cherished. Guidance is often solicited from the elderly to resolve questions of tradition or to settle personal or family disputes.

Dance-Drumming

Individual vs. Collective Sensibility

In this chapter I introduce necessary concepts that are particularly difficult for Western students to grasp. I should warn you that the subject of *collective sensibility* has probably earned me more blank stares as a teacher than all others combined, but it's probably the most important thing I can tell you about African culture, and perhaps about your own culture by comparison.

When Africans dance, they are drumming. When they drum, they are dancing. When they sing, the songs are part of the dancing and drumming. The way they approach all group activities is fundamentally and qualitatively different; what one person does is a part of what someone else is doing, and the two together are a part of a larger whole. Whatever they do, wherever and whenever they do it, *they do it collectively*. This simple statement highlights a profound gap in Western comprehension of African art forms and society, one that we must try to bridge in order to play African music with the proper sensibility.

There are many ways to appreciate the music and dance of Africa – attending concerts, dancing to the drums, studying movements and music, building a collection of recordings – but any student who hasn't explored the social context, the way Africans themselves think about and practice these traditions, is missing a crucial piece of the puzzle. African music and dance, like African society, is a collective experience, and as such it is the single most important force that binds people together.

Dancing and Drumming vs. Dance-Drumming

To practice African music effectively, we must learn to think of music the way Africans do – not as an intellectual exercise or rite of passage, but because the most important skills required to perform the music are social, not technical. The first step towards bridging this gap is to add a new term to our language, because we need to name things before we can understand them. When Africans are dancing, drumming and singing, what they are really doing is *dance-drumming*, a term coined in recent literature for a concept which is so foreign that the English language cannot otherwise express it.

An African friend once confided to me how strange it seemed that a grant he had received for dancing didn't include money for drummers. He might have felt the same way about a grant for drumming. In fact, the way we separate dance and music in the West is downright odd from a global perspective, a telling example of how we are moving towards cultural specialization and disintegration. Even when we combine the two, the bond between them seems tenuous at best. Music is used as a backdrop, to set a

mood or to delineate sections of choreography – or it may be the main dish and the dance added for flavoring – but there is never a one-to-one correspondence between musical events and dance movements.

It's important to understand how differently Africans view things in this regard. We see music and dance as two art forms which sometimes complement each other; Africans see the two as inseparable, two halves of the same body. We see them as specialized pursuits separate from mainstream society, a noble statement about what humanity may someday become; Africans see them as the very thread from which society is woven, a daily enactment of what society is and should be right now. We do music and dance *separately*; Africans do them *collectively*.

Dancers and musicians in the West are distinct subcultures with different values and aspirations. When they come together to perform, the mixture is sometimes the social equivalent of oil and water; they may occupy the same room, but they seldom occupy the same space. Relatively speaking, dancers ignore musicians and musicians ignore dancers. At parties and dance classes, drummers can play for hours in a room full of dancers and virtually ignore them the whole time. If some of the drummers drift out of time or play the wrong part, even dancers with well-developed rhythmic skills might not notice for several minutes.

In African dance-drumming, dancers and drummers are the same people. That's not to say that all drummers are great dancers or the other way around, but you can't do one without knowing something about the other. The drum music is literally part of the dance, and vice-versa. It's quite common to see dancers and drummers correcting each other and exchanging advice. Dancers are judged for their musicality and drummers for their ability to inspire energetic dancing. If a dancer stumbles or a singer stutters, the drummers might skip a beat in confusion. If a drummer plays the wrong part or drifts out of time, the dancers stop dancing immediately because they are unable to continue. If the singers stop singing, the drummers and dancers lose enthusiasm and the performance becomes dull and lifeless. No part can continue without the others; the connection between them is never broken.

What's Missing – Things To Notice

This may be a good time to stop and examine our own way of doing things so that we may better understand African dance-drumming by comparison. In particular, we should look for instances of individual versus collective sensibility; of concentrating on the parts and overlooking the whole; of emphasizing personal expression over interpersonal interaction and communal goals. Since we're dealing with the performing arts in this book, I will limit the discussion to that domain, but the same things can be observed just as well in society as a whole.

To begin with, dancers and musicians trained in Western institutions concentrate on learning individual steps and parts, then combining them to make a finished performance piece. In even the best performing ensembles, the whole is viewed in terms of its technical or esthetic qualities, but almost never as a living social organism. There is often little or no attention paid to the collective awareness which in Africa binds all

performers into a common experience. In rural Africa, children grow up observing and even participating in the traditions they will someday take part in. Only later do they begin to study the parts, the drum patterns and dance steps, long after the whole is clearly understood as a social institution rather than a performance piece.

Audiences in the West do not consciously view performing groups as social entities. After the show, they are unlikely to comment on the social aspects of the performance, other than to observe that the performers “seemed to be having fun.” They are much more likely to have noticed individual emotional expression or technical prowess, or lack thereof. After all, we think of performers as professional artists and entertainers, not as members of a community. Whether there are one, two or a hundred dancers or musicians on stage, we judge them primarily by individual achievements, far less by the social interaction between them. In contrast, African dance-drumming is judged primarily by the cohesiveness of the community which is performing, since that is precisely its purpose. If the people do not perform well together, it is a shameful affair.

In spite of this, the same Western audiences wildly appreciate performing groups whose members obviously enjoy each other’s company and enthusiasm. I think the reason is pretty obvious; in our culture, people would desperately love to share common purpose and creative expression with others, but seldom get the opportunity. Watching performers do just that is a great vicarious thrill. It’s such an important element that the practice of performers pretending to have fun with their colleagues on stage has become standard professional craftsmanship – and for the most part audiences are so desperate for this stimulation that they are willing to settle for an act.

Collective sensibility (or lack thereof) is especially noticeable when people sing together. When Western students learn to sing African songs, whether we’ve had musical training or not, the biggest problem we have is not with the accent, nor intonation (singing in tune), not even the rhythm; it is how we perceive ourselves in relation to the group that stands out clearly as un-African. Individuals are self-conscious, concerned mostly with what they themselves are doing and whether it is esthetically or technically correct. Even after subtleties have been mastered, there is little awareness of how each singer affects others nearby or the group as a whole. In fact, singers actively avoid eye contact with others. Most students sing softly so as not to call attention to themselves, or don’t sing at all in the hope that no one will notice. Some with more confidence may sing forcefully but still in isolation from others, overpowering nearby singers.

There is always a shared awareness of the totality when Africans sing, dance and play music together. The singers feel the way in which each voice blends with the chorus, and the chorus in turn adds its collective voice to the drums and dance to create a single living organism. Individual performers feed off of each other’s palpable spirit and enthusiasm. The confidence apparent in each voice, drum or moving body reflects the pride of the community, not of the individual, and so there is never a question of self-confidence. There is a common understanding that each individual must contribute whatever he or she can to the life of the performance, and that the human, emotional quality of participation is far more important than technical skills.

Crossing Over – Things To Try

In short, getting started in African dance-drumming is not just a matter of learning tunes, steps and drum licks; there are new social skills to acquire as well. Armed with all of this intellectual baggage about individual versus collective sensibility, how does one make the transition to participating with the proper social attitude? Let me offer some concrete suggestions to experiment with while singing in groups (the principles are the same whether you're singing, dancing, or drumming). With a little courage and guidance, it's easier than you might think.

First of all, use your voice to feed the voices of the people next to you. If they're singing weakly and you have a bit of confidence to spare, try reinforcing their sound with your own. Don't think about how your voice sounds alone, only how the two or three sound together, and make the most of that sound. This might not make sense to you until you try it, but give it a shot. It really works.

Next, remember that your job as an individual is to contribute what you can to the success of the group. What your fellow singers need from you is not so much sound or technique, but *spirit*. As you sing, look around you and notice where the enthusiasm is, and where there could be more. Sometimes just sharing a brief smile with someone can have amazing results. Don't try to do more than you're comfortable doing; that's not the idea. You're supposed to contribute *what* you can, not *more* than you can. Try to imagine what the song circle would be like if everyone simply contributed what they could. Wouldn't that make a tremendous difference? If you start doing it, pretty soon everyone will; that's human nature.

Finally, a word about confidence. When you sing, let your confidence come from the pride you feel for the group, not for yourself. Your sense of self-worth may come and go, belief in your own abilities may waver, but community pride is something you can always count on. Try to identify more with the group than with yourself. When you've mastered this, you will never feel shy about singing in groups – and ironically, identifying with a community can be a source of personal pride and self-worth. If you've ever wondered why Africans as a group seem to enjoy remarkable self-confidence, now you know at least part of the reason.

An Institution of Higher Learning

Having touched on the *what* and *how* of African dance-drumming, it's time to discuss the *why*; specifically, why are these traditions so important? Africans who practice traditional dance-drumming generally do so because it's entertaining and because it fulfills obligations to family and society; but like all worthy traditions throughout the world, these institutions exist for many good reasons other than entertainment. There are several levels of education and acculturation going on within this traditional framework. Songs play an important part in the learning process, but the music and dance as well have been carefully crafted over hundreds of generations to serve society in several important ways.

Among the *Aḡlḡ*, physical strength and skill are trained from birth, and are instilled largely through the dance-drumming traditions. Virtually all gatherings and social events feature some form of dance-drumming festivities. The dances are physically demanding; they require great skill and a refined sense of balance and timing. They are also fun, so just about everyone participates. Young children trying to mimic their parents soon mature into formidable dancers and musicians. In the process, a wide range of physical and mental skills are enhanced.

There is also a great deal of social acculturation going on here. How to lead, how to follow, how to succeed, how to think and behave in ways that benefit everybody – it's all taught through dance-drumming. Individuals who practice dance-drumming are learning the very same skills that will allow them to work together collectively towards improving the communal quality of life. You will learn more about this as you explore the songs in this book, so I only mention it in passing here – but if I had to choose the most important or fundamental purpose of African dance-drumming, this would be it.

There is still more to learn through dance-drumming than just physical and social skills. As we delve further into the esoteric aspects of traditional African life, it becomes more difficult to describe in terms commonly understood in the West. New ideas often require new ways of thinking. Nevertheless, we have much to gain by exploring beyond the boundaries of our own understanding.

In a remarkable way, these disciplines teach a state of mind which can overcome great obstacles, which can turn ordinary people into heroes. In the face of surprising and terrible circumstances, warriors must be able to remain calm, to preserve the free use of reason and judgment. The mind must be raised above the fear and confusion which anticipation of great peril can create. Dance-drumming prepares individuals on many levels to face such moments of crisis. If a flight simulator can teach pilots to react calmly in dangerous situations, why not a life simulator for the human spirit?

The artistic elements of *Aḡlḡ-Eve* music are not just abstract phenomena; they represent and recreate some of life's real challenges. A main beat scheme (the most fundamental beat or pulse, the place where you clap your hands) represents a strong purpose in life. Secondary beat schemes (another simultaneous and inescapable way of feeling the music) represent an obstacle. Tension is created by *cross-rhythms*, the customary polyrhythmic overlapping of beat schemes which is at the heart of all *Eve* music and dance. Performers face the difficult challenge of integrating and balancing these opposing forces.

For the young student struggling to master a musical style, training and correction is likely to come in the form of philosophy rather than technical advice. Lack of subtlety in handling sophisticated rhythmic contrasts is criticized as lack of a strong sense of purpose, inability to balance the contrasting obstacles in life. Blocking off or ignoring a beat scheme to ease the tension of opposing cross-rhythms is criticized, sometimes severely, as unwillingness to face life's challenges. The student is guided by proverbs – such as *To solve a problem you must convert obstacles into stepping stones* – then expected to independently apply such abstract advice to the task at hand.

Finally, there is an elusive element of spiritual growth associated with dance-drumming, elusive because our language lacks the words and concepts to discuss it. Some styles of

music, when understood and performed correctly, have an immediate physiological effect on both performers and audience. Like a prayer or meditation, it acts as a catalyst for mystical experience. Two or more cross-rhythms can fill your head and force the cessation of conscious thought, allowing other channels of communication to open. On religious festival days, entire towns are filled with such music, carrying for miles to neighboring villages. When my African friends describe childhood memories of being surrounded by such music, I can't help thinking that their lives have been profoundly enriched by the experience, and they seem to feel the same way.

Dance Clubs

Introduction to Dance Clubs

Among the *Aḡlɔ-Eve*, traditional dance-drumming is organized into formal institutions called *habobowo* (in English, *dance-drumming societies* or simply *dance clubs*). It's because of these clubs that ancient and modern traditions both survive and adapt to serve new generations. As you will see, there is no adequate English term for these clubs because of the many ways they enhance the lives of their members, and also because of how inseparable they are from the culture in which they exist.

There are several kinds of dance clubs and the terminology for them gets confusing, but they have many things in common. Most groups practice and perform one specific style of dance-drumming, such as *Atsiã*, *Gahũ* or *Agbadza*. Group membership is normally restricted to interested men & women from a particular district and of a specific age group. The groups are usually governed by formal leadership and strict rules; sometimes they even have a written constitution. The most important rule requires members to attend rehearsals and performances, with failure punishable by a fine. Other rules might govern social behavior among members and financial donations.

Beyond these similarities, the features of these organizations can vary widely. Some societies are generations old, while others have been formed more recently - especially those organized in cities by immigrants from rural villages. Some groups meet weekly or monthly, others may come together only for funerals or special events. In some clubs, especially in the cities, members make monthly contributions to the treasury. Others ask for money only from new members, or only when they perform at a funeral (contributions to help the grieving family).

Why People Participate

Another aspect that can vary is whether participation is voluntary or compulsory. Dance clubs are sometimes formed to recreate the more specialized cultural, historical or sacred dance forms like *Gahũ*, *Agbekɔ* or *Gadzo*. Performing these dances properly requires unusual dedication and commitment, so these groups are voluntary in nature and the members tend to be a small subset of the community.

But in the larger sense, dance-drumming is considered a compulsory obligation to one's family and society. It is the very core of community life and everybody participates, especially in rural areas where traditional values are still strong. At most secular or social dance performances, every able-bodied community member turns out to help make the event a success. Everybody dances, sings and/or plays an instrument to the best of his or her ability.

These activities are obligatory because dance-drumming is a demonstration of the collective will to work together towards a common purpose. Much of the acculturation required for people to live and act collectively happens at these performances. Because it's so important, the consequences of non-participation can be severe; self-isolation is a bitter experience in a communal society where members survive and prosper largely from their own collective efforts.

Social obligations aside, there are positive and compelling reasons for individuals to participate. For instance, the dance clubs provide a social life and a cohesive community to depend on in difficult times. Of particular importance, the group will help out when an active member dies or loses an immediate relative. The family of the deceased can count on having musicians and dancers for a proper funeral, and probably financial contributions as well. For religious reasons, the threat of being denied the proper rites of passage upon one's death is severe.

Another good reason to belong is that participants earn status and recognition as active members of the community - not just performers, but their financial sponsors as well. Dance clubs attract wealthy patrons of the arts for the same reasons that Western orchestras, operas, and dance companies do.

Starting a New Dance Club

When a new dance club is formed - usually by young people - there are standard procedures which the founders follow in order to be taken seriously and to receive financial backing. First, they must thoroughly learn the material they will be performing. A club wishing to adopt an existing dance-drumming style will send representatives to live for months or years among the originators of that style. They will stay as long as necessary to properly master the music and dance. The teachers are eager to pass on the tradition correctly, and the young people want their teachers to be proud of them, so everyone takes this process seriously.

Then, back home in secretive night rehearsals (*hakpa*), the club will rehearse for many months before subjecting themselves to the scrutiny of chiefs, dignitaries and nearby communities. The group leaders teach the songs, musical structure, discipline and customs required for a respectable performance to the rest of the group. If necessary the core members will return to the founders for more instruction, as often as it takes to get everything just right. Although great care is taken to preserve the essential stylistic elements of the music and dance, it is also common practice to carefully add original material to the old - but to do so without spoiling the original style requires the best efforts of a master composer and choreographer.

When the performers and their advisors finally feel the group is ready, it's time for the outdoorings (*digo*). This is the critical point in the life of a club when their art is first presented to the public. The group must adopt a name at this time if they haven't already. For example, a club performing *Gadzo* may call themselves *Gadzoviawo* (The Gadzo Society or The Gadzo People), or they may use a larger name, like *Kofi Gadzoviawo* (Kofi's Gadzo Society). An *Agbeko* group from Anyako might call itself *Anyako Agbekoviawo* (the Anyako Agbeko Society).

On the day of the performance, the group starts out early in the morning with appropriate prayers and blessings, then processes into town at dawn with bells and songs calling attention to their event. Since preparations are sometimes made in secret, the performance may be a pleasant surprise to almost everyone in town. Spectators of all ages gather excitedly at the community circle to watch and participate in the show, which may last all day. Other neighboring communities also come to watch and hopefully admire the proceedings.

The reaction of the chiefs and elders is vitally important at this stage, since they are the undisputed caretakers of tradition. If your club does not live up to their standards, the response is swift and harsh; put simply, that is the end of your group and you will never live it down. Your family, your entire district is disgraced. As one man put it, "A hundred years later they will still be laughing at you." Harsh as the criticism can be, it is not mean-spirited. Everyone understands the need to preserve the potency and vitality of these traditions. A poor performance can weaken society and dishonor the ancestors; both are shameful and potentially dangerous things to do.

Traditional Leadership Roles

Although the entire community puts its best effort into dance-drumming performances, individuals do participate to varying degrees depending on their experience, leadership and artistic abilities. The most experienced members fill a hierarchy of leadership positions which remain pretty much the same across all dance clubs.

At the top is a committee of male and female *elders* (*vumegawo* and *vudadawo*) who represent the chiefs and dignitaries of the community. They are like a Board of Directors, providing a respected source of authority and advice to ensure that performances are based on solid traditional values, and also filling necessary administrative roles.

Below them is the *master composer* (*hesinɔ*), followed directly by the *master drummer* (*azagunɔ*). These two provide the experienced leadership which makes good performances possible. The composer is the guiding creative force of the group. This master artist is responsible for writing fresh songs and music to keep the tradition alive, and often acts as head song leader as well. He or she creates the distinct artistic texture which makes the club's music unique. No new dance club can survive long without at least one competent composer in its ranks, although a well-established club may outlive its original composers on the strength of accomplished singers who can remember the song repertoire.

The master drummer is the artistic director who guides the entire ensemble in their pursuit of excellence. He is almost invariably the group's best and most experienced drummer, and is ideally an accomplished dancer as well. He leads rehearsals, drilling the performers until they meet his high standards. In performances, he acts as master of ceremonies and controls many aspects of the event; he starts and stops the music, chooses tempos and musical sections, corrects musicians who forget a part, interacts with the dancers, and chooses the order and duration of their dance movements. If things

start to get dull he exhorts the performers to greater enthusiasm. The success of each performance rests largely in his hands.

Beneath the composer and master drummer are several supporting roles. The *ringleaders* (*tonuglawo*) are experienced participants with leadership potential; they inspire and exhort the performers along the dance arena and provide them with noble examples of participation for them to emulate. The *support song leaders* (*haxiawo*) assist the composer in leading and directing the singing. The *whips* (*kadawo*) enforce group discipline and secure the attendance of community members at every performance. In clubs that perform styles like *Agbeko* or *Gahũ* where the dancers are specialists and separate from the general community of spectator/participants, there may also be male and female *dance leaders* as well. These men and women represent the dancers to group leadership, and act as role models and counselors to the other dancers.

The next level of performers are the *supporting drummers*, who assist the master drummer in creating a solid musical foundation for the singers and dancers to build upon. The rest of the ensemble occupies the lowest level of the performing hierarchy; they sing and dance, and at times accompany the music with rattles and clapping. From composer to novice hand-clapper, everyone understands that each person must give his or her best effort in order for the performance to succeed and for the community to remain strong.

Composers and Songs

Composers and Society

Songs play a vitally important role in African society; like many things about African life, however, this may be difficult to fully appreciate at first. A song might be a political advertisement, a call for social justice, a taunt to an adversary, an act of courtship, a cheer, a punishment, a boast, a memorial, a prank, a petition for higher wages, a memorial to great deeds, a demonstration of respect, a history lesson, a call to revolution, a reminder to wear condoms ... you get the idea. Practically everything worth doing in Africa has some sort of music associated with it, and every music has its songs. From peasants to politicians, everyone knows that songs are often the best way to reach people.

All of this makes song composers very important people in the scheme of things, and begins to explain why they command such respect. In Western culture, the politicians and social activists must be master media manipulators, because their messages are delivered to the people through television, radio, newspapers, and the like. In West Africa, the movers and shakers of people and ideas must use composers or be composers themselves to get their ideas across, because music is the prime medium and composers are the masters of that medium.

In a larger sense, the composer's role in African society is to create an image of a good and desirable life – not so much reflecting the life that people actually lead, but rather an ideal that everyone can aspire to. In a process refined by countless generations, these social visionaries and their idealistic images are put to work constantly reevaluating and redefining society's most critical assumptions and values. In the normal course of dance-drumming activities, the entire town helps to define the desirable attributes of communal life, then actively molds its citizens to conform to these ideals of ethics and behavior.

Here's how it works. Composers rise to the rank by their ability to move and inspire people, and by the potency of their ideas. The composer's visions are presented to the community in the form of new songs. A process of natural selection weeds out songs which have a weak message or which people find disagreeable; these simply won't get sung. On the other hand, songs which achieve widespread popularity are sung repeatedly in social and religious settings. Their messages are absorbed at an early age by young audiences. Lyrics remembered from childhood return to mind later in life to guide and encourage the developing individual, and eventually to change the very fabric of society.

Common Song Themes

What kinds of songs do composers write in Africa? There is no fixed answer to that question because African traditions are always evolving. We can learn something, however, by exploring a body of traditional songs for common subjects. Although each song has its own creative life, songs with these themes seem especially popular and occur repeatedly in this book:

- **Enthusiasm songs** – Cheers and exhortations to liven a performance.
Let's be lively and enjoy ourselves, we'll be at our best today. We'll dance and play with energy and vitality. Everyone will be proud of our fine performance.
- **We are sanctioned songs** – Confidence-building and self-congratulations.
We will do what we have planned. The most important people say we're doing a good job. If you don't wish us success, why not go somewhere and die?
- **Morale and self-esteem songs** – Finding dignity in the face of adversity.
These outsiders see us as animals, as some kind of dirt. Our splendid heritage and civilized ways make them look like barbarians, but they can't appreciate that. We follow our irreproachable ancestors; there is nothing wrong with us.
- **Personal growth songs** – Proverbs that guide individual development.
Turn obstacles into stepping stones. Keep your insides as clean as your outsides. Tend to the little things for a spiritual life.
- **Ethical conduct songs** – Social lessons repeated often, but without naming individuals (although a small town may have a particular offender in mind).
Don't commit adultery. Don't be stingy about money. Care for the needy. Don't be a gossip. Don't laugh at a neighbor's misfortune.
- **Castigation songs** – Somebody has done something atrocious and is mentioned by name. The offender will hear the song everywhere (if it's good) and will be forced to leave town. The ultimate form of African social justice. *Kayiboe has molested a child. Can you believe what some people will do?*
- **Religious instruction songs** – Rules for various ritual situations.
Perform rituals faithfully. Do them correctly to ensure our future. When this pattern of seeds is cast, take the following action. After this, you must do that.
- **Altered state songs** – Ritual chants which induce various spiritual states.
We will enter a spiritual state to protect ourselves from weapons (or other less tangible forms of assault). The evil will pass over us but have no effect.
- **Leadership / role model songs** – Praise for great leaders present and past.
We are inspired by our great leaders. Look at Hede, see how he helps us. Or: Where are the great leaders of the past, now that we really need them?
- **Mourning songs** – Commissioned for the funerals of important individuals.
Here lies the casket of a fine man. The house of a great warrior is left vacant.

