

HAND IN HAND INTO THE UNKNOWN:

The Potential of Experimental Intercultural Collaboration in Music in Africa

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DECLARATION

I declare that this thesis is my own unaided work. It is submitted in partial fulfilment of the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in Music Composition at the University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg. It has not been submitted before for any other degree or examination in any other university, and no section has been previously presented or published.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Lukas Ligeti', with a stylized, cursive script.

LUKAS LIGETI

9 December 2019

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I wish to thank my wife, Ilke Alexander, and my mother, Dr. Vera Ligeti, for their moral and intellectual support. I thank all of the musicians mentioned in this thesis – my collaborators across political, geographical, and cultural boundaries; without them, this work would not have been possible. And I thank Prof. Jeanne Zaidel-Rudolph, my supervisor, for her patience, advice, and support. I also thank Nikki Richard for her help with formatting, as well as Prof. Grant Olwage and Prof. Brett Pyper for their help in navigating the bureaucratic obstacles that occasionally presented themselves.

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INTRODUCTION

In this thesis, I describe and analyze the significance of African music traditions for my work as a composer and improvising musician, focusing on my collaborative work in West Africa. I commenced my work in Africa at a workshop in 1994 and initially had no plan to develop an ongoing relationship with musicians on the continent. But, as I will recount, an ensemble literally founded itself and I have continued working with African musicians ever since in a variety of projects and contexts. The accumulation of my experiences as an experimental musician conducting intercultural work has led to an approach I refer to as ‘experimental intercultural collaboration’. While providing an exact definition or methodology of this approach is not a straightforward task because many aspects and factors can only be considered on a case-by-case basis in creative endeavors, I will attempt to convey some notion of why and how I have developed this approach and some of the artistic results it can lead to.

In Chapter 1, I provide background information on my personal and professional development and the role African music has played therein. I describe some of my earliest reactions to African music, predating my practical involvement with African musicians, in which some of my creative practices and inquiries already began to crystallize. In Chapter 2, I provide theoretical background and context for this research and attempt to arrive at a definition of my approach by reflecting on the meanings of the three component words of its name.

Chapters 3 and 4 comprise the heart of this research report. Here I tell the stories of my two key intercultural projects, Beta Foly (based in Côte d’Ivoire) and Burkina Electric (based in Burkina Faso), and provide in-depth analyses of several pieces by each group. I describe the collaborative nature of our work, recount some of our joint experiments with various cultural concepts and performance practices and retrace the musical and social processes that led to the multifaceted and unconventional music of these two groups.

In the much briefer Chapter 5, I describe my scored composition based on African concepts, using two recent, very different compositions as case studies on how my contact with African musicians has influenced the way I compose.

Chapter 6 presents press reactions to Beta Foly and Burkina Electric in a reflection on what kind of impact this work has had on the participants in this creative process (amongst which I include myself), but also on the 'outside world'. Interviews I made with my collaborators reveal interesting background information from the viewpoints of these musicians.

In Chapter 7, I return to some of the broader theoretical considerations introduced in Chapter 2, this time to arrive at and describe personal positions based on which I engage in intercultural work; many of these positions are, in fact, a result of my intercultural experiences.

The Appendix contains links to videos of concerts that will be helpful to refer to while reading this thesis and the portfolio of scores.

Overall, my objective in this research is not to develop a theory or generalizable approach for intercultural collaboration. Perhaps it is even the exact opposite, because by arguing (as I will) that a person's individual mind is ultimately of greater significance than their cultural identity, I also imply that there is no one-size-fits-all in artistic collaboration. Instead, my objective is to give insights into my thought processes when creating intercultural work, both for my own benefit and for that of others who might perhaps be interested in undertaking such experiments in the future.

Finally, I note the dearth of musicological and sociological literature on intercultural work in music, particularly such intercultural work that focuses on artistic originality rather than political agendas, relief work, and other objectives that can be absolutely laudable, but where the music is subservient to that agenda. I hope that my report, written from the perspective of a musician engaging in experimental exchanges, and therefore from the inside out as opposed to the

musicologist's view from the outside in, will provide valuable insights into how intercultural musical creativity can develop and what this might mean for music and society.

On a technical note, I have *italicized* not only titles of books or musical works but also words that are not commonly used in the English language. However, once a word has been mentioned in *italics* several times, I consider it a part of the established vocabulary of this thesis and revert to normal font in the interest of more fluid reading.

CHAPTER 1

Personal Background and Early Interactions with African Music

Since this research is based in no small part on knowledge gained through my own work as a musician and intercultural collaborator, some information about my personal and musical background will provide useful context.

1.1: Personal Background

Given my personal history, I come to experimental intercultural work rather naturally. I come from a Hungarian-Jewish family from both parents' sides; as 'assimilated Jews', my ancestors adopted many of the cultural values of the majority religion and/or ethnicity amongst which they lived, but not without a feeling of difference, sadly reinforced by the anti-Semitism that culminated in the Holocaust. After having survived the horrors of Nazism and World War II, my parents were forced to endure a bleak, perilous life under Stalinism. They escaped to Austria in 1956 and settled in Vienna, where I was born – geographically close to Hungary, but very distinct from it in language and many facets of culture. At home, I grew up like an immigrant whose parents were doing their best to facilitate my integration into my supposed home country. But just as I was about to begin school, my father received an invitation to teach in California; I therefore went to a public elementary school in the U.S., and when we returned to Europe, I opted to stay in the American educational system and attended American international schools until completing high school. My environment at school was free-spirited and cosmopolitan; my classmates came from all over the world (Africa, however, was somewhat under-represented) and there was no strong pressure to adapt to any prevailing culture. Given my home and school environments, it is not surprising that I am more of a 'rootless cosmopolitan' than a tribesperson; I have no feeling of belonging to a strictly defined place or culture and feel rather more like a perpetual expatriate from a non-existent country.

Upon graduating, I decided to pursue music, having had very little prior training in that field in spite of, or perhaps because of (I myself am not exactly sure), my father's¹ work and success as a composer. While I heard much music during my childhood, almost all of it from the Western classical canon, I was not an avid music listener in my early teens. When I started listening again at the age of 17, I listened unsystematically to anything I could find. At 18, I began playing percussion; it was an arbitrary decision and not based on any affinity for the instrument. I could barely read music at the time, and it would be inaccurate to say that I was rooted in the Western concert music culture. I was, however, rooted to some degree in the culture of new, adventurous music: while I did not attend very many concerts during my childhood and adolescence, most of the ones I did go to were of my father's music and therefore at the cutting edge of the adventurous and unconventional. The sounds that elicited feelings of confusion and alienation in the vast majority even of dedicated music listeners seemed entirely normal to me. I began writing down compositions when I was 20 years old and commenced composition studies shortly thereafter.

My interest in African music was triggered by several unrelated but approximately simultaneous events during the early years of my composition studies, which took place at the University of Music and Performing Arts in Vienna. The most influential of these was a lecture (around spring of 1987) by the ethnomusicologist Gerhard Kubik at the Department of Musicology of the University of Vienna (a different institution to the above) about the traditional court music of the Kingdom of Buganda, in Uganda. This lecture changed my way of thinking about, and listening to, music, and the unique and complex composition techniques of Baganda court music became a primary influence on my own composing. Having started to learn systematically about music only after finishing high school, I was exposed to this influence at such an early stage of my development as a composer that my grounding in Western music theory and practice was not yet established. From that point on, my investigations of African and Western music proceeded simultaneously. It is therefore fair to say that, while I grew up in a European and American

¹ György Ligeti

cultural environment, my identity as a practicing artist was shaped by African ideas and influences along with Western ones more or less from the beginning.

Indeed, one could perhaps argue that, when I later began my intercultural collaborations in Africa, I was insufficiently rooted in Western music versus African to be an adequate representative of the European side of the exchange. Yet I would contend that by 'osmosis', through being consistently surrounded by Western culture as I grew up, I had been sufficiently exposed to the Occidental mindset so as to consider myself, lacking any more precise cultural affiliations, a Westerner. Even if this may have been disputable on a strictly musical level, it seemed quite clear on a general cultural one.

1.2: Initial Creative Responses

The more I learned about African music, the more I came to recognize that some of its traditions offered a huge range of interesting perspectives and approaches in their treatment of meter, rhythm, sound, and psychoacoustic phenomena, as well as in their integration of various musical parameters and artistic disciplines. I was inspired to create innovative and personal responses to this wealth of concepts. I was, obviously, far from the first composer to create music in the Western canon yet fundamentally based on theoretical approaches of African traditions, but neither is it a widespread practice.

It was clear to me that I was as uninterested in imitating or appropriating this music as I was in emulating Western music from earlier periods (I am referring here to my nascent artistic activity; I have always been a proponent of emulating historical styles to enhance my craft). The relevant question therefore became: how might I find my own, personal responses to this extremely inspiring music, and how can I derive my own, original concepts regarding perception and performance from the ones the Ugandan musicians and composers employ in their music?

Among the earliest tangible results of this quest was a choreographic, polymetric drum-set playing technique used primarily in improvised contexts. It takes from the court music of Buganda the idea of two interlocked melodies being performed at a very high rate of speed. Kubik's analyses (for example Kubik: 1983, but also in numerous other books and articles cited in the bibliography) concentrate on this music primarily as played on the *amadinda* xylophone, where these melodies (known as *okunaga* and *okwawula* and played in parallel octaves at speeds of more than MM=260-300 per melody [Kubik 1983:146], resulting in an aggregate pulse of over MM=520-600) are executed by two players sitting across from each other at the same xylophone (and playing the same bars) and interlocking their parts. A transcription of such a composition is shown in Figure 1.

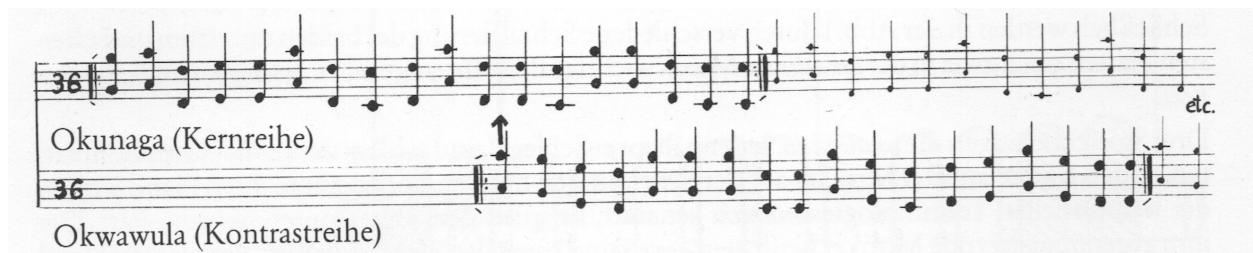


Figure 1. A transcription of the *okunaga* and *okwawula* parts of the *amadinda* composition *Ssematimba ne Kikwabanga* (Kubik 1983:146)

However, Kubik also states that the melodies are played by the two hands of one player when the music is performed on the *ennanga* harp. Quoting a text by Sempebwa from a previous article of his own, he writes, "The melody... is then played by the harpist on the bow harp with the four fingers. This can be broken up into two parts and each part is allocated to one of the (two) players of the *madinda*' (Kubik 1964)" (Kubik 1983:153). The court music repertoire was probably originally played on the *ennanga* before being 're-arranged' for xylophones. In Kubik's words:

Nach der mündlichen Überlieferung und der übereinstimmenden Auffassung verschiedener Musiker und Autoren in Buganda (Kyagambiddwa, Muyinda, Sempebwa, etc.) wurde die

Instrumentalmusik für *amadinda* ursprünglich auf der Harfe komponiert [...] Erst später wurden die Kompositionen auf die *amadinda* übertragen.² (ibid)

My drum-set technique takes up the ennanga paradigm in this regard: I move across the drum-set with each hand, striking components of the drum-set as I move, interlocking the two hands. Notated conventionally, this can appear as in Figure 2 (Fig. 2a provides a legend for a conventional drum-set staff³ and Fig. 2b is an example of a polymetric pattern as played using my technique). With each hand playing at a steady pulse here notated as eighth-notes, the resultant pulse is a steady stream of 16th-notes, with the left hand playing constantly on the offbeat just as the ‘second’ musician, i.e. the one whose melody interlocks between the notes of the first, would appear to do on the *amadinda*.

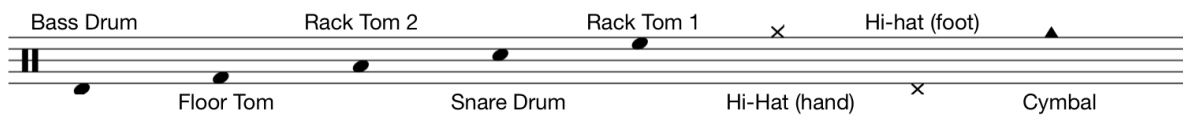


Figure 2a. Legend for conventional drum-set notation



Figure 2b. A polymetric drum-set pattern using my proprietary technique

But, as Kubik explains in his analyses of Baganda music, it would be pointless to conceive of these ‘offbeat’ notes as syncopes. Since it would be impossible for the player of the second melody to syncopate at that fast a tempo, the player uses a different concept, namely a conviction that they are playing on the beat while the other player is playing offbeats:

² “According to the oral transmission and the unanimous opinion of various musicians and authors in Buganda (Kyagambiddwa, Muyinda, Sempebwa, etc.), the instrumental music for *amadinda* was originally composed on the harp [...] Only later were the compositions carried over to the *amadinda*.” [My translation]

³ There exists no general standard for notating drum-set music; the notation used here is an example of one possible approach that is within the range of what could be considered conventional.

Scheinbar ist seine Kontrastreihe eine Kette von Synkopen. In Wirklichkeit löst er sich in dem winzigen Moment seines Einsatzes vom Puls des *omunazi* und empfindet nunmehr seine eigene Reihe als Puls, die seines Partners als dazwischenfallend.

Die zwei Musiker denken ihr Musikstück aus einer relativen Schau heraus. Für jeden von ihnen repräsentieren die Töne des eigenen Parts den Puls oder *Beat* und die des gegenüberstehenden Partners sind *Off beat*.⁴ (ibid: 146)

It is through this 'relative' notion of the beat (among other aspects) that this music is so different from Western music in both its musician-to-musician interplay and its sonic result. Listening to both players perform their interlocked melodies on the same bars of the same instrument, it quickly becomes impossible to distinguish who is playing what note. The listener's brain finds new ways to lend structure to what is heard, reprocessing the music's aural image not by player but by frequency band. As the performers repeat their melodies (the two interlocked melodies can be of the same length or can differ in a way similar to how pattern lengths often differ in African music, say 8 and 12), repetitive patterns emerge in different frequency bands, one with a high ambitus, another with a low one, and perhaps even one in between. Kubik refers to these heard melodies as 'inherent patterns' as they are not played as such by any musician but are inherent to the deep structure of the music. Analogously, I do not think of either of my hands as playing 'on' or 'off' the beat. The listener can feel, understand, or reprocess the aural result of my drumming in any way imaginable, assigning the beat to my right hand or my left, or to, say, every third note played, in which case the beat would be played alternately by each hand.

Until this point, the concept of my drumming technique is very closely tied to the music of Buganda, but in other aspects, it diverges from this inspiration. The component instruments of the drum-set (at least in its usual configuration) are of indefinite pitch, so that a 'melody' played

⁴ "It would appear that his contrasting melody is a chain of syncopes. In reality he separates himself from the pulse of the *omunazi* [musician playing the first melody] during the tiny moment of his entrance and now conceives of his own melody as the pulse, and as that of his partner as falling in between his pulses.

The two musicians conceive of their piece from a relative position. For each one of them, the notes of their own part represent the pulse or *beat*, and those of the partner sitting across the instrument are *off beat*." [My translation]

around the drum-set is inevitably not a pitch melody but a *klangfarbenmelodie*⁵. That leads to cognitive/psychoacoustic effects different from those in Baganda music. Also, as I move my limbs around the drum-set, some components are more easily reached with one hand and some with the other. While *amadinda* musicians always play in parallel octaves and play the same bars as explained above, my two 'players', i.e. my hands, share some components situated towards the center of the drum-set, but also have several components to themselves.

Even more crucially, the motion patterns I describe with my hands are based in no small part on the affordances of the instrument and what 'routes' my limbs can practically travel. That leads to hand patterns that are usually shorter than Baganda melodies, but with more complex length relationships. For example, I might play a *klangfarbenmelodie* of four notes with one hand and one of five with the other, which does not result in a longer cycle than, say, 12:8 in *amadinda* music, but creates a more complex mathematical relationship (5:4 as opposed to 3:2). This circumstance is further intensified through the use of my feet, available to me on the drum-set but not used in Baganda music. Even playing just the conventional one pedal per foot (bass drum with the right foot and hi-hat with the left), I can take two different approaches. I can either integrate my feet into the hand patterns or play some other rhythm with my feet. The former approach is relatively difficult to execute as playing these patterns requires a fluid motion of the arms; when a pedal note replaces one played with the hand, the upper-body motion has to come to a rest. I have attempted to remedy this situation through the invention of what I call the 'non-sounding percussion instrument' (Figure 3): a thick layer of foam glued onto, for example, a plastic temple-block. By placing these instruments in strategic positions within my drum-set, I can incorporate rests into my hand-patterns without interrupting my flow of motion; such a rest can also occur simultaneously with a note played with a foot. However, I have more commonly used the second approach, playing, for example, my right foot every x-th pulse unit and my left foot every y-th pulse unit.

⁵ Timbral melody.



Figure 3. Non-sounding percussion instrument

As an example, let us revisit the pattern shown in Example 1. Here I play a three-note repetitive pattern with my right hand: I begin on the ride cymbal, proceed to the right rack tom, then to the floor tom, and back to the ride cymbal as the point of origin. With the left hand, I play a four-note pattern starting with the left rack tom and continuing to the snare drum, hi-hat, the snare drum again, and thereafter back to the left tom as the point of origin. This 3:4 pattern cycles back to its beginning every 12th beat, but since the hands interlock, it is more accurate to say that it repeats after every 24th fundamental pulse unit. Now I can add my feet, playing, say, my bass drum on every 5th pulse (coinciding every other time with the left hand and every other time with the right) and my hi-hat on every 7th (again coinciding with whichever hand happens to play at the time). The pattern length now increases rapidly: By adding the bass drum, it is now $24 \times 5 = 120$ pulses long, and adding the hi-hat, the length becomes $120 \times 7 = 840$ pulse units. This increase in complexity through the iteration of a simple idea is not directly suggestive of amadinda music, but reminds of properties of fractal geometry, which Ron Eglash (1999) described specifically in connection with African culture.

When playing in this fashion, I am not thinking of the actual melodies played, nor am I thinking of any particular beat placement. Rather, I am thinking in terms of shapes of movement,

executing a choreography with my limbs (which is not as difficult technically as it might seem, though it depends on exactly what movements I am executing). Were a component of the drum-set switched out for a different one – say, for example, the snare drum were removed and a cymbal put in its place, or even a non-sounding instrument – it would not change the way I conceive of the pattern, as the limb movement remains the same despite the change in timbre.

By any standard, the notation depicted in Example 1 is very difficult to read. The use of a grand staff to separate the hands is helpful but does not remedy the issue that the visual representation of the pattern is not indicative of the above-described thought process. Staff notation implies that pitch, and as a close second, rhythm, are the determining aspects of what is to be played, but that is not the case here. Attempting to find a simpler notational solution, it seemed obvious that the notation had to be focused on motion and hand position rather than on pitch, rhythm or timbre. The solution, therefore, was tablature. Figure 4 shows the same pattern in tablature, with Rx and Ly notes written into an aerial view of my drum-set.

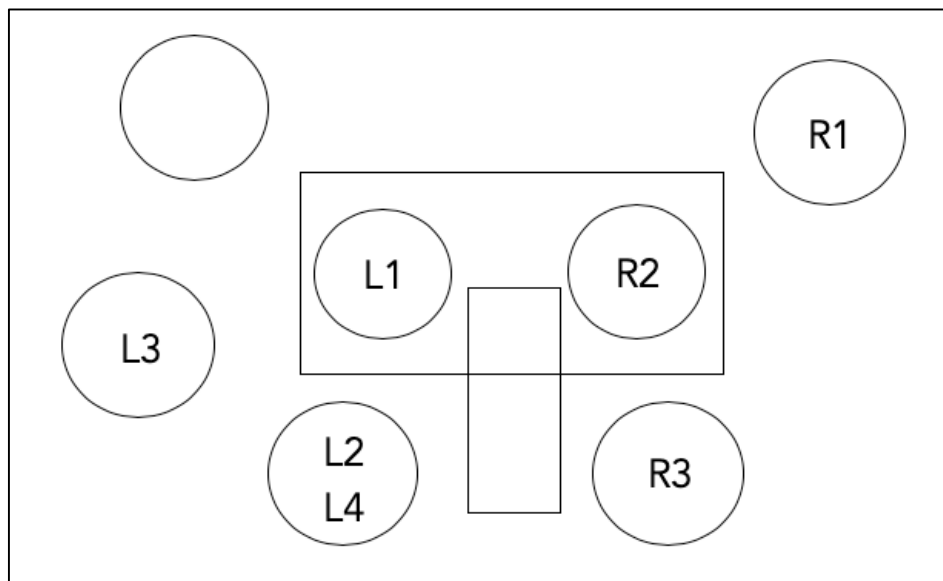


Figure 4. Drum-set tablature

This approach to drum-set playing is unique; it was not practiced by any other drummer before me to the very best of my knowledge and has not been taken up by anyone else. The drumming of Pete Zeldman (Zeldman 1991) bears a certain resemblance in outcome; it was unknown to me at the time I began playing in this way (around 1987/88) and is based on completely different conceptual considerations. As he states in the liner notes for his CD (ibid), Zeldman thinks of a common beat and its subdivisions, such as 7:9:11:13 – a complex approach but nonetheless within the realm of conventional Western thinking. In my case, while the impression of polyrhythmic structures is present (for example, in my above pattern, a 4:3 polyrhythm might seem to manifest between the left and the right rack toms), no polyrhythms are actually played: Since my hands share no common beat, and, for instance, these two tom-toms are never hit simultaneously, it is not actually a polyrhythmic playing style but a polymetric one through the superimposition of different pattern lengths. But even the impression of two different tempi (again, say, 4:3) is not entirely accurate as I am merely playing steady eighth-notes with each hand; the polytempo impression emerges not through the actual presence of multiple tempi but through the instrumentation of the timbral melodies. It can therefore be regarded as an ‘illusionary’ multi-tempo music. The piece *Village dans 8 pays* by Beta Foly, analyzed later in this thesis, contains an example of this playing style.

While my invention and initial development of this technique preceded my collaborative intercultural experiences by several years, it is already an example of my later approach insofar as it is centered on the development of independent creative ideas based on a conceptual inspiration from African music. The original impetus came from the court music of Buganda, but while conceptual parallels are evident, the result of my creative process is one that differs from the original inspiration in both the way the concept is implemented and the aural outcome.

Another strand of creative responses to my initial exposure to the music of Buganda was the composition of fully-scored ensemble works for various instrumentations in which I make use of interlocking patterns and the polymeters they can generate. The first example of this was *Pattern Transformation* for four players on two marimbas, written in early spring of 1988; it also became

my first composition to be performed internationally (premiered in 1990 in Vienna by the Amadinda⁶ Percussion Group from Budapest, it remains my most frequently performed piece with probably well over 500 performances to date by numerous percussion groups).

In *Pattern Transformation*, a constant and unchanging fast pulse (notated as eighth-notes) underlies the music; this pulse is common to all four players. The piece begins as a chromatic canon; the long canonic melody consists only of eighth-notes, thus using each pulse unit, but is divided into multiple phrases. Eventually, rests are interspersed between the phrases, and later, between the notes within the phrases, until each player plays only every other pulse; now two pairs of players are interlocking. Subsequently, the players' parts diverge, with each playing different, ever-changing multiples of the basic pulse; the impression is one of a constant *accelerando* and/or *ritardando*, or, to use a visual analogy, an image an accelerating bicycle wheel, its spokes first becoming blurred and then seemingly turning in retrograde. The constant variation in the density of played impulses (since the piece is for marimbas, only note attacks are controlled) creates an ever-changing landscape of tempo mutations while actually the players are always referencing a constant pulse. The most extreme interlocking occurs when all four players play every fourth pulse, each staggered from the other by an eighth-note. The piece ends with a brief reprise, with the chromatic canon from the beginning making a short return, bringing chromaticism back after a lengthy pentatonic section.

In 1992, I received my first composition commission and wrote *Groove Magic* for 11 musicians. I wanted to employ interlocking patterns once again, and to build upon the possibilities of polymeters and polytempo structures with which I was experimenting through my drum-set playing. However, while I was lucky with *Pattern Transformation* to find the Amadinda percussion Group, a rare example of a Western ensemble who had mastered this type of interlocking (they were preceded in this skill only by Nexus, the Canadian percussion ensemble), it would be

⁶ This Hungarian percussion group was aware of Baganda music and had named itself after the *amadinda*, one of the most important musical instruments in Buganda.

impossible for me to expect the same from the London Sinfonietta, who premiered *Groove Magic*. I therefore had the idea of having the musicians play to metronomes, relayed via headphones and centrally coordinated by a computer; each musician would have their own metronome track. This idea was rendered viable thanks to the program *Polyrhythm* by Frank Baldé of the computer music research center STEIM⁷, written originally to help the Den Haag Percussion Group rehearse rhythmically complex pieces by Iannis Xenakis. This software made it possible for me to compose individual metronome tracks for the musicians, whereby each track could have any tempo at any given time. Since I did not myself own a computer at the time, composing this work, where each instrument had to remain in coordination with the others despite at times vastly divergent tempi, required a considerable amount of keeping track of each part as it progressed in time. But the result is likely one of the most complex polymetric pieces of music ever composed, rivaling some of the work of Conlon Nancarrow, but absolutely playable by a group of live musicians. At times, all 11 musicians play at different tempi; at times, each musician plays based on a shared, extremely fast underlying pulse, but staggered by one pulse unit from the previous musician, resulting in a structure where 11 melodic lines are interlocking rather than just two or four. This is likely the fastest klangfarbenmelodie ever composed.

The headphone setup I developed for *Groove Magic* proved very reliable, and I continue to use it today (with some modifications due to the passing of time necessitating changes in equipment). I used the setup in Beta Foly from the first work phase on and have used it in many other contexts since. It consists of a computer (nowadays a MacBook Pro) running a sequencer program (originally Cubase, now Logic; I never used *Polyrhythm* in performance as it has numerous limitations that make it problematic in concert situations; today, the program is essentially obsolete); tracks in the sequencer each contain the information a musician is supposed to hear via headphones. This is routed to an audio interface; each track is assigned an individual output. From the outputs, the signals are routed to small headphone amplifiers and from there to the musicians' headphones. This setup has several significant advantages over other possible

⁷ Stichting Elektro-Instrumentale Muziek (Foundation for Electro-Instrumental Music) in Amsterdam.

solutions: The sounds to be relayed to the musicians' headphones could also be played from multitrack tape, but playing them on a computer makes the setup more portable and flexible. As opposed to playing from tape, an option I was asked about several times when I first used this type of setup in the 1990s, the speed of playback can be changed without altering pitch, and each musician can ask for individual changes in the sound of, for example, a click track, if they find the sound unpleasant. The tracks can easily be edited. By giving each musician a small headphone amplifier, players can individually control the volume of their headphone playback. In an article I wrote in 2000 for *Leonardo Music Journal*, I described how I intended for musicians to use metronomic information heard via headphones:

I employ open, Walkman-style headphones, because they allow musicians to hear sounds coming from 'outside', enabling them to maintain the listening habits commonly associated with musicianship. It seems to take most musicians about 5 or 6 hours to get so used to this setup that they 'forget' their 'isolation' and start treating the click as a 'friend' in the background, allowing them to concentrate on listening to their fellow musicians in a nearly normal fashion. I have used such setups on many occasions, in compositions and improvisations, and do not limit myself to 'click' sounds: spoken word samples can be used to imitate speech rhythm; samples in certain keys can be used to influence the harmonic direction of an improvisation, for example. (Ligeti 2000:45)

While none of the above-described music evoked the sound or rhythmic or melodic structure of Baganda music, instead exploring different worlds of timbre, harmony, rhythm, and form, the original conceptual impetus was still closely linked to the inspiration I received from amadinda music. But, for all my interest in African music, I did not, at the time, consider a collaboration with African musicians, probably because none were available to me and the prospect of traveling to Africa to seek collaboration seemed remote.

All that changed around 1993, when I was invited by the Goethe Institute to travel to Côte d'Ivoire to conduct a workshop with traditional musicians. I accepted the invitation and decided on a general objective for this work: I assumed that African musicians would not be readily able to play my compositions without a learning process that would go hugely beyond the scope of our two-week workshop, nor would a similar objective be attainable *vice versa*. I therefore felt that the workshop might be most successful if we attempted to come up with something entirely new,

yet grounded in the cross-fertilization of our various cultural backgrounds and knowledge-bases. In other words, I came to Africa not to imitate but to innovate. Furthermore, I did not want to take a clear lead, because I did not feel qualified to lead musicians with whom I shared no true common language, neither verbally nor musically. Conversely, I did not wish to be led by them, either: I was hoping for a collaboration as equal participants.

To my surprise and delight, my dangerously optimistic idea worked out fairly well and led not only to a continuation of that collaboration but to several other collaborative projects across the continent. And the longer I worked on such projects, the more it became clear to me that such collaborations, effected among artists of various cultural backgrounds working (more or less) as equals with the express purpose of creating conceptually innovative work, were not very common. What seemed like such an obvious and fruitful approach to me apparently had not been adopted by many other people, and the presenters in Europe or America, who had the budgetary resources to make such work known to the general public, could not quite figure out how to categorize it, and it remained a neglected area.

Gradually, as I worked on more of these types of projects with increasing involvement and passion, it also became increasingly evident to me that, while issues of interculturality had become fashionable (to say the least) among sociologists, political scientists, and cultural theorists during the 1990s and 2000s, very little if any research had been done into such collaborative experimental projects, particularly from the vantage point of a practicing artist who is also creatively involved in such pursuits. Indeed, this kind of work is still often overlooked by artists and researchers alike.

It is with this situation in mind that I set out to work on the research I am herewith presenting. It is of great importance to me that the purpose of this research is not exclusively musicological, ethnological, sociological, nor political. It comprises all of the above, and as this is a thesis for a creative PhD in composition, I feel ideally situated to examine this from the viewpoint of the creative musician.

CHAPTER 2

Theoretical Background

2.1: Arriving in Africa: Foundational Thoughts on Creative Cross-Pollination between Cultures

“Je trouve d’abord, je cherche ensuite.”⁸

(Attributed to Pablo Picasso)⁹

Every creative artist is exposed to a myriad of influences, and in one way or another, consciously or not, many of these influences find their way into his/her work. Musicians and composers are no exception, and even those who are strongly rooted in a regional cultural framework and make no effort to go beyond it will nevertheless incorporate some measure of influence from civilizations and cultures farther afield; pure, completely self-reliant cultures do not exist, and therefore, outside influences are already present in the fabric of the artist’s native cultural environment:

The movements of people around the world and the cultural contacts arising therefrom have always resulted in the mixing of musics. One can hardly find any ‘authentic’ music existing in the world today and even the so-called traditional types have in historical times been subjected to innovation through cultural contact. It can therefore be said that interculturalism in music is likely to be as old as music itself. At the same time, specific musical cultures and traditions of instrumentation, composition and performance indubitably exist.” (The Centre for Intercultural Musicology at Churchill College, Oxford: <<http://cimacc.wordpress.com/>>)

As the earth’s continents and the cultures embedded therein have increasingly come into contact with each other during the past few centuries (in some instances, in turbulent and tragic ways), so have artists in all parts of the world become more attentive to foreign societies and have, with increasing frequency and intensity, looked to these ‘others’ as influences, engaging with their

⁸ “I find first; I search thereafter.” [My translation]

⁹ This quote with attribution can be found in many places; one reference is on the internet at <<http://recherche-action.fr/intermedes/2012/12/15/je-ne-cherche-pas-je-trouve-picasso/>>

cultures in various forms of communication and exchange. In his book *Beyond Exoticism: Western Music and the World*, the musicologist Timothy D. Taylor gives examples of how this engagement developed in the Euro-American cultural arena. For example, discussing 18th-century references to and imitations of Turkish music by European composers, he observes:

Earlier western confrontations with peoples and musics from other cultures seldom resulted in anything but the grossest approximation of non-European music in western notation; western composers before the nineteenth century didn't yet possess concepts of authenticity, ethnography, even history that were constructed by late-eighteenth-century modernity, and so their transcriptions of the appropriated music look and sound rather like western European music of the time." (Taylor 2007:49)

Nevertheless, from the Age of Enlightenment on, and especially as Occidental explorers discovered ever-increasing sections of the earth and began studying their geographies and cultures, artists began consciously incorporating these newly-available influences into their works. Needless to say, attitudes were often governed by a patronizing looking-down-upon the newly discovered 'savages', regarding them as humans to be civilized and converted to Western religious and cultural ideals. Over the course of the next several hundred years, this engagement with foreign cultures gradually became increasingly deliberate and systematic. Again, in the words of Timothy Taylor: "The first nonwestern sounds to appear in western music were from the people geographically nearest to European metropolises" (ibid: 50).

And:

[...] it wasn't until the end of the nineteenth century and early twentieth that an important break with the past was made. Composers in Europe and the United States dramatically altered their relationship to Other musics, or even other musics. Canonical twentieth-century moderns and modernists – such as Béla Bartók, Claude Debussy, Igor Stravinsky – all took musical forms from outside their own cultures and manipulated them to such an extent that it usually requires a significant amount of exegesis to find the borrowed material. (ibid: 74)

Debussy's incorporation of Javanese gamelan music influences has been amply described, but did Debussy's music have any reciprocal influence on Javanese musicians and composers? I think we may take for granted that this was not the case - for various reasons, not least because while Debussy was able to hear gamelan music performed at the 1889 World's Fair in Paris, the gamelan musicians likely had no opportunity to listen to music by Debussy. Had the exposure

been reciprocal, would it have inspired in them a similarly significant revelation and source of new creativity? What if the gamelan musicians and Claude Debussy had been put together in the same room and asked to create a new musical work in collaboration? In 1889, this idea would probably have seemed somewhat remote, and quite likely no one thought of it. Nevertheless, it is an interesting thought-experiment to fantasize about the Javanese musicians and their impressions of France. Quite likely, many if not all of these musicians were visiting Europe for the first time, and they may well have been taken aback by what they saw. And it is conceivable that their impressions of a country so foreign and alien, and perhaps even some music they heard while there, may have, directly or indirectly, made some kind of a mark on their personal expression as musicians.

Indeed, Debussy and some other Western composers notwithstanding, the influence of Western on non-Western music was almost definitely stronger at that point in history than the other way around. The infusion of Western elements into non-Western cultures goes back to the days of the explorers but became much more substantial in the era of colonization. Likewise, the exchange of knowledge, influence, and political control between non-Western cultures must be taken into consideration. For example, what we know today as the traditional music of the Mandé *griots* (musician-storytellers/oral historians) incorporates important influences from Arabic music, an exchange whose origins date back at least as far as the 14th century, when the Moroccan scholar and traveler Ibn Battuta visited today's Mali; even earlier, the Malian *mansa* (emperor) Musa Keïta made a pilgrimage to Mecca, and the possibility that Mandé artistic expression had an effect on Arabic culture also cannot be ruled out.

As mentioned, most Westerners regarded the 'foreign' cultures as somehow inferior, and that certainly included these cultures' musics. Educators and missionaries who were sent to the colonies taught the colonized peoples to play and appreciate Western music, often attempting to force the 'savage tribes' to discontinue their traditional practices. The influence of Western thought is by now so deeply ingrained in many non-European musical forms that it is often difficult to distinguish exactly what elements are indigenous and what elements originate from

systematic or asystematic exposure to Western influences. In their jointly-written article, *Integrating musical arts cultures*, Robert Mawuena Kwami, Eric Ayisi Akrofi and Sean Adams state:

For example, in South Africa we find the coexistence of Western, indigenous African, Asian and 'coloured' musical arts cultures, as well as syncretized styles and forms. The syncretic categories include jazz in its various manifestations as well as Christian, Islamic and traditional black African religious musics. In many African countries one also has to contend with a kaleidoscopic and multifarious scenario that includes three dimensions: indigenous, colonial and religious. (Kwami, Akrofi, Adams 2003: 262)

And: "A concept of musical cultures as solitary islands may be something that does not truly represent the reality of life in a modern and complex world" (ibid).

In most aspects of coexistence of European cultures and the 'others', the exchange has indeed been somewhat one-sided. Jared Diamond devotes his book *Guns, Germs, and Steel* (Diamond 1999) to the question why the South was colonized by Europe rather than the other way round, and why Europe was (and remains) so much richer in economic terms. But in culture, and specifically in music, the picture today is not as clear. Yes, Euro-American influences have been adopted by wide swathes of the non-Western world on many levels of music – conceiving, creating, performing, and disseminating it as well as listening to it. But structures from non-Western music, especially from Africa, have become such ubiquitous and fundamental ingredients of the popular music of Europe and America during the past century or more that their influence and usage is by now largely taken for granted. African structures and thought-patterns entered the world of Western music mainly via those Africans who were forcibly imported to America as slaves; though their cultures were suppressed by their masters in the new world, certain conceptual remnants made their way into the styles of music that came to be known as blues, jazz, salsa, and from there, onwards. Gerhard Kubik traces this development (Kubik 1999), describing how certain musical elements from traditions of inland West Africa – areas from which relatively smaller numbers of slaves were taken to North America – filtered through historical developments to become fundamental elements of blues, jazz, and later, rock.

Not all confrontations between cultural worlds happened by force, and especially after the end of slavery in America and, roughly a century later, of colonization in Africa, much cross-fertilization occurred via the gradual assimilation of influences gained through attending concerts or, more often, by listening to recordings. This process was generally not academically or otherwise systematized, and the musical ‘others’ were rarely consulted. It would also be wrong to assert that only Western cultures had a condescending attitude towards non-Western ones. Indeed, colonialism aside, it is probably safe to say that many, if not most cultures around the world initially viewed cultural ‘others’ with alienation, suspicion, and even some degree of condescension and patronization. Discussing the 16th-century Spanish colonialist, bishop, and human rights pioneer Batolomé de las Casas, Tzvetan Todorov explains de las Casas’ position: “Jeder ist der Barbar des anderen, und um es zu werden, genügt es, eine Sprache zu sprechen, die dieser andere nicht kennt: In seinen Ohren ist sie nur ein Kollern.”¹⁰ (Todorov 1985¹¹:227). Referring to 1st-century-BC Greek geographer Strabo, he explains that the ancient Greeks referred to other peoples as ‘barbarians’, “weil sie nämlich die griechische Sprache nicht gut, sondern unbeholfen und fehlerhaft aussprachen; so gesehen gibt es keinen Menschen und kein Volk, die für irgendein anderes Volk nicht barbarisch wären”¹² (ibid). And thus, as Todorov describes de las Casas’ experience, “die Völker dieser Indischen Länder”¹³,¹⁴ (ibid, quoting de las Casas) regarded the Spanish as barbarians just as the Spanish regarded them as barbarians.

Indeed, among wide segments of the population everywhere in the world – particularly among people who do not engage with culture on a professional or at least somewhat dedicated level –

¹⁰ “Everyone is the other’s barbarian, and to become that, it suffices to speak a language that this other doesn’t know: In his ears, it is but a rumble.” [My translation]

¹¹ I am quoting a German translation of Todorov’s work originally written in French, while de las Casas’ writing is originally in Spanish.

¹² “because they did not pronounce the Greek language well, but clumsily and incorrectly; seen in this way, there is no person or people that would not be barbarian to a different people.” [My translation]

¹³ “Indische Länder” refers to the West Indies, not to India

¹⁴ “the peoples of these Indian lands” [My translation]

that attitude probably continues until today. If you choose a random sample of people in Europe and ask them about African music, most will probably know nothing about it and display no interest in changing that. Reciprocally, if you ask randomly selected people somewhere in Africa about European or American music, they will know a limited number of names from the pop music industry, but Western art music will prove to be largely unknown, and the idea of listening to it will provoke interest only among an extremely small minority. Michael Tenzer indicates that a similar situation exists in Bali: "I wager that today there are more toes on my feet than Balinese who know Robert Schumann's music" (Tenzer 2011:363).

Until fairly recently, it was probably equally safe to say that the general increase in awareness in all parts of the world of the existence of other regions and cultures, increased migration, and greater ease of travel during the course of the 20th century slowly and steadily contributed to erode the most overt feelings of cultural supremacy among a majority of people, or, at least, have made it clear to these people that such feelings are socially unacceptable (developments across the globe in the second decade of the new millennium, however, suggest the resurgence of a tendency towards cultural supremacism in many areas). And as condescension gave way to curiosity, people began studying and learning the music of other cultures, not because they were forced to do so or made to believe it would privilege or improve their chances in the afterlife, but simply because they wanted to. The American composer Scott Johnson observed, "Culture's talent for making hybrids suggests a variation on the single most common and useful image of evolution: that of a tree, with its trunk dividing into multiple branches as new forms of life arise" (Johnson 2000:32).

Ethnomusicologists began studying music traditions, both within their own cultural environments and foreign ones. African musical groups began touring Europe and America. Westerners became interested in learning to play African instruments, sometimes by going to Africa to study with local musicians but more often by attending music workshops offered by African musicians in Europe or America, especially since the late 1980s, when recordings of African music, both

traditional and popular, began appearing in stores.¹⁵ In Africa, starting already in the 1930s and increasing from then on, the Western influence led musicians such as Fela Sowande of Nigeria, Kwabena Nketia of Ghana, Halim El-Dabh of Egypt, and Akin Euba of Nigeria to attend universities in the U.K. and the U.S. and become composers as per the Western definition; they often returned to Africa where they developed stylistic fusions, composing works containing African-influenced musical structures to be performed on Western instruments (Euba coined the term 'African Pianism' for his piano music based on African structures [Onyeji 2008]).

In the late 1980s, 'world music' emerged as a marketing term; its origin is often explained as in the following text:

This was a time when the reggae boom had passed, when Paul Simon had popularised South African music with *Graceland*, and interest in European music was growing thanks to *Le Mystère des Voix Bulgares*. No one knew how all this music should be promoted. And so, on June 29, 1987, a group of music enthusiasts involved in the running of independent record labels met in a London pub, *The Empress of Russia*, to discuss how they might market music from around the world. The group - which included DJ Charlie Gillett, Ian Anderson (now editor of *fRoots* magazine), record producer Joe Boyd and Iain Scott - decided on a joint campaign to put 'world-music' boxes in record stores to promote their products. This would cost just £3,500, financed by 11 indie record labels. It was a simple decision - but the result has been remarkable. African bands found a new global market, as have Latin musicians (notably Cuba's Buena Vista Social Club) and artists from Asia and Europe (Denselow 2004).

Simon Frith sums this up as follows, succinctly adding that while this was about music from outside the international music business' core territory of the Western industrialized nations, it was nonetheless about *pop* music: "'World music' is an unusual pop genre in that it has a precise moment of origin" (Frith 2000:305).

Festivals for 'world music' were soon founded and an industry was created which has continued to grow to this day and has become something of a smaller, gentler pop music business, without

¹⁵ Of course, recordings were available much earlier, but it was in the 1980s that a critical mass of recordings, plus improved distribution, made them noticeable also to people who did not necessarily seek them out.

the trappings offered by the capitalistic showbiz of Western pop, but also, ultimately, without its reach.

In the meantime, musicians originating from different parts of the world began to pair up to collaborate on various projects. The initiative for these projects sometimes came from cultural organizations such as the network of French Cultural Institutes, which sent musicians from France to Africa for workshops and projects. Clearly, however, the aspects of goodwill ambassadorship and representation of French (or other analogous) cultures were probably at least as important to the instigators of these cultural policies as the creation of artistically valuable new music. It was also in 1985-86 that the American singer-songwriter Paul Simon journeyed to South Africa (in disregard of sanctions against the apartheid state) to collaborate with local musicians (predominantly the group Ladysmith Black Mambazo) in the creation of his album *Graceland* (see section 7.2), which became a groundbreaking template for many later collaborations by other artists.

Still in South Africa, Kevin Volans' string quartet *White Man Sleeps*, written also in 1985 for the American Kronos Quartet, was one of the first widely-marketed art-music compositions to use sonic imitations in addition to structural influences of African traditional music (the latter already employed by Steve Reich from circa 1970 on¹⁶) in a Western art music context. (Between Asia and Europe/America, exchanges were, if anything, more frequent and had started earlier than with Africa.)

But while such collaborations and exchanges of influence have become more and more frequent, the instances where representatives of different cultural traditions met with the express objective to create something conceptually new in a truly collaborative spirit and consultation have remained surprisingly rare. Scott Johnson formulates a reason why this might be so:

¹⁶ Reich and Volans were, however, referencing completely different African music traditions, from different parts of the continent – Reich from Ghana and Volans from South(ern) Africa.

