13 The Musical Rhythm of Agbadza Songs

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Introduction

Agbadza and the Alorwoyie Project

Agbadza is a genre of performance art that originated among the Ewe people (Ghana, Togo). The drumming features musical interactions between lead and response drums; in songs, poems are set to tunes that have a variety of call-and-response arrangements between several song leaders and a larger choral group. As discussed here, the rhythm of the vocal music contributes to the overall temporal vitality of an Agbadza performance.

The songs analyzed in this chapter may be heard on a recorded performance by Gideon Foli Alorwoyie[1] and the Afrikania Cultural Troupe of Anlo-Afiadenyigba, Ghana, and are thoroughly documented on an online site (https://sites.tufts.edu/davidlocke/agbadza/).[2] In what might be considered a long work in twenty-five sections, Alorwoyie paired songs with compositions for lead-response drums on the basis of the meaning of a song's lyrics and the meaning of the drum language. Making the point about how it was performed during "the time of our grandparents," Alorwoyie undertook this project to establish a historical baseline for contemporary musicians who would try new ways of playing Agbadza.[3]

Agbadza is generally regarded as the prototypical music and dance of the Ewe people. It began during a tumultuous era (1600–1900) of migration, conquest, and imperialism, including the trans-Atlantic African slave trade. Profound themes of life, death, and warrior ethos make it suitable for performance at funerals, memorial services, and rituals of chieftaincy. In Ewe communities, Agbadza can be heard at wake-keepings and memorial services. If one would posit the existence of an Ewe national dance, it likely would be Agbadza.

Agbadza's instrumental music for drum ensemble features drum language compositions for the low-pitched lead *sogo* drum and medium-pitched response *kidi* drum that are set within a multi-part texture sounded

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by *gankogui* bell, *axatse* rattle, high-pitched *kagan* support drum, and handclap (*asikpekpe*).[4]

As may be heard on the audio files of Alorwoyie's recording, at the beginning of each drum-dance item of Agbadza music, the song leader freely lines out the tune and text. After this brief introduction, the instrumental ensemble's time parts start the phrases that they continue without variation for the duration of the item. The melo-rhythmic energy generated by this multi-part texture powers the singing and drumming.[5] Guided by the bell phrase, the song leader raises the song in tempo, offering it to the group of singers who reply with gusto. When the song and the time parts are going nicely, the lead drummer plays the drum language phrases on the sogo using his two bare hands. The response drummer answers the leader's call, using two wooden sticks to fashion the medium-pitched kidi drum's recurring phrase. The lead drummer's solo line complements the singers' tune and weaves around the response drum's phrase. In the recorded performance that is our source material, each song recurs with subtle musical variation before the lead drum signals the end of that item.

Author's Preface

Stance

When cultural outsiders do inter-cultural musical analysis, it behooves authors to establish their positionality, especially in the case of Africa with its emotionally powerful histories of the trans-Atlantic slave trade, racial discrimination, and inequality. My stance toward Ewe performance traditions is that of an experienced student who is emboldened to teach and write to the extent of my knowledge and abilities. Compared to expert born-in-the-tradition insiders, I consider myself to be a relatively adept outsider. My authenticity depends on the veracity of information gathered in research, the quality of my ethnographic understanding, the value of my ideas, the clarity of my presentation, and the effectiveness of my pedagogy. Is my analytic apparatus relevant? Does it yield meaningful insight or explanation? Can other musicians make productive use of my publications?

In the text that follows, I position myself as the readers' guide along a path we follow together toward an understanding of musical temporality in Agbadza songs. A discussion of specific songs will precede general conclusions about the full corpus of twenty-five songs in Alorwoyie's Agbadza. This approach mirrors my own learning experience in which clarity emerged gradually from a fog of cognitive uncertainty. I feel that moving

from the specific to the general guards the reader against adopting a premature sense of being able to comprehend Agbadza songs at a high level of abstraction and thus to assume control over them.

Analytic Toolkit

I write for all readers who would seek knowledge of music rhythm in Agbadza songs. I do not presume that readers have advanced knowledge of the theory and analysis of any of the world's musics, whether Western Art Music or any of the world's ethnic, folk, or traditional musics. Although I am enculturated into Western culture and have been schooled in Western institutions, I am largely self-taught in music theory and analysis.[6] It may seem enigmatic, therefore, that my scholarly interest lies in transcription, analysis, and aesthetic criticism.

My analytic toolkit, so to speak, grew from direct engagement with Ewe performance arts. In trying to figure out "how the music works," I have used a variety of notation systems and have explored diverse theoretical traditions. My writing aspires toward engaging the most sophisticated aspects of Agbadza's music without either mystifying or condescending to the curious reader. I always try to make available audio files so that readers may also be listeners who do the hard work of bringing together the music itself with its representation in words and graphics.

Pitch

The musical instruments of Agbadza are tuned relative to each other and, as far as I know, no traditional instruments in Eweland are tuned to absolute pitches. The important issue in the tunes of songs is the intervals between pitch classes, not the precise pitches. Singers seem to use a range that is rather high in their comfort zone because this makes them audible in competition with the loud sound of the drum ensemble. The main range of pitch classes in an Agbadza song is an octave, with most songs extending as much as fifth above or below. Like most scholars, I believe staff notation to be adequate in representing the pitch material, even though the actual pitches and their intonation will always be at variance with a strict interpretation. I use simple capital letters to name pitches and assume readers will be able to follow my meaning when I write, "After opening the song with a dramatic relatively wide upward leap (C to G), Leader moves in steps and modest leaps until another large leap (D to A) and final downward step to G."[7]

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Because of the patterning of melodic motion, I will argue that pitch class sets in songs, "scales," if you will, are essentially pentatonic in design even when there are more than five pitch classes in a tune. These pentatonic scales are either with or without semi-tones. Tunes sometimes feel organized around one tonal center, but because of their pentatonic structure many songs have more than one pitch class that functions as a place of tonal resolution. Due to their rather brief overall duration and their recurrent nature, the arrival at tonal conclusion on a song's final tone always is short lived.

Rhythmic Mnemonics for Short-Long Time Values

The time values in Agbadza songs overwhelmingly are either short or long, represented here as eighth notes or quarter notes. Because I have found it immensely valuable to vocalize musical time values, I adopt the mnemonic "ti" to represent a short time value and the mnemonic "ta" to represent long time values.

