The Afro-Cuban Abakuá: Rhythmic Origins to Modern Applications

Donald Brooks Truly
University of Miami, btruly@yahoo.com

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THE AFRO-CUBAN ABAKUÁ: RHYTHMIC ORIGINS TO MODERN APPLICATIONS

By

Donald Brooks Truly

A DOCTORAL ESSAY

Submitted to the Faculty of the University of Miami in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Musical Arts

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the requirements for the degree of
Doctor of Musical Arts

THE AFRO-CUBAN ABAKUÁ:
RHYTHMIC ORIGINS TO MODERN APPLICATIONS

Donald Brooks Truly

Approved:

Ney Rosauro, D.M.A.
Professor and Program Director, Percussion

Terri A. Scandura, Ph.D.
Dean of the Graduate School

Gary Green, M.M.
Professor and Chair, Instrumental Performance

Ferdinando DeSena, D.M.A.
Assistant Professor, Music Theory and Composition

Nancy Zavac, M.M., M.S.
Librarian Associate Professor
The objective of this doctoral essay is to help shed some light on the Afro-Cuban musical style called the Abakuá. This essay traces the development of the Abakuá secret society and its music from its ancestral beginnings in Africa (with the Èfik and Efut Leopard Societies), through its movement into Cuba and the development of the first lodge (in the eighteen hundreds), to its eventual influence in America. This essay also describes the impact the Abakuá has had on music in general, but especially the music of the Cuban Rumba and Afro-Cuban jazz.

Detail is given on many different aspects of the Abakuá, including the history, beliefs, and practices of the secret society, the types of ceremonies, the types of drums and rhythms associated with each ceremony, including their purpose, and the influences of Abakuá on rumba and modern music. The essay concludes with an assessment of the development of the drum set and how this instrument has played a part in the music of the Abakuá as well as Afro-Cuban jazz in general. While this essay covers many elements, the focus remains on the drums and rhythms of the Abakuá and how they have influenced others and evolved throughout this process.
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CHAPTER 1
INTRODUCTION

Many regions of Latin America have a particular rhythm associated with them and a style of playing that is all their own. With every unique rhythm usually comes a different dance, religion, set of beliefs, style of playing, and variety of instrumentation. The Afro-Cuban Abakuá (sometimes spelled Abacuá or Abakwá) is difficult to define because it encompasses many elements, including: secret societies, traditions, language, music, culture, dance, religion, politics, beliefs, and mythology, to name a few. “It is not so easy to say exactly what Abakuá is. If Abakuá is not precisely a religion, it is a religious organization; but it is better understood as a ritual brotherhood, sometimes compared to the freemasons in structure.”¹

The African Diaspora

Beginning in the sixteenth century and continuing over a period of four centuries, millions of Africans were transported to the “New World,” mainly for cheap labor, in what was called the Atlantic, or transatlantic slave trade. Most of the slaves came from Africa’s west coast due to the fact that it was close, which meant less expense and

more profits for the slave traders. This slave trade, or \textit{African Diaspora}, led to the dispersion of African culture, dance, music and religion across hemispheres.\textsuperscript{2}

After being uprooted from their homeland and scattered about in a completely new region, the African people somehow managed to hold onto their rich heritage and traditions as well as completely reform their identities. This essay will focus on one particular result of the African Diaspora: Afro-Cuban music. The chapters that follow will begin with the African origins of the Cuban Abakuá Societies and will follow the historical and musical progression of this society to the present day.

**Need for the Study**

Modern-day percussionists in post-secondary institutions are expected to be well versed in many aspects of their field. One is expected to have knowledge in orchestral percussion, solo percussion, chamber music, world music, and jazz, not to mention the instruments associated with each idiom. However, it is today a more frequent occurrence that percussionists do not achieve this overall general expertise in every aspect of their field. More and more, percussionists are becoming specialists on a particular instrument and are losing the desire and ability to be “total percussionists.”

One of these neglected percussion idioms is world music, particularly Afro-Cuban music, perhaps because it is a somewhat recent addition to the “necessary” idioms of serious percussion study. Even though these skills are considered essential, at the

university level, they are rarely authentically reproduced due to both a lack of knowledge and proper instruction. In some cases, Abakuá rhythms in one source will be notated completely different in another source. This makes it very difficult to understand this music and reproduce it authentically. All styles of Afro-Cuban music have many variations, but the patterns, when examined, should be similar from source to source. It is the author’s intent to provide basic authentic rhythms, including some variations and combinations, for a variety of patterns that will always sound authentic.

In order to fully understand the natural, historical progression of Afro-Cuban musical styles, the student should possess a basic, but clear understanding of the history and culture of each region that contributes to the Afro-Cuban styles as a whole. Usually, during the beginning stages of Afro-Cuban music study, much time is spent on the traditional folkloric ensemble with emphasis on the 6/8 styles, particularly the *Bembé* because, in many cases, it is the most common. Brief mention is given to the Abakuá, but usually not enough to fully understand all the subtleties of this music/culture. It is the author’s intention to fill the void that presently exists in many post-secondary institutions by supplying both historical information as well as many notated musical examples which will demonstrate both traditional and modern Abakuá patterns and rhythms on the individual hand held instruments, as well as on congas and the drum set.
**Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of this essay is: 1) to trace the development of the Afro-Cuban Abakuá music to determine its importance in regards to percussion traditions; 2) to establish a solid foundation of knowledge of this particularly neglected Afro-Cuban musical style and culture; 3) to create a concise source containing both traditional and modern adaptations of Abakuá music, combined with an in-depth historical background; and 4) to establish Abakuá as a direct influence of much of today’s music, particularly *Rumba*, and Afro-Cuban, or “Latin” jazz.

“The activity of an entire generation of Cuban musicians, in the decades of the 1960s, 1970s, and 1980s, was significant in the expansion of Latin jazz into a separate genre and for the increasing popularity of Cuban rhythms in general.”

The interest in Afro-Cuban music, as well as its academic study in schools throughout the country, has definitely increased, and continues to increase. Beginning in 1995, Afro-Cuban music took an even larger step in the direction of establishing itself as its own genre with the addition of its own category in the Grammy awards. It is clear to see that Afro-Cuban, or “Latin” jazz has come into its own, and rightly so. But, behind all of this fame and attention is the Abakuá. It was there in the beginning and it will remain until the end.

---


4 Ibid.
CHAPTER 2
REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

This chapter outlines the research related to all aspects that are covered in this essay regarding the Afro-Cuban Abakuá. Many sources are listed in this chapter that contain a wealth of information on the Afro-Cuban Abakuá culture and practices, and should be consulted in addition to this essay for serious study. This chapter is broken down into three large categories that cover the entire scope of the essay: 1) History, 2) Music, and 3) Influences and Applications.

The Secret Societies of the Afro-Cuban Abakuá

According to the book *Creole Religions of the Caribbean*, “The Abakuá Society is a confraternity and magical-religions esoteric society exclusively for men. The first chapters of the society appeared in the town of Regla in 1836 and later spread through Havana, Matanzas and Cárdenas.”5 Olmos goes on to mention that, in the beginning,

the initial members of the Abakuá Society were black men. Other races were not
admitted until the late nineteenth century.

The origins of the Abakuá are also discussed in David H. Brown’s book entitled
*The Light Inside*. Brown provides maps of Old Calabar, the Cross River region and goes
into depth about the slave trade and the different regions of Old Calabar including the
two main regions, Èfik and Efut. Brown also covers, in detail, the racial make-up of the
Abakuá and discusses how the societies became diversified over time.

Reference is again given to the origins of the Abakuá Society in the book *Cuba
and its Music*. “Abakuá descends from the *Egbo* (or *Ékpè*) leopard society, a society that
functioned as a kind of government in the Old Calabar region, a semi-*Bantu* territory that
today is divided between western Cameroon and southeastern Nigeria.”

Members of the Abakuá societies became known as Ñáñigos. The term ñáñigo
can also refer to an Abakuá dancer. In his book *Afro-Cuban Religious Experience: Cultural Reflections in Narrative*, Matibag states:

The popular designation of Ñáñigos for the members of the Abakuá
fraternal associations originally named the Abakuá figures called *íremes*,
ñañas, diablitos, or ñáñigos. These íremes are the street dancers of the
society, and they symbolize the spirits of the dead or the spirits of the
society’s founders.

---

6 David H Brown, *The Light Inside: Abakuá Society Arts and Cuban Cultural History*

7 Ibid., 23-26.


9 Eugeino Matibag, *Afro-Cuban Religious Experience: Cultural Reflections in Narrative*
Details of membership and religious growth of the Abakuá societies are discussed in the article/review of a Cuban television program on the Global Information Network entitled “Religion-Cuba: Recognition for Afro-Cuban Religious Sect.” “To be a man, a good son, father, brother, friend; to be honest; to have no vices, were among the virtues listed on the application form to join the Abakuá secret society,”\textsuperscript{10} states Matos. He goes on in his review to mention how the Abakuá religious society is growing by listing facts and figures. Religious growth is also mentioned in the article “Cross-Cultural Rhythms: Salsa-Es De Cuba!” Here, Jolly states, “By the 1840s, Africans represented half of the Cuban population. They formed cabildos (councils) for the four main religions – Abakuá, Congo, Lucumi, and Arare.”\textsuperscript{11}

In two of the books previously cited, Cuba and its Music, by Ned Sublette, and Creole Religions of the Caribbean, by Olmos and Gebert, there is much detail on the story of the Abakuá, of which there are numerous versions; two of which are described in the Folklore/Mythology subchapter of Chapter four of this essay.

Music of the Abakuá:
Instrumentation, Rhythms, and Techniques

In the book Drumming for the Gods, much detail is given concerning the two types of Abakuá ensembles: sacred and secular. Comparing both ensembles, Velez


mentions the types and sizes of drums, rattles, bells and even the skins that were used on
the drums. Velez also discusses the appearance of the instruments and explains
how some of them are tuned, as well as the techniques used to play them.12 Mention is
made also of the most prominent drums of the Abakuá society in the book From Afro-
Cuban Rhythms to Latin Jazz, “such as the bonkó and ekué of the Abakuá society.”13

Another source pertaining to Abakuá instrumentation and ensembles is an article
entitled “An Abbreviated History of Cuban Music and Percussion.” In this work, the
O’Mahoney mentions:

[Abakuá ensemble members] used a four-drum ensemble that included
single-headed drums played with sticks, an ekón (a type of cowbell), and
two gourd rattles (erikundi) for religious services. The Abakuá’s use of two
distinctly different sounding rattles (maracas) was slightly different from its
African predecessors (who often used only one), as was its concept of
playing drums with two sticks.14

In the article “The Drums and Rhythms of Cuban Abakuá,” musical examples of
the traditional rhythms are notated along with descriptions of the instruments,
performance techniques, instrumentation, and stylistic variations that exist between the
different Abakuá ensembles.15 Numerous notated musical examples are available in The
Essence of Afro-Cuban Percussion and Drum Set. In this book, Uribe discusses and
demonstrates, by using musical examples and an accompanying CD, the feel of the Afro

12 Maria-Teresa Vélez, Drumming for the Gods: The Life and Times of Felipe García Villamil,

13 Fernandez, From Afro-Cuban Rhythms to Latin Jazz, 25.

14 Terry O’Mahoney, “An Abbreviated History of Cuban Music and Percussion,” Percussive Notes

15 Barry Cox and Andrea Pryor, “The Drums and Rhythms of Cuban Abakuá,” Percussive Notes
37, no. 6 (December 1999): 40.
6/8 styles, clave interpretation, conga patterns and techniques, timbale patterns and techniques, song styles, and drum set patterns and techniques. Even more notated examples may be found in the following two books: The Drummers Bible, which contains a section dedicated to traditional Abakuá patterns applied to drum set as well as Afro 6/8 bell patterns, and Conversations in Clave, which contains a nontraditional, modernized notated variation of an Abakuá rhythm.

The following books, Cuba and its Music, Salsa!, and The Essence of Afro-Cuban Percussion, contain a wealth of material regarding the clave: its origins, purpose, and different forms. These books also contain information on the direct influence Abakuá had on the rumba as well as Cuban music in general. In Rumba: Dance and Social Change in Contemporary Cuba, Yvonne Daniel explains the Rumba and breaks it down into its three forms: Yambú, Guaguancó, and Columbia, including a thorough analysis of each form. In Salsiology, Vernon Boggs describes the influence Abakuá had on the development of the Cuban Rumba. In Voice of the Leopard, Dr. Miller describes an early musical form founded by Abakuá members called coros de clave that had an enormous impact on the Cuban rumba.

---

Influences and Modern Applications of Abakuá Music

*Afro-Cuban Jazz* gives a brief history of the development of “Latin” Jazz from its beginnings in 1947 to the present. Yanow lists a “Latin” jazz discography of 500 recordings with a rating system describing each recording, as and offers biographies and other information about some of today’s most popular Latin jazz artists, many of whom have been influenced by Abakuá,\(^{21}\) such as Chano Pozo. Pozo’s Abakuá background, as well as his union with Dizzy Gillespie, is well documented in a variety of sources including: *Salsiology*, and other internet sources individually listed in the footnotes throughout the essay as well as the bibliography.

Another book that addresses the impact of Abakuá on Latin Jazz is *From Afro-Cuban Rhythms to Latin Jazz*. This book discusses how Abakuá played a vital part in the development of the Cuban *Son* and goes on to describe the connection of current Latin jazz artists with their Abakuá pasts.\(^{22}\)

The Abakuá applications (musical examples) used in this essay were derived from transcriptions of traditional and modern adaptations of Abakuá music, percussion method books, and the author’s knowledge of studying and performing Abakuá rhythms since 2004. As mentioned throughout the essay, these examples are a reference and are not to be taken as the only possibility of performance.