- **Political action songs** – Calls to arms that rally the people to fight injustice.
Let's work together to overthrow corruption and greed. Our songs are a sharp axe that can fell the most deeply rooted trees.
- **Classic war songs** – These prepare warriors for battle, intimidate the enemy.
We are fierce, we are strong. We know our land, they don't. There is no way they can win. We will crush them in battle. Don't come to war unless you are ready to fight like a warrior.
- **Next-generation war songs** – Moving beyond war, preparing to wage peace.
It's easy to shout and boast, but think of the consequences of what you're saying. If war comes, you'll soon be shaking with fear. Cool down, think it over.

These categories are listed merely to help you get started. As I hope you'll see, each song has some indescribable quality that sets it apart from the rest. They are as unique and uncommon as the composers who created them.

Form and Function

Virtually every song involves some sort of *call and response* between a song leader and the community. This is not only true of songs, but of the dance and music as well. A song leader, lead dancer or master drummer will make a call or a gesture, and others are expected to respond immediately with a new chorus, dance movement or supporting drum pattern. This is, by the way, a reflection of *how* African society works and an important aspect of *why* it works. The responsibilities of leadership and also of good follower-ship are reinforced through musical traditions simply because, as in life, everything requires cooperation to succeed. Both effective leaders and attentive followers emerge from this lifelong training to fill the roles that tradition has defined for them.

Paradoxically, the greatest creativity in African art (some would say in all art) emerges from following rigid traditional guidelines. *Eve* songs in particular frequently use a standard form (AABBA), or some close variation of it, to great advantage. A typical song begins with an intriguing statement (A) which grabs your interest but is somehow puzzling or incomplete. This first statement is begun by the leader and finished by the chorus. Soon the meaning is clarified or at least elaborated by a second statement (B), again split by the leader and chorus. There is always a reiteration of the initial statement at the end (A), this time sung by the entire group, as though it were being reconsidered or reinforced in light of the center section. It is a wonderfully effective form which has spawned thousands of potent and stylish creations.

Music Fundamentals

Introduction

In this chapter I'll introduce some of the fundamentals of West African music, including several important bell parts and how to feel them, plus some instrument names and other musical terminology. Within the scope of this book, I can present a basic overview in very simple terms, but remember that this is an oral tradition with a great degree of subtlety which Western musical terminology and notation cannot adequately convey. If there are live classes available in your area in any style of African music or dance, I hope you'll take advantage of them. The more dancing, playing and listening you do, especially in the presence of experienced and helpful teachers, the more it will all make sense to you.

The Instruments

There are an amazing variety of instruments in daily use in West Africa, but for the purposes of this book we need only introduce the instruments commonly used for music making among the *Ajlo-Eve*. Let's start with what I call the *Standard Eve Drum Set*, which includes these instruments:

- **atsimevu** – This is the lead drum of the *Eve* set. Largest of the *Eve* drums, it has a long thin body with an open bottom and rests diagonally on a wooden stand called *vudetsi*. It's played with two sticks, two hands, or hand and stick.
- **sogo** – A teardrop-shaped drum with a solid bottom. Sometimes used as the lead drum, it normally plays supporting parts to the *atsimevu's* lead. As a lead drum, it's played with two sticks, two hands or stick and hand, just like *atsimevu*. As a supporting drum, it's usually played with two sticks, sometimes with two hands, but it still plays a strong leadership role in the ensemble.
- **kidi** – The middle-sized supporting drum of the *Eve* set, it's similar in construction to *sogo* but smaller and higher pitched. This drum is always played with two sticks. *Sogo* and *kidi* often play the same supporting parts and change patterns together in response to lead drum calls, but in some music they play different patterns which are highly interdependent (neither part is quite complete without the other to support it).
- **kagaŋu** – Smallest drum in the *Eve* set, it is thin with an open bottom, similar to *atsimevu* but much smaller and pitched higher than *kidi*. Two thin sticks are slapped against the head to make a high crying sound which cuts above the entire ensemble. *Kagaŋu* usually fills in the off-beats with a pattern that, unlike the other supporting drums, does not change in response to lead drum calls (although experienced players often improvise *kagaŋu* variations).

- **gaṅkogui** – Hand forged by *Eve* blacksmiths, these iron double-bells are the essential timekeepers in *Eve* music. In nearly every *Eve* musical ensemble, one *gaṅkogui* plays the basic bell pattern around which the rest of the music is structured. The bell almost never changes throughout a musical section. It is usually played with a single stick and can produce both a high and low pitch.
- **axatse** – A hand rattle made from a dried gourd, perhaps 5 or 7 inches in diameter, with seeds or beads woven around it on a string net. *Axatse* is usually played along with *gaṅkogui* to form a musical backdrop for singing and/or drumming. Performances feature at least one *axatse* and sometimes as many as 30 or more, depending on the style of music.
- **akpe** – Wooden clappers held in the hands. Several singers may play these while singing to reinforce the rhythmic hand clapping which is also common at performances. In a musical style known as *akpevu* (clapper music), a large number of clappers replace the usual crowd of *axatse* for a distinct musical texture (a few *axatse* play along with them, but they are not as prominent).

In addition to these standard instruments, some other drums and bells are added to the ensemble at various times. These are:

- **kloboto, totodzi** – Smaller and larger versions of the same instrument, they are both short and stout cylindrical drums with an open bottom, producing a deep weighty sound. The two drums replace *sogo* in the standard *Eve* set during *Agbeko* music, and are featured in other music as well. They are always played with two sticks.
- **agboba** – This drum is a much larger version of the cylindrical *kloboto* and *totodzi* drums. Held diagonally on a stand just like *atsimevu*, it can be used as a lead drum (played with fat sticks as in *Gahū*) or a supporting drum (played with hands to enrich the musical texture as in *Kinka*). Its open bottom and large head area give it an incredible booming bass sound.
- **atoke** – These boat-shaped iron bells (they look like an iron taco shell) are held in the open palm or curled fingers of a hand and struck with an iron striker, producing a high ringing sound that cuts through everything else. A pair of *atoke* tuned a third or more apart sometimes replaces *gaṅkogui* in a musical ensemble, or is added to a group of *gaṅkogui* bells to form a *gamemlā* bell orchestra to accompany *Hatsiatsia* songs.
- **adodo** – Two clusters of small iron bells forged onto both ends of a sturdy iron rod. Because of the sound they produce, they are sometimes described as iron rattles rather than bells. They are carried and shaken in some of the more sacred musical traditions, especially by members of the *Yeve* religious cult. Several played together makes a heavenly noise to accompany sacred drums or singing.

Section Names and Other Useful Terms

The classical music of Western Europe follows standard guidelines of form which have allowed a vocabulary of commonly understood musical terms to evolve; for example, words like *Adagio*, *Andante*, and *Allegro* refer to specific sections of music within a

larger work, as well as suggest the tempo and mood of those sections. This is also true of classical *Aṅlɔ-Eve* music; words like *Uulɔɔ*, *Hatsiatsia*, and *Uutsɔtsoe* refer to musical sections and also suggest something of the tempo and mood in which they are performed. As with their Western counterparts, these terms don't imply that every musical style follows the same structure or uses the same section names, but it does represent a large body of common practice and terminology that is useful to know about.

Uulɔɔ is the slow processional section of a performance. The performers dance, drum and sing their way through town, the drums carried on the heads of the shorter and/or younger performers as they are played. When they arrive at the designated performance arena, the performers may continue with *Uulɔɔ* for some time, or they may go on to something else. Sometimes there is no procession, but *Uulɔɔ* is still performed in place to attract a crowd and warm up performers for the faster sections to come. *Uutsɔtsoe* is the subsequent fast section, often the main attraction at a performance. It may be similar to the *Uulɔɔ* that precedes it in terms of instruments and musical texture, but is usually much faster and with a different repertoire of music and dance movements.

Most traditions also have *Hatsiatsia* sections, during which the most elaborate songs are sung with only a few bells or rattles as accompaniment. *Hatsiatsia* songs are sometimes the most artistic and original offerings of the performance. They may also feature simple drum accompaniment, even stylized gestures or dance movements – but the songs are always the center of attention. A *gamemlã* ensemble may accompany the *Hatsiatsia* songs; this is a small group of *ganʒkogui* and *atoke* bells playing carefully composed parts which interlock with each other to form a beautifully ornate ostinato background.

In religious music, *Ago* sections are slow processionalists similar to *Uulɔɔ*, but with the implication of a spiritual consecration. The word *ago* suggests knocking on a door, as though the congregation were humbly scratching at the entrance to the spirit world, asking permission to enter. Another term which may be confused with this is *Adzo*. This is a kind of stripped-down traditional jam session, music played on traditional instruments but with some parts missing. At least one writer has used *Adzo* as a musical section name, referring to the stop-and-start dance interjections of *Agbekɔ*, but as far as my informants are concerned this is not an appropriate use of the term.

Finally, you'll encounter the word *atsiã* a lot in this book. It can mean several things, but it's most often translated as *style* in English. In a dance which consists of several short episodes which display distinct dance movements or "styles," each episode is called an *atsiã*. In music with several larger sections, like *Adzohũ*, there may be one section called *Atsiã* in which many individual *atsiãwo* (plural) are performed consecutively. It may also refer to an entire style of dance-drumming; *Atsiagbekɔ* is another name for the *Agbekɔ* dance, meaning the "Agbekɔ style" of dancing. If that isn't confusing enough, there are dances known only as *Atsiã*, but which are identified by the region in which they are performed. A section of this book documents songs from the *Atsiã* dance performed among the *Aṅlɔ-Eve* of Anyako – but there are other *Atsiã* dances performed elsewhere in Eueland which are completely different.

Basic Bell and Clapper Technique

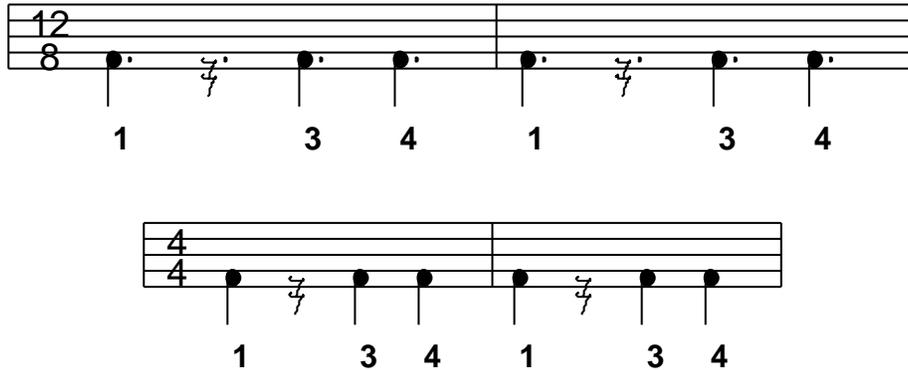
In all of these traditions, the bell is the foundation and heartbeat of every musical composition. Everything that happens musically, happens in relation to the bell. The bell plays unwaveringly throughout a musical section and its part never changes; it can't change, because without it the other parts would cease to make sense. Within one dance there may be several musical sections, each using a different bell. Or, different sections may use the same bell but at different tempos. This adds variety to performances, since different bells create very different musical textures. The first step towards hearing any style correctly is to learn its bell, and especially how to feel it in the proper orientation.

Usually the main bell is played on *gan'kogui*, an iron double bell which can play two distinct pitches. There are three strokes you should know how to play, and they are notated as follows:



The first note is an open strike of the *lowest* pitched bell, and the second is an open strike of the *highest* bell. The third note is a pressed strike to the high bell; the stick strikes the bell but instead of bouncing right off, it presses gently but firmly into the bell to produce a high-pitched *ting* sound.

Beneath the notation of each bell, I also indicate where the fundamental beats of the music are. This is how it looks, both in 12/8 and in 4/4 time:



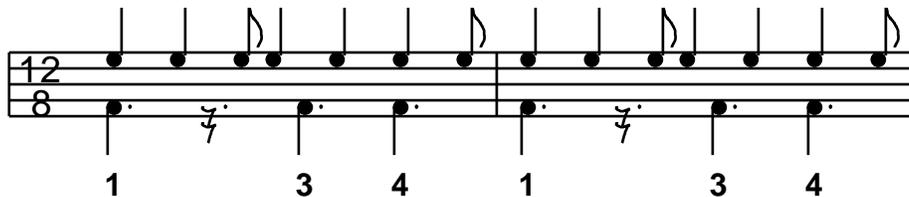
There's a very good reason why these beats are included. Knowing how to play the bell is not enough to understand it; you must also feel it in the proper orientation. I teach a technique called *3-4-1* (for lack of a better name) which helps give students the proper feel for the music. Almost every bell, both in 4/4 and 12/8 time, is built around four fundamental beats. That is, you should be able to clap four evenly spaced beats for every one bell cycle. That's just what I have my students do, but I ask them to play the 2nd beat *subjectively* (feel a beat but don't actually clap). This leaves them clapping just the 3-4-1 pulses but *feeling* all four beats, which is closer to the way the music is supposed to be perceived.

All strokes on the bell and clapper should maintain the same volume – there are no accented beats in this music – but there *should* be a constant sense of grounding weight on the main musical beats. Clappers must feel 3-4-1 as a cycle which both begins and ends at 1, but with no variation in volume or intensity. This was actually taught to me as a metaphysical principle – the infinite circle of life, each ending is another beginning – but that kind of subtlety is unfortunately beyond the scope of this book. If you learn to clap the 3-4-1 with each of these bells as I’ve described, you will be off to a good start.

Basic Eve Bell

By far the most popular bell in Eueland is what I will call the *Basic Eve Bell*, which sounds like this:

Basic Eve Bell (2 cycles)



This bell is at the heart of most *Eve* music and dance. Its apparent simplicity is deceptive; it is an ingenious and highly versatile invention which has inspired countless amazing musical creations for hundreds of years. In this book alone, you’ll encounter it in the music of *Adzohũ*, *Atsiã*, *Afãvu*, *Agbadza*, *Agbeko*, *Atsiã*, *Gadzo*, *Takaqa*, *Agovu* and *Sogba*.

Mathematically, the Basic Eve Bell is built on the same principles of physics as the Western chromatic scale (the 12 notes of the piano keyboard). In fact, if you play all twelve notes starting from C, in straight time and with a strong accent on each white key, you will discover that the Basic Eve Bell is none other than our own major diatonic scale – but the notes are defined by their relationship in time, not frequency. In fact, *Eve* composers primarily do with *polyrhythm* (multiple beats played together, related in time) what Western composers do with *polyphony* (multiple notes playing together, related in pitch). Cross-rhythms played across the Basic Eve Bell to build and release tensions and create emotional moods are the equivalent, both artistically and mathematically, of chords and pitch intervals used to do the same thing.

It’s very important for you to feel this bell correctly. Once you get comfortable playing the bell part, experiment with playing the 3-4-1 along with it (maybe tap your foot or cluck your tongue on 3-4-1). Learning to play the bell with a 6-beat feeling is not too difficult, but the main feel of the bell is in 4 (as you can see from the 3-4-1 notes on the bottom). Actually, the ideal is to feel both 6 and 4 simultaneously, but to keep 4 as the stronger of the two. You should also try playing just the 6 over 4 feel for awhile, giving each hand one of the parts and slapping them on your lap or a table top. The 6 and 4 together look like this:

Six Over Four Polyrhythm (2 cycles)

When you can play these two rhythms simultaneously, try playing the Basic Ebe Bell again and tapping out either the 6 or 4 feel along with it. When you can do either one with ease, you've got a good solid start on understanding the bell.

Other Bells in 12/8 Time

Every other bell in 12/8 time is really just a variation of the Basic Ebe Bell. They may seem radically different at first, but as you learn more about them you'll see that they work in pretty much the same way. The faster bells (*Ago*, *Husago*, *Afouu*) are easier to feel in 2 rather than in 4; instead of feeling the count as ONE-TWO-THREE-FOUR, try feeling ONE-AND-TWO-AND instead.

Adzohū Kadodo Bell (1 cycle)

Adzohū Ago Bell (1 cycle)

Husago Bell (4 cycles)

Afouu Bell (2 cycles)

Bells in 4/4 Time

These bells have a completely different feel to them, but there is still a solid 3-4-1 running through them. With some of the bells, you can't tell where 3-4-1 is by listening to the bell alone – but an experienced musician can hear it in the other parts being played. On the CD, listen carefully for the clapper, which is played clearly to allow you to find your orientation at all times.

Kinka Bell (4 cycles)

Souu Bell (4 cycles)

Gahū Bell (2 cycles)

Bells in 7/4 Time

Remember when I said that *almost* every bell is built around four fundamental pulses? Well, here's an exception. The *Bawa* bell actually does line up with a 3-4-1 at some places in the dance – but mostly it seems to have a varying cycle which sometimes has 4 beats, sometimes 6, and sometimes just goes and goes. Of the two *Bawa* songs in this book, only one has a 4-beat feel. The other has a 6-beat feel, so you'd need to clap something like 3-4-5-6-1 instead. For completeness, I've included two notations of the bell, showing both the 3-4-1 and 3-4-5-6-1 feel. Fortunately, the bell itself never changes.

Bawa Bell (3-4-1 feel, 4 cycles)

1 3 4 1 3 4

Bawa Bell (5-6-1 feel, 6 cycles)

1 3 4 5 6 1 3 4 5 6

By the way, if this bell sounds out of phase to you, in a way you're right; compared to *Kinka*, *Sovu* and *Gahũ* (which are all *Eve* dances), *Bawa* (which is a *Lobi* dance) does have a kind of phase-shifted bell part. Of course, to the *Lobi* it must sound quite natural.

How to Use the Audio CD

Just a few last words about taking best advantage of the audio recording which accompanies this book. The recording was made specifically as a tutorial, not as an authentic representation of traditional African music. There are many musical elements missing entirely so that you can hear the songs and their relationship to the bell clearly. Actual field recordings are great to listen to if you can find them, but it's often impossible to pick out individual voices or instruments for the purposes of learning, especially for beginners.

It wouldn't hurt to start out by listening casually to the CD several times, perhaps while driving to work or polishing your stamp collection. You may learn a few songs all the way through just by listening to them, and you'll get more familiar with the sound and feel of the music. Listen also for differences in the musical styles; each music has a distinct mood and texture.

Before you study a song in more depth, be sure to understand the bell that goes with it. You should be able to clap 3-4-1 along with the song as described previously in this chapter. This will ensure you have the proper orientation. It's difficult at first, but there's a very good reason for doing it. A surprising number of songs are easier to learn in the *wrong* orientation, so new students will try to ignore the bell and follow the path of least resistance. This is a mistake; the songs are much more interesting in the proper feel and they make a lot more sense. Since you may be working without a teacher, it's especially important to check yourself for bad habits, and the 3-4-1 technique is one good way of doing that. If you can't clap 3-4-1 to the song, you are not hearing it correctly (yet).

Once you hear the song in the proper orientation, try humming or singing the melody without words at first. On the CD, I sing the first round of each song without harmony or variation so you can hear the exact melody. Once you've got the feel and the melody, it's just a matter of memorizing some language and you've got a new song in your repertoire. Since you probably don't speak any languages remotely similar to these, memorizing the lyrics will be easier if you look over the word-by-word translations first. Having a few words in your vocabulary makes it feel less like memorizing nonsense syllables.

And if you don't like any of my suggestions, just tear out this section and use it to line your bird cage. Have fun!

Sample Song Chapter

Introduction

In this chapter you'll find one tutorial song entry which describes how each song is presented. Each chapter covers one dance-drumming style, beginning with an introduction to the dance or religion from which the songs originate. After that come the songs, organized so that you can always open the book to view both the lyrics and translation for the song you're working on.

The Songs

The songs are not necessarily in alphabetical order; instead, I've arranged them to be (somewhat) representative of common performance practice so that the CD can follow along with the book and still make sense as a stand-alone recording. At performances it's typical to hear the slow *Uulolo* songs first, followed by *Hatsiatsia* songs at various tempos, then finally the fast *Uutsotsoe* songs.



Sample song title [style and section name]

- LEAD: Lines labeled LEAD are sung by the song leader.
- DRUM: Lines labeled DRUM are spoken by a lead drum rather than by a human voice.
- GROUP: Everybody sings lines labeled GROUP.
- «repeats and special instructions look like this»*

Literal Translation

- LEAD: A literal phrase-by-phrase translation of the song appears here. [Brackets usually indicate words not literally from the original text but added by me for clarity. They sometimes indicate words that are in the original text but not always sung.]
- GROUP: This translation won't always make sense, but it's usually the best place to start. I use words that best convey the meaning of each original sentence, without any attempt to explain them and regardless of how awkward they sound in English.
- L/G: When lead and group are saying the same thing, I save space by translating only once.

a word.....key individual words are translated here.
 a phrase.....sometimes I translate a group of words for clarity.
 ch, he, oh, lo, lo ho, oo.....these are some very common expressions at the end of lyric lines which I don't generally translate. They all mean roughly the same thing: *yeah; oh; that's right.*

What It Means

Here I paraphrase the song in the first-person (as though the composer were speaking to us). Unlike the literal translation, I try to match the dignity and grace (or lack thereof) of the original statement as well as the intended meaning. Most songs are subtle and multifaceted, so please remember this is only my interpretation of what the composer might be saying. Sometimes it seems especially foolish to even attempt an interpretation, so I leave this section out.

Additional notes and explanations appear here as necessary. At this point you should have a pretty good idea of what the song is about, or at least have enough information to form your own opinion. If you don't agree with my interpretation, go with your own. You may be closer to the truth than I am.

Adzohũ Songs

Introduction

The magnificent *Adzohũ* tradition originates from the *Fɔ̃* people of Benin, which was known in ancient times as Dahomey. *Adzohũ* is also practiced widely among the *Eve*, who are close cultural relatives of the *Fɔ̃*.