Axiomatic Rhythm Concepts and Basic Terminology

The elapsing flow of musical time will be reckoned by timepoints, which in theory are equidurational but in practice may exhibit consistent non-isochronous microtiming.[8] Elapsing musical time is felt to contain steady temporal marks that will be called beats; beats both divide the time span of the bell and add up to fill the measure. A beat will have one moment that is onbeat and other moments that are offbeat. A beat with three subdivisions is called ternary; a beat with two or four subdivisions is called binary or quaternary. In beats of binary morphology, the midpoint between successive beats is called the upbeat or the "and" of the count; this will be graphically represented with "&," the ampersand. Ternary beats, which are foundational to Agbadza's meter, have an onbeat timepoint (1.1), an afterbeat timepoint (1.2), and a third timepoint (1.3) that may either function as an unaccented pickup if it leads toward a subsequent onbeat tone or an accented offbeat if no note occurs on the subsequent onbeat. The first onbeat in a measure is designated as the downbeat; onbeat three is the midpoint in the measure; onbeats two and four are backbeats.

Accent

Accentuation in songs and drumming, that is, conferring especially strong feeling to particular musical moments, is an important subject in this

chapter. Structural accentuation is built into Agbadza's musical meter, the recurring themes sounded on the instruments in the drum ensemble, and the modal/melodic design of tunes. In tunes, for example, modal motion toward arrival on a tonicized pitch is one aspect of a composition's structural accentuation. Notes that are onbeat or onbell will have different accentual valence than those that are offbeat or offbell. Within the polyphonic texture of the full music, notes in unison will have a quality of accentual force that is different from notes not reinforced by other parts. In the analytic system proffered here, each component of the music projects accentual power onto the others. As is true in many of the world's musics, Ewe composers often position a musical note on a structurally unaccented position, which paradoxically gives it special potency for intense musical feeling. In contrast to the features of accentuation that are embedded into the design of an item of Agbadza music, during performance musicians will make spontaneous decisions about timing, pitch, and timbre. The various publications of Alorwoyie and Locke provide ample evidence for study of expressive accentuation, so to speak, but this subject is not addressed here.

Graphic Representation

In prior work I have used staff notation to graphically represent Agbadza's music and will refer readers to these musical examples, which are readily available online. Inevitably, staff notation is regarded by some readers as a sign of a non-African, Western epistemic regime, a semiotic assumption I wish to counteract. Here, I use the Time Unit Box System (TUBS), which is an excellent way to depict temporal relationships. Like staff notation, time moves on the page from left to right, with one graph box equating to one musical timepoint. Readers who would like to see musical examples in staff notation should follow the hyperlink references.

Audio/Visual Documentation

The music discussed in this chapter is available in two ways: a book with audio CD and an online site (https://sites.tufts.edu/davidlocke/agbadza).[9] The online site contains Ewe texts for songs and drumming, various translations into English, lead sheets for songs and drum compositions, complete note-for-note transcriptions of the audio files, interviews with Alorwoyie, and analytic criticism of each of the twenty-five items of Agbadza in Alorwoyie's project.

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The Musical Rhythm of Agbadza Songs

Our journey into the rhythm of Agbadza songs begins with the fundamentals of musical time in Ewe dance-drumming. The path begins with the bell part.[10] In genres of Ewe dance-drumming music, the bell part sounds over and over as a recurrent temporal theme that gives to musical time a distinctive pattern or shape.

Learning the Bell

Seven hits with a straight stick on the iron instrument take a player through one occurrence of the bell's theme. The time values are of two types: short notes ("ti") and longer tones ("ta") that are twice the duration of the quicker tones. (The custom in scholarship about Ewe music is to notate these sound events as eighth notes and as quarter notes.) Ewe experts teach the bell part as the sum of two figures: (ta ti ta) + (ta ta ti ta). Alorwoyie teaches that when the music begins, the bell player should strike first on the lower-pitched of the gankogui's two bells and then play all other notes on the higher-pitched bell. The first appearance of the bell theme thus suggests the following pattern of time values – (ta ta ti ta ta ta ti ta) + (ta . . .).[11] To summarize: two grouping patterns of the time values are recognized by culture-bearers as foundational: (1) ta ti ta ta ta ti ta, and (2) ta ta ti ta ta ta ti.

Taking the duration of the short bell tone as a unit for measuring musical time, we observe twelve units within one full occurrence of the phrase. The two fundamental ways of hearing or grouping the bell pattern may thus be rendered numerically as (A) 12 = (2+1+2) + (2 + 2 + 1 + 2), and (B) 12 = 2 + 2 + 1 + 2 + 2 + 2 + 1. Readers familiar with the scholarly and popular literature on African music likely will recognize the second formula, but I emphasize the ethnographic significance of the first formula and suggest its importance for those who would desire to enter what might be termed "an Ewe way of hearing." As a teacher of this music myself, I echo my Ewe teachers who urge students to hear rhythmic shapes in actual musical phenomena rather than counting time according to an abstract mathematical schema (meter, time signatures). Paradoxically, meter is of vital importance.

The Bell in Four: Ternary-Quadruple Time

Agbadza moves with steady tempo that may be felt according to recurring temporal units (beats). Dancers typically step (transfer weight from foot to

Table 13.1 Fundamentals: 12-pulse, 4-beat, bell phrase

12-Pulse	01	02	03	04	05	06	07	08	09	10	11	12	01	02
4-Beat	1.1	1.2	1.3	2.1	2.2	2.3	3.1	3.2	3.3	4.1	4.2	4.3	1.1	1.2
Bell	Ta		ta		Ti	ta		ta		ta		ti	ta	
	1		2		3	4		5		6		7	1	

foot) in unison with these beats.[12] Four beats occur over the time span of one bell phrase. The two-part polyrhythmic duet between the asymmetrically shaped bell part and the steady flow of the equidurational beats is absolutely at the bedrock foundation of Agbadza's musical temporality. Overwhelming evidence suggests that the bell phrase typically is felt "in four." In other words, if and when players or listeners want to reference metric units, they will attend to what I will refer to as "four-feel beats" (dotted quarter notes). The twelve units within one span of the bell phrase thus are structured into four ternary beats: $12 = 4 \times 3$.

