

African Drumming

Move with the beat!

Africa is a huge continent, with a rich and diverse history. It has produced many strong musical traditions, both instrumental and vocal. We are going to focus on the drumming traditions of Sub-Saharan Africa.

Music is performed every day in some African cultures, at occasions ranging from celebrations and funerals to more mundane, everyday tasks. The sounds and rhythms of African drumming are like a language that carries across both time and place, communicating messages from one person or tribe to another.



African instruments

Let's look at some of the instruments you might typically find in African drumming (or in your classroom!)

Left: The djembe
Right: The dunun



Djembe

The djembe is a single-headed drum, shaped like a goblet, that is played with the hands. It comes in several sizes, and a skilled djembe player can produce several different sounds with a single drum.

Traditionally, djembe drums are only played by men, while women play a variety of other percussion instruments.

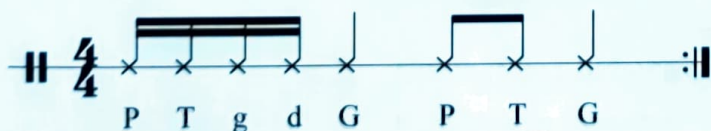
Basic djembe technique involves three different sounds, and both your hands:

Drum Sound	Hand	Description
Gun (G)	Right	A long, low-pitched bass sound made by striking the middle of the drum.
Dun (D)	Left	
go (g)	Right	A medium-pitched tone made by striking the drum halfway between the edge and the centre.
do (d)	Left	
Pa (P)	Right	A short, high-pitched slap made by striking the edge of the drum.
Ta (T)	Left	

JUST FOR FUN!

If you have a djembe, or similar hand drum, try creating these three different sounds.

Then try playing this simple rhythm (slowly at first, then speed up):



A YouTube video made by Nowick Gray gives more detail about basic Djembe technique. You can find it by searching YouTube for 'Basic djembe technique and terminology'.

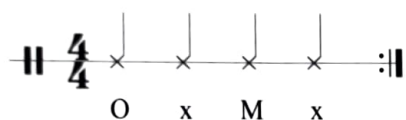
Western notation is only used to help you get started with these African rhythms. An African musician would learn by listening, copying and remembering.

Dunun (or dundun)

The dunun is a larger, double-headed drum played with a stick. It is often worn on the shoulder, using a strap. Sometimes two or more drums are stood on one end, and played by a single musician. Often a bell-like instrument is mounted on the dunun. A dunun can produce these basic sounds:

- **O** An **open** sound.
- **M** A **muted** sound, played with one hand 'muting' the drum by resting on the skin, creating a shorter sound.
- **X** The bell on the dunun.

Ask a classmate to add this simple dunun pattern to your djembe pattern:



Agogô (bell)

African drumming usually features bells and rattles to 'cut through' the sound of several drums. A popular bell-like instrument is the agogô, which can create two different pitches when struck (low and high).

The agogô player often leads the ensemble, keeping everyone else in time. A common agogô rhythm is below:



Rhythmic devices

We will now look at two of the fundamental musical concepts found in a lot of African drumming:

Polyrhythm

Many of the different rhythms found in African music, when played on their own, are quite simple. However, when combined with other rhythms, we hear much complexity. This is due to **polyrhythm**, the combining of several different rhythms.

In the following example, the two separate rhythms combine to create a more complex **polyrhythmic** texture. See if you (and a classmate) can perform these rhythms together. Watch out for the time signature - there are six beats in the bar.

Agogô

Hand drum

Cross rhythms

A cross rhythm is a complex type of polyrhythm, which uses different 'conflicting' rhythms.

Often, the rhythms do not follow the same pulse, as shown in the example below.

Part 1

Part 2

This is known as a **two against three** cross rhythm. Part 1 is playing groups of three notes on each beat, but Part 2 is playing groups of two notes on each beat. Try performing it by assigning one part to each hand and tapping a drum or a table.

Saying the phrase, 'nice cup of tea' in rhythm might help:

Part 1

Nice cup of tea

Part 2

This is just a simple example of a cross rhythm. African music makes extensive use of these.