---


\(^{22}\) Fernandez, *From Afro-Cuban Rhythms to Latin Jazz*, 24-25, 109, 115, 116-117.
CHAPTER 3

METHOD

This chapter describes the organizational process used to construct this essay. Research materials include reference, historical, and percussion method books that are personally owned by the author, as well as, journal articles, CDs, audiocassettes and VHS tapes that have been collected from the Richter Library and the Weeks Music Library at the University of Miami, in Coral Gables, FL. This collected material is organized into four main categories including: 1) Historical Data: Origins, Practices, Explanations and Myths of the Abakuá Societies; 2) Traditional Abakuá Music: Instrumentation and Performance Practices; 3) Modern Abakuá Music and Performance Practices; and 4) Traditional and Modern Abakuá Drum Set Applications.

Historical Data

The first part of this section begins with a detailed account of the origins of the Abakuá. The second part of this section presents and discusses the geographical region in which this society was formed. Present day maps are supplied from Google Maps of both the Carabali region (Old Calabar) of Africa (now Calabar), and of the Port of Regla in Havana, Cuba, where Abakuá was initially established. This provides visual geographic content about the regions where the Abakuá originated and thrived.
The third part of this section provides an in-depth definition, description, and explanation to show what the name Abakuá encompasses. Also included in this section is information about membership in the societies (i.e., obligations, and practices), pictures and explanations of costumes that are used during the festivals and or celebrations, as well as the Abakuá symbols, with descriptions of what they signify. Finally, there is a summary of the many different versions of the myth surrounding the secret of the Abakuá and how it was discovered and revealed. This summary discusses who was involved, what allegedly happened and the impact it had on the Abakuá society.

**Traditional Abakuá Music**

This category consists of detailed descriptions of five categories: 1) Clave – origins, purpose and forms; 2) Instrumentation – types of drums, bells and rattles; 3) Technique – what is required to perform the instruments; 4) Rhythms – notated patterns for each instrument; 5) Combinations and Variations – layering of multiple rhythmic patterns, and the cohesion of the patterns around the 6/8 clave bell.

**Modern Abakuá Music**

Some aspects have changed with Abakuá music since its beginnings, but at the same time, much has remained the same. In addition to the differences and similarities the five categories of the previous section, “Traditional Abakuá Instrumentation, Music and Performance Practices,” this section introduces three new categories: 1) Advancement in instrument design and manufacturing; 2) The technical advancement of performers and or soloists; and 3) The Drum Set and “Latin” jazz.
Traditional and Modern Abakuá Drum Set Applications

The final category is comprised of drum set applications. There are many musical examples, created by the author, which demonstrate each individual rhythmic pattern within the Abakuá, and show how they are to be executed (voiced) on the drum set. In addition to the patterns, there are several combinations and variations of these patterns.

The brief conclusion consists of a select list of traditional and modern Abakuá performers. This list includes significant musical groups and individuals who perform, or have performed Abakuá music, or that have shown traces and/or influences of Abakuá in their music.
The very first Abakuá society in Cuba, named Èfik Butón, was established in the Port of Regla in Havana in 1836, and designated by the symbol above. A direct result of the African diaspora, the initial members were “pure blood” Africans. These founding members were from the Cross River region of present day Southeastern Nigeria and Southwestern Cameroon, then known as Old Calabar.

Old Calabar was a society of nobles and slaves. By the time the nobles were getting rich selling slaves to Cuba, they had evolved a system that made lavish use of human sacrifice, in which the death of an important man would occasion the slaughter of dozens or even hundred of slaves.  

The human sacrifices continued even into the mid-nineteenth century until a group of both freemen and slaves, known as the “Blood Men,” began a social revolution to put an end to the killings. While sacrifice was prevalent in Old Calabar, in Cuba, this was not the case. “In Cuba, where there were never any black royals who owned other blacks, the religions offered animal sacrifices, but there was no human sacrifice.”

The inhabitants of Old Calabar came to be known as the *Carabali*, which was a Cuban name that generally was applied to all of the displaced Africans of the diaspora

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26 Ibid., 197.
movement into Cuba. Once the first Abakuá *juego* (lodge) was established, the society flourished and spread mainly through Havana and Matanzas, and even into Cárdenas.\(^{27}\)

![Figure 4.3 Map of present day Havana, Cuba, near the Port of Regla where Abakuá began in 1836.\(^{28}\)](image)

The Abakuá members became known as Ñáñigos (also the name of the dancers of the ceremonies), and quickly established a fearsome reputation throughout Cuba.\(^{29}\) Ñáñiguismo (act of all things ñáñigo) was almost contagious; it became very popular very fast, and was comparable to that of a violent street gang today. “It seems everybody wanted to be feared as a member of a terrible secret society.”\(^{30}\)

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\(^{27}\) Olmos and Paravisini-Gebert, *Creole Religions of the Caribbean*, 88.


\(^{30}\) Ibid., 199.
The Abakuá were generally considered by the middle class to be the underworld, and were the object of much defamatory propaganda. Anything negative that could be said about the Abakuá was likely to be believed, no matter how fantastic. And indeed, criminals did find a home in the ranks of Abakuá, with its promises of mutual aid for those who complied with its rules.  

The original ñáñigos in Cuba, who were prior inhabitants of Old Calabar, Africa, had one very distinct feature. They filed their teeth down to sharp points as a means of a weapon if needed in a fight. Many tribes in Africa filed their teeth (without anesthesia of course); it was common, but this was unheard of in Cuba, and people were terrified.  

**History**

In Africa, the Abakuá society counterpart is called the Ékpè society which, translated, means the *leopard* society. The leopard is used as a symbol of strength, power, and political influence throughout various communities. The African Diaspora adopted the Creole name Abakuá from the word Abakpa “a term by which the Ejaghams of Calabar are designated.” Ékpè was more than just another tribe; it was a type of government in the Cross River Region. After establishing juegos in Cuba, the many groups associated with the Carabalí were eventually condensed into two main groups or

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32 Ibid., 200.

33 Vélez, *Drumming for the Gods*, 17.


branches – Efí (Èfik in Africa) and Efó (Efut in Africa), and the members were considered one or the other, but they were both governed by Êkpè.

Membership in these Leopard societies was, and is still, extremely secret. Each member is considered as a brother and has to pledge strict oaths of silence in regard to the society and its sacred rituals and practices. Many times, people would not know that their own family members were in one of these societies until their death, when other society members would show up to perform the funeral rites. Originally, the Abakuá society was developed exclusively for black men but in the late nineteenth century, the societies were broadened to include other races. The first “white” Abakuá lodge was founded by Andrés Petít in 1863 in Havana and was called Akanarán Efó Ocobio Mukarará. The term white refers to any race not of “pure blood” African.

Built on proverbs and West African influences, the Abakuá society employed a unique language called Brícamo that only members themselves could speak and interpret. Due to the secrecy surrounding the Abakuá, Brícamo has existed to this day and has been kept alive and used by the society members since the eighteen hundreds. During this span of time, the language has changed in terms of inflection to the point that it is now considered “Afro-Spanish” or “Afro-Cuban” and is nearly impossible to pinpoint any type of origin.

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37 Olmos and Paravisini-Gebert, Creole Religions of the Caribbean, 88.
38 Brown, The Light Inside, 22-23.
The Abakuá dancers, also known as diablito (little devils) or ñáñigos, are probably one of the most identifiable elements of the Abakuá society.

This elaborate dancer was first publicly seen in the middle third of the nineteenth century on the Catholic Epiphany on January 6th, also called El Día de los Reyes (The Day of Three Kings), which is an annual Cuban festival. The ñáñigos play the part of past ancestors who are summoned by the drums and chants (of the percussion ensemble)

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41 Brown, *The Light Inside*, 133.
to make sure the ceremonies are correctly executed by the living participants.\(^{42}\) The word ñáñigo can also refer to an Abakuá member. “The term comes from the Èfik nyan-nyan with the meaning of ‘a man impersonator’ and –ngo ‘leopard.’ Its full literal meaning is ‘the leopard man,’ so-called because in the original African ritual the impersonator would crawl like a leopard before jumping on its prey.”\(^{43}\)

The ñáñigo costume varied slightly from dancer to dancer but mainly consisted of a hooded (insun) suit made of saco (a fabric similar to burlap) with checkerboard type print (reminiscent of a leopard) in either black and white or a combination of many different colors, along with a small sombrero worn on the back of the head. In addition to this, the ñáñigo would also be heavily ordained with nkaniká\(^{44}\) (a belt of bells) around his waist (and sometimes ankles), and a leafy herb and itón (staff) in his hands (used to greet and punish wrongdoers, respectively). In the early Abakuá societies, the costumes were known to possess magical powers that would entrance anyone that put them on.\(^{45}\) In the late nineteenth century, the term ñáñigo became associated with criminal elements surrounding the Abakuá mainly due to its secrecy and fearless nature. The name ñáñigo was later replaced with the name ïreme as an attempt to escape the dark persona that had developed.

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The Secret

All of these components: Êkpè, societies, language, ñáñigo, religion, music, dancers, and costumes, are all based on the single most important and interesting element of the Abakuá: the secret. This secret that is so special and sacred to have remained protected through loyal membership since before the mid eighteen hundreds is actually not a spoken word, but a sound. Not just any sound, it is believed by the Abakuá to be the voice of God.46

Folklore/Mythology

In African and Cuban folkloric mythology, the story is based on this: The Efó and the Efi were hostile tribes in the Calabar region. The great sorcerer Nasakó prayed to Abasí (the Supreme Deity) for a way to achieve peace. Abasí answered by placing the secret of the Abakuá into the physical state of a supernatural fish named Tanze and released the fish into the sacred river Od’dán (the cross-river). The name Tanze comes from Oban Tanze, who “was a king, a chief of the leopard society in Africa who had died many years before; [his] spirit was reincarnated as a fish.”47 Tanze has been described as “half eel, half toad, with a little bit of fish. His tail was divided into three parts and he had a great crest of plumes on his head from which four points protruded.”48 The secret was supposed to be discovered by the Efó, to whom it would bring great riches and honor, but Sikán, an Efó princess, accidentally intervened. As she was gathering water with a

47 Brown, The Light Inside, 37.
48 Sublette, Cuba and its Music, 197.
calabash in the sacred river, she heard a frightening, roaring sound; it was the voice of Tanze.\textsuperscript{49} Without knowing, Sikán had accidentally captured the sacred fish in her water vessel.

\begin{figure}[h]
\centering
\includegraphics[width=\textwidth]{figure45.png}
\caption{Figure 4.5 Depiction of the Discovery of Ekué.\textsuperscript{50}}
\end{figure}

In this illustration, you see Sikán towards the center holding the calabash on her head, the cross-river that separates the tribes and many other symbolic objects which are discussed later in this essay.

At this point in the story, some say Sikán rushed home to tell her father of her experience and he forbade her to tell anyone of her story, fearing she would be killed for discovering the secret; however, he eventually found the calabash containing Tanze and

\textsuperscript{49} Sublette, \textit{Cuba and its Music}, 197.

\textsuperscript{50} Brown, \textit{The Light Inside}, 39.
turned her in. In other accounts, she told her lover from the opposing Efi tribe, and the
two tribes joined forces to share in the riches and then she was turned in as well. On both
accounts, Sikán was held responsible because the calabash containing the lifeless fish,
Tanze, was eventually discovered.\textsuperscript{51}

In an effort to re-summon the voice of Tanze, a drum called the \textit{ekué} was
constructed from the calabash and Tanze’s skin was stretched across it, but to no avail.
Then, after the Efó elders contemplated the fact that Sikán had possibly seen Tanze or
heard the sacred voice, thus discovering the secret, she was sacrificed by \textit{Nasakó} (a one-
eyed priest in some versions, or sorcerer in others) in the hopes that her blood could
reproduce the voice. “When activated with a magical wand, the drum roared like a
leopard. Her blood was used to consecrate the spiritual material symbols; her flesh was
used to make protective symbols and her bones were powdered to make spells against
traitors to the religion.”\textsuperscript{52} As time went on, a variety of animal skins were used to re-
summon the voice and eventually, \textit{mbori} (goat) became the preferred skin. Today Sikán
is seen by many as the “Mother of the Abakuá” due to her discovery, and is often referred
to as “the first initiate” of the Abakuá.

\begin{flushright}
\footnotesize
\textsuperscript{51} Olmos and Paravisini-Gebert, \textit{Creole Religions of the Caribbean}, 90.
\textsuperscript{52} Shubi L. Ishemo, “From Africa to Cuba: An Historical Analysis of the Sociedad Secreta Abakuá
\end{flushright}
Symbols, Signs, and Markings

Next to the íreme, arguably the second most identifiable element of the Abakuá society is the detailed symbols and chalked markings called firmas (signatures) in Spanish, or anaforuana in Bricamo. From the sign of the first lodge (Èfük Butón) in 1836 (see Figure 4.1), to the more modern geometric depictions of shapes and animals, each marking has a very distinct meaning and significance, and is used as a form of identification, as well as a way to convey messages.\(^53\)

The most basic Abakuá drawn figure is a cross (cruz) within a circle, square, or triangle; each of the four quadrants produced thereof is occupied by a dot, a tiny circle (óvalo), or a cross. Four dots—two over two—represent the ‘eyes’ of Tanze over the eyes of Sikán.\(^54\)

Other symbolic markings that are commonplace are the cross, which represents the four trade winds; the serpent that represents Nasakó; the gourd that represents Sikán’s water vessel (calabash); the Palm tree (ceiba) that represents the burial location of Sikán’s unused remains; the crocodile that represents “the object of the women’s devotion;”\(^55\) and the arrows that, depending on the direction they are pointing, can mean birth (as in a new initiate), death, or death and rebirth (see Figure 4.5 for depictions of these). The following illustrations (Figure 4.6) show mainly different combinations of óvalos and cruz.

\(^53\) Olmos and Paravisini-Gebert, Creole Religions of the Caribbean, 89.

\(^54\) Brown, The Light Inside, 53.