Adzohũ is an epic heritage with many facets: religious, historical, cultural and practical. Several of its dance episodes depict scenes of cunning and bravery in battle. Some sections of the event help to prepare otherwise civilized individuals for the uncivilized tasks of war and killing. Others help warriors readjust to communal life when the battle has ended. There is a martial arts component of *Adzohũ* which is still practiced in some parts of Benin. There are also sacred rituals and prayer dances, miraculous feats of strength and skill, community song circles, and a lot more. Major cultural traditions like *Adzohũ* reflect the richness and diversity of life itself.

Historically, *Adzohũ* emerges from the legendary struggle of *Togbui Kundo*, the last and most famous of the great kings of ancient Dahomey, against European domination. Legend tells us that although *Togbui Kundo* was a great war commander, he would never personally go to the battlefield. Instead, he commanded his army from the shrine of *Adzogbo* (a deity associated with war) where virgins of both sexes served as a medium of communication between *Kundo* and the deity. Battlefield situations were revealed through the virgins, who became possessed by *Adzogbo* and danced messages to their commander and his army.

The *Fɔ̃* and related peoples were among the last to be defeated in the course of several wars with the Europeans and their African allies. In fact, legend states that *Togbui Kundo* was never actually conquered by his enemies. They finally resorted to treachery and kidnapped him during a treaty meeting, after which he was presumably killed (although wishful rumors of *Togbui Kundo* sightings reappear from time to time). Because of these circumstances, his battles and life continue to be an inspiration to people throughout West Africa.

The Dance

The scene at an *Adzohũ* performance is colorful and unmistakable. A line of young male dancers (women are now allowed in some places) move in a large circle around a seating of perhaps 10–20 musicians. Hundreds of people are gathered around them to watch. A man with a switch waves menacingly at younger spectators who threaten to crowd in on the performers.

The dancers are lined up roughly in order of experience, with the best adult dancers in front and a few precocious youngsters trailing along in back. Each is mostly bare-chested and wears a floppy hat, thick colorfully dyed raffia hanging from their upper calves to the ground, short baggy pants known as *atsaka*, and huge multicolored waist skirts called *avlaya* that might be described as the African equivalent of a ballet tutu for men. As the dancers leap, shake and twist, *avlaya* enhances every movement with waves of fluid motion and flashes of color.

Adzohũ has three main sections. *Ago* is the processional which brings dancers initially into the performance arena. It is a rite of consecration composed of several ritualistic dance episodes, during which the divinity *Adzogbo* is said to first manifest its presence. The music for *Ago* is highly polyrhythmic and can be especially difficult for beginning students to follow.

Atsiã is a series of episodes in which battlefield maneuvers are enacted and the dancers display their virtuosity and agility. Here the performers reenact the historic use of *Adzohũ* as a medium for divining battle strategy. For each episode, a dance leader displays a movement in front of the other dancers, as if he is possessed by *Adzogbo* and transmitting tactics to an assembled army in the form of a dance. When he finishes, the dancers will perform the same steps to the accompaniment of drums, as though the army is repeating the tactics in order to memorize them.

Kadodo is a less formal section primarily for entertainment and fellowship. The performers form a communal circle to dance in a graceful side-to-side motion and sing historic songs of pride and accomplishment. Periodic drum calls draw the dancers into short intensified displays of style, then release them back into the basic movement to continue singing.

The Songs

I've included a few songs from each of the major sections to give you a taste of the wide diversity of *Adzohũ* music. Songs from *Ago* tend to be sacred and ritualistic. Most *Atsiã* dance episodes have specific songs that go with them, and these cover a wide variety of subjects. The *Kadodo* songs are more informal and focus historically on building the morale and confidence of besieged citizens in wartime.

The language of these songs falls somewhere between *Eve* and *F5* (the predecessor of contemporary *Eve* dialects). As one travels east from Ebeland, older forms of the *Eve* language are encountered as though one were moving back through time. *F5* is still spoken in Benin, but most young *Eve* today would have trouble understanding the language.



Atsɔm do gbexo mi ya [Adzohũ Kadodo]

LEAD: Atsɔm do gbexo mi ya
Dzɔgbe Mawunye do baɗa do ye de ha

GROUP: Atsɔm do gbexo mi de
Mawunye do baɗa do ye he
«repeat lead & group»

LEAD: 'Xovile kple kanumawoe kpe

GROUP: Kanu ma do ta na 'xovile
«repeat lead & group»

GROUP: Azasu tɔ mi la kpe
Atsɔm do gbexo mi ya
Ameɗe yo gbetsenye woa dzua
atsɔm do gbexo mi de
Mawunye do baɗa do ye lo

Literal Translation

L/G: You take me to be inferior.
My God, now I'm really cursed.

LEAD: The indigenous people and the strangers have clashed.

GROUP: There is no way the strangers can overcome the people.
The day has come that we clash together in battle.
You take me to be inferior.
Somebody has called an insult to my forefathers.

atsɔm.....taken, to place (as in categorize).
gbexo.....inferior, scum, lower than dirt.
mi ya.....continuous, intentional.
Dzɔgbe Mawunye.....literally, my creator God.
do baɗa do yeI am cursed.
de haemphasis, it's ridiculous.
'xovile.....the citizens, the natives of this land.
kanumawoethe strangers.
kpe.....crushed together, as in battle.
ma do tacannot top/best/overcome.
azasu tɔthe day has come.
ameɗe yosomebody calls.
gbetsenye.....my forefathers/ancestors.
woa dzua.....insult.

What It Means

You Europeans treat my people as inferiors, but from what I've seen of you I can't say I'm impressed. If we're inferior to you, good God, we've really got trouble! Your

attitude and your actions have insulted my forefathers, and that is a very serious matter. The time has come for us to meet in battle.

Conquerors throughout history have often held a low opinion of the people they conquered, and the Europeans in West Africa were no exception. At best the natives were considered wayward children in need of strict parenting, at worst a lower life form suitable for slavery. Those who are colonized, on the other hand, inevitably see the worst of the conquering civilization. This remarkably understated song is typical in that it speaks forcefully without losing dignity or insulting anyone directly. It is still popular, having lost little relevance with time.



O mi ya wu ha kumi ye [Adzohū Kadodo]

LEAD: O mi ya wu ha kumi ye
Tɔ melo wuili degbo he

GROUP: Mi ya wu ha kumi ye
Elo wuili degbo he
«repeat lead & group»

LEAD: Tɔ melo manɔ yiago

GROUP: Egeli manɔ hoesɔ
«repeat lead & group»

GROUP: Mi ya wu ha kumi ye
Elo wuili degbo he

Literal Translation

L/G: Oh, come and see a miracle!
A crocodile has attacked a hippopotamus.

LEAD: A crocodile can't live on dry land.

GROUP: A cow can't live in water.

mi ya wu hacome and see!
kumi.....miracle.
tɔ melo OR elo.....crocodile.
egeli.....cow.
wuili.....has captured/attacked.
degbo.....hippopotamus.
yiago.....on dry land.
hoesɔ.....in water.

What It Means

You've attacked thinking we would be an easy victory, but that was a miscalculation. We know our land better than you and cannot be defeated.

A crocodile will not normally attack a hippopotamus, because the hippo is well adapted to water and will put up a bloody fight. A cow is much easier to kill because it is defenseless once dragged into the water. When the British attacked the Fɔ̃, they thought they were making an easy kill, but instead they encountered warriors well adapted to their land and capable of fierce resistance. The British crocodile found itself with an angry hippo in its mouth.



Atsiã do woe alifo me [Adzohũ Ago]

LEAD: Atsiã do woe
Atsiã do woe alifo me

GROUP: 'Tsiã do woe
'Tsiã do woe alifo me
«repeat lead & group»

LEAD: Gbado xeui
'Tsiã do woe alifo me

GROUP: 'Tsiã do woe
'Tsiã do woe alifo me
«repeat lead & group»

Literal Translation

L/G: Oh Gbado bird,
the dance episodes we perform should be strong and energetic.

atsiã.....the episodes/styles/movements of this dance.
do woeto create and perform, to put forward, to do it.
alifome.....to be strong; powerful limbs, waist and lower back,
the family of body parts that can be bent.
Gbado xeui.....the Gbado bird. Gbado is probably the name of a place.

What It Means

God grant us the physical agility and strength to perform these dances with power and grace.

This ritual is part of *Eflãnana*, a purification performed before the main dance begins. The performers ask for divine blessings on behalf of the event which is taking place. In this episode a few of the best dancers move through the dance ring before the others arrive, blessing it for the main event. The prayer asks humbly for strong limbs and enhanced physical abilities in order that the dances may be performed well.

I can't say for sure what the "Gbado bird" reference is about. It might refer to a particular spirit or (deceased) person who is being called or who would agree with the statement. It might be asking for the strength and agility of a Gbado bird (we do not know of such a bird, but the song is very old). Or, it may be a metaphorical reference to the spirits the performers are calling to, as though calling for a divine bird to come land on one's finger.



'Meaḍe yi ɔdu yɔge [Adzohū Atsia]

LEAD: 'Meaḍe yi ɔdu yɔge

GROUP: Wɔ de nu do

LEAD: 'Meaḍe yi ɔdu yɔge

GROUP: Wɔ de nu do

Enugbe yila me gbea 'go ma do o

'Meaḍe yi ɔdu yɔge

Wɔ de nu do

Literal Translation

LEAD: Somebody who goes calling on the gods

GROUP: should put his mouth to the ground in humility.

A person who goes on a [divine] mission doesn't refuse to knock first.

ameaḍesomebody.

ɔdu.....gods, divinities.

yɔgecalling.

wɔ de nu doliterally “should down mouth ground”; should bow humbly to the ground.

enugbemission, purposeful adventure.

yila.....the goer, the person who goes.

me gbea ... odoesn't refuse.

ago ma dothe process of knocking, as on a door.

What It Means

Those who would call upon the gods for help must approach them with humility and respect. Just as you wouldn't enter a house without knocking, you should never contact the spirit world without first performing the proper rituals.

This ritual is part of *Eflānana*, a purification performed before the main dance begins. The performers ask for divine blessings on behalf of the event which is taking place. As part of the movement for this episode, the dancers quickly but gracefully lower their mouths to the ground and then leap back into energetic dancing.



Adzogbe Kalēwo yi he [Adzohū Atsiā]

GROUP: Adzogbe Kalēwo yi he
Adzogbe Kalēwo yi he
Ekale ηutsu woe Kalē yi woe
Avu matɔ dzogbe Kalē yi woe
Ekale ηutsu woe Kalē yi woe
Avu matɔ dzogbe Kalē yi woe

Literal Translation

L/G: The warriors have gone to the battlefield.
The brave men, the warriors are in battle.
A fool can't set a battlefield ablaze, the warriors are in battle.

adzogbethe war, the battlefield.
Kalēwothe warriors.
ekale ηutsu woebrave men.
avua dog, meaning a fool.
dzogbefire, *agbe* bush.

What It Means

War has come and the warriors have gone into battle. War is for brave men, not fools. If you claim to be a warrior, you'd better have what it takes.

This song accompanies a specific *atsiā* or dance episode which depicts warriors creeping forward through the brush, stalking the enemy, then leaping up to attack.

Afãvu Songs

Introduction

Afã is a West African god of divination worshipped by the *Eve* people of Ghana, Togo, and Benin. This religious sect is thought to have originated among the *Yoruba* of Nigeria, where the deity is known as *Ifá*.

The essence of the *Afã* religion is the belief that the future can be glimpsed and influenced through various sacred rituals and practices. *Afã* is consulted prior to undertakings of every sort: a journey, investment, going to war, healing the sick – in short, whenever there is doubt about the future. Of the various divination methods practiced among these people, *Afã* is regarded as the most important and reliable.

The *Afã* religion is not secretive or restrictive (unlike the *Yeve* cult, for example), so its music is appropriate for many types of occasions. Among the *Eve*, dance-drumming performances almost invariably begin with the music of *Afã* to invoke guidance and blessings for the event. It's also a chance for everyone to sing, dance, and generally warm up for the main attraction. Because of this, *Afã* is perhaps the most popular and often-heard religious music in Eueland.

If you've been involved with *Eve* music before, you might recognize some of these songs but remember them from other traditions such as *Agbekò*, *Gadzo*, or *Axatsevu*. In fact, *Afã* songs often cross over into other dance-drumming styles, but songs from other styles are rarely adopted into *Afã*. Being sacred and relatively unrestricted, *Afã* songs lend respectability to secular events, like saying a prayer at a baseball game – but you wouldn't expect to hear "Take Me Out to the Ball Game" in church.

The Music

In *Afãvu* (*Afã* music), the lead drum is a *sogo* played with the hands. *Kidi* and *kaganu* play supporting roles along with the standard bell and rattles, but there is no *atsimevu*. The smooth, heavy sound of *sogo* cuts through the other drums easily, partly because it has the low end of the pitch range all to itself.

There are two principal sects in the worship of *Afã*: *Anago* and *Dzisã*. These sect names are also commonly used to refer to the slower and faster *Afã* music respectively (although both sects use the same music, so the reason for this is unclear). I will stick with convention and refer to the slower music as *Afã-Anago* and the faster as *Afã-Dzisã*. Both styles use the same *Eve* bell (but at different tempos).

The Songs

Although *Afã* music is often performed informally, true priests and priestesses² of this religion spend a lifetime in pursuit of wisdom and spiritual growth. There is a great deal to learn, so it's no surprise that *Afãvu* songs play an important role in the learning process. The songs are deeply metaphoric; they offer guidance, encouragement, and sometimes specific instructions to the developing initiate.

Some of the songs mention *Edu*, the spirit agents through which *Afã* speaks to disciples. *Tulamedzi*, *Eloso-ṅṅli*, and *Tsyé-woli* are examples of *Edu* names. During the divination process by which *Afã* is consulted, seeds are cast on the ground. The pattern they form is interpreted according to the *Edu* divinity it represents, who is assumed to have influenced the outcome of the cast in order to transmit a message from *Afã*. Each *Edu* carries its own meaning or instructions for the subject of the divination.

The songs of *Afã* teach, among other things, the meaning of each *Edu* and what must be done when that pattern is cast. They also guide and instruct disciples towards success in their religious pursuits. In fact, like so many other things in Africa, the spiritual and philosophical lessons of *Afã* are largely learned through songs; they are like an instruction manual for the religion.

The language of these songs can be considered an *Eve* dialect specific to the *Afã* religion which features bits of *Afã* prayer language as well as some *Yoruba*. The names for the *Edu* spirit agents and their associated meanings, along with other esoteric references, are at the heart of this dialect.

² When C.K. Ladzekpo discusses religions like *Afã* and *Yeve*, he uses the phrase “priests and priestesses” to refer to the entire congregation, not just the leadership. He points out that although there are the equivalent of “high priests” in these religions, all initiates have equal access to the divine agents which are manifest during rituals, and all are authorized to perform the same rites and sacraments. Since everyone is “ordained”, everyone is a priest or priestess.



Aloya (agbo yato) [Afã-Anago or Afã-Dzisã]

LEAD: Aloya

GROUP: Agbo yato

Literal Translation

agbogate.

What It Means

This spoken call is used in *Afã* to bring the performers to attention. The song leader is ritually asking the community for permission to speak. The people give a metaphorical response indicating they will “open the gate” to allow his words in.



Ale ya ɲutsiwo akɔ hã [Afã-Anago]

LEAD: Ale ya ɲutsiwo akɔ hã
Dɔwome akɔ hã nanema

GROUP: Amekoe wɔ yɔ nawo
«repeat lead & group»

LEAD: Dawoviwoe

GROUP: Amekoe wɔ yɔ nawo

LEAD: Fofowoviwoe

GROUP: Amekoe wɔ yɔ nawo

LEAD: Ale ya ɲutsiwo akɔ hã
Dɔwome akɔ hã nanema
Amekoe wɔ yɔ nawo

Literal Translation

LEAD: In the way that your outsides are clean,
if your insides are exactly the same,

GROUP: people will call you a human being.

LEAD: Your mother's children.

GROUP: People will call you a human being.

LEAD: Your father's children.

GROUP: People will call you a human being.

ale yain the way that.
ɲutsiwoyour skin/body/outsidess.
akɔis clean.
dɔwomestomach, insides.
nanemaexactly the same.
amekoethe quality of being human, your humanity.
dawoviwoeyour mother's children.
fofowoviwoeyour father's children.

What It Means

You're always neatly groomed, you pay attention to your image and to appearances, but something is missing and everyone knows it. If your insides were as squeaky clean as your outsides, people would start calling you a decent human being. At the moment they are not.

Someone in town thinks they are fooling everyone by maintaining appearances, but nobody is fooled. People can see past the skin and through to the heart. To be a better person, attend to both your outsides *and* your insides.



Dzo yia Adza [Afã-Anago]

LEAD: Dzo yia Adza 'gbetsi dzo yia Adza ee
Afã menya mia de wodzo le oo

GROUP: Dzo yia Adza 'gbetsi dzo yia Adza ee
Afã menya mia de wodzo le oo

«repeat lead & group»

GROUP: Dzo yia Adza 'gbetsi dzo yia Adza ee
Afã menya mia de wodzo le oo

«repeat»

«repeat»

«repeat»

Literal Translation

L/G: The spirit has gone to Adza, it has gone.
Afã did not originate in your town.

dzo yia Adza.....has left for Adza.

agbetsia compound word, literally “life’s water.” Some possible translations: life
force, holy water, spirit, potency.

detown.

wodzooriginate.

What It Means

Don't look now, but the spirit of your performance just got up and left for Adza. You did the best you could, but I guess there's no place like home, even for a deity. Better luck next time.

The song is entirely metaphorical. Adza is the Mecca or Jerusalem of Afã, a holy place from which the religion originates. *Something* has gotten homesick and left to return to Adza. Those who are doing their best to recreate Afã in their own town are now left with nothing, because Afã won't work without it.

I can't pin just one meaning on this song; a lot depends on who is singing it to whom. It may sometimes be a good-natured tease, as in “Nice try, better luck next time,” directed at rival Afã practitioners. The song also reminds us that home is a special place for anyone or anything; even a god must return occasionally to renew connections with family and friends.



Aye loo aye kuḍabla [Afã-Dzisã]

LEAD: Aye loo aye kuḍabla

GROUP: Aye loo aye kuḍabla

«repeat lead & group»

LEAD: Aye loo oo

GROUP: Aye loo oo

LEAD: Aye loo ee

GROUP: Aye loo ee

Aye loo aye kuḍabla

Aye loo aye kuḍabla

Literal Translation

L/G: This life is worth living.

What It Means

Life is a great gift. Though at times we endure hardships, it's always worthwhile to keep going.

A simple, uplifting encouragement to move beyond hard times.



Dume nyo meso afe o [Afã-Dzisã]

LEAD: E dume nyo meso afe o hee

GROUP: Tulamedzi

LEAD: E dume nyo meso afe o

GROUP: Tulamedzi
E dume nyo meso afe o hee
Tulamedzi

Literal Translation

L/G: A very good town is still not like home.
Tulamedzi.

dume nyo.....a good town.
meso afe o.....is not like home.
Tulamedzi.....an *Afã Edu* (agent of divination).

What It Means

When Tulamedzi is cast, it is time to return home.

This song bears instructions for the practice of *Afã* divination. *Afã* speaks to his worshippers through spirit agents; *Tulamedzi* is one such agent. In a divination, seeds are cast to determine the will of *Afã* and the fate of an individual. When the *Tulamedzi* pattern appears, the subject must return home immediately to take care of business, the nature of which is determined by further divination.

On the metaphorical side, any reference to *Tulamedzi* reminds us that people have a special connection to their home town: “Be it ever so humble, there’s no place like home.”



Haye haye tsinotowo le uawo me

[Afã-Dzisã]

- LEAD: Haye haye
Tsinotowo le uawo me
- GROUP: Oo, ahanotowo le uawo me
- LEAD: Haye haye
Tsinotowo le uawo me
- GROUP: Oo, ahanotowo le uawo me
Tsi nyuiwo le uua me la
Miku viađe ne mađo kpo
Aha nyuiwo le uua me la
Miku viađe ne mađo kpo
Oo Tsinotowo le uawo me

Literal Translation

- LEAD: Hey, there are drinkers in this boat.
- GROUP: Oh, there are liquor drinkers in this boat.
There are some good waters in this boat.
Fetch me some so I can test it.
There are some good liquors in this boat.
Fetch me some so I can test it.

haye hayelisten, hark.
tsinotowowater drinkers.
ahanotowo.....liquor drinkers.
uawoa vehicle, form of transportation, a boat.
miku.....fetch for me.
viađea little.
mađotest.

What It Means

This is a great party. Good friends, good liquor. Hey, bring me a drink, will you?

This popular tune is a simple, good-natured party song. It does not originate from Afã, as you might have guessed from the subject matter; it is one of those rare songs that has crossed over from social music traditions such as *Agbadza* and *Axatsevu*.



Ma fui tsa tsa [Afã-Dzisã]

LEAD: Ma fui tsa tsa

GROUP: Logodzo

LEAD: Tsa tsa tsa

GROUP: Logodzo, Afetɔ Logodzo
ɩɲu woe mia zio ɔo Logodzo

Literal Translation

LEAD: I will perform energetically.

GROUP: Like Logodzo.

LEAD: Energetically.

GROUP: Logodzo, Mr. Logodzo,
We will lean against you.

Logodzo.....name of a great community leader.
tsa tsasound of a rattle played energetically; with enthusiasm.
AfetɔMister.
ɩɲu woeagainst you.
mia zio ɔowe will lean.

What It Means

Today we will give our best performance, inspired by the leadership of Mr. Logodzo.

Mr. Logodzo is a well-known community leader whose qualities the composer encourages everyone to emulate. The performance should be something that Logodzo himself will be proud of. Tradition is often characterized as a mighty tree with deep roots, so the image of leaning against Logodzo equates him with strong leadership and sturdy traditional values.



Mi lea 'fɔ ne lo [Afā-Dzisā]

LEAD: Mi lea 'fɔ ne lo
 Tɔnyeawo mi lea 'fɔ
 Ne agede

GROUP: Uu tɔ fɔuu mamɔa
 Adzido gbedee
 Tɔnyeawo mi lea 'fɔ
 Ne agede

Literal Translation

LEAD: Hold its leg steadfastly, my people, hold firmly to that thing.

GROUP: A drummer who is drumming can't [make love to] an *adzido* tree.

mi leayou [must] hold it firmly, steadfastly.
 afɔleg.
 nefor him, for her (third person).
 tɔnyeawomy people.
 uu tɔ fɔuu.....term for a drummer.
 mɔmake love (crude).
 adzidovariety of tree, similar to a *baobao* tree.
 gbedeenever.

What It Means

Hold firmly to the leg of tradition, my people, don't ever lose your grip. We must take care of tradition first so that it will always be there for us. If you're doing this for personal glory, strike a new attitude, because that's not what's important here.

Master drummers are accomplished and highly respected individuals, but the glory can easily go to one's head. The *adzido* tree is huge, so big that no man can get his arms around one. Drums are not carved from *adzido* wood because the trunk is too wide.