How shall bell part, beats, and faster pulses be set within a recurring musical cycle or metric framework? Study of the bell phrase shows that the note played on the low-pitched bell is its main moment of musical resolution and therefore a prominent moment of accentuation in the permanent structure of the music. Furthermore, this is the temporal location in the ever-cycling pattern toward which other parts move for cadence. Even when what the late Ewe scholar Willie Anku termed the "regulative time point" is not accentuated by other parts, the RTP nevertheless serves as a temporal reference point.[13] Despite positing that ONE comes *at the end of the phrase,* I join other scholars of Ewe music who place it at the beginning of measures and assign numbers from there (see Table 13.1). For the sake of simplicity, I will simply use capitalization to denote these crucial time-points in the music's ongoing flow. To summarize our presentation of the bell part: seven short and long tones in two grouping patterns occur over twelve quick pulses that are shaped into four ternary beats.

Meter as a Matrix

Elsewhere, I have suggested that it is productive to think of Ewe meter as a *nexus of temporal fields* that are interconnected in a matrix-like relationship.[14] In genres disciplined by ternary beats, a multidimensional quality arises from the presence of time values in a three-with-two temporal ratio. In staff notation, this can be represented with "dotted notes" and their "undotted" counterparts and signaled through time signature – $\frac{6}{8} : \frac{3}{4}$. This

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ratio happens between time values of different durations in a multilevel structure that reminds me of a three-dimensional chess board. When the span of the bell phrase establishes a four-beat quadruple measure, the music has the simultaneous presence of metric beats in three time signatures – $\frac{12}{8}$, $\frac{6}{4}$, and $\frac{3}{2}$ – as well as their double-time and cut-time derivatives. Finally, accentuation may be consistently placed on offbeat moments within a metric beat, which multiplies the relationships among metric fields.[15]

In traditional music genres like Agbadza, the flow of metric units is normally experienced as a background part of mental and physical consciousness rather than actively counted as a timing reference. Many African-born teachers instruct students to refrain from tapping their feet as a method of keeping time, for example. To emphasize the phenomenal presence of metric units, I use the word *feel* in my writing as in "four-feel beats" or "six-feel beats." I theorize the constant presence of the "metric matrix" as an implicit and latent resource to inspire creativity, guide timing, shape accentuation, and enhance expressiveness.

The Drum Ensemble Context

The bell part structures musical time for dancers, singers, and drummers. The instrumental ensemble consists of one bell, many hand clappers, many rattles, one high-pitched support drum, one medium-pitched response drum, and one lead drum. Each part in the ensemble establishes its own musical personality and also makes its own distinctive contribution to what Meki Nzewi suggests we call the "melo-rhythm" of Agbadza's "ensemble thematic cycle (ETC)."[16]

Format of Songs

Agbadza songs are sung by a chorus of singers in two parts – Leader and Group.[17] The leader part actually may be performed by as many as three or four people, although one person will be regarded formally as "song leader." The group part, on the other hand, is sung by many voices. Contrast in texture and energy between the few voices in Leader and the many voices of Group is a prominent quality in these songs. In the Alorwoyie's Agbadza project, the song leader began each item with a short, temporally loose rendition of the song without instruments. Once the song was "lined out," the ensemble entered and the full version of the song started.

Selected Agbadza Songs

Let us now consider several songs. General rhythmic characteristics will emerge through discussion of these specific tunes and texts.[18]

Kaleworda (#7)
https://sites.tufts.edu/davidlocke/agbadza-items/

In this discussion of musical rhythm in the twenty-five songs in the Alorwoyie Agbadza project, "Kaleworda" will represent a typical or average song. Its comparatively uncomplicated musical features are a good place to start.

Over the span of four bell cycles, song leader and singing group each sing the same two-sentence lyric about the lonely death of a strong warrior on a distant battlefield (see #7, Song Lyrics).[19] The tune's pitches array within an octave except for the upper A in the Leader's opening motive (see #7, Lead Sheet). Leader works higher in the pitch set, while Group lowers the melody to its final note on the lower G. After opening the song with a dramatic, relatively wide upward leap (C to G), Leader moves in steps and modest leaps until another large downward leap (D to A) and final downward step to G. The group's reply centers on C until it too descends to G with cadential leap-step motion (D–A–G). With the exception of B♭ in m. 4, the tune uses five pitch classes.[20] To me, the song's pitches move toward modal and temporal conclusion on the final G, but C also feels like another, complementary "tonicized pitch," so to speak; this would mean that the song's tonality is a pentatonic scale without half-steps in the modes G–A–C–D–F (2–3–5–6–1) and/or C–D–F–G–A (5–6–1–2–3). Both parts in the call-and-response are of equal duration – two "measures of bell," so to speak – and set the text with the same time values as shown in Table 13.2.

The rhythmic design of its time values contributes to the musical personality of the melody. The words to the song are rendered in four

Table 13.2 "Kaleworda" time values in melody

Bell		5		6		7	1		2		3	4
4-Beats	3.1	3.2	3.3	4.1	4.2	4.3	1.1	1.2	1.3	2.1	2.2	2.3
m. 1	ti	ti	ti	ta								
mm. 1–2						ti	ti	ti	Ti	ti	ta	
m. 3	ti	ta		ta								
mm. 3–4						ti	ti	ti	Ti	ta		

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Table 13.3 "Kaleworda" temporal effect of melodic rhythmic patterns

m. 1	▪ Time: Onbeat onsets confer accentuation to four-feel beats 3 and 4. ▪ Bell: Onset on 3.1 makes strong polyrhythmic contrast with bell.
mm. 1–2	▪ Time: Pickup and afterbeat notes soften the accentuation of four-feel beats 1 and 2. ▪ Bell: Pickup and afterbeat notes make the tune rhythmically independent from bell.
m. 3	▪ Time: Omission of an onset on time-point 3.3 adds accentuation to the note on time-point 3.2 (accentuation by duration or agogic accent). ▪ Bell: Omission of an onset on time-point 3.3 highlights tune's unison with bell tones 5 and 6.
mm. 3–4	▪ Time: Pickup-to-onbeat motion gives accentuation to onbeats 1.1 and 2.1. ▪ Bell: Pickup-to-onbeat motion reinforces the bell's cadence on ONE but then the tune extends to 2.1, which does not align with bell.

nearly identical rhythmic figures, each spanning two four-feel beats (see Table 13.2). The idea stated in m. 1, that is, motion in eighth-note values between successive onbeats, establishes a pattern that is slightly modified in the three subsequent rhythmic patterns.