Gahu: an interactive drumming example

Find a website called thisworldmusic.com and within the 'Interactive audio' section find 'Great grooves #1: Gahu'. This web page features a recording of a Gahu, a traditional dance from Ghana.

At the bottom of the web page is a mixer, allowing you to change the volume of each part and mute tracks.

Start by clicking the solo button for the Sogo part; you will find that each individual part is quite simple (you can probably clap all the parts quite easily), but by combining lots of layers and using polyrhythms, the overall effect is complex.

You might want to pick out two (or more) rhythms and perform them in class, using suitable percussion instruments.

Call and response

The idea behind call and response is very simple. One person shouts, or plays, a 'call', and the rest of the performers (or audience) respond.

Call and response is used in many additional ways in African music:

- A caller might start a rhythm, and pass it to another drummer.
- In a vocal performance, call-and-response singing is very common.
- A caller controls the **tempo** of the piece, as well as when it starts and ends.

Many African pieces are controlled by a **master drummer**, a **virtuosic** musician who acts as the 'caller' during a performance. As well as controlling the piece the master drummer often plays a core rhythm, around which the other rhythms fit. A master drummer may even improvise rhythms based on the core rhythm, as a kind of solo, and then fit seamlessly back into the overall texture.

TALKING DRUM: FACT FILE

The **talking drum** is a very special instrument in African culture. The drum is played with a hooked stick, and contains string that can be tightened and loosened to change the pitch of the drum. Through specific pitches and rhythms, a master drummer can replicate the sound of human speech and communicate messages using the drum. Historically, this language was understood both within and between tribes.

Master drummer Ayan Bisi Adeleke demonstrates the talking drum on YouTube. Search for him on YouTube to find the video.



Performing African music

KEY

+ = muted

o = open

↓ = strike drum
with palm

Here are some examples of common West African rhythms:

Gahu

The Gahu is a popular dance among the Ewe people of South Ghana, Togo and Benin:

Agogô (bell)

Axatse (shaker)

Kaganu (small drum)

Kidi (medium drum)

Sogo (large drum)

play open w/sticks

w/sticks unless stated

w/sticks unless stated

Akom

The fast Akom is a religious dance from West Africa:

Dawuro (bells)

Dawuro (bells)

Agyegyewa (small high-pitched drum)

Apentemma (medium-pitched hand drum)

Play w/hands

Play w/hands

When performing these pieces:

- Use instruments that are the closest you can get to the traditional instruments.
- Start slow and get faster.
- Try adding parts one by one, dropping out and rejoining once you have got going. A master drummer could help by signalling when to do this.
- Simplify or double-up parts if you need to.
- Try varying the rhythms slightly once you are confident - try short improvisations before returning to your rhythm.

Doudoumba

This rhythm is known as 'the dance of the strong men':

The musical score is written for six instruments: Bell, Djembe, Djembe, Djembe, Dundun, and Clave. The time signature is 6/8. The score is divided into two measures. The instruments and their notes are as follows:

Instrument	Measure 1	Measure 2
Bell	Quarter, Quarter, Quarter, Quarter, Quarter, Quarter	Quarter, Quarter, Quarter, Quarter, Quarter, Quarter
Djembe	s, s, s, t, t	s, s, t, t
Djembe	t, t	t, t, b, b
Djembe	s, t, s	s, t, s
Dundun	M, O, O, O	O, O, O
Clave	Quarter, Quarter, Quarter	Quarter, Quarter, Quarter

Note: The djembes are labelled **s** (slap), **t** (tone), or **b** (bass).
'M' and 'O' refer to 'muted' and 'open', as before.