So if we step back and think in general about the convergences of lineages, we can imagine a sort of sliding scale of the practicality of influences, based on the relative complexity of the two genres involved, and the relative ambitions of a given merger. A 50/50 cross-pollination from two complex fields, such as the jazz and classical traditions [...] is the most ambitious and risky of all [...] But compositions incorporating a more modest influence, we'll say 20/80, are [...] common [...]. (Johnson 2000:38)

My experiences in Côte d'Ivoire, where my Goethe Institute-commissioned workshop led to founding an ensemble named Beta Foly, convinced me that this kind of work, attempting to create new musical forms by fostering a profound intercultural discourse, can lead to interesting and perhaps even groundbreaking artistic results. At the same time, I also came to feel that such collaborations could promote a deeper understanding between people of different backgrounds than would be possible in less conceptually demanding projects: the difficulty of trying to create innovative work forces the participants to ask questions and discuss concepts rather than merely trusting intuition to locate a lowest-common-denominator platform for interaction. Furthermore, it has sometimes appeared to me as if experimentally-oriented collaborations might have the potential to encourage people to ask deeper questions about the human condition and life's challenges, whatever these may be for any given individual, and that these thoughts, in turn, may give rise to ideas not at all anticipated by the original artistic research. In other words, I would cautiously argue that such projects may trigger results not only in the artistic domain but also in other areas, making them potentially relevant to development-cooperation-related strategies and wider issues of policymaking beyond just the cultural.

Additionally, such collaborations can provide an ideal forum to ask questions about perception, listening, learning, comparative aesthetics, cultural identity, context, and appropriation. And if technology is involved, the discussion can be expanded to include topics such as the dissemination and availability of information via the internet, as well as the conceptualization of culture-specific and/or interculturally applicable software, instrument building, and much more.

Much of this is, at the present time, still relatively virgin territory. In the chapters following, I will analyze some of my own experiments, methods, and solutions, concentrating on musical creation as this is the foundation of my work and my central area of expression, but also examining wider

cultural and societal questions. 25 years on from my initial involvement in what I later came to call ‘experimental intercultural collaboration’, I feel as if I have just scratched the surface of what might be possible, yet it is also an opportune moment to take a look back and analyze what has been done so far.

2.2: Towards a Definition of Experimental Intercultural Collaboration

At the time of this writing (November 2019), a search on www.google.com for the exact phrase “experimental intercultural collaboration” yields only 18 unique results, all of which are connected to my work. It seems, therefore, that I have, for all practical intents and purposes, coined this particular phrase, and that it is not otherwise in use. Replacing the word ‘intercultural’ by ‘cross-cultural’ yields seven results; by ‘multicultural’, one; by ‘transcultural’, none. I find this quite remarkable, especially because the omission of one of the three words changes the situation entirely. “Intercultural collaboration” yields 86000 results; “experimental collaboration”, 42700. “Experimental intercultural” is obviously not a complete phrase, but it could be followed by any number of words other than ‘collaboration’, and searching for it on Google yields 3740 results, modest compared to the other two pairings above, but still a considerable number. “Experimental intercultural art” generates five results, “experimental intercultural music” only four, and when switching the word order and trying “intercultural experimental art”, I receive no results; replacing art again by music yields 10. Stretching this further and replacing, for example, ‘experimental’ by ‘innovative’ does yield some results – but always very few. Perhaps the alternative phrase closest in meaning to ‘experimental intercultural collaboration’, ‘intercultural creative collaboration’, is also very rare and found most prominently in an article (Chua 2011) on business management, published on the internet by the Harvard Business School, interesting but not related to artistic activities.

The above exercise suggests, then, that there is something unusual, rare, and even untried about the idea of experimental intercultural collaboration. It is also worth asking: why does the link between the experimental and the intercultural seem relatively unusual (less than a tenth of the Google results as for the other combinations of two words above)? And why is it even more

unusual to combine the notions of 'experimental' and 'intercultural' with the collaborative? Does this allow us to infer something about the attitudes of artists and researchers concerning the compatibility or combination of different systems of cultural thought? Can we go so far as to perhaps infer that, in pursuing work that is experimental, intercultural, and collaborative, while reflecting on the possibilities of such activities, one is forging a new and as yet largely unproven path in both art and cultural theory?

Before going any further in the use of such a phrase, especially if it is indeed a new one, it is important to understand and define its component parts. What is 'experimental'? What is 'intercultural'? What is 'collaboration'? I examine 'intercultural' first because it is a compound word and leads directly to an even more fundamental question: what is 'culture'?

The term 'culture' is so widely used, and so taken for granted, that it is very difficult to define. The problem is magnified when referring to culture in conjunction with music:

It is not easy to talk about music and culture together, much less define them in ways that draw them together. Definitions of music that we might extract from widely used dictionaries neither include the word *culture* nor refer to any intrinsic or extrinsic property of the 'arranging of sounds in time' or 'a musical composition' (*American Heritage Dictionary*) that has anything to do with culture. Definitions of culture, it goes without saying, also do not refer to music in any explicit way. (Bohlman 2003:45)

But even without respect to music, culture is so multifaceted, multifunctional, and laden a term – and so context-dependent – that arriving at a single definition is a nearly impossible. A dictionary is a good place to start; in the *Online Etymology Dictionary*, I found the following entry:

culture (n.)

mid-15c., 'the tilling of land, the act of preparing the earth for crops' from Latin *cultura* [...], figuratively 'care, culture, an honoring,' from past participle stem of *colere* 'to tend, guard, [...] till, cultivate' [...] The figurative sense of 'cultivation through education [...]' is attested by c.1500. Meaning '[...]the intellectual side of civilization' is by 1805; the closely related sense of 'collective customs and achievements of a people [...]' is by 1867. (<http://www.etymonline.com/index.php?term=culture>)

Webster's Dictionary offers the following definition: "[...] 6 a) the ideas, customs, skills, arts, etc. of a people or group, that are transferred, communicated, or passed along, as in or to succeeding generations b) such ideas, customs, etc. of a particular people or group in a particular period; civilization" (Neufeld 1994:337).

Referring to the ethnographer and social theorist Clyde Kluckhohn (specifically his book *Mirror for Man*¹⁷), Clifford Geertz observed:

In some twenty-seven pages of his chapter on the concept, Kluckhohn managed to define culture in turn as: (1) 'the total way of life of a people'; (2) 'the social legacy the individual acquires from his group'; (3) 'a way of thinking, feeling, and believing'; (4) 'an abstraction from behavior'; (5) a theory on the part of the anthropologist about the way in which a group of people in fact behave; (6) a 'storehouse of pooled learning'; (7) 'a set of standardized orientations to recurrent problems'; (8) 'learned behavior'; (9) a mechanism for the normative regulation of behavior; (10) 'a set of techniques or adjusting both to the external environment and to other men'; (11) 'a precipitate of history'; and turning, perhaps in desperation, to similes, as a map, as a sieve, and as a matrix. In the face of this sort of theoretical diffusion, even a somewhat constricted and not entirely standard concept of culture, which is at least internally coherent and more important, which has a definable argument to make is (as, to be fair, Kluckhohn himself keenly realized) an improvement. Eclecticism is self-defeating not because there is only one direction in which it is useful to move, but because there are so many: it is necessary to choose.

The concept of culture I espouse [...] is essentially a semiotic one. Believing, with Max Weber, that man is an animal suspended in webs of significance he himself has spun, I take culture to be those webs, and the analysis of it to be therefore not an experimental science in search of law but an interpretive one in search of meaning. (Geertz 1973:4-5)

This quote is interesting not only for the way it helps progress towards a coming-to-grips with the meaning of 'culture', but also because it mentions the terms 'eclecticism' and 'experimental'.

The word 'eclecticism' is often used in discussions about Western art and music. Hearing conversations between artists and intellectuals of Geertz's generation, I noticed that it was primarily meant in a derogatory way, equated to an aimless mix of styles, a formless pastiche, while stylistic homogeneity, clarity and consequence were seen as virtues. Contrastingly,

¹⁷ (Kluckhohn 1949)

musicians of a younger generation, born after World War II, enthusiastically describe themselves as 'eclectics', especially artists working in the area of 'creative improvised music', where there exists a voracious appetite for the integration of extremely varying influences. By the time I started composing - while a student in the late 1980s - it seemed as if the eclecticism debate had run its course; appropriating old styles was no longer taboo, but it wasn't a necessity, either.

Concerning Geertz's use of the word 'experimental', it is important to distinguish between this and the meaning of 'experimental' to which I will be referring below. Experimental artistic work is not a science, and it is not in search of law. To the contrary: it aims to produce singular, original results that, if anything, defy laws while producing new meanings. So, in my use of the word, 'experimental' refers to a mindset, an adventurousness that lures the artist to unexplored territory. My use of the word does not contradict Geertz's; we simply use it in completely different contexts, thereby imbuing it with entirely different meanings and connotations.

'Inter', a Latin prefix, is altogether easier to define than 'culture'; it means 'between', 'mutual', or 'reciprocal'. 'Intercultural', then, means 'between cultures' or 'among cultures'. The implication, of course, is that, in an intercultural environment, there are participants from, or representing, at least two different cultures: what it means to 'be from', 'belong to' or 'represent' a culture is, obviously, another matter. For the purpose of the present discussion, I will postulate that it is possible to be from or represent a culture, although, truthfully, I have serious doubts about this. I will revisit this question later in this thesis.

Can people from different cultures communicate in a profound way about questions relating to their cultures and the similarities and differences therein; can such communication yield worthwhile results? It goes without saying that I, as a practitioner of intercultural collaboration, would answer this question in the affirmative; if I were not of that opinion, I would not spend my time and effort doing such work. That does not imply that I see artistic potential in all kinds of intercultural combination, or that I deny the numerous problems such combinations can create, both artistically and socially – or that I feel that a successful intercultural combination must or

should deny these problems. Nevertheless, it is reassuring to me to note that I am by no means the first to think this way. In his paper *The Myth of the Framework*, in some form originally from 1965 but here published in 1994, Karl R. Popper wrote:

[...] there is, even without a discussion, a possibility of a fruitful confrontation among people deeply committed to different frameworks. *But we must not expect too much*: we must *not* expect that a confrontation, or even a prolonged discussion, will end with the participants reaching *agreement*.

But is agreement *always* desirable? (Popper 1994:37)

And:

Thus my thesis is not that the gulf between different frameworks, or between different cultures, can, for logical reasons, *always* be bridged. My thesis is merely that it can *usually* be bridged. There may be no common assumptions. There may perhaps be only common problems. For different groups of humans do, as a rule, have much in common, such as the problems of survival. But even common problems may not always be needed. My thesis is that logic neither underpins the myth of the framework nor its denial, but that we can try to learn from each other. Whether we succeed will depend largely on our goodwill, and to some extent also on our historical situation, and on our problem situation. (ibid:37-38)

Of course, all this assumes that different cultures are intrinsically different from one another. While I do not deny that cultures differ, it appears to me that sometimes too much is made of their differences. A culture is not, in and of itself, a monolithic structure; it comes to exist through (usually large) numbers of people living within, and espousing, its systems and values. But all these people are individuals, each one with unique character traits and thoughts setting him or her apart from other individuals. So, a collective culture is already composed of a puzzle of micro-differences, giving it a very complex, multifaceted 'surface structure' rather than a smooth, straight one. Yet, as significant as differences between individuals are, there is also much to unite them. And the same goes for cultures: expanding on Popper's statement, I would say that humans across the world have many more things in common than set them apart.

Kofi Agawu has commented forcefully on this matter from an African perspective. In *Contesting Difference*, Chapter 7 of his book *Representing African Music*, he writes:

Difference is regularly invoked by ethnomusicologists in their ordinary discourse. Erich von Hornbostel, for example, opened his seminal 1928 article on 'African Negro Music' with a question that directs attention to the comparative method and thus to difference: 'What is African music like as compared to our own?' Hornbostel's brief but subsequently worked out answer was, 'African and (modern) European music are constructed on *entirely different principles*' [Agawu's emphasis]. Why Hornbostel chose to emphasize differences over similarities, instead of granting similarities alongside differences, probably had less to do with the comparative method as such than with an inherited tradition of European representations of others. (Agawu 2003a:155-6)

How does one decide, to start with, that a given culture is 'sufficiently different'? [...] Is cross-cultural understanding ultimately possible? (ibid: 167)

[...] sameness is liable to make some people nervous. We surely do not all want to look alike, play the same instruments, listen to the same music, or deploy the same critical language. [...] What I am arguing for, however, is not sameness but the *presumption* of sameness [...] [which] would precede action and representation [...] Indeed, such presumption guarantees an ethical motivation. (ibid:171)

In my initial contacts with African musicians in 1994, without giving much thought to such questions, I naturally tended to presume sameness to be more relevant than difference, possibly a consequence of my international upbringing; I felt then and in many subsequent instances that assuming sameness is, essentially, less presumptuous than any other supposition. Agawu, however, goes a step further in *How Not to Analyze African Music*, Chapter 8 of *Representing African Music*:

The truth is that, beyond local inflections deriving from culture-bound linguistic, historical, and materially inflected expressive preferences, there is ultimately no difference between European knowledge and African knowledge. All talk of an insider's point of view, a native point of view, a distinct African mode of hearing, or of knowledge organization is a lie, and a wicked one at that. (Agawu 2003a:180)

While I agree with Agawu that difference should not be overemphasized and regard his attempt at demystification as laudable, I think he might be overreaching somewhat here as the local inflections he refers to are, after all, relevant; for instance, people in different parts of the world speak different languages, which provide different vocabularies which in turn give rise to different syntax, phrasing, and different ways of structuring thought.

When I first went to Côte d'Ivoire in 1994, my 'presumption of sameness' made it possible for me not to encounter the traditions and values I found there with a feeling of alienation or a need to adapt, but with a sense of being fundamentally able to relate, in one way or another, without sacrificing my identity.

Bernd Pirrung, the director of the Goethe Institute in Côte d'Ivoire at the time, who had previously been posted in Ghana and, during his years in West Africa, had become enthusiastic about the region and possibilities of cultural exchange, was an excellent advisor, facilitator, and mentor during my first steps in intercultural collaboration. In a text he wrote for the booklet accompanying the CD *Lukas Ligeti & Beta Foly*, recorded in 1996 together with my colleagues of the group Beta Foly which we had founded together at the Goethe Institute in Abidjan, he expressed a Popperian view, but with a specifically African slant:

In West Africa, it was attempted during the age of colonization to force a foreign culture on the subjugated territories, to prevent independent development and to get rid of native culture by banning it to secluded regions of the bush. This was destined to fail, but it has left behind many forms of sensitivity. Therefore, it is crucial to achieve a high degree of togetherness, collaboration, experiencing each other's ways of life, in short, complete mutual acceptance, in cultural exchange projects in this region today. Aside from his or her quality as an artist, the guest from the north must be open and willing not only to get acquainted with his surroundings, but to adopt some of its aspects as values of his own. If this is achieved, a fruitful exchange is almost guaranteed. (Bernd Pirrung writing in the liner notes of CD *Lukas Ligeti & Beta Foly*¹⁸)

Yet again, though: how to achieve this "high degree of togetherness, collaboration"? This leads me to the next of the component parts of the original phrase, collaboration, easily defined as an act of working together, of cooperating. This can obviously be done in many different ways and can include various types of hierarchies. The type of collaboration I am interested in here, however, is one in which either all involved, or at least the key participants, work together, to the extent possible, as equals. I do not deny that, for example in Beta Foly, I had a degree of extra responsibility (and power) because I had posited the fundamental concept of our collaboration and because I ultimately was the producer of our recording. Nevertheless, I was careful to make

¹⁸ Cologne: Intuition Music, 1997.

sure that a high degree of trust between all participants had been established before I took upon myself any responsibility to represent our activities towards others. Beta Foly formed organically as a group; it ‘founded itself’. There was no personal or institutional pressure to start an ongoing collaboration; in fact, the workshop I came to lead in 1994 was initially meant as a one-off and I had considerable difficulty motivating the Goethe Institute to fund a continuation. I believe that one of the factors that ultimately led to the ongoing nature of this project was that I, in effect, refused to ‘lead’ the workshop, emphasizing instead the collaborative nature of the effort to come up with something new. I am not suggesting that I mastered the skill of collaboration perfectly then, nor that I do now; it has been a steady process of learning by doing.

Richard Sennett, in the preface to his book *Together*, writes:

Cooperation oils the machinery of getting things done, and sharing with others can make up for what we may individually lack. Cooperation is embedded in our genes, but cannot remain stuck in a routine behaviour; it needs to be developed and deepened. This is particularly true when we are dealing with people unlike ourselves [...] (2012: ix)

It requires of people the skill of understanding and responding to one another in order to act together, but this is a thorny process, full of difficulty and ambiguity [...] (ibid: x)

One could, perhaps, argue that Africa was a good continent on which to begin a path of musical collaboration: while most music in Europe is composed by individuals, the communal aspect is important in African cultures. I caution, however, against the widespread assumption that in Africa everything is communal and that individual expression is in some way discouraged. In 1997, I was in Zimbabwe and visited the Batonga village of Siachilaba near Lake Kariba, where the very complex and under-researched *ngoma buntibe* funeral music is practiced. The pieces of this repertoire are normally composed by individuals, and I met the senior composer of the village, Bokotela Mudenda, known as Siankwede (unfortunately, he passed away a year later). The same holds true for many other cultures in Africa, not to mention African art music. But there are also, just as well, examples of fully-fledged communal composition traditions. Kofi Agawu describes one of them:

A vibrant example is found among the Anlo-Ewe in the town of Wheta, Volta Region, Ghana, where groups of poet-composers belonging to a musical club meet to assemble communally

new compositions for specified occasions (Anyidoho 1983¹⁹). Individuals contribute ideas about song texts, polyphonic organization, melody and overall form. The resulting composition is therefore their song, not a named individual's. (Agawu 2003b:5)

In my collaborations with musicians in Africa, we have tended to list by name all composers involved in the creation of a piece as that facilitates the registration of the work with copyright societies; of course, these are administrated according to Western templates. I will discuss the question of composer attribution in Beta Foly later in this thesis.

It is possible that the idea of experimental music is also something of a Western template. It is, in any case, somewhat difficult to define, and as a composer and musician who refers to himself as 'experimental' (I do so for want of a better term), I am, perhaps, rather too immersed in the cauldron of this particular branch of the music scene to have the distance to define it clearly. Consulting Wikipedia – not always the most reliable source but rather instructive in this case – I find the following: "Experimental music refers, in the English-language literature, to a compositional tradition which arose in the mid-20th century, applied particularly in North America to music composed in such a way that its outcome is unforeseeable" (<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Experimental_music>).

Certainly, John Cage's compositions featuring randomness are of an unforeseeable outcome, but unpredictability need not be a constant component of experimentalism. Rather, I would define it as an attitude of making music with the intention of creating something hitherto unknown, not necessarily connected or indebted to tradition. That does not imply that an experimental musician disregards or disrespects tradition – it means that, as in a scientific experiment, something is being consciously and deliberately explored, and that these explorations hopefully lead to new insights or conclusions while new questions inevitably arise. In the same Wikipedia entry, this is later confirmed: "Warren Burt cautions that, as 'a combination of leading-edge

¹⁹ Agawu refers here to *Oral Poetics and Traditions of Verbal Art in Africa* by Kofi Anyidoho, an unpublished PhD thesis at the University of Texas, Austin.

techniques and a certain exploratory attitude', experimental music requires a broad and inclusive definition."²⁰ (ibid)

I also do not believe that experimental music is limited to North America – accordingly, the Warren Burt quote above was taken from an article about experimental music in Australia. In France, Romuald Vandelle, writing in the magazine *La revue musicale* in 1959, posited similarities between experimental and 'exotic' music:

Si à partir d'un choix judicieux d'enregistrements, on fait entendre à un auditoire non prévenu des oeuvres de musique exotique et des oeuvres de musique expérimentale, il peut arriver qu'on vienne à les confondre. Ce n'est pas un effet du hasard mais parce qu'il existe de grandes ressemblances entre les deux musiques.²¹ (Vandelle 1959:34)

Some artists and critics believe that the exploratory attitude pioneered by American composers such as Charles Ives, Henry Cowell, Edgard Varèse (French but a longtime U.S. resident), John Cage, Conlon Nancarrow and others, which led to a surge of non-traditional music-making by the mid-to-late 20th century, has peaked and is now a phenomenon of the past. Perhaps Benjamin Piekut is making such a statement when he subtitles the introduction to his book *Experimentalism Otherwise*, in which he describes various events in New York's experimental music scene in the year 1964, "What *Was* Experimentalism?" (my emphasis). Or perhaps he wants to refer to the 1960s only, but in that case, he does not indicate that experimental music continues. In the same introduction, however, he also formulates a more detailed characterization of what experimental music is (or, at least, was in the 1960s):

In Michael Nyman's influential formulation, a set of 'purely musical considerations'²² sets off experimentalism from its close cousin, the avant-garde. Experimentalism, he writes, offers fluid processes instead of static objects; antiteleological procedures instead of goal-driven works;

²⁰ Quote from (according to Wikipedia): "Burt, Warren. 1991. 'Australian Experimental Music 1963–1990'. *Leonardo Music Journal* 1, no. 1:5–10."

²¹ My translation: "If, given a judicious selection of recordings, one were to play works of exotic music and works of experimental music to a group of uninitiated listeners, one might confuse them. This is no coincidence; it would be due to strong similarities between the two types of music."

²² (Nyman 1999).

new roles for composers, performers, and listeners instead of hierarchies of traditional art music; notation as a set of actions rather than as a representation of sounds; a momentary evanescence instead of temporal fixity; an ontology that foregrounds performance over writing; and a welcoming of daily life instead of its transcendence. (Piekut 2011: 5)

This is true to varying degrees; not all of these attributes would be found in my own music, though some would. I believe that it is, again, the attitude that counts, and given that technology continues to progress, new discoveries are made in science, etc., there is no reason to believe that experimental music-making is on the decline: observations made, for example, by Walter Benjamin in his essay *The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction* (1936) are, fundamentally, no less valid today than they were 83 years ago.

The ‘experimental’ in ‘experimental intercultural collaboration’, however, doesn’t refer to the experimental music tradition per se. It refers, rather, to an attitude, a mindset of deliberately and consciously attempting to forge new paths, taking risks, questioning tradition, to ‘try even if others say it won’t work, because if we don’t, we will never know’. Christopher Ballantine wrote:

If some experimental situations are trivial or patently absurd, this may not necessarily be a bad thing, especially if one views them as *experimental* occasions. It is part of a scientific frame of mind to realize that experiments may fail or be inappropriate, and that there is something to be learned from these failures. (Ballantine 1977: 246)

And this “scientific frame of mind” is present not only in the composition process itself, but already in the basic constellation of the collaboration: the people, the place, the circumstances, and the attempt to travel together on this route towards the unknown.

While experimentalist attitudes exist worldwide in concept, there has not been a tradition of, or broad movement for, experimental music in Africa (though dance and the visual arts tend to be more progressive). Even in North America or Europe, it could not be presupposed that there would be a readiness to engage in experimental practices if project participants were chosen randomly. Possibly, it is even more challenging to find appropriate collaborators in Africa; I have, however, been able to find open-minded, interested and interesting collaborators in Africa on

many occasions. Nevertheless, coming from a more 'traditionally' minded music culture as they do, my experimental attitude sometimes requires explanation.

Among researchers, there has been a tendency to look upon traditional artists as resisting change, but in many cases it is the researchers themselves who wish to preserve, out of fear that a tradition that means much to them might be lost. The psychoanalyst Mario Erdheim quotes Margaret Mead as follows:

'In traditionellen Kulturen geht der Wandel so unmerklich vonstatten, dass Grosseltern sich für ihre neugeborenen Enkel keine andere Zukunft vorstellen können als ihre eigene Vergangenheit. Die Vergangenheit der Erwachsenen ist die Zukunft einer jeden neuen Generation, ihr Leben bildet den Grundplan' (Mead 1970²³).²⁴ (Erdheim 1984:276)

She was, however, saying this as an outsider, an observer. The practitioners of these slowly-changing cultures, or 'cold cultures' as Claude Lévi-Strauss referred to them²⁵, perhaps do not ask whether change is necessary. But as fewer cultures have remained in isolation, and information between the various parts of the world has been exchanged at an ever-increasing pace, quick change has come to almost all of them. Erdheim writes, leaning on Jürgen Habermas, whom he subsequently quotes:

Ein entscheidender Unterschied zwischen Kultur und Natur liegt in der Art ihrer Entwicklung: Natur entwickelt sich durch Mutation und Auslese, Kultur durch soziale, und das heißt durch tradierbare Lernprozesse. Die kulturelle Evolution verläuft im wesentlichen 'nicht über die

²³ Erdheim is quoting here from a German translation of Margaret Mead's book *Culture and Commitment: A Study of the Generation Gap*, which first appeared in German in 1971 with the title *Der Konflikt der Generationen. Jugend ohne Vorbild*. The German version here quoted is referenced in the bibliography.

²⁴ "In traditional cultures, change happens so imperceptibly that grandparents cannot imagine any different future for their newborn grandchildren than their own past. The past of the adults is the future of each new generation: their life is the template." [My translation]

²⁵ In the book *The Savage Mind* (see bibliography); explained by Sklar (1967) as follows: "He is opposed [...] to their common assumption that primitive life is more instinctive, more simple, more natural than in modern civilization [...] 'cold' societies [...] have devised institutions to annul the effects of historical change [...]"

Veränderung des Genbestandes sondern über die Veränderung eines Wissenspotentials (Habermas 1976:188).²⁶ (Erdheim 1984: 275-276)

This reservoir of cumulative knowledge is now evolving, increasing, changing so quickly that it has become nearly impossible for a living culture not to undergo rapid, and at times potentially destructive, changes. African traditional music is no exception: if its function is to accompany people during important moments of their lives – circumcision, marriage, death, etc. –, as people's lives change due to the influx of new technology, information, and so on, it is only natural for the accompanying music to change as well. Therefore, the amplified griot ensembles in Mali, for example, are not a sign of the deterioration of tradition; they are, rather, a sign of tradition in transition. And while pop music in the West often experiences itself as a form of rebellion against traditionally-held values, the relationship between traditional and pop musics in Africa is much less one of a schism than a continuum.

And as these transitions are palpable to the musicians performing at such rituals, the idea of trying something new, of questioning the old and pushing the ship off the dock to embark on a trip of exploration, is not nearly as far-fetched as it may seem.

Into the exchange with artists in Africa, I supposedly bring knowledge of Western music and the attitude of an experimentalist. The African musicians supposedly contribute knowledge of the various traditions and musical practices they have been reared in. In our profound, long-term collaborations, we learn as much as we can about each other and, to a certain degree, inspire each other with knowledge and areas of interest. We do not aim to adapt to one another; we aim to meet on a new plane, a plateau we are building through our collaboration, thus creating

²⁶ "A decisive difference between culture and nature lies in the way they develop: nature develops through mutation and selection; culture, through social learning processes which can be handed down. Cultural evolution occurs, essentially, 'not through a change in the gene pool but through a change in cumulative knowledge' (Habermas 1976:288)." [My translation]

our own syncretic micro-tradition. Many of the musicians I have worked with are now also experimentalists while I have learned a great deal about African music.

Rather than protect our individual identities, we try to find an identity for our collaboration; our identities as individuals are secure because the work we create in collaboration respects all traditions involved, but does not aim to conform to them. I see my collaborators less as representatives or owners of certain traditions than as individuals, each with his or her own area of expertise and sets of life experiences. Thinking back again to my first trip to Côte d'Ivoire, the musicians with whom I was working, who came from various parts of West Africa (Abidjan is, and especially at that time was, a decidedly cosmopolitan city that attracted immigrants from all over the region) had to first come to terms with each other by engaging in an intra-African cultural exchange. Africa's linguistic and cultural diversity is enormous and not all cultures are compatible on all levels. Yet, here again, things began to become cohesive when the participants started building upon their commonalities rather than emphasizing differences. Just like European music, for all its regional differences, has many common elements and attributes, the music of Africa south of the Sahara also shares numerous characteristics among many of its various component cultures. As Meki Nzewi wrote, "Incontrovertibly, there is an African field of sound" (Nzewi 1997:31). And Kwame Anthony Appiah wrote:

What we in the academy *can* contribute – even if only slowly and marginally – is a disruption of the discourse of 'racial' and 'tribal' differences. For, in my perfectly unoriginal opinion, the inscription of difference in Africa today plays into the hands of the very exploiters whose shackles we are trying to escape. (Appiah 1992:179)

As intercultural collaboration has both commonalities and differences to build on, it is not necessary for one party of such an exchange to be from outside Africa. Artists from different parts of Africa could collaborate equally well, and equally experimentally if that attitude is brought into the exchange: one need not be from the West to be experimental, nor from Africa to be traditional. In addition, the concept of the intercultural could, conceivably, be stretched to include interdisciplinarity. For example, Western classical and jazz musicians approach certain

aspects of music-making so differently and think about structure, dynamics, etc. in such different ways that one could legitimately speak of two distinct musical cultures.

Whenever elements from one cultural environment are transplanted to another, decontextualization is a matter of concern. Its pitfalls are particularly emphasized by those who fundamentally believe in the homogeneity of cultures – in my opinion, an unrealistic viewpoint. That is not to say that I am unconcerned by matters of context; I would, however, argue that the ‘defense’ of a cultural value in an exchange should be left to those participants who feel most closely connected to it. That is, if someone told me that, say, a certain musical phrase taken out of context would lose its use, be stripped of its beauty from the viewpoint of someone familiar with the original context, I would think twice about featuring it in our intercultural repertoire. Ultimately, I don’t think it is possible to find across-the-board solutions for these kinds of issues; they must be addressed, and decisions made by the musicians, on a case-by-case basis, and the same also holds true for the researcher.

Unquestionably, however, intercultural collaborations run danger of being superficial. The best way I have found to counter this problem is to find people with whom one has intellectual and emotional rapport, where the willingness to engage in dialogue, to exchange information and share challenging conceptual discussions, is present. Such conversations take time; therefore, collaborative projects are most promising when they are allowed to continue over long periods, not necessarily uninterrupted, but with some degree of continuity. The experimental aspect of the work, as an added conceptual layer to negotiate, makes the need for time and continuity all the more urgent. In this respect, many of the governmental and non-governmental organizations facilitating cultural exchange have enormous deficiencies.

When de- and re-contextualizing traditional elements, much, then, depends on the mindset of the participating musicians; nevertheless, some ability to ‘mix’ may also be innate in certain musical structures. When an idea is able to maintain its *gestalt* in a recognizable way while being lifted from its usual contextual environment, in other words, if it possesses some integrity of form

beyond or apart from its traditional significance, it is a viable candidate for the decontextualization it will experience in the intercultural mix.

I experienced an interesting situation in 1992 when I visited Taiwan with my then-partner, who was an expatriate Taiwanese and a musician. We entered a temple where a traditional music group was playing. When they took a break, I went to the percussion and began imitating the phrases I had heard the percussionist play. The percussionist did not seem to mind but showed no interest in what I was doing. After a while, my partner asked him (in Hokkien) whether he does not find it remarkable that I, an outsider who had never heard this music, would be able to play back his rhythms. The percussionist answered that he did not recognize his rhythms in what I was playing. Apparently, the percussionist, who was perhaps used to hearing these phrases only within their customary context, did not regard his rhythms as having an independent *gestalt*, whereas my partner, who had a keen ear but was not immersed in this form of temple music, heard the rhythms much like I did: essentially out of context.

This experience suggests that it is not actually necessary for a cultural element to be taken out of its environment in order to be decontextualized. The (de)contextualization occurs, first and foremost, in the mind of the listener, who either knows or doesn't know the 'codes' necessary to hear the music according to the grammar of the tradition. While my partner spoke Hokkien fluently and knew the culture of the region very well, the fact that she was not knowledgeable about this particular musical form was apparently enough to make her a foreigner in this instance. Of course, she could have learned this music, and I could have, too, albeit, lacking the language skills and even a fundamental idea of the broader cultural context, with considerably more difficulty.

One of the lessons learned from this experience was that being 'of' a certain culture does not necessarily mean that one 'knows' it. That is why phrases such as 'their own culture' trigger a measure of unease in me. I see no reason to believe that being born in a certain place or environment entitles one to ownership of a culture; in fact, I tend to believe that culture, *per se*,

has no owner. Ultimately, every person has his/her own mind and experiences and understands a culture – even one within which s/he was raised - in their own particular way. I have encountered many people who were initially foreigners in a cultural area, who felt strongly about it for some reason and came to understand it more thoroughly than most locals. Writers and poets who chose to express themselves in a language other than their native one is a good example; Joseph Conrad, Vladimir Nabokov, or Joseph Brodsky come to mind. And due to the incredibly complex web of tribal, cultural, ex-colonial, and national allegiances and non-allegiances in Africa, such situations are more natural, and perhaps more commonplace, here than anywhere else.

As already stated, I am fully aware that the discourse I am putting forth is driven in many ways by my personal opinion. I would be fooling myself were I to believe that I am representing universal truths or that I might be able to formulate theories; that is not my objective. I do hope, however, that my work, both as a musician and as a researcher, contributes to tolerance and to creative thinking. It appears to me that many impediments to intercultural understanding in general, and artistic collaboration in particular, are caused by the positing of difference in order to address various residual feelings caused by unfortunate events in history. The overemphasizing of questions of identity and power at the expense of level-headed conversations about problems and solutions may construct more barriers than it takes down.

Denis Ekpo writes:

For the modern African mind appears to have definitively conceptualized its identity, its destiny, its past and present, in the horizon of a conspiracy theory, that is, in perpetual accusation of, opposition to and fight against, the West. From this perspective, the West seems to have acquired the static eternity of an imperialist demon whose every move may conceal a conspiracy to underdevelop Africa. (Ekpo 1995:126)

My personal mission in experimental collaborative intercultural work is not to develop or underdevelop Africa; it is to develop, in all of us, the capability to listen and to think. If indeed Africans and Westerners are to be involved in such an exchange, both sides have plenty to learn from each other, and thus, both sides can be developed - thanks to input from the other. Is that too much to ask?

[...] for the modern African mind to come to terms with the irrepressible West, he must first strategically immerse himself in the West, not in order to know it, but through guile, to master its various knowledge/power games strictly in accordance with the Master's knowledge rules. The ulterior motive of course is to gain cognitive control over the West by transforming an adversary, complex-ridden perception of it into a means of gaining advantage and increasing our power. (Ekpo 1995:133)

But to what end? It is my hope that the increased mutual understanding fostered by such collaborations will help overcome power-based approaches to intercultural contact, while increasing our cognitive abilities (not to gain control, as expressed by Ekpo, but to find new ways of expression) and creating challenging but enjoyable music.

CHAPTER 3

Beta Foly



Figure 5. The group Beta Foly during the workshop in 1994 in Abidjan, before its official founding. L to R: Tounkara, Hervé Blé, Siriki Keïta, Aly Keïta, Lamine Baldé, Dramane Keïta, Leye M'baye, Babagalé Kanté, Yaya Sangaré, Issa Kourouma, Lukas Ligeti, Kaba Kouyaté, Tiémoko Kanté, Abou Ouatt, Kurt Dahlke, Elisabeth Aka, Arland Tago

3.1: Introduction

Beta Foly was an ensemble based in Abidjan, Côte d'Ivoire. Co-founded in February 1994 by several Abidjan-based musicians, the German musician "Pyrolator" Kurt Dahlke, and myself, it was active until the end of 1999 and was my first experience in intercultural collaboration. In many ways, it remains the most wide-ranging, dedicatedly experimental intercultural group with which I have been involved. Many of my ideas about intercultural collaboration originated in or evolved as a result of this project, and due to its seminal position in my development as a creative musician, this group and its music is central to my research.

I will provide a brief background and overview of the history of the Ensemble, a longer description of the nature of our collaborative work, and a detailed analysis of several pieces from the group's repertoire. I will also discuss issues of reception and examine how this experience shaped my and my colleagues' further development as musicians.

One morning during the 1992/93 academic year, my last year of composition studies in Vienna, I received a call from the Goethe-Institut, Germany's network of cultural institutes abroad. I was told that Bernd Pirrung, the Director of the Goethe Institute's branch in Abidjan, wanted to invite a percussionist to conduct a workshop with musicians, primarily traditional percussionists, local to that city. The Institute's headquarters in Munich, with its music curator Jürgen Drews, had identified me as their preferred artist for this project. I was pleasantly surprised by this call, especially as I had not entertained any prospect of actually visiting Africa, despite the influence its music already had on me.

I did not know West African music well and would probably not be able to play in the styles of the musicians with whom I would be collaborating. Similarly, I could not expect the African musicians, who I assumed not to be trained in reading music notation, to play my compositions; furthermore, I could not assume that there would exist a highly evolved improvisational vocabulary shared by all of us. What, then, to do with the opportunity of a two-week-long collaborative workshop, which I was expected to lead and from the results of which it was hoped that I could put together a concert to mark the end of our brief period of joint activity? The only viable answer seemed to be to attempt to investigate and pool our combined backgrounds and capabilities so as to arrive at a music that was equally new to all of us. In other words, based on the premise of mutual openness and curiosity, we would have to build the common ground on which we could stand together.

While the notion of a collaborative project between traditional musicians from Africa and a musician from Europe was obviously not unprecedented, such meetings were still relatively rare at that time (the number of African-European collaborations started increasing exponentially

soon thereafter, in the mid-1990s). Most Western musicians who ventured to Africa to collaborate with local musicians were jazz or pop musicians with a rather mainstream musical orientation. The circumstance that I was a trained composer of new Western art music and an improviser on an instrument related to jazz (drum-set), all of which with an experimental attitude, put me in an unusual position. While this constellation was indeed very rare (though not unheard of²⁷), the fact that I had been profoundly influenced by African music, but through theoretical insight provided by ethnomusicological treatises rather than practical experience, made the situation, if anything, even more unusual.

Asking myself what I could contribute in terms of original ideas, it seemed worthwhile to me to bring my nascent approach to electronic music into the mix. My composition studies in Vienna included only a small amount of electronic music, and having been a late starter, I initially concentrated on areas more directly linked to traditional craft. By 1992, I was ready to investigate electronics, and I knew how I wanted to go about it.

I wanted to explore electronics in live performance, and I was more interested in the structural, melodic, and rhythmic possibilities of electronics than in the timbral aspect, as the vast majority of composers working with electronics seemed to focus on timbre first and foremost. This decision led me naturally away from effects processing and towards MIDI²⁸ technology. Furthermore, I wanted to interface with my electronics via a percussion paradigm. Having spent much time practicing drums, I did not want to dispense with my percussion technique by playing a laptop or other instrument that would make me sacrifice the kinetic aspect of music-making, nor did I want to play keyboards, as I did not consider myself a technically advanced keyboardist. I was interested in how electronics might influence and transform my extant techniques and what new cognitive and motional possibilities would emerge through this exercise. Not long after I received the call from the Goethe Institute, I purchased a *DrumKAT*, a MIDI electronic percussion

²⁷ One rare example is Lateef: 1983.

²⁸ Musical Instrument Digital Interface

controller consisting of 10 piezo-electronic pads and inputs for several pedals, programmable via fairly advanced, built-in software. My initial idea was to expand on the choreographic drumming technique I had invented based on Baganda court music, triggering a large array of sampled sounds rather than just drums.

Aware of my lack of experience with electronics, I asked the Goethe Institute whether I could bring a musician colleague with me, someone more versed in this area. I was told that this would be possible provided it was someone from Germany. I did not know any suitable German musicians, so the Goethe Institute recommended Kurt Dahlke, also known as Pyrolator. While I had never heard of Dahlke, it soon turned out that I was familiar with some of his music.

Pyrolator, who is seven years my senior, was a pioneer of avant-garde pop music in Germany, a seminal musician of the *Neue Deutsche Welle (NDW)*. This genre was a German response to the British 'new wave' music that emerged in the late 1970s, which was, as Michael Reece, a high school classmate of mine, insightfully observed c. 1981 in a casual conversation, "a mixture of punk and disco". An important attribute of this music was a strong presence of synthesizers along with, or even instead of, electric guitars, and a punk-derived 'do-it-yourself' attitude mixed with the use of cutting-edge music technology. The German version was more experimental than the British template and was also the first post-World-War-II popular music style to use German lyrics, apart from songwriters of a more folk-oriented or patriotic aesthetic. Often, these lyrics were imbued with a childishly naïve humor that revealed itself as deeply cynical upon closer scrutiny. Despite the German scene's experimental leanings, NDW brought forth some major hit songs, such as Nena's *99 Luftballons*, Peter Schilling's *Völlig losgelöst*, and Andreas Dorau's *Fred vom Jupiter*. Pyrolator was the producer of Dorau's song. He had also been a co-founder and short-time member of the well-known band Deutsch-Amerikanische Freundschaft, and, soon thereafter, a founding member of the lesser-known Der Plan, perhaps the most daringly experimental NDW band, which remained for many years his main project. Part of the vivid and vital art scene of Düsseldorf, Pyrolator and Der Plan also ran their own recording studio and

record label, AtaTak. I had heard some of his music on the radio, such as the hit song *Es geht voran* by the band Fehlfarben, where he played synthesizer.

Still in 1992, I contacted Kurt and we agreed to meet in Arnhem, the Netherlands, where Kurt was working at the studio of the Centrum voor Elektronische Muziek. The result of our first meeting was an informal, mutual agreement that we would work together. After completing my composition studies in Vienna and passing my final examination in June 1993, I set my sights on the United States and traveled to California to begin organizing myself for an extended residency as a visiting scholar at the Center for Computer Research in Music and Acoustics at Stanford University. Coincidentally, Kurt was also in San Francisco at the time, working on a sound installation, once again commissioned by the Goethe Institute. During the six weeks we overlapped in San Francisco (late September until early November 1993), we worked intensively on a duo program which we planned to present in Abidjan. We continued our preparations in early 1994, when I spent about a week at the AtaTak studio. During our rehearsals, we jointly created a repertoire of music which, combined with some solo pieces by each of us, could account for a concert of conventional length. Most of the conceptual ideas in our duo pieces came from me and were in various ways inspired by what I knew about African music, but Kurt also contributed important ideas, in addition to being responsible for the bulk of the technical concepts and their execution. I played a conventional drum-set as well as the DrumKAT. Kurt's primary instrument was also a MIDI controller, the *Lightning* designed by synthesizer pioneer Don Buchla. This instrument consisted of two 'wands' (one for each hand) that communicated with a 'brain' unit via infrared signals. As our sound sources, with which the MIDI controllers communicated, we used samplers (I, an Akai S-1000, and Kurt, a Roland); we also had sequencing software running on laptops (in my case, Cubase on an early Apple laptop, the PowerBook 180, and in Kurt's, Logic on an Atari).

3.2: History and Evolution of the Group

3.2.1: February 1994

Kurt and I arrived in Abidjan on February 10, 1994 for a 17-day stay. The first few days were to be used to acclimatize, meet musicians, and make preparations; the workshop with local musicians was scheduled to begin on Monday, Feb. 14. Two concerts were scheduled: A duo concert of Kurt and me on Tue., Feb. 15, and the final concert, presenting collaborative work, on Sat., Feb. 26.

On our first evening in Abidjan, a vivid first impression of music in the city came via a visit to a small, informal music venue, the Djongoman in Treichville. Here we met several musicians who would join our workshop; they were playing in a Mandé²⁹ traditional style.

The workshop was to consist of two sections, though it was unclear whether or not they should overlap. One section was the aforementioned collaboration with professional (traditional) musicians; the other was with students from INSAAC (*Institut National Supérieur des Arts et de l'Action Culturelle*), the city's principal institution for tertiary music education, whereby I was expected to teach drum-set. Potential participants in the professional workshop were being identified and invited by Bernd Pirrung, who knew the city's music scene well. In the morning of February 14, musicians interested in both of the sections met with Kurt and me, all at the same time, for an initial get-together. I estimate that roughly one-hundred people attended, and I felt immediately overwhelmed by the idea of having to work with so many people. To introduce myself, I decided to play some of my music, live in duo with Kurt and also from recordings, but selected particularly unconventional or difficult-to-understand music. I speculated that reactions to this might elucidate me as to who was genuinely interested in experimentation; these were the kinds of musicians I wanted to work with.

²⁹ Music of the griots (traditional musicians/storytellers) of the Mandé people of Guinea, Mali, Côte d'Ivoire, Senegal.

Many of the musicians in attendance obviously felt alienated by what I presented, and the following morning, only about 18 people came. Of those, half were coming to participate in the creative collaboration, with the rest hoping for drum (or other) lessons. As best as I can recall, the musicians interested in the creative collaboration were the following:

- Babagalé Kanté, 34 years old, *tambin*³⁰ flutist from Guinea-Conakry
- Tiémoko Kanté, 25 years old, *bolon*³¹ player from Guinea-Conakry
- Aly Keïta, 24 years old, *balafon*³² player from Mali/Côte d'Ivoire
- Dramane Keïta (no relation to Aly and Siriki), 35-40 years old, *djembe*³³ player from Mali
- Siriki Keïta, about 20 years old, Aly's younger brother, *bara*³⁴ player from Mali/Côte d'Ivoire
- Kaba Kouyaté, about 22 years old, *balafon* player from Guinea-Conakry
- Amadou Leye M'Baye, 31 years old, *sabar*³⁵ player from Senegal
- Abou Ouattara (known as Abou Ouatt), about 35 years old, *djembe* player from Côte d'Ivoire
- Yaya Sangaré, about 20 years old, *djembe* player from Côte d'Ivoire

The following three INSAAC-affiliated musicians, all natives of Côte d'Ivoire, were interested in both sections of the workshop:

- Elisabeth Aka, 26 years old, music education student, playing *ahoco*³⁶
- Dominique Yao Amani, about 28 years old, drum-set player (and instructor at INSAAC)

³⁰ Diagonal diatonic flute of the Peulh (Fulani) people of Guinea.

