

ROOTS OF RHYTHM - CHAPTER 5: THE *DONDO* FROM GHANA

Instrument:

Dondo, an hourglass talking drum

Country:

Ghana



Ghana Flag:

Ghanaian flag colors are red for the spirit of sacrifice, gold for sun and wealth, green for forests. The black star symbolizes African freedom.

Size and Population:

Ghana has an area of 91,098 square miles with 335 miles of coastline and is slightly smaller than Oregon. Its population in July 2013 was estimated at 25,199,609; 48th in the world.

Geography and Climate:

The land in Ghana slopes upward from the Gulf of Guinea (5° above the equator on the Atlantic Ocean) to the Kwahu Plateau, which runs across the central part of Ghana from the northwest to southeast (dividing the White Volta River from the Black Volta River). Northern areas primarily consist of sloping grasslands while in the southwest there are thick forests. Ghana has the world's largest artificial lake, Lake Volta, which was created by the Akosombo (ah-koh-som-boh) Dam, a major power source for the country.

The climate of Ghana is tropical with an annual rainfall of 40 to 60 inches and an average temperature of 80° F. Areas in the north and east of the country have severe dry spells from November to March.

Background and History:

People from the ancient Ghana Empire (present day Mauritania and Mali) migrated southeast and settled in what is now Ghana in the 13th century. Explorers from Portugal landed in the area in 1471, and called it the *Gold Coast* based on the large amount of gold they found there. Dutch merchants followed, competing for gold and eventually slave trade profits, and by 1641 the Dutch took control of the area's forts from the Portuguese. As a large slave trade developed in the 1600s, the Danes and the English also competed for these profits.

After the slave trade was officially banned in the 1860s, Britain gained control of the Dutch and Danish forts and the area inland up to the Asante (ah-saan-tee) Empire; the British changed the pronunciation of the word Asante to Ashanti (ah-shon-tee). After a famous battle in 1895, the



ROOTS OF RHYTHM - CHAPTER 5: THE *DONDO* FROM GHANA

British took the Asante territory and northern lands as a protectorate. Britain improved and extended the roads and railways, built hospitals and developed schools, but also outlawed many traditional African traditions including drumming.

By the late 1940s, Britain began to give control of the Gold Coast back to Africans and in 1957 the country became the independent nation of Ghana under the leadership of Kwame Nkrumah (kwa-meh en-crew-mah), the first president (1960). Ghana was the first African country to become independent of colonial rule. Nkrumah was the main political leader in Ghana beginning in 1949, but in 1966, after mounting national debt and government corruption, the military took control in a coup. This was followed by six years of elected presidents and 7 years military rule.

In 1981 Air Force Lt. Jerry Rawlings took control and became head of state. Rawlings led the country back to elected rule, but after two years of problems with President Dr. H. Limann, he saw the need to retake control in 1981. Elected president in 1981, Rawlings stayed in power until 2001. He was followed by three elected presidents, including the incumbent President, John D. Mahama (2013).

Culture:

Ghana's people are mostly black Africans, but include small populations of Middle Easterners, Asians, and Europeans. While the official language is English, most people speak an African language, the most common being Ewe (eh-way) and Ga (gah) in the south, Twi (tschwee) in the central region, and Mossi-Dagomba (moh-see dah-gom-bah) in the north. About 5.2 percent of Ghanaians practice traditional African religions, while 71 percent are Christians and 17 percent are Muslims. About 49 percent of Ghanaians live in rural farm areas and the remaining 51 percent live in the cities and many have government jobs. The cities have mostly Western-style buildings, but traditional village homes that include mud brick walls and metal roofs are often built around courtyards.

There are 10 cultural regions in Ghana, each with its own identity: Ashanti, Brong-Ahafo (brong ah-hah-foh), Central, Eastern, Greater Accra, Northern, Upper East, Upper West, Volta, and Western regions. There are also refugees from neighboring countries including Liberia, Sierra Leone, and Togo.

