

Percussive Notes

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TEACHING DRUMSET

with Peter Erskine

Kenny Aronoff: Rock Drumset Goes to College ◆

Carl Nielsen's Use of the Snare Drum ◆

Transcription of Bag's Groove ◆

DCI Championship Results ◆

Journey to West Africa ◆

Obo Addy's Donno—The Talking Drum of Ghana, As Played in an Ensemble Format With a Drumset With Transcription and Analysis by Royal Hartigan, Ph.D.

By Diane Gordon

THE DONNO IS ONE OF A LARGE group of African instruments called talking drums, which are capable of imitating human speech through the manipulation of pitch. Played by many peoples of Ghana, the donno has an hourglass-shaped wooden body, and circular heads on either end connected by a series of leather strings. Traditionally, the donno is made from the wood of the 'nku tree and goat skin, although one manufacturer has replaced the goat skin strings with steel cables. The forearm, elbow, and fingers compress the strings to create the characteristic variations in pitch while the drum is hit with a curved wooden stick, held in the right hand. The design and playing technique of the donno is similar to many others in the family of talking drums.

"In Ghana, for every fifty miles you travel, you'll find that both the language and instruments change," says Ghanaian master drummer Obo Addy, who learned the traditional drumming of the Ga culture from his father, a Wonche priest and medicine man.

"But donno is different," he explains. "It is a national instrument, and is played everywhere. People who play these drums especially well are the Dagomba in the northern part of Ghana, so most of the drumming is in Dagbani, their particular language. If you want to say, 'Why me?', the drums will say 'Why me?'"

Many West African languages, such as Dagbani, are "tonal," which means

that the meaning of a word is partly determined by inflection, for instance, the raising or lowering of the pitch of one's voice on different definitions. For this reason, the wide range of tonal and timbral qualities that one can express on the donno are uniquely suited to the languages of the people who have historically played the instrument.

"To play the donno in the traditional way, you hold it under your left armpit, and grab a few strings with the fingers of your left hand," says Addy. "Sometimes, when people don't know how to play it, they will squeeze the drum with their entire left arm, but the sound of the pitch should come from the elbow, not the

whole arm. You also can pull on the strings with your left-hand fingers to create an undulating tone, like a vibrato. I also put the edge of my palm on the edge of the drum head and move it up and down."

Donno is used for many different kinds of music," Addy continued. "In Ghana, people don't improvise very much, and they play rhythms that have been prescribed for hundreds of years. There are certain times when you can get creative for twenty or so phrases, but others are purely traditional. Otufo (pronounced oh-too-foh, with an accent on the last syllable) for instance, is a dance used in initiation ceremonies for young girls. For this, the master drummer would play five or six rhythms, which are prescribed by tradition."

Popular musical styles, however, combine the old and the new. Highlife, for instance, incorporates Western instruments and techniques with traditional elements, and more improvisation. The following donno solo by Obo Addy is an example of a master drummer incorporating traditional rhythms on the donno in an ensemble with a drumset, an innovative combination that nevertheless retains a vibrant West African sound.

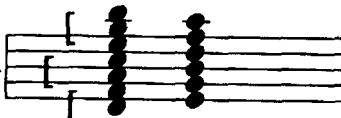
ANALYSIS AND TRANSCRIPTION OF "LET ME PLAY MY DRUMS"

Because of the highly differentiated and subtle use of tones and timbres in the traditional way of playing talking drums, a visual Western notation cannot capture the nu-

MUSIC KEY

Donno Tones

High
Medium
Low



Pitches are not exact

✕ = Thud or Sharp Tone without pitch

♪ = Auxiliary tone produced by a light stick stroke or change in hand tension on the strings