³¹ Bass harp of the Mandé people of Guinea, Mali, etc.

³² Xylophone/marimba of the Mandé people, though the term is also used for similar instruments of other ethnic groups of the region.

³³ A rope-tuned single-headed drum of the Mandé people, now ubiquitous across Africa.

³⁴ A single-headed drum made of a calabash and used primarily in Mali, Côte d'Ivoire, and Burkina Faso among the Dioula and other nearby groups; in the Voltaic Moré language, it is called bendré.

³⁵ A drum of the Serer and Wolof people in Senegal, played with a stick in one hand and the other hand bare.

³⁶ A scraping instrument (not unlike the guiro) of the Baoulé people in Côte d'Ivoire.

- Martial Djébré, about 23 years old, violin student also interested in conducting.

During the next few days, with word about an unusual workshop spreading in town, the following three musicians joined the creative collaboration:

- Lamine Baldé, 40 years old, guitarist and singer from Guinea-Bissau
- Hervé Marius Blé Yao, 24 years old, electric bass guitarist from Côte d'Ivoire
- Arland Tago, about 28 years old, saxophonist from Côte d'Ivoire

In addition to these participants, several other musicians soon appeared and then attended rehearsals occasionally, such as a *ngoni*³⁷ player named Tounkara and a Senegalese dancer, Djibi (Djibril) Welle.

Throughout the first week of the workshop, I maintained the division between the creative and the teaching sections, with some overlap in personnel. As far as I remember, I terminated the teaching section at the end of the first or the beginning of the second week to concentrate fully on the creative aspect, which began showing signs of serious promise. Initially, however, the collaboration was rather chaotic. Most of the musicians had not met prior to the workshop; exceptions were Babagalé, Kaba, and Tiémoko, who knew each other well and often played together at traditional functions in the Guinean community in Abidjan's suburb of Abobo, and the brothers Aly and Siriki Keïta.

While it might be said that the African musicians had a common cultural background to some degree – they were all from a geographically somewhat compact region comprising the countries of Côte d'Ivoire, Mali, Senegal, Guinea-Conakry and Guinea-Bissau – watching them struggle to come to a consensus on what and how to play together was an object lesson in how music is *not* a universal language³⁸. Observing their communication and interaction, it also quickly became

³⁷ A string instrument of the Mandé people, believed to be a predecessor of the banjo.

³⁸ Henry Wadsworth Longfellow: "Music is the universal language of mankind" (Longfellow 1835:II:4).

clear that the distinction between a traditional, neo-traditional, and contemporary stylistic orientation was much less pronounced than musicological and commercial categories had led me to expect. Non-traditional instruments could integrate themselves into traditional contexts and *vice versa*. The dividing lines between styles and approaches seemed quite fluid, just as (as I increasingly observed) ethnic distinctions and affiliations could also be fairly fluid in this part of the world³⁹.

Lacking any other common language, the musicians used French as their lingua franca: not all of them spoke it equally well, but its use as the primary means of communication is par for the course in Abidjan. In Côte d'Ivoire alone, some 70 languages are spoken; across the five countries from which the musicians came, the languages are in the hundreds, so the importance of a lingua franca cannot be overstated. The language that comes the closest to an indigenous lingua franca in Côte d'Ivoire is Dioula, a Mandé language used primarily at markets though it is also the native language of a fair-sized population in northern Côte d'Ivoire and southern Burkina Faso and Mali. But the one language that is understood across all of the countries in question here, with the exception of Guinea-Bissau, is French. Abidjan is the largest city in Francophone West Africa and an important, highly cosmopolitan regional hub, with significant communities from all over West Africa as well as from France, Lebanon, and even Vietnam. And indeed, despite, or perhaps because of, the multitude of languages represented in the city, more than a few people in Abidjan, even of African descent, speak French only, and no African language at all. Abidjan's position in the region was aptly illustrated by the fact that the majority of the professional workshop participants were expatriates who had settled in the city due to the professional opportunities it offered.

³⁹ A good example is Beta Foly's bassist, Hervé Marius Blé Yao. The name Yao is typically Baoulé, but Hervé is not of Baoulé ancestry, having received the name in honor of a neighbor of his family's in Abidjan. Blé is a Bété name but Hervé did not identify as Bété and only spoke French.

My own French, consisting of a few years of classes in high school, quite a bit of which I'd since forgotten, was still limited at the time, while Kurt spoke none. A translator was therefore crucial, and Issa Kourouma, a 38-year-old Ivorian employee of the Goethe Institute, filled that role with aplomb. His spoken and written German was perfect, which was very unusual even considering that he had studied and lived in Germany for several years. He was extremely engaged and managed to keep track of the many simultaneous conversations between the musicians; when smaller groups of musicians talked in indigenous local languages, he attempted to translate those conversations as well, provided he understood them. My French has consistently improved since then due to time spent in Côte d'Ivoire and later in Burkina Faso; I'd say I was fluent by 1996, with a noticeable African accent, and since 2003 or so it has become second nature to me to the degree that I often catch myself thinking in French.

During the first few days, Dramane Keïta established himself as the unofficial leader and spokesperson of the African musicians due to his calm, well-organized, and confident personality. Abou Ouatt, much more widely known in the city's music community and to the general public through his band Groupe Zagazougou, was energetic, ambitious, and fast-tempered, and constantly challenged Dramane. Leye M'Baye positioned himself as perhaps the most creative participant, contributing many musical ideas. One of the most active musicians in Abidjan's sizeable community of Senegalese expatriates as well as a member of Awana, arguably the city's most up-and-coming jazz-rock fusion band, he was a 'musician's musician', uninterested in group leadership but enthusiastic about the creative exchange. Aly Keïta was the most skillful instrumentalist, a virtuoso in the making. Worldly and open-minded, his services were often called upon by international organizations and cultural centers. Aly had spent much time working with George 'Makinto' Macintosh, a Liberian-German jazz pianist who lived in Abidjan for some years. In order to be more compatible with Western instruments, he built a heptatonic (7-tone) balafon tuned to C-major. While heptatonic balafons are common among various Mandé peoples particularly in Guinea-Conakry, Aly's family came from southeastern Mali, a region populated by Dioula- Bobo-, and even Senoufo-speaking people, and the balafons there are mostly pentatonic and built slightly differently from those found in Guinea. Kaba Kouyaté, younger than Aly, played

a Guinean-style balafon, also heptatonic but in a different key and built in the way found among the Malinké and Susu of Guinea. He was likewise a virtuoso, but much more traditional in approach. Babagalé and Tiémoko shared a background strictly as traditional musicians and were largely unfamiliar with musical styles outside the Peulh⁴⁰ and Malinké traditions of inland Guinée-Conakry. Lamine Baldé, the oldest participant, was refined and charismatic. Politically outspoken, he had a strong interest in community organizing. Dramane had already begun to assume a leading role by the time Lamine entered the workshop, and Lamine did not challenge that, but it was quickly clear that this project was, for some reason, close to his heart. A Peulh from Guinea-Bissau, he had been a member of Super Mama Djombo, one of the most popular bands of post-independence Bissau, before leaving his impoverished home country for the more promising pastures of Côte d'Ivoire. He was a singer-songwriter, accompanying himself on guitar, with great respect for traditional music, but himself more ensconced in the neo-traditional styles of Portuguese-influenced Cabo Verde and Bissau, and sang in Crioulo, not in Peulh. As for the remaining musicians, Hervé Blé was a technically adept, sharp-minded bassist who quickly found good accompaniments to other musicians' ideas. Yaya Sangaré, a strong, fluid djembé drummer, and Siriki Keïta, who played the bara, a gourd drum, were very young and did not make strong independent contributions. Elisabeth Aka and Dominique Amani were calm and cooperative but occupied relatively peripheral roles. Martial Djebré was, by contrast, extremely assertive in the beginning, drawing upon his Western classical background to 'correct' other musicians' playing. He was, however, more or less ignored by the others and soon withdrew from the proceedings.

Kurt and I were initially largely relegated to the role of spectators. The local musicians wasted no time trying to introduce us to their musical ideas – they just started rehearsing, and while they recognized our special status as 'visitors' and seemed eager to collaborate with us, they didn't forcibly draw us in. And in any case, I was more interested in getting to know them by observing their exchange and workflow than in imposing my ideas, not least since these ideas were at that

⁴⁰ Also known as Fulani, the Peulh are a nomadic people spread across West Africa and even beyond; one of their traditional heartlands is the Fouta Djallon mountains in Guinea-Conakry.

point still rather inchoate. Furthermore, as mentioned above, it took the musicians considerable effort to come to terms with each other's playing: while subgroups had common musical backgrounds and languages to draw upon (such as Babagalé, Kaba, and Tiémoko, or Dramane and Yaya and to some extent Abou), much listening and some (occasionally heated) discussion ensued before people started feeling truly comfortable.

My recollection of this first phase of the workshop is somewhat blurry: it was an intense, at times confusing experience, and I was trying to pay close attention to what was happening while also formulating ideas in my mind as to my possible contributions. Most of the ideas presented by the African musicians – Leye, Dramane, and Abou were the most active – consisted of phrases they played on their drums. Based on these phrases as 'rhythmic themes', accompaniments were developed; different musicians would then take turns playing solos over these repetitive accompaniments. On cue from a leading musician – usually either Dramane or whoever had proposed the rhythmic theme – the theme would then be played again, either to close the piece, or (later, as the arrangements grew more sophisticated) to introduce a new section. I gradually joined in; when I felt that I understood the rhythm, I usually played a groove on drums, something quite simple like a rock groove. An example of this was the piece *Sawa*, which came together quickly and naturally based on an idea, shown in Figure 6, that may have been proposed by Dramane. This two-bar motive (the second bar consisting of a rest) was played in unison by the whole ensemble before solos began. We made a recording of this piece, joined together with another theme, *Tchoré*, contributed by Hervé Blé, in 1995 for Beta Foly's demo tape (something I couldn't yet foresee in the early stages of the 1994 workshop).

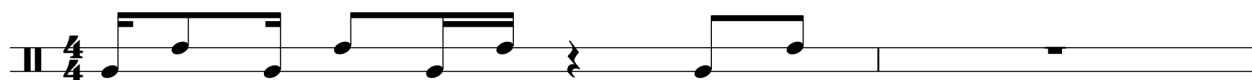


Figure 6. Rhythmic theme of *Sawa*

While I enjoyed playing a rock groove to these drum patters, and while Kurt contributed interesting improvised parts using the Lightning and his library of sampled sounds, I quickly felt that we were just scratching the surface: we were doing something that came easily to everyone, essentially ‘jamming’.

I need to differentiate here between jamming and improvising by positing, for the purpose of this discussion, that ‘to improvise’ means to make up music spontaneously, in real-time, while not being subject to agreed-upon constraints. This does not mean that the music must be free of all rules or conventions; indeed, that is nearly impossible. But whatever rules or conventions are in place, this consensus is arrived at through and during playing, and each musician should have the freedom to diverge from them and be encouraged to do so. By contrast, then, ‘to jam’ implies that certain aspects of the music are agreed upon before playing and maintained throughout, for example a key, a basic rhythm, and a tempo. Obviously, some degree of a common spoken and music-theoretical language is a prerequisite to arrive at such an agreement (it is hard to ask a musician to play in the key of E Major if they don’t know what the terms ‘E’ and ‘Major’ mean). And it turns out that having such a lingua franca was possible between Kurt, myself, and some of the participating musicians, but not all (none read Western music notation, but some knew the French names for notes and modes). But despite our limited shared vocabulary, I would categorize much of what happened during the first few days of the workshops as jamming.

Since the majority of the musicians played percussion instruments of indefinite pitch, the importance of keys, modes, etc., was somewhat less urgent. Babagalé, the flutist, had no knowledge of Western music terminology. But the musicians were good at picking things up by ear. Everyone had heard some rock and a little jazz on the radio. And obviously, some of the conceptual roots of jazz and other American popular music forms originated from this very part of the world, which I will return to later in more detail. Thus, playing solos over a repetitive accompaniment, punctuated by the occasional recurrent rhythmic theme, with references to a somewhat jazz-rock-ish style, seemed natural. And certain conventions seemed predetermined even if unspoken: The groove does not change during a piece; the tempo remains stable; people

take turns soloing rather than doing so simultaneously; the ultimate aim is to introduce more composed/arranged elements into the mix, especially making use of the basic ‘rhythmic theme’, which, when it occurs, is usually played in unison. While the music wasn’t of bad quality, I was frustrated because I felt that the musicians were looking for a lowest common denominator, a set of unwritten rules that could easily be adhered to, rather than truly experimenting.

Yet even this initial stage of the workshop pushed the limits of my musicianship. Leye proposed a motive, shown in Figure 7, that became the essential component of a piece he titled *Casamance*, after a region in the south of Senegal.



Figure 7. *Casamance* rhythmic motive

Notated as is, the *Casamance* motive is four measures of 12/8 time. On the other hand, I say several times in this thesis that it is not quite appropriate to apply the concept of bars and bar lines to African music. This is a significant contradiction that must be addressed. In his essay *The Invention of ‘African Rhythm’* (Agawu 2003a:55-70), Kofi Agawu argues that Western notation is not as inadequate for African music as many ethnomusicologists have declared it to be:

Motivated, I believe, by the belief that African music is fundamentally different from Western music, earlier researchers such as Hewlett Pantaleoni and James Koetting decided that Western staff notation was simply not suitable for conveying the reality of African rhythm and its uniqueness and individuality. Then they proceeded to invent new and improved notations for the job at hand, notations that have fortunately fallen by the wayside in the subsequent practice of representing African rhythm. I say ‘fortunately’ because the problems Koetting and Pantaleoni wished to address, such as [...] neutralizing the downbeat emphasis supposedly normative in Western music, are by no means unique to African music. In other words, Western music, too, suffers from being notated in the way that it has been notated so far; if a new notation should be developed, it should be developed for *both* African and Western music. (Agawu 2003a:64)

As previously stated, I appreciate Agawu’s recognition of similarities between African and Western music but hesitate to go as far as he does in the negation of differences. In any case, I use Western notation, consciously in contradiction to some of my own arguments, in an effort to

make my examples easily legible, and since most of the notational examples used in this thesis are quite simple, I believe that conceptual ‘distortions’ caused by my use of Western notation will not lead to a misunderstanding of the structures I am representing. It is nevertheless important to keep in mind that my use of bar lines is for purposes of orientation only and does not imply any kind of accentuation or ‘weighting’.

Casamance was recorded for our 1995 demo, and over the years, we made several arrangements; I recall taking the lead in making at least two, the one from 1995 and another one in 1996 that was intended for our CD but ended up not being included.

When I initially heard this rhythm, I did not know how to recognize the beat. I also didn’t know how many elementary pulse-units constituted a beat. By elementary pulsation, I refer to what Gerhard Kubik calls *Elementarpulsation*:

Die Elementarpulsation ist in der tanzbaren afrikanischen Musik eine alle Teilnehmer, ausführende Tänzer und Musiker, verbindende innere Wahrnehmung eines Ablaufs kleinster, regelmäßiger Pulseinheiten, ohne Anfang und Ende und ohne irgendeine A-priori-Akzentuierung. [...] Die Elementarpulsation bildet eine Art Zeitraster, der in allen objektivierten rhythmischen Abläufen enthalten ist. Dadurch wird in der afrikanischen Musikpraxis, auch bei äußerst irregulär verteilten Akzentfolgen, eine subjektive Orientierung in der Zeit möglich, denn alle Akzente fallen mit Punkten der Elementarpulsation zusammen.⁴¹ (Kubik 1988:73-74)

Things became clearer to me when I attempted to join in on drum-set. Not knowing what to do, I asked for help, and Leye gave me a simple pattern to play on the hi-hat, shown in Figure 8. Along with that, I was supposed to play the beat (dotted quarters as per the above notation) on the bass drum. So now I knew where the beat was in relation to the accents, and I knew there were

⁴¹ “In danceable African music, the elementary pulsation is an interior perception - shared among and connecting all participants, musicians and dancers - of a succession of infinitesimal, regular pulse-units, without beginning or end and a priori without any accentuation. [...] The elementary pulsation constitutes a kind of basic system of temporal orientation that is contained in all chains of rhythmic events. This enables a subjective orientation with regard to time in African musical practice, even in case of highly irregular accent distributions, because all accents coincide with units of the elementary pulsation.” [My translation.]

three elementary pulse-units to each beat. This rhythm immediately alerted me to an important difference between meter as it is understood in Western music and its African counterpart: In Western music, the ‘one’ of every bar, and certainly of a phrase stretching over multiple bars, tends to be accented. But here, there was no sound on the ‘one’. (To elaborate on my previous observation about bars, while African music contains repetitive phrases of different lengths, it does not employ the Western concept of time signatures. The phrase notated above is 16 beats long, each of which consists of 3 pulse-units, so 48 pulse-units in total. But that does not necessarily make it four measures of 12/8, as another, simultaneous phrase could also be present, sharing the same elementary pulse and beat, but of a different length – say, 36 pulse-units.) Hence, the metric feel of this phrase, which is based on the Senegalese sabar drumming tradition, did not depend on having an accent, or even a sound, at its beginning. Indeed, perhaps a rest could function as an accent and a sound as the counterweight?

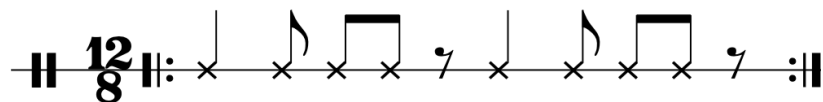


Figure 8. *Casamnance* hi-hat pattern

It is at such moments that my inquiry as a creative musician contrasts crucially with that of a musicologist. An ethnomusicologist might now ask: Can I find examples of this – is it a typical feature of Senegalese music, or indeed of African music in general? And, obviously, I am interested in these questions, too, which is why my work is so strongly influenced by that of ethnomusicologists. But the question I, as a composer, might primarily ask is: Let’s suppose silence can function as an accent, or at least as a phrase-opener. Can I develop this feeling in practice, counterintuitive as it may yet seem to me (actually a question of music cognition), and then build on it to arrive at something creative and new? That challenge in itself, and the question of how this very interesting, sparse rhythmic phrase or theme could be used in a larger-scale piece of music, was very inspirational to me. And moments of inspiration such as this helped me gradually gain a foothold in this exchange, permitting me to come up with original contributions of my own.

I needed to produce more such moments. As I quickly noticed, opportunities arose mostly during situations where foundational conceptual aspects of *musicking* (to use a term coined by Christopher Small⁴²) could be questioned. More and more, I started asking questions of the musicians, trying to understand what they were doing and why. One such question, in particular, sticks out in my memory. I observed that Aly Keïta and Kaba Kouyaté, the two balafonists, despite both being very active and engaged, would never play at the same time; when one played in a piece, the other sat it out. I asked them why, and they told me that their balafons were tuned in different keys and were therefore incompatible. My reaction to this may have marked the turning point for me in stepping up to my assigned task of ‘leading’ this workshop. I asked whether it might be possible for them to try playing at the same time despite their different tunings, just to see what would happen. Unfortunately, I do not remember exactly what came next, but I seem to recall asking them to just play together without the other musicians, and the result was highly interesting to me. Aly’s instrument was tuned roughly to the white notes of the piano, starting on the C below middle C. A heptatonic instrument with 22 keys, it covered three octaves, with the C two octaves above middle C as the highest note. Kaba’s balafon had 20 keys and was also heptatonic but conformed more closely to a ‘usual’ Mandé tuning system while Aly’s had been built for compatibility with ‘Western’ music. The lowest note on Kaba’s instrument was roughly equivalent to the A below middle C, so a major sixth higher than Aly’s, though its sound had less prominent overtones, giving it a darker quality. From there, it continued on the white keys until the E above middle C, but then had an F# instead of an F natural. The G was again natural. At 20 keys, its highest key was the F# two-and-a-half octaves above middle C. Hence, one might say it was tuned in G-major but without the fundamental, or, maybe more usefully, in A Dorian. In essence, then, the only real tuning difference between the two instruments was the F versus F#, but the differing timbres added another facet to the ‘clash’. I felt that this strategy – using the available creative, intellectual, technical, and instrumental resources to try things that somehow seemed counterintuitive, taboo, or downright impossible – might have the potential to lead us

⁴² (Small 1998)

down a path where we would come up with music that sounded unusual and new. As far as the differently-tuned balafons go, I made use of them in the piece *Balarama*, on Beta Foly's CD.

Had I asked random musicians from the large pool of people who initially came to the workshop to do such things, I would probably have been ridiculed or ignored, or maybe there would have been a mutiny. But these musicians were the 'survivors' of the presentation of my 'strange' music on the first day. For whatever reason – which undoubtedly differed between individuals and which I will come to speak more of later – they were ready to explore and persevere. So I kept asking questions and proposing experiments.

I assume that the presence of Kurt's and my electronic instruments contributed to the spirit of experimentation. While commercial (mostly cheap) synthesizers were a frequent sight in Abidjan in 1994, laptops and sequencers still had something novel about them, a situation that would change quickly and dramatically over the next half-decade. Alternative MIDI controllers, however, were mostly unknown, and while my DrumKAT seemed somewhat understandable on an intuitive level, the same could not be said of Kurt's Lightning. Indeed, it was often unclear even to me exactly how Kurt's movements, wands in his hands, corresponded to the sounds he was triggering, and to what degree he was in control of the results of his movements. For the other musicians, not accustomed to live electronics performance at all, what Kurt was doing seemed like magic, and reviews of our concerts in Abidjan newspapers over the next few years often spoke of "sorcellerie" when describing Kurt's contributions made via the Lightning.

On Thursday, Friday, and Saturday of the first workshop week, Kurt and I were gradually able to collect our thoughts about the workshops during conversations over lunch and dinner. More and more, I was able to build up personal relationships with some of the workshop participants through conversations. And I began to see possibilities of how some of the ideas I had come up with before arriving in Abidjan (such as trying to play interlocking patterns *à la* Uganda) might be worked into the fabric of the collaboration. But it would still be appropriate to say that the rehearsals were somewhat unfocused – a rather large group of people, up to 14 of us, all trying

to be heard over the din of various drums, with not much of a schedule or concept as to what would be rehearsed when. By the end of the first week, I felt that it would be possible to present a substantive concert the following Saturday, but also that much more structured rehearsals and a deeper immersion into some experimental ideas would be needed in order to make the concert a success. I therefore made a list of ideas and tentative pieces we had started working on up to that point, along with a list of the musicians who would play in each piece, as I had arrived at the impression that working with smaller groups made for much more adventurous and satisfying exploration. Using this list, I drew up a rehearsal schedule, dividing our time up amongst various sub-ensembles but also leaving time for the group to rehearse in its entirety. In preparation for this, I spent considerable time talking to each musician about their availability and decided to terminate the educational workshop in order to have full days for rehearsals with the professional musicians. I also spent many hours each day working alone or with Kurt in the concert hall of the Goethe Institute where we rehearsed, editing samples, programming the DrumKAT, etc., while he did the same with his Lightning, and practicing rhythms on the drum-set.

The final concert of the workshop, on February 26, 1994, was the culmination of what was my second life-changing encounter with African music, the first having been my purely theoretical encounter with the music of Buganda some seven years earlier. The performance was of a far higher quality than anticipated. We played most of the music better than we ever had in rehearsal, and an electrifying, sweat-laden intensity was palpable in the Goethe Institute's concert hall. The very sizeable audience filled the hall completely, with more people standing outside. We played some very challenging music, so it was no wonder that some of it was still a little shaky or rough around the edges. But the musicians mastered the conceptual difficulties with aplomb, and even the audience, many of whom must have been taken aback by the experimental nature of our presentation, went along for the ride without any protest or resistance. All things considered, it was a resounding success. But to me, the most remarkable moment came after the show was over, the applause had died down, and all workshop participants gathered together for a debriefing on the terrace outside the concert hall. The

Abidjan-based musicians, with Dramane as their spokesman, informed me that they enjoyed this collaboration so much that they wanted us to continue working together, and they suggested we form a group and call it *Bê-Ta-Foli*, ('the music of us all' in Malinké). They hoped Kurt and I would return soon, but while waiting for us to come back, they would continue rehearsing weekly at the Goethe Institute (they had discussed this with the director), continuing experimental explorations in the spirit of what we had started, albeit, by necessity, without the electronic instruments.

My reaction was delighted confusion. I was only eight months out of university in Vienna, so this was one of my first experiences as a professional musician. I had enjoyed this workshop tremendously – it was an extraordinarily intense period of learning, exchange, and creativity, stressful but radically mind-opening. I had received a unique and priceless amount of inspiration and exposure to many types of music that were entirely new to me. I was (and remain) convinced that we had embarked on something unique, culling from one another a density of conceptual invention and musical learning I have found in very few other intercultural projects, if any. The idea of continuing this collaboration seemed wonderful to me, though I didn't know how it could be accomplished in practice. I believe it was at this time that Kurt suggested that the next step could be to record a CD. Obviously, how this would be organized or funded was yet unclear. Dr. Pirrung was enormously satisfied with the workshop and declared his interest in organizing a continuation, but also said he could not make any promises.

3.2.2: March 1994-August 1996

Once I left Abidjan, it proved challenging to stay in touch with my musical collaborators, but I received occasional updates by telephone from Dr. Pirrung and Eleonore Sylla, the head of German language instruction at the Goethe Institute in Abidjan, who was strongly supportive of the collaboration and had helped Dr. Pirrung in all aspects of its organization. By early 1995, I asked Dr. Pirrung whether he could fund a new workshop and recording session, but he said he had not received a go-ahead from the Goethe Institute's headquarters in Munich. In spring of 1995, I decided to return to Côte d'Ivoire to record a demo tape with the musicians, in hopes of

then finding a record label that might fund the recording of a CD. Rather than wait for Goethe Institute funding, I decided to pay for this trip myself. When I told Dr. Pirrung of my decision to come, he committed to contributing some of his local budget (which was small but not tied to approval from Munich) to the project. Unfortunately, Kurt was unable to travel with me due to personal and financial problems. This was a serious blow to me as Kurt was not only valuable to the project through his artistic contributions but was also infinitely more knowledgeable than me about studio production. Frankly, I was not sure how I would coordinate the production of this recording at a studio in Abidjan, but I decided to forge ahead and try to grow with the challenge.

I arrived in Abidjan in mid- or late April of 1995 to find the group in a somewhat changed condition. Dramane was no longer in the group, apparently having left on good terms due to too many other commitments. I never found out exactly what happened, but Lamine had taken his position as the quasi-bandleader and spokesman (see section 6.2). Abou, Kaba, and Yaya were also no longer there. But there were some new arrivals: Yéro Bobo Bah, a 44-year-old Peulh *wassamba* (rattle) player and singer from Guinea-Conakry, and Lassine Koné, a 19-year old *djembe* drummer also from Guinea-Conakry by family origin, but who had been born and lived his entire life in Abidjan. They would play important roles in the ensemble over the next few years. Babagalé and Bobo were Peulh traditional musicians from Guinea's Fouta Djallon highlands; Tiémoko and Lassine were Malinké musicians with roots in the Kankan area. These traditions were quite compatible, and together, these musicians formed something of a bloc of people with a Guinean traditional background who had not had much exposure to other types of music. Lamine had a strong affinity with the music tradition of Babagalé and Bobo but wasn't fluent in their repertoire.

The difficulty of not having Kurt along for my second visit to Abidjan ended up having the upside that, with nobody but the African musicians to talk to about the music and our work, I came to know them and their ways of thinking much better. Rehearsals once again took place at the Goethe Institute. Before my arrival, a recording studio had been booked: Studio Séquence, owned by the Lebanese-Ivorian Alain Sawaya, was perhaps the third-most-reputed studio in the

city after Nefertiti and JBZ, two much more expensive studios that received the bulk of the recording business from pop musicians around West Africa, Abidjan being the hub of the region's recording industry. Séquence was a small, slightly dank facility with a small recording room and a largely (but not perfectly) functional mixing board and 24-track two-inch tape recorder. In preparation for the session, I worked on arrangements for some tunes and recorded some drum tracks; I arrived in Abidjan with a reel of two-inch tape with these drum tracks. The recording engineer was a young man (almost certainly younger than me; I was 29) called Steph le Fantôme. Unfortunately, I never found out his real name; I worked with him again the following year but thereafter was unable to track him down again. He was sensational, working tirelessly with never a lapse in concentration, always extremely quick to react and to understand our fairly complicated music that was so different from the normal fare at the studio. I have never met an engineer with greater dexterity at punching in and out on an analog tape machine, and frankly, I don't know if we'd have been able to complete this session in the allotted time had it not been for him. I don't remember how long we were in the studio but would guess it was five or six days.

The 1995 demo tape included some of the pieces for the full ensemble that emerged during the 1994 workshop, such as *Sawa* combined with *Tchoré*, and *Casamance*. The 1995 version of *Tras di Sol*, a piece by Lamine with Crioulo vocals in a relatively conventional Bissau-Cape Verdean style, I have always preferred to the version we recorded the following year for our CD. The tape also included a polymetric improvisation based on my choreographic drumming style for which I pre-recorded the drums. The other musicians then added their improvised reactions one by one, each on a different track, listening to everyone who had recorded before them. The straightforward approach would have been to play live as an ensemble, but Studio Séquence had too little space and too few microphones, forcing us to record by overdubbing even in the case of what was supposed to be a collective improvisation. I chose to record the drums before arriving in Abidjan because I had been informed of these limitations. The last piece on the demo tape was entitled *Raz calme* and was an extensive medley of various ideas that had been brought forth by different ensemble members. The CD ended with a similar piece, with some of its

melodies and sections grafted from *Raz calme*, though freshly recorded. I will analyze *Raz calme* and its successor piece, *Le chant de tout le monde*, in section 3.3.3.

Despite the changes in personnel and Kurt's absence, the rehearsals and subsequent recording session in 1995 did much to help the group coalesce. We also played one or two concerts during this time. A consequence of this second phase of collaboration was that the group became more active not only rehearsing but also performing around town after I departed. Lamine even organized a small festival, a series of concerts at the Goethe Institute, in late 1995. While the Goethe Institute was helpful as a location for our rehearsals and in some logistical matters, most of the organizational effort around this work phase was done by us, the musicians in the group. In 1994, Kurt and I were paid artist fees by the Goethe Institute. The workshop participants did not receive fees as far as I know, though their transportation expenses – not always negligible as Abidjan is very spread-out – were reimbursed. I found this arrangement ethically acceptable as the objective was a workshop. However, after our initial concert on Feb. 26, 1994, we became a group, and from now on it was crucial to me that everyone get paid. But the 1995 workshop was a transitional phase in that rather than everyone getting paid, nobody was paid. The Goethe Institute again reimbursed transportation expenses and also paid for my hotel (a much more modest one than the year before), though I assumed a significant loss by paying for my plane tickets and the studio.

After I left Abidjan in mid-May 1995, I used Bê-Ta-Foli's demo tape to attempt to find a record company to commission a CD recording. I came into contact with Vera Brandes, the founder of the Cologne-based record label Intuition Music, which had just been bought by the Schott publishing company. I met Peter Hanser-Strecker, the owner of Schott; I was slightly reluctant to work with the company because they published my father's works and I wanted to define my independent place in the music world. But Intuition was not a name that was strongly associated with Schott, and Hanser-Strecker was enthusiastic about the planned CD. Funding was secured from the Maria-Strecker-Daelen-Stiftung, a German foundation to which Hanser-Strecker had a family connection. It was never clear to me how this was organized, but to the best of my

knowledge, the funds were used internally within Schott/Intuition to defray costs of the manufacturing of the CD, cover design, etc. In early 1996, Dr. Pirrung called me to tell me that the Goethe Institute had decided to fund another workshop with the Abidjan musicians, Kurt, and me. Pirrung recounted that he had repeatedly asked Jürgen Drews, the music curator at the Goethe Institute's headquarters, to approve the continuation of this project, but to no avail. Finally, Pirrung gave Drews a copy of our demo tape; Drews listened to it; commented, "Anyone can make a mistake sometimes"; and approved funding.

3.2.3: September/October 1996

Kurt and I arrived in Abidjan on August 31, 1996 for our workshop and recording session; I stayed until October 15, with Kurt leaving a week earlier if my memory serves. We had a few days to acclimatize and prepare before starting rehearsals; recording at Studio Séquence began in mid-September, and there were a few concerts as well. While I don't remember exactly how much time we allotted for the recording, I think it was at least 10 days; however, we soon realized we'd need more time, and I think we must have stayed at Séquence all day long six days a week (if not seven) for three weeks. Towards the end of the session, we were in the studio virtually around the clock, with musicians sleeping in the hallway while others were tracking. All group members put in an unbelievable effort to make the most of this opportunity. I had done quite a lot of preparing for this session and once again recorded some of the drum tracks for our planned pieces before traveling to Africa. However, I conceived of these drum parts as guide tracks, and due to changes in the pieces, I rerecorded some of the drums after leaving Africa, or recorded tracks that had not been recorded before going to Abidjan. I also recorded several drum improvisations that did not end up getting used. I also recorded a few drum tracks at Studio Séquence. The studio was in a slightly lesser state of repair than in 1995, and Steph Le Fantôme was less engaged and was sometimes replaced by assistants due to the grueling schedule toward the end of the session. Because of faulty tracks on the mixer and tape machine, we had to figure out quite a few technical workarounds, and Kurt's experience as a recording engineer came in handy.

The 1996 rehearsal phase once again saw the group undergo several changes in personnel, some of which were of lasting importance to the group. I do not remember any existing members leaving, though Djibi Welle, not a member but always a close friend of the group, passed away around then. Due to Lamine's connections in the local music scene and the impending recording session, he brought in several musicians who he hoped would contribute as session musicians rather than as band members. Other musicians were interested in our work and intended to join the group. Like Tounkara in 1994, there were some musicians who appeared occasionally at rehearsals and had a more marginal presence. Among these were a Malau, a Senegalese percussionist brought in by Leye, and Dele (Ayorinde Bamindele), a Nigerian percussionist brought in by Aly. Lamine brought two saxophonists, veterans of the Abidjan music scene: Nicolas Ossomba (from Cameroon) and Abou Cissé (an Ivorian). Both must have been at least in their late 60s and have since passed away. He also brought several guitarists: Kader, an able Senegalese guitar accompanist probably around 40 years old with an alcohol problem that led to his untimely death several years later when he was run over by a bus whilst walking drunk in the street; Jean-Claude Lauboué, a young Ivorian guitarist and bassist who was very active in the group in this phase; Madou (Mamadou) Dao, a 40-year-old very meticulous guitar accompanist from Burkina Faso; and Wende (Abdoulaye Kouanda), a younger (about 25-year-old) guitarist also from Burkina Faso who will figure prominently later in this thesis. He also brought several background singers, notably Antoinette Adjoua Kangah, an Ivorian in her 30s who contributed strongly to the recording but very sadly passed away the following year. Two new djembé players joined the group: Sekou Ba Traoré, a Malian percussionist, was extremely energetic and skillful and, at probably about 70 years old, had a great amount of experience in various musical situations; Monimba (Adama Bamba), an Ivorian in his early 20s, was comparable to Lassine with his energy and fine technique. And then there were two vocalists who ended up participating in the recording more by accident than by design. Both were young women whom Lamine knew from Adjamé, the neighborhood where he lived. Joëlle Kacou was a 14-year-old who would sometimes drop by Lamine's house on her way home from school and sing with him as he played his guitar on his porch. She had no musical ambitions but attended rehearsals and read some lyrics as spoken word on one tune on the CD. And Maï Lingani was a 22-year old aspiring singer from

Burkina Faso who played with Lamine in a low-key group of musicians from the neighborhood. Shortly after Kurt and I arrived in Abidjan, before rehearsals started, Lamine came by the apartment where we stayed and played us a recording of a rehearsal of this group. Kurt and I were intrigued by the singer's voice, so while we were not looking for a singer (and indeed were not thinking of expanding the group and did not anticipate all of these new arrivals), we asked Lamine whether he could bring Maï to a rehearsal – we were simply curious to hear this beautiful but unusual voice in real life. Upon hearing Maï sing in rehearsal, all group members agreed that we wanted her to participate in the recording.

Contributing greatly to the atmosphere of enthusiasm and the musicians' relentless commitment to our project was a gesture I made, not with the intention of appeasing my colleagues but out of a feeling that it would simply be fair to do so: Sometime in late 1995, I applied for a grant in Austria. While the grant was not connected to this recording project, Beta Foly's demo tape was among the work samples I submitted with my application. I received the grant, and since I felt that the efforts of my colleagues had contributed to my success through their work on the demo tape, I took a part of the grant money with me to Abidjan and distributed it among the musicians.

At around this time, and at very short notice, the group also received its first international invitation, to perform at the Wien Modern festival, an important contemporary music festival at Vienna's Konzerthaus, of which that year's topic was *Fremde Welten* ('foreign worlds'). Not a world music festival or other event that would normally have included African music, they were interested in our combination of the 'foreign' and the experimental. But we were told that we could only bring a total of 11 musicians due to budgetary limitations. I invited the American improvising guitarist Henry Kaiser, a close collaborator of mine on other projects, to join us for Wien Modern and as a guest musician on the CD (he overdubbed his tracks in California); together with Kurt and myself, he would enhance the electronic and free-improvisation aspects of the group's sound. Therefore, only 8 musicians from Abidjan could come to Austria. Selecting musicians was a decision to be made together, and the group deliberated for a long time. By common consensus, we settled on Lamine, Aly, Leye, Babagalé, Bobo, Lassine, Tiémoko, and

Hervé. With three outstanding djembé players in the group, the choice was extremely difficult; we decided on Lassine because he had been in the group the longest of the three. We would have liked to include Maï, but she was nine months pregnant, with her due date exactly during our very short trip to Europe. It turned out that this decision foreshadowed much about the group's personnel for the next three years, during which it remained quite stable.

3.2.4: November 1996-December 1999



Figure 9. Beta Foly in Linz, Austria in 1997 (photo: Werner Puntigam). From L to R: Hervé Blé, Aly Keïta, Issa Kourouma, Lukas Ligeti, Kurt Dahlke, Lassiné Koné, Babagalé Kanté, Leye M'baye, Yero Bobo Bah, Siriki Keïta, Tiémoko Kanté, Wende K. Blass, Lamine Baldé

After the recording session in Abidjan, Kurt and I continued production at various locations. We recorded some guest musicians (Henry Kaiser; Sarah Cahill on piano; Randy Porter on saz⁴³) and mixed at Bay Records in Berkeley, California with engineer Michael Cogan; I did some drum

⁴³ A Turkish plucked-string instrument

overdubs in Vienna; and we completed the mix at the Hansa-Haus-Studio in Bonn, Germany with engineer Klaus Genuit, who came recommended by Intuition. The record was released in spring of 1997, the spelling of the group's name having been changed to Beta Foly based on the preference of the group's Dioula- and Malinké-speakers. Kurt and I were in Abidjan again around that same time and we rehearsed for a record release tour that took us to Germany and Austria. Dr. Pirrung was no longer in Abidjan, having assumed his new post as director of the Goethe Institute in Cairo, and the Abidjan institute was being run on an interim basis by Eleonore Sylla, who was extremely hospitable.

In 1998, we again came to Abidjan in the spring to compose new music with the local musicians and prepare for a tour, the anchor engagement of which was a concert at the opening festival of the Goethe-Forum, a newly constructed concert hall at the Goethe Institute's headquarters in Munich. While our project was regarded by headquarters as one of the most successful cultural exchanges in the history of the Institute, the Abidjan institute's new director, Ute Grauerholz, was uninterested and largely unsupportive. We again rehearsed in the institute's concert hall but felt that we were being tolerated rather than welcomed. When it came time for Kurt and me to visit again in 1999 to prepare what would be our longest tour (during that November 1999 tour, we performed in Austria, Germany, Belgium, the Netherlands, and France), we decided to rehearse at a studio in Abidjan's Marcory district and largely dissociate from the Goethe Institute. This decision was prompted by the fact that while we were able to rehearse at the institute in 1998 when Kurt and I were present, Ms. Grauerholz did not allow the musicians to continue their weekly rehearsals at the institute when Kurt and I weren't there, an unacceptable situation for us. Unfortunately, our 1999 tour of Europe turned out to be our last; the political situation in Côte d'Ivoire had started to deteriorate, leading to a coup d'état on Christmas Eve, exactly as some group members were in transit in France on their way back to Abidjan. They were stranded in Paris for several days, and a few of them decided to stay. Furthermore, we were no longer supported by the Goethe Institute: this foundation does not normally support projects on an ongoing basis and the fact that they had funded three workshops and invited us to Munich was probably already more than one could have asked for. And other support and invitations were

not forthcoming. We never decided to disband; it simply became unfeasible to continue, and ultimately the hope of reviving the project faded.

As mentioned, the group's personnel remained fairly stable from October 1996 on. Several musicians who had hoped to travel to Austria in 1996 but did not get the chance gradually withdrew from the group, such as Jean-Claude, Sekou Ba, and Monimba. Antoinette died. Maï, the oldest of several siblings and now the mother of a baby girl, found herself unable to shoulder the responsibilities that fell upon her after having lost her (step-)father in early 1997 (her mother had died years earlier) and returned to Burkina Faso with her dependents; she was just in the process of packing up when I was in Abidjan in May of 1997. Madou also eventually returned to Burkina Faso. For our 1997 tour, we included the same musicians as in 1996 (minus 1996's special guest Henry Kaiser), plus Wende and Siriki. Sadly, Siriki died in 1998. Later in 1998, Hervé went to the U.S. on tour with Cameroonian-Ivorian theater artist Werewere Liking. He defected from the company and stayed in the U.S., eventually going out of status – something that never happened during any Beta Foly tour.

In February 1999, I went to Côte d'Ivoire to continue working with the group to bridge what seemed like a very long gap between tours in May/June 1998 and November 1999. Kurt was not present for this visit, but the group traveled to Ouagadougou, the capital of Burkina Faso, for a few concerts. Here we reconnected with Maï, whose luck had turned for the better after she returned to her home country. Having left for Côte d'Ivoire with her parents (mother and stepfather) as a baby, she had not visited Burkina Faso in 22 years. Returning home, she first went to Koudougou to rejoin her biological father, but then left her siblings there and ventured to Ouagadougou (often shortened to 'Ouaga'), where she quickly established herself as one of the most talented young singers on the scene. By the time I saw her in Ouaga, only 21 months after she left Abidjan, she had won Burkina Faso's most important music award, the Grand Prix National de la Chanson Burkinabè, and had become a TV personality known to almost everyone in the country. For our concerts in Ouaga, we were also joined by a young and dynamic local bass player, Sylvain Dando Paré. Since our tour in November 1999 was more expansive and the anchor

concert, at the *Jahrhundertmusik* ('Music of the Century') Festival, once again in Munich, gave us a relatively good budget, we were able to include Maï and Madou this time, with Sylvain replacing Hervé. Despite these changes in personnel, the group retained its sound; we were able to add a few new pieces to our repertoire.

I remain in contact with almost all of my colleagues from Beta Foly to this day. Kurt, Maï, and Wende are founding members of Burkina Electric; after the end of Beta Foly, I continued working with them, producing Maï's debut solo album, *Entrons dans la danse* ('Let's Begin the Dance') in 2000. On a more private note, Maï also became my partner until we separated in 2007; we have remained very close since then and continue to collaborate in Burkina Electric. I continued working with Kurt also outside of Burkina Electric until 2011 when he closed his studio in Düsseldorf, moved to Berlin, and left the band to concentrate on new projects. We are in occasional, friendly contact. I am in very frequent contact with Lamine and Leye; I had the chance to play with Leye while teaching in Ghana in 2008 and hope to work with him again in the future. I made a recording with Aly in 1999 just before Beta Foly's last tour – the CD *Pattern Time*, an improvising quintet with saxophonist Gianni Gebbia from Italy, pianist Benoît Delbecq from France, American bassist Michael Manring, Aly on Balafon, and myself on drums. I think it features some of Aly's strongest playing ever. At the end of the last Beta Foly tour, Aly gifted me his balafon, which I still have and cherish. Aly has lived in Berlin for many years and tours worldwide as a soloist, with his band, and with German jazz pianist Hans Lüdemann. We rarely see each other but are aware of each other's activities. Madou lives in Ouaga and I see him during my (usually yearly) visits. He tours as a guitarist and kora player with various Burkinabè artists, and at one time, I saw him perform in New York. I haven't seen Lassine, Bobo, Tiémoko, and Babagalé in many years, but they have all established themselves as musicians, the former three in France and Baba Gallé (as he now spells his name) more recently in the U.K. Lassine, especially, has toured worldwide with artists such as Mory Kanté. Monimba also lives in France, performing and teaching djembé. Sekou Ba passed away at some point, already very old. Hervé lives in Switzerland today and still plays the bass, though he is the only group member who now works primarily outside music, as a real estate broker. Of the musicians who were present for the 1994

workshop but no longer by the time we recorded the demo tape in 1995, I was told that Abou Ouatt sadly passed away in 2017 or 2018, and I have to this day not been able to locate Dramane Keïta. On a happier note, through a coincidence, I have been back in contact since the end of 2018 with Yaya Sangaré, with whom I had lost contact for the entire meantime. He still works as a djembé player and lives in Abidjan. I saw Dominique Amani Yao and Arland Tago when I visited Abidjan in August 2018 for the first time in nearly 19 years. Dominique still teaches drums at INSAAC while Arland works at the *mairie* (city hall, i.e. in city government) in charge of cultural affairs. Martial Djebré is the conductor of the University Orchestra of Tours, France, but we are not in touch. I have not seen Kaba Kouyaté in many years but am aware that he lived for some time in Germany, working with the Nürnberg-based musician Dieter Weberpals, and now lives in Paris. Elisabeth Aka is a schoolteacher and owns a restaurant in San Pédro, and we are often in touch.