The national dress is made from brightly colored cloths, the most famous being *Kente* (ken-teh) cloth, or strips of symbolic patterns that are sewn together to become large, wrapped clothing mostly worn by men. Women wear blouses, brightly colored skirts and often a head wrap. Another pattern with numerous symbols is *Adinkra* (ah-ding-krah) cloth named after a famous chief.

Most children attend school until they are 12, and over one third of the nation's adults can read and write. Students at the three Ghanaian universities come from Ghana, other African nations and nations around the world. The Center for African Studies in the capital city of Accra is world famous for studying and preserving artistic traditions of Ghana and other African countries.

While there are many so-called tribes or language groups in Ghana, the Asante, who speak the Akan (ah-kon) language, Twi, dominated the country at one time. Their influence has spread beyond their capital of Kumasi (koo-mah-see), across Ghana and even beyond political borders

ROOTS OF RHYTHM - CHAPTER 5: THE *DONDO* FROM GHANA

of the country. Surrounding peoples have influenced the Asante, and the *dondo* (done-doh) drum is one example of such influence. This instrument came to the Asante people from the Mamprusi (mam-pru-see) tribe in the north of Ghana after a war. The *dondo* drum is the focus of this lesson.

Music: Instruments & Rhythms

Instruments: There are many types of African musical instruments in Ghana, including the six-stringed *seperewa* (se-pair-eh-wah), the *benta* (ben-tah), a musical bow, the *atenteben* (ah-ten-teh-ben) flute, and the *ntahera* (en-tah-hair-ah), an elephant tusk horn. However, the majority of instruments in Ghana are in the percussion families of idiophones and membranophones (see Introduction section for definitions of these terms). Melodies are played on the *gyilli* (gee-lee) xylophone and the plucked “thumb piano” called *gyilligo* (gee-lee-go - the suffix “go” means small). Even though the *gyilligo* is actually a different type of idiophone, it takes its tuning from the *gyilli* and is therefore considered a “small xylophone.”

The most famous bells in Ghana are the double bell, *gankogui* (gong-koh-gwee), and the boat-shaped *adawia* (ah-dah-we-ah). There are rattles that have beads outside, *axatse* (ak-sot-seh), and inside, *ntorowa* (en-tro-wah). The barrel-shaped Ewe drums contrast with the goblet-shaped Asante drums and the square frame drums of the Ga people.

The subject of this lesson, the *dondo* (*donno* is the plural of *dondo*), is an hourglass-shaped talking drum that is played under your arm by squeezing cords connecting two heads as one head is struck with a curved stick. This drum is found in many countries in West Africa and is called by many names in different areas. For example, the *tama* (tah-mah) is from Senegal, and the *kalangu* (kah-leng-gu) and *dundun* (doon-doon) are from Nigeria.

Regardless of the types of instruments in an ensemble, the melodies and rhythms are like the members of a family. In a drum ensemble, the main or lead drums are “the parents,” smaller drums are “the children,” and the smallest (usually a bell or rattle) is “the baby.” The baby’s rhythm is repetitive like a baby’s demanding voice and as such influences all of the other members of the family. So you hear a little bit of the bell part in the other instruments’ rhythms.

Rhythms: There are three main types of rhythms in Ghana: speech rhythm, dance rhythm and signal rhythm. When an instrument is used to talk it is imitating the rhythm of the language, following the changing tones of speech, typically low, medium and high levels. Many African (and Asian) languages are different from English and other languages in that the pitch of a syllable gives a word a particular meaning. An Asante chief’s drummer will call other drummers to come and perform by hitting the *atumpan* (ah-toom-pon), two goblet-shaped drums tuned to a low and high pitch respectively (see Resources below). These two tones represent the minimum of low and high tones in the Twi language. Even though the *atumpan* drummer usually plays the words calling the drummers to play, the *dondo* drummer can also play along on the call. While the *dondo* drummer can play many pitches by squeezing the cords connecting the heads, the *atumpan* drummer is restricted to a few fixed tones on each drum to recreate the Twi language. The dance rhythms vary from social to religious to royal patterns, which are immediately recognized by the performers. One of the most important social rhythms among the Asante is *Adowa* (ah-doh-wah), a type of ensemble that is used for official ceremonies, funerals and parties. This music is said to have been started by an Asante Queen Mother over 150 years ago,