\(^55\) Miller, The Voice of the Leopard, 49.
Figure 4.6 Abakuá Markings (Anaforuana or Firmas).\textsuperscript{56}

\textsuperscript{56} Brown, \textit{The Light Inside}, 52-55.
CHAPTER 5

INSTRUMENTATION, PLAZAS AND THE POTENCIA

Abakuá Ceremonies

There are several types of Abakuá ceremonies, but they can be grouped into two main categories: musical and sacred. The musical ceremonies consist of any type of celebration or festival outside of the fambá, which is a sacred room in a house, or chamber where rituals and initiation ceremonies are held. This is also where the sacred drums are kept. The sacred ceremonies consist of initiations, funerals, celebrations of newly formed Abakuá groups or branches, the appointment of dignitaries, and the swearing of Ekué. These all take place within the fambá.57

Drums, Rattles, and Bells

Just as the Abakuá ceremonies are grouped into a musical and sacred category, the drum ensembles follow suit as well. The musical drum ensembles perform outside of the fambá during the day long plante (celebration). This ensemble’s purpose is to signify the presence of the dignitaries leaving the fambá in procession as well as to summon and

57 Vélez, Drumming for the Gods, 18.
accompany the ireme.\textsuperscript{58} The musical drum ensemble consists of four drums, rattles/shakers, bells, claves, and call and response vocals, or chants called \textit{enkamé}.

**Musical drums**

The general name for all four drums in this ensemble is \textit{biankomekó}, or \textit{conjunto biankomekó} meaning a biankomekó ensemble. Each drum has only one head made of goatskin which is held in place by a rope-and-wedge-type tuning system called \textit{bekumá}. Each drum is made from a single log and takes on a conical shape. Because of the non-sacred application of these drums, they do not have any special markings or symbols.\textsuperscript{59}

\begin{figure}[h]
\centering
\includegraphics[width=0.45\textwidth]{conjunto_biankomekó.jpg}
\caption{Conjunto Biankomekó.}
\end{figure}

\textsuperscript{58} Vélez, \textit{Drumming for the Gods}, 18.
\textsuperscript{59} Ibid.
The main drum of the conjunto biankomekó is called *bonkó enchamiyá* and is commonly referred to as the “mother” drum. This drum is the leading voice of this ensemble and is the largest (about three feet tall) and deepest sounding drum of the four. It is played tilted, almost flat on its side, with the playing side of the drum resting on an elevated surface, enabling it to be played. Also called *bonkó* for short, this drum can be played by two drummers, one player (*monibonkó*) sitting on the upper portion of the drum, playing on the head with their hands, and the other player (*monitón*) playing on the wooden shell portion of the drum.\(^6\) It can also be carried during processions by both drummers, one at each end, or played by one player and held over the shoulder by a strap.

The remaining three drums in the conjunto biankomekó are grouped under the general name of *enkomó*. Each drum is roughly the same size (ten inches in diameter and ten inches in depth), and they are distinctly tuned high, medium, and low; however, regarding the individual names of these drums, there seems to be a bit of confusion. Of every source consulted for this essay, there were some variations. For the purposes of this essay, the drums will be named *biankomé*, *kuchí yeremá*, and *obiapá* (from high to low).

Played similar to a bongo drum (hand position), these small drums are held under one arm and struck with the opposite hand.\(^6\) The main difference between the *conjunto enkomó* and the “mother” drum is the fact that the conjunto enkomó plays repetitive polyrhythmic ostinatos that do not change, while the bonkó acts as a solo drum that phrases with the enkomó, but mainly evokes and interacts with the ireme (see Appendix E for a Musical Drum Layout Graphic).

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\(6\) Ibid., 19.
In addition to these four drums, there is also a rattle called the *erikundi*, which is actually two pairs of small, round gourds filled with seeds. Extending from each gourd are handles that are tied together to form a cross to enable all four rattles to be played in one hand. This instrument looks and sounds similar to very bright maracas; however, it is played quite differently. Woven African basket shakers, similar to Brazilian *caxixi* (but larger) have also been used in place of this instrument, but are still referred to as *erikundi*.

![Figure 5.2 Two types of Erikundi](image)

The other two instruments used in this conjunto are the *itónes* (a pair of wooden strikers, similar to claves), and the *ekón*, a large bell originally constructed of wood as a sort of clapper used to “call the Voice back to Tanze’s dried skin.” Today, the *ekón* is

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made of two pieces of cast iron welded together with a handle and shaped in somewhat of a conical triangle that looks similar to an agogó bell (double African bell), but consists of only one bell that is larger than the agogó, which produces a deeper, more resonant tone.

Figure 5.3 Ekón.65

Symbolic drums

The sacred or symbolic drums also consist of four drums, just like the conjunto biankomekó, but these drums are not related, and serve a very different purpose. As with the biankomekó, there is one symbolic drum that stands apart from the other three; this drum is called the sese de kankomó, or sese. The remaining three drums are referred to with the general name of kankomó. In addition to these four drums, there is a fifth drum called the ekué that is the most important of all the Abakuá drums.

Unlike the biankomekó, the drums of the kankomó serve a distinct purpose. They do not take part in the musical celebrations; however, they are sounded (tapped) to “authorize each officeholder’s role and duties.” The empegó, or tambor de orden (drum of order), is the first drum to be heard, the drum that initiates everyone, and is considered “the drum of punishment” if there is any wrongdoing. If need be, it may be substituted for the ekúé with the addition of a yín or güín, which is the rod that enables the friction to take place. The next drum, ekueñón (referred to as the executioner), conducts the sacrifices that take place during the rituals. The last drum, enkrikamo, is the drum that is used to assemble and communicate with the various íreme (see Appendix E for a Symbolic Drum Layout Graphic).

The kankomó are much more decorative than the biankomekó and have several symbolic markings. Roughly the same dimensions as the biankomekó, and using the same tuning system, each drum employs a single towering feathered staff called a plumero and is adorned with a type of decorative fringe that wraps around the head of the drum. This fringe is comprised of a fiber-type material called belemé or belefè. Collectively, there is a total of seven plumeros which “embody the seven principal grades of the lodge.” See the Plazas subchapter of this chapter, as well as Appendix D for more plaza explanation and detail.

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67 Ibid., 96-98.
The main drum that stands apart from the kankomó is the *seso de kankomó*, or *seso*. Constructed much differently from the drums of the kankomó, the *seso* has three additional plumeros (four total) symmetrically placed around the circumference of the drum, is fitted with a crown, and is highly adorned with markings and elaborate decorative pieces such as cowrie shells, and beads. There are two types of *seso* drums, the *seseribó* (or *eribó*) and the *seso de copón*. While each serves the same purpose, the differences are that the *eribó* is open on the bottom and is associated with the Efó while the *seso de copón* is closed on the bottom and takes on the shape of a goblet or cup, and is associated with the Efí.  


The sese is very symbolic within the Abakuá rituals and is carried by the dignitary Isué (see Plazas subchapter of this Chapter). The sese is the only drum of all the Abakuá drums, both musical and symbolic, that does not have the rope-and-wedge tuning system. Unlike the other symbolic drums (kankomó), the sese is not played at all, not even tapped; instead, the sese is “fed” (given blood), and embodies Sikán. The plumeros represent her hair, while the drum itself represents her lifeless, dismembered head in that they are both “silent.” In addition, Isué places sacrificial offerings on this drum (a rooster’s head) as another act of silence.

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73 Sublette, Cuba and its Music, 204.
The sacrificial rooster’s (nkiko) head, is carried in Isué’s mouth during the plante while holding the sese. While still living, nkiko represents the voice and the power the voice possesses as well as Sikán’s choice to “voice” the secret. After being sacrificed and beheaded, nkiko also represents the silence of Sikán (after she was executed), her dismembered head and hair, and “the limit of the secret’s revelation.”

The drum that was constructed to re-summon Tanze, originally made from a calabash covered with Sikán’s skin and blood, is still to this day, called the euké. The ekué is a type of friction drum played similar to a Brazilian cuica; however, with the ekué, the wand (yín, or güín) is not made into the head; it is unattached. Also different

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75 Brown, The Light Inside, 76.
from the cuica, the ekué emits a long, continuously sustained groan as opposed to a short, rhythmic squeak.\textsuperscript{76} This sound still represents the sacred voice of Abasí and constitutes the secret of the Abakuá society. Sikán’s spirit is said to live on in this friction drum.\textsuperscript{77}

The ekué is different from all the other drums of the Abakuá in the fact that it can be heard but is forbidden to be seen, even by the person playing it. The player is blindfolded and moistens his hand with either water, or blood from sacrificed animals, usually a rooster, to create the friction with the yín.\textsuperscript{78} The ekué resides behind two curtains and an altar inside the fambá in a hidden chamber called the butamé, or the fo-ekue. If the ekué is seen inappropriately, the penalty could very well be death.\textsuperscript{79}

Over time, the ekué has transformed into many different shapes. Originally, it was Sikán’s calabash/gourd that was turned into a drum. Later, the drum began to take on the shape of Tanze himself. Eventually, the ekué became a three legged drum to which it remains today (see Figure 5.7).\textsuperscript{80} In addition to a friction drum, the word Ekué is also literally considered by the Abakuá as “The Divine Voice,” or the actual voice of Abasí (God); therefore, it is appropriate to name the drum that possesses the secret voice, the ekué.


\textsuperscript{77} Ibid., 198.

\textsuperscript{78} Ibid., 204.

\textsuperscript{79} Brown, \textit{The Light Inside}, 37.

\textsuperscript{80} Sublette, \textit{Cuba and its Music}, 45.
Figure 5.7 Transformation of the Ekué.81

All of the Abakuá drum heads, or parche, are made from goat, or mbori. The Abakuá drums use only mbori that has been sacrificed and consecrated during an Abakuá ritual. When the parche for the ekué are replaced from time to time, they are not discarded because they are believed to possess the spirits of the former Abakuá members (the spirits of the ancestors), and are still considered as the embodiment of Ekué (voice). Therefore, the old parche are removed and placed inside the ekué.82

The skin of the Ekué can break, and in order to replace it, you must have another goatskin that has eaten blood with the fundamento [consecrated object], that is, which came from a goat that was killed to feed the fundamento. Old skins are put away, and although they are not functioning, they are regularly fed and attended to because in those skins reside the ancestral spirits of those who were sworn atop that Ekué drum skin. There, in them, is the transmission of all the old ones that died and passed into those skins.83

82 Ibid., 94-96.
83 Ibid.
Plazas

The symbolic drums of the Abakuá have even more significance. Within the Abakuá are many *plazas* or grades which are hierarchical levels of power, which get their names from the founding ancestors, who govern the societies. There are thirteen “top” or main *plazas*, which, combined with others, comprise a total of twenty-five. These top thirteen plazas can be broken down into three groups: *obones* (kings), *principales*, and *fundamentales*. Technically, all thirteen are considered *fundamentales* and the top seven are considered *principales*, with the top four of the *principales* being the *obones*, the highest level (see Appendix D for Plaza detail).84

“Nine of the thirteen fundamental plazas are represented by altar drums, plumeros, and/or itónes, which together with ekué and the masquerade costumes, make up the *potencia*” (spiritual power).85 The top four *obones* of these nine plazas are named in order of importance, *Iyamba, Mokongo, Isué*, and *Isunekue*, and are each represented by a plumero that is inserted into the sese drum. The *Iyamba*, who is considered the “highest king” of the *obones*, carries an itón (staff) and is responsible for sounding the ekué. The *Mokongo*, who is considered the “Supreme Chief,” or “Military Chief,” follows the *Iyamba* with an itón. The *Isué* is considered “The Bishop,” and is the custodian of the seseribó. Finally, the *Isunekue*, considered “The Husband of Sikán,” is the owner of the parche.86

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84 Brown, *The Light Inside*, 62-64.
85 Ibid.
86 Ibid.
The next three plazas (principales), named in order of importance are Mpegó, Ekueñoñ, and Enkrikamo. These plazas are represented by the kankomó of the same name. Each drum carries its own plumero marking its owner’s chiefly status. The Mpegó is considered “The Law,” or “The Scribe,” and owns the empegó drum and the sacred chalk, ngomo. The Ekueñoñ is considered “The Hunter,” “The Executioner,” or “The Guardian of the Ekué,” and is the owner of the ekué drum. In addition to this, the Ekueñoñ “searches for the voice” by opening the ceremonies with an enkamé (chant) prayer. Finally, the Enkrikamo, who is considered “The Chief of the Íremes,” owns the enkrikamo drum, which commands the íremes, and guards the fambá.87

The remaining six plazas (fundamentales) are Mosongo, Abasonga, Enkóboro, Eribangandó, Enkanima, and Nasakó. Mosongo is considered “The Owner of the Heads” (all of the Abakuá initiates), or the “Father of the Religion,” and is the guardian of the güín/yín which he keeps in his itón. Abasonga is titled “Religion, Justice, Order.” He carries an itón and is the helper of the Iyamba and Mosongo. Enkóboro is an íreme that is the master of initiations and helper of Isué; he does not leave the fambá. Eribangandó is also an íreme, but is the master of cleansings, with the river as his origins. Enkanima is the last of the íremes. As the master of the forest, he is the íreme of prayers and cleansings. Finally, Nasakó, who is considered a “Sorcerer,” or “Ritual Doctor,” is the creator of the fundamentos (consecrated objects), as well as the sacred herbal fluids used in all consecrations (wemba), and the secret carga (consecrated relics) of Ekué.88

87 Brown, The Light Inside, 63-64.
88 Ibid.
The Potencia

The term *potencia* can refer to many things, but in general, it is a term used to refer to the ceremonial events of the Abakuá. Built on tradition, these “events” are very specific and have been meticulously recreated for over a hundred years. The following is a depiction of an Abakuá ceremony from *The Light Inside*, by author David H. Brown.