3.3: Analysis of selected pieces

3.3.1: Adjamé 220

The composition process of most Beta Foly pieces began with an idea presented by one group member; further development was usually collaborative to some degree. *Adjamé 220*, however, is entirely my composition, written for the group. It contains improvised passages by various group members, but the structure, harmonies, primary melodic and rhythmic ideas, etc. were set by me alone. Much like in a rock song, the improvised components have no agency to change the form of the piece and mostly have no influence on the accompanying parts. The piece is characterized by a complex form and employs minute rhythmic contrasts; transitions between sections are challenging to play.

The style of the piece is highly syncretic. Composed in 1994/1995, it was inspired by music I encountered during my first visit to Abidjan. That music, in turn, reminded me of other types of music I already knew, some of which are alluded to in the piece. My first evening in Abidjan was my first opportunity to hear music in the style of the Mandé griots, which, in its melodic figuration, sense of symmetry and equilibrium, and perpetual motion, reminded me of J.S. Bach.

By contrast, its harmonic simplicity, sophisticatedly ornamented yet predictable melodies and *ostinato* basslines made me think of folk music from the Austrian alps. An alpine association was also triggered by listening to music by Abou Ouatt's band Groupe Zagazougou or the Baoulé traditional singer Allah Thérèse; an accordion provides harmonies in these groups. Other influences are harder to pinpoint. I composed *Adjamé 220* while living in the San Francisco Bay Area, and my most frequent musical collaborator there was Henry Kaiser, who had recently recorded various discs with folk musicians in Madagascar and Norway. Something of these recordings, which I listened to frequently, undoubtedly made its way into the piece, albeit in a strongly modified form. And *kwela*⁴⁴ music, especially recordings of Donald Kachamba's Kwela Band from Malawi, which I knew about from lectures by Gerhard Kubik, also seems vaguely present. It is, at any rate, a piece that reveals many of the thought processes in my mind as I sought to chart new compositional territory between Western and African music theory and practice.

The title refers to a large housing development, the 220 Logements (meaning '220 Housing Units', though the development actually consists of far more units), in Abidjan's Adjamé neighborhood. Lamine lived in the 220 Logements, and I often spent time in this part of town.

We recorded the piece in 1995 for our demo tape. We then re-recorded it the following year for our CD, but initially used the drum tracks recorded in 1995. After completing the recording in Abidjan, I re-recorded the drum part in Vienna and replaced the previous drum tracks. In the studio, the ensemble consisted of Fula flute (Babagalé), balafon (Aly), djembé (Lassine), sabar (Leye), electric bass (Hervé), and me on drums and computer. Also present is a bara drum, yet, mysteriously, Siriki, the group's bara player, is not credited in the CD's liner notes, which is odd as I was very thorough about making sure everyone was correctly credited. That leads me to very dimly recall sitting in the studio and recording a bara track myself. While I have no recollection

⁴⁴ A neotraditional form of music from 1950s South(ern) Africa that originated from an effort to imitate American jazz and was mostly played by groups consisting of a pennywhistle, an acoustic guitar, and a one-string 'box' bass.

of whether that recording made it onto the album, it is possible (though I am not credited for *bara*, either). As in the other pieces on both the demo and the album, we recorded our instruments one-by-one using the 24-track tape due to Studio Séquence's small size and lack of microphones. While not originally envisaged, it became clear that this workflow enhanced accuracy and led to improvisational results that, while different from a conventional live situation, were satisfactory to us. The fact that we did rehearse by playing many of the pieces as a group helped reduce potentially musically adverse effects of the track-by-track approach; this was certainly the case with *Adjamé 220*.

There are five essential musical ideas or sections in the piece: *Intro*, *Theme*, *Cadence*, *Vamp*, and *Ländler*. Except for the *Ländler*, which occurs only once, each section is played several times, and Theme and Vamp manifest with slightly different rhythms at different times. There are also several transitional sections. The harmonic structure is simple; C, F, and G Major chords are nearly the only harmonies used. The tempo is 92 beats (quarter-notes) per minute, and the initial time signature is 4/4.

I composed the piece using pencil and paper. Unlike many other Beta Foly pieces, sequencing software was not involved in the composition process, though it was used in the recording session and in live performance. I wrote a drum part for myself; this was unusual as I rarely used notated material in performance with Beta Foly (Kurt was the only other musician in the band who read music notation, but he never used it in practice). The group learned this extremely complicated music by rote.

In preparing the composition for performance both live and in the studio, I created a "skeleton" of the piece using the Cubase sequencer program installed on my Apple PowerBook 180 laptop computer. It is prominently audible in the final mix of the CD and was played by the laptop using a harp sample that I found on a floppy disk of unknown origin (in the recording studio, the skeleton was not copied to tape, but was still played by the laptop, synchronized to the tape using SMPTE timecode). In the *Ländler*, an accordion sound was used instead of the harp. In

performance, the skeleton functioned as a guide track; I listened to it via headphones (headphone-guided performance was an important feature of Beta Foly's performance practice; see *Sound of No Restraint* in section 3.4.2). The other musicians were able to hear the guide track via on-stage monitors and played with and around it, but even if they were unable to hear it, they were guided by my drumming, which participated in and emphasized the subtle rhythmic changes that differentiated some sections (most notably the *Theme*) each time they were played. In addition to the guide track, I also used electronics to add some guitar sounds to the piece. These sounds were short samples from a recording I made in 1995 of Henry Kaiser improvising on guitar to the guide track. I used them in the demo recording and retained them for the CD.

Pieces with so many sections are not commonplace in African music, where the emphasis tends to be on extensive repetition of complex patterns. It is consequently also not commonplace for sections to be as short as they are in this piece; furthermore, African music often leaves open the number of repetitions of patterns in (and therefore lengths of) sections of pieces. In this piece, however, section lengths are predetermined and not subject to spontaneous modification. It would be tempting to say that such modular form is based more on a European way of thinking, yet that is also not completely accurate. While forms typical of European tonal music, such as sonata form, consist of various sub-sections, unlike *Adjamé 220* these sections are not normally characterized by harmonic progressions repeating in cycles of equal length; this renders the counting of measures a poor tool for comprehensive analysis of European classical music. By contrast, jazz – a music with a significant African influence – is often built on cyclically identical repetition of harmonic patterns. Modular constructions as intricate as *Adjamé 220*, however, are not found in mainstream jazz or pop music. The musicians of Beta Foly had varying levels of contact with, and interest in, jazz, but none of them had a background of playing jazz 'changes' or navigating complex modular forms. Since form in African music is usually derived from (contrasting) pattern length(s), the notion of playing, say, eight bars of one melodic or harmonic cycle and then, say, 10 bars of another is not frequently part of the skill set of African musicians. And although African pop productions often contain modular forms of some complexity (primarily in recording sessions where arrangements tend to be fixed, as opposed to concerts

where tunes are often played more loosely), I have seen musicians in Africa struggle with this aspect of form.

Possibly, this might be connected to a tendency to hear harmonic cycles according to regularities different from those that would be detected by European-trained ears. For example, the harmonic cycle in *Adjamé 220's Theme* is C-G-F-G, which, in European terms, could be understood as I-V-IV-V, a harmonic construct that would seem odd in common-practice tonal music due to the 'retrogression' from dominant (V) to subdominant (IV). African music employs harmonies and the contrasts between them but is not concerned with functional tonality in the European sense, rendering the C-G-F-G progression unproblematic. On the other hand, African music based on cyclic patterns attaches strong significance to the moment of onset of a pattern – in other words, where is the beginning of the cycle? For example, identical clavé patterns can be played starting from different points in the pattern, giving them a completely different gestalt (Toussaint 2013:73-83). The beginning of a harmonic cycle would not necessarily have to be on the first harmony played; for instance, the first harmony could function as a type of harmonic anacrusis, making the second harmony the start of the cycle – in other words, |CGFG|... becomes C|GFGC|... When the length of the melody played over these harmonies is not equal to that of the harmonic cycle, the question of which repeated aspect – melodic or harmonic – a musician deems more relevant becomes significant. The problem is further compounded by the fact that the notion of measures is not generally a feature of African traditional music. In a European way of thinking, meter implies a stress and sense of outset on the first beat of a measure, leading one to assume, absent any indications to the contrary, that the first harmony played should mark the beginning of a cycle. In African music, however, a pattern exists on its own terms, free from the constraints of meter. This allows for more complex accentuation, and, more significantly, it lays the foundation for the polyrhythmic structures that are fundamental to many forms of African music. But it also means that the beginning- and ending-points of patterns may be difficult for an outsider to detect or may be variable and open to interpretation. All of these factors can conspire to make it difficult for musicians steeped in African formal thinking to determine exactly how

many measures long a section of music defined by a repetitive harmonic cycle should be. Kubik describes this phenomenon, albeit encountered in Southern Africa, in *Africa and the Blues*:

Today, in the countries on the periphery of South Africa, one may encounter outstanding musicians playing in contemporary pop styles based on South African *mbaqanga* or Zimbabwean *chimurenga* music [...] who have enormous difficulty even grasping the *idea* of the 12-bar blues harmonic sequence [...] The problem seems to be the long stretch on the tonic chord found in many blues, covering measures 11, 12, 1, 2 and 3 of the form. With no caesura marking the beginning of the blues' first line [...] these musicians become disoriented. They seem to hear the *start* of the blues on the beginning of measure 11 [...] (Kubik 1999: 176)

This demonstrates an area of key difference between European/American and African musical thinking, and it is clear that conceptual differences such as this can present a challenge in intercultural collaboration. Differences between African and European musical thinking and concepts have been thematized notably by George Lewis, who coined the terms 'Afrological' and 'Eurological' to describe some differing perspectives (Lewis 1996), albeit specifically concerning the reference to jazz in improvisation. My experience working between European and African music theory and practice has allowed me to identify numerous other areas of subtle difference, though I still consider these to be outweighed by the commonalities. To me, one of the principal challenges in intercultural work is to ensure that participants in the exchange take account in a balanced manner of similarities and differences between cultures on a conceptual level; if this is accomplished, the potential for deeper mutual understanding is greatly enhanced.

The overarching formal structure of *Adjamé 220* – consisting of the five basic sections mentioned above – can be divided into three parts, each of which contain the succession of *Intro*, *Theme*, and *Cadence*, in that order. Part 1 presents these three key sections in direct succession in their 'first' form. In the other two parts, sections are added. In Part 2, the three key sections are once again played in direct succession; however, the rhythm in the *Theme* is now slightly different (a difference that was predetermined during the composition process, not improvised). This is followed by the *Vamp* and then a recapitulation of the *Theme*, which is now lengthened due to a transitional unison passage leading back to the *Intro* that forms the beginning of Part 3 (otherwise, the *Intro* is preceded by the *Cadence*, not the *Theme*, hence the necessity for the

inserted transitional passage). Part 3 once again opens with a succession of the three key sections, but then demonstrates an even more complicated structure. As in Part 2, the *Cadence* is followed by the *Vamp*, but this latter section lasts only one measure now, acting as a transition to a new section, the *Ländler*. This leads back once again to the *Vamp*, which is now subjected to some transformations. Thereafter, we return to the *Theme*, which is now followed by a final, lengthened *Cadence*. At the very end stands an unaccompanied drum fill.

The *Intro* is the simplest section of the piece. Over a pedal tone of *G*, it consists of a harmonic cycle of 2 measures of 4/4: *G-F-C⁶-F*, each harmony lasting a half-note. In the *G* chord, *B* arrives after the *G* and the *D*, while in the *F* chord, *A* is not played at all by the guide track, which might lead to modal ambiguity, but other instruments supply context clarifying that all chords are major. With most of the key melodic and harmonic information contributed by the guide track, the other instruments are free to improvise embellishing phrases and melodies, resulting in a heterophony between flute and balafon. Of some note is the first appearance of the bara drum: On the first downbeat of the piece, simultaneously with the guide track's first note, it plays a *sfz* accent followed by a few notes played *diminuendo*, *rubato-rallentando*. If my memory serves, this idea was created in the studio and was intended as a kind of analogy to the solo drum fill at the end of the piece.

The *Theme* is the section with the most detailed and memorable melodic material. The harmonic cycle (*C-G-F-G*) is again 2 measures long, with each harmony lasting a half-note. The melody (or core theme of the entire composition) also lasts 2 bars and is played 4 times when the section is 8 measures long. It manifests in two different forms throughout the piece, shown in Figures 10a and 10b, neither of which is the original form in which I first wrote it down. The 'original' melody starts on the 2nd 8th-note of the 1st measure and ends on the 3rd 16th of the 2nd measure (the *G* on the 4th 16th is already the first note of the repetition, held for three 16ths and replacing the rest at the beginning of the first time the melody was played). With the exception of the 3rd and 4th beats of the 1st measure, the elementary pulse unit is the 16th note. In those two beats, however, the elementary pulse is the 16th-sextuplet. The phrase benefiting from this change in

elementary pulsation is a descending C-Major scale that constitutes a key element of the melodic theme. The inspiration for this descending motion very likely came from the intricate, scalar runs I heard some Mandé musicians play in Abidjan, especially Kaba Kouyaté on the balafon. Such ornamental figurations are one of two key components of instrumental playing in the music of the Mandé griots and are known in the Mandinka language (at least on the kora) as *birimintingo*, as opposed to the more repetitive *kumbengo* accompaniment (Charry 2000:167-168).

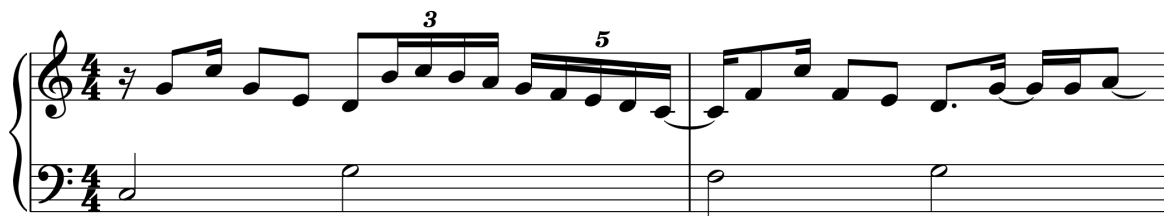


Figure 10a. The *Theme of Adjamé 220* in its 1st form

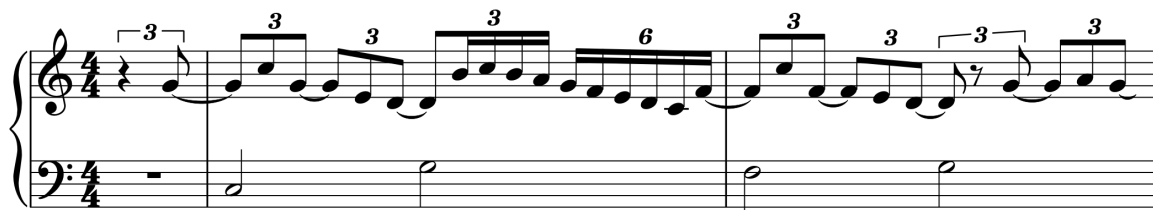


Figure 10b. The *Theme of Adjamé 220* in its 2nd form

In listening to musicians playing in this style, I often found these scalar runs fairly difficult to ‘quantize’ rhythmically; they seemed to be somewhat freely superimposed over the constant elementary pulsation. The contrast between the more triplet-based scalar run and the 16th-notes of the rest of the theme in its original form imitates that effect. However, in the piece as it was ultimately played, the original form never appears; it is only through examining my sketches that I can determine that this was the point of departure. Looking again at my sketches, this time of the drum part, it is notable that I never seem to have written a drum part for the original form, but only for the versions I actually ended up using. I am unfortunately unable to recall whether the original form was only a conceptual sketch I made to aid myself in developing the other forms, or whether I had initially intended to use it in the piece. In the form of the *Theme* used the first

time it is actually played, which I call the first form, the onset of the melody is slightly delayed compared to the original version; notes are shifted slightly throughout, and, notably, the five last notes of descending C-Major scale are now a quintuplet, so that the elementary pulsation shifts thrice: from 16ths to a sextuplet to a quintuplet and back to 16ths. Groupings of five pulses, such as quintuplets, are rare but not unheard of in Mandé music; I was unfamiliar at the time with (but soon came to know) the important Mandé griot standard *Boloba*, which uses a five-note melodic theme (Charry 2000:185) that could, with some imagination, be regarded as a large quintuplet. (I stress, however, that *Adjamé 220* is in no way an attempt at an imitation of Mandé griot music and sounds nothing like it; it is an independent composition that was inspired by a variety of sources, this tradition among them.) The second form, by contrast, has a triplet feel throughout. Here all of the longer-held, ‘heavier’ notes are played on the last triplet of the beat, creating a feel so syncopated that the beat can only be traced by listening to the bass line, played by the electric bass. In this regard, as well as the fact that the triplet is kept throughout as the elementary pulse unit, it is perhaps the most generically ‘African’ of the three forms. In Part 1 of the piece, the *Theme* is played in its first form. In Part 2, it appears in second form, and later in the first form with a transitional phrase tagged on. In Part 3, it appears twice in the second form. In 4 of the 5 times the *Theme* is played, it consists of 8 measures of 4/4. But the *Theme* at the end of Part 2 has a 9th bar, in 3/4, tagged on (or one could say that the 8th measure is in 7/4). The first two beats of the 8th measure are played as usual. In the 3rd beat, *G* is played by the bass, again as usual, but now lasts only 1/16 instead of a half-note. At that point, electric bass and balafon play a transitional figure in unison with the harp guide track. This unison figure is made up of a motive six 16ths long, played 3 times, plus an accented final *G* that sets up the next *Intro*, which ushers in Part 3 of the piece. The motive consists of two neighboring pitches: the first (*A*) is played for an 8th and a 16th; the 2nd (*B*) for a dotted 8th. The second and third time the motive is played, it is sequenced, occurring each time a seventh lower than previously. The result is a scale, that, while the pitch classes form an ascending scale, nevertheless descends by two octaves plus a third: *a'-b'-c'-d'-e-f-G* (with the *G* on the 1st beat of the *Intro*).

This transition is necessary because the *Theme* normally leads to the *Cadence* rather than to the *Intro*. When the *Theme*, which ends in G, is followed by the *Intro* – underpinned by a pedal tone of G – there is a lack of harmonic contrast that makes the succession feel weak. The transition inserts a C-major scale that makes the G pedal tone of the *Intro* feel like a fresh, new section. This transition is unusual in my compositional output in that I am generally reluctant to write unison lines. This is due in part to my interest in polyphonic and polymetric structures but is also connected to a distaste for (fast) unison lines that I acquired by listening to jazz-rock fusion in my early days as a drummer – days that were still recent when I composed this piece. An overabundance of fast unison lines inserted between more improvised sections felt like a jazz-rock cliché to me. *Adjamé 220*, a piece that resists any classification such as jazz fusion, classical, or even African music, but in some ways does seem to reference the (in my opinion slightly annoying) popularity of jazz-rock fusion in Africa, was an interesting opportunity to confront my dislike of unisons. With the balafon and the drums often faithfully doubling the guide track and the bass providing lines that reminded of the style of Jaco Pastorius (a strong influence not only on Hervé but on virtually all electric bass players in Africa), this unison transition seemed to be all the piece needed to cement its relationship with jazz-rock. There certainly is something tongue-in-cheek about this, but it was about as far as I could go in approaching this fusion cliché without actually sounding like fusion: the reference should be barely perceptible. The rather architectural concept of the descending-ascending scale helps distance the line from fusion, tempering my playful fusion reference and placing it closer to the more constructivist attitude of classical new-music composition.

The *Cadence*'s (Figure 11) harmonic cycle is one measure of 4/4 in length, with the harmony changing per quarter note: FCGC. The entire section is short, only 4 bars, where the last of the 4 bars is shortened, normally to 3/4 and therefore dispensing with the final C harmony. However, in Part 1, the first time the *Cadence* is played, the last bar is 7/8 long, so that the final C is played for 1/8. This is because the *Intro* that follows it has (as already stated) a pedal tone of G, which would make the transition directly from G sound indecisive. All other times the *Cadence* is played, it is followed by the *Vamp*, which starts in C, so that truncating the final C from the *Cadence*

creates a smooth and decisive transition. The interest in the *Cadence* is produced by an ambiguity of elementary pulsation. The bass plays 8th-notes (always the fundamental, but with octave leaps) while the lead melody, played by the flute, is in triplets, with the note onsets occurring on the 2nd and 3rd triplet of each quarter-note and never on the beat. The leaps in the flute melody create the impression of a compound melody with suspension dissonances. Both 8th-note and triplet pulse are represented in the drum part: the bass drum plays quarter notes while the snare drum is generally on off-beat 8ths, though I handled that quite freely; the ride cymbal plays the triplet rhythm.

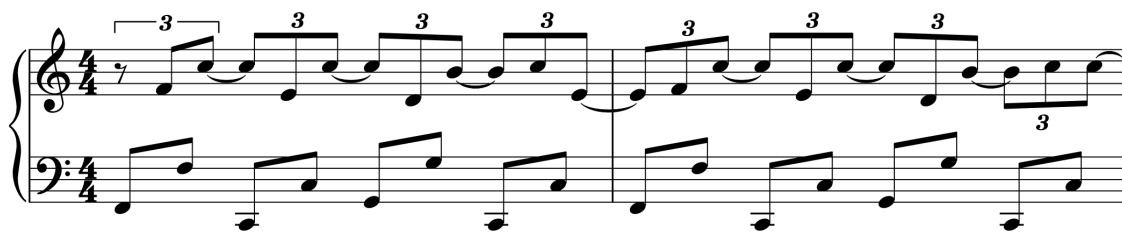


Figure 11. The *Cadence* from *Adjamé* 220

Each of the four times the *Cadence* occurs, it is preceded by the *Theme*, and it is the default ending of each of the three parts of the piece (though Part 2 ends with the previously explained unison passage rather than the *Cadence*). The *Cadence* is also the final section of the entire piece, bringing the composition to its very unusual ending. In its 4th and final rendition, the *Cadence* is prolonged and lasts 7 measures, with the final measure 3/4 long as usual; however, this leads directly into an unaccompanied drum fill played in a rubato-rallentando manner, analogous to the bara fill at the very beginning. Leading into that final drum fill, the last cymbal triplet of the *Cadence* is accented with a splash cymbal. The *Cadence* is once again a syncretic musical idea in its own right: The FCGC harmonic progression seems more typical of African music than European. Also typically African is the constant superposing of 2 against 3. However, while in African music the rhythmic-metric ambiguity is normally accomplished by grouping together a fast, elementary pulsation in two different ways, here it is achieved by subdividing a slower pulsation in two different ways, a much more European approach.

The remaining sections of the piece, *Vamp* and *Ländler*, could be considered less essential, although they supply contrast, melodic interest, and, in the case of the *Vamp*, variation of a complex nature. The *Vamp* could be thought of as a two-bar structure alternating 4/4 and 5/4, but I prefer to regard it as one bar of 9/4 (Figure 12). Like in the *Cadence*, the harmonic rhythm is fast, with a new harmony occurring every quarter-note: CGFGCGFaG. The a-minor harmony on beat 8 is of interest: it is the only minor harmony in the entire piece. However, the melody, at least in the *Vamp*'s initial/original manifestation, includes not only an *e''* during this harmony but also an *f''*, so that it may be more accurate to regard this harmony as $F^{6/5}$. Not unlike the situation with the Theme, the *Vamp*'s melody in its originally notated form is not used in the recording, where it is played by the balafon. In its notated version, it preserves a rhythmic aspect of the *Cadence* in that the melody plays all elementary pulse units except those on the beat, though there is no ambiguity of pulse now: the melody is in 16th-notes. What I describe here as 'melody' is, however, not actually a single-note line: on the 2nd and 4th 16th of every quarter are two notes which either complete the triad of which the root is in the bass or double the bass' root while also providing the chordal 3rd. On the 3rd 16th of every quarter is the note *g''*, with the exception of beat 8, where it is the aforementioned *f''*; when the harmony is F, it thus represents a somewhat foreign pitch. This recurrence of the same pitch at the same metric position in every beat is a frequent feature of Mandé kora and balafon music. However, the actual balafon part differs from the originally notated version: it is a chain of 16th-notes, the 1st and 2nd of which are the higher of the two notes written to be placed on the 2nd 16th, while the 3rd and 4th are *g''*. Again, the exception is beat 8, where the notes are *f''-e''-f''-e''*, retaining the $F^{6/5}$ chord.



Figure 12. The *Vamp* from *Adjame 220*

The *Vamp*, which ordinarily consists of two bars (the second being a verbatim repetition of the first) is played a total of 6 times throughout the piece. The 2nd time follows immediately after

the 1st and features a change in the melody: The 3rd 16th of each beat is now an *a''* instead of a *g''* (the 8th beat remains the same). The remaining 4 occurrences of the *Vamp* are in Part 3. Here it once again succeeds the *Cadence*, but this 3rd rendition lasts only 1 bar; melodically it is identical to the *Vamp*'s 1st occurrence, except that the drums play a fill at the end to set up the next section, the *Ländler*. After that 16-bar section, the *Vamp* is played 3 more times in direct succession, for a total of 6 measures. The melody now undergoes an unusual development. The 1st measure is once again a repetition of the 1st (and 3rd) manifestation. The 2nd measure is identical to the 2nd manifestation, i.e. with an *a''* on the 3rd 16th, except for beat 8 which always remains unchanged. In the remaining 4 measures, the rhythm of the melody changes from steady 16th notes to a figure that sits somewhere between a 16th rest followed by two 32nd notes and two 16th notes, and a quintuplet, the first note of which is a rest. The exact rhythm is a product of the feel of Aly's balafon playing, but in any case, these figures are fast arpeggiations of the harmonies, albeit always with a *g''* as the highest note (the melody in the 8th beat remains unchanged compared to what came before). Once again, the recorded balafon part is not exactly what I notated; my sketches include numerous possible rhythms for the melody, without specifying exactly which is/are to be used. The flute takes on the role of an improvising soloist in all *Vamps*, but during the very last measure it converges on the *a''-g''* melody on the 3rd and 4th 16th of every beat, standing in for the balafon which now concentrates on the fast arpeggiated figures. In my original score, I prescribed 8ths with octave leaps for the bass, much as in the *Cadence*, but in the studio, Hervé and I came up with a more interesting bass part that effectively imitates the balafon melody though with a slightly different rhythm, providing a counterpoint. The drums in the *Vamp* play an upbeat rock rhythm, in double-time compared to the rest of the ensemble, meaning that the snare drum backbeat doesn't fall on weak beats but on the 3rd 16th note of every beat. I played the bass drum very freely, often injecting two successive 32nd-notes, and threw in splash cymbal accents here and there – a clear reference to the Police's Stewart Copeland, one of my favorite rock drummers. While Copeland was heavily influenced by Afro-Caribbean genres such as reggae and ska, such fast rock rhythms are rarely found in music from the African continent.

Finally, as an interlude between manifestations of the *Vamp* in Part 3 of the piece, the lone occurrence of the *Ländler* provides melodic and atmospheric contrast in addition to an element of surprise as entirely new material would probably not be expected by the listener this late in the piece. It consists of the harmonies F-C-G-C, each lasting one measure; this cycle is played four times for a total of 16 bars. However, due to small melodic differences, I would regard the section as being 8 measures long (twice the harmonic cycle), repeated once. Also, thinking melodically, the section seems to begin with an anacrusis of 3 8th-notes. These 3-note figures, occurring in every other bar, together with a melodic figure ushering in the C harmony coming from G (*g-a-g-f-e-d-c*), might be regarded as the section's principal melodic material, although it actually seems more like an accompaniment. The latter, scalar, figure is a common bass 'fill' in traditional music from the Alpine region of Europe, an association reinforced by the use of an accordion as the sound of the guide track as opposed to a harp – hence the name *Ländler*, a traditional dance from the greater Austrian/Alpine region. It is not, however, an actual 'Ländler', as that dance normally is in 3/4 time; rather, I felt that the name evoked a generalized rural Austrian atmosphere ('Land' means country or countryside in German, and 'Ländler' refers to something coming from the countryside). The accordion sound delivers all of the fixed material of this section; the bass freely responds to the accordion while the remaining instruments provide improvised melodic gestures. There is no clear soloist, no lead melody, and the drums do not play. While the melody begins with an anacrusis as stated, the 4/4 meter of the piece is retained, so that what would normally be on the 1st beat is now actually on the 3rd; the entire section is "pushed" by two beats in this manner, and the final scalar fill of the accordion, now doubled by the balafon, sets up the return of the *Vamp*.

Regarding the melodic improvisation, two items seem worthy of mention. First, the melody played by the balafon exactly halfway through, leading from the first 8-measure section to the second, is somewhat typical as an accompaniment in Mandé music, consisting of the intervals *c'-g'* (implying C in this modal environment), *a-e'* (implying a minor), *c'-f'* (implying F), and once again *a-e'*. All this happens over the harmonies G, C, and then F, with the harmonies implied by the balafon never coinciding with those provided by the accordion. This harmonic incongruity,

while mild, is noticeable and lends the section additional interest; it was the product of spontaneous improvisation. Second, the short guitar phrases sprinkled throughout the *Ländler* are the aforementioned samples of Henry Kaiser's playing; I chose samples and placed them in the music according to my taste. These inserted samples occur throughout *Adjamé 220* but seem especially noteworthy in the *Ländler*: in the absence of a clear lead melody, the ear is free to concentrate on these short phrases and gestures.

It is hoped that this rather elaborate analysis demonstrates to what degree of complexity the combination of elements of Western and African composition can lead. For example, throughout the analysis, I spoke of time signatures and bar lines, a European way of thinking, though the thought processes involved in many aspects of the melodic and harmonic invention were more African-based. Perhaps it would be accurate to think of *Adjamé 220* more in terms of a granular intermingling, a conglomerate, of distinct cultural features rather than an amalgamation wherein heterogeneous ingredients have been mixed together to the point of creating a new homogeneity. But because the conceptual-cultural switching in *Adjamé 220* happens very quickly and sometimes in different directions simultaneously, and because I could never have composed this piece without the concrete influences I was exposed to through my colleagues in Abidjan, it is still a representative example of the hybridization that occurred in and through Beta Foly.

Furthermore, it demonstrates some of my thought processes when attempting to create intercultural music as well as music for specific musicians I know well, and provides an interesting link between the more collaborative works I will now analyze and the fully- or almost fully-scored works I will describe in Chapter 5. Also, due to the degree to which it is through-composed, meaning that decisions were made in a non-real-time composition process and entirely by myself, I am able to explain many elements of *Adjamé 220* more accurately, rationally and with less speculation than in the following pieces. And while each piece in Beta Foly's repertoire was conceptually distinct, some of the ideas in *Adjamé 220* also transfer to other pieces.

3.3.2: Village dans 8 pays

Village dans 8 pays might exemplify the spirit of Beta Foly more clearly than any other piece. While its arrangement and form is highly complex, it is the result of close collaboration between numerous group members, all of whom contributed substantive ideas, although Aly Keïta and I were credited as the lead composers. The piece was performed on the recording by Bobo, Lamine, Antoinette, and Maï (vocals); Leye (vocals and sabar); Tiémoko (bolon); Hervé (electric bass); Kurt (electronics); Henry Kaiser (electric guitar, overdubbed in Berkeley, California); Aly (balafon); and me (drums). Broadly speaking, it consists of three ‘movements’ played attacca, the end of the second movement overlapping with the beginning of the third. The first and third movements are similar in material and atmosphere and focus on the simultaneity of a balafon melody and a polymetric drum-set pattern. The middle movement consists of several sections featuring different vocalists.

The title, translated from French into English, means ‘Village in 8 Countries’, but rather than the village being divided into sectors with impermeable borders à la Berlin or Nicosia, perhaps these countries are superimposed onto each other, or mix to the point of being difficult to tell apart. The countries alluded to, according to my liner notes to the album, are “Mali, Ghana, Burkina Faso, Senegal, Guinée, Côte d’Ivoire, Uganda, and the U.S.” (Ligeti 1997); one might add Austria and Germany to the list, and Guinée could refer to two, either -Conakry or -Bissau: maybe a more appropriate title would be *Village dans 11 pays*! The musicians on the recording were citizens of Guinée-Conakry (Bobo and Tiémoko), -Bissau (Lamine), Côte d’Ivoire (Antoinette, Hervé), Mali (Aly), Burkina Faso (Maï), Senegal (Leye), the U.S. (Henry), Germany (Kurt), and Austria (me). Perhaps more relevant, the piece contains vocals in Peulh (Guinée-Conakry), Wolof (Senegal), and a gibberish resembling Moré (Burkina Faso). Aly’s main compositional input, a pentatonic theme on the balafon, is in the tradition of the border region of Mali, Burkina Faso, and Côte d’Ivoire. My primary compositional contribution, a polymetric pattern on the drums, is based conceptually on music from Uganda. A rhythmic pattern by a composer from Austria is referenced; the fundamental rhythm of the long middle section of *Village...* is from Ghana. Some techniques used to treat motives are derived from the thematic-motivic development of classical

art music of Austria and Germany, while some of the improvisation builds on the legacy of American experimental improvised music. And even Indonesia is referenced in Kurt's use of samples of a pentatonic metallophone that Aly had built in response to an inspiration from gamelan music.

The initial impulse for *Village...* came from two unrelated ideas Aly and I brought to the group. Aly's idea was a theme he had composed long before. Introduced by a virtuosic flurry based on a descending scalar pattern on the diatonic balafon followed by a motive of descending 3rds, it consists of a right-hand melody with its left-hand accompaniment, strongly reminiscent of the pentatonic Bobo/Senoufo balafon tradition of his home village in southeastern Mali (Figure 13). The flurry and the descending-3rd motive, however, are diatonic, and this combination of diatonic and pentatonic elements perfectly illustrates the intercultural syncretism lying at the very foundation of Aly's artistic personality: his home village is in a region that favors pentatonic tunings, but he grew up in the international melting pot of Abidjan and, through this exposure to many types of music including jazz, developed a keen interest in mixing the traditions of his home with regional and international influences. My idea was a polymetric, choreographic pattern on the drums in the Baganda-derived manner explained in section 1.2. In the course of our conversations and rehearsals leading up the 1996 recording session, we decided to experiment by playing these two ideas repetitively at the same time. We noticed that my bass drum and ride cymbal occasionally coincided with the beginning of Aly's melody – to be exact, every 7th time I played the ride cymbal, it coincided with both the bass drum and every 8th beginning of Aly's melody. Taking that as a foundation, we gradually put together a piece featuring the aforementioned disparate range of elements, and while I was probably more responsible for how they were combined into a composition than my colleagues, the process of gradually assembling the piece was so collaborative that I cannot remember exactly what happened, when, and how.



Figure 13. Aly Keïta's pentatonic theme in *Village dans 8 pays*

The piece begins with Aly's scalar flurry. Towards the end of this introductory passage, I join with a cowbell pattern derived from a completely different side of my musical activities: In the years 1990-93, I was a member of a Viennese band/artist collective, Kombinat M. The group was founded by Erwin Redl, a classical guitarist who had become fascinated by electronic music, minimal music, heavy metal, and minimalist conceptual visual art. (He moved to the U.S. in 1993 to study at the School of Visual Arts in New York and has since left music completely, becoming a successful light artist working primarily with LEDs.) The music of Kombinat M ranged from free improvisation to almost completely notated pieces. One of Erwin's compositions for the group, *Schöne Tiere*, featured a rhythmic pattern of 3+2+2+3+2+2+2/16 (Figure 14). This rhythm bears some resemblance to the 'asymmetric timeline patterns' used in many forms of African music, which can probably be traced to Erwin's interest in the minimalism of Steve Reich. I 'borrowed' this pattern for *Village...* and played it on two cowbells during Aly's scalar introduction, evoking the sound of the *gankogui*, a set of two conjoined metal bells found in the traditional music of the Ewe in Ghana.



Figure 14. Rhythmic pattern from *Schöne Tiere* by Erwin Redl

Aly's scalar introduction is followed by a brief motive in descending 3rds (discreetly accented by Leye on the sabar), before launching into his pentatonic theme. At the exact time he begins his theme, I start playing my polymetric pattern. We repeat this 7:8 relationship several times; then Aly frees himself into a solo while I revert to the *Schöne Tiere* pattern, now played on tomtoms.

Soon, an overdubbed guitar solo by Henry Kaiser is superimposed onto Aly's balafon. This highly dissonant solo is played with a noisy sound, lending the already complex musical environment an air of aggressive urgency. A click track was used to keep the ensemble in sync during the recording process; while most parts were played in accordance to the click (even if some rhythmic relationships were complex), Henry's overdubs floated freely over it. Together with the beginning of Henry's guitar solo, Tiémoko starts playing the bolon and continues doing so for the remainder of the piece. His bass line is improvised and constantly varied, and the tunings of the strings are not completely stable and are influenced by the intensity of his attacks. The 3 pitches he plays, from high to low, are approximately *c*, *A*, and somewhere between an *F* and an *F#*. A set of sympathetic metal rattles is attached to the bolon, making it as much of a percussion instrument as a bass, providing some rhythmic impulse but actually more of a mirlitone effect. During Henry's solo, his playing, too, is rhythmically free, not synchronized with any other instruments, but later on, he converges on the rhythmic reference provided by the click track. Leye gradually joins in on sabar; my drums recede (during which time I imitate the sound of Leye's sabar by muffling certain tomtom notes with my hand) and ultimately drop out, but soon thereafter, I come in once again with the *Schöne Tiere* pattern played on two cowbells. Little by little, Henry's solo takes on a more tonal quality; at the same time, Aly's solo, having been more subdued for a little while, becomes more aggressive, with attacks of seemingly random flurries of fast notes. At that point, I resume playing a drum-set pattern, transporting and transforming the Ewe allusion of *Schöne Tiere* into an actual Ewe rhythm. Henry's solo continues, still aggressive but much more melodic and with a second overdubbed track, an accompaniment consisting of the broken chords *d*, *G*, and *F*. During this section, Aly drops out; however, it is the first time in the piece that Hervé joins on bass, with an accompaniment to Henry's guitar based on the tone *D* albeit with numerous fills and short improvisations. Unlike Henry's solo and accompaniment, Hervé's bass is played to the click; consequently, Henry's *d* chords don't always coincide with Hervé's *D* bass notes, yet increasing the complex, polymetric disposition of the music. This effect was desirable to me due to my interest in complex polyphony and polymetrics; as previously mentioned, the avoidance of unisons or all-too-predictable relationships of pattern lengths has been a staple of my compositional technique since even before I visited Africa.

I have already mentioned that my drum part here is based on a traditional Ewe rhythm. My theoretical introduction to the music of the Ewe, who inhabit the southeast of Ghana and southern Togo, came through the book *Drum Gahu* by the American ethnomusicologist David Locke. Since I have never worked with Ewe musicians, I have until today not had strong practical exposure to their music, but I have repeatedly come across it due to its ubiquity in American universities: of all African music forms, Ghanaian, and particularly Ewe, drumming and dance is the one most often practiced in American academia (Dor 2014). Locke's book (Locke 1987) focuses primarily on *Gahu*, a well-known component of Ewe traditional (or, rather, neotraditional, as it appears to have been created well into the 20th century) repertoire. In *Gahu*, a timeline pattern (Figure 15) is played on the gankogui, and other drums play various interlocking patterns. Figure 16 shows the gankogui part together with the parts of 3 drummers, playing the *sogo*, *kidi*, and *kaganu* drums. My drum-set playing in *Village...* quotes the gankogui and kaganu parts of *Gahu*, but subjects them to transformations in instrumentation. During Henry's guitar solo, I play the gankogui line on the bass drum instead of on cowbells, and the kaganu part on a cowbell instead of a drum. On the snare and the tomtoms, I play a rhythm reminiscent of, but not identical to, *Gahu*'s *kidi* part. These re-orchestrations are of interest to me since they subvert each part's intended function and portray the rhythm in a new light, with a different timbral disposition and balance.



Figure 15. Timeline pattern played on gankogui in *Gahu*

The image shows a musical score for four parts of a Gahu section. Each part is on a separate staff with a 4/4 time signature. Part A (Cankogui) has a melody of eighth notes with lyrics 'ko ko ko ko ko' and a 'repeat ad lib' instruction. Part B (Sogo) has a melody of eighth notes with lyrics 'de de de de'. Part C (Kidi) has a melody of eighth notes with lyrics 'gi-di ki-di-gi-di ki-di gi-di ki-di-gi-di ki-di'. Part D (Kaganu) has a melody of eighth notes with lyrics 'ka-ta ka-ta ka-ta ka-ta ka-ta ka-ta ka-ta ka-ta'.

Figure 16. The parts of four players in a section of Gahu (Locke 1987:47)

This section, which can be considered the final component of the first movement of *Village...*, comes to an abrupt end to make place for the second movement. Each of the second movement's three sections features a different vocalist singing a counting rhyme in a different language, underpinned by an increasingly complex rhythmic architecture.

The first of these sections is sung by Maï Lingani. The lyrics, a children's counting rhyme, are essentially nonsense but based on the Moré language from central Burkina Faso, Maï's home country. The tonality shifts suddenly to E, although it is in reality not E major but E pentatonic, using the pitches *e*, *f#*, *g#*, *b*, and *c#*. The tempo also shifts suddenly; it is slightly faster than in the preceding section. The texture is sparse, preparing for an increase in intensity throughout the rest of the movement; Maï is accompanied by Tiémoko on bolon, now playing in strict time (but using the same pitches as before, not in the same scale as Maï), Leye on sabar, and me on tomtom playing the kaganu rhythm I previously played (at a slightly slower tempo) on cowbell. Also

present are two backing voices, recorded at the same time and on the same track as Maï's lead; I believe they are Antoinette and Lamine.

This section is followed immediately by one in which Leye raps a counting rhyme in his native language, Wolof, from Senegal. He is accompanied by Tiémoko, whose bolon part is more intense than in the previous section, and by Hervé, who supplies a tonal foundation. Using the 'white keys' of the piano – and thus the pitches available on Aly's balafon - he plays essentially in G and D. Maï and Antoinette provide two fast vocal responses to Leye's rapping. I now play the entire drum-set, with the gankogui rhythm again in the bass drum, but the kaganu part now in the ride cymbal. On the snare and a tomtom, I play a rhythm of 5 notes that does not appear to form part of *Gahu*, but were one to shift the rhythm back by 1/16, the first 3 notes would coincide with the gankogui. As soon as Leye finishes his rap, Aly comes in with a wild, seemingly almost random solo flurry on the balafon while Hervé, Tiémoko, and I continue undeterred. Such a moment in the music once again emphasizes a possibility that is of compositional interest to me: the simultaneity of seemingly unrelated actions, creating an element of polyphonic unpredictability. Most arrangers of music endeavor to tighten up the music to make it more transparent. If my job as the piece evolved was that of an arranger, my choice often was the exact opposite: to make it more multifaceted and obscure, akin to looking at a body of water with various organisms swimming around, each representing an independent sense of motion.

The last of the three vocal-led sections features Bobo singing a counting rhyme in his native Peulh language. This section is unconventional both metrically and tonally. Tonally, Hervé initially lays a foundation in A, and Bobo's vocals are essentially in A Major, consisting, approximately, of *e*, *a*, and *c#*'. However, Aly's balafon accompaniment creates an impression of bitonality, focusing on four intervals rather evoking F Major/d minor: *f'* and *c(natural)''*; *a'* and *d''*, again *f'* and *c''*, and *d'* and *a'*. The metric structure is even more unusual: I play only two cowbells, and at first, I play the *Gahu* gankogui pattern. As seen in Figure 15, this pattern consists of 4 beats, whereby the initial dotted 8th and 16th are followed, in the remaining 3 beats, by offbeat 8th-notes. Now I subject this rhythm to a progressive elongation. After having played the original pattern 4 times,

I add a beat with an offbeat 8th-note, resulting in a pattern 5 beats long. I play that 4 times and then continue the process, lengthening the pattern to 6, 7, and eventually 8 beats. Hervé, on the bass, plays accents on every 'one' of my lengthening gankogui patterns, while Leye, on sabar, plays crescendo rolls culminating in an accent on every 'one'. Tiémoko's bolon part is relatively free. Even though the accents occur ever more rarely as the gankogui-derived rhythms get longer, the obvious presence of a process and Leye's lengthening crescendi lend the music an increasing intensity.