Subtle differences among these four rhythmic figures enable each variant to project its own quality to the flow of time within the span of one bell phrase and each has a particular relationship to notes in the bell phrase (Table 13.3).

Discussion of "Kaleworda" has introduced musical features common in most all Agbadza songs. Call-and-response between the leader and group parts is a foundational aspect of a song's temporal design. The timing of the transfer in vocal action between Leader and Group parts, that is, the rhythm of call-and-response, and the consequent change in musical texture that results is an important component of Agbadza's overall rhythm. Their exchange establishes a before-after temporal structure that provides an opportunity for antecedent-consequent musical logic, which may include aesthetic forces of tension-resolution. The timing of shifts in tonal centers within a pentatonic scale exerts yet another rather large-scale temporal effect. At a more fine-grained dimension, the rhythmic patterns of time values in the melody make polyrhythm with the bell phrase. As if it were another drum in the ensemble, the melodic rhythm may be heard to project musical forces toward other instruments, imparting nuances of accentuation on onbeat and offbeat timepoints to a listener's interpretive experience of the polyphony.[21] Finally, the song's musical form, which is

shaped by call-and-response design as well as by melodic factors of tunefulness, so to speak, has impact on a song's rhythm through the comparative duration of its several sections.

Let us review the specific temporal features of this song that are characteristic of most songs among the twenty-five in the Alorwoyie collection. First, Leader was higher in the song's range and had more tonal movement; Group quieted the rhythmic activity of the tune as it lowered the song's pitches toward the finalis.[22] Second, in a straightforward A1A2 form, Leader and Group both set the same text to identical time values; each part made a coherent melodic statement, but the two parts preceded and followed each other according to an Ewe musical logic of melodic gesture, pentatonic tonality, and rhythm governed by bell phrase and meter. Third, time values had a memorable theme – in this case, eighth-note motion through successive four-feel onbeats – that helped unify the tune.

Although I have proposed this song as being prototypical, every Agbadza song is unique. Overall, the genre has characteristic style, but each venerable song was intentionally crafted to convey particular meaning.

Miwua 'Gbo Mayi (#2)
https://sites.tufts.edu/davidlocke/agbadza-items/

Like "Kaleworda," this song spans four bell cycles and has two exchanges between Leader and Group (see #2, Lead Sheet). But the rhythmic design of "Miwua 'Gbo Mayi" is much more asymmetric and the relationship between Leader and Group much more intertwined.

The melody has three phrases with a rounded ABA form in the span of four bell cycles (see Table 13.5). Although the metric structure groups the ternary beats into sets of four (quadruple meter), the pattern of call-and-response confers an asymmetric design: 16 = (3+3) + 5 + 5 (see Table 13.4).

Leader and Group share in the song's dramatic opening lyric, "Brave ones, open the gate. I will go" (see #2, Song Lyrics). Begun by Leader on four-feel beat three (m. 1), Phrase 1 requires a hand-off to Group on four-feel beat two (m. 2). Leader's relatively long Phrase 2 fits neatly within one complete bell cycle: 1–2–3–4–1. As it did in Phrase 1, in Phrase 3 Group

Table 13.4 "Miwua 'Gbo Mayi" asymmetry in duration of melodic phrases

Phrase 1	L: 3-4-1 + G: 2-3-4	six beats (3+3)
Phrase 2	L: 1-2-3-4-1	five beats
Phrase 3	G: 2-3-4-1-2	five beats

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Table 13.5 "Miwua 'Gbo Mayi" four-feel of call-and-response

Measure			2				3				4				1	
Beats	3	4	1	2	3	4	1	2	3	4	1	2	3	4	1	2
Phrases	1						2					3				
Form	A						B					A				
c-r	L			G			L					G				

Table 13.6 "Miwua 'Gbo Mayi" three-then-two pattern in melodic rhythm

Bell		5		6		7	1		2			3	4
4-Feel beats	3			4			1			2			
6-Feel beats	4		5		6		1		2			3	
2:3	1			2			1		2			3	
Accentuation													
Song text	Mi-	wua		'gbo		ma-	yi		Ka-	lea-		woe	

takes over the flow of four-feel beats from Leader on beat two (m. 4) with another five-beat gesture that extends through the next ONE: 2–3–4–1–2.

The tune adds more intricate melodic rhythm to this motion of metric units. The Leader begins the first phrase with upward and downward pendular leaps of a minor third interval (B–D–B) in a rhythm that aligns with the bell's cadential motion over tones 5–6–7–1 (mm. 1–2).[23] Countering the structural tendency of the music to reach cadence on ONE, the Group quickly continues the melody's rhythmic flow with an upward half-step on timepoint 2.2. Together, the melodic rhythm of the two sub-phrases in Phrase 1 articulates an important metric rhythm in Agbadza's music: the oscillation within the span of one bell cycle between a half-measures "in three" and "in two" (see Table 13.6).[24]

Each part is restricted to two pitches, but the Group part stands out for its long sustained note on C that sets the word with a key semantic image: brave Ewe warriors (see #2 Song Lyrics). Tonally and rhythmically, the melody creates a feeling of anticipation for phrase 2 (m. 3). Into this musical space, the Leader jumps boldly with a dramatic downward gesture that begins in polyrhythmic contrast to bell before aligning with its cadential tones to arrive at G on timepoint 1.1 (m. 4). In the lyric, this powerful melody establishes that the song is about struggle between the Ewes and their prototypical enemies, the Fon people of Dahomey. Although rhythmic motion of Phrase 2 achieves a sense of closure by aligning with bell's cadence to ONE (m. 4), the Group again enters rather quickly (m. 4), this

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Table 13.7 "Miwua 'Gbo Mayi" palindrome

Syllable count, number of onsets	3	2	1	2	3
Text	Ka-lea-woe	mi-wua	'gbo	ma-yi	Da-hu-me

time with its own long phrase that arches upward to D before the final plunge to F♯ (m. 5), which to my ear leaves the whole song in an unresolved tonal condition. In a clever feature of the song's text setting, the rhythm of the final word, "Dahomey," imitates the two prior positions of "brave ones" (m. 2, m. 4). I especially enjoy the design of the rhythmic figures in this phrase, which suggest a palindrome: 3–2–1–2–3 (mm. 4–5) (see Table 13.7).