In light of this, the proverb in this song can be taken at least two ways. One point of view has the composer humbling the drummer: "Do you think your drum is made out of *adzido*? No, I think it is of the same wood that all drums are made of." Or, perhaps the composer thinks the drummer is abusing a traditional office by using it solely for his own satisfaction: "Here is the mighty tree of tradition, offering security and shelter, so big that you can't even grasp it, and all you can do is try to make love to it. (or use it to impress the women)"

By any interpretation, the composer presents a ridiculous and sobering image to remind drummers and everyone else that there is more at stake than fun and games. Humility and respect are the qualities that keep tradition alive.



Sewogbe dzie mele [Afã-Dzisã]

LEAD: Sewogbe dzie mele
Ne ðe me kpoe hã ne nyoawu

GROUP: Sewogbe mete
Ne ðe me kpoe hã ne nyoawu
«repeat lead & group»

LEAD: Mete Sewogbe

GROUP: Ne ðe me kpoe

LEAD: Mete Sewogbe

GROUP: Ne ðe me kpoe
Mawo mawo o fide yenu
Ne ðe me kpoe hã ne nyoawu
Sewogbe mete
Ne ðe me kpoe hã ne nyoawu

Literal Translation

LEAD: The word of *Se* is what we are following.
If I had found better, it would have been good.

GROUP: Preordained by the word of *Se*.
If I had found better, it would have been good.

LEAD: Preordained by the word of *Se*.

GROUP: If I had found it,
I would have done the right thing with it.

Se.....a concept linked with *Mawu*, the creator God. In this case it refers to a man's destiny.

Sewogbethe voice of *Se*, the word of *Se*.

dzie meleis what we are following.

ne ðe me kpoeif I had seen, had found.

nyoawubetter.

mawo mawowhatever I do.

What It Means

My destiny is preordained, and so I live my life according to that design. I know I was not meant for material wealth in this life, though that would have been sweet. But had I been chosen for it, I would have used it to do God's work.

This is a song to lift the spirit and help one to accept destiny, or to use it wisely. Although the composer laments having led a hard life, he or she advocates and assists the hidden purposes of God by leading a humble and pious life, and if given the opportunity would use wealth and power towards the same end.



Tototo ku ɔeke [Afã-Dzisã]

LEAD: Tototo ku ɔeke
 GROUP: Kɔlɔ 'mewo yia Adza nugbee
 LEAD: Tototo ku ɔeke
 GROUP: Kɔlɔ 'mewo yia Adza nugbee
 Dzadzadza ku ɔeke
 Kɔlɔ 'mewo yia Adza nugbee
 Adza ku ɔekkee hoo
 Elosɔ-ŋɔli ŋɔ ne
 Kɔlɔ 'mewo yia Adza nugbee

Literal Translation

LEAD: One *tototo* seed
 GROUP: can guide people to Adza.
 One *dzadzadza* seed can guide people to Adza.
 One seed can mean Adza.
Elosɔ-ŋɔli can guide people to Adza.

tototo, *dzadzadza*two plant varieties.
tototo ku ɔekeone *tototo* seed.
Kɔlɔ amewo yia Adzalead people to Adza.
nugbeespiritual duty/errand/activity.
Elosɔ-ŋɔlian *Afã Edu* (agent of divination).

What It Means

A single seed can guide you to Adza.

This is an instructional song for the practice of *Afã* divination. *Afã* speaks to his worshippers through spirit agents; *Elosɔ-ŋɔli* is one such agent. In a divination, seeds are cast to determine the will of *Afã* and the fate of an individual.

When the *Elosɔ-ŋɔli* pattern appears, the subject is destined for Adza, the ancestral homeland of *Afã*. Several divination signs can send a person immediately to Adza on errands (*nugbee*) of a spiritual nature. This may be a great opportunity or an unwanted diversion depending on the individual, but the signs must be obeyed. Just one seed, one small event, is all it takes to change destiny.

In addition to being a physical place, *adza* is also the name of an internal spiritual state of awareness and enlightenment. On another level, the song teaches that the little things in life are most important for spiritual growth. Simple habits and principles, practiced with humility and respect, can bring about the spiritual state of *adza*.



Tsye-woli edzia nya [Afã-Dzisã]

LEAD: Nye ñutɔ manɔ ɖokuinyesi

GROUP: Tsye-woli edzia nya
Tsye-woli

«repeat lead & group»

LEAD³: Tsye-woli edzia nya

GROUP: Tsye-woli

«repeat lead & group»

GROUP: Nye ñutɔ manɔ ɖokuinyesi
Tsye-woli edzia nya
Tsye-woli

Literal Translation

LEAD: I want to depend on myself alone.

GROUP: *Tsye-woli* says you are causing trouble.
Tsye-woli.

Tsye-woli.....an *Afã Edu* (agent of divination).
edzia nya.....bother people, asking for trouble.
ɖokuinyesimy own.

What It Means

I'm seeing to my own affairs, trying to depend on myself, but you keep getting into people's faces, especially mine. Tsye-woli is warning you that you're causing trouble. The gods knows what you're up to, so cut it out.

This is another of the instructional songs for the practice of *Afã* divination. *Afã* speaks to his worshippers through spirit agents; *Tsye-woli* is one such agent. In a divination, seeds are cast to determine the will of *Afã* and the fate of an individual. When the *Tsye-woli* pattern appears, it is probably a warning for the subject to get out of someone's way.

From another perspective, this song might be sung when someone in the community is causing trouble with his neighbors or family, for example an elder brother trying to interfere with a younger brother's affairs. Hopefully the offending party will hear the song and heed its message.

Note the footnote on the second lead part. I'm used to hearing the song begin at this verse, although its form suggests that this is actually the middle of the song. It's much easier for the chorus to respond to this verse the first time through, which is probably why it's done that way.

³ It's common practice to start the song here.

Agbadza Songs

Introduction

Agbadza is a popular secular dance-drumming style, one of many practiced among the *Eve*. Traditions like *Agbadza* are common at funerals and social events. They are generally more cultural than religious or historical in nature. This type of music provides an opportunity for everyone to dance variations of the prototypical *Eve* dance movement, a unique style which no two people do in quite the same way. Naturally, singing is an important part of these events.

The Music

The music of *Agbadza* is formally defined, but it is also an evolving cross-cultural tradition which changes with each generation (*Agbadza* itself evolved from older styles such as *Atrikpui*). I consider it one of the more subtle and refined musical styles in its use of polyrhythmic textures. The lead drummer, who in this case is playing a *sogo* drum with hands only, weaves an intricate layer of rhythms over the foundation of *kidi*, *kaganu*, bell and rattles. With each new pattern he calls, a fresh wave of dancers crosses the arena to display their style and musicality.

Agbadza music comes in two tempos: *Poka* (slow) and *Ageshe* (fast). Both are built around the same basic *Eve* bell and both are structured as a chain of drum dialogues joined together by several standard transitional passages, but the repertoire of dialogues is different for each music. The different tempos are important elements that a master drummer uses to build excitement at a performance.

The Songs

Agbadza songs are often satirical or political in nature. There are a large body of songs from other musical styles which can and frequently do cross over into *Agbadza*, but the unique texture of *Agbadza* music is supported best by its own compositions. The songs featured here are in the *Eve* language.



Akpabli Hõsu ma ɔo ɔa [Agbadza Poka]

LEAD: Akpabli Hõsu ma ɔo ɔa he

GROUP: Mi ɔua 'gbo

«repeat lead & group»

GROUP: Akpabli Hõsu ma ɔo ɔa he

Mi ɔua 'gbo

Danyeviwo mi ɔua 'gbo ma yi he o

Literal Translation

LEAD: Akpabli Hõsu can't leave his hair growing wild.

GROUP: Open the door.

My mother's children, open the door so I can pass through.

Akpabli Hõsu.....name of a person.

mi ɔua.....you open.

agbo.....the door.

danyeviwo.....my maternal family.

ma yi he o.....so I can pass through.

What It Means

The man called Akpabli Hõsu is falling away from society. His appearance is unkempt and he is down on his luck, but he is still a human being. Instead of making him an outcast, we must open our doors to him. Why do we treat Akpabli Hõsu like an outsider? He is one of us.

I can't say for sure who Akpabli Hõsu is or was; he may have been a real person or a mythical figure. Someone who is not taking care of himself is said to be "letting his hair grow wild." The composer wants to know why people turn away from the indigent and homeless, from those who can't make it alone, as though they were no longer human beings. We're asked to envision a society that would at least try to help by extending opportunities, by leaving the door open for them to return.



'Gbadza ɖea ɣro lo [Agbadza Ageshe]

- LEAD: 'Gbadza ɖea ɣro lo
Bea 'yise lo ho
- GROUP: Amewo ɖea ɣro lo
Gbɔvie kuna
«repeat lead & group»
- GROUP: 'Gbadza ɖea ɣro na mi
Kotoka ɖea ɣro na mi
Kotoka be gbɔvie kuna
Amewo ɖea ɣro na mi
Kotoka ɖea ɣro na mi
Kotoka be gbɔvie kuna
'Gbadza ɖea ɣro lo
Bea 'yise lo ho
Amewo ɖea ɣro lo
Gbɔvie kuna

Literal Translation

- LEAD: *Agbadza* demonstrates our pride and our artistry,
like a spider.
- GROUP: The people are displaying their pride.
It is only a servant who dies.
Agbadza displays your pride.
Kotoka displays your pride.
Kotoka says, "It's only a servant who dies [on command]."

ɣrodemonstrate pride, creative expression.
ayise.....spider.
amewothe people.
na mifor you.
Kotokaname of an historic figure.
gbɔvieservant.

What It Means

Like a spider spinning its web, Agbadza displays our pride and artistry for all to see. Our determination is inspired by the greatest leaders. They could not be silenced like a servant, nor can we.

General Kotoka led the military coup which successfully overthrew Kwame Nkrumah in Ghana. Those who tried to silence Kotoka beforehand, as though he were a lowly servant, discovered that he could not be intimidated. These singers intend to display the same conviction as the great leaders of the past. Their rivals will discover they are just as determined as Kotoka to succeed. Names of other leaders (such as Nkrumah) are commonly substituted for Kotoka.

Agbeko Songs

Introduction

Agbeko, also known as *Atsiāgbeko*, is considered the most spectacular of *Añlo-Eve* dances. It is a grand and timeless exhibition of virtuosity which at once recalls the bitter conflicts of the past and symbolizes the contemporary desire for peace. It's a style of dance-drumming which translates particularly well to the stage, and so in addition to its traditional venue it has become standard repertoire for dance companies in Ghana and throughout the world.

The word *Agbeko* is formed from the roots *agbe* and *ko*, literally meaning *life* and *clear*. Together they suggest something like "Our lives are now safe" or "The battles are over, we are in the clear." The name symbolizes the passage of a dance style and of a people through times of struggle and oppression to an era which offers stability and hope.

The modern *Agbeko* style evolved out of an old war dance known as *Atamgã*, which means "The Great Oath." *Atamgã* symbolized the solemn oaths that *Eve* ancestors would take before going into battle. The ancient *Eve* were a warrior race, and *Atamgã* reflected the frequent hostilities they endured; it was a physical and spiritual preparation for war. Stylized forms of the old *Atamgã* dance movements are still evident in passages of *Agbeko*.

Contemporary *Eve* live in peaceful coexistence with their neighbors, so war is no longer associated with *Agbeko* in any practical sense. Today it is a treasured heritage performed for entertainment, cultural enrichment, and to honor the dead. At the funerals of important community leaders, the war drums of *Agbeko* still serve as they did in the past, to rally the people in a time of crisis. Through dance and song the performers portray the life, character and accomplishments of the deceased, improvising gestures as needed to dramatize the story.

The Dance

The central dancers in *Agbeko*, traditionally male but increasingly of both sexes, dance in rows facing the musicians so that visual contact with the master drummer is maintained. They are barefoot and wear special shorts called *atsaka*, a short-sleeved collarless shirt, a colorful cloth wrapped about the waist with ends hanging down at the hip, and possibly a cap or head wrap.

Each dancer holds a horsetail in the right hand which dramatically emphasizes movement and serves as a focus for many of the dance episodes. The tail becomes a different prop for each sequence: spear, sword, gun, whatever helps to tell the story. In former times the dancers would carry a sword or battle axe instead of a horsetail; some

modern dance companies still outfit their dancers with wooden versions of these weapons.

Uulɔlɔ, the slow processional section, is a rich and varied dance form all by itself. In *Uulɔlɔ* we see movements reminiscent of the battlefield: reconnaissance, surprise attack, hand to hand combat. The dancers and musicians will travel through town with this processional, drums carried on the heads of club members as they are played, until the performers reach the central dance arena. They may continue to dance *Uulɔlɔ* after arriving in order to warm up the crowd.

In *Hatsiatsia*, slow songs are sung between ritual patriotic calls and episodes of fast dancing which begin and end very quickly. The ritual calls are initiated by the master drummer or song leader to bring the entire group to attention and generate enthusiasm. *Hatsiatsia* songs in *Agbekɔ* often begin with just human voices, no instruments. A single bell will join with the singers halfway through, and its orientation to the song can be surprising (if you're not familiar with the music). Even when the songs are slow in *Agbekɔ*, they are never dull. There are three standard fast dance episodes performed during *Hatsiatsia*.

Uutsɔtsoe is the main section of the performance. It is fast and exciting, full of virtuoso passages of music and dance which leave audiences breathless. Once it gets started it can last 30 minutes or more without stopping, then it may start up again after a brief pause for *Hatsiatsia* songs. In *Uutsɔtsoe* we see movements which represent planning an attack, advancing and retreating, and many other references to battle and strategy.

The number and variety of dance movements in both *Uulɔlɔ* and *Uutsɔtsoe* is formidable. Each move is associated with a specific musical phrase played by the lead drum. The dancers are expected to know a great many of these phrases and must respond immediately with the appropriate step when the drum calls for it. In this way, the master drummer is choreographing the dance anew at each performance. Every show is different. There are also times when the dancers can call a movement and expect the master drummer to follow them. It's easy to see why *Agbekɔ* is regarded so highly. It takes great skill and dedication to put together a respectable *Agbekɔ* performance.

The Music

Agbekɔ music uses the standard *Eve* drum ensemble, except that *sogo* is replaced by *totodzi* and *kloboto*, two cylindrical drums with open bottoms and a low weighty sound. Each of the supporting drums has a phrase which it repeats throughout the dance, both slow and fast, modified only by spontaneous improvisation around the original language. The lines spoken by the drums recall the battlefield origins of *Agbekɔ*. Baby *kaganju*, flushed with the thrill of battle, shouts "We will show our bravery!" *Kidi*, the mother drum, does not want to lose her sons so calls "Look back, let's turn back towards home!" *Kloboto*, an older brother, says "I will sleep only in the bush!" (meaning "I must die on the battlefield"). *Totodzi*, his twin brother, encourages him by saying "Onward to the bush!" These are loose translations and the language is not exactly the same in every town, but the sentiments are similar in all versions of *Agbekɔ*.

The Songs

In this selection of *Agbeko* songs, there are some which date back as far as the original *Atangã*, while others are relatively recent compositions. The songs of *Agbeko* have changed as dramatically as the dance itself with the passage of time, so it's not surprising to find that they vary widely in message and purpose. Newer songs and movements have more peaceful intentions, warning of the folly and consequences of war, while the ancient songs reflect the needs of people fighting for survival. The more recent compositions makes today's *Agbeko* come across as a preparation for peace rather than war.

The language of these songs combines various *Eve* dialects with ancient *Fõ*, some of the *Fõ* having been corrupted by generations of *Eve* speakers not familiar with the language. In fact, some *Agbeko* songs no longer make sense to either *Eve* or *Fõ* speakers, but they survive nonetheless because people still love to sing them.



Wo da kpakpo [Agbeko Hatsiatsia]

DRUM: [Wo da] kpakpo
 GROUP: Wo da abo
 «repeat drum & group»
 DRUM: «plays one of two calls»
 GROUP: Adzesæ «or» Gbede ha

Literal Translation

DRUM: We are strong.
 GROUP: We raise our shoulders in strength!
 DRUM: They say we can't succeed.
 GROUP: It's a lie!
 aboshoulder.

What It Means

We are strong. See how strong we are! Someone thinks we can't win? Ridiculous.

Some of the words are unfamiliar because the language is so old, but that's the general idea. This exchange is used by the lead drummer to call performers to attention in Agbeko. There are actually two very similar calls which have different endings; you'll hear both on the audio recording. In both cases, the lead call is spoken by a drum, not a song leader. Either call can come at any time before or between dance episodes or Hatsiatsia songs.



Atsie la tɔ mi Agbekɔ tsie [Agbekɔ Ɔulɔ]

LEAD: Atsie la tɔ mi Agbekɔ 'tsie
 GROUP: Ame yome miele atsie la tɔ mi he
 LEAD: Atsie la tɔ mi Agbekɔ 'tsie la tɔ mi eh
 GROUP: Ame yome miele atsie la tɔ mi he

Literal Translation

LEAD: A stick will touch us, the *Agbekɔ* stick.
 GROUP: We are following a person, a stick will touch us.
 LEAD: A stick will touch us, the *Agbekɔ* stick will touch us.
 GROUP: We are following a person, a stick will touch us.

atsiestick.

What It Means

We follow in the footsteps of the founders of Agbekɔ. We have all been touched by the “stick” of Agbekɔ, transformed by the inspiration of its wisdom and philosophy of life.

A stick is a well-known symbol of wisdom and authority in *Eve* culture, suggesting in this case both leadership (the stick of the master drummer) and discipline (novice drummers may be struck from behind with the master drummer’s stick for playing a part incorrectly).



Glagovi Tete [Agbeko Dũbũ]

LEAD: Glagovi Tete woa 'gba nye yia
Sohõtu la ðe miawo eh

GROUP: Glagovi Tete woa 'gba nye yia
Sohõtu la ðe miawo eh
«repeat lead & group»

LEAD: Woa 'gba nye yia

GROUP: Sohõtu la ðe miawo eh
«repeat lead & group»

GROUP: Glagovi Tete woa 'gba nye yia
Sohõtu la ðe miawo eh

Literal Translation

LEAD: This is Glagovi Tete's casket.
This has been a great loss to us.

Glagovi Tete.....name of an important person.
agbacoffin, casket.

What It Means

Glagovi Tete is dead, here is his casket. His death is a great loss to us.

A song for the funeral of Glagovi Tete, possibly commissioned by his family. An *Agbeko* performance is especially prestigious at funerals, so Glagovi Tete was probably an important leader or patron of *Agbeko* dance. Good songs can survive long after their introduction, while weaker songs fade away because nobody wants to sing them. This one has carried Glagovi Tete's name halfway across the world.



'Gbeko za mie do ha [Agbeko Uulob]

LEAD: 'Gbeko za mie do ha
Lã woe fiada

GROUP: Oh aza mie do ha
Lã woe fiada o

Literal Translation

L/G: On the day we have planned for our *Agbeko* event,
the animals will become wild.

Agbeko za.....the day set aside for performing *Agbeko*.
mie do.....[which] we have planned.
lã.....animals, referring here to people.
fiada.....wild.

What It Means

Our adversaries do not want this Agbeko event to succeed. Let those animals rattle their cages, it won't change a thing. We will not be intimidated.

This song is a tease to those who may be jealous or antagonistic towards the performers, perhaps individuals from neighboring communities or rival *Agbeko* societies.



Kalēnya me nya he na o [Agbeko ɔulɔɔ]

LEAD: Kalēnya me nya he na o
Tu dagbe ɔo he bebe ɔo

GROUP: Kalēnya me nya he na o
Tu dagbe ɔo he bebe ɔo eh

Literal Translation

L/G: Bravery is not an easy boast [to follow through with].
When the day of the shooting gun arrives,
the act of hiding [also] arrives.

kalēnyaheroism.
me nyanot easy.
he naboast.
tu dagbethe day of the shooting gun.
ɔois here, arrives.
bebehiding.

What It Means

It's easy to boast of heroism, but when the guns start shooting many will run and hide. You say you're going to war, but are you ready for the stark reality of the battlefield? If you intend to survive, prepare yourself to meet hideous obstacles, even Death itself.

The composer's original intention may have been to prepare young warriors to face the real and unexpected horrors of battle, or perhaps this song was to cool the warlike passions of overeager young men by reminding them that war is actually a deadly business. In either case, it has a timeless quality because its message remains relevant to today's political, social and personal challenges.



Tsɔ fia ɔaɔaa [Agbeko Ɖulɔ]

LEAD: Tsɔ fia ɔaɔaa
Amewo natsɔ fia
So ɔe gbe
Amewo natsɔ fia ɔaɔa
Minya wo eh

GROUP: Tsɔ fia ɔaɔaa
Amewo natsɔ fia
So ɔe gbe
Amewo natsɔ fia ɔaɔa
Minya wo eh

Literal Translation

LEAD: Take a sharp axe.
The people should take an axe.
War has started, we are under attack.
The people should take a sharp axe.
Let's drive them away.

fia ɔaɔaasharp axe.
amewopeople, meaning the warriors.
So.....god of thunder, refers to war.
minya wowe drive them, we push them.

What It Means

We are under attack, to arms! We warriors will charge into battle and drive away the enemy.



Miso kpe ee [Agbeko Ʋulɔɔ or Ʋutsɔtsoe]

LEAD: Miso kpe ee

GROUP: Lãwɔya

LEAD: Miso kpe de 'dzi

GROUP: Lãwɔya miso kpe ee
Lãwɔya

Literal Translation

LEAD: Let us bet on it.

GROUP: The badger.

LEAD: Let us bet on it.

GROUP: The badger, let us bet on the badger.

miso kpebet on it.

Lãwɔyaan animal similar to a badger.

What It Means

*Who is going to win the battle? We're fierce like badgers, so the outcome is obvious.
You can bet on us to win.*

This song is one of the few that can cross over between slow and fast *Agbeko* music. You'll hear two versions on the audio recording, one at each tempo.



Adza nyi ma lieke s̃ (yise se)

[Agbeko Ɖulɔɔ]

LEAD: Adza nyi ma lieke s̃

GROUP: Yi se se

Literal Translation

LEAD: Fall off of your horse so that I may climb up.

GROUP: Hooray, hooray.

adza nyi fall down.

ma me.

lieke climb on top (of the horse).

s̃ horse.

yi se hooray, a cheer.

What It Means

Your defeat is at hand. You must fall from power so we may rise to take your place.

Only kings and other royalty ride horses, so pulling someone from their horse is symbolic of removing him from power. The composer asks us to envision the fall of an enemy.

This ritual chant accompanies a specific dance movement in *Agbeko Ɖulɔɔ*, made in response to a lead drum call. The horsetail is swept before the body as if brushing an enemy aside.