ROOTS OF RHYTHM - CHAPTER 5: THE *DONDO* FROM GHANA

over 150 years ago, when for the first time she was inspired to interrupt a performance to play a gentle rhythm on the *atumpan* drums. People said it sounded like the motion of an antelope walking, and *Adowa* means antelope.

Signal rhythms were used in times of emergency and in times of war. In the past, a bell called *dawuro* (dah-oo-row) was played if a dangerous animal approached a village. During past battles, the Asante's chief talking drummer, or *atumpanhene* (ah-toom-pon-hee-nee), relayed the chief's commands to warriors in the field through other drummers. These signals were kept under strict secrecy.

Listen & Play Along: *Use *Roots of Rhythm* CD Notes to support this section.

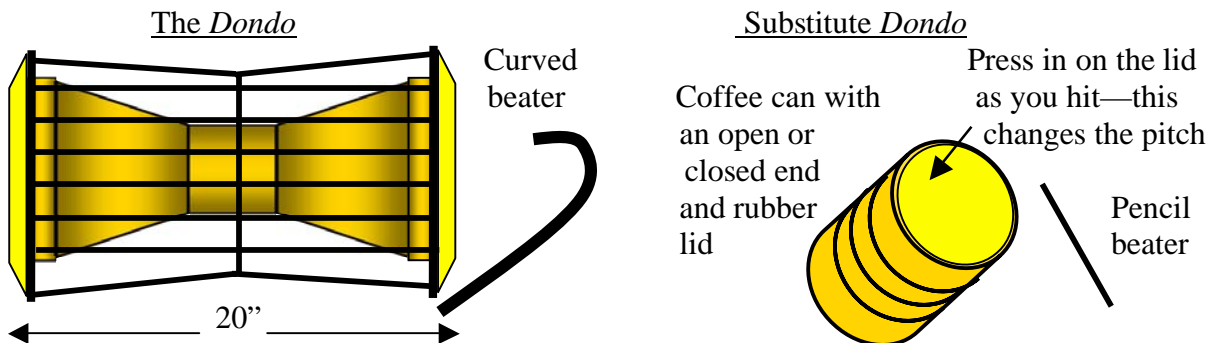
Note to teachers: if instruments are not readily available, consider having students make their own (a general activity for making drums can be found in the Roots of Rhythm: Introduction section) or encourage them to improvise - using everyday items such as buckets, containers, phone books, desk tops, etc., as instruments. Rhythms can also be created with body percussion including hand clapping, foot tapping, finger snapping, etc.

Listen to Track 42 of the Roots of Rhythm Companion CD to hear the sound of the dondo. Now it's time to play along. If you don't have a dondo drum, use substitutes like bongos, tom-toms, and congas for high and low drum sounds, and a cowbell. Or, see below for an illustration on creating a homemade dondo drum.

Listen to Tracks 43-49 of the Roots of Rhythm Companion CD and play along to the Adowa rhythms by improvising some rhythms. If you have a real African squeeze drum like the dondo, practice hitting then squeezing to change the sound from a low to a high pitch. Listen to the sound of the dondo on the Roots of Rhythm Companion CD and see if you can copy that sound. The dondo supports the atumpan by playing or echoing the same rhythms. An important difference is that the atumpan is a set of two drums used to get two or three tones and the dondo is one drum that can change pitch to get two or many more tones.