↗ = Upward pitch inflection

↘ = Downward pitch inflection

~~~~~ = Undulating tone produced by arm or finger pressure on the Donno strings



## Obo Addy's Donno

ance of the master drummer's art. Also, rhythmic interplay between the duple and triple beat subdivision results in some patterns actually sounding somewhere between the notated sixteenth

notes and eighth note triplets.

The transcription serves as a guide, and while it does not correspond to the Western tempered pitch, the highest donno tones in measures 41 and 42 fall

about one octave and a third above middle C. The transcription is presented here with the permission of Mr. Addy.

Addy begins with a descending donno line played in rhythmic unison with the

### Let Me Play My Drums

#### Obo Addy, Donno Solo

**Donno**

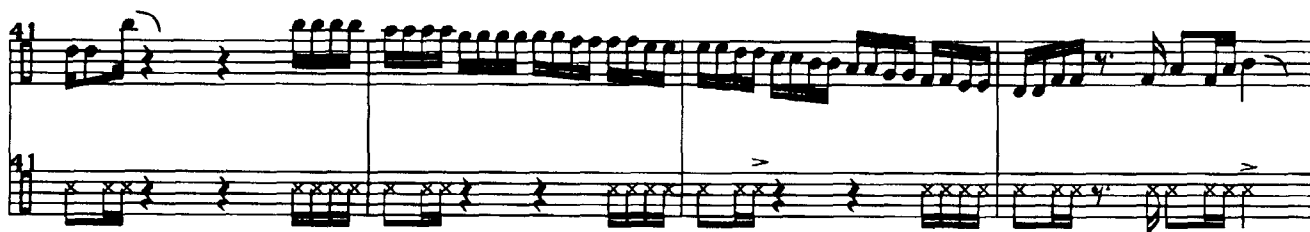
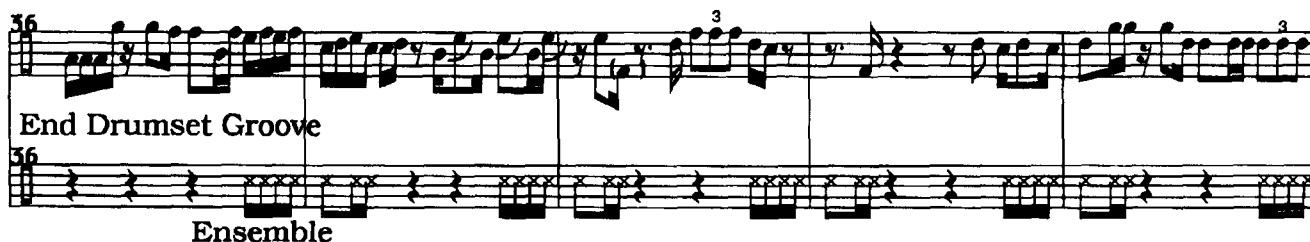
**Ensemble**

Drumset continues time until measure 36

1 5 9 14 19 23 28 32



[Left to right] David Bindman (playing the danuro bell), Edward Blackwell and Royal Hartigan (playing donno), Freeman Kwadzo Donkor (playing petia), Abraham Kobena Adzenyah (playing apentemma), and Paul Austerlitz (playing ntorwa rattle)



ensemble and two short statements in measures 1 through 4. The drumset establishes a basic groove in measure 5, which serves as a foundation throughout Obo Addy's solo. Paired phrases highlight measures 6 through 18. In the first pair, from measures 6 through 9, Addy ends with inflected high-low tones. He then explodes a longer phrase in measures 11 and 12, mixing 16th notes, 8th note triplets, and successive short-long durations, resolving in the same manner as measures 7 and 9. The second pair, in measures 14 through 16, is characterized by descending, fastpaced lines punctuated by sharp thud tones. Measures 17 and 18

feature two short phrases ending with inflections in opposite directions.

Addy continues with a rapid stream of low tones in measures 19 through 22, which he suddenly raises in measure 23, and resolves in measure 24 with an undulating tone on beat three. Measures 25, 27, and 28 are punctuated with three quick off-beat strokes, followed by a longer pattern in measures 29 through 31, which ends in a single high tone, also on beat three.

Successive four-stroke statements in measures 33 through 36 lead to the band's reentry. Addy then dialogues with the repeating ensemble figures in mea-

sures 37 through 44, culminating in a continuous series of 16th notes descending in pitch, which end in unison with the ensemble in measure 44.



**Diane Gordon** is a journalist and guitarist. Since graduating from Smith College in 1983 she has written articles for publications

including *Guitar Player*, *Modern Drummer*, *Down Beat*, *The Australian Guitar Journal* and *Street Musician* the first Soviet pop music publication.