The Mpegó would mark each object with the basic invocatory quartered circle and four óvalos in yellow or white chalk (*ngomo*) – yellow for ordinary ceremonies and initiations, white for funerary ceremonies. Each action would be accompanied by a chant of “authorization” (*enkamé*), uttered by the officer responsible for each action. The ceremony, one of many steps, is called the “authorization of the plumeros.” The plumeros are initially laid obliquely across their respective drumheads. Nasakó “washes” each of them, using a basil branch wetted with the purifying herbal infusion, called *wemba*; he fumigates them with cigar and incense smoke; and they are sprayed with aguardiente and vino seco (cane rum and dry cooking wine). Meanwhile, the chanted *enkamé* prayers of the plumeros are intended to “call the spirit to them.” In order of seniority, each officer chants his own *enkamé* and inserts his plumero into the drum that represents his office with the lodge: Iyamba, Mokongo, Isué, and Isunekue atop the sese, and Mpegó, Ekueñoñ, and Enkrikamo atop their respective drums.

Arranged about the elevated altar, the grouping of objects organizes and displays the consecrated attributes of the seven Abakuá highest grades (plazas), plus those of three additional plazas: Abasí (Christ statue), Mosongo (staff), and Abasonga (staff). These “attributes,” or piezas, along with the three-footed Ekué drum, which resides in the guarded fo-ekue, as well as some of the masquerade costumes (sacos) of the numerous ñremes, embody the collective *potencia* of the lodge. *Potencia*, literally “potency,” might be defined as the spiritual power of *ekué*: tapped, materialized, contained, guarded, and prepared for transformative practice within the hierarchical corporation of the individual Abakuá lodge.89

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The Procession

Following the ceremony inside the fambá, a musical procession takes place outside. The procession is made up of groups of Abakuá members, comprised of various members of the obones, principales, and fundamentales of the plazas, with the full biankomekó ensemble (see Appendix D for Plaza detail). This procession, referred to as the *plante Abakuá*, is a combination of celebration, music, and dancing, and in most cases, lasts for the entire day. The following illustration shows a typical procession.

![Procession illustration](image)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Group Three</th>
<th>Group Two</th>
<th>Group One</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>New Initiates</td>
<td>Abasí</td>
<td>Moruá Yuansá</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Enkomé</td>
<td>Diverse Plazas (5)</td>
<td>Íreme</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Erikuñí</td>
<td>Sikán</td>
<td>Isué</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bonkó-Monibonkó/Monitón</td>
<td>Ekón</td>
<td>Mokongo</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Mosongo</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figure 5.8 Procession during Plante Abakuá.\(^{90}\)

In this illustration, the first group consists of five Abakuá members which lead the procession. First, at the front of the line is *Moruá Yuansá* to represent the Abakuá.

Second in line is an íreme, possibly *Eribangandó*. Next are two of the highest grades of

the plazas. In order, they are the “Supreme Chief,” Isué, carrying the sese, and “The Bishop,” Mokongo, carrying the itón. At the end of group one is “The Father of the Religion,” Mosongo who also carries the itón.\(^91\)

The second group consists of seven Abakuá members and is led by a member representing “The Supreme Being,” Abası, while holding a crucifix. Following Abası are five members from diverse plazas that carry a variety of items. Figure 5.8 shows some of these items, such as candles, bowls, and a leopard skin mounted on a large stick as a type of flag. At the end of this group is a member who is made to resemble Sikán. This member is either a postmenopausal woman or a cross-dressing man who carries a calabash on their head.\(^92\)

The final group is led by the new initiates with Abakuá markings on their bodies. The initiates are closely followed by the full biankomekó ensemble, comprised of the enkomó: biankomé, kuchi yeremá, obiapá; the bonkó, played by both monibonkó and moniton; and the shakers and bells: erikundí, and ekón.


\(^{92}\) Ibid.
CHAPTER 6

TRADITIONAL ABAKUÁ MUSIC

Clave

The Abakuá rhythms, and most Afro-Cuban rhythms for that matter, are structured around a two-bar, five-note repetitive pattern known as the clave that is most commonly written in 4/4, cut time (alla breve), and 6/8. Regardless how it is written, it should always be heard and felt in a two feel. The clave, both an instrument and a rhythmic figure, is the single most important element of Abakuá rhythms in terms of phrasing and structure. Literally “key” in Spanish, clave can also refer to a keyboard or clef.

The word clave comes from the word clavijas, which were wooden pegs used in colonial Cuba for the process of shipbuilding. In the early seventeenth century, the Spanish removed millions of hardwood trees from Havana to be used for this thriving industry. Some of the trees were cut down into clavijas and were used as a type of nail to hold the ships together. The workers in these shipyards were made up of black slaves from Africa, and Spanish prisoners, among others. It is rumored that the black slaves, after hearing the sound the wood made when struck against the other, began to use them as a rhythmic instrument, thus eventually creating the pattern we now know as clave.93

93 Sublette, Cuba and its Music, 94.
The main purpose of clave is to hold rhythmic and melodic parts together; it is a point of reference. Many of the *rumba* styles are so rhythmically dense, with layered patterns and polyrhythms, that, without clave, they would be extremely difficult if not impossible to fit into place. In fact, clave is such a dominant force in Afro-Cuban music that even when it is not being physically played, it still exists and is felt.

The clave is regarded as beginning as soon as the music begins, and continuing without interruption until the last note. It remains in effect as a centrifugal force throughout the performance of a piece. It continues even when the music is silent during the course of rests, or when breaks in the flow of the arrangement occur.  

There are two forms of clave: *son* and *rumba*. *Son clave* is associated with the dance styles of Cuban popular music (*mambo* and *chachacha* among others), whereas *rumba clave* is associated with folkloric styles of Cuban traditional music (*guaguancó*, *guajira*, *son*).  

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*columbia*, and *yambú*, among others). The only difference between the two is the displacement of one note. See Example 6.1-A (son clave), and 6.1-B (rumba clave).

Example 6.1 Clave Patterns.

A

B

In addition to the two forms of clave, there are different directions the clave may take depending on the melody of the piece, and/or the style of the pattern. In modern music, within the son styles, the clave can be 3:2 (forward) or 2:3 (reverse). The two bar phrases are identical with the exception of where they begin. This concept of clave direction came about during the movement of Cuban music to America (mainly New York and Miami), and its fusion with American jazz in the 1950s.

In traditional music, it is only rumba clave. There is no such thing as 2:3 (reverse) clave, and no son clave (of any direction); however, today, many modern arrangements of traditional music will use 2:3 rumba clave for melodic purposes. Therefore, there are five clave patterns that could exist in modern music: 3:2 son (forward), 2:3 son (reverse), 3:2 rumba (forward-in cut time), and 2:3 rumba (reverse-in cut time), and the 6/8 rumba clave. As confusing as it may seem, many people today like to simplify the concept of clave into three types: son, rumba (both in either direction), and traditional 6/8.
6/8 Rumba Clave

The 6/8 rumba clave pattern is the traditional rumba clave of Cuba. Out of context, it sounds identical to the rumba clave in cut time (used for guaguancó, and yambú, among others), but in its 6/8 context, it is “stretched” from an eighth note feel (duple meter) into a triplet feel (compound meter). As previously mentioned, all clave patterns are felt in two, but the 6/8 rumba clave has a certain distinguishable “swing” to it when all the percussion parts are added.

To further complicate matters, there is one more clave pattern with two unaccented notes added to give the pattern even more of a “swing” than traditional rumba. This clave is called Afro 6/8, or Afro 6/8 bell, and is used in many African rhythms, as well as Cuban rhythms such as rumba columbia and bembé, among others. In addition to these styles, the Afro bell is very common in most modern, nontraditional drum set patterns in 6/8 meter. If you look closely, the rumba clave is accented, but son clave is also present. This variation is traditionally not used in Abakuá music.
There are two bell patterns used in Abakuá music; one that doubles the rumba clave pattern, and one that is not constant but instead, appears periodically throughout the ceremony as a sort of interlude, call, or signal. When this pattern enters, it introduces an entirely new feel and creates an incredible hemiola effect than can influence the untrained ear to hear the pattern in 2/4 or 3/4 meter, when actually, it is still in 6/8. Because of the nature of this pattern, it realigns itself to begin on beat “one” of every other measure, giving an “over the bar line” feel that creates yet another sense of meter.

![Example 6.4 Bell Pattern No. 2.](image)

The shaker (erikundi) patterns are somewhat basic and do not change much from region to region or from style to style with the exception of a few variations. Both African and Cuban societies use either the maraca or basket style erikundi during their musical celebrations. The most common patterns that are played on the erikundi are either downbeats at the beginning of each measure or a dotted quarter rhythm, both in 6/8 time. The nature of any shaker is to produce two sounds with one motion due to the fact that the filler material has to go up before it can come down, striking both sides. When downbeats are played, there is usually an audible “prep” note preceding the actual note even though it may be written and intended as one note. In other words, what could be written or intended (Example 6.5-A), could result in a different pattern due to the upstroke (Example 6.5-B).
Often, one player will use two erikundi (one in each hand) in order to play multiple lines, or to simply “thicken” the sound. The weak hand always holds a dotted quarter rhythm (downbeats in 6/8 time) while the strong hand will play a pattern that, when combined, create a catá rhythm. The catá is a large hollowed out piece of bamboo that is struck with palitos (little sticks), producing a bright, brittle, wooden sound. This is the same pattern that is played by the monitón on the shell of the bonkó.

If the erikundi plays a basic dotted quarter pattern (Example 6.5-A), then the catá will usually perform the double erikundi rhythm (shown below in Example 6.6) played on the single surface of the catá, replacing the double stops with flams, in other words, slightly separating the two notes that are struck together (beat one in measure one, and “big” beat two in measure two). In Example 6.6, the rumba clave is outlined by the pattern in the strong hand (top line).


Rhythms and Variations

There are many rhythms associated with the musical drums of the Abakuá. “The number of rhythms that fall under this category is quite large, and even more so if you account for all the different societies and all the varieties possible in these rhythms.”

Commonly in Cuba, traditional Abakuá rhythms are sometimes grouped into two distinct styles, those of Havana, and those of Matanzas. While each of these regions shares some musical traits with the other, there are distinct elements that are different and instantly recognizable once you become familiar with them.

The musical traits that are identical in all Abakuá rhythms are the meter, the clave pattern, the bell patterns (ekón 1, and ekón 2), the shaker patterns, the catá patterns, the instrumentation, and the juxtaposition of two over three. The only musical traits that really vary from region to region are the drum patterns. Sometimes identical patterns are played on different drums and sometimes completely different patterns are used on the same drums. Whatever the case, the patterns still possess the same overall quality of sound. The clave is the 6/8 traditional rumba pattern mentioned earlier and never changes (see Example 6.2).

There are two distinct styles of playing Abakuá, the Havana style and the Matanzas style. The drum parts are definitely different as is another important concept; tempo. Whereas the tempos of Abakuá in Havana can be very fast, the tempos in Matanzas are much slower, reflecting the differences between a fast-paced city life, and the life of the country.

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The following musical examples are in their basic forms without any type of ornamentation whatsoever. It is important to note that even though these musical examples are represented as being distinctly the Havana style, or distinctly the Matanzas style, many variations can and do exist. In these examples, (x) can indicate either a slap or muffled (muff) tone depending on the application.

**Conjunto Biankomekó: Havana Style**

Traditionally, in the Havana style, the high drum, biankomé, plays a rather simple pattern consisting of open tones on dotted quarter downbeats. The middle drum, kuchi yeremá, utilizes combinations of open and slap/muff tones to create a juxtaposition of three over two. The low drum, obiapá also utilizes combinations of open and slap/muff tones while implying the duple feel of 2/4 meter. The obiapá drum (sometimes spelled opiapá or obi apá), is often referred to as the “one-hit” drum, because there is just one note (an open tone) per measure. The “mother” drum, or bonkó which is the largest and lowest-pitch of the biankomekó, solos and interacts with the dancers. Refer to Appendix B for a percussion notation legend.

Example 6.7 Conjunto Biankomekó: Havana Style.
Conjunto Biankomekó: Matanzas Style

Traditionally, in the Matanzas style, the high drum, *biankomé*, plays a slightly more complex pattern than in the Havana style. This pattern consists of open tones on dotted quarter downbeats, followed by an optional slap/muff tone on the following eighth note. The patterns on middle drum, *kuchi yeremá*, consist of optional slap/muff tones on the third eighth note of each beat in the first measure but use a combination of open and optional slap/muff tones in the second measure. The pattern of the low drum, *obiapá* is identical to the pattern of the Havana style, which also utilizes combinations of open and slap/muff tones implying the duple feel of 2/4 meter. The lead *bonkó* also solos and interacts with the dancers as in the Havana style.

The main difference with the Matanzas style is the slower tempo and optional slap/muff strokes. Keep in mind that these are the traditional patterns that are used while holding the drum under one arm, so only one hand is utilized in playing these rhythms. Modern adaptations of these rhythms are played on modern instruments that allow the incorporation of both hands and modern techniques, so as one might imagine, the patterns can become much more involved. Refer to Appendix B for a percussion notation legend.

Example 6.8 Conjunto Biankomekó: Matanzas Style.
Conjunto Enkomó

The following musical examples were created to show each traditional pattern as they would be played on traditional drums with one hand. There will be three examples, including variations (where applicable), which will feature each of the three drums of the Abakuá enkomó. The kuchí yeremá patterns shown below are from the Havana style only. Refer to Appendix B for a percussion notation legend.

Example 6.9 Traditional Biankomé Pattern.

Biankomé - Traditional Drum
Example 6.10 Traditional Kuchí Yeremá Pattern.

Kuchí Yeremá - Traditional Drum

Example 6.11 Traditional Obiapá Pattern.

