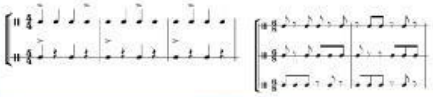
African Drumming Knowledge Organiser

African instruments are often made from plants and animal products such as hide and bone. African musicians are very fond of **PERCUSSION** instruments and use a wide variety of drums (called **MEMBRANOPHONES**) Drums are traditionally used as an accompaniment to be singing, dancing, working and communicating between villages. Drummers are typically the most respected members of their community.



Characteristic Rhythms and Metres, Traditional Rhythm Patterns & Repetition and Ostinato

REPETITION and **CYCLIC RHYTHMS** used to organise music. A repeated rhythm pattern (**OSTINATO** or **TIMELINE**) is used as a basis for **IMPROVISATION** to "hold the piece together". Use of **SYNCOPATION, POLYRHYTHMS** (shown below right), **CYCLIC RHYTHMS** and **CROSS-RHYTHMS** (shown below left). **MASTER DRUMMER** can give musical 'cues' to performers to change rhythms during a performance and can also choose to **ACCENT** different beats within a **RHYTHM CYCLE**.



Pitch & Melody and Harmony & Tonality

Most African melodies are based on a "limited number of pitches" - four, five, six or seven note **SCALES** and are normally short and simple, often expanded by **REPETITION** and **IMPROVISATION**. The pitch in African drumming is largely determined by the tuning of the drums. African singers often create vocal harmony by singing in thirds, fourths or fifths. **UNISON** and **PARALLEL OCTAVE** harmony is also common. The basic form of African Vocal Music is **CHORAL SINGING** known as **CALL AND RESPONSE** where one singer (**SOLOIST**) or small group of singers sings a line and the whole group (**CHORUS**) makes a reply (often a fixed **REFRAIN**) – like a "musical conversation" – in alternation with the "lead singer". The soloist often **IMPROVISES**. African singers often "shout words" (**VOCABLES**) and male and female singers enjoy using their highest **VOCAL REGISTER** known as **FALSETTO**. African singing can be accompanied by instruments but can also be unaccompanied (**A CAPPELLA**).

Ornamentation

The **MASTER DRUMMER** can elaborate and decorate his solo drum part with **ACCENTS** and playing in a technically demanding style to "show off" to the rest of the drum ensemble and audience.

Texture

In West Africa, drum ensembles have 3-5 players each with a distinctive method of striking their drum and playing interlocking rhythms. This creates a **THICK** and complex **POLYPHONIC** texture.

Dynamics

Since African Drumming is often performed outside and at social gatherings and celebrations, the dynamics are generally **LOUD (FORTE – *f*)** or **VERY LOUD (FORTISSIMO – *ff*)**, but like changes in tempo, can be indicated by the **MASTER DRUMMER**.

Tempo

FAST – designed for dancing and social gatherings – tempo will match the dance steps. The **MASTER DRUMMER** can both establish the tempo as well as speed up **(ACCELERANDO)** or slow down **(DECELERANDO)** or even set a new tempo with musical 'cues'.

Ensemble

A **MASTER DRUMMER** often leads giving signals to the rest of the group to change rhythms or sections of the piece and can also control the **TEMPO**. He often **IMPROVISES** highly complicated rhythms and can indicate the ending of a piece of music as well as playing the "**CALL**" to **CALL AND RESPNOSE SECTION**S which are 'responded' by the drum ensemble.

Form & Structure and Phrasing

The structure of a piece of African drumming depends on the **MASTER DRUMMER** and has no fixed or determined length, entirely dependent on the rhythms used.

Origins and Cultural Context of the Traditional Music

African Drumming is 'traditional' and handed down via the **ORAL TRADITION** (not written down). Not performed 'at a concert', rather everyone joins in by dancing or playing an instrument, singing or clapping. Combines other art forms and heard at special occasions and celebrations. Many Africans believe that music serves as a link to the spirit world.

Musical Characteristics of Folk Music

Traditional drums such as the **DJEMBE, TALKING DRUM** and **DUNDUN** remain popular in African music today, often combined with a number of percussion instruments, stringed instruments and woodwind instruments. **RHYTHM** remains a key feature of African drumming.

Impact of Modern Technology on Traditional Music

African music has been a major influence on the development of popular music contributing rhythms, structures, melodic features and the use of improvisation to such styles as blues, gospel and jazz, brought over to America by slaves. High quality recordings of traditional African music are now possible with advanced recording techniques

Artists, Bands & Performers of African Drumming



Bolokada Conde



Ladysmith Black Mambazo





Other percussion instruments such as clappers, maracas, scrapers, gongs and xylophones (called **BALAFONS**) produce their sound by vibration and are known as **IDIOPHONES**.

Instrumentation – Typical Instruments, Timbres and Sonorities



Stringed instruments (**CHORDOPHONES**) such as bows, lyres, zithers, harps and the **KORA** are popular as well as some woodwind instruments (**AEROPHONES**) such as whistles, flutes, reed pipes, trumpets and horns.



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