# The Role of the Drumset in Ghanaian Highlife and its Relation to Traditional Drumming Styles of the Akan, Ga, and Ewe Peoples

By Royal Hartigan and Abraham Kobena Adanyan

**T**HERE IS AN ONGOING DISCUSSION regarding the creative musical response of indigenous peoples to the external influence of Colonialism and Neocolonialism. While in the West reaction against these forces includes the poetry-music of Imamu Amiri Baraka, Hip-Hop Attitudes and lyrics of the rap group *Public Enemy*, Max Roach's *Freedom Now Suite*, and new compositions and uses of traditional instruments by Asian-American jazz artists Jon Jang and Fred Wei-han Ho, the reaction in the so-called third world itself—Asia, Africa, the Near East, and Central and South America—may take a quite different path.

Ghana is a part of West Africa that was one of the earliest to develop its own musical response to external penetration, but there has been to date little detailed research on the specific manner of this response, one avenue of which is Ghanaian Highlife Music.

This paper will focus on guitar band highlife musicians who see their work as an African, and specifically, Ghanaian way of making music, and who feel an intimate kinship with the drum and dance ensemble. I will offer an analysis of the process by which traditional drum, bell, and rattle rhythms are incorporated into the performance practice of individual drumset players.

The drumset itself is a complex symbol: as part of the European style ballroom orchestras of the second, third, and fourth decades of this century, such as the Excelsior Orchestra of Accra, it might signify an elitist upward mobility to newly urbanized workers, while in a highlife guitar band it constitutes a Western instrument played in a non-Western way, as one means by which Ghanaian musicians adapt traditional rhythms in a new context: a music of national identity, specifically for a Ghanaian audience.

Apart from documenting this rhythmic adaptation, this work is significant

since the drumset is an American instrument whose history is filled with rhythmic innovation by African-American percussionists, and its use in an African context underlines the ongoing reciprocal influences among African and African-American music. Further, the use of the drumset as part of a Ghanaian way of music-making reveals a continuity of tradition in which new materials become extensions of, rather than substitutes for the indigenous dance drama.

For purposes of clarity two terms need explanation: the term "tradition" is used to refer to the long heritage of indigenous dance drumming, and to the 20th century phenomenon of highlife music. Some Ghanaian musicians see highlife as a continuation of the earlier heritage. The term "style" is used in two ways in this paper, the first refers to a recognized instrumentation and way of playing shared by a significant number of musical ensembles or individuals. The second is commonly used by Ghanaian musicians to describe specific individual rhythms or drumset patterns.