Obiapá - Traditional Drum
CHAPTER 7
ABAKUÁ INFLUENCE ON THE DEVELOPMENT OF RUMBA

The Rumba Complex

“The Spanish words rumba and rumbón refer to a collective festive event, a gala meal, a carousel, or a high time.”98 Like the term Abakuá, rumba is also difficult to define. By far, the most complex, highly artistic and improvisatory form of Cuban music, the rumba draws influences from many diverse elements and cultures. For the purpose of this essay, reference will be made to the rumba as a rhythm, as well as song and dance styles.

“[Rumba] is music designed for spontaneous street performances rather than for dance halls, nightclubs and the concert hall.”99 Developed in the provinces of Havana and Matanzas in the late nineteenth century, rumba [ROOM-bah], not to be confused with the rhumba [RHUM-bah] (ballroom dance style and phrase of the 1930s and 1940s), is highly improvisatory and comprises three main dances, rhythms, and song styles: yambú, guaguancó, and columbia. The instrumentation for all three styles is identical: three drums playing repetitive rhythms, one solo drum, palitos, which are little sticks (not claves) that play on a wood surface or drum shell, claves, and solo voice and chorus.


99 Gerard and Sheller, Salsa!, 71.
While each of the rumba styles are distinctly different, they all are connected with rumba clave and share African ancestry. Collectively, they are referred to as “The Rumba Complex.”

The *yambú* is the eldest of the trio and has significant African influence; the name alone suggests such. “Established in Havana and Matanzas by the end of the 1870s,” it [yambú] is the slowest style of the three in 4/4 meter, and is commonly referred to as “the old person’s rumba.” This couple’s dance is also called the *rumba de cajón* due to the fact that it was originally performed on packing crates by Creole slaves. These packing crates have been recreated into modern instruments called the *cajón*, meaning “box.” Even modern performances do not use actual “drums” but instead, use the cajónes.

![Figure 7.1 Cajón.](http://www.esflamenco.com/img/imagenesgrandes/25712723-147.jpg)
First appearing around 1880 in Matanzas,\textsuperscript{103} the guaguancó is perhaps the most common of the rumba styles. Even though it ranges from a moderate tempo to extremely fast in cut time, the tempo of the guaguancó is generally considered to be in the middle of the three styles. The guaguancó is also a couple’s dance; however, this dance has a sexual overtone that simulates the “capture” of the woman by the man, culminating with the vacunao (vaccination), an evocative hip thrust that the woman attempts to fight off. The drums of the guaguancó are named from highest to lowest, quinto, conga, segundo, and tumbadora, and are commonly referred to as either congas or tumbadoras. By far, the guaguancó is the most common of the rumba complex and is instantly recognizable due to the “melody” created by the open tones of these drums.

Example 7.1 Guaguancó Melody.

\begin{figure}
\centering
\includegraphics[width=0.5\textwidth]{guaguancó_melody.png}
\end{figure}

The columbia is the fastest and usually most difficult style of the rumba complex. Due to the fact that it is in 6/8 time and employs African dialects, it is by far the most African sounding. In addition, it is the only dance of the rumba styles that is not intended for couples, but rather for a solo male dancer.\textsuperscript{104}

\textsuperscript{103} Sublette, \textit{Cuba and its Music}, 270.

\textsuperscript{104} Gerard and Sheller, \textit{Salsa!}, 68.
Despite its African character, rumba (like the blues) is not a conservation of another land’s music. There is nowhere in Africa you can go and hear rumba, though you might hear things that remind you of rumba. Rumba is a synthetic Cuban tradition, in which one can feel the creativity of Africans adapting themselves to their Hispanic surroundings.\textsuperscript{105}

That, in a nutshell, is \textit{rumba}. It is used here not as a major section of this essay, but instead as the first transformation of traditional Abakuá elements and rhythms into modern applications.

\textbf{Major Contributing Factors}

In the sixteenth century, Cuban authorities allowed African slaves of the Diaspora to practice their religion freely. This ultimately led to a profound influence on the music as well as the culture of contemporary Cuba.\textsuperscript{106}

Massive numbers of new arrivals kept a persistent and forceful garden of African culture growing wherever and whenever they could in the nooks and crannies of overwhelming colonial authority and restriction. These numbers gave Cuba limitless possibilities of direct African influence for more than two hundred years.\textsuperscript{107}

In the late nineteenth century, there was a ban on public drumming for many decades. Displaced African slaves began to create groups referred to as \textit{coros de clave} (rhythm choruses). Since drums were prohibited, the only instruments used, besides voice, were the claves. The very first of these groups started in Matanzas and was comprised of many displaced Carabalí people. Abakuá was also prohibited in Matanzas during this time, so the Carabalí people began using these rhythm choruses in order to

\textsuperscript{105} Sublette, \textit{Cuba and its Music}, 267.
\textsuperscript{106} Boggs, \textit{Salsiology}, 31.
\textsuperscript{107} Daniel, \textit{Rumba}, 34.
secretly continue to participate in Abakuá activities. During these musical collaborations, Abakuá began to blend with this new style of music.\footnote{Miller, \textit{The Voice of the Leopard}, 160-161.}

Dancing is a distinctive feature of the rumba styles, especially the interaction between a solo drum and dancer as in the case of the rumba columbia. “These dances which find their legacies in secret societies from the Calabar region of Africa, have been transported, replicated, and transformed to a certain extent to fit the social environment of Cuba.”\footnote{Daniel, \textit{Rumba}, 36.} Also very distinct and present in rumba is the call and response vocals that are very reminiscent of many of the traditional African styles including the Abakuá.

The rumba complex is also very similar to Abakuá in the way the drum conjunto performs. In all three rumba styles, two drums (\textit{salidor}: lowest drum, \textit{tres dos}: middle drum) play repetitive ostinato patterns with some variation, while a lead drum (\textit{quinto}) solos and interacts with a dancer. This is exactly the same structure as Abakuá, minus one drum. One interesting side note, however, is that with Abakuá, and most African music, the lowest drum solos (bonkó), but within the rumba complex, it is the highest drum voice that solos and interacts (quinto). This switch from the low solo voice to the high solo voice is believed to be “the influence of European derived musical aesthetics where the highest pitched instruments often take the main melodic material.”\footnote{Boggs, \textit{Salsiology}, 36.}

Another similar Abakuá instrumentation trait that applies to each rumba style is that of the \textit{palitos}, which is commonly interchanged with the terms \textit{cascara}, \textit{catá}, or \textit{guagua} (see example 7.2). The top line of this example emphasizes downbeats while the
bottom line outlines rumba clave. If you play the accented notes (downbeats) of the first example with the left hand, and the accented pattern (rumba clave) of the second example (cascara) with the right hand simultaneously, you get the exact double erikundí pattern of the Abakuá (see Example 6.6 for comparison). This palito pattern can function equally well in both duple time (yambú and guaguancó) and compound time (columbia).

Example 7.2 Palitos Patterns in Cut Time and 6/8.

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\begin{figure}[h]
\centering
\includegraphics[width=\textwidth]{example7.2.png}
\caption{Example 7.2 Palitos Patterns in Cut Time and 6/8.}
\end{figure}
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Just as the Abakuá throughout history have been scrutinized and accused of criminal behavior due to the unknown elements of their societies, rumba too has had its share of misunderstandings and judgments. This is quite possibly due to the fact that Abakuá and rumba are so closely related musically that certain people thought they must share the same ideals religiously and philosophically, as this absurd quote will show:

For the white upper class, the rumba was little more than a barbarian expression of an inferior and primitive culture and was intimately tied to such things as drinking, rowdy and licentious behavior, and crime. Rumbas were associated with the all male secret societies known as ñáñigos. The ñáñigos were commonly accused of various crimes and even such atrocities as the eating of children. The association of rumba with members of the ñáñigo cults added to the general negative atmosphere that surrounded rumbas in Havana around the turn of the century.\footnote{Boggs, Salsiology, 33.}
Yambú

Looking individually at each of the three styles of the rumba complex, there is even more evidence that Abakuá had a major impact in influencing rumba. The yambú incorporates the same type of interaction between drum and dance as does the Abakuá. The quinto player interacts (solos) with the dancers in yambú much the same way as the bonkó player interacts with the íreme in Abakuá. Based on improvisation, both the quinto and bonkó performers influence the dancer’s moves, and react to them as well.

The fact that the main instruments used in the yambú are shipping crates, suggests a much earlier influence. Due to the public drumming ban during the late nineteenth century, the Creole slaves in the ports of Havana determined that basically the same tones could be achieved from playing on shipping crates (highs, mids and lows) than could be achieved from actual drums. Also, by using shipping crates instead of drums, the workers would not be incarcerated when authorities would search the ports, because there would be no “drums” found. These “box-drums” or cajones, along with the clavijas (wooden pegs that became claves) were the beginnings of the rumba in Havana. Being the oldest style of the rumba complex, one might imagine that the yambú, among all others, would be the most affected by the influence of the Abakuá but this is not necessarily the case (as you will see in the columbia subsection of this chapter).

Guaguancó

The percussion of guaguancó might be described as a composite language that superimposes a wide vocabulary drawn from the Yoruba Iyá,
from the Arará, from the Abakuá, and from other aspects of Cuban rhythmic tradition—all in the context of a street party.¹¹²

Besides the elements that are common with all the rumba styles, as noted above, there is one specific example of this “vocabulary” that is drawn from the Abakuá tradition, which is the rhythm of the obiapá drum, or the “one-hit” Abakuá drum of the conjunto biankomekó. If you look closely at this pattern (Example 6.7 or 6.8), and then compare it to the salidor pattern of the guaguancó (Example 7.1), you will notice that they are very similar.¹¹³ Both of these rhythms share a single open tone that leads to another open tone of a higher-pitched drum.

**Columbia**

The *columbia* began in the rural areas of Matanzas, and is a male solo dance that features many acrobatic and mimetic movements. This may be the most complex form of rumba. In it, the dancer imitates ball players, bicyclists, cane-cutters, and a variety of other figures. He may also reproduce steps of the Abakuá íreme.¹¹⁴

The columbia shares the closest resemblance to Abakuá; it has more of an African feel than a Cuban feel due mainly to the fact that it is in compound time. As mentioned before, the text is African, not Spanish, and the lead drummer interacts and improvises with a solo dancer. Not only is this style almost identical in structure to the Abakuá, it is much more intricate and technically demanding than the other rumba styles.


¹¹³ Miller, *The Voice of the Leopard*, 160.

Modern Drums of the Rumba

The drums in the rumba complex are named salidor, tres golpes, and quinto. The salidor is the lowest drum and is also called hembra (female). The tres golpes is the middle drum and is also called segundo (second), macho (male), tres dos, or seis por ocho. The names of this drum are interesting because tres dos (three-two) refers to the hemiola (3:2) pattern just as the middle drum in the Abakuá ensemble (kuchí yeremá), and seis por ocho (six by eight) refers to the 6/8 meter that is shared by the columbia and the Abakuá. The quinto is the highest-pitched drum that solos and interacts with the dancers much in the same way that the bonkó does in the Abakuá.

![Modern Congas or Tumbadoras](http://www.lpmusic.com/Product_Showcase/Congas/lp_salsa_conga.html)

Quinto        Tres Golpes       Salidor

Figure 7.2 Modern Congas or Tumbadoras.

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To clarify, depending on the region, these drums have either similar or very
different nomenclature. In general, Cubans tend to refer to all of the drums as
tumbadoras, and name them individually (low to high) salidor or tumbadora, tres golpes
or segundo, and quinto, whereas most areas in the United States tend to refer to all of the
drums as congas and name them individually (low to high) tumbadora, conga, and quinto.
For the purposes of this essay, the author prefers the latter.

If you compare modern drums of today to those of the traditional Abakuá, there
are many differences. First of all, the sizes of the modern congas are much larger than
those of the Abakuá, and they are free-standing. Second, the tuning system has undergone
a major upgrade. Since the 1950s, congas have developed a sophisticated mechanical
system of equal tension around the head that is adjusted by the turning of tension rods
with a wrench (somewhat similar to that of a snare drum), as opposed to the rope-and-
wedge-type tuning of the traditional drums, and the “tacked-on” heads of the early
twentieth century that had to be continuously heated to retain pitch.\footnote{Poncho Sanchez, \textit{The Conga Cookbook} (New York: Cherry Lane Music, 2002), 7-13.}
Next, the tones of
the modern drums are drastically improved. Modern drums literally “sing” as opposed to
the traditional drums which have more of a short, “thuddy,” less resonant sound. Finally,
the modern drums enable one player to perform on two, three or four drums (super
tumba) simultaneously, creating more intricate patterns. These elements, among others,
mark the beginning of the conga virtuoso.
CHAPTER 8

CHANO POZO AND THE INFLUENCE OF ABAKUÁ

Figure 8.1 Chano Pozo.118

Chano Pozo Background

Luciano “Chano” Pozo Gonzalez was born in Havana, Cuba, on January 7th, 1915. Raised in El Africa Solar, former slave quarters and an extremely rough and

dangerous neighborhood, Chano took to petty criminal activity as a means of survival. After dropping out of school in the third grade, he spent most of his days fighting, drinking, and playing drums. When he was thirteen, Chano was sent to a reformatory where he learned essential skills such as reading and writing, among other things.

While briefly incarcerated, Chano began to really focus on his drumming, which led him to discover both Abakuá, and Santería, the latter being an Afro-Caribbean religion practiced by the Yoruba people of Nigeria. Chano was eventually initiated into the Abakuá and his drumming was taken to another level. “This would manifest itself in his style of conga drumming that would be his musical identity.” After leaving the reformatory in the 1930s, Chano shined shoes for a living and played his drums with different street musicians. As time passed, Chano began forming his own groups and playing his own compositions, all of which were sung in the Abakuá dialect, Bricamo.