Such piecemeal processes may be encountered in styles such as minimalist music but are not usually present in traditional music from coastal West Africa; here, timeline patterns might be subjected to a minimal amount of variation but far more often remain constant. Variation is provided by improvising soloists rather than by progressive alteration of the rhythmic/metric 'backbone' of the music. In European tonal music, however, musical ideas can be split up into parts, with component sub-motives repeated, varied, etc., leading to an expansion or contraction of the original idea. Such techniques of thematic-motivic development were pioneered by Joseph Haydn and quickly established themselves as an essential feature of composition in the classical style and thereafter. In the context of Beta Foly, it was primarily Leye's interest in arrangement that made it possible to perform such structures; he contributed many ideas of his own, and when I presented him with an idea, he enthusiastically and quickly internalized it. Leye was a member of Awana, Abidjan's leading jazz-rock fusion band at the time, which used sophisticated arrangements featuring the unison runs commonly seen in 'international' jazz-rock. Accustomed to complex arrangements through that group, Leye's capability to navigate abstract, complicated musical forms was also a product of the tradition of Senegalese sabar drumming, where large ensembles of drummers play rhythmic phrases often rooted in underlying lyrics that are not recited and thus only present subliminally in the musicians' minds (Tang 2008).

Bobo's vocal section is the final element of the 2nd movement of *Village...*; the last movement follows with a transition to a reprise of the original theme, the reprise, and a long balafon solo concluding with a fade-out. As soon as Bobo has finished his *sprechgesang*, Kurt joins in with his

sole appearance in the piece, a very short solo played on Lightning using samples of a pentatonic metallophone Aly had built under the influence of gamelan music. This is brusquely interrupted by a loud and dissonant, likewise very short solo on (overdubbed) guitar by Henry Kaiser, which I accompany on drums once again using the *Schöne Tiere* rhythm, on its last repetition with the accents played on splash cymbal, lending the rhythm a windswept, amorphous gestalt. From there, while Henry's solo concludes, I proceed to my cowbell introduction, and Aly picks up his initial idea from the descending-3rd-motive that introduces the pentatonic theme. Like at the beginning, I start my polymetric drum pattern as soon as Aly begins his melody, and this time, Aly gradually frees himself into a highly intense solo where he flirts even more with chaos than earlier in the piece. The ending of *Village...* is in form of a slow fade-out.

Clearly, many aspects of *Village...*'s structure evolved in the recording studio and could not be played the same way live. It is therefore worthwhile to examine how we played the piece in concert, with slightly different personnel and without the possibilities of overdubbing or playing a smooth fade-out.

A video compilation of a concert at the Musée de l'Art Moderne et Contemporain in Strasbourg, France, on 25 November 1999 contains footage of most of a live performance of the piece. The video was shot and edited by a team from the museum without input from myself or other ensemble members, and not the entire performance made its way into the compilation. Roughly the first six minutes of the performance are visible, comprising the entirety of the first two movements and the beginning of the third. In the studio recording, this much of *Village...* takes about four-and-a-half minutes. The live version preserves the overall formal structure, but everything is played somewhat more loosely. While eye contact certainly supports this type of spontaneous interaction, most of the relevant cues for changeovers are embedded in the music.

At the Strasbourg concert, Aly opened the piece with very short improvised phrases that quickly led to the scalar flurry. In the studio recording, I began the *Schöne Tiere* rhythm on the cowbell during Aly's flurry and maintained it during the descending-3rd motive; as soon as Aly began his

pentatonic theme, I commenced my polymetric drum pattern. In Strasbourg, Aly prolonged the descending-3rd motive by embellishment, following it up with another short, improvised passage before then repeating it without embellishment. It was only when Aly began playing his pentatonic theme that I started my cowbell pattern. Aly then played the descending-3rd motive once again, and it was only thereafter, at the return of the pentatonic theme, that I commenced my polymetric pattern. Aly's balafon solo growing out of his pentatonic theme was more halting and reserved in this concert than three years earlier in the studio. From there, Aly worked his way – via another repetition of the descending-3rd motive – to the melody Maï sang in the 1st section of the 2nd movement, and from there, to the accompaniment he played in the studio during the section in which Bobo sings. All of this happened before the electric guitar solo, so within the first movement and before any singing. Once Aly found his way to this accompaniment, I, having accompanied Aly's solo with a rather free take on my polymetric pattern, played the *Gahu* gankogui pattern on the cowbell. Wende then joined in with a solo on electric guitar, replacing Henry's. While Wende did not play on the original recording of this piece, he studied Henry's guitar stylings with great interest and arrived at his own style of noisy, dissonant electric guitar improvising, an unusual skill among West African guitarists. During Wende's solo, I played the same re-orchestration of *Gahu* as I did on the record.

Throughout the ensuing vocal sections led by Maï, Leye, and Bobo, Aly maintained the accompaniment used on the CD only during Bobo's section. Accordingly, Maï sang her part a semitone higher than on the CD, in F pentatonic rather than E pentatonic. At the opening of Leye's rapping section, some call-and-response between lead and backing vocals was inserted, but Aly's accompaniment continued as in the previous section while mine was identical to the CD. In his section, Bobo delivered his vocal part somewhat differently from the CD. The lyrics were identical, but instead of singing in A Major, he was now in F Major, and, unlike the recorded version's *sprechgesang*, his delivery in Strasbourg was quite tuneful. The rhythm of his singing, however, seemed somewhat distorted, playfully extending syllables in ways that didn't flow naturally like spoken word but created interesting contrasts with the elongating rhythmic cycles of the accompaniment, which were played as on the CD. Proceeding from there, Kurt played a

Lightning solo as he did on the CD. Unfortunately, just as Aly launched back into his pentatonic theme, the video is edited and switches over to another piece, so that the final movement of this live rendition remain inaccessible to me.

Footage also exists of a concert on 4 April 1998, situated chronologically halfway between the recording session and the performance in Strasbourg. This performance was organized by the foundation MusikKultur and took place at the Hauptschule (secondary school) in St. Johann in Tirol, Austria, and on this video, the entire rendition of *Village...* is visible. While similarities with the CD and Strasbourg versions abound, a crucial difference is that not only was Henry absent, but so was Maï (she was living in Burkina Faso at the time, where we only found her again in early 1999). Maï's lead vocal part was taken over by Lamine. However, the most significant difference from the other versions is the beginning, which accounts for almost all of this take's added length - it is almost 9 minutes long. Aly opened the piece by casually improvising on the balafon, playing phrases, some more melodic than others, with the butt end of his mallets. Within an overall sparing texture, the others in the group – Leye, Hervé, Lamine, Bobo, and myself, and to a lesser extent Kurt and Wende, responded to his phrases. This was free improvisation, and the spirit was one of timbral exploration: Bobo hammers the lid of a pan; Lamine plucks strings of an acoustic guitar suspended on a stand, then touches and slides on the strings using a calabash, producing scratching sounds. I play disjointed phrases in alternation with Aly's equally disparate ones. Someone – I don't know who as it is only audible, not visible in the video – plays a duck call. After two minutes, Aly finally launches into his scalar flurry.

It would not be an exaggeration to say that these first two minutes of St. Johann's *Village...* represented new musical territory. The somewhat sparse and tentative, yet highly interactive, free improvising we performed here is not suggestive of any particular musical idiom, other than, perhaps, the lineage of free improvised music that emerged in the early 1960s in the UK through musicians such as Derek Bailey, Tony Oxley, Gavin Bryars, and John Stevens. Yet the subliminally tongue-in-cheek, irreverent humor present here puts it in somewhat closer proximity to the Dutch response to these British precedents, with musicians such as Misha Mengelberg, Han

Bennink, or Willem Breuker. But in Beta Foly, it's African traditional musicians doing this improvising. Crucially, we were not trying to evoke a particular atmosphere: it would be conceivable, with some African music groups, to see slightly similar playing as a means of suggesting, say, a jungle idyll, or representing some other concrete social or geographical situation. But here it is clear from the playing that no effort is being made to be illustrative, and that the purpose is entirely abstract, an exploration of the sounds themselves rather than any supposed 'real-life' context. I can think of no example of similar free improvisation performed by West African musicians. South African musicians such as Johnny Dyani played free jazz in the UK, but the jazz reference was crucial there, more so than in the case of players like Derek Bailey who attempted to suppress their jazz background. Bailey wrote about his process of developing away from jazz and towards free improvisation during the mid-1960s in the group Joseph Holbrooke (he here describes rhythmic developments; later, he describes a similar process for harmony, not quoted here):

Initially, we were playing fairly conventionally in a jazz manner [...] But it seems that almost from the very beginning there was a movement to expand these boundaries. The regular meter was always under attack [...] until the feeling of a regular pulse was totally removed. (Bailey 1980: 103)

With my colleagues in Beta Foly – except in my own case, but including even Kurt, who had no stronger a foundation in jazz than did my African colleagues – there was neither a strong reference to jazz in this context, nor was there any interest or attempt to subvert/reject such a connection. Conversely, of course, each of the participating musicians had their respective traditional backgrounds from which they were unfettering themselves in the process of free improvisation. Some of the instruments on which this improvising was done – balafon, sabar, wassamba, fula flute – were practically never used by European or American free improvisors, and hence the timbres were different. I was the instigator behind this playing, having acquainted my colleagues with European and American improvised music, but the results surpassed what I had anticipated. Certainly, elements of what we played reminded of European free improvisation, but the thoughts in the musicians' minds must have been quite different, and hence their aesthetic concerns, and thus, both the sound and the 'atmosphere' of the resulting music.

On this March 1998 tour, we also gave another concert in Tirol, at the Innsbruck Easter Festival. The day before our concert, the seminal British free-improvising trio AMM performed, and after it became clear that Beta Foly would arrive in Innsbruck in time for AMM's concert, I proposed a collaboration between the groups, an idea that was enthusiastically received by the festival organizers. They put me in touch with AMM's drummer, Eddie Prévost, who, after some reflection, rejected the idea, saying that he feared the groups would be incompatible: certainly the African musicians would play much louder than anything AMM was able or willing to keep up with, and would not understand AMM's trademark soft, sparse, timbrally-oriented playing. While I was able sympathize with Prévost's fear on a theoretical level, I knew he was wrong in practice and was sad about this lost opportunity for an innovative encounter. Nevertheless, most members of Beta Foly attended AMM's concert. AMM's 'non-idiomatic' idiom was not unfamiliar to them.

The further course of the piece in St. Johann was largely consistent with the other versions; nonetheless, some details are worth pointing out. Aly's scalar flurry led to a short balafon improvisation, this time with some dramatically effective rests, followed by the descending-3rd motive and the pentatonic theme with my cowbell accompaniment as in Strasbourg. Here, too, Aly returned again to the descending-3rd motive to start off the section contrasting his pentatonic theme with my polymetric drumming. But in this instance Aly seemed quite playful and exuberant and, after only a brief period of playing the theme over my polymeters, began improvising in a more tuneful, consonant manner than in Strasbourg or on the CD. I also soon freed myself from my predetermined patterns and loosened up my playing. As in Strasbourg, this balafon/drum-set dialogue led to an anticipation of Maï's melody by Aly – now in C pentatonic – before gradually ushering in a dissonant guitar solo by Wende which, however, was now slightly more rooted in a central pitch – again, c' – than in Strasbourg. Due to Maï's absence, Lamine now sang the first section of the second movement, and he sang it in C pentatonic as anticipated by Aly, a fourth lower than Maï in Strasbourg. Aly's accompaniment, only present in Bobo's section on the CD, there had the treble melody $c''-d''-c''-a'$, contrasting with Bobo's A Major vocals. In

Strasbourg, Aly played as on the CD, with Maï and Bobo singing in F. In St. Johann, however, Aly's accompaniment was a fourth lower, in accordance with Lamine's singing. In addition to singing, Lamine also prompted the audience to clap along with the music. As in Strasbourg, Leye's section was interspersed with moments of call-and-response with others in the group answering his vocal calls. While my drumming was essentially the same re-orchestration of *Gahu* as in the other versions, I introduced more variations towards the end of Leye's section, and the whole group played without a vocal lead for a while after Leye finished rapping, with Leye returning to his sabar, before I ushered in Bobo's section as in other versions by reducing my drumming to the gankogui pattern on the cowbell. However, Bobo this time centered his singing on the pitch *c'*, interspersed with occasional pitches *e'*, *a*, and *g*, over Aly's accompaniment that remained unchanged from the previous sections. Kurt's solo was short, and as I transitioned from the gankogui pattern to polymetric drumming, Aly joined and eventually supplanted him as the soloist. Aly ended this section (and the entire piece) somewhat abruptly with the descending-3rd motive, played twice, at the end of the second of which the piece was over.

Differences in arrangement between the piece on the CD and in concert were mainly due to slight simplifications to facilitate performance; for example, the way I began the cowbell rhythm at the beginning of the piece in the studio was clearly the result of a calculation with the intention of having Aly and me converge at a certain moment. In live performance, this would have been difficult to accomplish, so Aly took the lead and cued me with his descending-3rd motive, first for the cowbell rhythm and then for the polymeters. Another element was the inconsistency in personnel, with Wende replacing Henry and, in 1998, Lamine replacing Maï. The free-improvised section opening the piece in 1998 was certainly the result of prior deliberation, not as to exact content (as in that case it wouldn't have been free-improvised) but in that we agreed to do it; I am not sure why we omitted it in 1999. Actually, the piece in the 1999 video does begin with a short, improvised phrase on the balafon, and I cannot rule out the possibility that this was preceded by an ensemble improvisation that was not retained by the video producers when they made their edits. It is also possible that we decided to free-improvise on other tunes and felt that

there was already enough free improvisation in the concert, thus cutting it from the beginning of *Village....*

Yet perhaps the most significant structural differences between the versions are those in the second movement. The transposition down a fourth from Maï's singing to Lamine's was doubtless the result of rehearsals where Lamine determined a conducive key in which to sing. But the migration of Maï's singing from E in 1996 to F in 1999 was likely the product of Aly now playing his balafon accompaniment throughout the second movement; in the studio, he played it only during Bobo's section. Since Aly's balafon was diatonic in C, he would not have been able to maintain the same intervallic relationships had he transposed his accompaniment from *c* to *b* in an effort to adapt to Maï's singing in E, so Maï singing in F was likely a result of the affordances of the balafon. On the other hand, Bobo, not a trained singer at all, seemed to choose his pitches, if not randomly, then according to his momentary inclination based on the general pitch environment he was listening to.

It is noteworthy that Tiémoko did not perform in live renditions of *Village...* as far as I can discern from the videos. The reason for this is not clear to me today. It could be that, as a group, we felt that his somewhat 'rogue' contribution, while interesting and valuable on the recording, would be too timbrally complex in live performance to successfully integrate into the mix, making the overall impression of the piece muddy and unclear. But it is also possible that Tiémoko, knowing full well that the execution of complex arrangements was not his strong suit, decided to refrain from playing in the interest of making this already complex piece easier to follow, or that he simply felt he didn't have much to contribute.

Overall, *Village...* is one of those pieces that seem to me to best demonstrate Beta Foly's unusual position among cultural exchange projects. A wide variety of elements from numerous musical cultures and genres – including ones foreign to all participants – is embedded into the composition; these elements enter into a relationship with each other while maintaining their individual integrity and authenticity; a fairly high degree of mutual comprehension and

engagement was necessary to put the piece together; practically all of the musicians involved contributed substantive ideas; and the theoretical complexity of the piece as originally laid out was largely retained in practice during live performance.

3.3.3. Le chant de tout le monde

Le chant de tout le monde is the longest, and in certain respects the most complex, piece on the Beta Foly CD, and an analysis of all its aspects would exceed the scope of this thesis. However, I would like to examine its form, and, specifically, its ‘medley’ characteristic. I will trace how various component ideas, which can be considered independent compositions in their own right, were combined into one large, eclectic conglomerate and how this was facilitated by the ‘sociocratic’ decision-making process that often took place within the group.

The liner notes accompanying the CD (Ligeti 1997) list 17 musicians as having participated in the recording process, more than in any other piece on the CD. All Beta Foly members participated, as well as several guest musicians. Composition credits are shared between Lamine Baldé, Tiémoko Kanté, and me, but ‘Trad.’ is also cited among the composers due to some of the music (specifically, the *Feux de brousse* section) being based on traditional music of which we did not know the composer. Credit for the lyrics went to Tiémoko as the sections he contributed were the only ones featuring vocals. As regards the arrangement credits, when anyone other than a composer was credited as arranger on the CD, it was me, except for one piece, *Samaya*, where Leye M’Baye and I shared the arranging credit. In *Le chant...*, however, the credited arranger is ‘Lukas Ligeti/Beta Foly’, implying that while I was the lead arranger, so many group members contributed in such complex and intertwined ways that it was not possible to distinguish individual contributions; it became, indisputably, a group effort.

Le chant... is the final piece on the CD, and has its predecessor in *Raz calme*, the final piece on the 1995 demo cassette. Not all sections of either of these pieces have their own titles, but I will identify them using short descriptors. These will be written in quotation marks while the titles of

fully-fledged pieces that form sections of *Raz calme* and or *Le chant...* will be in italics. Figures 17a and 17b display the sections in chart form.

Section	Time	Length	Instruments	Rhythm	Tempo	Solo
"Percussive Mess"	0:00-0:12	0:12	Bara 2 Djembe	Unmetered	Senza Tempo	No
<i>Calm Theme:</i> "Piano Theme"	0:12-1:05	0:53	"Piano" Bara 2 Djembe Balafon Bass Sabar	Straight 8ths, different meters	120	No
<i>Calm Theme:</i> "Ensemble Section"	1:05-2:42	1:37	Sabar 2 Djembe Bass Drums Guitar "Accordion" "Vibraphone" Bara	Straight 8ths, funk	120	No
<i>Calm Theme:</i> "Piano Theme"	2:42-2:58	0:16	"Piano" Balafon Drums	Straight 8ths, different meters	120	No
"Percussion Battery"	2:58-3:52	0:54	Drums Sabar 2 Djembe Balafon	16ths	140	No
"Synth"	3:52-4:47	0:55	Sabar Synth Djembe Balafon	16ths	140+layers	Synth
<i>Madagascar</i>	4:47-5:13	0:26	Drums Organ	Triplets	160	Organ
"Transition Madag– triplets"	5:13-6:35	1:22	Drums Balafon Organ Bara	Triplets to shuffle	190	Organ and balafon
"Triplets"	6:35-7:42	1:07	Drums Balafon Organ Bolon	Triplets	108	Balafon

Figure 17a. The sections of *Raz Calme*

Section	Time	Length	Instrument	Rhythm	Tempo	Solo
"Samba"	0:00-0:34	0:34	Djembe 2 Guitars Bass Drums	Samba?	264	Guitar (H. Kaiser)
<i>Calm Theme:</i> "Ensemble Section"	0:34-0:46	0:32	2 Guitars Bass	Straight 8ths	116	Guitar (H. Kaiser)
<i>Calm Theme:</i> "Piano Theme"	0:46-1:39	0:53	Piano Djembe Bass Balafon	Straight 8ths, different meters	116	No
<i>Calm Theme:</i> "Ensemble Section"	1:39-3:17	1:38	Drums Piano Balafon Guitar Bass Djembe Saxophone "Accordion"	Straight 8ths, funk	116	No
<i>Calm Theme:</i> "Piano Theme"	3:17-3:48	0:31	Balafon Piano 2 Djembe	Straight 8ths, different meters	116	No
"Transition"	3:48-3:53	0:05	Balafon Piano Bolon Nyanyero Flute Bass Drums			
<i>Kolonisé</i>	3:53-5:13	1:20	3 Vocals Flute Drums Bass Nyanyero Bolon Guitar	Reggae	70	Vocals (Tiémoko)
"Ngoni- nyanyero duo"	5:13-5:30	0:17	Ngoni Bolon Nyanyero			Vocals (Tiémoko)
<i>Kolonisé</i>	5:57-6:15	0:18	3 Vocals Flute Drums Bolon Guitar	Rock	110	Vocals (Tiémoko)

			Djembe 2 Djembe			
<i>Feux de Brousse</i>	6:15-8:25	2:10	Drums Sabar 3 Djembe Bass Balafon Guitar	Ziglibithy, rock	106	Various short
<i>Kolonisé</i>	8:25-8:52	0:27	Guitar Djembe Balafon Bass Bolon Nyanyero Flute Drums	Triplets/ shuffle	110	Flute
"Djembe solo"	8:52-9:00	0:08	Djembe			Djembe (Sekou Ba)
<i>Djébrélé</i>	9:00-9:39	0:39	3 Vocals Bolon Guitar Drums Djembe Balafon Flute Bass	Punk rock	190	Vocals (Tiémoko)
<i>Calm Theme:</i> "Piano Theme"	9:39-9:55	0:16	Piano Balafon 2 Djembe	Straight 8ths, different meters	124	
<i>Calm Theme:</i> "Ensemble Section"	9:55-10:18	0:23	2 Djembe Saxophone Balafon Piano	Straight 8ths	124	
"Triplets"	10:18-11:52	1:34	2 Djembe Balafon Bass Guitar Drums	Ternary polymetric pattern	124	Balafon, Guitar (H. Kaiser)

Figure 17b. The sections of *Le chant de tout le monde*

Raz calme begins with a short percussion introduction, described in my sketches as "Percussive Mess", in which two percussion parts (on djembe and bara), and then another djembé, were superimposed via overdubbing, with no obvious synchronization. While the first major

component section, *Calm Theme*, all of which I composed and wrote down on various sketch papers, starts after 12 seconds, “Percussive Mess” persists, co-existing with *Calm Theme* in a complex crossfade: While *Calm Theme* fades in, “Percussive Mess” adapts not by a reduction of volume but through a gradual restructuring of the percussion to fit the new section.

The opening section of *Calm Theme* is a melody played (by a sequencer) with a (sampled) piano sound. Repeating cyclically, it consists, in its originally notated version, of six measures of 4/4, one of 5/8, and eight more of 4/4 (Figure 18), with the inserted 5/8 bar giving the theme an ‘interrupted’ feeling, as if it were abruptly reset to its beginning. A melodic line played by Aly on the balafon, inspired by the Mandé melodic patterns I heard Kaba play, soon joins the piano theme; this is joined by a second, contrasting balafon line as a counterpoint, and the bass also joins, contributing to a buildup of energy. I will refer to the section with the piano melody, two balafon lines, and eventual contribution of the bass as “Piano Theme”; including “Percussive Mess”, the process of accumulation takes slightly over a minute. At that point, the drums enter with essentially a funk rhythm, and the electric guitar with a melodic pattern that could be heard to be inspired by Mandé balafon melodies or by the guitar parts of Congolese *soukous* music. I will refer to this new section as “Ensemble Section”, even though bass and piano drop out: due to the forward motion contributed by the drums and guitar, the sense of increasing energy is preserved, as if by a gathering of instrumental forces. The bass soon resumes playing and engages in a call-and-response with an accordion sound played by the sequencer and pointing to Baoulé music from Côte d’Ivoire, and eventually, another sequenced part is added, using what I will consider to be a vibraphone sound though in reality it is a vibraphone-like electric piano sound (very likely manufactured using FM synthesis), and then another part with the same sound; this latter will assume significance in *Le chant...* and I will therefore give it a separate name, “Contrasting Theme”. (My original sketches for *Raz Calme* have names for all of these parts and sections, but they are obscure abbreviations such as ‘BL’, ‘GS’, or ‘M’, which would be confusing unless I provided a far more detailed analysis.) At this point, the accumulation process has been completed, and “Ensemble Section” ends; after an absence of roughly 100 seconds, the initial “Piano Theme” returns, played by piano and balafon as before. The accumulation of energy gives

this section of the piece a sense of development, and the return of the “Piano Theme” a sense of closure, establishing it as a complete entity within the greater context of the medley.



Figure 18. Piano part of “Piano Theme”, a component of *Calm Theme* from *Raz calme* and *Le chant de tout le monde*

But after just 15 seconds, a new process of accumulation starts, which I will call “Percussion Battery”: the bass drum introduces a faster tempo and the balafon switches to this new tempo while the piano does not. Soon, percussion (sabar and two djembés) and eventually the other components of the drum set join in. This is, in turn, interrupted after less than a minute by a “Synth” section: a balafon melody from *Calm Theme* is now played by a Nord virtual-analog synthesizer, again at a slower tempo, while the balafon soon rejoins with the same melody but at the faster tempo it had played prior to the synthesizer’s appearance; the sabar and three djembé drums soon join as well. The simultaneity of several tempos fulfills multiple purposes and can be considered innovative in several ways. On the one hand, it is a variation on the polymetrics of African music, produced with different means, primarily the recording studio’s affordance of combining tracks played one after the other as if they had been made in real-time, allowing the composer to disregard mechanisms otherwise needed to ensure coordination between musicians. At the same time, it contributes a markedly constructive, architectural element, akin to a building constructed through the overlaying of various slabs. To me, one of the wonderful

opportunities afforded by intercultural inspiration and collaboration is the possibility to combine stylistic elements from different backgrounds to create novel combinations, such as, in this case, Mandé melodies with constructivist superimpositions of tempos and phrases.

This section has a duration of slightly under a minute; I then play a drum roll to introduce an entirely new section, *Madagascar*, based on a piece Kurt and I presented during the duo concert we gave at the beginning of our 1994 workshop in Abidjan. This section features a melody played by the sequencer using an organ sound together with a *salegy* drum-set rhythm.⁴⁵ An accumulation process occurs again, as follows: The first organ melody is joined by a second, contrasting melody, and, roughly 20 seconds after *Madagascar* started, the balafon joins with a solo that works its way towards the piece's final section, "Triplets". This development creates a feeling of suspense or disorientation: the exceedingly deliberate beginning of *Madagascar* created the promise of an important new section, yet the balafon puts this notion into question, and increasingly it seems as if *Madagascar* was merely a transition. It is, however, significant exactly because of this disorientation or disappointment: I was making the attempt to create an unpredictable setting where eclectic ingredients do not lead to a patchwork of ideas but build on aspects of each other's *gestalt*. Here, *Madagascar* turns out to be, perhaps more than anything else, a decoy-like section that brings about the transition of the piece from a binary to a ternary rhythm. And soon, the new ternary environment is combined with the idea of superimposition first exposed in the "Synth" section.

⁴⁵ Salegy is a neo-traditional dance-music genre from Madagascar wherein each beat consists of three pulsations of which the second is accented. While salegy can be played at a wide range of speeds, it is most often heard at a medium to fast tempo. Similar rhythms can be heard on other Indian Ocean islands; for example, sega, a popular style in the Seychelles, also features a triplet rhythm with the second of the three pulses accented. But sega is usually slower than salegy, and the accentuation pattern is usually interrupted every 4th beat while in salegy the accentuation of the second triplet is normally preserved throughout. I became familiar with salegy not long before my first trip to Africa via Henry Kaiser, who had visited Madagascar in 1991 and recorded a collection of albums (Kaiser and Lindley 1993) that included several pieces of this genre.

A few seconds after Aly starts his solo, I reduce the salegy drum rhythm to a looser, sparser groove where the triplets are more implied than actually played, and then increase intensity and speed by converting this into a loose shuffle feel while Aly and the sequenced organ play simultaneous solos. The bolon also enters at this point, to remain in the mix until the piece ends. This “Transition” lasts relatively long, about 80 seconds, before the theme for “Triplets”, a two-voice pattern likewise played by the balafon, fades in. But while *Raz calme* still continues for more than another minute after this, “Triplets” appears somewhat like a mirage in that its theme remains low in the mix while the balafon solo, bolon, and loosely shuffle-like drumming carry on. It turns out that “Triplets” is not really a section in its own right as much as an accompanying figure, a vehicle for a soloist and a foundation for the fadeout that brings the entire medley to a close. The “Triplets” theme does eventually come to the forefront of the mix so as to rival the soloing balafon track, but no sooner does this occur than the entire piece fades out, ending approximately 20 seconds later.

Overall, one is left with the impression that the entire second half of *Raz Calme* consists of a succession of transitions without ever settling for a clear direction, leaving the ultimate destination to the imagination, or, perhaps, delaying its discovery until *Le chant de tout le monde*. In any event, the complex form of *Raz Calme* with its recurring layered accumulations was the product of an elaborate composition process I undertook in which I created certain themes, enough to define an overall form and succession of sections and sub-sections, but left certain spaces, such as “Percussive Mess”, “Percussion Battery”, and “Triplets”, to be filled largely by my colleagues’ imagination, while other parts, such as *Calm Theme* with its ensuing buildup culminating in the appearance of “Contrasting Theme”, as well as *Madagascar*, were through-composed and largely written down by me. The realization of the piece was a product of music technology, making ample use of click tracks, sequencers, and overdubbing.

Having examined *Raz Calme*, we now turn our attention to its expanded and further developed successor, *Le chant...* But before providing a description of this piece, I must digress for yet another moment to mention another piece in Beta Foly’s repertoire, *Djarabi*.

Djarabi (the title means ‘my love’ or ‘beloved’ in Dioula) is a piece composed by Lamine Baldé, setting his own lyrics. While his work is generally situated in the traditions of his home country of Guinea-Bissau and of the culturally and historically closely related Cape Verde, he is also extremely open to experimental ideas and influences from other styles and cultures as evidenced, for instance, by his enthusiastic participation in the free improvisation at the opening of *Village dans 8 pays* at the concert in Austria analyzed above. *Djarabi* is in many ways a fairly conventional song, but it features sections I arranged and to which I brought some ideas not normally encountered in this genre, such as a two-voice, contrapuntal saxophone part (played by the late Nicolas Ossomba using overdubbing). In a cue taken from Congolese pop music, the piece starts out at a slower (though certainly not sluggish) pace and then switches to a faster section. This fast section is guided by a melodic accompaniment that is played on the electric guitar by Wende K. Blass and might be found in Congolese *soukous* or *rumba* or in Ghanaian *highlife*, while my drumming is more reminiscent of an up-tempo jazz samba. At the very end, I take an unmeasured drum solo – unusual in African pop music – while guitar and saxophones bring the piece to a close; I end my drum solo on the downbeat of the final harmony. *Djarabi* is the 13th of the 15 tracks on the Beta Foly CD. Track 14 is *Langage en dessin*, a piece of a completely different nature, a highly experimental polymetric improvisation guided by click tracks. *Le chant...* concludes the album as the 15th track.

The opening of *Le chant...* shares with *Raz calme* that it is an introductory section to be followed by *Calm Theme*; otherwise, the two opening sections have little in common. Instead of referring to *Raz calme*, the introduction to *Le chant...* picks up where *Djarabi* left off: A short, unmeasured drum solo over an opening chord from the guitar leads into a very fast, freely interpreted samba groove and a guitar accompaniment with the same harmonies as in *Djarabi*. For a moment, it seems as if *Langage en dessin* had been an interlude and we have now returned to *Djarabi*.

But it turns out that this opening section of *Le chant...*, which I will call “Samba”, is the vehicle for an exuberantly high-pitched, melodic, effects-driven guitar solo by Henry Kaiser while Wende’s guitar accompanies. Henry uses ‘clean’ guitar alternating with processed sounds, especially a

reverse delay. “Samba” lasts some 30 seconds until the drums abruptly drop out. Henry’s guitar solo, however, continues unabated, while Wende’s guitar accompaniment switches to his guitar part from *Calm Theme*’s “Ensemble Section”. Hervé joins on bass, also playing his part from “Ensemble Section”. In essence, the 12 seconds after the drums drop out constitute a transition to *Calm Theme*, abruptly ended by the arrival of the piano and “Piano Theme”. Unlike *Raz Calme*’s sampled piano, however, we now hear the actual instrument. Since there was no pianist in Beta Foly, the part was still sequenced during our recording session in Abidjan but was subsequently replaced by pianist Sarah Cahill at Bay Records Studio in Berkeley, California during the same overdubbing session at which Henry recorded his solos. The piano is – similar to the arrangement in *Raz Calme* – underpinned by two djembes, now panned hard left and hard right and playing short soloistic ‘comments’ rather than a rhythmic accompaniment. And, once again, the piano is soon joined by Aly’s balafon with first one, and then another, overdubbed, melody. The buildup is also identical in that the bass joins with the same part as in the original recorded a year earlier. And at about 53 seconds, the duration of “Piano Theme” is identical to *Raz Calme*. Yet there are some slight differences in interior structure. In *Le chant...*, the balafon joins the piano slightly sooner than in *Raz Calme*, after 20 rather than roughly 30 seconds. On the other hand, in *Le chant...*, the balafon plays its initial melody four times before the countermelody joins in while in *Raz Calme* it is played only thrice. But in *Le chant...*, the bass begins together with the balafon counterpoint, while in *Raz Calme* the bass waits for the counterpoint to be played once and only comes in on the repetition.

This is followed by the “Ensemble Section”, which is structurally largely identical to the one in *Raz Calme*. My drumming appears slightly tighter during the initial funk rhythm, but then loosens up more, making ample use of a variety of cymbal colors. Most importantly, however, both lines of the “Contrasting Theme” are now played by Nicolas Ossomba on the saxophone instead of the previous vibraphone-timbred sequencer. As in *Raz Calme*, this is succeeded by the return of the “Piano Theme”, which soon gives way to a surprising transition.

At this point, *Le chant...* appears to take a different direction from its predecessor piece, to return to some degree of similarity only in the final “Triplets” section. In *Le chant...*, the transition after the return of “Piano Theme” does not lead to “Percussion Battery”; instead, a new section, *Kolonisé*, begins after a very short transition consisting of *Calm Theme*’s balafon quickly fading out while *Kolonisé* has already started. This takes the piece into a much more traditionally West African musical area, but more unexpected transitions are soon to come.

Like *Calm Theme*, *Kolonisé* is a complete composition that could stand on its own, but was fused into the medley conglomerate of *Le chant...* for the purpose of our CD recording; in concert, we never performed this medley but played *Kolonisé* in various other combinations or on its own. *Kolonisé* was composed and sung by Tiémoko, with lyrics in Malinké, ‘kolon’ meaning ‘well’ or ‘fountain’ and having nothing to do with colonization. Tiémoko sings in a griot style, and the instrumental accompaniment, on guitar (played primarily by Madou Dao), nyanyero (also Madou, overdubbing), flute (Babagalé), and bolon (Tiémoko himself), is adequate for the style. But I opted to play a reggae drum beat, albeit in a somewhat halting, disjunct way. This decision was rooted in a problem that troubles me until today: it is not clear to me what kinds of drum-set parts fit with Mandé griot music, should the drum-set be called for at all. The music tends to be ternary, but the second of the three pulses in a beat is rarely played (i.e. resulting in what could be written as a quarter note and an eighth within the space of a dotted quarter). The feeling is not unlike a slow swing or shuffle, though lacking the tempo-dependent aspect of swing. (Rainer Polak [2004:174-175] has described how a general tendency towards an increase in tempi in renditions of certain Mandé djembé rhythms over the course of decades has also, necessarily, engendered changes in phrasing, but that is not the same phenomenon as the tempo-dependence of swing phrasing, where a ternary feel at medium tempo becomes a binary one when accelerated to a high speed). It has always seemed difficult to me to translate djembé and *dundun*⁴⁶ drumming to the drum-set in these contexts, a problem that later posed itself acutely to me when, in October 1998, I was asked to accompany the Malian griot-pop singer Babani Koné

⁴⁶ The dundun is large Mandé ‘bass’ drum.

in a concert in New York City. In the case of *Kolonisé*, I found the ‘disjunct reggae’ solution interesting and satisfactory, but it certainly lent an unusual feeling to the song, imbuing it immediately with a degree of uncertainty and a license for improvisational freedom.

The core section of *Kolonisé* lasts 80 seconds and is followed by a “Ngoni-Nyanyero Duo”, an interlude of some 15 seconds wherein Tiémoko and Madou play simultaneous solos on these two traditional instruments. This *ngoni*, which here makes its only appearance on the album and indeed in Beta Foly’s entire lifetime, is not to be confused with the more guitar-like *ngoni* often used in Malian griot music (and generally accepted to be an ancestor of the banjo) that was played by Tounkara, an occasional visitor to our initial 1994 workshop. The one used here was a more harp-like instrument similar to (but smaller than) a *kamalengoni*,⁴⁷ and thus more similar in construction to Tiémoko’s main instrument, the bolon, which he played on another track before overdubbing the *ngoni*. (The fact that Tiémoko simply called the instrument ‘*ngoni*’ is a testament to the fluidity of certain terms in West African culture, due not least to the extreme linguistic diversity of the region.)

At the end of the “Ngoni-Nyanyero Duo”, a drum fill ushers in a return to *Kolonisé*, but this time at a markedly faster tempo, a beginning of a gradual build-up of intensity that will culminate later in a further section, *Djébrélé*. I initially continue with the reggae feel, but soon change to a looser, more shuffle-like drum part establishing a polymeter in a hemiola relation of 3 beats to 4 of the rest of the band. While it seems like the course of *Le chant...* has by now deviated strongly from *Raz Calme*, it is worth noting that conceptually similar transitions between tempi and between more- or less-shuffle-based drum rhythms also occurred in *Raz Calme*, especially following the *Madagascar* section.

The up-tempo version of *Kolonisé* lasts barely 45 seconds, at which time a drum fill and subsequent unaccompanied bass vibrato form a transition to the next of *Le chant...*’s component

⁴⁷ The *kamalengoni*, or ‘young person’s harp’, is a neotraditional instrument from the Wassoulou region of Mali.

compositions, *Feux de brousse* ('bushfires' in French), a piece based on *ziglibithy*, a popular music style of the Bété people of southwestern Côte d'Ivoire. Popularized by Ernesto Djédjé and other singers since the mid-1970s, *ziglibithy* was part of the everyday musical world for anyone living in 1990s Abidjan. The rhythmic theme that formed the core of *Feux de brousse* is shown in Figure 19. The piece as played was deemed to be traditional and no member of Beta Foly wanted to assume credit for the composition, but its genesis within the group was a truly collaborative process in which my own contribution was, at best, marginal. Either Lassiné or Leye suggested the core rhythm, which appeared to be known by at least some of the others. Hervé contributed strongly to the arrangement, as did Aly.



Figure 19. Core rhythmic theme of *Feux de brousse*

As played on the CD, *Feux de brousse* was in an ABA form, A being the core rhythmic theme and B a contrasting idea. After the entire form is stated once by sabar and three djembés (accompanied by myself on drums with a rock rhythm), it is repeated, now joined by bass (Hervé), guitar (played, if my recollection is accurate, by Jean-Claude Lauboué), and balafon (Aly). This is followed by a section with solos (bass, sabar, djembé) accompanied by percussion and drums; the core rhythm is not played during the solos.

Altogether, *Feux de brousse* lasts two minutes and 10 seconds and is followed, with no transitional passage, by a reprise of the fast version of *Kolonisé*, though Tiémoko does not sing this time and is replaced as the lead melodic voice by Babagalé's flute. This, in turn, is followed by a short (only eight seconds) but fiercely intense djembé solo, and only one musician in Abidjan was deemed capable of delivering such a fireworks display: Sekou Ba Traoré, the elderly virtuoso,

deceased in the meantime, who engaged himself very strongly in Beta Foly's collaborative work in 1996 during the run-up to the recording session. Lassiné and Monimba considered Sekou Ba to be their role model, and indeed, he was legendary in Abidjan's musical circles. His right pinky had been amputated, allegedly because he had shattered it decades ago during a very intense djembé solo, resulting in a fracture so complicated that the finger could not be saved. Sekou Ba's appearance in the group could have caused conflict in that there were now decidedly too many djembé players, but it was no problem: he was, if anything, a calming presence, guiding the younger percussionists to stronger performances. And when Beta Foly traveled to Europe for the first time just after the 1996 recording session and we made the decision to take Lassiné on tour rather than Monimba or Sekou Ba, the latter proved incredibly selfless and helpful. Lassiné was born in Abidjan, though his family came from Guinea-Conakry, making him a Guinean citizen. But he had no passport. With the departure for Austria imminent, he traveled frantically to Guinea to procure a passport but returned empty-handed: the state printing house had run out of templates and there would have been a waiting period of at least six weeks. At that point, Sekou Ba intervened. A Malian, he had a close relationship with the Malian ambassador in Abidjan, whom he had once helped through witchcraft during a ritual and who owed him a favor. It was now time for Sekou Ba to claim his favor with the ambassador, and within a day, Lassiné was ready to travel – on a Malian passport!

Sekou Ba's djembe solo sets up the tempo for the next component song of *Le chant..., Djébrélé*. Not unlike the fast second half of *Djarabi, Djébrélé*, by Tiémoko, corresponds to the slower *Kolonisé* as an uptempo continuation. But I suggested that the tempo be further raised and proceeded to play a very fast rock rhythm on the drums inspired by the Police's drummer Stewart Copeland, lending the piece a punk-rock attitude. Lasting roughly 40 seconds, this section, in the form in which it appears on the CD, was the result of one of the most difficult moments in Beta Foly's collaborative work. I was determined to play *Djébrélé* at this fast tempo, an idea that initially met with much resistance from my African colleagues, especially Tiémoko, who said he could not sing at that speed, but also by the backing vocalists, Antoinette and Maï. They worked hard to convince me that it was impossible to enunciate the lyrics at the speed I proposed, while

I worked hard to convince them of the contrary. I ultimately prevailed but felt that my colleagues were dissatisfied. It took a fair amount of time – even after the CD was released – for them to accept and perhaps even appreciate what I had proposed. Did I ‘railroad’ this decision through in a non-sociocratic manner, relying on my relative power as the producer and as the group member who had the most intimate knowledge of *Le chant...*’s complex arrangement? It is possible, and it is even likely that my colleagues gave up arguing with me because they found it futile as I was so convinced of my idea. To me, it was one of the rare moments in Beta Foly where the ends justified means I did not find desirable. But I felt that my idea made an original contribution to African music, an integration of griot song and punk-rock in a cultural region where punk and heavy metal were virtually nonexistent at the time (and largely continue to be).

The transition away from *Djébrélé* is once again abrupt; it is followed by a return of “Piano Theme” at a slightly faster tempo than the original. This time, however, surprisingly, “Contrasting Theme”, played once again by the saxophone, is superimposed onto “Piano Theme” rather than onto “Ensemble Section” without any prior gradual accumulation of instrumental forces or increase in density. And once the “Contrasting Theme” has started, Aly begins altering his balafon part, introducing ornaments as if to find his way toward a solo.

Yet, in a tendency analogous to *Raz Calme* to create several successive transitions with no clear destination, an actual balafon solo is not reached. Instead, after about 40 seconds of *Calm Theme*, I enter on the drums, ushering in the piece’s final section, “Triplets”. My drum rhythm differs from the one I played in the analogous section of *Raz Calme*: I now play a polymetric pattern in my proprietary drum-set style, and the ternary nature of the rhythm is much clearer. On a different track of the multitrack tape, Aly joins me with the two-voiced “Triplets” balafon theme, while his presumed solo gradually tapers off along with the piano and the saxophone during a transition of roughly eight seconds. Instead of a balafon solo, Henry Kaiser’s soaring guitar, using effects similar to those at the beginning of the piece, becomes the lead voice, playing for the remaining duration, nearly one-and-a-half minutes, of which the final 20 seconds are a slow fade.

Without going into great detail regarding melodies and harmonies, this overview of the form of *Raz calme* and *Le chant...* demonstrates (1) how Beta Foly worked on complex forms resulting in the combination of different compositions into ‘medleys’, and (2) how this concept evolved from the demo to the CD recording session.

Re (1), we never played *Raz calme* or *Le chant...* live, but did play components in concerts, particularly *Kolonisé* and *Feux de brousse*. However, while I was primarily responsible for creating the form of the medley and laid out plans for how to put these pieces together using multitrack tape and multiple click-tracks, the final result was a team effort, with musicians ‘filling in voids’ between pre-existing compositions. For example, the “Ngoni-Nyanyero Duo” was the result of collaborative decisions made in the studio. When I designated a short section to transition between different sections of *Kolonisé* at different speeds, I did not think specifically of Tiémoko and Madou, but they came forward with ideas. And while I established the larger formal framework into which *Feux de brousse* is integrated, that section’s arrangement was, as already mentioned, a team effort. Obviously, this was only possible because of what we came to call the ‘*esprit du groupe*’, the ‘group spirit’, where everyone was ready and eager to contribute creatively, and where decisions were made by general agreement. As recounted above, this willingness for consent was sometimes stretched to its limits, most notably by my insistence on the very fast tempo in *Djébrélé*. But sometimes it was I who was part of the dissenting minority or even the lone dissenter against a suggestion made by others. For example, I initially had qualms about *Feux de brousse* sounding too conventional, too similar to existing ‘Afro-jazz’ music, an objection I soon abandoned. Due to the complicated collaboration that shaped *Le chant...*, all of us – certainly including myself – not only learned new musical concepts and ideas, but also became more open-minded and flexible as musicians and conceptual artists.

Re (2), it is interesting to compare the evolution towards *Le chant...*, a piece which, in its medley form, was a product of the compositional affordances of the recording studio, to that of *Casamance* (see below), where the studio enabled us to try out new concepts but where the development was driven primarily by the possibilities and requirements of live performance.