Dzogbe Nye Nutsu Tor (#21)
https://sites.tufts.edu/davidlocke/agbadza-items/

Some Agbadza songs feel especially drum-like (see Items #13 and #21): the sectional form moves quickly between Leader and Group, the melody reiterates only a few pitches, and the rhythms are repetitive and percussive. Compared to the tuneful setting of poetic text in songs like "Kaleworda," these songs seem more like chants to "rally the troops," so to speak. Because the singing functions like drumming, this song provides us with an opportunity to go deeper into the music of the drum ensemble.

The song lyric expresses quintessential warrior bravado: "The battlefield is for men. If I die, bury me there" (see #21, Song Lyrics). To enhance the feeling of urgency, Alorwoyie selected an extraordinarily intense composition for lead and response drums that sets the scene with the insistent statement, "On the battlefield," and/or "The brave place" (see #21, Drum Language). Rhythmic intensity derives from the unusually short time span of the drum parts – only two four-feel beats. Two bounce tones from the response drum align precisely with a similar figure in the high-pitch support drum, thus joining the power of each instrument in a new synthesis (see #21, Full Score). One rhythmic consequence of the fusion of these two drumming parts is accentuation of the fast-moving eight-feel beats, which suggests a "double-time" feeling of tempo. (Compare to the quality of "cut-time" accentuation in "Ahor De Lia Gba 'Dzigo," below.)

The song leader insistently intones the same lyric, "Battlefield-men's place," to a short descending motive (D–C–A) whose rhythm carries the feeling of metric closure – three–four–one motion of the four-feel beats – as well as the bell phrase's cadence to ONE over strokes 5–6–7–1 (m. 1,

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m. 3, m. 5). The singing group responds with a sequence of two melodic phrases that end first on D (m. 3) and last on G (m. 5), which conveys a fleeting feeling of tonal and rhythmic stasis before the song's next iteration.

The time values in Group's part have an ingenious impact on the overall polyrhythmic texture. I enjoy hearing this rhythm as two successive occurrences of a four-note motive – ti ta ta ta – that is launched first from the pickup to four-feel beat two (timepoint 1.3) and then again from the onbeat of four-feel beat four (timepoint 4.1). The note with short time value ("ti") functions like a temporal switch that toggles the melodic rhythm back and forth between the upbeats and the onbeats of the six-feel beats (see Table 13.8); the handclapping part gives phenomenal presence to this counter-metric field. The same toggling procedure happens within every cycle of the bell phrase: the short note on timepoint 2.2 shifts the bell's long tones into unison with the flow of beats in the upbeat six-feel until the short note on timepoint 4.3 returns the long bell tones into unison with the flow of beats in the onbeat six feel. In this song, a similar procedure creates two identical rhythmic patterns that make very effective polyrhythmic interaction with bell.

Ahor De Lia Gba 'Dzigo (#17) and *Dzogbe Milador* (#12) https://sites.tufts.edu/davidlocke/agbadza-items/

Songs discussed thus far have illustrated rhythmic dynamism in Agbadza songs. Whether due to factors such as the duration of composed themes, formal design, metric accentuation, or the pattern of its time values, the melodic rhythm of these songs adds to the ever-changing quality of Agbadza's overall musical temporality. The next two songs illustrate a different capacity: the steady and relatively unambiguous accentuation of one kind of metric field, that is, the flow of four-feel or six-feel metric beats. Although the musical rhythm of Agbadza will always be malleable to different interpretations, in these songs we hear and feel strong alignment between a song's accentuation and the foundational time feels of Agbadza.

In many ways, "Ahor De Lia Gba 'Dzigo" is a classic Ewe song. The song lyric heralds a sneak attack on Adzigo, a legendary center for Ewe warriors, a message enhanced by the drum language's command, "Put on your war belt" (see #17, Song Lyrics and Interview). Although more fully developed than "Kaleworda," the design of the call-and-response, the melody's shape, and the song's form are typical for a dance-drumming song (see #17, Lead Sheet): an opening section (A1A1) in which Leader and Group twice exchange relatively long phrases (mm. 1–6); a middle section (B1B2) with

Table 13.8 "Dzogbe Nye Nutsu Tor" toggling onbeat and upbeat six-feel beats

4-Feel	1.1	1.2	1.3	2.1	2.2	2.3	3.1	3.2	3.3	4.1	4.2	4.3	1.1	1.2	1.3	2.1	2.2	2.3
6-Feel	1	&	2	&	3	&	4	&	5	&	6	&	1	&	2	&	3	&
Song			ti	ta		ta		ta		ti	ta		ta		ta			
Bell	ta		ta		ti	ta		ta		ta		ti	ta		ta		ti	ta

Table 13.9 "Ahor De Lia" melodic rhythm of Leader phrase

Measures 1–2												
Beats	2.3	3.1	3.2	3.3	4.1	4.2	4.3	1.1	1.2	1.3	2.1	2.2
Song	ti	**ti**	ta		**ta**		ti	**ti**	ta		**ti**	ta
Measures 2–3												
Beats	2.3	3.1	3.2	3.3	4.1	4.2	4.3	1.1	1.2	1.3	2.1	2.2
Song		**ti**	ta		**ta**		ti	**ti**	ta		**ta**	

faster call-and-response timing (mm. 6–10); and a reprise of Group's phrase from the opening section (A2) (mm. 11–12).

Time values in Leader's melody make a memorable rhythmic topography, so to speak (see Table 13.9, bold shading shows accentuation).[25]

The prominent notes on every onbeat enable a listener to feel the melodic rhythm as conferring accent to the four-feel beats. With long notes initiated from timepoints 3.1 and 1.1 (mm. 3–4), Group's reply reinforces this hard-driving onbeat rhythmic quality.[26] Because it continues with the same text and time values in its B and A2 section, the entire song has an "onbeat four" quality of rhythmic accentuation. This is not the full story, however, as will be discussed below after a brief detour into the theory of Ewe meter.