In the 1940s, Chano developed a reputation as a rough and dangerous individual mainly due to his large, imposing stature, and his unknown activities within the Abakuá. He took a job as a bodyguard for a senator who, in turn, introduced him to some people at a radio station in Havana who also needed protection, so he became their doorman as well. While working at the radio station, Chano began to play his congas for guests and even accompanied some recording artists. He later formed his own group and in 1945 was almost killed after being shot three times over royalty disagreements, adding even more to his infamous reputation.120


120 Ibid.
Abakuá Influence

Besides many previous compositions sung completely in Brícamo, the most direct and specific example of the influence of Abakuá in Chano Pozo’s career came next. In 1947, Chano moved to New York City to record some drumming sessions. During this time, he recorded *Abasí*, which is the name of the supreme deity of the Abakuá. In this track, comprised of conga drumming and vocal chants, Chano basically evokes an Abakuá ceremony, including the summoning of its past ancestors using the vocal line “cle, cle, cle” which means “come forth, come forward” in Brícamo.\(^{121}\) This track marked the beginning of Chano’s enormous influence on Afro-Cuban music.

Dizzy Gillespie and the Beginning of Cubop

Mario Bauza, a Cuban-born musician who is credited as one of the first musicians to bring Cuban music into the New York jazz scene, was friends with jazz trumpeter Dizzy Gillespie. In an attempt to make his music more “Latin,” Dizzy asked Bauza for assistance. “In the fall of 1947, Bauza called Gillespie and told him that he had just what Gillespie needed in order to realize his dream of enriching jazz with Afro-Cuban rhythms: Chano Pozo.”\(^{122}\) Chano worked with Gillespie for the next year and recorded a totally new style of music which fused Cuban music with jazz, particularly bop. This style ultimately became known as Cubop, Afro-Cuban jazz, or Latin jazz. Of all the collaborations between Gillespie and Pozo, *Manteca* was possibly the most well known.

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\(^{121}\) PRI, “The Voice of the Leopard,” [accessed October 25, 2008].

\(^{122}\) Boggs, *Salsiology*, 99.
Via Chano Pozo, the conga player in Dizzy Gillespie’s big band and himself a member of Abakuá, the society’s ritual language traveled from the fambás or sacred chambers of Havana’s lodges to the jazz clubs on Manhattan’s 52nd Street. During a long solo drum break on “Manteca,” recorded live at the Royal Roost night club in 1948, Pozo launches into a passage in Èfik, answered by the band’s “Ua!” (Everybody shut up and listen!). The puzzled audience responds as if he had been singing “Minnie the Moocher.”

The music to come from the union of Gillespie and Pozo went on to influence Cuban and American popular music, including jazz, and rhythm and blues. Big band music had already been established before Chano arrived on the music scene, but anytime you see or hear a conguero (conga performer) performing with a small group, it is a direct result of Chano’s influence. Chano brought the conga drum into the spotlight and shortly after his influence, the modern conga drum was born (1950s). This new sound influenced so many now famous percussionists such as Mongo Santamaria, Ray Barretto, Tito Puente, Poncho Sanchez, and Armando Perez to name a few, as well as prominent bandleaders such as Cal Tjader, Herbie Mann, Tito Puente, and the later styles of Stan Kenton, Machito, and Chico O’Farrell to name a few. This makes a strong case that the influence of Abakuá, or African music in general, can be found in every style of popular music after 1948 in some form or another.

After coming off a very successful European tour with Dizzy, Chano was touring through the southern regions of the United States when his congas were stolen. He returned to New York to acquire another set and ended up staying there longer than anticipated. On December 2nd, 1948, Chano’s hot temper cost him his life as he was shot dead over a bad drug deal in Harlem just before his 34th birthday.

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123 Morton Marks, Program notes for *Afro-Cuba: A Musical Anthology*, Rounder 1088, 1994, CD.
CHAPTER 9
MODERN ABAKUÁ MUSIC

Compared to the traditional music of the Abakuá, some aspects of modern Abakuá music have changed, but most have remained true to tradition. The main change of these two styles of music is in the instrumentation rather than in the rhythms. In many circumstances, outside of Abakuá ceremonies, conga drums are primarily used in place of the biankomekó ensemble. This makes a huge difference in the performance of Abakuá. Traditionally, the drums of the enkomó (biankomé, kuchí yeremá, and obiapá) were played with only one hand due to the fact that the other hand holds the drum under the opposite arm. Modern conga drums, on the other hand, sit upright on the ground, enabling the performer to use both hands and add many different strokes, rhythms, and articulations, not to mention the ability to combine patterns, thus eliminating the number of performers needed.

In the modern ensemble, the quinto could take the place of the bonkó; two congas could take the place of the biankomé and kuchí yeremá; and the tumbadora could take the place of the obiapá (or the combination of quinto, conga, tumbador, and super tumba could be used). In addition to the congas, the ekón 1, and 2 can be performed on a large and small cowbell, respectively, and the erikundí can be replaced with a shekeré. This change in instrumentation leaves just the claves as the only unaltered instrument of the traditional Abakuá ensemble.
The following musical examples were created to show each *traditional* pattern as they would be played on *modern* drums with both hands. There will be three examples (including variations) which will feature each of the three drums of the Abakuá enkomó.

The kuchí yeremá patterns shown below are from the Havana style only. Refer to Appendix B for a percussion notation legend.

Example 9.1 Modern Biankomé Pattern.

**Biankomé - Modern Drum**
Example 9.2 Modern Kuchi Yeremá Pattern.

Kuchi Yeremá - Modern Drum

Example 9.3 Modern Obiapá Pattern.

Obiapá - Modern Drum
The following musical examples were created to show possible combinations of each traditional pattern and how they would be played on two modern drums by one player. There will be three examples (including variations) which will feature each of the three drum patterns of the Abakuá enkomó. The kuchí yeremá patterns shown below are from the Havana style only. Refer to Appendix B for a percussion notation legend.

Example 9.4 Two Drum Combination – Biankomé / Obiapá.

**Biankomé / Obiapá - Two Drums**
Example 9.5 Two Drum Combination – Kuchí Yeremá / Biankomé.

Kuchí Yeremá / Biankomé - Two Drums

Example 9.6 Two Drum Combination – Obiapá / Kuchí Yeremá.

Obiapá / Kuchí Yeremá - Two Drums
CHAPTER 10
THE DRUM SET AND MODERN APPLICATIONS OF ABAKUÁ RHYTHMS

Up until this point, most of the rhythms described have been for individual percussion instruments played by one person per instrument. These instruments have included congas, bells, shakers, and claves. For the actual Abakuá ceremonies that take place today in Cuba, none of this instrumentation has changed. Only in the more artistic forms of Afro-Cuban jazz do you see a change in percussion instrumentation, namely the drum set.

Of all the percussion instruments to make an impact over time, the drum set has to be one of the largest. With the drum set, one person can take the place of four people and play each individual rhythm simultaneously. It should be noted that the drum set is not intended to replace the individual instruments, but rather recreate and imply their sound in an unconventional modern setting. Even though the drum set is not capable of producing the same authentic sounds as the individual percussion instruments, given the right circumstances, the drum set can play all the same traditional rhythms while creating something modern and entirely unique.

For the most part, modern Afro-Cuban music is evenly split with groups that still use full percussion sections as opposed to groups that use only the drum set; by far, more jazz-influenced groups prefer the latter. Even though the drum set is believed to have first come into use in the 1920s, its presence in Afro-Cuban music was not until the 1950s.
With the aid of the music of Dizzy Gillespie, Chano Pozo, and many others that followed suit, the drum set was soon used to emulate the rhythm sections behind all of the son and rumba styles to some extent. This, in turn has also influenced the drum set and the way modern performers set up and approach this versatile instrument.

Latin jazz, Afro-Cuban jazz, or whatever term is used to describe this music has had a profound influence on the drum set. World music has become so commonplace that virtually every musician that considers himself a “jazz” drummer is knowledgeable of at least one or two Afro-Cuban styles and usually performs them successfully within a “straight ahead” jazz performance. In many cases, the drum set has even begun to expand, incorporating more “Latin” instruments such as cowbells, blocks, bongos, timbales, and anything else performers feel they need, in order to express themselves in this “Latin” setting.

**Traditional Rhythms applied to the Drum Set**

In a modern jazz setting, the Abakuá is not considered a popular musical style as is the mambo or chachachá. Rather, it is generally grouped into a type of Afro 6/8 that includes other 6/8 styles such as bembé or less frequently, columbia, and is commonly referred to as ſánáño. Whatever the case, the patterns remain the same as they did over a hundred years ago with a few minor adjustments.

In order to explain and demonstrate how the drum set can best execute the Abakuá rhythms, the traditional percussion instruments must first be assigned, or voiced on the drum set. Using a basic drum set consisting of a hi-hat, snare, bass drum, two toms, ride cymbal, and cowbell, the following paragraphs will explain how to properly
voice the individual percussion instruments of the Abakuá on the different components of
the modern day drum set.

The clave pattern is played with the strong hand either on the shell of the floor
tom, on a cowbell, or on the ride cymbal, depending on the texture of the music. The
erikundí, patterns are assigned to the hi-hat, usually simplified to a dotted quarter pulse
due to the fact that they are played with the foot. The catá patterns can be played either
on the shell of the floor tom or on the hi-hat with the strong hand, which, along with the
erikundí pattern played by the foot, can create the double erikundí pattern mentioned
earlier (see Example 6.6). The ekón 2 or bell is also played with the strong hand at certain
times and is played either on the cowbell, or the bell of the ride cymbal depending on the
texture of the music.

Voicing the congas on the drum set is a bit more complicated. There are three
basic individual tones produced on each conga (open, muffled, slap). In order to
accommodate all these sounds, the conga patterns are spread out over several drum set
components and played with the weak hand. Slap tones are played on the snare drum
using a cross-stick execution (see Appendix A for detailed definition); however, the slap
can also be played as an open rim shot at higher dynamic levels. Open tones are executed
on the toms, and can vary depending on how many tones are desired. Muffled tones are
produced by playing dead strokes into the toms with either hand (striking the drum and
pressing into the head, not lifting the stick).

The bass drum or *bombo* is the only instrument or rhythm that differs from
traditional patterns; this is probably due to the fact that it was not part of the traditional
ensemble to begin with. The bombo plays a pattern that is a segment of the kuchí yeremá
pattern, but is simplified. The strategic placement of one note per measure, inherent in this pattern, gives the Abakuá an “unanchored” feeling. Many musicians that are unfamiliar with the Abakuá bombo, find it very difficult to feel “one,” unlike the other 6/8 styles where the bombo occurs on beat one of every other measure. This single bass drum note, combined with the single note of the obiapá pattern (played on cross-stick and toms) creates a duple feel which also adds to the confusion of where beat “one” is.

Example 10.1 Bombo Pattern.

Due to the fact that the drum set is a modern instrument and is not used at all in traditional Abakuá patterns, there are many variations. Unfortunately, in many jazz applications, 6/8 patterns get mixed together and come out being a completely different rhythm altogether. The patterns that should stand out and make Abakuá identifiable from other 6/8 styles are the ekón 2, the obiapá, the bombo, and the kuchí yeremá patterns. These patterns belong only to the Abakuá and are not used in any other 6/8 style.

Abakuá Drum Set Patterns, Combinations, and Variations

The following musical examples were created to demonstrate each individual pattern of the enkomó and how it applies to each corresponding part of the drum set, concluding with all parts played simultaneously. There will be three Abakuá examples, each featuring one of the three drums of the enkomó followed by combinations and some variations. Refer to Appendix B for a percussion notation legend.
In Application No. 1, the hi-hat is playing the basic erikündí pattern and can be played either on beat one for a more open feel, or as dotted quarter notes for a more driving feel. The high tom and snare (cross-stick) are playing the biankomé pattern. At faster tempos, the cross stick can be played simply as a rim click on the snare. This pattern works equally well with both bell (ekón) patterns 1 and 2.
Example 10.3 Drum Set Application No. 2 – Kuchí Yeremá.

Abakuá 2 - Kuchí Yeremá

Application No. 2 would be less common and more difficult to perform than the biankomé. Here, the hi-hat is playing the same erikundí pattern as before, but now, the high tom is playing the *kuchí yeremá* pattern which creates an amazing juxtaposition of 2 over 3. The (+) and (o) signs on the tom notes indicate open tone and closed tone (dead stroke). This pattern works equally well with both bell patterns 1 and 2.
Example 10.4 Drum Set Application No. 3 – Obiapá.

**Abakuá 3 - Obiapá**

Application No.3 would be a very common Abakuá pattern for drum set. Again, the hi-hat is playing the basic erikundí pattern as before, but now, the high tom and snare (cross-stick) are playing the obiapá pattern. This pattern works equally well with both bell patterns 1 and 2.
Example 10.5 Drum Set Combination No. 1 – Biankomé / Obiapá.

Abakuá Combination 1 - Biankomé and Obiapá

Combination No. 1 is an extremely difficult combination which combines the
biankomé pattern (played on the high tom and cross-stick on snare drum) with the obiapá
pattern (played with cross-stick on the snare drum and the floor tom). Since the cross-
stick overlaps in both patterns, the performer can simply omit each occurrence in the
obiapá pattern. This cross-stick pattern (biankomé) can be played as a rim click on the
snare drum fast tempos.
Combination No. 2 combines the *kuchí yeremá* pattern (played on the floor tom with open and closed strokes, as before) with the *biankomé* pattern (played on the high tom and cross-stick on snare drum). Again, the cross-stick pattern can be played as a rim click on the snare drum at fast tempos. Note there is no bell pattern played during this combination due to the use of both hands to play the individual drum parts.
Example 10.7 Drum Set Combination No. 3 – Obiapá / Kuchi Yeremá.

Abakuá Combination 3 – Obiapá and Kuchi Yeremá

Combination No. 3 combines the obiapá pattern (played here with cross-stick on snare and high tom) with the kuchi yeremá pattern (played on the floor tom with open and closed strokes). Notice the juxtaposition of 2 and 3 between the snare/tom and floor tom combination. Note there is no bell pattern played during this combination for the same purposes of Example 10.6.
Example 10.8 Drum Set Variation No. 1 – Toms.