Ghanaian highlife music grew out of the interaction of indigenous musicians first with European and later, American and Caribbean playing styles, instruments, and performing ensembles. Among the major avenues of contact were the festive and ceremonial music occasions at European commercial centers and forts, such as Sao Jorge Del Mina Castle near Cape Coast.

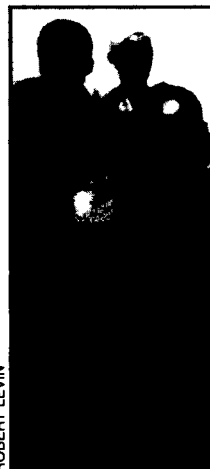
Since at least the 1750s, Ghanaians were taught and became proficient on European instruments at missions and as members of military and police bands and dance and concert orchestras which provided music for state and social functions. Europeans were exposed to tradi-

tional Ghanaian music and encouraged its inclusion in social events. An example are the work songs and rhythms of the Ga and Fante fishermen related to the *Kolomashie* processional music.

During the 20th century, highlife has represented a complex and resourceful blend of available materials: Western instruments, melodies, and functional harmonies have been combined with Ghanaian lyrics, tunings, song melodies, rhythms, and playing styles. The *prepensua*, a large, deep-toned, plucked, wooden box resonator, functioned as a bass instrument in earlier pre-highlife styles such as the Akan (Fante) music Nntwese. The *seprewa* is an Akan string instrument upon whose melodies many later highlife tunes were based (Collins). An appreciation for the sound of this stringed *seprewa* presaged the prominence of the guitar throughout the history of highlife.

Since the 1930's, other influences on Ghanaian musicians have been American and Caribbean recordings and live concerts of jazz, calypso, mambo, cha-cha, merengue, salsa, gospel, blues, reggae, funk, and rap. Highlife can be performed in diverse formats: a small ensemble of guitar, voice, and a bell-type instrument; big band ballroom orchestra; village brass bands with winds and percussion; or guitar bands, which will be our focus. The typical guitar band instrumentation includes one or more lead guitars, bass guitar, one or more percussionists, drumset, one or more vocalists, and sometimes, keyboards and horns, including trumpet, saxophone, and trombone.

Let us now focus on guitar band drumset styles which employ traditional rhythms: One way traditional rhythms are adapted to drumset involves the



ROBERT LEVIN

suggestion of an individual supporting rhythm. The *patsi* is a small, cylindrical double-headed drum played with a combined stick and hand technique in the Eye recreational music *Boboobo*. Its pattern is a rapid, dense succession of open and mute tones. I have heard this rhythm on snare drum, which possesses a high-pitched timbre similar to *patsi* (examples 1a, 1b, and 2).