In Agbadza's musical meter, four-feel beats with ternary subdivision (dotted quarter notes) always are balanced by six-feel beats with binary subdivision (quarter notes). The co-existence of two types of metric units imparts to the music a permanently ongoing three-with-two temporal ratio (3:2 over a half-measure; 6:4 within one bell cycle) that makes patterns in Agbadza's music amenable to different rhythmic interpretations. The timing of the implicit four-feel beats will be so familiar to persons competent in Ewe music that the explicit iteration of the six-feel beats by the hand-clapping part in the Alorwoyie recordings likely makes for a pleasing counterpart. Just as some songs align to the four-feel beats, a song may also "be in six," if I may put it that way.

"Dzogbe Milador" exhibits steady accentuation of the onbeat six-feel beats (see #12, Lead Sheet). Because the time values in the A section (mm. 1–5) tend toward uniformity in eighth notes, they do not suggest a particular accentual pattern in and of themselves. However, the syllabic division of words in the text and the choice of pitches in the tune bring out the "onbeat six-feel," suggested by the bold shading in Table 13.10.

While this quality of rhythmic accentuation is unequivocally present in the Leader's part, in the Group part (m. 2), the consecutive eighth notes on

Table 13.10 "Dzogbe Milador" A section, melodic rhythm accentuation of onbeat six

Measures 1–2; Leader												
Beats	4	&	5	&	6	&	1	&	2	&	3	&
Song	**Dzo-**	gbe	**mi-**	la-	**dor**	Be	**dzo-**	gbe	**mi-**	la-	**dor**	
Measures 2–3; Group												
Beats	4	&	5	&	6	&	1	&	2	&	3	&
Song	**Fon**	ma-	**de**	ma-	**de**	Be	**dzo-**	gbe	**mi-**	la-	**dor**	

Table 13.11 "Dzogbe Milador" B section, melodic rhythm accentuation of onbeat-six in B

Measures 5–6												
Beats	4	&	5	&	6	&	1	&	2	&	3-	&
Song	**L: Tu-**	le a-	**si**		**da-**	da	**glo**		**G: Me-**	yi-	**na**	
Measures 6–7												
Beats	4	&	5	&	6	&	1	&	2	&	3	&
Song	**L: He-**	le a-	**si**		**da-**	da	**glo**		**G: Me-**	yi-	**na**	Be

pitch A present a more rhythmically malleable situation that could be felt in sets of three, i.e., organized within ternary beats three and four.

In the B section (mm. 5–7), Leader and Group combine their incomplete melodic fragments to set one line of text to a full tuneful idea; the melodic rhythm continues to accentuate the onbeat six-feel beats (see Table 13.11, bold shading shows accentuation).

For the first time in our discussion, this song has a C section with important new information in the lyrics. In the A section, Leader and Group both conveyed the message "As warriors, we are prepared to die on the battlefield." In the B section, the song belittled the effectiveness of the enemy's weapons, "Your guns cannot shoot. Your knives cannot cut." The confidence expressed in these lines is tempered in the C section: "Men will die in battle, while women await their own deaths back at home." As if to give the turn in the song's poetry a new musical setting, the melody's pattern of steady accentuation changes dramatically from being "in six" to being "in four" (mm. 7–9). Melodic motion on B♭ and D confers the feeling of grouping within ternary beats onto the long set of nine eighth notes that lead to the onbeat dotted quarter note on G in

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Table 13.12 "Dzogbe Milador" C section, melodic accentuation "in four"

Beats	2.3	3.1	3.2	3.3	4.1	4.2	4.3	1.1	1.2	1.3	2.1	2.2	2.3
Song	Be	**nu-**	tsu-	wo	**ku**	me-	Le	**dzi-**	dzi	'fe	**o**		

m. 8, that is, the four-feel groove (see Table 13.12, bold shading shows accentuation).

Then at the midpoint of m. 8 (timepoint 3.1) comes a striking departure from the prior time values of eighths and quarters: a dotted figure followed by highly distinctive duplet motion through beat one of the next bell cycle (m. 9).[27] This is a clear instance of melody dramatizing the meaning of song text. In the closing return of section A (mm. 9–10), Group brings back its opening phrase, thereby ending the song with a return to its accentuation of the six-feel beats.

Multistability is the normal condition of musical rhythm in Agbadza. The primacy of the four-feel beats notwithstanding, the design of tunes usually enables more than one way to interpret the song's rhythmic accentuation and melodic grouping. I suggest that this very quality of temporal dynamism is a reason why traditional genres of music like Agbadza have been popular among Ewe people for centuries. The songs and drumming never will become stale as long as people listen creatively. We return to "Ahor De Lia Gba 'Dzigo" to illustrate.

Above, "Ahor De Lia Gba 'Dzigo" served to exemplify steady accentuation of the four-feel onbeats. Returning again to this song, we can observe how its melodic rhythm also conforms to the resultant rhythm of time values in 3:2 between quarter notes and dotted quarter notes – ta ti ti ta, ta ti ti ta, etc.[28] In this song, the four-note 3:2 pattern is phrased ti **ti** ta **TA**, that is, from offbeat pickup, through onbeat two, toward onbeat one, with the final "ta" aligning to the moment when the two timing streams come together in unison (bold shading and capitalization shows accentuation). From the temporal perspective of the "three side" of 3:2, the melodic rhythm in this song may be said to consistently align with the "ands" of six-feel beats, that is, the flow of upbeat six-feel beats (see Table 13.13, bold shading shows accentuation).