Abakuá Variation 1 - Toms

Variation No. 1 is a tom-tom variation which is based on the Afro 6/8 bell pattern, where the strong hand plays the floor tom as well as the bell 1 pattern. All of the other patterns in this variation are that of the obiapá (see Example 9.3) but could be experimented with and combined with any of the other patterns. When using this variation with the bell 2 pattern, the first floor tom note must be omitted.
Abakuá Variation 2 - Hi-hat

Variation No. 2 is a hi-hat variation which is based on a common modern shekeré pattern. The shekeré is a beaded gourd of African origin commonly used in place of erikundí. Note the staccato (.) markings above the hi-hat notes. This is to prevent the foot from coming up too soon, creating an open hi-hat sound. All of the other patterns in this variation are that of the obiapá (see Example 9.3).
Variation No. 3 is a *catá* pattern played on either the hi-hat, or block. This rhythm is played between the strong hand and the weak foot. Note: the strong hand rhythm is the bell 1 pattern. The staccato (.) markings are for the same purpose as Variation 2 (see Example 10.9). If a block is desired, rather than a hi-hat, two will be needed – one played with the strong hand and one mounted on a pedal and struck with the weak foot, in place of the hi-hat. All of the other patterns in this variation are that of the *obiapá* (see Example 9.3).
**Abakuá in a Modern, Nontraditional Latin Jazz Setting**

All of the above applications are examples of ways Abakuá may be used in a “Latin” or Afro-Cuban jazz setting. Even though most of the rhythms are authentic traditional rhythms, the fact that they are being played on a drum set makes them non-traditional. The Abakuá patterns, and all Afro 6/8 patterns, for that matter, work extremely well with compositions written in 3/4 time. This juxtaposition of 6/8 and 3/4 creates an extremely modern sound and feel, and will give any jazz “standard” new life.

Generally speaking, when a 6/8 feel is played on drum set, it is usually some form of bembé. Actually, any 6/8 pattern will sound right when played against a 3/4 feel. More times than not, drum set players usually mix different parts of different styles, either intentionally or unintentionally, and sometimes even come up with their own style of 6/8 patterns, such as Elvin Jones. When playing jazz, this is usually acceptable because jazz is such a free, improvised art to begin with; however, when playing Afro-Cuban music, it is best to try to keep the patterns straight, so as to sound as authentic as possible.

Afro 6/8 rhythms lend themselves particularly well to the jazz genre due to the fact that jazz, like Afro 6/8, is based on triplets. Knowing this, the skilled performer can tastefully interweave the two styles, depending on the application, to create a very distinct sound. One example would be the drumming of Ignacio Berróa who is arguably one of the best at doing this. Ignacio can seamlessly switch back and forth from a swing style to a rumba with ease. This approach creates an entirely new sound for drum set players.
CONCLUSION

The Afro-Cuban Abakuá, while not as well known as the other Afro-Cuban rhythms, song styles, or dances, has undoubtedly had a profound influence on the music of today. Notable musicians and groups that were either influenced by Abakuá or presently perform Abakuá music include the following: Chano Pozo, Dizzy Gillespie, Ray Barretto, Cal Tjader, Armand Pereza, Tito Puente, Mongo Santamaria, Carlos “Patato” Valdez and Francisco Aguabella (still living Abakuá members), Ignacio Berróa, Los Muñequis de Matanzas, Raices Habaneras, Arsenio Rodriguez, Gonzalo Rubalcaba, Septeto Habanero, the Buena Vista Social Club, and countless others.

Since its movement into Cuba and its interaction with prominent jazz musicians in the 1950s, the Secret Society of the Abakuá is larger than ever yet the “secret” has remained, due to the respect of the ancestors and through loyal membership. “There were 120 recognized lodges in 2005, and in 2006, there were 147, with a membership of more than 20,000.”

Abakuá is alive and well in contemporary Cuba. In Havana, Matanzas, and Cárdenas today, men are still feeding their drums blood. Young Cuban men are still swearing Ekué. They are still sitting blindfolded in a closed room making that sound on a friction drum they cannot see.

124 Matos, Review of television broadcast, Religion-Cuba, 2.

125 Sublette, Cuba and its Music, 205.
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APPENDIX A

GLOSSARY / PRONOUNCIATION OF TERMS

A


Abasonga – [ahb-SOHN-gah] “Religion, Justice, Order” of the Thirteen Fundamentales (see Appendix D).


Afro-Cuban music – Musical style combining African and Cuban elements.

Agogó bell – [aah-gah-GOH] Double bell of African origin that has two distinct high and low pitches.


B

Bantu – [bahn-TOO] Large language grouping comprising over 513 different languages in the Niger-Congo region of Africa.

Bauza, Mario – Cuban musician credited with bringing Cuban music to the New York jazz scene. Bauza introduced Chano Pozo to Dizzy Gillespie.

Belemé (belefé) – [beh-leh-MAY / beh-leh-FAY] Shreds of fiber affixed to each drum in the kankomó.

Bembé – [behm-BAY] Popular 6/8 Afro-Cuban rhythm based on the 6/8 rumba clave. Literally means “a party with the gods.”


Biankomekó – [bee-ahn-koh-may-KOH] The general name given to the celebratory ensemble of four drums including the bonkó, biankomé, kuchí yeremá, and obiapá.


Blood Men – Freedmen and slaves of Old Calabar, Africa, who joined together in the mid-nineteenth century to start a social revolution to stop the incessant slaughter of black slaves by the nobles.

Bombo – [bohm-BOH] Spanish name for bass drum.

Bongo(s) – [bohn-GOH(S)] Cuban percussion instrument consisting of two small joined drums constructed of wood, held between the legs, and played with the hands.

Bonkó Enchemiýá – [bohn-KOH in-chee-mee-YAH] Also called Bonkó, this is the largest and deepest sounding drum in the biankomekó ensemble. This drum does not play a pattern as the other drums in the enkomó; instead, it performs ad lib solos and interacts with the dancer.


Butamé – [boo-tah-MAY] Hidden room deep inside the fambá where the voice emits.

C


Cajón – [kah-HONE] Percussion instrument constructed from wood in the shape of a box. The performer sits on the instrument uses the same techniques as a conguero.

Calabash – Hollowed out gourd with hundreds of uses; mentioned in this essay as Sikán’s water vessel.
Carabali – [kah-rah-bah-LEE] The people that inhabited Old Calabar. Primary exponents of the Abakuá societies in Cuba.

Carga – [KAR-gah] Consecrated relics of Ekué created by Nasakó of the Thirteen Fundamentalles (see Appendix D).

Cáscara – [KAHS-kah-rah] Spanish for shell. Refers to the rhythm that is played on the shell of the timbales.

Catá – [kah-TAH] 1] Instrument: A large piece of hollowed out bamboo, played with palitos. 2] Rhythm: Various repetitive two-bar rhythms/patterns that are played on the instrument of the same name. Also called guagua.

Caxixi – [kah-SHEE-she] Brazilian shaker constructed of a woven basket with a gourd bottom and filled with seeds.

Cedar – Type of wood most commonly used in the construction of Abakuá drums.

Ceiba – [SAY-bah] Silk cotton tree (palm tree) symbolic to the Abakuá because Sikán’s unused remains were buried at its base.


Clavijas – [kla-VEE-hass] Wooden pegs used in shipbuilding, which were struck together as a musical instrument in colonial Cuba; The precursor to the claves.

Cle, Cle, Cle – [klaay] (command) Brícamo chant used in Chano Pozo’s composition entitled Abasi, meaning “Come forth, come forward.”


Compound Meter – Time signature in music in which the basic pulse is divisible by three (e.g. 3/8, 6/8, 9/8, 12/8). Compound meters consist of three eighth notes per quarter note.

Conga(s) – [KOHN-gahs] General name of modern hand drums; Three sizes quinto, conga, and tumba, or tumbadora.


Coros de clave – [KOH-rohs deh KLA-vay] Rhythm choruses, comprised of vocals and claves, developed in Matanzas in the late nineteenth century by displaced slaves, mainly Carabali.


Cross-stick – On drum set, the snare stick is turned around (backwards) and placed down on the head (extending horizontally across the drum at roughly a 2 o'clock position), with the “butt” end of the stick touching the rim and hanging over the drum two or three inches. When lifted and struck, a thick, woody click sound is produced (used to emulate a slap stroke on congas).

Cruz – [kruuss] Spanish name for cross.


Cuica – [QUEE-kah] Small metal friction drum of Brazilian origin with a stick made into the head. Sound is produced by rubbing the stick with a damp cloth.

Day of Three Kings – Type of carnival on Epiphany, January 6th.

Dead Stroke – Sound that is produced by striking a drum and leaving the hand, or stick on the head, thus inhibiting the natural vibration.

Diablito – [dee-aah-BLEE-toh] Literally means “little devils” (see ñáñigo).

Diaspora – [die-AS-pour-ah] Refers to the movement of any population sharing common ethnic identity who were either forced to leave, or voluntarily left their settled territory, and became residents in areas often far removed from the former.

Deity – [dee-ah-tee] An immortal being, thought of as holy, divine, or sacred, held in high regard, and respected by human beings.

Drum set – Assimilation of percussion instruments set up for one player. The basic instruments include the following drums: snare drum, bass drum, toms, and the following cymbals: hi-hat, ride, and crash. Other instruments may be added or taken away.
Duple Meter – Time signature in music in which the basic pulse is divisible by two (e.g. 2/4, 3/4, 4/4, 5/4). Duple meters consist of two eighth notes per quarter note.

Èfik – [EH-fick] One of the original tribes in Old Calabar. (Efí in Cuba).

Èfik Butón – (eh-FEE-kay booh-TOHN] The name of the very first Abakuá lodge established in the Port of Regla in Havana, Cuba.

Efut – [eh-FOOT] One of the original tribes in Old Calabar. (Efó in Cuba).


Ekué – [eh-KWAY] 1] Instrument: Friction drum that is said to possess the spirit of Sikán. The drum is not played, but instead a wand is rubbed against the head, which is covered in rooster blood, producing a drone sound. The sound that emits represents the “voice” of Abasí. 2] God’s divine voice.

Ekueñón – [eh-kway-nee-YONE] 1] The second drum to be heard (of three: empégó, ekueñón, and enkríkamo) of the “sacred” or “symbolic” Abakuá drums. This drum is referred to as “the executioner” because it conducts the sacrifices that take place during the ritual. 2] “Hunter, Executioner, Guardian of Ekué” of the Seven Principales (see Appendix D).

El Africa Solar – Former slave quarters, turned poverty ridden neighborhood, in Havana, Cuba, where Chano Pozo grew up.

Empégó – [em-pay-GOH] (also tambor de orden) The first drum to be heard (of three: empégó, ekueñón, and enkríkamo) of the “sacred” or “symbolic” Abakuá drums. This drum brings order at the beginning of the ceremony.


Enkanima – [in-kah-nee-MAH] “Íreme, Master of the Forest” of the Thirteen Fundamentales (see Appendix D).

Enkomó – [in-koh-MOH] General name of Abakuá celebratory drums, minus the lead drum bonkó. This group includes biankomé, kuchí yeremá, and obiapá. These drums play the specific patterns that make up the Abakuá feel.

Enkríkamo – [in-KREE-ka-moh] 1] The last drum to be heard (of three: empegó, ekueñón, and enkríkamo) of the “sacred” or “symbolic” Abakuá drums. This drum is used to assemble and communicate with the various íreme. 2] “Chief of the Íremes” of the Seven Principales (see Appendix D).


Eribangandó – [eh-ree-bahn-gahn-DOH] “Íreme, Master of Cleansings” of the Thirteen Fundamentales (see Appendix D).

Eribó – [eh-ree-BOH] (see Seseribó).

Erikundi – [eh-ree-kuhn-DEE] Rattles or shakers used in the conjunto biankomekó.

F

Fambá – [fahm-BAH] Sacred room in a house, or chamber where rituals and initiation ceremonies are held. This is also where the sacred drums are kept.

Firmas – [FEAR-mahss] Spanish name for signs, symbols, or markings of the Abakuá society; also called anaforuana.

Flam – Percussion technique where both hands strike together but one is slightly softer and just ahead of the other, creating a “thicker” sound.

Fo-ekue – [foh-eh-KWAY] (see butamé)


Fundamentales – (Fundamentals) The name of all thirteen hierarchical plazas of the Abakuá, including the Principales and the Obones (see Appendix D).

Fundamento – [foon-dah-MEN-toh] Something that is the object of a cult because it incorporates a God or spirit.
**G**

Gándó – [gahn-DOH] Design or project.

Guagua – [wah-wah] 1] Instrument: A hollowed out piece of bamboo, played with palitos. 2] Rhythm: Various repetitive two-bar rhythms/patterns that are played on the instrument of the same name. Also called catá.


Guataca – [wah-TAH-kah] An actual hoe-blade originally used by slaves as a bell. This instrument is still used in traditional rumba ensembles.

Güín – (also yín) Wand used to produce sound (fragallar) on the ekué drum.

**H**

Havana style – One of two styles of Abakuá music, the other being Matanzas. The Havana style is more common and is at a faster tempo.

Hembra – [HEEM-brah] Spanish for “female.”

Hemiola – [hee-mee-OH-lah] The rhythmic relation of three notes in the time of two, or (3:2).

Hierarchy – [HI-er-ark-ee] A ruling body of clergy organized into ranks or orders, each subordinate to the one above it.

Hi-hat – Component of the drum set that sits to the weak side of the player. The hi-hat consists of two cymbals mounted on a stand that open and close into the other. The open/close action of the cymbals is operated by the weak foot while the instrument is played with a striking implement.

**I**


Íreme – [EER-ah-may] Street dancer of the Abakuá society that symbolizes the spirits of the dead or the spirits of the society’s founders.

