

Gahu (pronounced gah-HOO) is a recreational dance of the Ewe people residing in the south-eastern region of Ghana and southern Togo and Benin. Its name meaning ‘money drum,’ Gahu is a descendent of Kokosawa, a style from the Yorubans of Nigeria. I had an opportunity to study this and several other Ewe pieces during a 2003 stay in Kopeyia, Ghana. There I worked with members of Sankofa Root 2, under the direction of Emmanuel and Rubben Agbeli, sons of the late master drummer and teacher Godwin Agbeli.

This is traditional music, having been passed down through many generations only in an oral manner. Village youth absorb the rhythms, dances and vocals of these songs at an early age, hearing them throughout their lives at parties, funerals and other celebrations. I have chosen to notate the rhythms for each instrument in two ways: a ‘standard’ method, using a single-line staff containing stemmed and barred rhythmic notation; and a ‘boxed’ system of notation, utilizing a grid inside which bullets (•) and letters correspond to specific strokes or techniques to be played. Be aware that while I am, for teaching purposes, writing the rhythms in ‘common (4/4) time’ and counting four beats per measure, rarely (if ever) do Ewe musicians think of their music in these limiting terms. Rather than basing patterns within the framework of any particular ‘time signature,’ a repeated bell part is most often the time reference point- on top of which the drummers, dancers and singers can build their parts. This article will focus on introducing all of the ‘supporting instruments’ typically played in a Gahu performance. Unfortunately, space does not allow delving into the roles and rhythms of the *boba* master drum here- these will be addressed in Part Two of this series.

Gakogui

As is commonly the case in Ewe performances, several drums of different sizes and pitches are accompanied by bell and rattle. Arguably the most important instrument is the *gakogui*, or iron double bell. The *gakogui* is comprised of two connected bells, one higher and one lower pitch, both sharing one long handle and played with a stick. During Gahu, the *gakogui* plays a continuous, ostinato pattern made up of three notes, phrased as two long tones followed by one short tone. My experience was that the lower bell would often be played on the first note of a song; subsequent notes would be played on the higher bell, with a low tone occasionally substituted on the first note of the three-note phrase. Our boxed notation will show a bullet (•) when the bell is to be played and a dash (-) when the bell player is to rest. Our standard notation will show the low bell below the staff line, while the high bell will appear above the line.

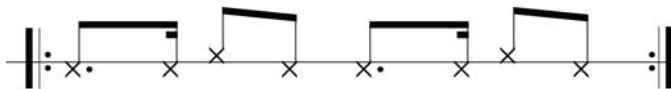
•	-	-	•	-	-	•	-	•	-	-	•	-	-	•	-
1	E	&	A	2	E	&	A	3	E	&	A	4	E	&	A



Axatse

Helping the gakogui to lay down the foundation is the *axatse*, or rattle. The axatse is a gourd onto which many small seeds, beads or seashells are tied. The performer holds the narrow, long end of the rattle in one hand and plays the larger, bead covered, end against his/her leg and free hand. The first stroke is called *pa* and is played by hitting downward, onto the player's thigh. *Ti*, the second stroke, is played by moving the rattle upward, hitting the open palm of the player's free hand. The rhythm of the *pa* strokes exactly matches the rhythm of the gakogui bell. A single *ti* stroke is inserted immediately after the second *pa*. I have often seen axatse performers have a lot of fun with this repetitive phrase by improvising the placement of these strokes on different parts of their bodies. It is not uncommon to see the rattle bouncing off of players' fists, feet and chests! In our boxed notation, *pa* will be written as simply the letter P and *ti* will be the letter T. Our standard notation will show *pa* below the line, because the rattle is moving downward. The *ti* stroke will be above the line, as the rattle is moving upward.

P	-	-	P	T	-	P	-	P	-	-	P	T	-	P	-
1	E	&	A	2	E	&	A	3	E	&	A	4	E	&	A



Ewe drums can be found in solid-shell form- each drum carved from one solid tree trunk- or in stave-construction- several curved slats of wood held together by metal bands wrapped around the instrument, similar to a cooper's barrel. Played with two sticks (or occasionally one stick and one bare hand), the heads of the drums are most commonly made of antelope skin.

Kagan

The highest-pitched of the drums used in Gahu is the *kagan*, an open-bottom drum that is held between the legs, either fully off the ground or tipped away from the performer. Either method gets the bottom of the drum up off the ground, allowing air to escape from the inside and allowing the instrument to project its full tone. Played with two thin sticks, the kagan contributes another ostinato rhythm, consisting of two notes that fall opposite the primary pulse (or beat) of the groove. Resting 'on the beat,' its rhythm essentially speaks it's own name: "(rest) ka-gan, (rest) ka-gan"

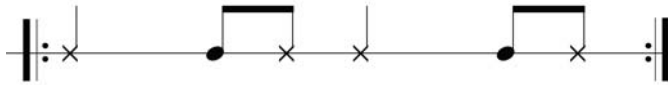
-	-	•	•	-	-	•	•	-	-	•	•	-	-	•	•
1	E	&	A	2	E	&	A	3	E	&	A	4	E	&	A



•	•	-	M	M	-	•	-	•	•	-	M	M	-	•	-
1	E	&	A	2	E	&	A	3	E	&	A	4	E	&	A



M	-	-	-	•	-	M	-	M	-	-	-	•	-	M	-
1	E	&	A	2	E	&	A	3	E	&	A	4	E	&	A



Together, the gakogui, axatse, kagan, kidi and sogo supporting parts form a strong rhythmic and melodic foundation for the master drum, the dancers and the singers. Most important to remember is that this music is functional. Gahu is recreational music-created, and passed down through the years, for a purpose. That purpose is to have fun with others, celebrating life and enjoying all that we have been given. And that is the single most important thing for you to do- have fun with it! Next time we will explore the boba master drum rhythms . . .

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