Ewe metric theory reveals another consequence of accentuation on the "upbeat six": moments of unison between upbeat six-feel beats and the onbeat four-feel beats occur on four-feel beats two and four, not one and three. In other words, notes timed to flow of the upbeat six-feel beats tend to accentuate the backbeats, a well-established hallmark of music in the African Diaspora.[29]

Table 13.13 "Ahor De Lia Gba 'Dzigo" accentuation of upbeat six

Measures 1–2												
Onbeat four	2.3	3.1	3.2	3.3	4.1	4.2	4.3	1.1	1.2	1.3	2.1	2.2
Upbeat six	3&		4&		5&		6&		1&		2&	
Song	**ti**	ti	**ta**		**ta**		**ti**	ti	**ta**		**ti**	ta
Measures 2–3												
Onbeat four	2.3	3.1	3.2	3.3	4.1	4.2	4.3	1.1	1.2	1.3	2.1	2.2
Upbeat six	3&		4&		5&		6&		1&		2&	
Song		ti	**ta**		**ta**		**ti**	ti	**ta**		**ta**	

Summary

The foregoing discussion has familiarized us with the overall nature of musical temporality in Agbadza songs and provided opportunity to articulate many of its more sophisticated features of rhythm. Let us summarize.

The bell part establishes the conditions of musical time:

- ever recycling temporal condition
- duration of time span or measure
- distinct pattern of sounded time values and unsounded timepoints using two time values – long and short
- two grouping shapes of full theme: (A) ta ti ta ta ta ti ta, (B) ta ta ti ta ta ta ti
- segmentation into fragments: (A) ta ti ta + ta ta ti ta
- onbell and offbell timepoints
- cadential motion over onsets 5–6–7–1 toward fleeting moment of stasis (ONE)
- strokes 7 and 1 are onbeat in the four-feel
- toggling between onbeat six-feel beats (onsets 1, 2, 3) and upbeat six-feel beats (onsets 4, 5, 6, 7)

Meter establishes duration, subdivisions, and structural accents:

- twelve timepoints within one bell cycle
- ternary-quadruple time or "the four-feel beats" (four groups of three) is foundational
- binary-sextuple time or "the six-feel beats" (six groups of two) is a permanent complement
- three-with-two (3:2) is omnipresent

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- the accentual force of four-feel beats ranges from most stabile to most motile as follows: 1–3–4–2, that is, downbeat, midpoint, backbeat, backbeat
- four-feel beats 1 and 4 are onbell; four-feel beats 2 and 3 are offbell
- six-feel beats 1–3 are onbell, six-feel beats 4–6 are offbeat
- three timepoints within one ternary beat: the onbeat timepoint (1.1), the afterbeat timepoint (1.2), and a third timepoint (1.3) that may function as either an unaccented pickup if it leads to a subsequent onbeat tone or an accented offbeat if no onset occurs on the subsequent onbeat
- two timepoints within one binary beat: onbeat and upbeat
- matrix conception: steady flow of onbeats, offbeats, and upbeats in 3:2 ratio at different durational values

Accentuation, heightened feeling of a particular musical moment, is made in several ways:

- structural: resulting from permanent nature of bell, meter, recurring themes of parts in drum ensemble, and scale/mode
- compositional: resulting from design of song and lead-response drum composition
- onbell and onbeat accents: structural
- offbell and offbeat accents: compositional
- agogic accent (relative time value or duration of a note)
- positional accent: first or last note in a group
- pentatonic scales and modes: multiple potential tonal centers
- song finali often is tonal center but not always
- recurrent cyclic nature of music time continuously refreshes accentual patterns of motility and stasis

Song design has impact on musical rhythm in many ways:

- overall duration: from relatively short to relatively long
- organization of motion through metric fields and bell phrase
- moments of beginning and ending on bell and within meter
- timing of transfer between Leader and Group; rhythm of call-and-response; each part may achieve melodic closure or, alternatively, the two parts may combine to make one phrase
- duration of Leader and Group parts: long Leader–short Group; short Leader–long Group; equal duration of Leader-Group
- rhythm of tonal motion: motion toward and arrival at tonal centers; timing of moments of tonal stasis on bell and in meter

- temporal features of musical form (design of melody considered together with design of call-and-response): A sections – tuneful, B-sections – percussive, C sections – tuneful but different and distinctive
- overall before-after temporal/tonal patterns: from temporally busy and high-pitched at a song's beginning to temporally quiet and low-pitch at its end

Melodic rhythm, that is, the design of time values in a melody, projects temporal force just as do the musical instruments in the drum ensemble:

- Duet with bell and each instrument
- Composite rhythm with other parts
- Metric placement of onsets
- Surface pattern: variegated time values make a definite rhythmic shape; unvaried time values have neutral temporal shape and are susceptible to being shaped by the force of other parts (malleability)
- 3:2 as a pattern of time values (ta ti ti ta); melodic rhythm often phrased ti ti ta ta.
- consistent accentuation of a metric field, and/or a metric rhythm such as three–then–two, or three–four–ONE
- musical dramatization of the meaning of song lyrics by a shift in accentual pattern or other means
- non-isochronous timing of two-note, short-long figures when short first note is onbeat
- temporal motion toward accentuation at the end of phrases
- clever design: palindrome; short riff repeated with difference on bell or meter; alignment with instruments in ensemble
- internal references: motivic variation, melodic sequence, recurring rhythmic figures

Conclusion

The onbeat four-feel groove in duet with the seven-note bell theme provides the ultimate temporal logic of Agbadza, but perhaps because this foundation is so well established, a plethora of countervailing forces may be put in play without threatening the music's groove. Agbadza's melodic rhythm might be characterized as iridescent: it resists a one-way interpretation and may be perceived to change depending on its setting in musical context. In Agbadza, everything musical happens within an interactive

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network of mutual influences: instrumental parts in a multi-part ensemble, meter as a dynamic matrix, and songs with multistable temporal design. Songs are designed to fit with other parts in interesting and musically satisfying ways. Like the other components of Agbadza music, a song acquires its full nature only in relationship to things outside itself.

Endnotes

1 Gideon Foli Alorwoyie has had a long, distinguished career as an expert in traditional African music. Since youth, he has played a leading role in various customs of the Ewe people that entail drumming, singing, and dancing. He has earned his living from performance arts in professional folkloric groups, notably the Gbeho Research Council, the Arts Council of Ghana Folkloric Troupe, and the Ghana National Dance Ensemble. Alorwoyie gathered material for this project during research on Ewe drum language funded by the University of North Texas where he is a tenured professor. As seems fitting for a virtuoso artist, Alorwoyie presented his research results in a sound recording and subsequently invited my help on written documentation.