Practice the authentic sounds of the *dondo* as shown in the box notation below (in the Resources section) and then play some of the rhythms, starting with the *adawia* in the *Adowa Atene* (ah-tin-nee) rhythm. To get the right rhythm say "I....like...to drum...with....you...I.....like...to drum...with....you," then add the correct drum hits. Read the notation and play part or all of the *Atene* rhythms. Begin with the *Adowa* drum call.

You can make a homemade *dondo*, as do Ghanaian children, with a can and rubber drumhead:



ROOTS OF RHYTHM - CHAPTER 5: THE *DONDO* FROM GHANA

***Dondo* and Performer:**

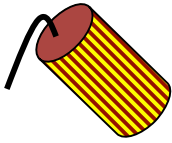


Photograph by Craig Woodson.

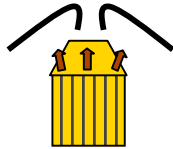
Resources: The *Adowa* Ensemble, Talking Drum Rhythm, and *Atene* Rhythm

The *Adowa* Ensemble

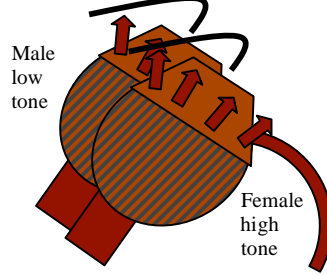
Dondo



Petia



Atumpan



Apentemma



Adawia



***Adowa* Drum Call in Speech Rhythm¹**

Atumpan
or *Dondo*

A	da	–	wi	–	a	Ko	–	fi	Ma	Ho	Me	Ne	So	Eh	
<u>L</u>	<u>L</u>	<u>R</u>	<u>L</u>	<u>L</u>	<u>R</u>					<u>L</u>	<u>R</u>	<u>L</u>	<u>R</u>			<u>R</u>	<u>L</u>

***Adowa Atene* Rhythms²**

Adawia

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12
I.....like.....to drumwith.....you.....											
<u>R</u>			<u>R</u>		<u>R</u>	<u>R</u>		<u>R</u>		<u>R</u>	

Apentemma

I.....like.....(to) dru--m.....											
<u>R</u>			<u>R</u>			<u>R</u>	<u>L</u>				

Petia

.....with.....you.....											
								<u>R</u>		<u>R</u>	

Dondo

I.....(would) like.....(to) drumwith.....you.....											
#1	<u>R</u>			<u>R</u>			<u>R</u>		<u>R</u>		<u>R</u>
#2	<u>R</u>		<u>R</u>				<u>R</u>		<u>R</u>		
#3	<u>R</u>			<u>R</u>		<u>R</u>			<u>R</u>		
#4			<u>R</u>	<u>R</u>		<u>R</u>			<u>R</u>		<u>R</u>
#5	<u>R</u>		<u>R</u>	<u>R</u>		<u>R</u>	<u>R</u>		<u>R</u>		<u>R</u>

Atumpan

I.....would like.....to drumwith.....you.....											
<u>L</u>		<u>R</u>	<u>R</u>		<u>L</u>	<u>L</u>		<u>R</u>		<u>L</u>	

Notation of the *Dondo* and other instruments:

R or L = Center High Tone – After squeezing the tension cords tightly, hit the drum with the stick near the drumhead’s center, and bounce the stick off the surface. This also means hit the *adawia* bell and hit the *petia* (stick) and *apentemma* (hand) by pressing into the drumhead.

R or L = Center Low Tone – After releasing the tension cords, hit the drum with the stick near the drumhead’s center, and bounce the stick off the surface. For the *petia* and *apentemma* bounce off of the drum to let the tone ring.

¹ This rhythm means “*Adawia* player [named] *Kofi*, come on, let’s play.” If played on the *dondo*, a right-handed drummer would hit the drum with a stick only in the right hand. “*Atene*” means straight forward.

² This rhythm is based on transcriptions of drumming by Kwasi Badu, an Asante master drummer.