Having conceptualized *Raz calme* mostly alone, the idea of a medley with surprising twists and turns originally came from me; *Calm Theme* was never intended to be performed on its own and was created specifically as the anchor-piece of such a medley. Indeed, in that *Calm Theme* was not extant and was never supposed to exist independently of this conglomerate, it could be argued that *Raz calme* and *Le chant...* do not fit the definition of a medley as per Webster's Dictionary: "[...] a mixture of things not usually placed together [...] a musical piece made up of tunes or passages from various works [...]" (Neufeld 1994: 843). But it does fit this aspect of the definition: "[...] heterogeneous assortment or collection; hodgepodge [...]" (ibid). Either way, in *Le chant...* I was able to build on my experience with *Raz calme* and integrate pieces developed by my colleagues either during our joint rehearsals in 1995 and 1996, or even between those rehearsal phases. Since we had several weeks of rehearsals in 1996 prior to entering the recording studio, much preparatory work could be done collaboratively in Abidjan.

Observing the development of *Casamance* (see section 3.3.4.1 below) from its earliest live manifestation in 1994 to the demo recording in 1995 to the 1998 live version analyzed below, a tendency towards increased complexity is evident; initially, this leads to a tightening-up of the arrangement, and subsequently, once the new, complex aspects were mastered and integrated into live performance, a loosening of structures concurrently with a further increase in complexity. The development from *Raz calme* to *Le chant...* is also one towards increasing complexity, as well as towards increasing diversity of musical materials used. Mastery of the complex arrangement in live performance is less of a factor here, but that is replaced by a compositional and interpretational mastery of complex transitional passages. Common to both pieces is the use of multiple tempi, overlapping during transitional sections. In *Casamance*, these tempi were all constructed based on a common beat, though the number of elementary pulses per beat was put in question – a superimposition of a Western concept on an African one. In the medley pieces, however, the tempi of the various sections were not constructed upon an obvious proportional relationship of beats and/or elementary pulsations: here the main concern was that each section or component piece be played in its ideal tempo (see the difficulties in determining

the optimal tempo of *Djébrélé*). Common to both works is that they are complexly arranged in ways normally found in neither African nor Western art- or popular music canons.

3.3.4: Further Examples

Without providing as detailed analyses as I did for the previous works, I will profile three more pieces from the Beta Foly repertoire, each of which exemplifies important aspects of our experimental intercultural collaboration.

3.3.4.1 Casamance

Casamance was one of our earliest pieces, and among our favorites to perform in concert. It was featured on the 1995 demo cassette and re-recorded in 1996 for the CD. However, we found that the new version did not quite live up to our musical expectations while the old one lacked the recording quality necessary for inclusion on the CD; hence, sadly, *Casamance* did not feature on the CD. The essential impulse for the piece came from a rhythmic motive by Leye, though several other group members also contributed substantive ideas as I will describe in the following paragraphs. Leye's core motive was described in section 3.2.1.

To arrive at an approximate description of the piece's evolution, I will examine three renditions: the first performance on 26 February 1994 at the Goethe-Institut in Abidjan (the final concert of the initial workshop after which Beta Foly was officially founded); the recording included on the 1995 demo tape; and a performance on tour in Austria in 1998. The concert performances were recorded on video, while I have the audio of the demo tape.

The 1994 premiere performance was prefaced by a short explanatory speech by Leye. He said,

Bonsoir [...] Casamance est une région du Sénégal [...] Quand j'étais avec mes amis, tout dernièrement pendant les deux semaines, je me suis inspiré de la Casamance. Casamance, c'est

toujours le Mandingue, parce que je raconte là-bas des ethnies comme les Diola, les Bambara, les Socés du Sénégal, donc à travers eux, je sens toujours le Mandingue [...] ⁴⁸

‘Raconte(r)’ should be understood figuratively here, as the piece does not include any singing or lyrics. Rather, Leye tells of these peoples through his rhythms, which allude to their musical traditions.

Featured in this original performance were most of the workshop participants, including some who later turned out to be somewhat ‘peripheral’ to the group such as Dominique Amani Yao and Elisabeth Aka. I played electronic drums, contributing arpeggiated triads using a vibraphone sound (chosen, I think, for its penetration, as the very loud djembés and other percussion created a challenging sonic environment for the electronics). The drum-set was played by Dominique.

After a short chordal guitar introduction (Lamine) joined by a djembé (Dramane) which sets up the piece’s tempo and harmonic rhythm, the core theme (Figure 20) is played, consisting of a call-and-response ‘dialogue’ with Leye (top line) ‘calling’ and practically the entire ensemble of approximately 17 musicians (bottom line) ‘responding’ in unison. The previously-mentioned rhythmic motive stands at the end of this theme and is subsequently cyclically repeated throughout the remainder of the piece. The flute (Babagalé) then plays a descending melodic motive of three long notes leading into a short solo, underpinned by a balafon accompaniment and the ever-repeating rhythmic motive. After his solo, Babagalé returns to the same descending motive at regular intervals, so that it becomes part of the complex fabric of repetitive accompaniments anchored by Leye’s rhythmic motive. The piece moves through a series of very short solos; Leye eventually introduces dancer Djibi Welle who presents highly animated dance moves (in dialogue with Leye’s sabar) throughout approximately the final one-and-a-half of the piece’s five minutes. The piece is brought to an end by Leye’s ‘call’ bringing in the theme and

⁴⁸ “Good evening [...] Casamance is a region of Senegal [...] When I was with my friends, just recently during these last two weeks, I took inspiration from Casamance. Casamance is still Mandé as I tell about ethnic groups such as the Jola, Bambara, Socés of Senegal, so through them, I always feel the Mandé [element] [...]” [My translation]

ends immediately upon completion of this reprise of the full theme. While this performance of *Casamance* included several solos, there did not appear to be a predetermined structure beyond the agreed-upon exposition and reprise of the theme; the constant, cyclic repetition of the rhythmic motive throughout the duration of the theme; and the concurrent cyclic repetition of certain melodic motives such as Babagale's descending scalar melody.



Figure 20. Rhythmic theme of *Casamance*

The demo version produced in the recording studio a year later features a slightly more complex arrangement. At just over three minutes, this take is much shorter than probably any live version of the piece. Like in the 1994 version, the guitar starts with a chordal introduction, though it seems 'out of tune'. I faintly recall that Lamine's guitar did not hold its tuning and that I suggested using it in this 'detuned' state so as to create more harmonic friction with other instruments, but this recollection may be a simplification or even entirely inaccurate. The guitar is joined by the djembé after just four seconds, and hardly two seconds thereafter, Leye commences the theme's call and response. I play drum set; no electronics are used. The first of two significant structural differences between this version and the 1994 performance is that Babagalé's descending flute motive is now imitated by Aly on the balafon while Babagalé proceeds into a short solo, ending with the descending motive which is again imitated by Aly before he, in turn, launches into a solo. The second new element is an unusual turn in the arrangement that occurs during Aly's solo. While normally each beat contains three pulse units, Aly begins playing slightly 'swung' four notes during one beat as I switch from the hi-hat to the ride cymbal and transfer rather discreetly to an up-tempo swing in 4/4, soon joined by Hervé, who switches to a walking bass. This section only

lasts some 20 seconds, however, and I use the cyclically repeated core rhythmic motive to return to the 'normal' meter while Aly returns to alternating renditions of the descending melodic motive with Babagalé to underpin a sabar solo by Leye. As in the live version, a reprise of the theme concludes the piece.

Finally, we examine a live performance at the Hauptschule St. Johann in Tirol, Austria, on 4 April 1998, the same concert already mentioned in the analysis of *Village dans 8 pays*. The ensemble now consists of 12 musicians: Leye (sabar), Lassiné (djembé), Bobo (wassamba), and Siriki (bara) on percussion; Babagalé on flute; Aly on balafon; Wende and Lamine on electric and acoustic guitars, respectively; Tiémoko on bolon; Hervé on electric bass; Kurt on Lightning; and me on drums. This version is by far the longest of the three, with a duration of almost 10 minutes: the guitar and djembé introduction alone lasts some 45 seconds as opposed to the demo recording's six seconds, and it is now an environment for brief soloistic comments from musicians not previously involved in this introduction, such as Hervé, Tiémoko, and Leye himself. After the theme, the descending long-note motives are played alternately by Babagalé and Aly, except that Aly now initiates and Babagalé imitates. After playing this melody, Babagalé plays an extensive solo featuring not only virtuoso flute playing but also a considerable amount of acrobatics: he plays the flute (with a microphone scotch-taped onto it) while rolling artfully on the floor and then climbing onto Bobo, grasping around Bobo's waist with his legs while continuing to play; Bobo continues playing the wassamba throughout. The next solo is by Lassiné. As in the demo version, I then switch to an up-tempo swing, although the transition is now accomplished differently: Leye (in near-unison with Hervé) plays a secondary rhythmic motive, not heard in the other two versions, giving me the cue for the transition. I join Leye in unison for the final few notes of the motive and then proceed via a short roll to the swing rhythm, with two quarter-notes in the space of a beat's three basic pulse units. This time, Hervé joins me immediately with a walking bass. The swing environment is ideal foil for a highly energetic solo by Aly, followed by an electric guitar solo by Wende using a very free approach during which we gradually exit strict time. In my fairly extensive drum solo, I eschew the polymetric patterns I otherwise often use in my solos, opting instead for a series of allusions to various jazz licks and

grooves. I conclude my solo by restating Leye's secondary motive, thus relaunching the original, ternary groove. Aly and Babagalé again cyclically repeat the descending long-note motive; Kurt takes a short solo consisting of downward synthesizer *glissandi* before Leye takes a more expansive solo, allowing Bobo space for a brief wassamba solo before invoking the call and response of the reprise, ending the piece as in the previous versions. Lamine, Siriki, Tiémoko, and Hervé accompany throughout, supported by all other musicians when they are not soloing.

Looking at the three versions, it is easy to observe a process of evolution: In 1994, a strong thematic idea and some structuring of ensemble playing occurred, but otherwise a 'jamming' approach was used, with soloists coming forward rather spontaneously over a cyclically repeating accompaniment. This was followed in 1995 by a tightened arrangement with a more deliberate succession of soloists and the introduction of a contrasting rhythmic idea (the swing rhythm); and in 1998, by a more elaborate transition to the contrasting rhythmic idea, more space and freedom for the soloists while preserving a similar overarching form, and more variation in rhythm, meter, expression, and interaction between musicians.

Leye contributed the rhythmic motives and theme that gave rise to the piece and was therefore the lead composer. As I recall, the guitar introduction was conceived by Lamine. I do not remember who suggested the descending long-note melodic motive, but I might have been the one to suggest imitation between Babagalé and Aly. Switching to the swing rhythm was my suggestion. All in all, however, the piece was largely the result of a collaborative rehearsal process and kept evolving throughout the lifetime of the ensemble.

3.3.4.2: Sound of No Restraint

In *Sound of No Restraint*, Beta Foly sought inspiration from Korean traditional music in an improvisation guided by acoustic signals relayed to the players via headphones in the manner I described in section 1.2. In April 2000, I wrote an article for *Leonardo Music Journal* (Ligeti 2000) describing in detail several pieces by Beta Foly from a technological perspective, including *Sound of No Restraint*:

When I first used [my headphone setup] in Beta Foly, the musicians would either isolate themselves completely or simply ignore the click (track)s if they gave different musicians different tempos, but since then, many have developed a remarkable degree of skill in this area [...]

Whereas African music usually has a fixed tempo (exceptions exist), Korean music is often very flexible in its temporal structure. Musicians ‘breathe’ together, expanding and contracting the flow of time to facilitate the performance and ‘feeling’ of their musical gestures. I was interested in what would happen if African musicians tried to imitate this Korean way of perceiving tempo. After describing some of the features of Korean music to the members of Beta Foly, we gave it a try [...] I played them examples of Korean music, most notably the CD *Unrestrained Sound* by Park Byung Chon [...] Our results did not sound Korean at all, but they do not sound exactly African, either. One of the most enlightening moments in all the time I spent in Abidjan was when Yero Bobo Bah, Babagalé Kanté and Lamine Baldé played a traditional tune from Guinea arranged in a Korean way: the result was some of the most peculiar music I have ever heard [...]

Sound of No Restraint is an improvisation for up to eight musicians, each listening to an individual track. Most of the time, no information is relayed and the musicians improvise freely. At certain points, they hear a succession of six cowbell beats. During these beats, they play a crescendo, with a loud accent on the last beat. After the accent, they pause for a few seconds, then resume their improvising. Since the musicians do not necessarily have their accents at the same time, strange instrumental combinations and accent distributions become possible. (Ligeti 2000:45-46)

As alluded to above, one of the main challenges in this situation was to take account of the occasional, individually independent six-beat metronome phrases, yet to still listen to each other and ‘breathe’ phrases together.

In an effort to supply added cohesion, we decided that Lamine would provide a steady accompaniment on acoustic guitar throughout significant sections of the piece. He plays arpeggiated F and G chords at a leisurely tempo, participating in a few accents but more often ignoring the other musicians’ improvisations and accents. I don’t remember exactly how we arrived at this idea, but I think Lamine was having trouble adjusting to playing with the click track, so I suggested to him to be a ‘free agent’ and he then created this accompaniment. I was very happy with this solution as I find the juxtaposition of the seeming meterlessness of the ‘Korean’ improvisation and the steady, discreet but unrelenting accompaniment very interesting. In fact, I was so taken with this idea that I used it in my 2007 composition for 10 musicians, *Castle of Turns* (for Düsseldorf’s Notabu Ensemble), where a harp plays a steady and undeterred two-chord accompaniment while nine other musicians explore a wide variety of pitches and rhythms.

Twice during *Sound of No Restraint*, I join Lamine's guitar accompaniment on the drums by playing a very loose, rock-ballad-like rhythm while the entire ensemble works its way up to a collective accent. Otherwise, I play in a freely-breathing manner like all other musicians apart from Lamine, following my individual click track for occasional accents.

3.3.4.3: African Loops

In my liner notes for the Beta Foly CD, I described *African Loops* as follows:

During our stay in Abidjan, Kurt Dahlke and I spent some time recording and sampling the individual musicians of Beta Foly, making what one could call 'musical snapshots' of phrases characteristic for their playing. Using these samples as source material, Kurt assembled this composition, a crossover between techno/house and West African, and plays all except the lead vocals and my brief electronic drum solo on his computer. The vocal part, called *Beydo* and sung by Bobo in Peul language, was put together by Bobo and Babagalé and talks about how a man should strive to please and satisfy his wife. My solo takes the piece's approach to the extreme: occurring about halfway through the song, it uses short samples of other pieces on this CD as sound material. (Ligeti 1997).

While the composition and production methods of *African Loops* are likely very different from those employed by other groups or producers, the result has a certain conceptual similarity to some electronic pop music produced in West Africa after approximately 1999. However, to the best of my knowledge, we were among the first, if not the first, to create such music in this part of the world.

Due to its appeal for disc jockeys and dance clubs, *African Loops* is possibly the piece from Beta Foly's CD that received the most radio airplay. It was featured heavily by a number of presenters such as the British club and radio DJ Max Reinhardt. It was also an important conceptual inspiration for Beta Foly's follow-up project, *Burkina Electric*, and the following chapter will discuss in more detail how it inspired that group's stylistic direction.

CHAPTER 4

Burkina Electric



Figure 21. Burkina Electric in New York City in 2008 (photo: Chris Borgman). L to R: Vicky L'Amour, Pyrolator Kurt Dahlke, Zoko Zoko, Maï Lingani, Lukas Ligeti, Wende K. Blass.

4.1: Introduction

The group Burkina Electric, ongoing as a working ensemble as of 2019, initially a sextet and since 2011 a quintet, was founded in 2004 to investigate combinations of West African (specifically Burkinabè) music traditions and electronics (specifically oriented towards club/dance music). Its foundation was a long-term consequence of work done in Beta Foly and of my increasing connections to the music scene in Burkina Faso.

Although the creative process in Burkina Electric is in certain ways even more collaborative than in Beta Foly, and although the history of the group stretches over a longer period and we have performed many more concerts than Beta Foly did, the evolution of the group has in some respects been more conventional. Most group members knew each other at the time the project started; a long-term trajectory was imaginable almost from the beginning; the group has seen only two changes in personnel in 15 years (in one case, with a member leaving and not being replaced); and most importantly, the artistic objective and the compositional methodology was primarily laid out by one person (me) and is more consistent from one piece to another.

During Beta Foly's longest tour, in November 1999 with some 17 concerts in Germany, Belgium, The Netherlands, Austria, and France, we did not know it would be the ensemble's final activity, though it was clear that a lack of funding as well as the deterioration of the political situation in Côte d'Ivoire would necessitate an extended hiatus. It turned out that new opportunities for the group were not forthcoming, even in the long run. I remained in touch with all ensemble members and even with some of the musicians who were more loosely associated with the group.

In late 1999, just before Beta Foly's final tour, I assembled a quintet for a concert at the festival of the Viennese improvised music organization Wiener Musik-Galerie. My idea was to bring together improvisers with a personal and unusual approach to polymeters. Aly Keïta was among the musicians I invited. A CD of this project was released by Innova, an American record label, though not until 2011. In 2000, I produced Maï Lingani's debut album (cassette) of pop songs influenced by traditional music from Burkina Faso, *Entrons dans la danse*; I composed some and arranged all of the music and played drums and some balafon. The recording, which also featured Wende K. Blass on guitar and Kurt as co-producer and lead engineer, was released at the end of 2000 by Seydoni, the dominant record label in Burkina Faso. I also collaborated with Maï on several other occasions, such as a concert in 2002 as part of the Ars Electronica Festival and curated by the Austrian composer and electronic musician Rupert Huber, where we performed via a telephone line between Linz, where I was at the Brucknerhaus, and Ouagadougou.

In 2003, I was approached by Horst Watzl of the Austrian NGO VIDC (Vienna Institute for Development and Cooperation) about the possibility of a project with musicians from Burkina Faso and electronics. Part of the VIDC's purview was the organization of exchange projects between artists from Austria and from the target countries of the Austrian Development Cooperation, one of which was Burkina Faso. Since the VIDC was mainly interested in projects taking place in, and attracting interest among the general population of, Austria, Watzl suggested a rather pop-oriented project and also asked me if I could imagine involving Rupert Huber, who was well-known to Austrian audiences through his duo Tosca with the DJ Richard Dorfmeister, one of the most popular groups of the Viennese 'downtempo electronica' scene. The VIDC offered to organize a tour of Austria for this newly-created project.

My initial idea for Burkina Electric – the name was also suggested by Horst Watzl – was that we continue where *African Loops* left off: an encounter between West African (primarily Burkinabè) traditional music and electronic dance/club music. Since the project was being created for live performances rather than a recording, it seemed essential to consider the viability of concerts and touring. To me this meant that the music should contain ample improvisation; while a recording was a fixed product, the benefit of concertizing was that the music could remain flexible, at least initially. It also seemed clear that the group should not consist of too many members, so as to be viable for touring.

I imagined a music using found sounds and field recordings as the foundation for songs. I was also interested in including sounds of traditional instruments, but through sampling such instruments rather than by inviting players of these instruments to join the live performances. This was for several reasons: first, numerous interesting instruments existed, and including many of them in our live performances contradicted the premise of keeping the group small. Second, since the music was to be fundamentally electronic, processing the sounds of the traditional instruments seemed an obvious choice; this is technically much easier to do if they are already digital rather than physically on stage. Thus, a wider array of treatments of the traditional sounds,

ranging from sound processing to detuning and other procedures, was available to us, while at the same time saving much time during soundchecks. Third, it enabled me to focus the choice of participants on musicians who were inventive improvisors, which was not always the case with traditional-music performers; finally, severing the link between traditional musician and traditional instrumental sound created the opportunity to emancipate these sounds from their conventional function or stylistic orientation, a desirable circumstance as I was aiming for a strongly 'modern' music.

Clearly, these considerations were also rooted in my thoughts as to the musicians to invite for the collaboration: I was thinking of my Burkinabè colleagues from Beta Foly, Maï Lingani and Wende K. Blass, who were not traditional-instrument performers. (Madou Dao was a traditional-instrument performer, but I considered the nyanyero too limited to include a musician by virtue of that instrument alone; Dao is a skilled multi-instrumentalist, but his other main instrument was the guitar, already covered by Wende, and he did not play the kora very well at that time though he certainly does now.)

I also chose to invite Kurt, who had become a trusted partner for me, not only regarding collaborative projects with Africa, but even more specifically, regarding studio production and music synthesis. I planned to play drums and share electronics duties with Kurt. Furthermore, while I obviously also invited Rupert Huber to join us, I had the feeling that Kurt might ultimately be more compatible with many aspects of the project. Rupert was a good friend of mine; I knew, and occasionally collaborated with, him since 1988. But while Rupert is a very creative musician, he is also quite idiosyncratic. He had never collaborated with African musicians, and I did not necessarily see his world as having much overlap with West African approaches; compatibility did not appear obvious. He was also, much like myself but unlike Kurt, not the kind of musician who could be counted on to always have the most fitting sound or technique ready for the needs of the moment: while Kurt had a fundamentally serviceable attitude, Rupert's stance was strongly individualistic and somewhat subversive. I felt that Kurt would be able to make the 'ship' of this project sail more smoothly, while I – a far more individualistic and subversive person than

Kurt though perhaps not as extreme as Rupert – would provide a link between Rupert and the African project participants. But notwithstanding all my enthusiasm to work with my good friend and highly esteemed colleague Rupert, I predicted that he would not quite integrate into the project and suggested to rather feature him as a special guest.

And I felt that it would be interesting to include dancers in the project. One of my foundational ideas was to use traditional rhythms from Burkina Faso as well as those of our own making; all of these grooves would differ from the ones generally employed in DJ culture and club dance music. I envisaged that featuring dance in our performances would not only enrich the live presentation and underline the inseverable connection between music and dance in West African culture, but would also guide the audience in how to dance to this music, and transform our shows from a pure listening experience into a more participatory one.

With Rupert's interest secured from the start as his participation was desired by the VIDC, I contacted Maï, Wende, and Kurt, and received an enthusiastic response from all of them. I was not certain which dancers to invite, but Maï suggested 'As' (Zoko Hugues Pierre Zoko), a 31-year-old Ouagadougou-based dancer and choreographer from Côte d'Ivoire who had participated in a music video made to promote *Entrons dans la danse*. An energetic, theatrically-inclined performer whose interests ranged from traditional dance to newer forms such as breakdance, As was skillful and dynamic. But we also felt that it would be interesting to add a second dancer, perhaps one with a more strongly modern-dance-oriented background, in addition to a mastery of specifically Burkinabè traditions. For this purpose, Maï and Wende suggested 'Lévy' (Tierema Koama), a young dancer from Ouagadougou active in the city's lively nonprofit arts sector with companies such as Salia ni Seydou and the troupe of Irène Tassembledo.

This brought the project to seven people, six as group members and Rupert Huber as a special guest, and we all felt that this was a maximum size. We decided to deliberately dispense with inviting a bass player. While I am not certain what motivations other than controlling group size governed this decision in the minds of my bandmates, I can explain my own motivations. First

and foremost, I was not aware of any bassist who I felt would make a fundamentally creative contribution in this scenario. We were about to experiment with unconventional grooves based on Burkinabè traditions; Sylvain Dando Paré, the Burkinabè bassist who participated in Beta Foly's last tour, would have been an option, but I ultimately found him perhaps too conventional and did not feel the kinship with him that I felt with Maï, Wende, Kurt, and, in a very different way, with Rupert. I also did not want the band to sound like a rock band; I was concerned with creating a fusion between the world of electronic club music, which is mostly performed by DJs and therefore using recorded music played through sound systems, and live performance. Using synthesized bass sounds played via the electronics, together with the sampled traditional instrument sounds, appeared to be a logical choice.

4.2 History and Evolution of the Group

In preparation for this work, I traveled to Burkina Faso in March 2004 to discuss ideas with Wende, Maï, As, and Lévy and to collect sounds. I asked several musicians to play phrases and single notes on their instruments, which I recorded with my small field-recording setup consisting of a portable DAT recorder and stereo microphone. I made recordings of ambient sounds on streets and at locations such as the Sankariaré market in Ouagadougou. I also traveled with Maï and Wende to Maï's father's home village, Tangaré, near Garango in Boulgou province in southern Burkina Faso. This is the heartland of the Bissa people, one of the ethno-linguistic groups of Burkina Faso and the easternmost Mandé tribe. A group of village musicians under the direction of singer and musician Amadou Harzouma Bambara performed for us, showing us some of their traditional music, which I also recorded.

Immediately thereafter, Maï, Wende, Kurt, and I met at Kurt's AtaTak Studio in Düsseldorf, Germany for a weeklong work session to compose music for our concerts in Austria. My initial idea was to work with repetitive rhythms or phrases provided mainly by the electronics, and that there would be much flexibility and space for improvisation. As we were composing together, I paid special attention to speak of 'tracks' rather than of 'songs'; song structures were not as important to me as having improvisation affect both sound and structure of the music.

Seven-and-a-half years went by between the initial creation of *African Loops* in 1996 and the founding of Burkina Electric, and 2004 found the overall picture of electronic pop music in West Africa substantially changed. When Beta Foly recorded *African Loops*, we were possibly the only group of artists in the region exploring the combination of electronic dance/DJ culture and traditional music. Around 2000, this type of inquiry suddenly became popular, especially in Mali, as that country's traditional music received more interest and exposure on the international world music scene than any other on the continent. Among the recordings that ushered in the popularity (at least in Europe and North America) of Afro-electronic world music, 1999's *Sya*, by the Malian *kamalengoni* player Issa Bagayogo, with production by the Frenchman Yves Wernert, deserves mention; other examples are *Electro Bamako* by Malian singer Mamani Keïta with French producer Nicolas Repac, and, after the release of Burkina Electric's debut cassette, *Frikyiwa* (2007) by French DJ Frédéric Galliano.

It is interesting to note that French producers are present in all of these examples, and Burkina Electric's personnel makeup as well as its reception in Burkina Faso only confirms the observation that the trend of electronically-danceable African trad-fusion was not an 'indigenous' product of African urban music scenes, as opposed to entirely 'foreign' genres that were enthusiastically taken up by purely African teams, such as salsa (in Senegal), hip-hop (everywhere, but especially in Senegal and Burkina Faso), and reggae (ubiquitous in all of West Africa). Most, if not all, of these recordings (Mamani Keïta's perhaps less than the others) have in common a production technique favored by DJs that I refer to as the 'remix method': Upon an extant recording of traditional music (often played by the headlining artist, such as Issa Bagayogo), an electronically-created drum beat is superimposed. I was always frustrated by the results of this technique as the electronic beats seemed to paint over the interesting rhythmic subtleties of the traditional music, sounding like a foreign body that steamrolled the music into a corset of globalized sameness. It was therefore of great importance to me to take a different approach with Burkina Electric. I suggested, with the agreement of my colleagues, that we would attempt to create a more organic fusion of tradition and electronics. We would not normally base our music on

extant recordings (only one piece in our repertoire, *La voix du Boulgou*, is based on a pre-existing recording). Instead of using traditional music verbatim, we would incorporate concepts and elements of traditional music into our compositions and consider those concepts as well as electronics from the very outset of our composition process for each piece.

Thus, unlike Beta Foly, Burkina Electric was founded with intention and a clear purpose, though here, too, it was unknown whether the collaboration would continue beyond the first tour. Yet, due to the already close relationship between some of the members, a continuation in some form was to be expected. The composition process was purposefully collaborative; during the initial session at AtaTak, which found a direct continuation during rehearsals in Vienna, we all suggested musical ideas and combined and juxtaposed them as we saw fit. We worked not so much with our instruments as in front of a computer. At times, Kurt and I worked on developing musical content, programming beats and finding synthesizer sounds, while Maï and Wende were in another room working on lyrics.

We quickly settled on Ableton Live as the software for our live performances; we continue to use it today. The program, then in its early versions, is an ideal environment for easy and flexible live playback of soundfiles. It is easy to loop these soundfiles and treat them in various ways, including rudimentary effects processing (in the meantime, it has become a highly sophisticated and advanced but also far more complex platform, with a wide variety of processing available). The creation and playback of MIDI files is also possible in Ableton. In concert, Kurt and I would share the duty of performing the electronics; additionally, I would play drum-set. Kurt had recently developed software for the processing of videos; he ran this program (written in MaxMSP/Jitter) from a separate laptop, and the processed playback of video material filmed in Burkina Faso became part of our live performances. It can therefore be said that Kurt switched back and forth between Ableton and Jitter, while I switched back and forth between Ableton and drums.

We subsequently traveled to Vienna and met As and Lévy for a few days of rehearsals before our concert tour. Rupert also joined us occasionally. The objective was to find modes of live interplay

between musicians, electronics, and dancers, while keeping the environment strongly improvisational. This created some conceptual challenges. The dancers wanted to work out specific choreographies, but since the music was flexible and unpredictable, it was unclear exactly how music and dance should be integrated. While Maï and Wende enjoyed improvising solos and also freely improvising (especially Wende), we found ourselves in a peculiar middle ground between pre-composed fragments (which could, however, be varied and played back in any order) and the expectation to interact spontaneously. In practice, this led to an eventual reduction of the improvised aspect while more and more of the material became increasingly elaborately prepared; of course, there remained considerable space for solos. This momentum towards (collective) composition was already noticeable in the initial rehearsals but increased the more often the band performed. Rupert's contribution was an element of unpredictability; he was given space for solos and interactions with the group members which were never discussed in detail and which he varied and altered during the two performances (in Nickelsdorf and Vienna) in which he participated. In four other concerts, we performed without Rupert.

After six successful concerts in Austria in April of 2004, we were determined to continue working together. We were soon contacted by the VIDC about performing at the Jazz à Ouaga festival in Ouagadougou in April 2006. Every six months, the presidency of the European Union falls to a different member country, and the first half of 2006 was Austria's turn. Burkina Faso being a partner of Austria's Development Cooperation, we were invited as cultural ambassadors for the cooperation between the two countries.

The two years between these performances did not pass without activity from Burkina Electric. In 2005, I took up playing the *Marimba Lumina*, a sophisticated MIDI controller designed by Donald Buchla; I thus joined Kurt as a user of Buchla instruments. The Marimba Lumina proved helpful especially due to its marimba paradigm, allowing for allusions to balafon music. Its hardware and software permit very flexible usage and I continue using it today in solo concerts and various ensemble settings, most significantly in Burkina Electric.

In late 2005, Mai, Wende, Kurt, and I met once again in Düsseldorf, this time with the intention of recording a CD. We continued developing some of the pieces presented in Austria in 2004 and added new compositions. In 2006, during our visit to Burkina Faso, we released a cassette entitled *Paspanga* in Burkina Faso, containing some of the recordings made at AtaTak in 2005. ‘Paspanga’ means ‘more power’ in Moré, a Voltaic language spoken in central Burkina Faso and the most widely used language in Ouagadougou. It is also the name of a neighborhood in Ouagadougou, and, amusingly, the site of the very large Diesel-powered generator of SONABEL (Société nationale burkinabè de l’électricité) that provides power to the city. The sound of this generator is omnipresent in the northeastern quadrant of the city; I first noticed it one evening in 2000 and explored its origins, and I thus came to understand that the entire city – now counting some three million inhabitants – was powered by one huge Diesel plant. I sampled its sound and used it in several of Burkina Electric’s pieces, and we adopted the name for our debut recording.

We resumed recording songs and mixing in Düsseldorf in late 2006 with the objective of creating more material for an eventual CD release. Four songs appeared on the double EP *Rêem Tekre*, released in 2007 by AtaTak. These songs are on one of the CDs comprising the double set; the other contains remixes of said songs by five invited guest artists: Paul Miller (DJ Spooky), Mapstation (Stefan Schneider), Raz Mesinai, Paul de Jong (of the indie-rock duo The Books), and Rupert Huber. In 2010, *Paspanga*, now featuring material recorded both in 2005 and 2006, was released as a CD by Cantaloupe Music, the record label of the New York-based Bang On A Can foundation for contemporary music. Unfortunately, Burkina Electric has not had any CD releases since that time.

When Kurt and I arrived in Ouagadougou in 2006 to rehearse for our concert at Jazz à Ouaga and prepare the release of the cassette, it turned out that Lévy had a schedule conflict and would not be able to participate. We had only a few days to find a replacement, and found one in Vicky L’Amour (Idrissa Kafando), an energetic 24-year-old dancer and choreographer from Ouagadougou who moved in similar circles as Lévy, participating in workshops and performances with some of the best-known companies of Ouaga’s vibrant modern dance scene. From the

moment he joined us for rehearsals, all group members felt a strong sense of compatibility with Vicky; working with him was easier and more natural than with Lévy, and Vicky has remained with the group ever since, constituting the only personnel replacement in the group's history.

After the concert in Ouaga in 2006, I was able, with the help of Stephanie Chaiken, a New York-based manager, to secure Burkina Electric invitations as artists-in-residence at several schools in New York State and Pennsylvania in October 2007 and February 2008. This began a phase of intense activity for Burkina Electric, with a fairly busy touring schedule in the U.S. from late 2007 and continuing, with some extended breaks, through late 2011, the culmination of which was the release of *Paspanga* as a CD in early 2010. Throughout this period, Maï, Wende, As, and Vicky spent more time in the U.S. than in Burkina Faso; Kurt visited for our rehearsals and toured with us. Among our fall 2007 concerts was one at the New York City club Joe's Pub, at that time a nexus for bands to attract the attention of music business professionals. The concert brought us to the attention of Phil Ballman, a booking agent whose roster we joined, which led to many of our subsequent engagements.

As encountered the problem that his artist name of many years was not easily understood in English; while 'as' means 'ace' in French, Americans pronounced it like 'as' or, worse yet, 'ass'. He soon began calling himself Zoko or Zoko Zoko, the latter justified as both his first and his last names are indeed Zoko.

Also contributing to the density of Burkina Electric's American activities during this period was our collaboration with the seminal Downtown New York choreographer Karole Armitage, well known for her mix of ballet and avant-garde modern dance and sometimes dubbed 'the punk ballerina'. I was first contacted by Armitage in 2006 or 2007 about composing music for a ballet on the topic of particle physics, especially string theory. While that project progressed slowly, she became interested in the work of Burkina Electric and proposed to create a new piece featuring our music, with the band playing live and our dancers interacting with her company. After an intensive rehearsal phase, the first result of this collaboration was *Summer of Love*, presented at

Lincoln Center Out of Doors in New York City in August 2008. Karole then reworked and expanded this piece and renamed it *Itutu*; this premiered in May 2009 at the Teatro Massimo Vincenzo Bellini in Catania, Italy and was subsequently presented at the BAM Next Wave Festival⁴⁹ in New York, as well as in Monaco, Belgium, Germany, and again in New York for a final performance at Celebrate Brooklyn in Prospect Park in July 2010. While this collaboration greatly increased our visibility, all members of Burkina Electric agreed that the initial version, *Summer of Love*, was the strongest, and after the performance of *Itutu* at BAM received a negative review in the New York Times (in which Burkina Electric was praised but Karole's choreography was criticized – in my opinion, far too harshly), engagements for the piece beyond the 2009/10 season were not forthcoming.

For us, the collaboration with Armitage was a significant learning experience. In addition to Burkina Electric songs, I also played some of my solo repertoire for Marimba Lumina; performing all of this music with Karole's choreography made me shift my attention in performance away from the purely musical to issues of coordination with the dancers. Zoko and Vicky profited from learning Karole's complex choreographies, necessitating different ways of counting and uses of their memory; at the same time, they also gained from teaching African dance vocabulary to Karole's dancers. Zoko, in particular, was given ample space for solos. For Maï and Wende, this was their first time on the stages of opera houses, an experience few musicians from Burkina Faso ever make due to the almost nonexistent connection between European opera and African music. Maï, mobile while singing into a Lavalier microphone, was also able to greatly expand her abilities in simultaneous singing and moving/dancing. For all of us, including Kurt, the project meant practical exposure to the world of ballet, an area outside our usual experience.

Despite all of these activities and successes, it was clear by late 2010 that it would no longer be feasible to keep the group in the U.S. for such extended periods. The earnings were insufficient

⁴⁹ The BAM (Brooklyn Academy of Music) Next Wave Festival has been one of the most important showcases for avant-garde dance and opera in New York since 1983.

for Maï, Wende, Zoko, and Vicky to spend so much time in New York, and logistical issues – such as those of rehearsal space – proved increasingly difficult as we wished to create new repertoire and the frequency of concerts diminished. In mid-2011, I was awarded a ‘Swing Space Residency’ from the Lower Manhattan Cultural Council, a residency program that made use of transitionally empty spaces in Downtown Manhattan. Through this opportunity, Burkina Electric was able to rehearse for three weeks in a former bank vault in a basement on Wall Street. At this time, Kurt informed us that he did not want to perform on the next tour (to the Western U.S. in September 2011); he now had two children and was in the process of closing his AtaTak studio and moving to Berlin. He soon left the group but did join us for the rehearsal phase on Wall Street, which was thus dedicated to finding ways for the group to perform without him. This required a reconception of the Ableton Live setup we used in performance, the video element already having been phased out during the previous several years. We initially contemplated inviting someone into the group to replace Kurt, but no candidates occurred to us and we eventually agreed that it would be best for the integrity and atmosphere in the group if we continued as a quintet.

It turned out that we were able to compensate for Kurt fairly easily in live performance. I was now far busier during concerts, and Zoko, Vicky, and Maï also took over some aspects of Kurt’s parts through the use of a Novation Nocturn, a small handheld MIDI controller that allowed them to control some effects processing, particularly while I was playing drum-set and therefore less available to communicate with the computer. It was in the production aspects that Kurt’s absence was felt much more acutely. We no longer had a place to meet for composition sessions; Kurt’s work as a contributor of synthesizer sounds, computer programming solutions, and other aspects of the electronic element was not easy to replace. For some time, we concentrated mainly on improving the standard of performance of our extant repertoire. While we performed fewer concerts than prior to Kurt’s departure, tours in 2012-14 took us to Austria, Hungary, Denmark, Sweden, Burkina Faso, Ethiopia, and Tanzania. We were also able to create some new pieces and met almost yearly in Ouagadougou to continue working towards a new album which, however, remains unfinished as of this writing (2019). In 2016 in Leipzig, Germany, we premiered the *Suite*

for Burkina Electric and Orchestra, a piece I was commissioned to write for the band to play together with the MDR (Mitteldeutscher Rundfunk⁵⁰) Symphony Orchestra with conductor Kristjan Järvi; aspects of this work will be analyzed in Chapter 5. Burkina Electric did not perform in 2017-19 but is currently looking forward to renewed activity.

Over the years, the collaborative approach to composition in Burkina Electric evolved to include more contributions from the dancers, who have also become increasingly active as background singers - Zoko even as lead singer in several pieces. Because the group is much smaller than Beta Foly and all members are well known to each other, the contributions of every member are, perhaps, more predictable in nature, and roles are more easily defined. This also ensures a more transparent decision-making process where it is more certain that all members' thoughts are taken into consideration. The fact that three of the five of us (or four of the six of us when Kurt was in the group) had already been involved in the collaborative, 'sociocratic' decision-making process in Beta Foly further facilitated interactions. Due to Burkina Electric's small size, it is perhaps more appropriate to consider this group a family than merely a group of collaborators.

Before Kurt left the group, his contributions as the 'custodian' of electronics, the element that often provides the rhythmic and harmonic foundation of our music, were pivotal: he did more than anyone else to implement others' ideas and make them playable. Conversely, he provided relatively few initial ideas for songs. Maï, who sings in Moré, Dioula, Bissa, and French, has been the main contributor of lyrics. Growing up in Abidjan, Maï did not speak much Moré in her early years and was not fluent when she arrived in Ouaga in 1997. She is fluent now, but sometimes seeks advice regarding grammar and pronunciation from Wende and Vicky. Maï has also contributed various melodies to compositions, though she relatively rarely provides the initial idea for a song. Wende has been more active in this regard; for instance, the song *To mi to zi*, a favorite in our concerts, is based on a harmonic-rhythmic riff contributed by Wende. Both Zoko and Vicky have lent much energy to the composition process, Zoko through frequent ideas

⁵⁰ Central German Radio

forming the foundation of pieces, and both with contributions to melodies and lyrics. Zoko, an Ivorian, does not speak Moré, and his Dioula is limited, but he has contributed lyrics in the Ivorian languages Baoulé and Bété.

I am probably the single most frequent contributor of basic ideas for songs, but still have done well under 50% of the composition in Burkina Electric, particularly as long as Kurt was still in the group. I have also contributed strongly to beatmaking and arranging. In more than a few cases, my fundamental contribution was not an independent musical idea but a fragment of a field recording I made in Burkina Faso. For example, the song *Sankar yaaré* was catalyzed by a recording I captured while walking through the Sankariaré market in Ouagadougou. Metalworkers are pounding, people are talking, and a radio is playing an unidentified song in the background. In the studio, I chose several short passages from this field recording, isolated them, and arranged them into a rhythmic texture. Kurt identified a bass drum sound, and Kurt and I together created a sparse beat consisting of that sound and a sample of a musical bow made in Ouagadougou. Wende then contributed some extremely imaginative guitar parts, while Maï created lyrics and vocal melodies. Finally, Kurt and I added some synthesizers. The entire process, done in the studio directly for recording purposes, took about two days. The final outcome is a song entirely different from what I might have imagined when I chose the initial passages from the field recording. This process of evolution, with different members adding and altering elements provided by others, is typical of Burkina Electric's compositional practice.

After Kurt left the group, much of the electronic aspect of the music became my responsibility, though my colleagues have helped in the live performance of the electronics as detailed above. My strengths are, however, very different from Kurt's. I am neither a sound engineer nor a professional producer, and I don't have large collections of sound libraries. I am, rather, a contributor of unconventional ideas and of sounds made through field recordings or other techniques that might yield interesting results, but don't necessarily provide the ideal solution for a pre-existing musical challenge. This has made our composition process slower, less predictable, and more difficult. But it has also strengthened the experimental, unconventional

side of our activity. The song *Keleguiya*, analyzed below (4.3.3), can be considered representative of our evolution after Kurt's departure, though I anticipate many new directions for the group from 2020 onwards.

4.3 Analysis of selected pieces

4.3.1: Ligdi

In many respects, *Ligdi* could be considered the quintessential Burkina Electric song. It was among the first songs we began to compose though it has evolved much over the years; it is built upon a traditional rhythm; it is not organized in a conventional verse-and-refrain form; electronics are used and played in various ways; it contains solos from the guitar, drums, and both dancers; it is recognizably a song, but also features some experimental and unusual elements. In a re-composed version, it is also part of the *Suite for Burkina Electric and Orchestra*. In addition to analyzing its musical features, *Ligdi* is a case study for the way I divide my labor between electronics and drum-set, an essential aspect of the group's performance practice.

Ligdi shares with Beta Foly's *Djarabi* as well as many African popular songs, particularly from Congo, a form consisting of a comparatively relaxed first section (during which I perform on Marimba Lumina) followed by a more animated second half (wherein I play drum-set). Building on this structural foundation, *Ligdi*'s form is rather complex, with the second half consisting of at least five sections that can be yet further subdivided. I will primarily discuss *Ligdi* as we perform it in concert at present, a form that differs from the version recorded on *Paspanga*. In either version, an analytical look at *Ligdi* demonstrates how a Burkina Electric song can be the result of an accumulation of ideas contributed by different band-members, leading to a corresponding accumulation of complexity and references to a variety of cultural practices.

Ableton Live's 'Clip View' environment has a chart-like appearance, with columns of boxes not unlike Microsoft's Excel software. Aligned next to each other along a horizontal axis are different channels, akin to a mixing board. Each channel contains a vertical list of 'clips', that is, sound- or MIDI files that can be cyclically repeated. Clips on different channels that reside in the same

Ligdi's Ableton Live playback environment (not counting click track clips) contains 43 clips spread across five channels and 15 scenes; in addition, there are six more channels that do not contain clips but are used for purposes of sound processing. Figure 22 shows this environment.



I start the piece by triggering a soundfile that is already a complex mixture of several recorded sounds. Roughly three seconds long (and repeated cyclically until I stop it or advance to the next scene), it contains the (processed) sound of a *kora*⁵¹ played by Mamadou Coulibaly, a percussionist and kora player who lived in Ouaga in the mid-2000s (he later relocated to France). The music played implies a back-and-forth between b minor and D Major and a time signature of 15/8, not because Mamadou played that way but because the sample of his playing was edited in this fashion: 4/8 of b, 4/8 of D, 4/8 of b, and 3/8 of D – a highly improbable phrase in African traditional or popular music. We thus see here the combination of a traditional timbre, albeit processed, with a decidedly non-traditional meter. Also present is the voice of Maï's daughter Ruth, seven years old at the time, calling, "Mama?". This was not artificially introduced into the sample, but Ruth had called her mother while I was recording Mamadou playing his kora, and I used the sample despite this 'disturbance'. Upon cyclically repeated listening, Ruth's voice appears more and more like merely an additional timbre rather than spoken word; the perception of the word "Mama", or association with its meaning, gradually diminishes. I have observed this phenomenon frequently in music based on sampling: Upon repetition, the *gestalt* and recognizability of text gradually diminishes, and after a certain time, the listener no longer hears a specific word or meaning, but simply sound. This observation is confirmed by cognitive neuroscientists Brice Kuhl and Michael C. Anderson, who describe "[...] a highly counterintuitive phenomenon: Prolonged rehearsal of a word can actually undo some of the accessibility benefits normally associated with brief rehearsal." (Kuhl, Anderson 2011: 967)

Once I have started playback of this soundfile, Wende begins a guitar solo. I remember that, as we were composing the piece and Wende first played to this soundfile, he frequently referred to the pitch *D*, inspiring me to suggest thinking of Indian music and of the note *D* as a drone; Wende's solo subsequently incorporated the deliberate influence of sitar or sarod music. The solo is played *senza tempo*, in no particular coordination with the soundfile. As the solo progresses, I cue the next scene and then the following one, adding a second clip, a sample of a

⁵¹ 21-string harp of the Mandé people.

sound produced using Reaktor, a sound-design program by the company Native Instruments. The second scene also adds several notes with a snare-drum sound to the original kora/Mama soundfile, though again with no obvious correlation to the original soundfile. The following scene adds bass drum sounds to the soundfile, but also adds a further clip that ushers in the rhythmic foundation of the piece, a *waraba* rhythm.