Isué – [iss-WAY] “The Bishop” of the Obones (see Appendix D).
Isunekue – [iss-uhn-eh-KWAY] “Husband of Sikán” of the Obones (see Appendix D).

Itón (Itán) – [ee-TOHN / ee-TAHN] 1] Stick or scepter held by the íreme; 2] Powerful staff held by top levels within the hierarchical plazas of the Abakuá (see Appendix D).


Iyamba – [ee-yahm-BA] “Highest King” of the Obones (see Appendix D).

J

Jeyei – (command) “Attention, listen!”

Juego(s) – [who-WAY-goh(s)] General name for an Abakuá society or lodge.

Juxtaposition – The act or instance of placing two or more things side by side.

K

Kankomó – [kahn-koh-MOH] General name of the three drums in the “sacred” or “symbolic” Abakuá ensemble. In order of performance (first to last) they are: empegó, ekueñón, and enkrikamo.


L

Latin – General vague term used to describe any music of Latin America.

Latin jazz – Term used to describe the musical art form that was created through the early collaborations of Chano Pozo and Dizzy Gillespie. It is a fusion of African and Cuban rhythms with jazz harmonies and forms. Also called Afro-Cuban jazz.

M

Macho – [mah-CHO] Spanish for “male.”

Matanzas style – [mah-THAN-zas] One of two styles of Abakuá music, the other being Havana. The Matanzas style seems less common and is at a slower tempo.

Mbori – [em-BOH-ree] Sacrificial goat used in Abakuá ceremonies. Also used to make the parche (drumhead).

Meter – A framework in music determined by the number of beats, and the time value of those beats.

Mokongo – [moh-kohn-GOH] “Supreme Chief” of the Obones (see Appendix D).

Monibonkó – [mohn-ee-bohn-KOH] General name for a drummer who performs on the head of the bonkó.

Monitón – [mohn-ee-TOHN] General name for a drummer that performs on the shell of the bonkó.

Mosongo – [moh-sohn-GOH] “Owner of Heads” of the Thirteen Fundamentales (see Appendix D).


Muffled tone (muff) – Term used to describe the production of a dead-stroke on congas (tumbas) that is produced by striking the drum and leaving the hand on the head.


Musical Drums – Four drums used in secular Abakuá ceremonies and festivals. Grouped under the general category of biankomekó.

Mutual Aid – The voluntary, reciprocal exchange of resources or services for mutual benefit.

N

Nkaniká – [nyea-kahn-eh-KAH] Bells worn around the waist of the íreme.


Ñáñiguismo – [NYAN-nyee-geese-moh] The act, theory or doctrine of all things relating to ñáñigo (Abakuá).
Nasakó – [nah-sah-KOH] 1] One-eyed priest, or sorcerer, depending on the variations of the myth. He ordered the sacrifice of Sikán. 2] “Sorcerer; Ritual Doctor” of the Thirteen Fundamentales (see Appendix D).

Ngomo – [in-goh-MOH] Sacred chalk (yellow or white) owned by the Mpegó of the Seven Principales (see Appendix D) and used within the fambá during Abakuá ceremonies.

Nkiko – [in-key-KOH] The sacrificial rooster used in Abakuá ceremonies.


Obones – [oh-BOHN-ess] (Kings) The first group and highest level of the thirteen fundamental hierarchical plazas of the Abakuá (see Appendix D).

Od’dán River – River separating Nigeria from Cameroon in Africa in which the supernatural fish, Tanze, was captured.

Open tone – Term used to describe a pure, unaltered tone on a drum.

Ostinato – [oss-tee-NAH-toh] Repetitive pattern or figure that does not change.

Óvalo – [OH-vah-low] Tiny circles used to represent eyes in the firmas/anaforuanas.


Plantes – [PLAHYN-tais] Festival or principal ceremony of the Abakuá.

Plazas – [PLAH-zas] Levels or grades of power within the Abakuá societies. There are thirteen main levels that are broken down into three main groups: Obones, Principales, and Fundamentales (see Appendix D).

Plumero – [ploo-MEH-roh] A single towering feathered staff. Plumeros are affixed to each drum in the kankomó, and are assigned to each plaza within the Obones.

Polyrhythm – Two or more differing rhythms performed simultaneously.
Port of Regla – Area in Havana, Cuba where the Abakuá began in 1836.


Pozo, Chano – [CHA-noh POH-zoh] Cuban conguero, and Abakuá member, who, together with Dizzy Gillespie, created the style of music called Cubop which led to the development of modern day Latin jazz.

Principales – (Principals) The top seven levels of the hierarchical plazas of the Abakuá, including the Obones (see Appendix D).

Q

Quinto – [KEEN-toh] Highest drum of three in the rumba guaguancó (quinto, tres golpes, salidor); used for soloing and interacting with dancers.

R

Rhumba – [RUM-bah] Popular ballroom dance style of the 1930s and 1940s.


Rumba clave – [ROOM-bah KLA-vay] Five-note, two-measure pattern with one displaced eighth note on the “three” side of the measure. This is the clave used in all 6/8 Afro-Cuban patterns, rumbas, and many others.

Rumba Complex – The Afro-Cuban song styles comprised of yambú, guaguancó, and columbia, that combine drumming, call and response vocals, and dancing.

Rumba de cajón – [ROOM-bah deh kah-HOHN] Another name for rumba yambú due to the fact that the dance is performed on the cajón (instrument).

S

Saco – [SAH-koh] Material similar to burlap used in íreme costume construction.


Secco – [SEH-koh] Spanish musical term meaning dry, short, or detached.

Segundo – [say-GOON-doh] (see Tres Golpes).

Seis por ocho – [sayss-poor-OH-cho] (see Tres Golpes).

Sese – [SESS-eh] (see Seseribó).

Seseribó – [sess-eh-ree-BOH] (also sese, eribó) The largest plumed ceremonial (sacred) drum that is “silent” and carried by Isué. It is “fed” the blood of sacrificial offerings.

Shekeré (chekeré) – [SHAY-kah-RAY] Percussion instrument (shaker) of African origin consisting of a gourd wrapped with beads.

Sikán – [see-KAHN] Efó princess that exposed the secret and was sacrificed in an attempt to re-summon the voice of Tanze.

Slap tone – Term used to describe the production of a “pop” on congas (tumbas) that is produced by striking the drum and slightly “grabbing” the head.


Son clave – [sohn KLA-vay] Five-note, two-measure pattern that is the basis for all Afro-Cuban popular dance styles.


Standard – Term used in jazz meaning a very common piece of music.

Straight Ahead – Term used in jazz to describe a performance consisting of standard jazz tunes.

Symbolic Drums – Three “played” drums used in sacred Abakuá ceremonies that are grouped under the general category of kankomó and include empegó, ekueñón, and enkríkamo. In addition to these, there are two drums that are not played musically, which are the seseribó and the friction drum, ekué.

Tambor de Orden – [tam-BOOR deh OR-den] (see empegó).

Tanze – [TAHN-ze] Supernatural fish that possessed the secret of the Abakuá; named after Obán Tanze.


Timbales – [tim-BAH-layss] Cuban percussion instruments consisting of a pair of metal drums mounted on a stand and played with dowel-type sticks that produce a piercing, cutting tone.

Toms – Drums ranging from 6” to 18” in diameter commonly mounted on stands either on their own (concert style) or comprising a drum set.

Tres dos – [trayss-dohs] (see Tres Golpes).


Triplet – Three notes that are played in the space of two notes of equal value.

Tumbadora – [toom-bah-DOH-rah] The lowest pitched drum of a modern drum ensemble; also the general name of all the drums.

U ————

Ua! – [ooh-AAH] (command) Bricamo for “everybody shut up and listen.”

V ————


W ————


Y ————


Yín – (also güín) Wand used to produce sound (fragallar) on the ekué drum.
APPENDIX B
DRUMSET / PERCUSSION LEGEND

Drum Set Legend

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Instrument</th>
<th>Notation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Clave</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hi-hat with hand</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Staccato</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hi-hat with foot</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Optional</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>High tom</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Open tone</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dead stroke</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Snare drum</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cross stick</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Floor tom</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Open tone</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dead stroke</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bass drum</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Percussion / Conga Legend

- **O** = Open Tone
- **P** = Palm/Bass Tone
- **S** = Slap Tone
- **T** = Tips of Fingers

**Ekon 2**

**Erikundi**

- **L** = Left Hand
- **R** = Right Hand

**Slash Notation - Ad Lib (Improvise)**

/ / / / / /
APPENDIX C

ABAKUÁ IN FULL PERCUSSION SCORE

Traditional Abakuá Conjunto
Havana Style
Traditional Abakuá Conjunto

Matarzas Style

cleve / iton

akón 1

akón 2

erkundi

benkó

bankomé

bukí yemná

obiapá
**APPENDIX D**

**THE ABAKUÁ HEIRARCHY OF PLAZAS CHART**

### The Top Thirteen Grades (4 + 3 + 6)

**The Four First: The Obones**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>PLAZA</th>
<th>TITLE</th>
<th>DUTIES</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Iyamba</td>
<td>Highest King</td>
<td>Sounds the Ekué drum; carries itón</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Moitongo</td>
<td>Supreme Chief</td>
<td>Carries itón</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Isué</td>
<td>The Bishop</td>
<td>Custodian of the Sese drum</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Isunekue</td>
<td>Husband of Sikán</td>
<td>Owner of the parche</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**The Three That Complete the First Seven “Principals”**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>PLAZA</th>
<th>TITLE</th>
<th>DUTIES</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Mpegó</td>
<td>The Law; The Scribe</td>
<td>Owns the Mpegó drum and the ngomo</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ekuefiófi</td>
<td>Hunter; Executioner;</td>
<td>Owns the Ekuefiófi drum; searches for the “voice;”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Guardian of Ekue</td>
<td>opens the ceremonies with his enkamo prayers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Enkrikamo</td>
<td>Chief of the Îremes</td>
<td>Owns the Enkrikamo drum, guards the jambá</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
## The Six That Complete the Thirteen “Fundamentals”

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>PLAZA</th>
<th>TITLE</th>
<th>DUTIES</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Mosongo</td>
<td>Owner of Heads</td>
<td>Guardian of the guinjún</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Abasonga</td>
<td>Religion, Justice, Order</td>
<td>Helper of Iyamba and Mosongo; carries itón</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Enkóboro</td>
<td>Íreme</td>
<td>Master of initiations, helper of Isue; never leaves the fambá</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Eribangandó</td>
<td>Íreme</td>
<td>Master of cleansings</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Enkanima</td>
<td>Íreme</td>
<td>Master of forest, Íreme of prayers and cleansings</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nasakó</td>
<td>Sorcerer; Ritual Doctor</td>
<td>Creator of the fundamentos and sacred herbal fluids</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

## The Next Twelve Plazas that Make Up Twenty-Five

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>PLAZA</th>
<th>TITLE</th>
<th>DUTIES</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Emboko</td>
<td>Íreme</td>
<td>Guardian of offerings</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Embakará</td>
<td>Íreme</td>
<td>Cares for the sese plumeros, custodian of the sacrificed victim</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Anamanguí</td>
<td>Íreme – “The Dead that carries the Dead”</td>
<td>Plays significant role in funerary ceremonies</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Eklumbre</td>
<td>Íreme</td>
<td>Helper of Nasakó</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Morúa Yuansá</td>
<td>Enchanter of the Íreme</td>
<td>Singer, carries the erikundi</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Aberisún and Aberiñán</td>
<td>Íremes – “The Twins; “Festival Íremes”</td>
<td>Responsible for preparing and enacting the public sacrifice of the goat by immobilizing him and knocking him out with a blunt rod</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kundiyóbé</td>
<td>Íreme</td>
<td>Helper of Mokongo; cares for ritual tributes; acts as treasurer</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PLAŽA</td>
<td>TITLE</td>
<td>DUTIES</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>------------</td>
<td>------------------------</td>
<td>------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ibandi</td>
<td>îreme</td>
<td>Deals with sacrificial practices and offerings</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Enkandemo</td>
<td>îreme – “El Cocinero”</td>
<td>Responsible for preparing the open fire and cooking the sacrifices and food for the ceremony</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kofián</td>
<td>îreme – “The Sweeper”</td>
<td>Cleans off the dining table and the temple at ceremonies; he “sweeps out” bad influences to the outside</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Abasi</td>
<td>“Supreme Being”</td>
<td>Carries the crucifix bearing the “Sad” or “Dead” Christ</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Moni Famba</td>
<td>îreme</td>
<td>Guards the door to the famba</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

APPENDIX E

ABAKUÁ DRUM LAYOUT GRAPHIC

MUSICAL DRUMS
SYMBOLOC DRUMS

EKRÉ

SESE

KANKOMÓ

MPEGÓ  EKUEÑÓN  ENKRÍKAMO
VITA

Donald Brooks Truly was born in Knoxville, Tennessee, on May 31, 1974. His parents are James Robert Truly and Phyllis Fail Truly. When he was three years old, his family moved to Mobile, Alabama. He received his elementary education at St. Aquinas Academy, South Brookley School, and University Military School (UMS), and his secondary education at UMS, and Murphy High School. In September of 1992, he was admitted to the University of South Alabama, in Mobile, Alabama, from which he was granted a Bachelor of Music (B.M.) degree in Percussion Performance in December of 1998. During the next four years, he played professionally in several orchestras, chamber ensembles, and musical groups in and around the Gulf Coast area. In August of 2003, he was admitted to the Music Conservatory of the Chicago College of Performing Arts at Roosevelt University, in Chicago, Illinois, from which he was granted a Master of Music (M.M.) degree in Percussion Performance in May of 2005. In August of 2006, he was admitted to the Frost School of Music at University of Miami, in Coral Gables, Florida, from which he was granted a Doctor of Musical Arts (D.M.A.) degree in May of 2009. Currently, he is active as a private percussion instructor, an adjunct percussion instructor, and a freelance musician in the Greater Miami Metro Area.