Here is a summary of the main features of African drumming:

- Melody**
- Call-and-response singing.
 - The majority of musicians play percussion.
 - Melodies are often short and contain just a few different pitches.
- Tonality**
- Percussion based - little harmony or tonality.
- Structure**
- The master drummer controls the structure.
 - Instruments start and stop, as instructed by the master drummer.
 - Short improvisations are developed around set patterns.
 - There may be a central vocal melody that keeps returning.
- Instruments (and timbre)**
- Several different drums are used.
 - Several different sounds can be produced on a single instrument.
 - Bells, rattles and shakers are used.
- Texture**
- The music consists of several layers of drums and other percussion instruments.
 - Drums combine in complex layers - polyrhythm.
- Tempo, metre and rhythm**
- There is a strong pulse, which is usually divided into groups of three or four.
 - Rhythms are 'cyclic' - short repeated patterns.
 - Polyrhythms - contrasting rhythms are played simultaneously.
 - Triplet rhythms are often used.
 - Cross rhythms are often used.
- Other things to consider**
- Music (and dancing) is performed at weddings, funerals, festivals and other public and private ceremonies.
 - No sheet music is used - musicians are taught by listening, copying and remembering.

TEST YOURSELF

'Akosua Tuntum'

Listen to 'Akosua Tuntum' from the album *Rhythms of Life, Songs of Wisdom - Akan Music from Ghana* and answer the following questions. Listen at least until 1:40 in the track.

1. Name three types of instruments you can hear. (3)
2. Is the solo singer male or female? (1)
3. How would you describe the relationship between the solo singer and the backing singers? (1)
4. What is the term that describes the complex layering of rhythms in this piece? (1)
5. 'Akosua Tuntum' refers to a specific type of African drumming ensemble. Give three details about the way these musicians perform, how they learn the music, and how they structure their performance. (3)
6. Give an example of a specific occasion in the lives of these musicians that might be accompanied by this style of music. (1)

See answers on page 175.

FURTHER LISTENING

Search for these artists and groups on YouTube:

- Master drummer Mustapha Tettey Addy ('Jalikunda African Drums take the Montserrat African Music Festival by storm')
- Tanante ('Dununba Tanante with Sipa and Wassalon group in Touba Kabira, Abene, 2011')
- Jalikunda African Drums.

EXTENSION: For even more listening ideas, try searching for 'Highlife' music which originated in Ghana. This is an example of fusion music. It combines rhythms found in traditional African drumming with Western harmonies and instruments like guitars and brass.



The Music of Central and South America

The music of Central and South America is alive with colour, dance and rhythm. Both calypso and samba form part of this rich tradition.

Calypso

Calypso is a form of traditional music from the (twin) island nation of Trinidad and Tobago. It has since become popular throughout the Caribbean.

Calypso music consists largely of songs, where the music and lyrics are equally important.

The lyrics usually tell a story, or comment on society. Famous examples of calypso songs include Lord Invader's 'Rum And Coca-Cola', which describes the relationship between Trinidadians and the American G.I.s who were stationed on the island.

'Out The Fire' by Lord Invader

Listen to 'Out The Fire' by Lord Invader, from the album *Calypso In New York*. The song and recording are from the 1940s.

Musical features of calypso, heard in 'Out The Fire':

Melody

- It includes call-and-response singing during the chorus.
- The chorus consists of short, simple phrases.
- The melodies are syncopated.
- Some of the instrumental melodies have an improvised quality.

Tonality

- The simple harmony uses primary chords.
- The song is in a major key.

Structure

- The structure consists of verses, choruses and instrumental sections.

Instruments (and timbre)

- It has a solo vocal and backing vocals.
- The vocalist combines singing with some spoken lyrics.

Texture

- Melody and accompaniment.

Tempo, metre and rhythm

- This is $\frac{2}{4}$ or $\frac{4}{4}$, with **syncopation**.
- A typical calypso rhythm is:



(This rhythm is found in guitar strumming patterns, as well as drum/percussion parts.)

- The shaker and guitar play almost constantly, providing a strong rhythm for the rest of the band to follow.
- There are 'stops' in the rhythm at the beginning of each verse.

Other things to consider

- The lyrics are witty and satirical, often about political or cultural problems.
- As this recording dates from the 1940s, it is not surprising that all of the instruments are acoustic. However, more recent calypso music will be more likely to use electric guitars, synthesisers and a drum kit.