Another way drum ensemble rhythms are used in guitar band highlife is the alternation of two support patterns. A style related to the Ashanti royal court music *Kete* alternates the *dawuro* bell pattern with the *murubua* drums' interlocking high-low tone pairs. *Adaban* is the music of the King's (Asantehene) executioners (examples 3a and 3b). One highlife style alternates the *dawuro* bell timeline on ride cymbal bell with fragments of *murubua* tone pairs on snare, toms, and high-hat (example 4).

A third manner in which traditional patterns are used is the statement of a rhythm and its embellishment in differ-

ent parts of the drumset. I have seen a style related to the *Otufo* ritual music of the Ga people which reveals this. The *gankogui* (Ga term, *ngongo*) bell timeline is literally stated on high-hat, and its embellishment fragmented among snare, bass, and tom-toms (examples 5a, 5b, and 6).

A fourth method involves the simultaneous statement of two supporting rhythms, as in a style related to *Gadzo*, originally an Eye pre-war music, but now played in a recreational context. The bell is played on a metal container, *ganugbagba*, and one support rhythm is sounded by the *donno*, an hourglass, double-headed, string-tension drum (examples 7a and 7b). The *ganugbagba* is transferred to high-hat and *donno* to bass drum with snare drum suggesting fragments of the *ganugbagba* timeline (example 8).

Another way drumset styles in guitar band highlife express traditional rhythms is the successive statement of different supporting drum, bell, and

rattle patterns. *Gahu* is a recreational music of the Eye people of southeastern Ghana whose bell timeline is played on a *gankogui* and reinforced by the gourd rattle *axatse*. A drummer may begin with a statement of the bell as accented strokes on high-hat and snare drum, followed by a successive statement of the high-pitched *kaganu* rhythm on high-pitched snare drum, medium-pitched *kidi* phrase on medium-pitched mounted tom-tom, and lower-pitched *sogo* tones on low-pitched floor tom-tom. This placement reveals a sensitivity for timbral and tonal parallels on the part of some Ghanaian trap set players (examples 9a, 9b, 10a, and 10b).

In order to follow the adaptation of a rhythm, a traditional ensemble playing the Ashanti recreational/social music *Sikyi*, will be analyzed. Consider the metal castanet-like *frikyiwa* bell pattern and the high-pitched *tamalin* frame drum voice (examples 11a and 11b). Example 12a illustrates these two rhythms in a guitar band highlife context—high-

## EXAMPLE 1A BOBOOBO

(MASTER)

Oprenten

Frikyiwa

Toke

Toke

Axatse

Donno

Apentemma

Patsi