Tò te hazegiden tò (adezo) [Agbekò Ɔulòlò]

DRUM: Tò te hazegiden tò

GROUP: Adezo

What It Means

This ritual chant accompanies a specific dance movement in *Agbekò Ɔulòlò*, made in response to a lead drum call. The word *Adezo* is no longer in use, but from the dance the symbolism is fairly clear. The dancers shake a horsetail near each ear as if listening for instructions from the tail, symbolizing attentiveness – we listen for the enemy, to our commander, to the lead drum, etc.



LEAD: Kiniwe!
 GROUP: Ya!
«repeat lead & group»

LEAD: Fi ke adã le?
 GROUP: Adã le dzome.
«repeat lead & group»

LEAD: Ne mie kpɔa 'gbo mia gbe?
 GROUP: E.
 LEAD: Mi dɔa 'fɔ dzi mia kpɔ.
«energetic foot stomping»

Literal Translation

LEAD: People!
 GROUP: Yes!
 LEAD: Where is the fight?
 GROUP: The fight is at the battlefield.
 LEAD: If you see a gate, are you going to break it down?
 GROUP: Yes, we will.
 LEAD: Put your feet on it, let's see if that's what you mean.

kiniwethe people, the community.
 adãfight/battle/conflict.
 dzomebattlefield, literally “inside the fire.”
 kpɔafind, sec.
 agboa gate.

What It Means

We are ready to go to war. We will crash through any barrier, so nothing can come between us and victory.

This spoken passage is a ritual patriotic statement used in *Agbeko* to call the performers to attention. There are several similar passages in *Agbeko Hatsiatsia*, usually performed quickly between dance episodes. They are sometimes abbreviated (just the first two lines are used) at the discretion of the song leader.



Dze ngo ɔ̀o tome [Agbeko Hatsiatsia]

- LEAD: Dze ngo ɔ̀o tome, menya wɔ̃ hã?
- GROUP: Adza hanya yi hanya yi ...
«repeat lead & group»
- LEAD: Sabla Dzesu eh dze lifo me
- GROUP: Mizɔ̃ belebele
«repeat lead & group»
- GROUP: Sɔ̀dotɔ̃ ɔ̀e made atsyia ee
Sɔ̀dotɔ̃ ɔ̀e made atsyia ee
'Mekae ɔ̀u So nu magbe So maɔ̀e hã ee?
Adza hanya yi lo hoo
Sɔ̀dotɔ̃ ɔ̀e made tsyia hee
Adza hanya yi hanya yi ...

Literal Translation

- LEAD: You were the first to enter the dance ring, but now you cannot do anything?
- GROUP: Just trembling and trembling ...
- LEAD: It is Death who is on the way.
- GROUP: Walk cautiously.
One on horseback doesn't show off.
Who will eat *So's* food and refuse to marry *So*?

So.....god of thunder.
Sabla Dzesu.....death.

What It Means

When the war drums began you were first into the dance ring, eager to go to war, but now look at you! You are overcome by fear, all you can do is tremble. In the quest for glory you have come face to face with Death, because the two always go together. You're in a deadly situation; think carefully about your next step.

When a warrior enters the dance ring, he declares his intent to prepare for war. The composer would like to cool the warlike passions of some hot-headed young men, get them to stop and think about the consequences of their actions. People will die because of what they are doing, a fact that young warriors seldom concern themselves with until it's too late.

The last two lines of the song are proverbs. A person on horseback sits high above the ground and controls a great deal of power. He is likely to hurt himself and others if he starts to show off. A woman who will eat from a man's table night after night without marrying him is taking unfair advantage. Who would claim the glory of war without sacrificing anything?



To ya woe tovi la dɔ xo ha

[Agbeko Hatsiatsia]

LEAD: To ya woe tovi la dɔ xo ha
To ya woe miawo la dɔ xoe

GROUP: To ya woe hee
To ya woe hee
To ya woe miawo la dɔ xoe
«repeat lead & group»

GROUP: Ehaa cho yo
To ya woe miawo la dɔ xoe
Ehaa cho yo
To ya woe miawo la dɔ xoe
To ya woe tovi la dɔ xo ha
To ya woe miawo la dɔ xoe
To ya woe hee
To ya woe hee
To ya woe miawo la dɔ xoe

Literal Translation

LEAD: In this circle, our people are the mightiest.
In this circle, only we are the mightiest.

GROUP: In this circle, in this circle.
In this circle, only we are the mightiest.
We fall together, we tighten up together.
In this circle, only we are the mightiest.

to ya woein this circle.
tovi.....people of the community.
dɔ xothe great ones, the mighty.
miawous, only us.
chaathe sound of water spilling on the floor, falling.
cho yo.....tightening one's wrap around the waist.

What It Means

We are a strong, cohesive community because we work together. Not you, not me, just we. We are all stars, no one is more important than the others. When we fall, we fall together, but we rise together as well.

This is a social lesson that one hears often in Africa. For a communal society to work well, everyone must cooperate. There is no place for stars, those who perform for personal glory rather than the greater pride of the community. When all do their best to succeed, everyone benefits.

On the word *ehaa*, the dancers symbolically drop to the floor, then gracefully return to their feet on the words *eho yo*. This reinforces the message that a community which works together can overcome obstacles and rise from defeat.



Wo ɖa Adza [Agbeko Hatsiatsia]

LEAD: Wo ɖa Adza
GROUP: Wo ɖe Yɔ
LEAD: Wo ɖo Soklimata
GROUP: Wo ɖoa Zametsi
LEAD: Wo ɖoa Zametzi
GROUP: Wo ɖo Soklimata

Literal Translation

LEAD: We arrive at Adza.
GROUP: We arrive at Yɔ.
LEAD: We arrive at Soklimata.
GROUP: We arrive at Zametsi.

What It Means

We arrived at Adza, we arrived at Yɔ. Time and again we have reached our destination and resolved the situation in our favor, and today we will do it again.

Adza, Yɔ, Soklimata, and Zametsi are places where the warriors have been or references to exemplary achievements (Adza and Yɔ are ancestral homelands which still exist, the others are references so old that we're not sure of the origin).

This spoken passage is a ritual patriotic statement used in *Agbeko* to call the performers to attention. There are several similar passages in *Agbeko Hatsiatsia*, usually performed quickly between dance episodes. They are sometimes abbreviated (just the first two lines are used) at the discretion of the song leader.



Ha oh (e kutɔe) [Agbeko Utsotsoe]

GROUP: Ha oh, Ha oh, Ha oh

LEAD: E kutɔe

GROUP: Hey!

«repeat lead & group»

«repeat lead & group»

Literal Translation

ha ohcalling [the spirits] for attention.

ku.....death.

tɔbelongs to.

e kutɔethat which belongs to death.

What It Means

Hey, Death! We know you are there. We will stand our ground against you.

This is almost like a toast or an offering to evil, giving Death its due respect – but not submitting to it. The warriors acknowledge evil in the world so that they are better prepared to overcome it. This ritual is spoken among the dancers, part of a fixed dance episode which begins the *Utsotsoe* section.



Kalēwoe mitso gbe ne azizā

[Agbeko Utsotsoe]

LEAD: Kalēwoe mitso gbe ne azizā

GROUP: Oo
Kalēwoe mitso gbe ne azizā
Oo

Literal Translation

L/G: The warriors; you should bet on a dwarf.

Kalēwoe.....warriors.
mitso gbebet on it.
azizā.....dwarf.

What It Means

We warriors are like dwarves. Our near-magical skill will make us invisible to the enemy. You can bet we will win the battle.

Dwarves are mythological beings known to be tricky and mysterious. They are able, among other things, to vanish at will when attacked and to work their way out of practically any entrapment.



Mia kple fiawo fiawo [Agbeko Utsotsoe]

LEAD: Mia kple fiawo fiawo hee

GROUP: Oo! Ee! Gãwo gãwo hee
Oo! ee!

Literal Translation

LEAD: I travel in the company of royalty.

GROUP: Oh! The mighty, the powerful.

fiawo.....chiefs.

gãwosenators, chiefs, the mighty and powerful.

What It Means

Our values, our character, our way of life, today's performance, these are all acceptable to the most mighty and powerful among us.

The singers are praising themselves highly by claiming to be sanctioned at the highest levels of society. In addition to their political duties, African chiefs are the guardians of traditional values. Anything which meets with their approval is beyond reproach, since their standards define those of the community.



Miwɔe nam loo koliko [Agbeko Utsotsoe]

LEAD: Miwɔe nam loo
 Koliko, koliko, So madza

GROUP: Miwɔe nam loo
 Koliko, koliko, So madza
 «repeat lead & group»

LEAD: Makpɔm ee

GROUP: Nawɔ belebele
 Makpɔm ee nawɔ belebele
 «repeat lead & group»

GROUP: Miwɔe nam loo
 Koliko, koliko, So madza
 Miwɔe nam loo
 Koliko, koliko, So madza

Literal Translation

L/G: Do it for me,
 lion, lion, So will refuse to fire.

L/G: If you see me,
 you'd better be careful.

koliko.....a lion, meaning a warrior.

So.....the god of thunder.

So madzaSo will not fire.

What It Means

We warriors are lions that can get the job done, so you had better watch out. Your guns will be useless against us.

So, the god of thunder, represents war and alludes to the sound of guns firing. Warriors believe that when properly prepared for battle, their mystical state of mind can defy physical harm. The guns of the enemy will not work for them, as though the spirit of the guns would refuse to fire.



La yi (wɔ yi kale yi woe) [Agbeko Utsotsoe]

DRUM: La yi

GROUP: Wɔ yi kale yi woe

«but it's pronounced like this»

Wɔyu kane yi woe

Literal Translation

DRUM: Let's go!

GROUP: We warriors are going.

Wɔ yi we.

kale warrior[s].

yi woe are going.

What It Means

It's time to go to war!

I don't know why the language has been corrupted here, other than the fact that the actual usage is easier to say quickly. This is a call between the lead drum and dancers from a ritualized episode which ends the *Utsotsoe* section. The warriors have made their preparations and are now ready to do battle.

Atsiã Songs

Introduction

Atsiã is a secular dance popular among the *Añlɔ-Eve*, who enjoy it for fellowship and informal entertainment. There are actually several very different dance traditions known as *Atsiã*, which in this case means “style of dance.” One way to distinguish them is by the region in which they’re performed; this version of *Atsiã* is popular in the town of Anyako and neighboring areas of southeastern Ghana.

The Dance

Atsiã is a communal ring dance. Participants form a large circle with a group of drummers in the middle. Circling around the musicians, they dance variations of a basic step which can change at any moment according to the inspiration of the dancers or master drummer. They sing continuously; some of the songs have special movements that go with them. The main feature of *Atsiã* is the smile on everyone’s face. This is a time for sharing good will with neighbors and friends.

The Songs

Atsiã songs are strong on humanism. They teach the moral values and cooperative attitudes that help people to live together communally. They encourage neighbors to resolve disputes and move beyond misunderstandings. Children learn the songs as part of their education; those songs that aren’t taught directly are absorbed at public festivals and performances. As they grow, the children hear or recall lyrics that help form their personality in a way that benefits both child and community.

Of course, they are also beautiful songs that are fun to sing. These songs are in the *Eve* language.



Atsiã dogbe loo [Atsiã Hatsiatsia]

LEAD: Atsiã dogbe loo
Mekawoe nye hũnɔ miya yɔwo ɖa

GROUP: Atsiã dogbe hee
Mekawoe nye hũnɔ miya yɔwo
«repeat lead & group»

LEAD: Dzokotouua ɖigo

GROUP: Toɖeme hã Dzokotouua ɖigo
Mile wɔge
«repeat lead & group»

GROUP: Atsiã dogbe loo
Mekawoe nye hũnɔ miya yɔwo ɖa
Atsiã dogbee hee
Mekawoe nye hũnɔ miya yɔwo

Literal Translation

L/G: *Atsiã* [the music] is speaking.
Where are the drummers, go and bring them.

LEAD: Dzokoto's music is outdoor-ing now.

GROUP: In our community circle, the music is outdoor-ing.
We will perform it enthusiastically.

dogbespeaks/sounds/lives.
Dzokotouuathe music of Dzokoto.
ɖigo.....is outdoor-ing, is making its debut.
toɖemein our community circle.
mile wɔgewe *will* perform it.

What It Means

Atsiã has begun and the music is speaking to us. Bring everybody together, the time has come for people to see our work. Let's do it!

An *Atsiã* dance club debuts its music today and this song calls upon the players to give a strong performance. Dzokoto is the name of an historical figure, a great war commander. Referring to *Atsiã* as “The music of Dzokoto” ascribes qualities of greatness to the music and its performers, similar to describing America as “The land of Lincoln.”



Katōge ya mie xōna

[Atsiā Hatsiatsia or Utsōtsoe]

LEAD: Katōge ya mie xōna
Naganye kavege hã
Mie xōne loo hoo

GROUP: Wō nebe yeme asiwo
Wō nebe yeme asiwo
Ya xō ga đeka
«repeat lead & group»

LEAD: Keke Tenge dume

GROUP: Ga đeka
«repeat lead & group several times»

Literal Translation

LEAD: Sometimes we receive sixpence,
sometimes we receive three pence.
Yes, that's all we receive.

GROUP: But you say you don't know about that.
You'll only accept one price.

LEAD: Even as far as Tenge's town.

GROUP: One price.

katōgesixpence, a coin.
xōreceive.
kavegethree pence.
asiwo.....hear, understand.
ga đekaone price (literally, money one).
Tenge.....Tenge Dzokoto, a great war commander.
dumetown.

What It Means

Sometimes we get a good price for our goods, sometimes we don't. Even in business we still need to help each other out, but you say you'll sell your goods only for one price, even to a poor man, even to a widow. One price, one price, one price, no matter what. That's ridiculous.

A certain sort of greed has arisen in the community and this song was written to combat it. Perhaps some merchant has refused to adjust his or her prices to account for the customer's means. The song asks, wouldn't it be better to remain flexible in business dealings? It should be possible to make a living without losing compassion for each other.

The song leader teasingly repeats the last section several times before restarting the song, improvising witty lines in place of *keke Tenge dume* to satirize the situation (*even when the world ends, even when pigs grow wings, one price!*). By the time the laughter dies down it's doubtful there will be many stingy merchants left in town.



Tome loo tome [Atsiã Hatsiatsia]

LEAD: Tome loo tome
Dzawutɔ be tome
Newɔ si ɖa
Miɖo ŋu hagbe

GROUP: Yi yee, tome newɔ si ɖa ee
«repeat lead & group»

GROUP: 'Meke le toto
Be ya foa 'tsiã
Dzawutɔ be tome newɔ si ɖa
«repeat»

Miɖo ŋu hagbe
Yi yee, tome newɔ si ɖa ee

Literal Translation

LEAD: Inside the dance circle, inside.
Dzawutɔ says, inside the circle
is where you will hear me clearly.
You should listen carefully to the song.

GROUP: Yes, inside the circle we know the truth.
Who is that person outside the circle
who says he knows *Atsiã* better?

tome.....inside the circle, the dance arena.
Dzawutɔ.....a name, the composer of this song.
be.....says.
si ɖa.....understand, learn the truth, hear clearly.
miɖo ŋu hagbe.....heed my words, listen carefully/deeply to the song.
meke.....who is that.
toto.....outside of the dance circle.

What It Means

Here inside the dance circle, we performers are the ones who understand Atsiã. Who is that sitting on the sidewalk, grumbling that my songs have offended him? Dzawutɔ says, listen carefully to what we sing and you will see that you have foolishly misunderstood my words.

Dzawutɔ, the composer of this and many other *Atsiã* songs, has been accused of abusing people unnecessarily with his lyrics. Here he strikes back with an accusation of his own, claiming that he has been misrepresented by those who don't understand enough to pass judgment. If only his detractors would come closer and listen carefully to the songs, he claims, they will see that they were mistaken.



Do gbe na ye loo [Atsiã Uutsotsoe]

LEAD: Do gbe na ye loo
GROUP: Ewɔ mi wɔ
LEAD: Do gbe na ye loo
GROUP: Ewɔ mi wɔ hee
Aye ewɔ mi wɔ hee
Atsiãuua do gbe na ye loo
Ewɔ mi wɔ

Literal Translation

LEAD: It speaks to me.
GROUP: Let's move on with it.
Yeah, let's move on.
Atsiã music speaks to me.

do gbespeaks, sounds.
dogbegreetings/goodwill/well wishes, says hello.
ewɔ mi wɔ.....let's go, let's move on with it.

What It Means

Atsiã speaks to me and sends greetings. Let's move on in the spirit of goodwill.

Used historically to extend peace offerings to rival communities, this song uses the phrase *do gbe*, which sounds identical to the word *dogbe*, for a clever double-meaning. Taken one way, the music is beginning or speaking (*do gbe*), saying something meaningful to the listener. But the main point is to express goodwill (*dogbe*) to set the proper mood for a joyful communal gathering.



Miyoe nam loo [Atsiã Utsotsoe]

LEAD: Miyoe nam loo

GROUP: Eɖevima

LEAD: Miyoe nam loo

GROUP: Eɖevima
Eɖevima kɔ le neabe dzogbeziwo kɔ
Mikpli miamlɔ aba ɖeka dzi loo

Literal Translation

LEAD: Call her for me.

GROUP: That girl, that child.
That child whose neck is as long as a deer's.
She and I will lie down on the same bed.

eɖevimathat girl, that child.

What It Means

That beautiful child has a neck like a deer. Someday she and I will marry.

The singer is struck by the beauty of a young woman and wishes to court her.



Ma ta avo na legba [Atsiã Utsotsoe]

LEAD: Ma ta avo na legba

GROUP: Yi yee

«repeat lead & group»

GROUP: Tameklo hotsuito
Neta avo na legba
Legba le avidzi
Be avo la mesu ye o
Yi yee hee

Literal Translation

LEAD: I will clothe the spirits of our ancestors.

GROUP: Oh yes.
Rich men should clothe the spirits.
The spirits are crying,
“The cloth is not enough, it won’t fit me.”

maI, me.
ta avoclothe, put on clothes.
neta avo.....should clothe.
legbadeity, spirits of the ancestors.
Tameklo.....name of a very rich man.
hotsuitorich person.
le avidziare crying.
be avothe cloth.
la mesunot enough to wrap, doesn’t fit.

What It Means

Those fortunate enough to receive riches too easily forget their duty to society. Your good fortune should benefit everyone, not just yourself. The spirits of our ancestors are saddened by one who cannot share his blessings with others.

A deeply proverbial song about being thankful for the blessings one receives. Tameklo is a well-known person of great wealth.; *Tameklo hotsuito* means “men who are rich like Tameklo,” as in “The Rockefellers of the world.” The composer points out that if people in the community are suffering, the ancestors also suffer because they are the spirit of the people. The ancestors have been given a stingy piece of cloth which is not enough to clothe them. A man of means who won’t help others should reconsider his ways.

Another interpretation might call for the rich to pay proper respect to the ancestors by supporting the traditional arts and dance clubs. It is commonly understood that this sort of observance improves the lives of everyone, because the ancestors when appeased can be powerful benefactors of mankind.

During the song, dancers will step out of the circle and symbolically clothe friends by draping spare pieces of cloth across their shoulders. Feuding neighbors may take the opportunity to make a gesture which will settle their differences. It reminds everyone, not just the rich, of the responsibility to care for each other.



Uu la yi Tsielele [Atsiã Uutsotsoe]

LEAD: Uu la yi Tsielele Atsiãvua gohũa
Yi Tsielele nyawo

GROUP: Uu la yi Tsielele loo hoo
Uu la yi Tsielele nyawo
«repeat lead & group»

LEAD: 'Tsiãvua gbõna amesrõ xõge

GROUP: Uu la yi Tsielele loo hoo

LEAD: Gohũa yina amesrõ xõge

GROUP: Uu la yi Tsielele loo hoo
Uu la yi Tsielele Atsiãvua gohũa
Yi Tsielele nyawo
Uu la yi Tsielele loo hoo
Uu la yi Tsielele nyawo

Literal Translation

L/G: This music is going to Tsielele, this *Atsiã* music.
It's really going to Tsielele.

L/G: *Atsiã* is coming to steal wives from their husbands.
The music is going to Tsielele.

uu.....music.
Tsielele.....name of a very sacred place.
gohũa[this] rattle music.
nyaworeally, it's the truth.
gbõnais coming.
amesrõact of sleeping with another man's wife.

What It Means

This Atsiã music is really going places. It's worthy of bringing to Tsielele, that's how good it is. Our music is so seductive it could steal a wife away from her husband.

Tsielele is a very important and sacred place. It is a great honor to be called to perform at Tsielele, a token of absolute respectability, something like performing at Carnegie Hall.

Adultery is a serious crime that can ruin a person socially and financially. *Atsiã* is playfully being compared to a man so desirable that wives would leave their husbands to sleep with him, regardless of the consequences. This may also make sly reference to the fact that during *Atsiã*, as with Western social dance styles that you may be familiar with, one may see flirtation between married adults that would be strictly forbidden under other circumstances.



Gohũa do gbe [Atsiã Utsotsoe]

LEAD: Gohũa do gbe

GROUP: Hayee

LEAD: Atsiãhũa do gbe

GROUP: Yaya lo ho
Ha gbõna mi la dzi hee

«repeat from first lead»

GROUP: Ga na uuuu yaya
Atsiã uuuu yaya lo ho
Amesrõxõtõ naxlẽ ga
Tseᅇ Tseᅇ Tseᅇ Tseᅇ Tseᅇ Tseᅇ

«repeat»

Literal Translation

LEAD: The rattle music sounds.

GROUP: Hooray!

LEAD: The *Atsiã* music sounds.

GROUP: The song is coming, we will sing it energetically!
The bell should shake vibrantly, *Atsiã* should shake vibrantly.
Womanizers had better count their money.

gohũarattle music.
do gbespeaks/sounds/lives.
yayavibrant, energetic, lively.
ha gbõna.....song is coming.
mi la dzi.....we will sing.
amesrõxõtõ.....a man who seduces another man's wife.
naxlẽ gacount [your] money.
tseᅇthe sound of money clinking, of counting money.

What It Means

Atsiã has begun. The bell should be solid and the dancing should be lively; everything should be at its best. Let's have fun and socialize, but if you're thinking of chasing after somebody's wife, you'd better count your money first!

This is a playful song, but embedded skillfully we find a sobering lesson in morality. Adultery is a serious crime in this culture, both ethically and financially. To take a wife, a man must pay the woman's family a great deal of money as a sign that he is sincere and can provide a good home. A woman who has slept with another man will not be welcomed back by her husband, so the husband will have suffered a great financial as well as personal loss. Regardless of the circumstance, the adulterous man is held responsible and is forced to pay severe financial damages to the husband.

During the song the dancers add a playful, flirtatious hip rotation to the basic dance step. When the words *tseη tseη* come along they pantomime the act of counting money (in time to the music, of course).