The *waraba* is a traditional rhythm of the Mossi people (speakers of the Moré language) from central Burkina Faso. One of the best-known rhythms of Burkina's folk music, it is occasionally employed in modern popular music as well, and is the most frequently used traditional rhythm in Burkina Electric's repertoire. It is customarily played on the *tchema*, a pair of handheld metal shells. Holding one shell with each thumb, the player wears metal rings on his or her middle finger in both hands and strikes the bells. The waraba rhythm, shown in Figure 23a, is a relatively simple timeline pattern consisting of 12 pulse units, exemplifying the polymetric nature of many forms of African traditional music. It can be understood as two groups of six pulses, as shown in Figure 23b, or as three groups of four (Figure 23c), both interpretations being correct, though the latter often favored by Mossi dancers. In *Ligdi*, the waraba manifests with the sound of a sampled tchema, and when it first appears, it sounds relatively traditional, though a delay effect is strategically positioned in the channel so that, when switched on, it can obscure the rhythm beyond recognition.



Figure 23a. Waraba rhythm



Figure 23b. Waraba in 'two'



Figure 23c. Waraba in 'three'

The beginning of the waraba rhythm, superimposed onto the initial sample's 15/8, is the cue for Wende to bring his solo to an end. This is an example of the cueing system we use throughout our performances: While the lengths of sections of pieces are open *a priori*, we will have agreed on a cue to signal that time has come to advance to the next section. In the instance described here, I give the cue; Wende follows me, and I, too, respond to my own cue by proceeding swiftly to the next scene. At different points and in different songs, different group members provide cues, which can also reside in the choreography, given by a dancer. This method of interaction, especially considering that every member of the band 'calls' a cue at one time or another, is an expression of the 'leaderless' organization of Burkina Electric.

As soon as I usher in the next scene, the texture of the music changes dramatically. The 15/8 sample is now gone; all that remains is the bass drum that was added during Wende's solo. The tchema, however, carries on and is now joined by some tom-tom like drum sounds. From the Marimba Lumina, I am able to add processing: a delay to the tchema, obscuring the timeline pattern; chorus to the tom-toms, creating an aggressive, synthetic timbre; and filtering to the Reaktor sample, altering its timbre by changing the audible harmonics. Another change of scene adds a snare drum; these scene changes happen fairly rapidly and give no particular cue to my colleagues but serve to gradually shape the environment within which Maï will sing. The process comes to completion with the next scene change, which brings in a bass line four waraba timeline patterns long. This bass line repeats persistently for nearly the entire remainder of the song, laying the foundation for its simple harmonic structure, an alternation of Bb and D chords, each lasting one waraba pattern. It is also the cue for Wende to bring in his next guitar part, consisting of melodic fragments he proceeds to play in gaps between lines of, and sometimes in unison with, Maï's singing. And the entrance of the bass is also the cue for Maï to start singing. For the rest of this scene, and the four next ones that engender relatively minor changes in the texture

of the basic track, Mai sings the entire lyrics of the song, a relatively long text in Moré reflecting in part on the positive, but rather more expansively on the negative, effects money can have on a person's integrity ('ligdi' means 'money' in Moré). Throughout this entire section, I add and vary effects on the sounds as mentioned above, Wende plays a fragmented guitar accompaniment, and Mai sings the text line by line with rests of variable length in between. Depending on how swiftly she moves from one line to the next, this section can be well over four minutes long, musically more a state of constant variation and back-and-forth than one of development.

On cue from Mai's lyrics, I leave the Marimba Lumina and walk to the drums, from where I perform the rest of the song. To my left as I sit behind the drums is a DrumKAT, the same electronic percussion MIDI controller I already used in 1994 with Beta Foly, allowing me to communicate with the computer while playing drums. While the control flexibility I have from the DrumKAT isn't equal to what I enjoy from the Lumina, it is sufficient: I can proceed to the next scene or scroll backwards through scenes; I can start and stop Ableton; I can trigger certain sounds; and I can control effects, though in a cruder manner than on the Lumina. The main challenge in playing the DrumKAT is to integrate it into the flow of movements required to play rhythms on the drum-set.

When playing drums, I use headphones and listen to a click track, ensuring that I remain synchronized with the computer. It would be possible to achieve the same coordination simply by listening to the computer tracks via a monitor speaker, but the headphones allow me to listen to a metronome track, a less complex musical texture and therefore easier to remain synchronized with; this approach also helps avoid issues that might arise were the monitor badly positioned or its volume badly adjusted – as explained earlier, my personal headphone amplifier allows me to adjust headphone volume myself rather than requiring the assistance of the sound engineer as would be necessary when relying entirely on a monitor. Here again, playing to music via headphones does not imply that I ignore my colleagues. As per my habitual approach to

headphone performance, I do use a monitor speaker to listen to the overall music, and use open headphones for the click, always attempting to reconcile these different elements.

A drum fill, one measure of 3/4 (equaling one waraba timeline pattern), leads to the next scene, which I trigger from the DrumKat, marking the beginning of the second half of *Ligdi*. While the tempo remains constant, the presence of the drum-set and the clear 3/4 rhythm bring about a considerable intensification of energy. The track provided by Ableton remains similar, though the tom-toms now stop. With me busy playing drums, Vicky takes over the effects processing of the tchema and Reaktor samples by using the Novation Nocturn MIDI controller, connected to the computer via a long USB cable. Maï sings lines from the first half of the tune, and the intensity builds until I begin playing a Congolese-style snare-drum march, albeit in 3/4 time. Figure 24 shows a default version of this rhythm; there can be small variations in the rhythm and the location of the rolls. As in Congolese music, the function of this march is '*de chauffer*', to 'heat up' the atmosphere. After Maï has sung, Zoko takes an extensive dance solo. The cue to end Zoko's solo comes from me and leads to perhaps the most unconventional feature of the song, although many other aspects – the 'unmeasured', Indian-inspired guitar solo with its underlying sample, the tchema sound that is often processed so that the waraba rhythm becomes obscured, the free, declamatory rendition of the lyrics, the absence of the drums in the first half of the tune followed by their sudden entrance halfway through – are all rather unusual.



Figure 24. Snare drum march in *Ligdi*

With a short drum fill, I begin a brief section wherein Wende and I detach ourselves from the piece's tempo. The Ableton backing track (including the metronome in my headphones) carries on, providing for a rhythmic and harmonic backdrop, but Wende and I temporarily ignore this, playing freely. Specifically, I begin playing a waraba at a much faster tempo, with Wende following, but I quickly dissolve that rhythm and play in a style reminding of free-jazz drummers

such as Sunny Murray, further dissolving into cymbal rolls. Then, while triggering the next scene, I play a fill to cue the next section, back again in synchronization with the computer. Here, an organ is added to the previous musical material, creating a stronger harmonic foundation and increased density. Otherwise, this section is a varied repetition and expansion of the previous one. Mai sings to the 3/4 groove and continues singing while I increase energy by playing the snare march. This time, it is Vicky's turn for a dance solo, and by now Zoko has taken over the Novation Nocturn. An eight-bar rhythmic phrase, with Mai's vocals and my drumming in unison, occurs at the beginning of Vicky's solo: this was not originally composed, but evolved over the course of numerous live performances and eventually became a fixture; it ends with a drum fill that cues Vicky to heighten the intensity of his solo. Mai then joins Vicky in dancing, subsequently receiving her turn for a short dance solo, ending with her and Vicky both executing a rotating movement with their arms. This is the cue for me to once again start a section where Wende and I play out of time, similar to the earlier occurrence. Once again, I end this with a fill to bring back the groove while triggering the next scene. However, this next and final scene contains a vastly different musical texture, the sample of a kora melody in slow-motion, replete with the buzzing and other artefacts that result from the extreme slowing-down of a digital recording while preserving pitch. All other sounds – the tchema, the Reaktor sample, the electronic bass and snare drums, the bass – are now gone, and while I did play a fill as if to lead back into the 3/4 groove, I don't actually play the groove now, but instead only mark the downbeat of this new scene. Over the kora sound, Mai repeats some words of the text, and I play various cymbals in rubato-rallentando, ending the song.

The version of *Ligdi* heard on *Paspanga* differs from this live version in several ways, most markedly in that the guitar solo, together with its Ableton accompaniments, occurs in the middle of the tune; I switch to drums immediately after that. The organ sound already appears before I switch to drums and before Wende's solo, and the piece ends with a downbeat after the second out-of-time section, dispensing with the slow kora melody used to end the live performances. This version was generated in the studio, and we changed the form due to a shared feeling that

the guitar solo, with its hard-to-follow underlying rhythm, interrupted the flow of the piece too much in concert.

While *Ligdi* is an unconventional song, it is typical of Burkina Electric's repertoire in its use of a traditional rhythm and of found sounds and sampling. It is also exemplary in that it unites many of the features of the group's music: electronic percussion and drum-set; navigation of a complex form using a series of cues, and at the same time, freedom of improvisation on many levels; unusual concepts in composition and arrangement mixed with simple elements that could be regarded as stereotypical in African pop, such as the alternation between two harmonies. It is pop music and experimental music at the same time.

4.3.2: *Mdolé*

While *Mdolé* is not what one would normally describe as a danceable tune, it has been among Burkina Electric's most appreciated regarding both radio airplay and inclusion on various compilation CDs, such as *Beyond the Horizon* (Gillett 2008). It has also figured in other contexts such as our collaboration with Karole Armitage and the *Suite for Burkina Electric and Orchestra*, in which capacity it will be re-examined in Chapter 5. A slow, expressive love song with lyrics in Moré, it exemplifies many of Burkina Electric's core values, albeit much differently from *Ligdi*.

The initial impetus came from an idea I suggested, a simple, eight-measure theme in a slow tempo (Figure 25). I was not thinking of any particular timbre when I wrote down this idea, but Kurt and I soon found synthesizer pads with a dark timbre for the chords and bass. The melody was originally played by a synthesizer but then processed by means of granular synthesis, a method whereby the sound is chopped up into infinitesimally short 'grains' that can be layered or subjected to various forms of further processing. In this case, the result is a soundscape devoid of a completely clear melody or rhythm though it does approximate my original melodic line in coordination with the synthesizer chords. It is occasionally further augmented by means of a granular treatment of a sample of Maï's voice. Other elements of *Mdolé* executed by Ableton Live are a phrase with a triangle sound (actually 14/4 long, but, as explained below, there is no

real sense of a time signature in the piece), and a funk/rock drum-computer rhythm consisting of four bars of 4/4; each of these is deployed twice during the piece.



Figure 25. Core theme used in *Mdolé*

I begin *Mdolé* on the Marimba Lumina by triggering an Ableton scene containing the chords, which are, however, initially inaudible, as will be explained below. As the chords start fading in, I play samples of a mouth-bow, soon joined by kora motives. These were extracted from an improvisation by Mamadou Coulibaly, and by stringing together (some of) the 12 motives at my disposal in different combinations, I can put together a nearly endless variety of new kora parts. Maï hums a melody to these phrases. A momentary deployment of the above-mentioned triangle phrase gives Maï the cue to begin singing the lyrics. I gradually step through the scenes of the Ableton arrangement, returning one more time to the triangle phrase and twice activating the drum-computer rhythm later in the piece.

Otherwise, however, *Mdolé* exhibits an unusual structure. The lyrics are divided into short stanzas, paired with melodies, that can be recited in any order. There are three short guitar solos in the piece, which have become less and less improvised over the years as Wende increasingly settled on certain preferred phrases. In principle, any of these stanzas or solos can be paired with any scene of the Ableton arrangement.

Soon after Maï begins singing her first stanza, I move from the Marimba Lumina to the drum-set, and my part is an improvisation consisting of several timbral-gestural approaches that are never played the exact same way twice but retain their overall *gestalt*. I do not play any repetitive rhythms in *Mdolé* but use the drum-set more or less as the centerpiece of a multi-percussion setup as might be found in a contemporary chamber-music work. Since accurate coordination between drums and computer is not a factor here, I dispense with the headphones. One of my timbral-gestural approaches consists of playing the drum-set's three tom-toms (two rack toms and one floor tom) with timpani mallets, loosely imitating the rhythm and pitch direction of Maï's speech. In another, I play the tom-toms with a sharper attack, underpinning Wende's solo guitar and attempting to double some of his rhythmic phrases (which I know he will play or which I anticipate given my knowledge of his playing style), though not in an exact unison. For the third, I hold a *Vibratone*⁵² in one hand while hitting it with a timpani mallet; this can be done in the same context and with a similar objective as the second approach, or to reinforce a pitch present in the music or add a new timbre.

Zoko and Vicky do not dance in this piece, but one of them plays the Novation Nocturn, processing the chords (with a filter and a chorus) and the bass (with a filter). They fade the chords in at the beginning of the piece; the initial condition of the filter is such that when I set the first scene in motion, nothing is audible, and I begin playing the mouth-bow samples when I start to have a notion of the chords. Throughout *Mdolé*, volume and especially timbre of the chords and bass are subjected to constant, gradual change through Zoko's or Vicky's work on the Nocturn, and the song closes with a long *diminuendo* during which I scrape the cymbal in approximate unison with long, wailing notes played by Wende at a low volume, evoking the sound of a person faintly crying. In this closing section, Maï quietly says 'I love you' in various languages including

⁵² A percussion instrument built by the company Latin Percussion, consisting of a metal tube with one end open and the other closed, and a hole on the side that can be covered by the player's thumb; when struck, it emits a definite pitch, and opening and closing the thumbhole adds a vibrato effect.

Moré ('ma'm nonga fo'), German ('ich liebe dich'), English, and possibly others including the language of the country or region where we are performing.

Mdolé is an interesting component of Burkina Electric's repertoire in that it combines various cultures in unusual ways, on different conceptual levels. It is a combination of a contemporary chamber music composition and a pop song (and more), as well as of western/European and African concepts. From new-music composition, it takes its flexible, mobile-influenced form, although this observation will be put in question two paragraphs below; the timbrally-oriented, rather than groove-based, approach of the percussion; the lack of a strongly emphasized tempo or meter; and the ample use of unexpected timbres such as the Reaktor-processed synthesizer, vibratone, cymbal scratches, and quietly wailing guitar. From African pop, it takes the harmonic structure consisting of a back-and-forth between two chords, and the guitar solo lines. The vocal melody is perhaps closer to that of a Mandé griot tune than any other musical style; however, the lyrics are in a Voltaic, not a Mandé, language. A drum-computer beat appears twice, pulling the music into the direction of modern, but not specifically African, pop. The interaction between guitar and percussion, based on a loose approach to the unison, with the musicians 'shadowing' each other's lines with no attempt to be exactly together, is unusual in both classical and pop music and reminds perhaps more of free jazz, or of Arabic heterophony. The use of samples, with new melodies being assembled through the recombination of fragments of a cut-up improvisation, might be found in experimental electronic music by Carl Stone or the German group Oval, although the way in which this recombination is executed is once again very loose and not focused on precision, a rendering more relaxed and perhaps disjointed than would typically be found in the work of either of these artists.

In its eclectic diversity, I would describe *Mdolé* as a strong example of experimental intercultural collaboration. I proposed the harmony and a melody without any clear idea of what might develop from it. While the harmonic structure was adopted, the melody I proposed was ultimately processed beyond clear recognition by Reaktor, and a new lead vocal melody was contributed by Maï. My original melody and harmony could form the basis of any pop song,

though the way it limits itself to two harmonies might be seen as rather more African than European, where three (or more) harmonies might be more characteristic. Maï's new melody draws on her West African background in its similarity to Mandé music, though it cannot by any means be deemed to be in a typical Mandé style, and with its arpeggio figures and sequences also has much in common with, for example, Baroque music. In other words, both Maï's contributions and my own are in themselves syncretic, reflecting our own experiences with our respective cultural 'others'. Wende's contribution though his guitar solos clearly draws on African guitar styles, while my drumming contribution is clearly related to my background as a new-music composer. The use of samples at the beginning of the tune is a new-music-influenced use of African sound material, and the live-improvised filter sweeps executed by the dancers are typical of electronic pop music. The fluid form of the piece, with its interchangeable parts, might be in its core a product of the license post-Cage new music gives the composer to generate flexible formal dispositions, but in actual fact it is the result of a more profound phenomenon within the band, a willingness of every member to participate in improvisation and to expect the unexpected. It is not the result of a conscious thought or reference to flexible form on my part, and not even the result of any group member's suggestion, but rather developed naturally as we were looking for ways to combine the eclectic components of the song, opting for open form and intra-group communication in performance rather than a more fixed structure until that open form had become the very foundation of the piece.

4.3.3: Keleguiya

While *Ligdi* and *Mdolé* are mainstays of Burkina Electric's repertoire that have evolved from improvisation through recording back to improvisation to eventually become increasingly fixed as a result of repeated live performance, *Keleguiya* is the exact opposite. One of the few pieces in our repertoire to have been recorded mostly after Kurt left the group in 2011, it has only seen a small handful of performances so far, none of which to our complete satisfaction. It was composed mainly in 2014 though some of its constituent elements are older, and a recording was assembled in 2015 from various patchwork. Not yet released, I do not know if this exact version will be published in the future, but I nonetheless consider this piece one of the most interesting

in our songbook due to how concepts and considerations from different cultures are combined and hybridized.

Formally, *Keleguiya* consists of a core song in an A-B-A'-B form preceded and followed by a lengthy introduction and an even longer epilogue. The recording is six minutes long, but in live performance, it can easily surpass 10 minutes. I will describe the core song first.

The A sections of the core song are driven by a repetitive synthesizer melody, ternary and in a fast tempo, six beats (18 elementary pulse units) long. Harmonically implying a back-and-forth between C and G, the melody sounds typically African, albeit more Southern than West African. This is supplemented by a bass line consisting of a rest on the first beat and notes on each of the remaining beats. Both the synthesizer melody and the bass are played by Ableton. I play a very fast waraba rhythm on drum-set, with each timeline pattern lasting three beats; the rhythm is therefore played twice in each 6/4 'measure'. My bass drum doubles the bass line, so that there is no bass drum on the first beat of each 'measure'. Wende's guitar part consists of descending scalar melodies, creating the effect of a hemiola in that his notes are three pulse-units long compared to the bass drum playing every 4th pulse. Mai's vocal melody coexists harmoniously with the synthesizer line; Zoko and Vicky contribute background vocals. The second A section differs from the first in that it is longer and in that the drum-set waraba uses a different, unconventional instrumentation. In the first A section, I play the tchema pattern on the hi-hat. In the second, however, I relocate the pattern, first playing a cowbell with my right hand and the snare drum with my left, and then shifting to the ride cymbal with my right hand and to the cowbell with my left. This creates a disorienting effect: the listener is used to all notes of the waraba timeline pattern having the same timbre; splitting it up between two timbres leads to a different aural image (Figure 26). Furthermore, as I initially play the cowbell with my right hand and later with my left (while keeping the division of labor between my hands constant), different components of the timeline pattern are heard on the cowbell at different times, heightening the disorientation. The bass drum rhythm, however, acts as a reliable anchor with its steady pulse interrupted by the omission of the first beat of each 'measure'.



Figure 26. Waraba split between two timbres

The synthesizer melody was my contribution, but I did not anticipate the other above-described elements at that time, nor the notion of accompanying the melody with a waraba rhythm. I did, however, envision the general atmosphere and development of the introduction at the time I thought of the synth melody; this will be detailed below. All the other parts of the initial A section were subsequently contributed by the musicians who perform them.

While many aspects of the A sections seem typical of African pop tunes and the deviations from the norm are, while noticeable, still somewhat subtle, the B section, which is performed twice more or less identically during the piece, deviates from African music norms in a downright brutal way. It consists of Vicky screaming at the very top of his voice, without any melody, underpinned by extremely loud, heavy-metal like drums from me and a V-IV-V-I chord cycle performed by Wende by strumming each chord once. In preparation for these sections, I advance Ableton to a new, empty scene: save for a click track in my ear, the electronics are silent during these passages, and there is no bass. The atmosphere, with Vicky shouting to the point of exhaustion and jumping around in an urgent, threatening way, reminds of both heavy metal and punk rock, with the singing and drumming styles perhaps closer to heavy metal but the irreverent atmosphere, the pared-down guitar playing, and the absence of a bass nudging the music in a direction of pure rebellion redolent of late-1970s or early-1980s punk music. The sudden shift from the A section to B is so surprising that it is probably jarring to most listeners even the second time it occurs. As mentioned in the analysis of *Le chant de tout le monde*, the influence of punk rock, a genre largely unknown in sub-Saharan Africa outside of South Africa, is extremely exotic in African pop. It is even more exotic when eclectically combined with the other styles referenced in *Keleguiya*. As opposed to *Djébrélé*, I did not have to overcome any significant resistance from my bandmates when I proposed the B section (though I did receive some resistance regarding

the introduction and final sections of the piece, explained below). They were already familiar with my interest in eclectic stylistic mixtures, knew about punk and heavy metal from their years living in the U.S. and touring there and in Europe, and are generally open to stylistic adventures.

The opening and closing sections of *Keleguiya* are at least as crucial to the identity of the piece as the core song. The introduction reflects my interest in environmental sounds, especially of urban Africa. When I first spent time in Ouagadougou around the turn of the millennium, the city had an unusually vibrant live music scene (it is less active today, though still significant), with bands playing all over the city in *maquis* (open-air grill restaurants that are also popular social meeting-places) and dance clubs. Walking around the city center was akin to taking a walk in a large-scale sound installation, with the sound of one band disappearing in the distance while another was coming closer, a constant, complex crossfade in surround sound. All of this combined with the sounds of the street, cars (not too many at the time) and motorcycles (more numerous) coming and going, people talking, with chirping crickets or quacking frogs audible during lulls in traffic or when crossing a larger undeveloped area. I proposed that we attempt to replicate this atmosphere in the introduction to *Keleguiya*, giving the listener a feeling of walking in the evening, with the sound of live music appearing in the distance and gradually coming into focus.

In 2013, I composed *O jogo insondável*, a surround-sound work commissioned by the Goethe Institute in Rio de Janeiro on the occasion of the upcoming Soccer World Cup in Brazil. The entire piece was assembled from field recordings I made in 2012 in and around stadiums before, during, and after soccer games in Brazil, Uruguay, and South Africa, as well as in Burkina Faso during and after television broadcasts of the 2013 African Soccer Cup. That tournament took place in South Africa but I was in Ouagadougou at the time, where there was an atmosphere of unbridled enthusiasm due to the unexpectedly successful performance of *les Étalons* ('the Stallions'), the Burkinabè national team, which ended up in second place. The semifinal match on 6 February 2013 in Nelspruit, where Burkina Faso eliminated Ghana through 11-meter kicks after an initial tie, found me watching the television broadcast at a maquis in the Ouaga neighborhood of

Dapoya. I was able to capture dramatic sounds of people cheering and horns honking, especially while driving away after the end of the game, where oncoming motorcycles and cars honked cheerfully while at high speeds, resulting in recordings of smeared and sliding pitches caused by Doppler effects. I used some of these sounds in the closing movement of *O jogo insondável*.

I reused these sounds from Ouagadougou in *Keleguiya*, combined with more ‘everyday’ street sounds from the city. They are processed through various filters, delays, and resonators in Ableton, increasing in volume as if the listener were walking through a nocturnal Ouagadougou, approaching a maquis with a live band. Soon, the synthesizer begins to play, and bass, guitar, drums, and singers join in. In the recorded version, this opening development, up to the beginning of section A, takes about one minute, but live, it can take three to four, during which time I sometimes concentrate on the processing of the sounds but sometimes join my bandmates in a variety of other activities that create a disorganized, restless atmosphere on stage. We occasionally utter fragments of text into microphones, walking around aimlessly between the microphones, starting to sing some pitches with the syllable ‘nye’ (to assume greater significance in the closing section of the piece) but stopping again, saying random numbers, all in no apparent coordination or relationship with each other. We do this with a somewhat cantankerous demeanor, occasionally giving the impression of being angry at each other or playing strange tricks on each other, such as one Zoko played on me where he took a microphone I was speaking into and tried to keep it away from me while I attempted to chase it by means of head movements. Sometimes I hit a Vibratone with a stick, then put it away again. This disparate, uncoordinated mode of performance continues until I sit down at the drums and commence the waraba rhythm, joining the synthesizer and bass that had already been playing for a while, sometimes processed beyond recognition.

The closing section of *Keleguiya* follows immediately after the second B section. When this long final section – it lasts over one-and-a-half minutes even in the recorded version – begins, it sounds quite different from anything previously encountered in the piece and could thus be regarded as a coda. But it is more epilogue than coda, as elements earlier encountered gradually

reappear, resulting in a mixture of rounded and balanced form. The synthesizer and the bass resume their parts after the B section's rest, and all of us sing the syllable 'nye', at a fast tempo with one 'nye' equal to two pulse units, each of us at a pitch of our choosing, preferably but not bindingly one belonging to the C-Major triad or at least to the key of C-Major. We repeat our chosen pitch for every 'nye' until we stop for a short breath, each of us whenever they need to, before resuming the 'nye' syllables, now at a different pitch of the C-Major triad or key. Wende plays the guitar part from A while singing, while I do not play the drums but instead keep time occasionally on the Vibratone, playing every other pulse unit in coordination with our singing. We all walk around stage while we sing, singing into a microphone when one is within reach, otherwise dispensing with amplification of our voice. I eventually stop playing the vibratone in order to fade out the synthesizer and the bass, and the singing gradually shifts from 'nye' syllables back to speaking numbers, returning to the introduction's uncoordinated, restless atmosphere. The piece ends as the field recordings slowly fade out.

I was the instigator behind the opening and closing sections of *Keleguiya*; what was my motivation for these ideas?

I was seeking to address several independent, but not completely unrelated, concerns. The first was the feeling that, while audacious experiments were certainly possible in the context of intercultural collaboration in general and with Burkina Electric in particular, the performative stance of our collaborative work inevitably was presentational rather than representational. In making this distinction, I refer to drama theory and two fundamental approaches to theatre, succinctly contrasted in the Wikipedia article on "presentational and representational acting":

Presentational acting and the related representational acting are opposing ways of sustaining the actor–audience relationship. With presentational acting, the actor acknowledges the audience. With representational acting, the audience is studiously ignored and treated as voyeurs. (https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Presentational_and_representational_acting)

It is fair to say that most African performance art is presentational in nature, not only acknowledging the audience but welcoming its active reaction, for instance by dancing, or even its participation, for example by offering money to the performers for singing their praises, as is

typical during a Mandé griot ceremony. On the other hand, much contemporary art music in America and even more in Europe takes a representational stance, not only in that the concert ritual discourages any audience behavior other than sitting quietly and listening, but also in that there is a widespread perception that an artist who does not seek to please the audience, or better yet, who ignores entirely the reactions of audiences or critics, is of high integrity, while one who strives to please or involve the audience could be regarded as pandering. For better or worse, the presentational stance of African performance is one of the elements that has, in my experience, proved the most resistant to destabilization in encounters with music or musicians from other parts of the world. I do not in any way oppose this presentational attitude, but my experiences with its stubbornness even in wildly experimental contexts such as Beta Foly or in Burkina Electric's immersive encounter with ballet and modern dance during our collaboration with Karole Armitage tempted me to examine the possibility of working with a deliberately representational attitude in the context of the band. Indeed, Armitage may have been the main impetus for this interest, as I felt that she, in her identity as a modern Western choreographer, fought Burkina Electric's predilection for a presentational disposition, albeit without much success. Perhaps it was observing this struggle as a somewhat neutral participant that alerted me to the one-sidedness of our presentational stance, and I felt that the more she attempted to develop the work we created together, the more she resisted the presentational, initially accepting it in *Summer of Love* and increasingly attempting to undermine it as the work turned into *Itutu*, and that the more she insisted on cultivating the representational, the less visceral, clear, and engaging the work became. I began to ask myself how a representational approach could be integrated into Burkina Electric's songwriting and live performance.

Playing into these considerations was my increasing interest in sound installations. Whether *O jogo insondável*, which was shown across South America as part of a traveling exhibition otherwise dedicated to photography and video art, should be considered an installation or merely a surround-sound piece for fixed media is an open question; it was certainly directed towards an audience willing to listen quietly even though it was not conceived for a concert environment. Also playing into my considerations was a nascent interest in music theater and

performance art, though without any clear ideas of where this might lead. In 2015, I was artist-in-residence at the POLIN Museum of the History of Polish Jews in Warsaw, where I created *That Which Has Remained... That Which Will Emerge...*, a site-specific work for improvising musicians playing in various ways to interviews I recorded; it also includes an element of audience participation, and I refer to it as a ‘performed sound installation’. With all of these thoughts subliminally present also while working with my colleagues in Burkina Electric, the idea of theatrical elements in the intercultural environment was strongly on my mind.

All of this was joined by my second concern: building bridges between the third-generation-minimalist⁵³ ‘indie classical’ music that was fashionable in New York’s new-music circles since the early 2000s and the African pop of Burkina Electric. The early years of the new millennium saw an increased momentum in the breaking-down of walls between so-called contemporary classical and pop music, a development to which I enthusiastically subscribed (I regard myself as one of a number of composers who practiced this ‘borderlessness’ for a long time before it became fashionable, and thus as one of those who laid the groundwork for these developments) even though I felt that the outcomes of this hybridization frequently left much to be desired. While African music was not much discussed in New York’s new-music circles – with my African interest, I was definitely an outsider – African music elements did creep into American third-generation-minimalism and indie-rock, be it via Steve Reich’s conceptual foundations in Ewe drumming or the African-influenced guitar lines of the band Vampire Weekend. That Cantaloupe Records, the

⁵³ Minimalism in its original form is usually understood to refer to the work early exponents of this musical direction such as LaMonte Young, Terry Riley, Phill Niblock, Tony Conrad, Steve Reich, and Philip Glass, all born in the 1930s. I regard the following generation, who built on these developments, as second-generation minimalists. Louis Andriessen (b. 1939) stands between the generations; the second generation could be regarded as starting with John Adams (b. 1947), encompassing composers such as Steve Martland, Michael Gordon, David Lang, Mikel Rouse, and Julia Wolfe, ending perhaps with Evan Ziporyn (b. 1959). Not many composers of this persuasion were born in the 1960s (if I am a minimalist, which I would question [but, after all, none of the early minimalists accept the term, either], I would be in between generations), but the age group born after c. 1975 has added an ample new voice to this musical lineage, and it is they to whom I refer as the third generation.

record label of the second-to-third-generation-minimalist new-music organization Bang On A Can, signed Burkina Electric for the 2010 CD release of *Paspanga*, was at the behest of Cantaloupe's label manager Alec Bemis, who saw in our group a bridge between classical, world music, and indie rock. He was, in particular, an expert on the latter, known as the producer of the well-known rock band The National and as the founder of the record label Brassland, where he issued not only that band's early recordings but also discs by the classical-indie crossover band The Clogs. Bemis, a visionary with an uncanny sense for connecting dots but notoriously difficult to work with, was dismissed from Cantaloupe soon after our CD was released, and thus the idea of integrating Burkina Electric into the seamless transition between Brooklyn's indie rock and Manhattan's new classical scenes as a means of infusing both with an African sensibility regretfully became a stillbirth. But I agreed with Bemis' idea, and it inspired me to ask myself whether it would be possible to integrate minimalist influences into our music.

I also recalled an interesting experience I had with my colleagues in Beta Foly during one of our European tours. We often spent free time on the road listening to music; they played me recordings of traditional and pop music from Africa while I showed them free jazz, Korean music, or new concert music. They were generally interested, with few exceptions. The most notable one was the music of Steve Reich, which elicited no reaction at all from my colleagues. When I asked them why, one of my ensemble-mates said something to the effect of recognizing some aspect of African music in Reich, but too generically for it to be interesting in an African way, and too little for it to be interesting as an example of African music appropriated into a Western style. The idea for the repetitive, somewhat canonic, Major-triad-based 'nyenyenye' singing at the end of *Keleguiya* came from a desire to inject an element of minimal music into Burkina Electric's repertoire while dispensing with minimalism's ultra-tidy, predictable side. Finally, the idea to say numbers was a product of two influences: First, Dadaism, not in terms of any particular work but of the idea of generating profound emotions through nonsense. And second, a recollection of a performance by the New York ensemble So Percussion, a stalwart group of the third-generation-minimalist scene, in which the ensemble members shouted numbers in between rhythmically

tight ensemble sections – very likely an excerpt from the piece *Nine Numbers* by So's co-founder Jason Treuting, though I cannot confirm this with certainty.

All of these ingredients made their way into *Keleguiya*'s peculiar opening and closing sections, and my suggestions generated a fair amount of resistance from my colleagues, who found all of it quite ridiculous. I had to invest considerable effort to explain my reasoning and convince them that we were doing something unique and expanding the conceptual purview of the group to include theatrical elements in a unique way not normally encountered in African culture. To this day, I am not sure how much my colleagues like the piece, and despite their significant contributions to the core song – in addition to the vocal and instrumental parts, the lyrics were fully written by Maï and Vicky –, *Keleguiya* is one of the least collaboratively composed pieces in our repertoire. (The theatrical aspects were further pursued – now with absolute consensus among all group members – in *Haïdara*, the first movement of *Suite for Burkina Electric and Orchestra*, to be discussed in Chapter 5.) But despite *Keleguiya*'s controversial reception within the group, I remain convinced that its mixture of African and European conceptual elements not only in the music itself, but also in its performative environment, opens doors to possible future experiments, such as in a future opera we are now beginning to contemplate.

CHAPTER 5

Compositions for Ensembles

As described in Chapter 1, I began incorporating influences from African music traditions into my compositions several years before visiting Africa for the first time. Since 1994, a major influence has been my work with African music practitioners themselves, and these experiences have also found their way into my ensemble pieces and other areas of my work outside of the collaborations. To illustrate how these influences can manifest in my recent compositional work, in this brief chapter I will analyze relevant aspects of two pieces. *Incandescence* (2017) contains influences from both East and West African music traditions and was written, in part, for the Amadinda Percussion Group, the ensemble that premiered *Pattern Transformation*, my first chamber work to incorporate African influences in an important way. The *Suite for Burkina Electric and Orchestra* (2016) combines the forces of Burkina Electric with those of a symphony orchestra and presents a situation where intercultural collaboration and individual composition, as well as African and Western music traditions and composition techniques, meet, overlap, and mix in complex ways. The two works share that they were each composed for combinations of two ensembles, each of which normally exists as a group in its own right.

5.1 Incandescence

Incandescence, a commission from Chicago's MacArthur Foundation International Connections Fund, was composed in 2017 for 10 musicians, the joint forces of Eighth Blackbird, one of America's most renowned chamber groups specializing in new music, and the Amadinda Percussion Group. The score is included in my PhD thesis portfolio.

Court music of Buganda was my primary influence in *Pattern Transformation*, which was based on a fast pulse and featured complex forms of interlocking. These interlocking techniques, based on the concept of a relative (rather than absolute/common) beat, are not normally part of the technical repertoire of Western-trained musicians; the Amadinda Percussion Group was a rare

exception. But with the piece having been played by dozens of percussion ensembles over the years, it has had some impact, and quite a few percussionists, at least of the younger generation, now have skills of this type. Otherwise, however, these kinds of interplay are still not normally practiced by Western musicians.

I have sought to find various ways of implementing such techniques without requiring musicians to be trained in them; one approach, also already described, is the use of headphones. Another is to embed these concepts into conventionally-played ensemble music in such a way that it is possible to benefit from the musical interest generated by them without the persistent interlocking or relative-beat approach being fully perceptible to the musicians who are executing it. *Incandescence* contains aspects of this latter approach.

One relatively straightforward workaround for the problem of having one musician constantly ‘syncopate’ is to notate interlocking patterns such that the parity of the number of elementary pulses in a beat is the opposite of the parity of the number of musicians. If music for two players is notated as a binary chain of notes, with two pulse-units to a beat, one player has to constantly play ‘off-beat’. However, with the same music notated as a ternary chain, with three pulses per beat, players alternately ‘land’ on the beat, a significant facilitation. Nonetheless, there are limits to the use of this approach, especially regarding speed.

In *Incandescence*, I employed such workarounds but also took a different approach. Eighth Blackbird’s musicians are not trained in *amadinda*-style interlocking, while Amadinda’s are. In composing a piece for the joint forces of these two ensembles, I first examined the instrumentation: Amadinda consists of four percussionists; Eighth Blackbird’s lineup is six musicians including one percussionist. The combined ensemble therefore consists of 10 musicians, five of whom are percussionists.

I thought of the combined ensemble as five dancing couples: each percussionist is paired with a player of a different instrument. This matched each of the four Amadinda percussionists with a

Blackbird musician; the fifth pair consisted of two Blackbird musicians. Akin to social dancing, where one partner is often expected to lead, the Amadinda percussionists lead their respective Blackbird partner through complex polymetric structures. The Amadinda percussionist assures rhythmic-metric integrity, and the other instrument contributes timbral variety (since the Amadinda percussionists are playing mallet instruments, both members of a pair contribute pitch). The fifth pair, consisting of Eighth Blackbird's percussionist and the pianist of the same group, serves a different function. Their parts are less tightly coupled, with the percussionist fulfilling an overall 'conducting' role by often playing timeline patterns on cowbells, and the pianist contributing added harmonies or unexpected rhythmic subdivisions.

These pairings are immediately evident when looking at rehearsal letter C of the score, which reveals the most typical form of coordination: Percussion 1 plays in rhythmic and pitch-class unison with the flute, percussion 2 with the clarinet, percussion 3 with the violin, and percussion 4 with the cello. Between these pairs, every pulse-unit is accounted for. Percussion 5, the percussionist from Eighth Blackbird, plays a timeline pattern on a cowbell; the pianist plays a slightly different structure, the left hand in pitch-class unison with other instruments and the right hand transposed by a fifth. The cowbell timeline pattern is, however, structured differently from African traditional patterns: It consists of an additive rhythm of 1+2+3+4+5+4+3+2 pulses, 24 in total, repeating every two bars. This rhythm creates an effect suggestive of slowing-down and speeding-up, but, much like in *Pattern Transformation*, the tempo of the music is actually constant. While *Incandescence* contains many instances of triadic harmony, it is not tonal music as such; on the other hand, the cowbell pattern, with its implied accelerando and ritardando, contributes a sense of tension and release. Similar cowbell patterns occur at various times throughout the piece.

Rehearsal letter J (m.119) is the beginning of a gradual buildup of an interlocking structure that arrives at a developmental peak roughly 30-40 bars later. To understand this structure, let us examine, for instance, m.155-156. The instrumental pairs are playing together as before. Distributed over the 16th-notes are triads: in m.155, four upward arpeggios of a Gb^{6/4} chord occur

during the 12 16th-notes of the bar in 3/4, giving each member tone of the triad the opportunity to appear once at each metric position within the quarter-note beat. The instrumental pairs are interlocking, but playing two 16th-notes each, so that each pulse unit is played by two pairs, one playing its first note and the other its second. This creates a situation of 'dovetailing', a well-known orchestration technique that ensures consistency through contiguity: with every pair playing one pulse and hocketing, the structure would easily feel labile, but this interweaving of instrumental entrances makes it feel solid, similar to the way bricks are offset against each other when constructing a wall. Yet, obviously, the total timbre changes with each pulse unit: on the first pulse of this measure, clarinet+percussion 2 are heard with the violin and percussion 3; on the second, the clarinet+percussion 2 pair has dropped out and violin+percussion 3 is now combined with flute and percussion 1, and so on. Further variety is brought by the fact that the flute plays an octave above percussionist 1's marimba and the cello plays an octave below percussionist 4's vibraphone, while the other two pairings play in complete unison.

Because there are four pairs of instruments and the rhythm is binary (four 16ths per quarter), each pair repeatedly lands on the same two positions within the quarter-note beats; in other words, this texture does not take advantage of the technique, described above, wherein an even number of instruments interlocks over an odd number of pulses per beat (or vice versa). However, that is unproblematic due to the tempo not being extreme (M.M.=66/quarter-note equals 264/pulse unit) and the pairs dovetailing. Examining m.156, the structure is similar, but now instead of four upwards arpeggiations of a triad, there are three up-and-down arpeggiations of a triad (bb⁶). While the following measure repeats m.155 in these four instrumental pairs, the parts of the piano and percussion 5 are subject to change during this short passage.

Overall, this structure sounds nothing like *amadinda* music even if the original technical inspiration is derived from that tradition. The arpeggiated Major and minor triads lend the passage a sound reminiscent of Philip Glass, but the interlocking, dovetailing instrumental pairs create a constantly-changing timbre that is far more complex than normally found in Glass' music; the polyphony caused by the offset instrumental entrances is further heightened by the

more independent parts of the piano and percussion 5. Actually, due to my close relationship with African pop music through Burkina Electric, the back-and-forth alternation between the two triads is probably better understood as a nod to chordal accompaniments in that style than as a reference to Philip Glass. And the fact that chords sometimes create a hemiola effect with respect to the beat (the triad is arpeggiated four times over three beats during m.155) and sometimes not (three times over three beats in m.156) might be understood as an allusion to the different possible dance interpretations of a rhythm such as the *waraba* or many others in Africa.

From the breakdown of this structure at rehearsal letter N, a different environment with new musical material begins emerging at rehearsal letter O. While the other instruments are still ‘reeling’ from the chaos of the previous bars, bringing their kinetic and chaotic motion to a gradual rest approximately 4 bars after O, the piano is already playing an accompaniment figure strongly reminiscent of Mandé balafon music. In this section, lasting until rehearsal letter S, the above-described instrument pairings are in abeyance (they return at S). Instead, a dense counterpoint results from an accumulation of descending scalar lines inspired by the melodic ornamentation of Mandé *birimintingo* kora and balafon figures already referenced in Beta Foly’s *Adjamé 220*, but also encountered, for example, in the sampled kora lines I recombine in the opening section of Burkina Electric’s *Mdolé*. In this section, individual melodic lines are the center of attention, rather than the tightly coordinated ensemble playing of the rest of the piece.

At rehearsal letter S, the ‘dance-pairing’ of instruments is reinstated, though the pitch relationships between the partners are more varied now. An interlocking structure is built up once again, but this time the result is not a flow of ever-changing timbral combinations as in the passage between J and O, but the angular, irregular rhythm reached at rehearsal letter T. While the four instrumental pairs again take turns attacking notes in a way similar to much earlier in the piece (although notes are now held longer, resulting in a slightly more blurred texture), Percussion 5 once again plays the additive timeline known from rehearsal letter C, though now on glockenspiel rather than cowbell, giving the timeline pattern equally strong penetration while also carrying pitch content.

In the vast majority of my music containing interlocking, there is no definitive beat, and certainly no definitive downbeat, with time signatures and barlines used for orientation only. This scenario is quite different: rehearsal letter T is one of the relatively rare occasions where I use frequently-changing time signatures. The underlying idea here is the playback of a sample from a keyboard: the sample is restarted each time the key is pressed and continues for as long as it is held. Examining each measure from rehearsal letter T to U, the beginning is always the same, but the bars are of different length, as if a sample were started, held, restarted, and held a little longer (or shorter). From m.270 on, transpositions – upwards in the winds and strings, downwards in the percussion – seem to gradually tear apart the pitch texture that was kept rather static during the previous 9 bars. With the piano playing in eighth-notes and the four instrumental pairs interlocking using that same elementary pulse, each piano note is (rhythmically) doubled by a different pair of instruments. While interlocking structures usually tend to spin themselves forward over longer periods, the constant restarting of the structure in this section makes for an unusual combination of interlocking textures with an almost stuttering overall gesture due to the constantly-changing phrase lengths. This stuttering effect is furthered by Percussion 5, now again on cowbell, restarting its timeline pattern (a different one from before) at the onset of every bar.

At letter U, the interlocking continues, with each instrumental pair first playing one eighth-note but subsequently extending their presence, gradually building up a denser texture that culminates just before W; here, the density initially continues, but the texture suddenly changes, with the pairs playing one note each carrying relevant pitch information and playing more timbrally-oriented filler sounds during the remaining pulse-units. With the elementary pulse as such continuing unabated, some of the instruments untether themselves from this pulse at letter Y as part of a gradual dissolution of the audible pulse and thinning-out of the texture that continues until a seeming standstill is reached, ending the piece.