Opening Call

Donno

—Ewe people of Ghana (Volta region) and Togo (Akposo)

*tamalin* played by claves and conga and the *frikyiwa* bell taken by snare drum. This is an example from Alex Konadu's *Okafo Didi* record, the song, *Tiwaa* (*Tiwaa*, a woman's name; *Twi* lyrics, meaning—"You work to develop something, and when you finally deserve its reward, you end up with nothing, and someone else sneaks in and reaps your reward.').

Another *Sikyi* style heard in Ghana places the low-*tamalin* pulse on bass drum, *frikyiwa* timeline transferred from snare to high-hat, and the high-pitched *tamalin* phrase on snare drum (example 12b).

Another traditional dance drumming, the *Adowa* music of the Ashanti, formerly a funeral music, but now played also as a recreational style focuses on the *dawuro* bell pattern and the *donno* string-tension drum phrase (examples 13a and 13b). Solomon Assan of the *Abibiman* highlife guitar band of Accra plays a highlife style related to *Adowa* which adapts the *dawuro* bell pattern to high-hat and fragments the *donno* phrase among bass, snare, and tom-toms (example 14).

The final example relates to the Ga recreational music, *Kpanlogo*, and its *ngongo* (*gankogui*) bell pattern which we recognize as son clave (examples 15a and 15b). This rhythm is played on snare drum over a bass drum pulse and open and closed high-hat (suggesting *frikyiwa*) in a style known as "hot highlife" (example 16).

These drumset styles are just a few examples of the adaptation of traditional drum, bell, and rattle rhythms as part of a creative and Africanized Ghanaian response to external influences, and constitutes a fertile topic for future research, with many implications for Ghanaian and African-American music. **PN**

#### SOURCES CONSULTED:

Field work-study-performances 1981-present

#### Master drummers

Freeman Kwadzo Donkor  
Abraham Kobena Adzenyah  
Martin Kwaku Obeng  
Midawo Gideon Folie Alorwoyie  
Aziz Botchway  
Godwin Kwasi Agbeli  
George Adama

C. K. Ladzekpo  
Mary Agama  
Agin

#### Dancers

Freeman Kwadzo Donkor  
Kwabena Boateng  
Martin Kwaku Obeng  
Aziz Botchway  
Sarah Thompson  
Ophelia Tetteh  
Taki Ofori  
Yaa Johnson  
Leticia Ahima  
Agnes Agetey

#### Atenteben/musicians

Makwell Akomeah Amoh

#### Gyilli

Abraham Kobena Adzenyah  
Joseph Chogo Kobom

#### Highlife drumset/ensemble

Abibiman Highlife Band 1991  
Sweet Talks 1983  
Solomon Assan  
Martin K. Obeng  
Abraham Adzenyah

### EXAMPLE 1B BOBOOBO (FAST)

From Freeman Donkor

Ewe

The musical score for 'BOBOOBO (FAST)' is presented in a multi-staff format. The top staff is labeled '(MASTER)' and 'Oprenten'. Below it are staves for 'Frikyiwa', 'Toke' (with a female symbol), 'Toke' (with a male symbol), 'Axatse', 'Donno', 'Apentemma', 'Patu', and 'Opening Call'. The 'Opening Call' staff is also labeled 'Donno'. The score is written in 4/4 time and includes various rhythmic notations such as eighth notes, sixteenth notes, and rests. The tempo is indicated as 'FAST'.