2 I have published several scholarly articles on the version of Agbadza produced and documented by Alorwoyie. For a comprehensive consideration of musical rhythm, see D. Locke, "An Approach to Musical Rhythm in Agbadza," in R. Wolf, S. Blum, and C. Hasty (eds.), *Thought and Play in Musical Rhythm: Asian, African, and Euro-American Perspectives* (Oxford University Press, 2019).

3 A succinct version of the Alorwoyie-Locke Agbadza Project has been published in the format of book/CD; see G. F. Alorwoyie with D. Locke, *Agbadza: Songs, Drum Language of the Ewe* (St. Louis: African Music Publishers, 2013).

4 The online site uses staff notation for musical examples, which are listed in Critical Edition Figures. Figure 2 shows the polyrhythmic texture of these instruments.

5 Discourses on African music in the scholarly literature tend to use Eurocentric analytic terminology that may be inadequate in conveying the full ethnographic truth of the insider point of view. Terms like *percussion* and *polyrhythm* may minimize the pitched dimension of drumming, for example. Meki Nzewi has been a very effective voice on this subject; see *African Music: Theoretical Content and Creative Continuum: The Culture-Exponent's Definitions* (Olderhausen: Institut für Didaktik populärer Musik, 1997).

6 The excellent and straightforward presentation of analytic concepts and descriptive language for writing about melody in J. H. K. Nketia, *African Music in Ghana* (Northwestern University Press, 1962) had a formative influence on my scholarly writing.

7 Those who listen to the audio files will notice the gradual rise in the actual pitch classes being sung during the recording. This upward drift does not change the intervallic relationships within a tune, however, and is not discussed here.

8 Non-isochronous microtiming of timepoints does not have an impact on the analytic schema I discuss.
9 Alorwoyie with Locke, *Agbadza*.
10 For discussion of this bell part, see K. Agawu, "Structural Analysis or Cultural Analysis? Competing Perspectives on the 'Standard Pattern' of West African Rhythm," *Journal of the American Musicological Society*, 59 (2006), 1–46.
11 This way of grouping the notes in the bell pattern has become standardized in the scholarly literature, which is a bit misleading because it exaggerates the importance of metric structure at the expense of the rhythmic shapes made by the asymmetry in the pattern's time values.
12 For discussion of the Agbadza dance see Locke, "Approach."
13 W. Anku, "Circles and Time: A Theory of Structural Organization of Rhythm in African Music," *Music Theory Online*, 6.1 (2000).
14 D. Locke, "Yevevu in the Metric Matrix," *Music Theory Online*, 16.4 (2010).
15 For my first iteration of these metric concepts, see D. Locke, "Principles of Offbeat Timing and Cross-Rhythm in Southern Ewe Dance Drumming," *Ethnomusicology*, 26 (1982), 217–46.
16 See Nzewi, *African Music*. Although I accept the value of Nzewi's project to interrogate the inappropriate connotations of conventional Eurocentric music terminology, not to mention its colonial history, I continue to favor the internationally accepted vocabulary in many cases. To me, polyrhythm and/or polyphony are helpful terms for Agbadza's drum ensemble music and overall multi-part texture. Furthermore, I disagree with Kofi Agawu's strong position on monometer; I hear polymeter as a constant condition in Agbadza – witness the handclapping part.
17 For a fuller discussion of call-and-response in Agbadza songs, see D. Locke, "Call and Response in Ewe Agbadza Songs," *Analytical Approaches to World Music*, 3.1 (2013).
18 Please visit the "Items" section of the online site and then refer to the item number to find all information referred to here.
19 In our interview, Alorwoyie suspects a "bad death" for which a person is spiritually unprepared (see #7, Interview). The language of the drum composition adds historical detail to the song lyric by calling the name of the place where the incident took place (see #7, Drum Language).
20 I hear the B♭ in m. 4 as a special pitch that is added to the pentatonic collection to enable the Group's tune to imitate the Leader's F–G–A upward stepwise motion in measure 2 (see #7, Lead Sheet).
21 Early in my study of Alorwoyie's Agbadza I notated only the time values of songs on a one-line staff to better understand the "rhythm of melody." It proved a helpful step along the path toward understanding the melodic rhythm of songs.
22 Confounding a purely forward-moving sense of time, Group's tune makes reference backward in time through melodic imitation by clever use of the pitch B♭.

23 For useful words to describe melodic motion, see Nketia, *African Music*.
24 This may be understood as a measure in 3/4 followed by a measure of $\frac{6}{8}$.
25 Especially in vocal music, when short-long rhythmic figures are launched from onbeat positions, seldom does the second, longer time value start precisely one-third of the way through the beat. Instead, the onbeat shorter time value is lengthened so that the onset of the offbeat longer time value occurs closer in time to the midpoint between successive onbeats. This is sometimes theorized as "swing," that is, deviation from an isochronous norm for expressive purposes. Challenging this orthodoxy, scholars such as Rainer Polak have discovered West African traditions in which non-isochronous, fast-moving pulses are normative; see R. Polak, "Rhythmic Theory as Meter: Non-Isochronous Beat Subdivision in Jembe Music from Mali," *Music Theory Online*, 16.4 (2010).
26 Group's rhythm also suggests a cut-time interpretation.
27 Rather than use tuplets, I prefer to notate even divisions of the ternary beats with pairs of dotted eighth notes, because in drumming, dotted time values often are handled with two notes – that is, a dotted eighth-note time value often becomes a sixteenth–eighth figure, just as dotted quarter-note time values are traversed with eighth–quarter figures. Maintaining consistency in notation at different temporal "architectonic levels," so to speak, visually communicates the remarkable coherence in the structural design of Ewe dance music. In other words, rhythmic proportions recur at different rates of speed and durational values.
28 First presented by Gerhard Kubik, the term *resultant rhythm* refers to a cognitive process in which a listener combines notes from separate parts into a new composite; G. Kubik, "The Phenomenon of Inherent Rhythms in East and Central African Instrumental Music," *African Music*, 3 (1962), 33–42.
29 Many of the musical features that link music of Africa and the African diaspora are articulated in S. Floyd, *The Power of Black Music: Interpreting Its History from Africa to the United States* (Oxford University Press, 1995).