Agudame nue (yiyee) [Atsiã Uutsotsoe]

LEAD: Agudame nue

GROUP: Yiyee
Be agudame nue yiyee

Literal Translation

LEAD: Like Dutch goods.

GROUP: Oh yes.
It's like Dutch goods.

agudaDutch traders.
yiyeeyes, hooray.

What It Means

Atsiã is a beautiful thing, like fine Dutch goods.

This call ends the *Atsiã* dance. The lead phrase is either spoken by the song leader or by the lead drum (in drum language), then the dancers call out the response and the dance ends.

During the early years of European trade and finally colonization, Africans were encouraged to believe that European goods were something fine and precious so as to increase their trade value. This perception can be seen as part of the larger belief that anything European was superior to anything African, a belief probably held by more Europeans than Africans, but which nonetheless many Africans came to accept.

This traditional ending to *Atsiã* seems to buy in to that Eurocentric perception, or perhaps the composer intended it as sarcasm. Some find it offensive today, but for better or worse it has become standard.

Bawa Songs

Introduction

Bawa is a festival dance performed in the town of NanDom by the *Lobi* people of northern Ghana. This dance celebrates the occasion of a good harvest. It is an offering of thanks to the ancestors and deities who are believed to have influenced the harvest on behalf of the living.

The Dance

Bawa dancers, both male and female, can fill a dance field with energetic movement. In circles, rows or moving randomly past each other, turning together to emphasize a beat with a stomp or swish, they create an effect of constant musical motion. The male dancers hold horsetails in the left hand and iron castanets in the right. The castanets play on specific musical downbeats which follow along with emphasized dance steps. Female dancers carry no props but their movements are nearly identical.

Bawa is a collection of music and dance interludes, and each new interlude begins with a song. The singing builds slowly in intensity as the lead drummer gradually increases his beat strength while the dancers mark time with a repetitive dance step, until finally everyone breaks into an energetic climax of music and motion. Then the excitement dies down and the process begins again with a new song. In stage adaptations of *Bawa*, it is common to string several of these episodes together into one exciting performance piece.

The Music

The music of *Bawa* is especially interesting because of its unique beat orientation. If you listen carefully to the bell pattern and compare it to some of the *Eve* music styles covered in this book such as *Gahũ*, *Kinka* and *Sovu*, you may be able to hear how the main beat scheme (where you stomp your foot) differs from these other styles. *Eve* musicians sometimes have to battle a lifetime of musical training to feel *Bawa* music correctly because of its seemingly phase-shifted rhythmic orientation.

The Songs

In *Bawa* as with many other dance-drumming traditions, there is a specific song for each dance episode. The songs I've selected are in the *Lobi* language and express heartfelt gratitude for the blessings bestowed by the gods. Although simple in sentiment, they are difficult songs to sing because of their rhythmic complexity, but I think you'll enjoy

trying. Start with the bell and see if you can feel the main beat in the proper place, then try hearing the songs in relation to that beat.



Lae lae Ekonijo niŋo [Bawa]

LEAD: Lae lae
 Ekonijo niŋo lae lae

GROUP: Lae lae
 Ekonijo niŋo lae lae
 «repeat lead & group»

Literal Translation

L/G: So tasty.
 The *ekonijo* harvest is so tasty.

laetasty.
ekonijoa type of fruit.

What It Means

Let's celebrate and give thanks for a delicious harvest of ekonijo fruit.



Wayi wayi wayi [Bawa]

LEAD: Wayi wayi wayi
 'Kutu wayi wayi wayi
 'Kutu wayi wayi wayi
 Akutu wayi wayi wayi

GROUP: Wayi wayi wayi
 'Kutu wayi wayi wayi
 'Kutu wayi wayi wayi
 Akutu wayi wayi wayi

Literal Translation

L/G: Let's rejoice and give thanks for these oranges.

wayirejoice, gratitude for divine blessings.
akutorange.

What It Means

Praise the gods for a great harvest of oranges.

Gadzo Songs

Introduction

Gadzo is a fast-moving dance which features the use of live swords. Originally a war dance from Togo, *Gadzo* has been adapted by the *Anlo-Eve* and, like *Agbeko*, has become more of a theatrical and cultural dance than one associated with war. In spite of this change of venue, it remains a serious discipline which prepares individuals spiritually and physically for life's challenges.

The basic dance step is vigorous and ends with a quick turn, during which the dancer's sword points directly to his chest. Total concentration is imperative; the result of any lapse could easily be fatal. Participants learn to induce a spiritual state (*akpo*) which allows them to anticipate and deflect physical harm. They also must learn to move quickly and decisively while sharing collective awareness with others. To enter the *Gadzo* arena, dancers must be prepared to safeguard their own life as well as others, exactly as in times of war and other crises.

As with most *Eve* dances, *Gadzo* is preceded by its own *Dulɔɔ*, a slow processional dance. Following that, the *Hatsiatsia* section starts and stops with climactic song and dance passages, leading up to the fast and vigorous *Utsɔtsoe*, the main event of the performance. In *Gadzo*, the lead is played with hands on a drum similar to the conga. Two smaller drums play supporting roles similar to *kidi* and *kaganju*, accompanied by the usual contingent of bell, rattles and singers. Like other social dance-drumming traditions, the master drummer brings groups of dancers forward to execute the basic *Gadzo* movements using a variety of sophisticated rhythmic passages.

The Songs

The songs I've included are representative of the spiritual, social and political aspects of *Gadzo*. It will help to understand that the frenzied spectacle of *Gadzo*, with its flashing swords and warlike past, did not inspire everyone with enthusiasm when first introduced in Eueland. Parents of participating young adults sometimes feared for the lives of their children. The British colonial government of the day, fearful of *Eve* uprisings from past experience, considered the dance a threat to their control and strictly regulated its performance. All songs are in the *Eve* language.



Etu akpo bete akpo [Gadzo Hatsiatsia]

LEAD: Etu akpo bete akpo
GROUP: Mieyi Gadzo doge enudzɔ
LEAD: E tɔnye kuvi nɔnye kuvi
GROUP: Mieyi Gadzo doge enudzɔ
LEAD: 'Mewo be ye malɔ o
 Tɔvi do ɖea hɔ me
GROUP: Ye malɔ o tɔvi do ɖea hɔ me
 «repeat lead & group several times»
LEAD: E tɔnye kuvi nɔnye kuvi
GROUP: Mieyi Gadzo doge enudzɔ

Literal Translation

LEAD: My body defies guns and swords.
 Fathers are concerned, mothers are concerned.
GROUP: We traveled to learn *Gadzo*, and things started to happen.
L/G: Some people don't wish us success.
 My father's child will meet with disaster.

etu, bete gun, sword.
akpo spiritual state which defies harm.
tɔnye, nɔnye father, mother.
kuvi fearful concern.
enudzɔ something happens, something changes.
amewo people, some people.
malɔ o disagree, don't love or support us.
tɔvi some father's child, someone we know.
do ɖea hɔ me will meet with disaster.

What It Means

In the spiritual state of akpo, my body defies guns and swords. As you can see, they cannot harm me. The parents fear for our safety when we perform Gadzo, but they needn't worry. The process of learning Gadzo has transformed us into adults. Woe to those who would see us fail; what they wish upon us shall come to them.

Full-out performances of *Gadzo* are frenzied and potentially dangerous. When the young founders of *Gadzo* went off to learn the tradition, they were taught levels of intense ritual that they hadn't been aware of, and were transformed by the experience. They returned home to establish their own *Gadzo* group and promptly drew criticism from those frightened by its intensity and fearful for the safety of participants.

The first lines are sung without music but accompanied by the characteristic *Gadzo* dance turn. Then the song leader calls *Mewo be ye malõ* ... to start the drummers. The last lead call ends this musical episode.



Xenyee loho xenyee nama

[Gadzo Utsɔtsoe]

LEAD: Xenyee loho xenyee nama

GROUP: Mi le Anago xenyee nama
«repeat lead & group»

LEAD: Xenyee loho xenyee

GROUP: Mi le Anago xenyee
«repeat lead & group»

GROUP: Xenyee loho xenyee nama
Mi le Anago xenyee nama

Literal Translation

LEAD: My bird, my bird for me.

GROUP: Catch my *Anago* bird for me.

xenyeemy bird.

namafor me.

mi le.....you should catch/hold.

Anagoa sect of the *Afã* religion, refers metaphorically here to divine or spiritual forces.

What It Means

I am prepared for divine visitation. Anago, I invite you to come to me.

A bird can fly anywhere, and so can a spirit being. This prayer song metaphorically invites *Anago* to “fly in” for a visit, like inviting a bird to come land on one’s finger. The performers are preparing themselves for divine communion and possession. This song may have originated in *Afãvu*, but it’s become a standard *Gadzo* song as well.



Kayiboe q̄evia me tsi o [Gadzo Uts̄otsoe]

LEAD: Kayiboe q̄evia me tsi o hee
Kayiboe q̄evia me tsi o
Kayiboe ŋutsuwo nya glo

GROUP: Kayiboe q̄evia me tsi o
Kayiboe

LEAD: E ŋutsuwo nya glo
«repeat lead & group several times»

Literal Translation

L/G: Kayiboe, the child is underage.
Kayiboe, the actions of men have become atrocious.

Kayiboethe name of a person.
q̄eviathe child.
me tsi ois not of age, is not mature.
ŋutsuwo nya.....the affairs/actions of men.
glo.....atrocious, abominable, too horrible.

What It Means

Kayiboe, you have molested a child. What have men become that one of us could do such a horrible thing?

Kayiboe has seduced or molested a young girl and is now paying the ultimate price, African-style. The composer seems to imply that all men share some responsibility for his behavior, but it is Kayiboe himself who will pay dearly for the crime.

Songs often praise popular or historical figures or the doers of great deeds, but it takes a truly infamous act to be named in a song like this. Only songs about the most serious crimes will expose the offender by name, since this can effectively destroy a person's life. In those that criticize minor misconduct, singling out individuals is considered unnecessarily rude and limits the song's usefulness. Besides, communities are usually small enough that everyone knows who the song is about anyway.

In this case, however, the composer intends harm to the subject. Kayiboe's name is clearly stated in every line of the song. Everywhere he goes, he will be reminded of the shame he has brought to himself and his family. Eventually he will be forced to leave town. No violence, no added trauma to the victim, no interminable court cases, just a swift and effective deterrent against future crimes.

I might add that, from my understanding, the consequences of writing such a song can also be severe if the charges later prove unfounded.



Gaḁe ga fo [Gadzo Uutsɔtsoe]

GROUP: Gaḁe ga fo

Literal Translation

GROUP: It's six o'clock.

gaḁesix o'clock.

ga fo.....it is, the hour is.

What It Means

It's six o'clock. Time to go home.

When it was first introduced, the flashing swords and feverish energy of *Gadzo* made a lot of people nervous. This included the British colonial government, which imposed a six o'clock curfew in an attempt to limit just this sort of activity. This chant became the official ending for *Gadzo* and remains standard to this day. The supporting drums stop playing, leaving the lead drum and singers to chant in unison accompanied by bell and rattle.

Gahũ Songs

Introduction

Gahũ is an *Eve* adaptation of a dance which originated among the *Yoruba* people of Nigeria. This cross-cultural social dance came to Ebeland in the 1950's, introduced by *Eve* fishermen who learned it while away on an expedition. The original *Gahũ* movements are stylistically *Yoruba*, but they've been augmented by characteristic *Eve* dance segments to create a style unique to Ebeland.

Some describe *Gahũ* as a satire which pokes fun at Africans who have adopted European ways, losing touch with traditional values in the process. Others think of it as an exclusive club which attracts those seeking recognition as people of wealth and substance. The words *ga* and *hũ* can be translated literally as "money music," a name which supports both viewpoints.

There is no doubt that *Gahũ* is an ornate and extravagant dance. The elaborate costumes and accessories required to participate do make *Gahũ* dance clubs rather exclusive. Aspiring members might work long and hard for the money to participate, perhaps spending a year's wages just for the outfit. This aspect of *Gahũ* attracts criticism about wasted money and effort, but aficionados are happy to pay the price.

The Dance

Most of *Gahũ* is performed in a circle of alternating men and women dancers. The men wear drawstring pants, floppy hats, and knee-length tunics with wide sleeves woven from highly ornate cloth. The women wear colorful waist and head wraps, and a blouse with wide flowing sleeves. In some groups the dancers wear sunglasses and sandals to caricature modern city dwellers.

For *Gahũ Hatsiatsia*, the performers sing comical and satirical songs accompanied by a compliment of double-bells playing *gamemlã* music. There are elaborate episodes of drumming and stylized dance movements that go with the songs, so *Hatsiatsia* is always full of fun and variety.

In *Utsɔtsoe*, the main dance, the dancers move in a circle around the drummers, singing and improvising gestures. Their hips and shoulders shake vigorously to the music. This is the characteristic feature of *Gahũ* dancing. In fact, one of the first duties of the master drummer is to call out (in drum language) "All you girls with big butts come out and start shaking," and then to inspire some energetic compliance with his drumming. While this may not seem very flattering to you, in this part of the world an ample posterior is considered the ideal for feminine physical beauty, so any well-endowed woman would be happy to join in.

In response to any of several standard signals from the lead drum, the dancers throw their arms in the air and shout, then go into an intensified dance movement. After a short time they are relieved by a terminating drum call, at which point they return to the basic step and begin another song. In the original *Yoruba* version of *Gahũ*, this sequence of events is repeated indefinitely. As *Gahũ* has moved into theatrical performance groups, however, more variety has been added to make an exciting stage presentation. Choreographers have borrowed several musical episodes from *Kinka* and composed new dance sequences in characteristic *Eve* style to accompany them. These new passages are interspersed among the *Yoruba* dialogues and make the dance even more fun to perform.

The Music

The drum ensemble for *Gahũ* includes the standard *Eve* set plus *agboba*, a large cylindrical drum with a heavy bass sound. *Agboba* plays the lead drum calls for the *Yoruba* movements while the other drums take up supporting patterns. An *atsimevu* (normally the lead drum in *Eve* music) calls lead signals for the *Kinka*-style dance episodes, or those signals may be called by *sogo* (the first supporting drum) instead. During these dialogues, *agboba* reverts to its role as a support drum as in *Kinka*, then as the dialogue ends it will take back the leading role.

The Songs

Gahũ Hatsiatsia features a wide variety of topical, satirical, political, and praise songs. There are songs of self-congratulation at having the means to participate in an expensive pastime, expressing pride in being people of substance. Songs for the main *Utsotsoe* section tend to be shorter and less ornate, designed primarily to inspire enthusiasm among the dancers and spectators.

Most *Gahũ* songs are in *Gũ*, a language spoken around the western border of Nigeria near Benin. It is reminiscent of both *Yoruba* (spoken in Nigeria) and *Fɔ* (a close relative of contemporary *Eve* spoken in Benin). They may also use expressions in *Eve*, *Yoruba*, and English, according to the whims and ethnicity of the composer. This is one of those cross-cultural musical styles where the mixing of languages is common, even within a single song.



Wole gatɔ hee [Gahũ Hatsiatsia]

LEAD: Wole gatɔ hee

GROUP: Wole gatɔ hee

«repeat lead & group»

GROUP: Wole gatɔ maɖo ayisu ɖokpo
Woeni wole gatɔ bodu ki dogbe
Vodzisi lo mi mɔ dɔ sisɔ hee

What It Means

This song unfortunately defies translation because it is full of references which only those close to the song's creation would understand. All I really know is that it's about some guy named Wole Gatɔ. I've included the song anyway because it's unique and I like it.

This is a *Hatsiatsia* song in the *Gũ* language, done with a specific dance movement and drum accompaniment. The dancers begin lowering themselves to the floor on the word *ayisu* and pop back up on *vodzisi*.



Mimo Suka monu [Gahũ Hatsiatsia]

LEAD: Mimo Suka monu dze avõtome ee

GROUP: Woli lete dogbe ni
Nye l̄osu nal̄o nu le

«repeat lead & group»

LEAD: Ado beble

GROUP: Ne mam̄o gogo lenu
Ado beble ne mam̄o avõt̄si nyuia d̄e

«repeat lead & group»

GROUP: D̄ekpe n̄o agbodzi agbodzi
M̄oli ya afi l̄oko
F̄õli mokpe do s̄olanu
'Gahũ fo niṅṅo niṅṅo
Woli lete dogbe ni
Nye l̄osu nal̄o nu le

Literal Translation

Suka a *Gahũ* composer.

beble the cloth head wrap worn by women.

What It Means

It's difficult to give a literal translation of this song, but I can discuss the general meaning. The people are proud of their elaborate adornment, the fine clothes they are wearing for *Gahũ*. There are those who criticize the extravagance, who would see the money go to better causes. The song attempts to validate the effort and expense of performing *Gahũ* with statements of praise and confidence.

This is one of those rare songs that is played at two tempos. It's sung twice in *Hatsiatsia*, the first time slowly without a bell, the second time quickly in time with the *Gahũ* bell pattern.



Mi dze toḡeme [Gahũ Hatsiatsia]

LEAD: Mi dze toḡeme
Ahõsewo mi no ta

GROUP: 'Fiḡe nõwoe nõlete
Sõle 'Gahũ kawoe bio
«repeat lead & group»

LEAD: Ga woe ḡõḡu

GROUP: Ma ḡe mḡ go na mi to ne ya
«repeat lead & group»

GROUP: Yḡkpḡ me ḡḡ go na gḡ, amexo me ḡḡ go na gḡ
Yḡkpḡ me ḡḡ go na gḡ, amexo me ḡḡ go na gḡ
'Fõnu kpe to ḡutsie go
'Fiḡe nõ woe nõ le te
Sõle 'Gahũ kawoe bio

Literal Translation

LEAD: We come from this community.
The young men should stand firmly.

GROUP: Where you get a lot out of something,
that is where you must give something back.
Gahũ is like a prayer which empowers us.

LEAD: It is money you do things with.

GROUP: Those who are capable of *Gahũ* are the people of substance.
Young people, come refresh and revitalize yourselves.
Old people, come refresh and revitalize yourselves.
The unprepared child will stumble in life.

toḡemecommunity.
ahõsewothe young men.
sõleprayer.
kawoerope, muscle/strength/power.
gamoney, wealth.
yḡkpḡyoung person.
amexoold person.
afõnustumble, trip.

What It Means

Gahũ makes us who we are, and so we must give it our best in return. We are the well off, the people of substance. Young and old alike can quench their thirst for life with Gahũ. Be prepared to do your best.

This song in the *Gũ* language calls for young and old to give their best to the *Gahũ* performance, and congratulates all on having the means and talent to be a part of such a fine organization.



Sò kple abena me ka ò o

[Gahũ Hatsiatsia or Utsotsoe]

LEAD: E sò kple abena me ka ò o la
Kilori? Kosi!
Agahũ dzeto hakpa

GROUP: E sò kple abena me ka ò o
Kilori? Kosi!
Agahũ dzeto hakpa
«repeat lead & group»

LEAD: Dzeto hakpa

GROUP: Agahũ dzeto hakpa
«repeat lead & group»

GROUP: E sò kple abena me ka ò o
Kilori? Kosi!
Agahũ dzeto hakpa

Literal Translation

L/G: A horse and a frog can't compete in a race.
What do you see? Nothing!
Gahũ is coming out of secret rehearsals.

sò kple abenahorse and frog.
me ka ò ocan't compete in a race.
kiloriwhat do you see.
kosinothing.
dzetocoming out of.
hakpasecret rehearsals before outdoorings.

What It Means

You who criticize our Gahũ performance, what do you know? We're more than ready to come out of hiding and show people what we can do. We've worked so hard that no one would dare compare themselves to us, because they would surely come out the loser.

A horse is so much faster than a frog that no frog in his right mind would take on a horse in a race. This song is mostly in the *Eve* language, with a smattering of *Yoruba*.



Olu kpokpo lu ba dze

[Gahū Hatsiatsia or Utsotsoe]

LEAD: Olu kpokpo lu ba dze

GROUP: Wọya fumi ló

LEAD: Olu kpokpo lu ba dze

GROUP: Wọya fumi ló
O woye wọya fu mi ló
Wọya fumi ló
O woye wọya fu mi ló
Olu kpokpo lu ba dze
Wọya fumi ló

What It Means

This song is in *Yoruba*. I've been unable to come up with a translation, but couldn't resist including it because it's one of my favorites.



Agba tonu ɔɔ [Gahũ ʋutsɔtsoe]

LEAD: Agba tonu ɔɔ

GROUP: Elawɔ yiyee elawɔ

LEAD: Agba tonu ɔɔ

GROUP: Elawɔ Agahũ dze hoeto elawɔ

Literal Translation

L/G: This [Gahũ] music is so powerful that we play it at the festival.

What It Means

This is a straightforward song of praise for *Gahũ*, written in the *Gũ* language.



Aseye ne qi aseye [Gahũ Utsotsoe]

LEAD: Aseye ne qi aseye

GROUP: Heno de ga va mi tso asaye

LEAD: Aseye ne qi aseye

GROUP: 'Gahũ henó de ga va mi tso asaye

Literal Translation

LEAD: Rejoicing should be heard, rejoicing.

GROUP: A unique new [Gahũ] composer has arrived among us, rejoice.

aseye.....praise, rejoice, give thanks.

ne qi.....should sound.

henócomposer.

What It Means

Let's rejoice. We have been sent a great composer.

Song composers are highly respected and play an important role in society. This song in the *Eve* language celebrates the appearance of a new one. Quite possibly the composer of the song is announcing his own arrival on the scene.



Kutɔnu yevu he [Gahũ Utsɔtsoe]

LEAD: Kutɔnu yevu he

GROUP: Agu aha yevu he

Literal Translation

L/G: There are white people in Kutɔnu.

L/G: There are white people in Agu.

Kutɔnu, Aguthe names of two towns. Any town name may be substituted.
yevuwhite person, European person (literally “tricky dog”).

What It Means

There are Europeans in Kutɔnu, there are Europeans in Agu. Everywhere you go these days, it’s the same thing.

Kutɔnu and Agu are large commercial centers in two different countries. Literally, this song in the *Eve* language observes simply that there are Europeans everywhere you go. The composer may also intend to imply that these foreigners behave the same wherever you go – that is to say, arrogantly – but no good composer would make such a rude statement directly so we’ll never know for sure. Suffice it to say that the song is derogatory or not depending on who sings it.

Students often ask whether this is a “racist” song, a reasonable question from an American perspective. In my experience, the sensitivity that Americans have to skin color and ethnicity is something that West Africans find foreign. People raised in communal societies learn to accommodate the differences between individuals rather than become sensitized to them. That’s not to say that Africans don’t exhibit fierce pride about their own ethnicity – because they do – but that’s not racism. I’d be surprised to find a song criticizing people for their skin color in the traditional repertoire; the Africans I’ve known don’t think that way.