## INTERVIEWS

All musicians listed above, plus:  
 John Storm Roberts, telephone 9/15/91  
 Anthony Brown, telephone 9/19/91  
 David P. McAllester, 9/15/91  
 Mark Slobin, 9/10/91, 9/17/91  
 Obo Addy, telephone 4/11/91  
 Robert Lancefield, 9/10/91, 9/18/91

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## EXAMPLE 2

## BOBOOBO

Patsi—Snare Drum



## EXAMPLE 3A

## KETE ADABAN

(MASTER)

Twinisin

Dawuro

Ntorwa

Donno

Murubua 1

Murubua 2

Apentemma

Variations:

Dawuro

Apentemma

—Ashanti People of Ghana



# EXAMPLE 3B KETE ADABAN

Abraham Adzenyah/Freeman Donkor

Akan—Ashanti

Twinsin (MASTER)

Dawuro

Ntorwa

Donno

Murubua 1

Murubua 2

Apentemma

Variations:

Dawuro

Apentemma

# EXAMPLE 4 KETE ADABAN

From Abraham Adzenyah

Dawuro—Cymbal Bell  
Murubua Fragments—Snare Drum and  
Mounted Floor Toms

RC bell

MT

SD

FT

HH

BD

# EXAMPLE 5A OTUFO

Oprenten (MASTER)

Gankogu

Axatse

Kagugu

Kidi

Sogo

—GA people of Ghana

\* mute with hand—  
open stick stroke

# EXAMPLE 5B

Martin Obeng

# OTUFO

GA

\* mute with hand—  
open stick stroke

Oprenten (MASTER)

Gankogui

Axatse

Kagagu

Kidi

\* Sogo

# EXAMPLE 6

From Martin Kwaku Obeng

# OTUFO

Gankogui—High Hat with stick  
Gankogui Variations—BD and SD, MT and FT

RH-HH

MT

SD

FT

BD

# EXAMPLE 7A

Freeman Donkor/Abraham Adzenyah

# GADZO

Oprenten (MASTER)

Ganugbagba

Axatse

Kagagu

Donno

Kidi 1

Kidi 2

—Ewe people of Ghana and Togo

**EXAMPLE 7B****GADZO**

Freeman Donkor/Abraham Adzenyah

Ewe

Oprenten (MASTER)

Ganugbagba R L

Axatse H L

Kagagu

Donno H L

Kidi 1 m o

Kidi 2 m o

**EXAMPLE 8****GADZO**

From Freeman Kwadzo Donkor

Ganugbagba/Axatse—HH with stick  
Donno—BD

PH—HH

SL

BD

**EXAMPLE 9A****GAHU**

Atsimeny (MASTER)

Gankogui

Axatse

Kagagu

Kidi

Sogo

—Ewe people of Ghana

**EXAMPLE 9B****GAHU**

Freeman Donkor/Abraham Adzenyah

Ewe

Atsimeny (MASTER)

Gankogui

Axatse

Kagagu

Kidi

Sogo

**EXAMPLE 10A****GAHU**

From Abraham Kobena Adzenyah

Axatse/Gankogui-accented SD/HH strokes

**EXAMPLE 10B****GAHU**

From Martin Kwaku Obeng

Kaganu—SD

Kidi—MT

Sogo—FT



Left Hand—Snare  
Right Hand—Toms

**EXAMPLE 11A****SIKYI**

Oprenten **(MASTER)**

Frikyiwa

Donno H L

Agyegyewa

High Tamalin H O

Medium Tamalin m O

Low Tamalin m O

Apentemma m O

Dialogue Response:

Apentemma m O

—Ashanti people of Ghana

**EXAMPLE 11B**

Abraham Adzenyah/Freeman Donkor

**SIKYI**

Ashanti

Oprenten (MASTER)

Frikyiwa

Donno

Agyegyewa

High Tamalin

Medium Tamalin

Low Tamalin

Apentemma

Dialogue Response

Apentemma

**EXAMPLE 12A**Highlife drumset style from Alex Konadu. Okafu Didi—"Tiwaa"**SIKYI**

Frikyiwa—SD  