Steel bands (or steel pans)

Steel band music started in Trinidad and Tobago. A steel band consists of a group of percussion instruments constructed from old oil drums. Different-sized drums are used for the melody, chords and bass line.

Steel bands typically perform instrumental arrangements of calypso and popular songs, both from the Caribbean and outside. 'Yellow Bird' is a traditional Haitian song which has become a standard steel band tune.

Listen to the version of 'Yellow Bird' by The Original Trinidad Steel Band (available to download and stream) and note the following:

- The highest pans play the melody. They are called **tenors** or **ping-pings**.
- The middle-pitched pans play the chords. They are the **altos**, **guitars** and **cellos**.
- The **bass** pans play the lowest notes.
- A drum kit and other percussion instruments accompany the performance.
- A rolling, **tremolo** effect is used on the long notes.
- Lots of syncopation is used.
- The melodic phrases are played expressively, using **legato**.
- The chords are simple, mainly primary chords.



Calypso composition

Use the calypso rhythm on the previous page, and play the following chord progression in G major and in $\frac{2}{4}$ time:

G	G	C	C
G	G	C	D7

Add a bass line, and percussion such as bongos, congas and shakers. You can use or adapt the 'calypso rhythm' on page 108.

Sample bass line

G C D7

Use these to compose a simple a simple call-and-response chorus.

Your chorus will consist of two quite simple melodies (the call and the response) played over the chord sequence. (HINT: Use the G major scale for your melody).

Remember, calypso musicians sing about events, problems and issues in society (maybe you could consider, for example, something you might want to change about your school).

Then compose a verse to accompany your chorus. Use the same chords or change them slightly.

If you want, add electronic or electric instruments to create a more modern version of your song.

LISTENING ACTIVITY

Listen up to 1:30 of 'The Hammer' by David Rudder:

Give three features of calypso music that you hear in this recording. (3)

See answers on page 175.

FURTHER LISTENING

- Lord Kitchener
- Mighty Sparrow
- Harry Belafonte (The track 'Jamaica Farewell' from his 1956 album *Calypso* is a beautiful example of a traditional calypso song. The guitar intro perfectly captures the calypso rhythm).

Samba

Samba is the dance and musical style that typifies Brazilian music. It combines a large number of different musical influences, but its roots are mainly in African drumming.

Millions of African slaves were brought to Brazil to work in mines and on sugar plantations, and they brought their musical traditions with them.

Originally the rhythms of samba were played on guitar-like instruments and accompanied by small percussion instruments. Taking influences from American military marching bands, the samba developed into the percussion-based style we hear today.



Musical features that typify samba are:

- A $\frac{2}{4}$ or $\frac{4}{4}$ rhythm (almost always 'felt' as two beats).
- Layers of different rhythms (it is polyrhythmic).
- A huge range of percussion instruments.
- Call and response.
- Led by one player with a whistle and a **repinique** (the lead drum).
- Sometimes vocals and brass instruments add a melody.
- No sheet music: music is taught aurally.

Instruments and rhythm

A samba band is known as 'bateria'. The best-known samba style is samba batucada, although other fusion styles exist. Listed on the next page are some typical samba percussion instruments, their roles in the ensembles and some typical rhythms they might play.

Instrument **Description** **Rhythms**

Surdo



Large drums played with a soft beater, and muted with the hand. They provide the basic rhythmic pulse. Usually a samba band has three surdo: low, medium and high.

Samba batucada surdo rhythms:

Low Surdo

Medium Surdo

High Surdo

Caixa

A snare drum. Provides a constant rhythm and pushes the piece forwards.

Caixa rhythm with accents:

Repinique



This tom-tom drum is tuned very high to cut through the ensemble. Played with the hand and a stick.

The repinique plays a range of rhythms, to announce changes of section, breaks and solos within a samba piece. It also leads call-and-response sections. A basic repinique rhythm during repetitive sections looks like this:

o = open
m = muted
r = rimshot

Tamborim



A small frame drum. Tuned very high and played with a small wooden or nylon beater.