Nunɔla ga yere 'Gahũvua [Gahũ vutsɔtsoe]

LEAD: Nunɔla ga yere 'Gahũvua

GROUP: E yere hee

LEAD: Wovenu ga yere 'Gahũvua

GROUP: E yere hoo

Literal Translation

LEAD: A great leader has blessed *Gahũ*.

GROUP: He has blessed it.

LEAD: Wovenu has blessed *Gahũ*.

GROUP: He has blessed it.

nunɔla a leader (referring to Wovenu).

ga yere has blessed.

Wovenu the name of a well-known priest.

What It Means

A great leader has given his blessings to Gahũ. Wovenu himself, the priest, has sanctioned our music.

Although many Christian priests in West Africa are native Africans (like Wovenu), it is uncommon for them to sanction traditional activities such as *Gahũ* (in fact, I'm told the native-born priests tend to be more judgmental than their foreign colleagues). The various churches in Africa tend to look down upon traditional rituals and beliefs, preaching instead that only a particular flavor of Christianity can lead to salvation and that other religious practices are evil. These doctrines challenge the traditional African approach in which ritual and spirituality are a part of daily life, not reserved for special occasions, and in which many beliefs and religious sects can coexist without contradiction.

In the case of this song in the *Eve* language, the priest Wovenu has gone against convention and actually sanctioned *Gahũ*, so this community is particularly proud to have been validated by the blessings of such an important church official. They can claim that their performances are so respectable, even the church can't deny them!



Se adzo Joseph se [Gahũ Utsɔtsoe]

LEAD: Se adzo a Joseph u se
Adzo saba dzo

GROUP: Se adzo Joseph u se
Adzo saba dzo

Literal Translation

L/G: This is Joseph's kind of music and dance.

adzothe music and dance (refers to *Gahũ*).
Joseph.....a *Gahũ* composer.

What It Means

This is Joseph's kind of scene, this is Maria's kind of jam. All of our best people think Gahũ is the greatest.

This song in the *Gũ* language praises *Gahũ* by pointing out that the most important leaders find it satisfying. Any name can be substituted for Joseph, especially someone with high standards (Maria is a common substitution).

When traditional music is played informally without the full ensemble, for example with just a lead drum, bell, and song, the *Eve* call it *adzo* (pronounced ah-DZOH), so to the *Eve* this word has a bit of the flavor of a jam session (“This is Joseph’s kind of jam”). In *Gũ*, the word *adzo* (pronounced ah-DJOH) has come to mean the entire music and dance (“This is Joseph’s kind of dance-drumming”). You may hear the word pronounced both ways, so now you know why.

I used to think Joseph and Maria were obvious Christian references, but my sources say that’s just a coincidence. It is true, however, that there are many Christians among the *Aṅlɔ-Eve*, so some people may prefer to think of Joseph and Maria as Biblical characters. Either way, the meaning is pretty much the same.

Kinka Songs

Introduction

Kinka is a popular social music that came upon the *Aḡlɔ* scene sometime in the 1950's and has inspired some great party dancing ever since. When *Kinka* drums are playing, it's very difficult to hold your body still. The music uses the same driving 4/4 bell rhythm as *Sovu* but has no restrictions or sacred associations, so it's appropriate at any festive social occasion.

As with any of the major *Eve* social dances, groups of *Kinka* dancers are led across the dance field by the master drummer, who calls each out in turn with a special roll of the drum. *Kinka* is an opportunity for people to show off their basic *Eve* dance movement or just about any other step that fits the music. There's lots of room for personal style and innovation. As long as the contribution is musical and lively, anything goes.

The Music

In *Kinka*, a large cylindrical drum with a booming bass voice called *agboba* is added to the standard *Eve* drum ensemble as a support drum and sometimes as an alternate lead drum. Played with the hands, it reinforces the supporting drum responses and adds some energetic syncopation and embellishment. The role of *atsimevu*, the lead drum, is to call out each new drum dialogue, then sit back and let *agboba* carry the ensemble for awhile.

Another interesting aspect of *Kinka* is the drum language. As with most traditional music, *Kinka* drums speak a language which can be understood by those trained to hear it. The dialogues spoken between *Kinka* drummers are full of lewd lyrics and explicit sexual references, and I'm told that many of the newer dance-drumming styles have similar language as well. This is a generational phenomenon, familiar to parents the world over. The young find ways to test the boundaries of society, stretching them just enough to shock the establishment but usually not enough to start a shooting war. *Kinka* distinguishes a generation from its parents by stepping just outside the bounds of propriety; but it makes its statement in typical African fashion – within the dance-drumming framework and with remarkable artistry.

Some people in the West still like to think of Africans as somehow more “wild” and “uninhibited,” and when they find out about the provocative *Kinka* drum language it just adds to the image of a somehow pre-civilized society. In fact, the need for dances like *Kinka* arises from just the opposite situation; African society can be so stratified and proscriptive, so “civilized,” that there is serious need for acceptable ways of releasing tension – sexual and otherwise. Dance-drumming traditions have always provided a healthy alternate escape route for all manner of human aggressions and frustrations. The

esoteric aspects of *Kinka* drumming add another level of release to the undercurrent of sexual tension present at any youthful social gathering.

The Songs

Kinka Hatsiatsia and *Utsotsoe* will normally feature a wide variety of excellent songs because *Kinka* clubs are judged primarily by the quality of their composers. *Kinka* songs are interesting for their rhythmic and melodic inventiveness as well as for the lyrics. The songs I've included are all in the *Eve* language.

Part of the fun in *Kinka* is to listen for how songs interact with the ever-changing drum language. The song leader will choose a song which creates an appealing rhythmic contrast with the current drum dialogue. After awhile, the master drummer will change the support drums to another pattern which is equally interesting against that song, then the song will change again to complement the new drum phrase, and so on. The song and drum leaders are judged in part by their skillful selection of material to keep each moment of the music fresh and exciting. These demanding roles require rare qualities of leadership and aesthetic judgment, qualities which are nurtured and encouraged by every African society.



Bokɔnɔ ɔoxo ne doa 'degbe

[Kinka Utsɔtsoe]

LEAD: Bokɔnɔ ɔoxo ne doa 'degbe nua na nyo

GROUP: Gbe dzia bla

LEAD: Bokɔnɔ ɔoxo ne doa 'degbe nua na nyo

GROUP: Gbe dzia bla aye e

Gbe dzia bla aye e

Gbe dzia bla

Awɔnɔ ɔoxo ne doa 'degbe nua na nyo

Gbe dzia bla

Literal Translation

LEAD: A wise old priest should consecrate this event for success.

GROUP: It *will* happen.

bokɔnɔ, awɔnɔa wise old priest (these are interchangeable).

gbe dzia blait *will* be so, it *will* happen.

What It Means

Call the priest to consecrate this event, because we're ready to go. Let it be, let the festivities begin!

Opening prayer and libation rituals are always observed before dance-drumming performances to secure the blessings of ancestors and make the event a success. This is a “Here we go, let’s do it!” song that also reminds everyone to make the proper ritual observances before starting out. Originally from *Afɔvu*, the song has been adapted rhythmically to fit the *Kinka* musical texture.



Gbɔ na kplo miawɔ [Kinka Ɖutsɔtsoe]

LEAD: Gbɔ na kplo miawɔ
Kede le
Gbɔ na kplo miawɔ he

GROUP: Oh
«repeat lead & group»

GROUP: Nanegbe ya wo yia
Gbɔgbɔ ha mele wo ɲuwo he
«repeat»
Gbɔ na kplo miawɔ
Woze le
Gbɔ na kplo miawɔ he oh

Literal Translation

LEAD: Return to lead us, Kede.
Return to lead us.

GROUP: Oh.
What sort of business have they gone to attend to
that means they can't return to us?
Return to lead us, Woze.
Return to lead us.

gbɔ na kplo miawɔ.....return to lead us.
Kede, Woze.....names of great leaders who have died.
nanegbemission, quest, trip to take care of some business.
ya wo yiathat they have gone to.
gbɔgbɔreturning.
ha mele wo ɲuwois not possible, is not part of it.

What It Means

Oh Kede, Woze, if only you could return from death to lead us. Where have all the great leaders gone?

If you've heard the popular song that goes "Has anybody here seen my old friend Martin?" then you're already familiar with this quintessential African song. The great leaders seem to have all passed on, and now we are sorely in need of their leadership. Why have they been taken from us? What great business have they gone on to that justifies our loss? "Can you tell me where they've gone?" The names Kede and Woze are interchangeable, or substitute the name of any great leader.



Ha nye zu fia mu logo [Kinka Utsotsoe]

LEAD: Ha nye zu fia mu logo
 GROUP: Fia ɗaɗa mu logo
 LEAD: Kinka zu fia mu logo
 GROUP: Fia ɗaɗa mu logo, aye aye he
 Fia ɗaɗa mu logo
 Ha nye lea tsigawote mu logo na ye hee
 Fia ɗaɗa mu logo

Literal Translation

LEAD: My song becomes an axe to fell the *logo* tree.
 GROUP: Sharp axe fells the tree.
 LEAD: *Kinka* becomes an axe to fell the *logo* tree.
 GROUP: Sharp axe fells the tree. Take heed!
 Sharp axe fells the tree.
 My song takes root in the community and fells the tree for me.
 Sharp axe fells the tree.

Ha nyemy song.
 zu fiabecomes an axe.
 fia ɗaɗasharp axe.
 logo.....a type of tree.
 mu logo.....fells the *logo* tree.
 tsigawotoa large shade tree under which the community gathers, the communal
 tree.
 na yefor me.

What It Means

My songs take root and grow in the Kinka community, until they become a weapon which can topple even the mighty and powerful.

The *logo* tree has very strong, hard wood. It is firmly rooted in the ground and very difficult to uproot or chop down. In this song, the *logo* tree represents powerful and corrupt individuals or institutions. Songs are an important force for social justice and political change in Africa. The composer warns those in power that his songs have helped the community to challenge corruption in the past, and can do so again if need be. The phrases *Kinka* and *Ha nye* are interchangeable.



Kinkaviawo zia ɔe tɔ [Kinka ʊtsɔtsoe]

LEAD: Kinkaviawo zia ɔe tɔ he

GROUP: Hadzise ɔo ye ɔa hee

«repeat lead & group»

GROUP: Kinka nye hūmadze
Kinka nye hūmadze
'Gbokɔdzawo le ye shi

«repeat»

Kinkaviawo zia ɔe tɔ he

Hadzise ɔo ye ɔa hee

Literal Translation

LEAD: In the *Kinka* community, a revolution is underway.

GROUP: The divine muse of composers has sent me here.

Kinka has possessed me like a deity.

The ram's tail is in my hand.

Kinkaviawothe *Kinka* community, *Kinka* people.

Hadzisethe divine muse of composers.

ɔo ye ɔahas sent me.

hūmadzepossessed, as though by a deity.

'gbokɔdza.....short white switch of ram's hair, symbol of the composer's office and authority.

le ye shiis in my hand.

What It Means

I have a lot to say to the Kinka community, things that will really stir things up and cause some heads to roll. I have been sent by Hadzise, the muse of all composers, on a divine mission. Kinka has possessed me as though it were a deity, and now songs just keep coming forth from me. The sacred responsibility of the composer is in my hands.

Possession by a spirit deity will normally happen only to initiates of a religion associated with that deity (for example, *Afã* is a religion and the name of a deity). *Kinka* is not a deity or religion but rather a social music, so there is no possession in *Kinka*. The composer says metaphorically that *Kinka* has become a deity that requires no initiation, one who possesses composers and compels them to write songs for social change.



Ako me to na ble yi o [Kinka Utsotsoe]

LEAD: Ako me to na ble yi o

GROUP: Ble dza li xoxo
Ako me to na ble yi o
Ble dza li xoxo

Literal Translation

LEAD: The parrot does not have a white tail feather.

GROUP: The red tail feather has been around for a long time.

akoparrot.
blethe tail feather of a parrot.
yiwhite.
dzared.

What It Means

A parrot's tail will not suddenly become white. Parrots have always had red tails, and that's not likely to change any time soon, so who do you think you're fooling?

A leopard never sheds his spots. Once a thief, always a thief. Probably every language in the world has a way to express this sentiment. He has always been one kind of person, and now we're supposed to believe that he has changed? Not likely.

Takaḍa Songs

Introduction

Takaḍa is another *Eve* social music which provides a backdrop for communal dancing and fellowship. To my knowledge, it is performed only by the *Adotri* division in the town of Anyako, but the founders claim they learned it from others in Togo or Benin.

This particular music is organized and dominated by women. Those who traveled to learn the style were women, as were those who organized the *Takaḍa* dance clubs and composed the music for them. That is not to say that only women participate; *Takaḍa* clubs attract young men and women alike. The music is exciting, the songs are sweet, and everyone has a good time. The drummers are almost always men, though the music they play may have been composed by women. Like other traditions, *Takaḍa* involves the entire community.

The Music

Takaḍa is built around the basic *Eve* bell, played at an unusual medium tempo which is especially nice for dancing. The rattles play an energetic rhythm that brings out important elements of the music in an ingenious way. Another uncommon feature is that two *atsimevuwo* (lead drums) play the same parts in unison (instead of one lead, or two taking turns). They are sometimes mounted on the same *vudetsi* (drum stand) so that the lead drummers can face each other. *Takaḍa Hatsiatsia* doesn't use the usual orchestra of *gamemlã* bells. Instead, the singers carry rattles and toss them into the air on every fourth beat of the song. Other than the sound of rich, harmonizing voices and the rattles falling in unison, all is quiet. It's a hauntingly beautiful effect.

The Songs

As you might expect, *Takaḍa* songs usually offer a woman's point of view on issues of substance. The ubiquitous statements of pride and confidence are directed as much towards jealous men of the same community as towards outsiders. A certain amount of effort is required just to defend the forum of *Takaḍa* against those whose lives would be more comfortable without the criticism. These songs are all in the *Eve* language.



Takaḡa nyonu koe la fui [Takaḡa Hatsiatsia]

LEAD: Takaḡa hee
 Takaḡa nyonu koe la fui he
 Takaḡa hee
 Takaḡa nyonu koe la fui ha
 Cecilia yedo vu la
 Ya me tsi tete ha afui oo

GROUP: Miḡoḡu Takaḡawo ḡmedzui
 Miḡoḡu Takaḡawo ḡmedzui
 Miḡoḡu Takaḡawo ḡmedzui
 Takaḡa hee
 Takaḡa nyonu koe la fui he

Literal Translation

LEAD: Oh *Takaḡa!*
 Women are the only ones who can speak in *Takaḡa*.
 Cecilia founded this music,
 but she didn't live long enough to enjoy it.

GROUP: Beware of *Takaḡa's* anger.
 Oh *Takaḡa!*
 Women are the only ones who can speak in *Takaḡa*.

nyonu.....women.
 miḡoḡu.....beware, be aware of.
 Takaḡawo ḡmedzui.....the anger of *Takaḡa* spirits.

What It Means

Only women can speak in Takaḡa, this is our forum. Just because our founder Cecilia has died, don't think that men can come and take over. Beware! Those insensitive enough to take advantage of our grief will know our anger, the anger of Takaḡa.

Cecilia was a founder of this *Takaḡa* club, a talented composer and a strong woman who could hold her own in the world of men. When she died suddenly, the *Takaḡa* club faced a crisis. Some men began talking about saving *Takaḡa* by bringing in some "real" (i.e. male) composers to keep the tradition alive. This song, written by another great woman composer, cautions the men to keep their distance. Although Cecilia is gone, she warns, don't make the mistake of thinking the women are vulnerable. *Takaḡa* speaks for women only; they will always be the composers in *Takaḡa*.



Uu la mie do loho [Takaḍa Hatsiatsia]

- LEAD: Uu la mie do loho
Uua mie do dzodzi ne fiahawo
- GROUP: Uu la mie do he
Uua mie do dzodzi ne fiahawo
«repeat lead & group»
- GROUP: 'Maḍe yo Awoviawo ku do nɔviawo
Miawo uu ŋuto va 'gboa dzi
Ḍekadzewo sɔ̄
Tugbewo ne mi wɔ midzo
Nu mi ɔo mi le wɔ ge
'Maḍe do domedzui la fia 'ku

Literal Translation

- L/G: The dance-drumming that we have introduced
warms the hearts of our chiefs and royalty.
- GROUP: Call together our great women and their families.
Our dance-drumming has arrived at the arena.
The young men have assembled.
The young women should prepare, let's move!
What we have planned, we are going to accomplish.
If somebody gets angry, they will just have to go burn and die.

- uu.....dance-drumming, meaning *Takaḍa*.
la mie do.....that we have introduced.
dzodzi ne fiahoawogladdens/warms the heart of chiefs & royalty.
Awovianame of a great woman, a strong leader.
Awoviawowomen like Awovia, strong and capable.
nɔviawobrothers and sisters, family.
agboadzicommunity arena, field for performances.
ḍekadzewo.....young men.
tugbewoyoung women.

What It Means

Takaḍa is approved by the chiefs and dignitaries, so it is beyond reproach. Let's come together, we women who are strong, capable and energetic like Awovia, and our families as well. Everyone get ready, we're on the move now. And if anybody doesn't like it, that's just too bad.

Affirmation songs such as this are fairly standard, but *Takaḍa* is unique in that the opposition is not just other communities, but some cynical men from the same community as well. This composer has made it clear with relatively strong language that the skepticism of a few men means nothing to the intrepid women of *Takaḍa*.



Bo me ɗi na wo he [Takaɗa Utsɔtsoe]

LEAD: Bo me ɗi na wo he
Botɔ he bo
Bo me ɗi na wo he

GROUP: Bo me ɗi na wo he
Ɛbo me ɗi na wo he
«repeat lead & group»

LEAD: Nyawo ɛbo me ɗi na wo he

GROUP: Nyawo ɛbo me ɗi na wo he
«repeat lead & group»

GROUP: Bo me ɗi na wo he
Botɔ he bo
Bo me ɗi na wo he
Bo me ɗi na wo he
Ɛbo me ɗi na wo he

Literal Translation

L/G: Your juju doesn't work for you.
Juju man, boasting and threatening your magic.
Really, your juju just isn't working.

bo, ɛbojuju, in this case an evil malicious sort of magic.
me ɗi na wo is not potent, is not working.
botɔjuju man.
nyawohonestly, really, as a matter of fact.

What It Means

Listen to you, bragging of your great conquests. Sorry to burst your bubble, Mr. Legend In Your Own Mind, but your big scary magic powers just aren't working for you, so wise up. What you need is a taste of humility.

When someone in the community is boasting offensively, for example a man bragging about all of the women he's bedded, the women may sing this song to shut him up. Everybody will know who they're singing about and he'll more than likely get the message. The same basic song melody is used in several standard one-liner songs. Sometimes new songs using the same melody are improvised as the need arises to expose bad attitudes, wrongdoing and the like.

Although this song pokes fun at a man's inflated sense of power over women, the song's main metaphor is also an interesting subject. The ways of traditional Africa do include methods of evoking mystical forces to influence the material world. Known as *bo* among the Eve, the English word "juju" refers to these same methods (my dictionary says "juju" is from the Hausa word *djudju*). The power to evoke these forces comes from

special charms, potions, and other techniques which are taught especially to men as they come of age. Along with this instruction comes a warning to use the knowledge responsibly. It can be used to help or harm people as the individual chooses, but the personal and spiritual penalties for misusing such powers are known to be swift and severe.



Tso no ga Toga [Takaḡa Utsotsoe]

DRUM: Ga ze gi to degi to degi to

GROUP: Tso no ga
Tso no ga Toga

Literal Translation

GROUP: Return the money to its rightful owner.

What It Means

If you borrow money, you have a responsibility to return it. It does not belong to you.

This chant comes in response to a specific lead drum call, which I've written out in drum language. The intended message is (probably) the obvious one.

Yeve Songs

Introduction

Yeve, the god of thunder and lightning, is a religious sect among the *Eve* of West Africa, and also among the *Yoruba* of Nigeria where the deity is known as *Shango*. Thought to have originated in Benin (formerly Dahomey), the *Yeve* religion is now practiced widely in southern Eboiland.

Although it is easiest to describe *Yeve* as a religious cult or society, there is much more to it. The *Yeve* have their own rituals, dance-drumming styles, belief systems, even their own language. In many ways they are a separate culture, possessing everything a community needs to support life – yet they are firmly rooted in southern *Eve* society. Every town has several *Yeve* shrines (cult houses), off limits to non-members, which are easily distinguished by characteristic markings. In front of each there is an open space reserved for public festivals.

Yeve is often described as a secret society. Their affairs are guarded so that outsiders are excluded from cult activities. Unlike the music of *Afã* or the various secular styles, *Yeve* music is appropriate only for specific occasions and is forbidden to non-members; outsiders cannot take part in *Yeve* performances except as spectators. To join requires an initiation ceremony followed by a period of seclusion which may last a year or more. New initiates take a new name and must discard their old identities. They are taught the secret cult language and conduct all rituals in that language to remain mysterious to outsiders.

Yeve festivities are usually easy to identify because of the nearby shrines, and also the characteristic adornments worn by cult members. In addition to the colorful waist wraps worn by *Eve* men and women, priests and priestesses of *Yeve* hang long strings of cowry shells called *dakpla* across their chests. They also wear special red headbands and usually some sash or upper body wrap, the color of cloth indicating which duties they perform within the congregation.

The Music

Yeve music and ritual are regarded with awe (and a certain amount of fear) in West Africa, since they are thought to be especially potent and potentially dangerous to intruders. Recently, however, some Africans have begun teaching *Yeve* music in the West, an exciting development because the music is especially powerful and evocative. It is considered among the most sophisticated and highly-developed forms of sacred music among the *Ajlo-Eve*.

No particular spiritual or cultural background is required to appreciate the unusual power of this music. Whether performing or observing, the experience can be mind-altering. Many of my students, upon hearing *Yeve* drumming for the first time, have immediately sensed an unfamiliar mystical quality to the music, and in a few cases been quickly overwhelmed by it. Even without its ritual component, the drums seem to tap forces of nature which have long been dismissed as fantasy in the West because they can't be verified or quantified. We have found in performance that it's difficult to switch to other styles of music after playing *Yeve* drums, especially *Adavu* and *Afovou*, simply because it takes a while to get back down to earth.

The standard *Eve* drum set is used to perform *Yeve* music. Sometimes *sogo* functions as the lead drum and *atsimevu* is not used. In addition, a two-ended iron cluster bell known as *adodo* is carried and shaken by priests and priestesses as they travel in procession. There are times when *Yeve* initiates are not allowed to speak, but may be required to sing as they travel from place to place; the *adodo* bell is a convenient musical accompaniment on such occasions.