High Tamalin—Claves

Claves

SD

HH

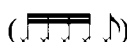
BD

**EXAMPLE 12B**

From Martin Kwaku Obeng

**SIKYI**

Low Tamalin—BD  
Frikyiwa—HH with stick  
High Tamalin—SD

()

Rt—HH

SD

BD



# EXAMPLE 13A

# ADOWA

(MASTER)

Atumpan (MASTER)

Dawuro 1 high

Dawuro 2 low

Ntorwa

Donno 1

Donno 2

Apentemma

Petia

Petia variations

Petia in fast tempo

—Ashanti people of Ghana

# EXAMPLE 13B

F. Donkor/A. Adzenyah

# ADOWA

Ashanti

(MASTER)

Atumpan (MASTER)

Dawuro 1 high

Dawuro 2 low

Ntorwa

Donno 1

Donno 2

Apentemma

Petia

Petia variations

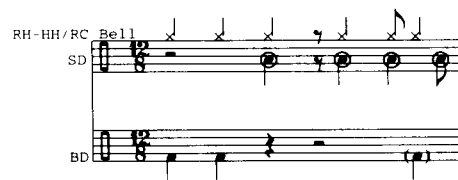
Petia in fast tempo

**EXAMPLE 14****ADOWA**

From Solomon Assan Accra, Ghana

Dawuro 1—HH with stick/cymbal bell

Donno 2—BD/SD

**EXAMPLE 15A****KPANLOGO**

Apentemma (MASTER)

Ngongo 1 (Gankogui)

from Adzenyah { 2 3 }

Dodonpa (Finkyiwa)

Axatse

Apentemma

Apentemma

Tamalin

Handclaps

—GA people of Ghana

**EXAMPLE 15B****KPANLOGO**

Sarah Thompson/Aziz Botchway/Freeman Donkor/Abraham Adzenyah

GA

Apentemma (MASTER)

Ngongo 1 (Gankogui)

from Adzenyah { 2 3 }

Dodonpa (Finkyiwa)

Axatse

Apentemma

Apentemma

Tamalin

Handclaps

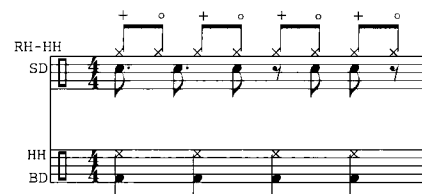
**EXAMPLE 16****KPANLOGO**

Hot Highlife, from Solomon Assan Accra, Ghana

Ngongo (Gankogui)—SD

Axatse—HH

Tamalin—BD



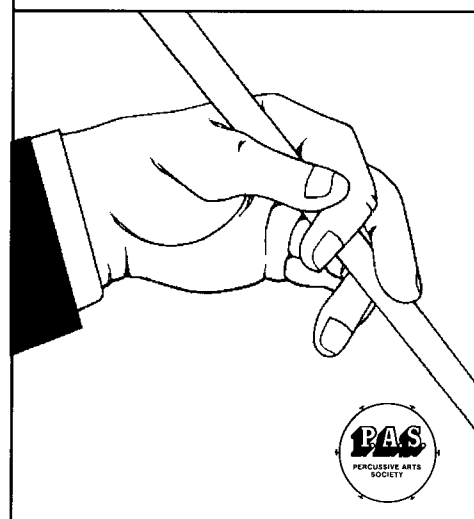
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Developed by Garwood Whaley and the PAS Education Committee, this book has been very well received and is now a required text in many college percussion techniques classes.

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*Steve Smith. Vinnie Colaiuta.*

*Gregg Bissonette. Dave*

*Weckl. Dennis Chambers. These*

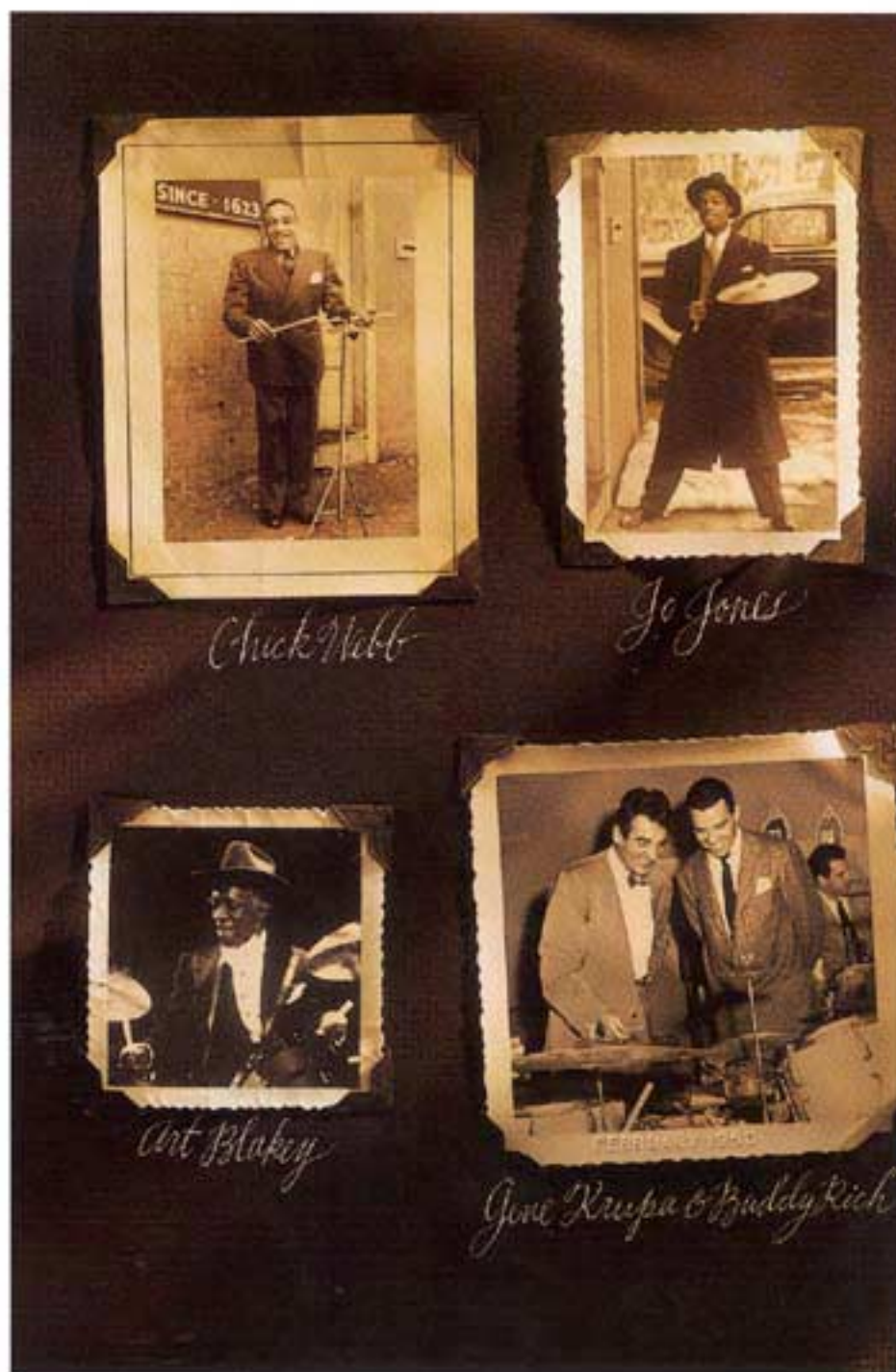
*are drummers whose creativity,*

*innovation and talent formulated the very essence of*

*what drumming is. And what we at*



TODAY'S LEGENDS GATHER AT THE BUDDY RICH MEMORIAL SHOW.



*Zildjian find particularly gratifying is, that as varied as*

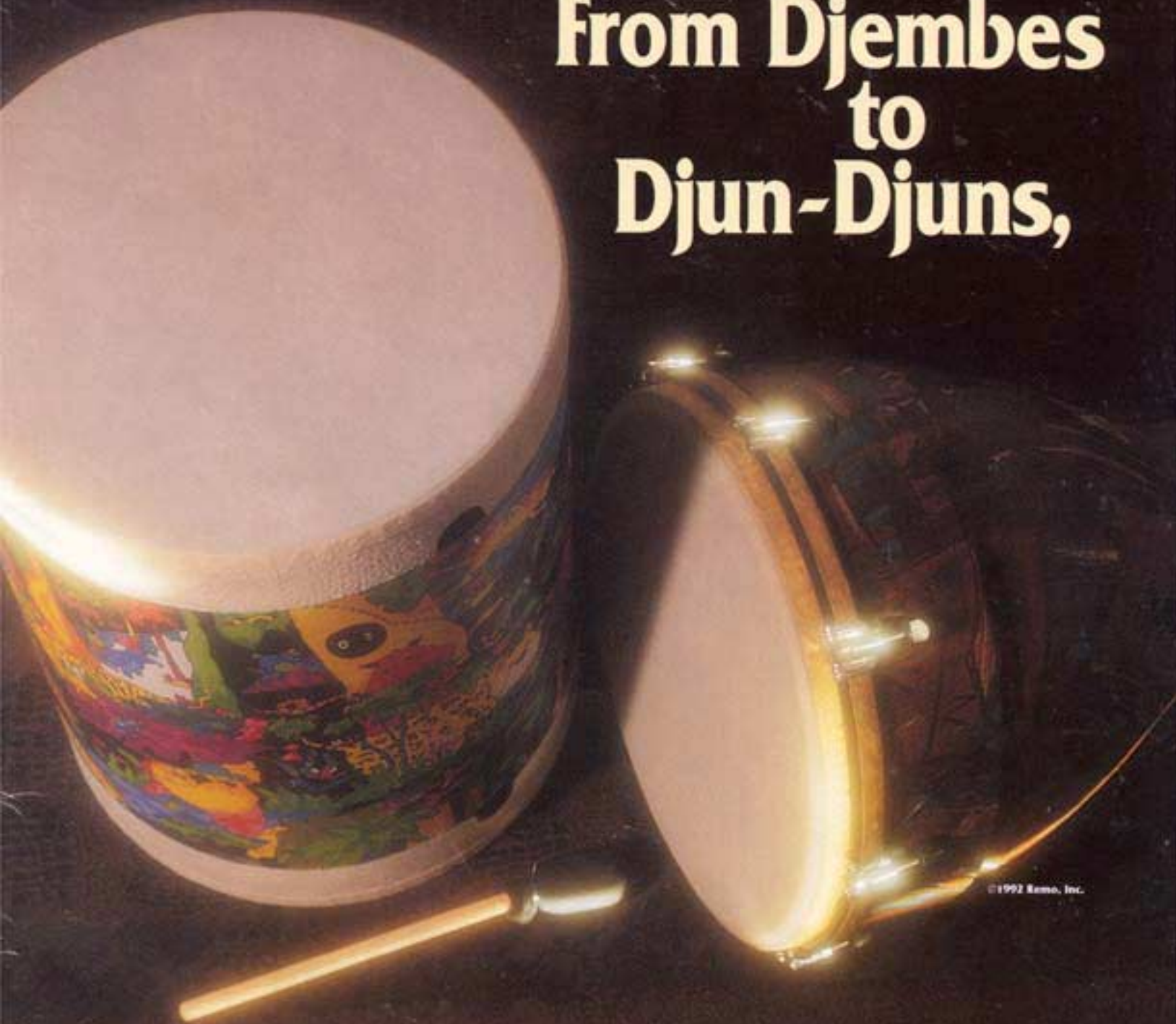
*all their styles are, all these drummers*

*play or played A Zildjians. Why A's? To begin with, the*

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The heartbeat of life is the beating of a drum. It's that rhythmic pulse that reminds us of who we are and where we came from. Which is why Remo has a lasting commitment to achieving the most authentic drum sounds of the world with every instrument

we make. No matter how ancient or far away.

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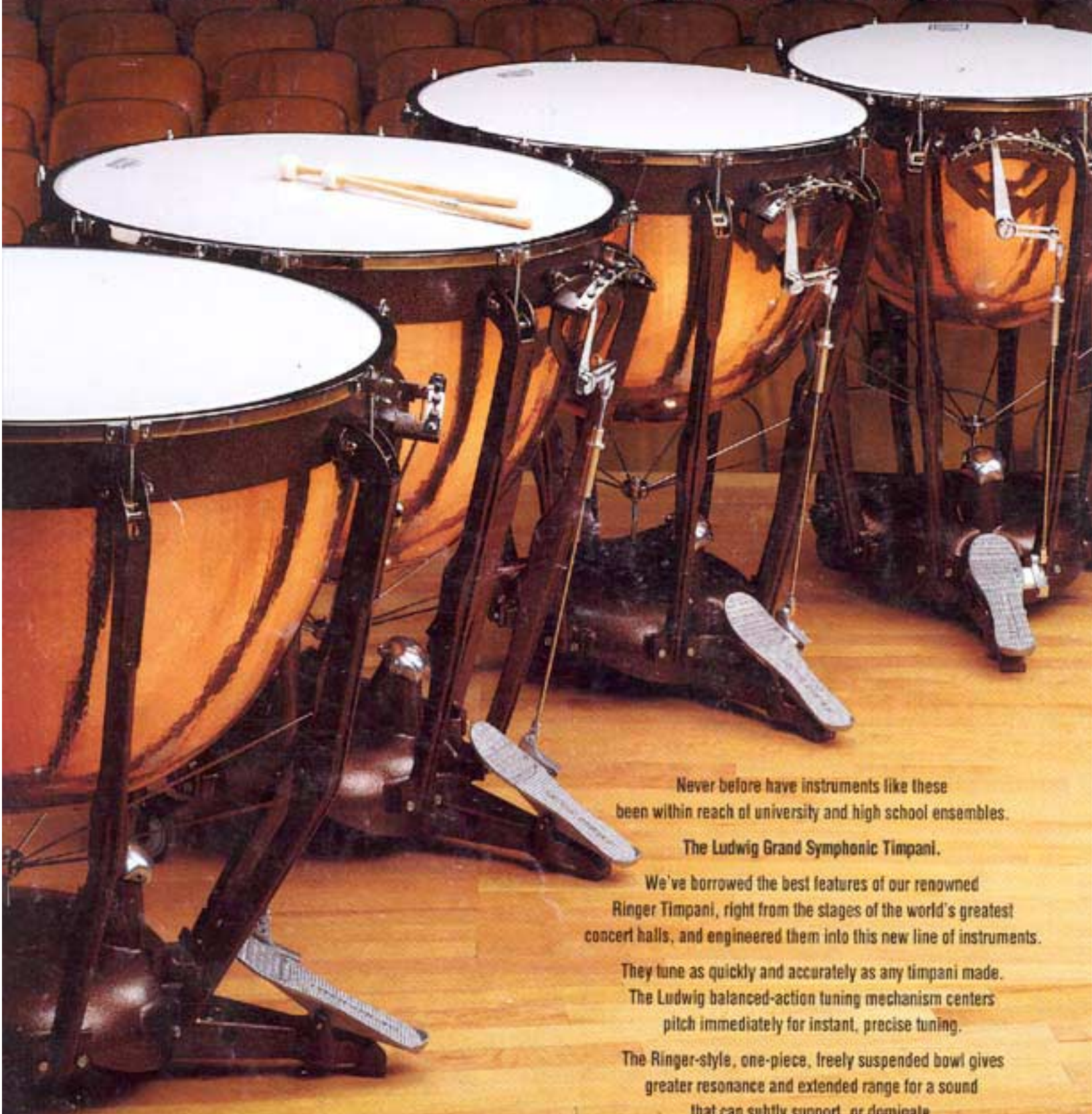
drum masters like Glen Velez and John Bergamo, Remo keeps bringing you the rhythms of life.

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**REMO** USA



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