

African drumming essay

The music of the native peoples of Africa. Sub-Saharan African music has as its distinguishing feature a rhythmic complexity common to no other region. Polyrhythmic counterpoint, wherein two or more locally independent attack patterns are superimposed, is realized by handclaps, xylophones, rattles, and a variety of tuned and non tuned drums. The African polyrhythm is the noticeable steadiness of the resultant rhythmic pattern. Pitch polyphony exists in the form of parallel intervals overlapping solo-choral response, and occasional simultaneous independent melodies. In addition to voice, many wind and string instruments perform melodic functions. Common are bamboo flutes, ivory trumpets, and the one-string ground bow. During royal times, European instruments such as saxophones, trumpets, and guitars were adopted by many African musicians; their sounds were integrated into the traditional patterns.

Rhythm is the most important feature of African music, and because of the slave trade this has influenced other countries such as the Caribbean and the southern states of America. In Africa music repetition is often used to organise the music. Polyphony is also important, with many musical parts or rhythms interweaving with each other. Call-and-response is very popular. The chorus repeats a fixed refrain in alternation with a lead singer, who then has more freedom to improvise. This makes the music conversational. Pitch in African music is largely determined by the tuning of the drums.

Talking drums are part of a family of hourglass shaped pressure drums these include "gan gan" (the smallest member of this drum family) or "dun dun" (the largest of the talking drums.) The drum heads at either end of the drum's

wooden body are made from hide, other which are around a Leather length of body and around when you cords under drum heads changing



body are made fish-skin or membranes wrapped wooden hoop. cords run the the drum's are wrapped both hoops; squeeze these your arm, the tighten, the instrument's

pitch. Talking drums are used to send messages, using a combination of pitch

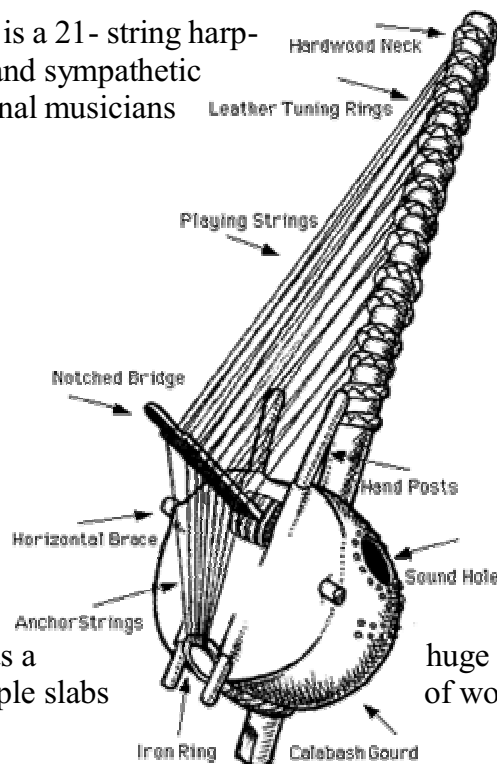
and rhythm to imitate speech. Africans believe that their instruments actually speak a language. This is because most African languages are tonal. Drums don't only play the rhythm some have strings attached to the skins or the player presses down on the skin, which alters the pitch making it similar to African spoken languages. Musicians treat their instruments with great respect rather than learning them. These instruments are tuned to suit the player's language.

Scale systems vary between regions but are generally diatonic. Since African music is passed on through oral tradition; songs are usually based on echo of brief rhythmic and melodic patterns. These patterns usually descend from a pentatonic scale, which is a scale consisting of five tones. At that time European music was based on major and minor diatonic scales, which consisted of eight tones, and their modes. They use the pentatonic scale because there are no semitones and it is easier to sing.

West African popular music combines the old with the new and is called highlife. This style uses a calypso-like melody that is backed with traditional instruments. The harmony of these songs is usually based around chords 1 4 and 5.

Songs are traditionally used to accompany labour or a manual task. An interesting feature of African music is that people don't go to hear music at performances or concerts they go to join in. Performances give the tribe or social group a sense of identity and a certain pride. Music is highly functional in national life, accompanying birth, marriage, hunting, and even political activities. Much music exists for entertainment.

The kora is a 21- string harp-plucked and sympathetic professional musicians in Gambia.



lute, which includes both strings. It is used by among the Mandinka people of

Africa has a form simple slabs

huge variety of xylophones ranging of wood to complicated instruments



Africa has a huge variety of xylophones ranging from simple slabs of wood to complicated instruments



M'bira has 22 keys and its 7 note scale is supposed to draw ancestral spirits to earth. M'bira is one of the most popular melodic instruments in Africa. Different cultures use the mbira in different ways. Also, the mbira exists in different forms in different cultures. Some mbiras are used for entertainment and others for religious ceremonies. Often, the people who can own and play the mbira are restricted to chiefs or other important people, especially when it is being

played for religious purposes.

The master drummer calls the rhythms and directs the dancers

The sogo is the largest of the supporting drums. In some pieces it is used as a lead drum. It is about two and a half feet tall, its head is about ten inches in diameter and it is closed at the bottom. Sogo responds to the lead drummer's calls in harmony with kidi.

Kaganu is a narrow drum or membranophone. It is about two feet tall, its head is about three inches in diameter and it is open at the bottom. Although kaganu is known as a supporting drum, it does not respond to calls from the lead drummer like the other supporting drums: kidi and sogo. The main function of kaganu is to give some colour or flavour to the music. Its also a high pitched drum

Kidi is a drum which is about two feet tall; its head is about nine inches in diameter and has a closed bottom. Kidi responds to calls from the lead drummer. This is known as a dialogue. This concept is also commonly known as call and response. Kidi plays in harmony with sogo when engaged in a dialogue.