There are seven musical styles, or "drums," performed among the *Yeve*. *Agovu* is processional music, played when priests & priestesses are moving from place to place, through a village or across a dance field. *Sogba* is the *Yeve* equivalent of social dance music. It is likely to be the longest part of an afternoon's performance because it has a nice cool tempo for dancing, singing and fellowship. *Sovu*, *Adavu* and *Afovou* are rituals related to consecration and divine communion. *Husago* is a grave and sorrowful dance normally reserved for the funerals of *Yeve* priests and priestesses; there are songs from two somewhat different *Husago* musical styles in this book.

The Songs

I've combined the songs of *Yeve* into one section because they are often performed together and deal with similar subject matter. There are naturally some aspects of *Yeve* songs and ritual which my informants are unwilling or unable to discuss. In one case I've included a song about which I could find out absolutely nothing.

Yevegbe is the secret language of *Yeve* song and ritual, used to keep the details of cult activities mysterious to outsiders. *Yevegbe* is thought to be a dialect of the *Fɔ̃* language. Some of these songs are in pure *Yevegbe*, while others are in *Eve* or a combination of the two.



Atsise ne woa bla atsise [Agouu]

LEAD: Atsise ne woa bla atsise
GROUP: ’Hõ dzogbe ne woa bla atsise
LEAD: Atsise ne woa bla ya
GROUP: Voduwo ’hõ dzogbe ne woa bla atsise

Literal Translation

LEAD: We will perform *atsise*.
GROUP: On the day of turmoil we will perform *atsise*.
LEAD: We will perform *atsise*.
GROUP: On the day the gods manifest themselves we will perform *atsise*.

atsisea very important *Yeve* ritual.
ahõday of turmoil, disaster, holocaust.
voduwogods.

What It Means

We will perform atsise faithfully at the proper time.

This prayer song is a reminder to perform the *atsise* ritual at the proper time, and to take it seriously. I don’t have any information about this particular ritual.



Go ma do go wo lea 'fiade [Agovu]

LEAD: He lo he lo he lo he
GROUP: Go ma do go wo lea 'fiade
«repeat lead & group»
GROUP: Me gbona sege
Me gbona sege
Go ma do go wo lea 'fiade
«repeat»
He lo he lo he lo he
Go ma do go wo lea 'fiade

Literal Translation

LEAD: Hello, hey you.
GROUP: You and I will meet somewhere.
I will come to listen to you, to hear you out.

lea 'fiade somewhere.

What It Means

So you have something to say to me? Someday you and I will meet and I will hear what you have to say. For now, why not stand aside and see what I can do?

This is a thoughtful and understated example of the sort of self-validation song that usually ends with "... and if you don't want us to succeed, I guess you'd better go somewhere and die." The composer will entertain opposing points of view, but for now is concentrating on the task at hand (presumably a sacred ritual) and asks his critics to kindly do the same.



Do dzadza va do [Sogba]

LEAD: Do dzadza va do
E Xeḗ do dzadza va do ḗ wḗdzie

GROUP: Amlima loso ma yo Xeḗ
Xeḗ do dzadza va do eh
«repeat lead & group»

LEAD: Oh

GROUP: Yeveshi do tsi ma gbea hūkpḗnu he
«repeat lead & group»

GROUP: Amlima loso ma yo Xeḗ
Xeḗ do dzadza va do eh

Literal Translation

LEAD: He has arrived in earnest, Xeḗ has come to the *awḗdzie* ritual.

GROUP: The *amlima* rituals have called Xeḗ to join, and Xeḗ has arrived.

L/G: Oh, a *Yeve* priestess who has received a *tsi* doesn't defy the shrine.

do dzadza.....in earnest, prepared to perform.

va dohas appeared.

awḗdzie.....a specific sacred *Yeve* ritual.

amlima losothe *amlima* sacred rituals.

Yeveshia *Yeve* priestess.

hūkpḗnu.....shrine.

tsia sacred potion or healing herb, applied to an incision at the crook of the subject's elbow.

What It Means

Midawo Xeḗ has arrived, now we know things will be done properly. He has come to do his part, driven by his good character and sense of duty. We can all learn something from such exemplary behavior.

Midawo (High Priest) Xeḗ is a respected religious leader known for his exemplary character and great achievements. The composer hopes to inspire people to emulate his good qualities. The proverb “A *Yeve* priestess who has received a *tsi* doesn't defy the shrine” (which sounds much more poetic in *Yevegbe* than English) appeals to the patriotism of *Yeve* initiates, exhorting them to fulfill their duty to society.

The *amlima loso* are ritual public exhibitions of mysterious acts which some might say defy “known” laws of nature. From the African perspective, they are displays of extraordinary art and skill in manipulating the supernatural forces of life which everyone takes pretty much for granted. You might see priests and priestesses leaping impossible distances in the air. Someone will slash their belly or arm open with a knife, then the wound will heal itself before your eyes. An old priest might challenge the strongest men

to break a thin thread, or smash a tiny calabash with a hammer, then watch as everyone tries and fails. Or the same frail old man might present his own back to be struck repeatedly by hard blows, then walk away unharmed.



Aye ɔ̄o hoe lo ho [Sɔ̄u]

LEAD: Aye ɔ̄o hoe lo ho
 Aye ɔ̄o hoe, aye ɔ̄o hoe za, aye ɔ̄o hoe
 Ah̄za aye ɔ̄o hoe ha
 Mudze dzes̄ axonugbo

GROUP: Aye ɔ̄o hoe lo ho
 Aye ɔ̄o hoe, aye ɔ̄o hoe za, aye ɔ̄o hoe
 Ah̄za aye ɔ̄o hoe ha
 Mudze dzes̄ lo ho

«repeat lead & group»

LEAD: Ew̄ze w̄ze ɔ̄ na met̄wo ha

GROUP: Mudze dzes̄ lo ho

LEAD: Ew̄ze w̄ze ɔ̄ na met̄wo ha

GROUP: Mudze dzes̄ axonugbo
 Aye ɔ̄o hoe lo ho
 Aye ɔ̄o hoe, aye ɔ̄o hoe za, aye ɔ̄o hoe
 Ah̄za aye ɔ̄o hoe ha
 Mudze dzes̄ lo ho

Literal Translation

L/G: A dark evil cloud hovers over us.
 Evil has set a date with us.
 On the day of disaster, we will protect ourselves from evil.

L/G: An evil that weakens and overpowers humans is let loose.
 We will protect ourselves from evil.

aye ɔ̄o hoedark cloud, great evil.
 zaday, date.
 ah̄za.....the day of disaster.
 mudzestop, prevent.
 dzes̄death, something evil that kills.
 axonugbospiritual state (*bo*) which protects against evil.

What It Means

Beware, an evil storm of darkness is moving over us. We must prepare ourselves spiritually so the storm will pass without harm.

This song in the *Yevegbe* language is deeply metaphorical. The state of *bo* is something like a spiritual bomb shelter, a place where the mind can find protection from certain kinds of harm. There is a great disaster in the making, but although nothing can stop it from occurring, proper spiritual preparation can protect the soul from devastation.



Dāwɔlawo gbɔna [Sovv]

- LEAD: Dāwɔlawo gbɔna
Evodu Dāwɔlawo gbɔna
- GROUP: Ɛhotsui gbogbo me nye Dā o hee
Dāwɔlawo gbɔna
«repeat lead & group»
- LEAD: Ɛ Dāwɔlawo gbɔna
- GROUP: Evodu Dāwɔlawo gbɔna
«repeat lead & group»
- GROUP: Dāwɔlawo gbɔna
Evodu Dāwɔlawo gbɔna
Ɛhotsui gbogbo me nye Dā o hee
Dāwɔlawo gbɔna

Literal Translation

- LEAD: The *Dā* people are on the move,
The deity *Dā's* people are on the move.
- GROUP: Wearing a lot of cowry shells doesn't make you one of *Dā's* people.

Dāthe snake deity.
 Dāwɔlawothe congregation of the deity *Dā*.
 gbɔnaare coming, are on the move.
 evoduspirit, deity.
 Ɛhotsuicowry shells, as worn across the body by *Yeve* priests/priestesses.
 gbogbomany, plenty.
 me nyais not.

What It Means

Here we go, the people of Dā are on the move. You don't get to be one of us just by wearing a bunch of cowry shells. The wisdom of Dā comes with discipline, humility and hard work.

Yeve is a discipline, a religion, a way of life. The full benefits of membership come only with time, patience and dedication to spiritual growth. Young people want everything to happen quickly, so some novice *Yeve* initiates will throw on a set of *dakpla* (cowry shells) and think they've accomplished something. This song tries to set them straight – nothing gets you nothing, kids.

A possible dual meaning lies in the fact that cowry shells were once used as money. If *Ɛhotsui gbogbo* is read as “much money”, the meaning becomes *You can't buy wisdom or spiritual power with money.*



Lāwo gbɔna kple dzo [Sɔvɔ]

LEAD: Lāwo gbɔna kple dzo
Nyĩtsɔ lāwo gbɔna kple dzo

GROUP: Oh eh
Lāwo gbɔna kple dzo

Literal Translation

L/G: The animals are coming in earnest.
To prepare for the future, the animals are coming in earnest.

lāwothe animals, referring here to people.
gbɔnaare coming.
kple dzowith energy/alacrity, in earnest.
nyĩtsɔliterally, a day after yesterday or a day before tomorrow. In this context,
it might mean "... in order to improve our future by being dutiful today."

What It Means

We're here to perform the necessary rituals with alacrity. Our dutiful observance today prepares the way for a bright future.

In *Eve* theology, things of a religious nature are done primarily for the future, since good relations with ancestors and other divinities can lead to beneficial intervention in times of hardship. In typically eloquent and metaphorical style, this song makes a spiritual call to arms, exhorting the faithful to make dutiful observances today to improve the quality of life tomorrow.



Ahǒdzǒ mi yi bo [Adavv]

- LEAD: Ahǒdzǒ mi yi bo
Aye he lo ho
- GROUP: Voduwǒa 'hǒdzǒ mi yi bo
«repeat lead & group»
- GROUP: Yali vodua 'hǒdzǒ mi yi bo
Yali vodua 'hǒdzǒ mi yi bo
Ahǒdzǒ mi yi bo
Aye he lo ho
Voduwǒa 'hǒdzǒ mi yi bo

Literal Translation

- LEAD: Disaster has occurred, we enter the *bo* state.
- GROUP: Divinities, we enter the *bo* state.
Divine *Yali*, we enter the *bo* state.

ahǒdisaster.
dzǒhas occurred.
bospiritual state of preparedness.
mi yi.....move into.
aye heheed, listen, oh yeah.
voduwǒagods, divinities.
Yalithe name of the wind god, strong wind.

What It Means

Disaster is upon us. Oh Yali, we will prepare ourselves spiritually to protect us from harm.

This highly charged prayer song in the *Yevɛgbɛ* language prepares the congregation for the spiritual state of *bo*. In this state, priests and priestesses can deflect evil of a spiritual or supernatural nature. It is an amazing song which seems to magically interact with the *Adavv* musical texture to generate palpable waves of energy and mind-altering excitement.

The song is unique because it is not sung strictly in rhythm, at least not in the same way as other songs. The phrases seem to come as a reaction to the main beats and major cross-rhythms of the music and dance, rather than in a strict relationship with them. At first hearing it may seem that the song is completely in free rhythm, but that's not really the case. The cross-rhythms which lock it down come primarily from the dance and are difficult to distinguish without training and visual contact with the dancers.



Bokaya kaya kaya [Afosu]

LEAD: Bokaya kaya kaya
Nu wo vitowo he
Nu wo vinowo he

GROUP: Bokaya kaya kaya
Nu wo vitowo he
Nu wo vinowo he

Literal Translation

L/G: Something terrible has happened.
Something has happened to fathers.
Something has happened to mothers.

bokaya kaya kayavery old phrase, the meaning is not known. Warning? Disaster? To arms?
nu wo vitowosomething has happened to fathers.
nu wo vinowosomething has happened to mothers.

What It Means

Hear ye, we have suffered a great disaster.

Something really *big* has happened. If the mothers and the fathers are all crying, the entire community must have been hit hard. The song is so old that we don't know what calamity originally inspired it, possibly a slave raid or an overwhelming military defeat.



Zagunɔ ne lea 'davua mia kpɔ [Afovu]

LEAD: Zagunɔ ne lea 'davua mia kpɔ
Amuɖe dzo he

GROUP: Zagunɔ ne lea 'davua mia kpɔ
Amuɖe dzo he

«repeat lead & group»

GROUP: Zagunɔ ne lea 'davua mia kpɔ
Amuɖe dzo he
Zagunɔ ne lea 'davua mia kpɔ
Amuɖe dzo he

Literal Translation

L/G: The lead drummer should play *Adavu* now.
Amuɖe has occurred.

zagunɔ.....lead drummer.
'davua*Adavu*.
dzohas occurred.

What It Means

It's time to move on to Adavu music.

I think this is one of those instructional songs that reminds initiates of the proper time and place for a ritual. I'm unable to learn what *amuɖe* is or was. The language is a mixture of *Eve* and *Yevegbe*.



Lã lem lo [Husago]

LEAD: Lã lem lo
Lã lem he qua
Nye deka me tsi vɔlifɔ
Lã lem he qua

GROUP: Lã lem lo
Lã lem he qua
Nye deka me tsi vɔlifɔ
Lã lem lo

Literal Translation

L/G: An animal has captured me.
An animal has caught and eaten me.
I have been left alone in the wilderness.

lã leman animal has captured me.
he quaand eaten.
nye dekame alone.
me tsiwas left deserted.
vɔlifɔ.....a deserted place in the wilderness.

What It Means

Life has captured and eaten me. I've been left alone and deserted on earth.

This is a funeral song. Someone has lost a loved one and feels frightened and deserted. The composer compares this loss to the horrible thought of being deserted by one's family and society, left alone in life's wilderness of hardships to be eaten by wild animals. To the communal African, whose life has been interwoven with others from birth, this is an especially powerful metaphor.



De ʋ nu mawo gbe [Husago]

LEAD: De ʋ nu mawo gbe lo
Amuḍe dzo he

GROUP: De ʋ nu mawo gbe
Amuḍe dzo he
«repeat»

GROUP: Wɔze wɔze wɔ
Wɔze wɔze wɔ
De ʋ nu mawo gbe lo
Amuḍe dzo he
De ʋ nu mawo gbe
Amuḍe dzo he

What It Means

This song is in the *Yevgebe* language. I'm unable to find out anything about it.



Ego me nɔ la o [Husago]

LEAD: E Xeḍe gbloe be Husago (ha) Yeve goe

GROUP: Ego me nɔ la o
Yeve go me nɔ la o

LEAD: Amewo gbloe be Husago (ha) Yeve goe

GROUP: Ego me nɔ la o
Yeve go me nɔ la o

Literal Translation

LEAD: Xeḍe (people, other leaders) said that Husago is the essence of *Yeve*.

GROUP: An ordinary gourd does not function like that.

gbloe besaid that.

ego, go, goea gourd, the spirit or essence of someone.

me nɔ la odoesn't function like that, doesn't work that way.

amewopeople.

What It Means

Midawo Xeḍe and other great leaders have called Husago the “essence of Yeve”. This music has extraordinary power and significance.

We have learned 2 different versions of Husago from our teachers; this song is sung for the second (and reportedly rarer) version. Husago is normally performed only during the funeral rites for departed *Yeve* initiates.

Key to understanding this song is the concept of a gourd representing the spirit of a human being. Among the *Eve* there are funeral traditions which involve the ritualized collection of body samples (hair and nail clippings, etc) from the deceased into a small gourd. Once constructed, the gourd is kept to physically represent the spirit or essence of the departed in future ceremonies.

Midawo (High Priest) Xeḍe (other names or phrases may be substituted by the songleader) has described Husago as the equivalent of a gourd for the spirit of *Yeve*. The music is associated with the creation of a *Yeve* funeral gourd (as opposed to an ordinary *Eve* funeral) because of its special nature. Proverbially speaking, “This is no ordinary gourd”, so ordinary music won't do.

Pronunciation Guide

Introduction

You've no doubt decided it's time to get a little help with pronunciation – and with songs that weave in and out of six unfamiliar languages it's no wonder. These pronunciation rules are most appropriate for the *Eve*, *Fɔ̃*, *Gũ* and *Yevegbe* languages (most of the songs in this book), but you can use them for the other languages as well with acceptable results. I deliberately avoid any mention of pitch, which plays an essential role in some of these languages, because it's a very complex and unfamiliar subject which I think would confuse rather than enlighten readers. For the purpose of singing, it is reasonable to rely on the melodic line of each song to provide the rudiments of correct pitch.

If you're wondering why one guide can serve for so many languages, the answer is simple. Written language was introduced in West Africa by European missionaries within the last few hundred years. They naturally tried to combine all necessary “unfamiliar” sounds into one extended and very Greek-looking alphabet, rather than create an alphabet for every language.

Alphabet

a b d ḍ e ε f f̣ g h ɣ x i k l m n ŋ o ɔ p r s t u v ʋ w y z
A B D Ḍ E Ẹ F F̣ G H ɣ X I K L M N Ŋ O Ọ P R S T U V ʋ W Y Z
ã ẽ ẽ̃ ĩ õ ð ã ã̃ ẽ̃ ẽ̃̃ ĩ̃ ĩ̃̃ õ̃ õ̃̃ ù

Quick Summary

If you like, you can get by with just a few simple rules. Since most African languages are written phonetically, try to pronounce all the vowels and consonants that are written. *gb* and *kp* are single consonants, so pronounce the two sounds at the same time. Pronounce *v* and *f* like *v* and *f*, but use both lips together instead of top teeth against bottom lip. Pronounce *ŋ* like *ng*. As for the vowels, you can pronounce *a* as in *pot*, *e* and *ε* as in *weigh*, *i* as in *beat*, *o* as in *boat*, *ɔ* as in *bought*, and *u* as in *boot*. The vowels *ã*, *ẽ*, *ẽ̃*, *ĩ*, *õ*, *ð*, *ũ* are nasalized (say them as though you were pinching your nose).

That should be enough to get you started. It's actually easier than English once you get the hang of it. The following sections provide a much more detailed pronunciation guide for those who wish to go further.

Consonants⁴

b, g, v, f, m, n

For all practical purposes, these consonants are pronounced the same as corresponding sounds in English.

d

Similar to the corresponding consonant in English, but pronounced with the tip of the tongue against the back of the teeth and not against the ridge behind the teeth.

ɖ

Made with the tip of the tongue against the front of the hard palate. Technically: a voiced retroflex stop.

p, t, k

Similar to the corresponding English consonants, but with less aspiration (puff of breath). *t*, like *d*, is pronounced with the tip of the tongue against the back of the teeth.

gb, kp

Pronounced with simultaneous closure at the lips (as for *b* or *p*) and at the soft palate (as for *g* or *k*). Released simultaneously and without aspiration. Technically: labiovelar stops, voiced and voiceless respectively.

dz, ts

Usually similar to the final consonant clusters in English *cads* and *cats* respectively, but pronounced with the tongue against the back of the teeth. Before *i*, and sometimes before other vowels, similar to the consonants in English *Joe* and *chew* respectively.

v, f

In pronouncing *v* and *f*, the air passes through a narrow opening left between the lips (rather than between the lower lip and the upper teeth as in *v* and *f*). Technically: bilabial fricatives, voiced and voiceless respectively.

z, s

Similar to the corresponding sounds in English, but slightly palatalized (i.e., somewhat closer to the medial consonant sounds in English *pleasure* and *pressure* respectively) before *i*.

⁴ The remainder of this chapter is a detailed summary of pronunciation rules reprinted with permission from *Ewe Basic Course* by Irene Warburton, Prosper Kpotufe, and Roland Glover (Indiana University, African Studies Program, 1968).

ɣ, ɣ̥

In pronouncing *ɣ* and *ɣ̥*, the air passes through a narrow passage formed by raising the back of the tongue towards the soft palate. Technically: velar fricatives, voiced and voiceless respectively.

h

Similar to *ɣ*, but produced somewhat further back in the mouth. Technically: a voiced pharyngeal fricative.

ny

Similar to French *gn* as in *Boulogne*. Technically: a palatal nasal.

ŋ

Similar to English *ng* as in *sting*. Technically: a velar nasal.

l

Similar to the first *l* in English *little*. The tongue is raised and flat, not retracted as in the second *l* in *little*.

r

In producing *r*, the air passes through a narrow passage formed by raising the tip of the tongue towards the ridge behind the teeth. Technically: a voiced alveolar fricative.

w, y

Similar to the corresponding sounds in English, but often weakened to the point of disappearing completely between vowels.

Vowels

a

Similar to the vowel in American English *pot*. Technically: a low central unrounded vowel.

e

Between the vowel in English *bet* and the final vowel in English *sofa*. Technically: a centralized mid front unrounded vowel.

ɛ

Between the vowel in English *bet* and that of English *bat*, but much closer to the former. Technically: a lower mid front unrounded vowel.

i

Similar to the vowel in English *beat*, but unglided. Technically: a high front unrounded vowel.

o

Similar to the vowel in English *boat*, but unglided. Technically: a higher mid back rounded vowel.

ɔ

Similar to the vowel in English *bought*, but unglided. Technically: a lower mid back rounded vowel.

u

Similar to the vowel in English *boot*, but unglided. Technically: a high back rounded vowel.

ã, õ, ĩ, ã, õ, ã

All of the above vowels have a nasalized counterpart.

About the Author



Dan Gorlin is the founder and director of **Alokli West African Dance Ensemble**, and a Master Drummer in the tradition of the *Ahlo-Eves* of West Africa. Based in Marin County, California, Dan has been teaching and performing African music and dance for 25 years, and has directed Alokli since 1985. Dan's unique and effective teaching style has introduced thousands of adults and children to African music and culture.

Dan has taught African music & dance at California Institute of the Arts, UCLA, and at several schools and recreation centers in Los Angeles and the Bay Area. The Alokli Ensemble is a regular feature at Northern California schools and fairs, and performed recently with the Marin Symphony.

Dan has studied and performed with several members of the world-famous Ladzekpo family of Ghanaian musicians, most recently the renowned Master Drummer **C.K. Ladzekpo**. Dan is also an accomplished pianist.

In addition to this songbook, Dan has published two traditional African music CDs and is working on a 3rd album combining Western and African musical influences. He is also the creator of several award-winning computer games, including the international mega-hit "Choplifter".

What's On the CD

The songs are presented on the CD in the same order as in the book, so you can use the table of contents as a reference for song order. Each track contains the songs for one chapter. These are unadorned performances, designed to let you hear nuances clearly. Listen for the 3-4-1 clapper to hear the correct orientation of each song relative to the bell and other instruments.

Track 1: Adzohũ Songs

Track 2: Afãvu Songs

Track 3: Agbadza Songs

Track 4: Agbeko Songs

Track 5: Atsiã Songs

Track 6: Bawa Songs

Track 7: Gadzo Songs

Track 8: Gahũ Songs

Track 9: Kinka Songs

Track 10: Takaḍa Songs

Track 11: Yeve Songs