A typical tamborim rhythm:

Agogô

A metallic bell that usually produces two different pitches. Played with a stick.

A typical agogô rhythm:

Ganzá

A shaker-like instrument. Plays a constant pattern underneath the main beat.

A typical ganzá rhythm:

PERFORMING

Now that you have all of the rhythms, put them all together as a class. Introduce the rhythms in the order that they appear on the opposite page.

The repinique is master

There is no set structure for a samba piece. It is led by the repinique player, who decides how the piece will change. Sections (or breaks) are usually preceded by a whistle, and might include:

- A section where all instruments play individual repeated patterns (**ostinato**).
- A section where all the instruments play the same rhythm.
- A **solo** section for the repinique (or other instrument).
- A **call-and-response** section where instruments copy, or respond to, rhythms of the repinique.



The Rio carnival, held every year before Lent in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, is easily the world's most famous carnival. It is the best place in the world to see samba drums and dancers. During a six-day festival performers from over 200 samba schools strut their stuff on the streets of Rio. Around two million people from across the globe attend this festival every year.

Performing samba bateria

The rhythms we've learnt can be adapted to create a 'fusion' of different styles of music. Here is another set of rhythms, based on the samba-reggae style:

The musical score is written in 2/4 time and consists of five staves, each representing a different instrument. The first staff is for the Surdo (High/Med/Low), the second for Caixa/Repinique, the third for Agogô, the fourth for Tambourim, and the fifth for Ganzá. The score is divided into four measures. The Caixa/Repinique staff includes rhythmic notation with 'R' and 'L' labels and accents. The Agogô staff uses eighth notes with accents. The Tambourim staff uses eighth notes with accents. The Ganzá staff uses eighth notes with accents.

Once you have the basic beat, introduce solos, call-and-response sections, and other breaks.

SON CLAVE

Son clave is one of the most important rhythm patterns in Central and South American music. It is most closely linked to music from Cuba (such as Salsa music). Cuban music is often built on this pattern, which is usually played on the claves.

The basic pattern is:

The basic Son Clave pattern is shown in 4/4 time. It consists of two measures. The first measure contains four eighth notes, numbered 1, 2, 3, and 4. The second measure contains a quarter rest followed by three eighth notes, numbered 1, 2, and 3. The pattern ends with a double bar line.

However, the pattern is often altered and changed - a very popular version of the son clave has the two bars reversed, like so:

The reversed Son Clave pattern is shown in 4/4 time. It consists of two measures. The first measure contains a quarter rest followed by three eighth notes, numbered 1, 2, and 3. The second measure contains four eighth notes, numbered 1, 2, 3, and 4. The pattern ends with a double bar line.

TEST YOURSELF

Tocanto Brazilian Music Ensemble

Listen to the following track and answer the questions below:

Song: 'Beginning Batucada'

Artist: Tocanto Brazilian Music Ensemble

Album: *A Musical Journey Throughout Brazil*

1. Name three types of percussion instruments you can hear in the piece. (3)
2. What is the time signature of this piece?
3. How do the musicians know when to change section, start or stop? (2)
4. Describe the relationship between the whistle and the drums during the introduction of this piece. (1)
5. Describe the texture of the rest of this piece. (1)
6. Give an example of an occasion where you might hear this type of music. (1)

See answers on page 175.

Summary

We have covered the basic musical features and background of several styles of 'world music'.

Remember that these styles are intrinsically linked to culture and tradition. The more you learn about a country or region, the better you will understand its many varieties of music.

We live in a global society; new music is emerging all the time that combines elements from all sorts of different world music traditions. Try and spot influences of samba, calypso, African drumming, Middle Eastern music or bhangra in the music you hear every day.

COMPARISONS Consider the similarities and differences in styles of world music we have studied. Here is a list of their shared features:

- No sheet music
- Aural tradition
- Accompanies special events
- Almost always associated with dancing
- Simple harmonies, or no harmony at all
- Melodic or rhythmic improvisation/decoration.