From rehearsal letter T on, the African elements in the music are, at best, subliminal. As opposed to several sections earlier in the piece, nothing about this music sounds particularly African. But

even here, the voice-leading techniques I employ derive from the interlocking textures in *Pattern Transformation* and, going back further from there, Baganda court music.

Did my experiences in Beta Foly and Burkina Electric influence my writing in *Incandescence*, or could I have written this music had I never collaborated with my African colleagues? That is a difficult question to answer with any certainty, and my best reply would have to be that, on some abstract level, my entire life experience enters into writing a score, and as such, so does my time spent in my intercultural projects. To be more concrete, though, I think that my experiences working with musicians coming from a wide variety of backgrounds as well as traditions of musical interplay have helped me find ways of making the techniques of one tradition accessible to musicians from another tradition and representing another skill set. Over time, I have noticed in myself an increasing ability to write music featuring unusual modes of interplay that is nevertheless not extraordinarily challenging to learn, even by musicians unfamiliar with these techniques. Much of my early work was prohibitively difficult to play, and I believe that my most recent work is challenging but not prohibitive, without losing the interest of the unusual structures I create. Working with musicians from cultures other than the one I grew up in cannot but have helped me in this development.

5.2 Suite for Burkina Electric and Orchestra

I now turn my attention to the *Suite for Burkina Electric and Orchestra* (2016), a work that is of interest because it combines my experience in writing scored music with my intercultural collaborations, brought together on one stage. It is, furthermore, a representative of a very rare genre: I am aware of only very few works combining an African group with a symphony orchestra in an art-music context. Examples that come to mind are *Timbila* by Hans Roosenschoon, pitting a Mozambican timbila orchestra against a symphony orchestra⁵⁴, and Daniel Schnyder's *Sundiata Keïta* for traditional Mandé musicians/singers, choir, and orchestra.⁵⁵ The *Suite* was

⁵⁴ <<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ARymzJV4mqk>>

⁵⁵ <<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8KwlgYkEmOc>>

commissioned by the MDR (Mitteldeutscher Rundfunk – Central German Broadcasting Company) and conductor Kristjan Järvi for the MDR Symphony Orchestra to perform together with Burkina Electric. Consisting of four movements, the total duration is 40-45 minutes, to which I may add further movements in the future. The scores of two movements, *Haïdara* and *Gom Zanga*, are included in my PhD thesis portfolio.

The project was challenging owing to the crucial differences between the two ensembles. Burkina Electric's sound world and approach to performance couldn't differ more sharply from a symphony orchestra. More daunting yet are the very different ways in which these groups learn and interpret their music. An orchestra works with fully notated scores and a conductor. Burkina Electric fluidly modifies and reshapes basic musical material in concert by improvising according to a variety of factors, including a cueing system we have evolved over years where each group member can call a cue at certain points in a piece. Myself aside, none of the members of Burkina Electric read music or had ever followed a conductor, and we compose our songs collaboratively and learn them by rote. To make matters worse, the (unionized) MDR Orchestra was not able to adapt to our rehearsal needs; we had one rehearsal of 90 minutes plus the dress rehearsal to prepare 40+ minutes of music for performance.

The major challenge, therefore, was how to coordinate the two groups. I composed music that would allow for slight inaccuracies in coordination. This is accomplished in different ways in each movement. *Haïdara* contains numerous brief solo/group improvisation sections for Burkina Electric during which coordination, if lost, can be regained; the singer is free to sing in a variety of rhythms that can line up differently with the instrumental music. *Ligdi* contains fermatas and sections where even the orchestra has some freedom to improvise as directed by the conductor. In *Gom Zanga*, an instance in the music allows one ensemble to wait for the other to catch up if they are not together, while in *Mdolé* the singer generally follows the orchestra's music, commencing sections on cue from the conductor.

Three of the four movements of the *Suite* are recompositions of existing Burkina Electric songs. While based on the original song, they include new sections and much musical material that wasn't in the original version. All three of the extant pieces are on our CD *Paspanga*. While a collaborative compositional process underlies these pieces, the recompositions were made by me alone. *Haïdara* is not based on a pre-existing song and was composed by me while Burkina Electric's singer Maï Lingani wrote the lyrics concurrently. The movements can be played in any order, but the order Kristjan Järvi chose for the premiere may well establish itself at future performances:

- *Haïdara*
- *Mdolé*
- *Ligdi*
- *Gom Zanga*

I did not want to create 'orchestral pops' music; in keeping with Burkina Electric's mission as an experimentally-oriented dance band, I chose to use a wide range of techniques and timbres in the orchestra. It is my hope that the result is an organic combination of African pop and Western contemporary orchestral music, electronic and acoustic instruments, and perhaps forges some new ground in the combination of 'classical' and 'popular' musical elements. On the other hand, the intercultural-collaborative aspect of this project played out primarily within Burkina Electric as my colleagues were confronted for the first time with the world of orchestral music and its *modus operandi*. As for the orchestra, their contact with Burkina Electric was too superficial to allow for any in-depth conceptual exchange; they played the music written for them with enthusiasm, but I am not convinced that this brief exposure to African pop music had any lasting effect on them as individuals or as an ensemble.

In the following, I will briefly examine selected aspects of *Haïdara*, *Mdolé*, and *Gom Zanga* in regard to the coordination of the ensembles, as well as aspects of the orchestration used in the work.

Haïdara, with lyrics in French and an operatic/oratorio-like atmosphere, is in praise of Abdel Kader Haïdara, a librarian from Timbuktu who secretly evacuated ancient manuscripts from the city, saving them from destruction at the hands of militant Islamists. The full Burkina Electric band performs along with the orchestra. The orchestral part is designed to enhance drama and provide timbral contrast to the band's electronics and African-style electric guitar; band and orchestra are equal partners. In essence, the piece is a constant back-and-forth between two scenarios: a *recitative*-like texture with rhythmic freedom for Maï's singing and the orchestra changing chords primarily on the downbeat of every measure, and a pop-song with a chordal guitar accompaniment (several different chord sequences and vocal melodies represent this scenario; the most recognizable chord-plus-melody pairing occurs thrice and functions somewhat like a refrain). An electronic soundscape underlies the pop song as well as sections under fermatas in which improvisation of an open (though not extensive) duration can occur; the internal rhythm of this soundscape, consisting of gently beeping sounds, provides the tempo in these sections.

The movement opens with the electronic soundscape, played by me on the Marimba Lumina. An orchestral marimba briefly plays chords that foreshadow Wende's accompaniment in the pop song scenario. Many bars have fermatas and contain either timbral developments or short improvisations; the cue to continue is given by the conductor. After several such fermatas, on cue from the conductor, Maï begins to sing the first recitative. During this scenario, the conductor only marks the 'one' of every bar. While an exact relationship between the vocal line and the instrumental parts is written out, it is not crucial for them to be exactly synchronized, so that offsets of even two or three bars are acceptable: the recitative section ends with an orchestral chord that is once again under a fermata, at which point coordination can be reestablished. This type of coordination is effective because Maï, who does not read music, cannot be expected to recite her vocal line exactly as written. On the other hand, it is an approach to coordination that subdivides the movement into many short sections separated by fermata-induced stops, which is appropriate in *Haïdara* due to its operatic style.

During the fermata ending the first recitative (m.27), I bring back the electronic soundscape that had been muted since approximately m.3. The soundscape provides the tempo for the first incidence of the pop-song scenario, which starts in m.29. The pop-song is set in motion by the conductor's cue to Mai and Wende to begin playing chords and singing, and the coordination between them and the orchestra is now strict. The pop-song scenario ends (in m.43) with another fermata, the last chord being prolonged by the conductor. As soon as the conductor cues the next measure, I gradually fade out the electronic soundscape, removing the tempo reference. We are now back to the recitative (in its second incidence), a much slower tempo, and once again a freer coordination between orchestra and singer.

This back-and-forth between pop-song and recitativ scenarios continues, with some elaborations and interludes, throughout the entire movement. The pop-song in its most easily memorable form, which could be called the refrain, occurs for the first time at m.57 and builds up in intensity and orchestral density each time it is played: the first time, only the two flutes represent the orchestral component; the second time, they are joined by the strings, and the last time, at the very end of the movement, woodwinds, brass, and percussion are added.

At times, during recitative sections or areas that are based on the recitative approach even if there is no singing, the orchestral musicians' parts feature a measure of indeterminacy by way of relatively conventional 'box notation', allowing musicians to select freely from several pitches in a box. This injects an element of unpredictability and a somewhat restless, disjointed aspect into the music, an unusual occurrence in a context featuring a pop band.

Several other factors also contribute to this unpredictability, with the most relevant one produced by the dancers, who sit still for most of the movement and only intervene near its end. In the original score, only Zoko has a solo, but during the short rehearsal, we inserted a dance solo for Vicky, who dances in silence during an extended grand-pause fermata before m.177. After the lively back-and-forth between the recitative and pop-song scenarios, such a standstill is surprising; it is all the more surprising to see a dancer moving to this silence. Once Vicky has

completed his solo, Zoko appears and proceeds to push the conductor off his podium. Zoko then dances on the conductor's podium, imitating a conductor's gestures and launching the orchestra into a box-notation-driven improvisation. The conductor gradually makes his way back to his podium, silences the orchestra, and restores his position of power. The final incidence of the pop-song scenario concludes the movement.

The above brief synopsis demonstrates one approach used to solve the problem of coordination between band and ensemble, as well as the theatricality of this movement, represented by Maï's free recitative singing and, in a more extreme way, by the dancers, especially Zoko. It was important to me to feature the full band in some of the *Suite*, yet combining dance with the orchestra was not an easy task, not least due to limits in the surface area of the stage. While solving this problem in a surprising way, Zoko's action also draws attention to a seeming power imbalance in this combination of ensembles – European vs. African; classical vs. pop; state-subsidized vs. freelance; conducted vs. beat-driven or free – and subverts it at the same time.

Due to limits in the amount of music that could be included in the PhD composition portfolio, the score for *Mdolé* is not provided. I will nevertheless briefly mention some aspects of this movement.

The recomposition of *Mdolé* features Maï as the sole representative of Burkina Electric; the other band-members, including myself, do not participate, making this movement a song for (African pop) soprano and orchestra. As mentioned in 4.3.2, *Mdolé's* form is largely open, with sections free to appear in a variety of sequences and configurations. The orchestral version represents one such sequence. But while the piece in its band-only version is strongly driven by electronics – the opening is entirely electronic – this option is not available here. I compensate by using a large palette of sound effects: harmonic sweeps in the bass clarinet; harmonic glissandi played pizzicato in the celli and arco in the contrabasses; rhythmic glissandi played col legno battuto in the violins. A harpsichord and a harp imitate the sampled kora of the original. Several times during the piece, instrumental interludes not present in the original version are inserted, such as

an imitation figure played *divisi* by six 1st violins (m.52-53), a brass chorale (m.88-95), and a long buildup from the movement's generally gentle disposition to a veritable cauldron of increasingly dense, loud, and complexly interwoven fragments of melodies typical of *kumbengo* accompaniments in Mandé instrumental playing (mentioned previously in 3.3.1). Figure 27 shows m.127-128 as an example of this texture that begins around m.115 and comes to a climax and sudden ending in m.129. In its wake is the final section of the song, with Maï's *sprechgesang* mimicking the original version. Vibratone and scratched cymbals are contributed by the orchestral percussionists, and the role of Wende's wailing guitar is played by a combination of a solo violin and a trombone playing short, very soft glissandi. The texture is completed by sounds such as stopped horn, tuba, a harmonica, and strings played *sul ponticello*; a longer and timbrally more diverse section than this part of the original song. Figure 28 shows m.138-140 as an excerpt from this section that lasts from m.130 until the movement's end at m.157. The voice is notated with 'x'-type noteheads to indicate rhythm only and not melody; even the notated rhythm is merely a proposition. Maï primarily improvises this part, as she also does when singing with the band.

Finally, I will mention several aspects of *Gom Zanga*. This song is normally our concert opener; in the *Suite*, however, the conductor of the premiere, Kristjan Järvi, chose it as the closing movement due to the ending of the recomposed version consisting of a section that can be repeated *ad infinitum*; here, Järvi motioned to the audience to join the group in dancing, triggering a veritable celebration. The song in its original form is relatively simple; it consists of a long text sung by Maï that introduces the band and invites the audience into our show. There are three distinct sections: A somewhat chaotic-sounding introduction followed by a call-and-response between Maï and the two dancers as background vocalists; a section wherein Maï humorously introduces the members of the group; and a long closing section featuring more lyrics and, especially, dance solos followed by a brief reprise of the opening. Wende plays funky accompaniment figures over a complex drum beat that I trigger and occasionally alter from the Marimba Lumina. Also from the Lumina, I trigger a variety of synthesizers that provide the harmonic and timbral foundation of the song.

Figure 27 shows measures 127 and 128 of the piece 'Mdolé'. The score is written for a large ensemble, including strings, woodwinds, brass, and percussion. It features complex rhythmic patterns, dynamic markings like *ff* and *p cresc.*, and a section marked *simile accelerando - presto poco.* with diagonal lines indicating a tempo change.

Figure 27. M. 127 & 128 from *Mdolé* in *Suite for Burkina Electric and Orchestra*

Figure 28 shows measures 138 to 140 of the piece 'Mdolé'. The score continues the ensemble's performance, featuring various instruments like Vibraphone, Timp, To Harm., and Crash. It includes dynamic markings like *ppp* and *p*, and a section marked *sul pont.*

Figure 28. M. 138 - 140 from *Mdolé* in *Suite for Burkina Electric and Orchestra*

In the *Suite, Gom Zanga* is scored only for Burkina Electric's singers with the orchestra, meaning Maï with Zoko and Vicky providing background vocals, which are required in the call-and-response section. Guitar and electronics are not present, and the strings imitate synthesizer textures several times during the movement, including at the opening, where string glissandi with indeterminate starting and ending points create a complex and unpredictable texture.

Coordination between the singers and the orchestra is somewhat free since many sections of the orchestral writing are mainly textural and the entire song is built on one harmony (c-minor). M.124-125 interrupts the 16th-note-driven rhythmic texture of the song by introducing septuplets. This noticeable difference is in service of coordination: should the singers be behind at this point, they can abandon the rest of the preceding section and rejoin the orchestra. Should the singers be ahead of the orchestra, they know not to continue any further before hearing the septuplets.

The two most relevant passages regarding the imitation of synthesizers by the strings are m.132-152 and m.223-283. These sections differ completely from the original song. The first consists of increasingly fast upwards scalar motions that can remind of both an arpeggiator and filter sweeps. The second contains similar scalar motions, but downward; here, intensity is built up and then gradually reduced, and scales are gradually replaced by glissandi in an effort to conjure the atmosphere of filter sweeps and pitch bends played by a synthesizer. Another section not present in the original song is an organ solo (m.191-223) that introduces an element of melodic variety not strongly present in the original song. This electronic organ also fulfills the purpose of adding some electronic texture to the music in an effort to create a new but equally creative environment to replace the strongly synthesizer-based texture of the original song.

CHAPTER 6

Reception and Reactions

An overview of reactions to the Beta Foly and Burkina Electric projects will help to analyze the reception these collaborations received, both among group members and by outsiders.

6.1 Press

Press reactions to Beta Foly and Burkina Electric have largely focused on the CD releases. Both CDs were distributed internationally, theoretically worldwide except in Africa. For *Lukas Ligeti & Beta Foly*, released in 1997 in Germany, distribution in the German-speaking countries was good, and the label organized a modest promotion campaign in Germany. The United States market was accessed through the Oregon-based distributor Allegro, and when it became clear to me that no efforts were planned to promote the CD, I hired an established world-music publicist in New York City and paid for her work out-of-pocket. I am not aware of any other organized efforts to promote the CD. Burkina Electric's *Paspanga* – thus far the Group's only CD with substantial distribution – experienced a similar situation, symmetrically across the Atlantic. It was released in 2010 in the U.S. National distribution was through Naxos, probably the most reliable distributor for classical CDs in the country. European distribution was somewhat disparate. Cantaloupe organized a press campaign in the U.S., and I attempted to organize campaigns in Germany and the U.K., though their reach remained limited.

The African market for recordings is particular in that most established Western labels simply eschew it, which I ascribe to a combination of fear of piracy and lack of knowledge of (or interest in) the territory; the latter aspect could also, more polemically, be described as a form of neglect based on bias, the challenges of building audiences in this supposedly infrastructurally deprived, politically complex part of the world apparently not worth the effort for most Western record labels. With Beta Foly, I insisted on a clause in our contract with Intuition that we would be free to find Ivorian distribution on our own, but we were unable to locate a company in the country

that was interested in our product. With Burkina Electric, this was easier due to the Ouaga-based record label Seydoni, with whom we had a friendly connection; *Paspanga* (in its initial form) had been released there as a cassette before it was released by Cantaloupe.

In the 13 years that passed between the two releases, the market for recorded music underwent drastic changes. CD sales declined rapidly while online downloading and streaming, practically nonexistent in 1997, had become an important phenomenon by 2010. Together with the decline of physically tangible recordings came a decline in interest from the media, and the increased difficulty of getting attention for the CD in 2010 compared to 1997 was palpable, notwithstanding Burkina Electric's more dance-oriented music and the fact that touring in support of the album was logistically far simpler with this smaller, more agile formation.

Regarding sales, *Paspanga* was, I was told by an employee of Cantaloupe Music approximately one year after its release, one of the more successful CDs in the label's catalogue; nonetheless, neither CD sold in great numbers. A contributing factor might have been that both CDs were published by labels whose strength lay in other musical genres. World music and new classical music sadly have little overlap in terms of audience, distribution, or press attention; the situation is slightly better between world music and jazz, and better yet between world music and 'indie' rock, but for the most part, all of these market niches remain separate, not to say segregated, from each other. Intuition Music was primarily a jazz label but had published several albums in the world music category, yet my access to the label was through Schott Publishing, due to my (familial) connection to new classical music. My access to Cantaloupe Music was through my (self-made) activities as a composer in New York's new-music scene; Bang On A Can commissioned a work, *Glamour Girl*, from me in 2007 for their in-house ensemble, the Bang On A Can All Stars, who performed it frequently and worldwide during the next several years. However, as previously mentioned, the ultimate decision to release *Paspanga* came from Alec Bemis, Cantaloupe's label manager at the time, who sensed a connection between our music and the 'indie' rock scene. Neither label received much attention from the world music industry and neither label had any presence in France, the most important country for (especially

Francophone) African acts in terms of performance opportunities. The fact that the groups were not able to release their CDs on better-placed record labels was not due to any lack of effort; in both cases, I sent demos to numerous record companies, but these were the only ones with any measure of distribution that displayed any interest.

Nonetheless, both CDs received enthusiastic reviews. About *Lukas Ligeti & Beta Foly*, Ulrich Olshausen wrote in the *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, one of Germany's most prestigious dailies:

Ist Genie vielleicht doch ein bißchen erblich? [...] In der langen Geschichte der Begegnungen von afrikanischer und westlicher Musik ist dies ein ästhetisch ungemein komplexes Abenteuer [...] Mit beispielloser unkonventioneller Verspieltheit wird hier scheinbar völlig Auseinanderliegendes zusammengebracht, ohne einander zu beschädigen [...] Verständliche Begeisterung für eine neue Dimension des Dialogs zwischen Afrika und der westlichen Welt.⁵⁶ (Olshausen 1997)

Like Olshausen, Stephan Hespos, writing in *Forum Kulturmagazin* (Germany), praised Beta Foly's originality and the way the music unites disparate elements:

Dabei ist deutlich zu hören, wie sich die Musiker gegenseitig inspirieren. Hier treffen Stile, Kulturen und Zeitalter ohne Vorwarnung aufeinander. Das Ergebnis kann Kollision sein, aber auch sanfte Verschmelzung. Ein ungeheuer interessantes Projekt, das musikalisch-traditionelle Unterschiede nicht einebnen, sondern weiterentwickelt.⁵⁷ (Hespos 1997)

In *Stereo* magazine, the renowned German jazz critic Bert Noglik compared the originality of my work with Beta Foly to that of Béla Bartók:

⁵⁶ "Is it possible that genius is hereditary after all? [...] In the long history of meetings of African and Western music, this is an adventure of incredible aesthetic complexity...With an unprecedentedly unconventional playfulness, seemingly completely disparate elements are brought together without getting in each other's way [...] Understandable enthusiasm about a new dimension in the dialogue between Africa and the Western world." [My translation]

⁵⁷ "One can clearly hear how the musicians inspire each other. Here styles, cultures, and epochs are confronted without prior warning. The result can be a collision, but also a gentle amalgamation. An incredibly interesting project that doesn't suppress differences between musical traditions, but takes them to a new stage of development." [My translation]

Lukas Ligeti [...] entdeckte, wie einst Béla Bartók in der ungarischen Folklore, bei seinen Workshops in Abidjan die populäre Grundsubstanz für eine ganz neue Musik.⁵⁸ (Noglik 1997)

Andreas Felber, writing in *Jazz-Podium*, an important German jazz magazine, likewise enthusiastically praised the project's diversity and originality:

'Beta Foly' verdankt seine Band-Werdung demselben Umstand, der das Projekt mittlerweile weit aus der Unzahl personell ähnlicher, zumeist eindimensionaler interkultureller Kooperationen heraushebt: Der scheuklappenlosen Offenheit und Kommunikationswilligkeit beider Seiten. Wer ist vor Ligeti schon auf die Idee gekommen, mit traditionellen afrikanischen Musikern und unter Bezugnahme auf koreanische wie ugandische Musik im Kollektiv frei zu improvisieren, koordiniert nur von einem per Kopfhörer vorgegebenen metronomischen 'Click-Track'? Wer konfrontierte afrikanische Musiker schon einmal mit [...] rekonstruierten Strukturen eigener Materialien? Wer ließ einen Balafon-Spieler je mit einem interaktiven Musikcomputer mit Piano-Klang zum Dialog antreten? Zwischen modernster Technologie und archaischem Gesang, einfachem Trommelschlag erstreckt sich die Palette der musikalischen Kommunikationsmittel [...] Beinahe mit jedem der 15 Stücke stößt man auf ein anderes Konzept, einen neuen Weg, die Zusammenarbeit zu erproben. Zustatten kommt Dahlke und Ligeti zweifellos ihr breiter musikalischer Background und ihr elektronisches Instrumentarium (Ligeti am elektronischen Sample-Schlagzeug dürfte im Moment ohne Pendant in der Szene sein) [...] Die Atmosphäre des Suchens, des Testens, Herum- und Ausprobierens besitzt ihren eigenen Reiz; man darf gespannt sein, welche der hier gefundenen Lösungen, Anregungen, Keimzellen in den nächsten Jahren aufgehen und Blüten treiben werden.⁵⁹ (Felber 1997)

⁵⁸ "During his workshops in Abidjan, Lukas Ligeti [...] much like Béla Bartók in Hungarian folk music, discovered the popular basic ingredient for a completely new music." [My translation]

⁵⁹ "'Beta Foly' owes its incarnation as a band to the same set of circumstances that has, in the meantime, positioned it far away from the legions of intercultural collaborations that are similar in personnel but usually one-dimensional: the unlimited openness of both sides and their will to communicate. Who, prior to Lukas Ligeti, had the idea to improvise freely in a collective with traditional African musicians, referencing music from Korea as well as Uganda, coordinated solely by a 'click track' relayed via headphones? Who had already confronted African musicians with recomposed structures [...] of own materials? Who had a balafon player enter into a dialogue with an interactive music computer with a piano sound? The range of musical communication extends from the most modern technology to archaic singing and simple drumbeat [...] With almost each of the 15 pieces one encounters a different concept, a new way of testing the collaboration. Dahlke and Ligeti undoubtedly benefit from their broad musical background and their electronic instruments (Ligeti on the electronic sampling drum-set is currently probably without peer in the music scene) [...] The atmosphere of searching, testing, trying out has its specific attraction; it

American reviewers were no less enthusiastic even if not as expansive in their descriptions. The seminal rock critic Robert Christgau, writing in the *Village Voice*, found that Beta Foly had “something to teach Mick Fleetwood, Byrne&Eno, and all too many other patronizing jazzmen” (Christgau 1998), while *Billboard* magazine published an article by an unidentified author stating that “World music’s role as the most refreshingly unfettered genre is affirmed by projects like this” (Anon. 1998a). Critic Richard Gehr, voting the album into *Spin* magazine’s top 10 “overlooked and ignored favorites from the margins of ‘97” wrote that “Familiarity with so-called world-music can’t begin to prepare you for this collusion of Western avant-garde bleeps and unusually free West African beats” (Gehr 1998), describing the music as “deeply textured mayhem” (ibid).

One of the most in-depth reviews of *Lukas Ligeti & Beta Foly* appeared in form of a feature article by Mike Cooper in the British *Folk Roots* magazine in June 2000, a time when the group no longer actually existed. Titling his article *Looking Ahead: New adventures in the 21st century with Lukas Ligeti*. Mike Cooper profiles a remarkable Austrian in Africa, Cooper wrote:

I am writing this as I enter the 21st Century [...] My thoughts ruminated often recently on the heavily hyped nonsense called New Millennium and every concert I’ve been to lately tells me that it is one of Music For The New... etc. Well, here’s my pitch on that score. Check this: Lukas Ligeti & Beta Foly, a CD on the Intuition label that came and went and hardly caused a ripple as far as I can make out.

[...] I believe that Lukas Ligeti [...] has helped produce [...] something like a 21st century African music [...] This is not, it must be emphasized, a cut and paste, white boy goes bush and plays along with the locals. This is true exchange of radical information that has had a permanent effect on both parties and on me.

[...]What I really like about this record is, for the most part I don’t know what this music is, I’ve never heard it before, even though I sometimes think I have, but then it will suddenly change completely.

[...]you can still dance to it and when you do you won’t believe you did and it will be very hard to go back to those Papa Wemba grooves afterwards, believe me. (Cooper 2000)

will be exciting to see which of the solutions, inspirations, nuclei will come to fruition and sprout blossoms in the coming years.” [My translation.]

Cooper's enthusiastic comments contain two statements that require further scrutiny: that the album "came and went and hardly caused a ripple", and that "the music had a permanent effect on both parties". I will elaborate on these points below.

With the CD not available in Côte d'Ivoire, reviews there focused on concert performances; they were extremely positive. As representative examples, I might cite "The musicians have succeeded in giving value to the traditional instruments that combine themselves perfectly with the computers and electronic instruments [...]"⁶⁰ (Boguy 1997); "[...] l'un des meilleurs groupes ivoiriens de recherche sur les rythmes musicaux africains"⁶¹ (Khalil 1996); or

Leur prestation a été fort appréciée par le public qui a effectué très nombreux le déplacement, car la salle était pleine à craquer. Toutes les places assises et les allées étaient occupées par les fans du groupe [...] Un groupe dont chaque élément joue de son instrument avec maestria⁶² (B.G. 1996)

whereby it should be noted that this last review was of a concert performed without Kurt or me, but also that the unconventional music of the group did not impede it from having a certain measure of popularity with local audiences.

The Abidjan-based journalist Awany Sylla exhibited a particular interest in the group; in a concert review, she described how the group played with information relayed via headphones:

Se degage alors une certaine complexité de sons, chaque musicien s'exprimant en toute liberté dans son propre couloir sonore qui lui attribue des signaux électroniques spéciaux. Étonnant, cette partition originale [...]"⁶³ (Sylla 1997)

⁶⁰ My translation from French; the original has been lost.

⁶¹ "[...] one of the best groups from the Ivory Coast to search for new ground in African rhythm" [My translation]

⁶² "The presentation was much appreciated by the public who came in great numbers; the hall was full to the brim. All seats and the aisles were occupied by fans of the group [...] a group in which each member plays masterfully" [My translation]

⁶³ "A complex sound results, every musician expressing himself freely in his sonic corridor that gives him special electronic signals. Amazing, this original score [...]" [My translation]

Commenting on the way the group assimilated, and at the same time preserved, various African music traditions, she wrote,

L'imagination vient des quatre coins d'Afrique. Les musiques de Guinée, du Mali, du Bissau etc. fusionnent en une seule musique au fil des compositions. Mais quelle énergie! [...] Comme pour narguer ceux qui veulent tourner le dos aux musiques oubliées.⁶⁴ (ibid)

On our sonic experimentation, based perhaps on the breakthroughs of John Cage and to be extended through the use of field recordings in the work of Burkina Electric years later:

Les hommes de Lamine Baldé sont allés jusqu'à associer les coups de pilon dans un mortier et les bruits de cuvettes en émail à leur recherché de sonorités. Pour dire que si l'on prête l'oreille dans un village africain, on se rend compte que tout y est musique.⁶⁵ (ibid)

Yet she also found that some passages sounded, perhaps, rough around the edges: "Cependant, une recherche supplémentaire s'impose car, par moments, on frôle la cacophonie"⁶⁶ (ibid).

Very few of our European concerts were reviewed, but one example is the 1998 concert in St. Johann in Austria mentioned in the analyses of *Village dans 8 pays* and *Casamance*. The unidentified reviewer wrote in the *Kitzbüheler Anzeiger*, a regional newspaper,

'Beta Foly' [...] kann als ganz außergewöhnlicher Erfolg eines sogenannten 'Afro-Fusion Projektes' gewertet werden [...] zusammen schufen sie [...] einen neuen, aufregenden Musikstil.

In den Stücken von 'Beta Foly' wird auf erstaunliche Weise die traditionelle populäre Musik Westafrikas mit Stilelementen aus Jazz, Avantgarde und elektronischer Popmusik kombiniert [...] Mit einer unnachahmlichen Ausdruckskraft und Spielfreude gelingt 'Beta Foly' mühelos der

⁶⁴ "The inspiration comes from all corners of Africa. The musics of Guinea, Mali, Bissau, etc. fuse together into one music following the thread of the compositions. And what energy! [...] as if to scoff at those who want to turn their backs on the forgotten musics." [My translation]

⁶⁵ "The men around Lamine Baldé went as far as to explore the sounds of mortar and pestle and cutlery in a pot in their search for new sounds, to say that if one opens one's ears in an African village, everything one hears is music." [My translation]

⁶⁶ "However, more research is still in order, because at certain moments, it reaches cacophony." [My translation]

Brückenschlag zwischen Nord und Süd, zwischen lebendiger afrikanischer Vergangenheit und moderster Musiktechnologie.⁶⁷ (Anon. 1998b)

I am not aware of any negative reviews from Europe or the U.S., and barely any negative comments from Côte d'Ivoire, about Beta Foly. Yet, as Mike Cooper noted, the album was barely noticed by the world-music scene; no organization or record label came forward with an offer to support a continuation of the collaboration. The reasons for this are still unclear to me; any explanation I might offer is speculative. One possibility is that Intuition Music did not generally receive much attention from the principal gatekeepers of the world-music scene. Perhaps more likely is that those gatekeepers – of the world-music scene as well as other areas of the music business - who did listen to the CD were confused by how our music fit into no existing categories: we were too experimental for the average world-music festival; too melodic and groove-oriented for the established avant-garde forums; too electric to be acoustic and too acoustic to be electric. Personally, I would regard this as a reason for people to be *more* curious, but the various music scenes operate based on unwritten stylistic rules, and we adhered to none of them.

I have recounted the story of the unrealized collaboration of Beta Foly and AMM; in that case, the impediment was not posed by a festival director, but demonstrated that even experimental musicians can become 'naysayers' when, paradoxically, they fear the risks of experimentation. Perhaps, however, there also were other reasons why Beta Foly played only one of the major world-music festivals during its existence (the World Music Meeting in Nijmegen, The Netherlands in 1999). Maybe it was simply that we had no presence in France; the Centre Culturel Français in Abidjan was likewise never supportive, and with no foothold in France, it is difficult for a Francophone African group to gain exposure. But my true impression is that most people

⁶⁷ "'Beta Foly' [...] can be regarded as a truly exceptionally successful 'Afro-fusion project' [...] together, they created [...] a new, exciting musical style. In the compositions of 'Beta Foly', the traditional popular music of West Africa and elements of jazz, avant garde, and electronic pop music are combined in surprising ways [...] With an inimitable power of expression and exuding the sheer pleasure of making music, 'Beta Foly' effortlessly succeed at building bridges between North and South, between living African heritage and the most modern music technology." [My translation]

simply did not listen to the CD due to a lack of aggressive management. While we had a decently distributed CD, we did not have an established booking agent or manager, and it would probably have been necessary to have all of these elements in place. If we didn't have them, it was, once again, not for lack of effort.

Press reactions to the *Paspanga* CD came almost exclusively from the U.S. and were largely positive. Writing in the *New York Times*, Nate Chinen characterized it as a “sleek, kinetic album [...] with its footing in the right place, and not just its heart” (Chinen 2010), describing me as a “dynamic percussionist and conceptualist” (ibid) and praising Maï as a “vocalist of irrepressible energy and unwavering self-assurance” (ibid). However, he also felt that “her backing falls short” (ibid) in several of the songs.

Steve Hochman, a Los Angeles music journalist, wrote on the website *AOL Spinner*:

it's an arresting sound that eschews the standard clichéd samples-and-beats approach of Afro-electronic projects. They didn't just take some African material and fit it into some dance or chill-out tracks. It's a much more integrated and creative result.

[...]on the track *Naab Koobo* [...] the distinctly African cadences of Lingani's vocals are tattooed with madly pulsating electronic ticks. The two distinctly different elements become one piece of art. (Hochman 2010)

In the review of a concert in Denver, Colorado in support of the CD, Kyle MacMillan wrote in the *Denver Post*, “Burkina Electric [...] compellingly merges traditional African music with an electronic dance vibe [...] the [...] group lit up the stage with a highly energetic, tightly integrated performance” (MacMillan 2010), and Jon Kertzer wrote in the announcement of a broadcast on the Seattle, WA radio station KEXP that “the sound of Burkina Electric is unlike anything else. It's an excitingly new 21st-century interpretation of African music” (Kertzer 2010). And in a review of a concert at the Montréal Jazz Festival in Canada not long after the release of *Paspanga*, Julia Haurio wrote in *Touki Montréal*, “À l'heure où certains artistes se contentent de reprendre des recettes qui marchent, il est rafraîchissant d'entendre un groupe qui n'a pas peur d'innover en

expirérimentant de nouveaux mélanges de sonorités.”⁶⁸ (Haurio 2010)

The above excerpts demonstrate that some journalists clearly understood and supported Burkina Electric’s aim for an innovative and organic mixture of traditional and electronic elements. While the number of reviews received was far inferior to that of Beta Foly, Cantaloupe Records seemed satisfied, clearly believing that much better results were hardly attainable in 2010.

Despite limited promotional activity, *Paspanga*’s release as a cassette in Burkina Faso in 2006 received much press attention, owing mainly to Maï’s great renown in the country. Critics focused on the innovative nature of our work and the newness of electronic music in Burkina Faso. To cite two representative examples, Parfait Silga wrote in *Évasion*, “une musique véritablement originale [...] qui doit continuer à explorer des horizons culturels nouveaux”⁶⁹ (Silga 2006), while Merneptah Noufou Zougmore wrote in a newspaper article I can only locate in a clipping where the name of the publication and its date are cut off, “C’est ce mélange entre la tradition et l’électronique qui fait la beauté de l’oeuvre [...] Burkina Electric offre un rythme qui n’est pour le moment pas connu au Faso. La musique électronique est un genre nouveau”⁷⁰ (Zougmore 2006).

6.2 Group Members

Yet altogether more interesting to me than press reactions are the thoughts of the members of Beta Foly and Burkina Electric themselves - what were or are their feelings about these collaborations, and have they had any effects on their broader outlook as musicians? To investigate this, I interviewed several of my present or former African collaborators. I wanted to

⁶⁸ “At a time when certain artists are satisfied to regurgitate recipes that work, it is refreshing to hear a group that is not scared to innovate by experimenting with new combinations of sounds.” [My translation]

⁶⁹ “a truly original music [...] that has to continue exploring new cultural horizons” [My translation]

⁷⁰ “It is this mixture of tradition and electronics that makes the beauty of the work [...] Burkina Electric offers a rhythm that is, at this time, unknown in [Burkina] Faso. Electronic music is a new genre.” [My translation]

elicit responses that were as honest as possible, which is not easy to gauge since I myself was the interviewer. A problem in this regard has been the lack of attention to these experimental intercultural projects specifically (but also attention to many intercultural collaborations in general) by musicologists. A researcher without a personal connection to the Group's members or history would be better equipped to receive replies from the musicians that criticize, for example, the work I did in and for the groups. Even in that situation, however, it must be considered that musicians, aware that these interviews might be published, would not want to insult me or break bridges they might see as potentially advantageous. In any case, given my personal implication in the teamwork of Beta Foly and Burkina Electric, I can deliver musical analyses in a far more authentic manner than I can collect feedback from group members. Nonetheless, I attempted to ask questions that would tempt my bandmates to reflect critically upon our activities, as well as on their and my role therein.

During a visit to Ouaga in August 2017, I had a chance to talk with Maï, Wende, and my Beta Foly colleagues Madou Dao and Leye M'Baye. Leye was a crucial musician to interview since he had been in Beta Foly from the very first workshop. Our conversation was far-reaching; though we had not met in person for some eight years, our friendship was completely intact. I mentioned how influential his rhythms were on me after being initially difficult for me to understand. And I recalled how I tried, in general during the 1994 workshop, to rehearse concepts that were deliberately challenging for all of us. He replied,

Mon opinion [...] c'était de faire des recherches [...] c'était quelque chose que je voulais [...] de faire quelque chose d'extraordinaire [...] j'ai toujours essayé de créer quelque chose [...] donc pour moi c'était intéressant d'apporter quelque chose de nouveau [...] c'était intéressant le fait que tu poussais les gens de faire de la recherche [...] c'était pas facile, mais [...] très souvent quand tu aime quelque chose, ca te motive, ca te donne la patience de travailler."⁷¹ (Private conversation, 2017)

⁷¹ "My opinion [...] it was about doing research [...] this was something I wanted [...] to do something extraordinary [...] I always wanted to create something [...] so for me it was interesting to bring in something new [...] it was interesting that you pushed people to experiment [...] it wasn't easy, but [...] often when you love something, it motivates you and gives you the patience to work [on it]." [My translation]

And also:

L'atelier avec Beta Foly m'a apporté tellement de choses. C'est avec Beta Foly que j'ai appris à compter le temps. C'est quand tu m'as demandé par rapport à *Casamance*, c'est là que j'ai compris comment j'ai joué. Ça m'a beaucoup aidé dans ma musique et j'ai aidé beaucoup de gens la-dessus.⁷² (ibid)

During all of the work we did in Beta Foly, it was clear that Leye was interested in challenging musical arrangements. But it was surprising for me to hear that it was through *my* difficulties understanding the rhythm of *Casamance* that *he* learned a new way of thinking about his music – by counting beats –, and that this allowed him to help other musicians master musical challenges thereafter.

Also interesting was the following conversation, revealing that the initial workshop was interesting to him in no small part due to the diversity of the African participants:

Lukas: As-tu souvent travaillé avec des musiciens européens et américains avant Beta Foly?

Leye: Oui, je l'ai fait quelque fois, avec des américains et des français.

Lukas: Où est-ce que tu vois une différence entre Beta Foly et ces autres collaborations?

Leye: Beta Foly m'intéressait beaucoup parce qu'il y avait de différents ethnies qui se sont croisées [...]

Lukas: Donc c'était rare d'avoir un mélange de différentes traditions africaines dans ces échanges?

Leye: Extrêmement rare.⁷³ (ibid)

Mostly, when cultural institutes organized exchanges between European or American and local artists, the local party to the collaboration was a pre-existing group; this was not the case with

⁷² "The workshop with Beta Foly gave me so much. It's with Beta Foly that I learned to count time [i.e. musical meter]. It's when you asked me about *Casamance*, that's when I understood what I played. That helped me a lot in my music and I helped many people with it." [My translation]

⁷³ "Lukas: Did you often work with European or American musicians before Beta Foly?

Leye: Yes, I did several times, with Americans and French [musicians].

Lukas: Where do you see a difference between Beta Foly and those other collaborations?

Leye: Beta Foly interested me a lot because there were different ethnicities that came together [...]

Lukas: So it was rare to have a mixture of different African traditions in these exchanges?

Leye: Extremely rare" [My translation].

Beta Foly, and Leye stressed that this was a learning experience for him and his local colleagues. Equally important was the experimental nature of the workshop and the lack of a preconceived musical agenda:

Lukas: Quelle difference [...] entre [...] Beta Foly et les autres ateliers concernant l'approche à la collaboration?

Leye: Bonne question. L'atelier que j'ai fait avec toi, j'ai pensé que peut-être je ne vais plus le faire dans la vie – c'était extraordinaire. On s'est chamaillé, mais je sais avec toi qu'on faisait des recherches. Tu as été ouvert, tu écoutes et tu apportes. Tu nous amènes de nouvelles choses. Tu étais intéressé de ce qu'on fait, on était intéressé de ce que tu fais. Dans les autres ateliers, on nous a imposé une musique et on l'a suivie.⁷⁴ (ibid)

I asked Leye what he thought was the primary motivation of the musicians to participate. He said,

Il y avait l'atmosphère musical. On était tous là, on ne se connaissait pas entre nous. L'atmosphère était tellement bien, l'atmosphère et l'amour de ce qu'on faisait.⁷⁵ (ibid)

Certainly, the possibility to make connections, and, as the work progressed, to earn money and to travel, will have been among the motivations; for myself, these were relevant factors as well. But, judging by what Leye said above, the primary driving force was an interest in the music we were inventing together.

Leye shed light on an important moment in the group's development, the transition from Dramane to Lamine as *chef de groupe*. This happened while Kurt and I were away, and I never knew exactly how it played out until Leye explained it to me in this conversation. He said that the musicians decided they needed a leader/spokesman, and held an election:

⁷⁴ "Lukas: What was the difference [...] between [...] Beta Foly and the other workshops regarding the approach to the collaboration?"

Leye: Good question. The workshop I did with you, I thought maybe I'll never do this again in my life – it was extraordinary. We bickered with each other, but I knew that with you we are doing research. You were open, you listen and you bring [ideas]. You bring us new things. You were interested in what we do; we were interested in what you do. In the other workshops, a music was imposed on us and we followed it." [My translation]

⁷⁵ "There was the musical atmosphere. We were all there; we didn't know each other [among the local musicians]. The atmosphere was so good, the atmosphere and the love of what we were doing." [My translation]

Lukas: Vous avez fait une élection et c'était Lamine qui est devenu chef du groupe?

Leye: Oui, après votre départ il nous fallait un chef nommé par nous mêmes. Je vais dire que j'ai triché pour aider Lamine. Il y avait deux candidats, Abou Ouatt et Lamine. L'esprit d'Abou Ouatt, il allait essayer de changer tout le groupe. Lamine, il ne maîtrisait pas trop le secteur. De son comportement j'ai vu qu'il voulait être chef d'orchestre. Moi j'aurai pu me présenter [...] mais ça allait risquer de diviser des choses [...] j'allais attirer des Sénégalais [...] ça allait mélanger les choses.

Lukas: Pourquoi Dramane n'était-il pas candidat?

Leye: À votre départ il y a beaucoup qui ont baissé les bras et Dramane était parmi. Il ne venait pas régulièrement [...] ⁷⁶ (ibid).

Leye thus felt that Lamine would be a more equitable leader (based in part on the lack of a Guinea-Bissauan community in Abidjan, the country being tiny) than Abou Ouatt or himself because both Abou and himself might have brought about a change in personnel that would have disturbed the ethno-cultural makeup of the group. With Abou this would have been due to his ubiquitous presence in the local music community and a tendency to want to realize his visions above all others. With Leye the issue was his strong role in the Senegalese community, which would have caused many other Senegalese to want to participate. And he said that Dramane was among a number of group members who doubted that it would be viable to continue and stopped attending rehearsals regularly. I was surprised to hear this, but Leye's honesty in recounting these events is underlined by his admission that he "cheated" to help Lamine win the election (he didn't elaborate on exactly what he did, and I didn't press him on it).

⁷⁶ "Lukas: You held an election and it was Lamine who became the leader of the group?"

Leye: Yes, after you [Kurt and Lukas] left, we needed a leader nominated from amongst us. I will say that I cheated to help Lamine. There were two candidates, Abou Ouatt and Lamine. Abou Ouatt's spirit, he would have tried to change the whole group. Lamine, he didn't know the scene too well. From his behavior, I saw that he wanted to be the leader of the group. I could have been a candidate [...] but it might have been divisive [...] I would have attracted [too many] Senegalese [...] that would have caused problems.

Lukas: Why wasn't Dramane a candidate?

Leye: After your departure, many gave up and Dramane was one of them. He didn't come regularly [...] [My translation]

Finally, I asked Leye whether he felt that there was a danger that Western cultural institutions or musicians might exploit African musicians during exchanges in what one could call acts of (post)colonial cultural imperialism, and that this is a concern in today's discourse among numerous academics and cultural observers. He said:

Ça, c'est les gens qui ne connaissent pas ce qui se passe, qui ne connaissent pas les relations, [ils] peuvent croire que c'est une exploitation. On fait des échanges, là je ne vois pas l'exploitation. Peut-être que c'est quelque chose qui peut m'amener au dehors. On essaye de découvrir, on échange des idées. C'est une fusion des recherches [...] On n'a pas une indépendance totale, mais je vois que c'est la faute à l'Afrique. Si tu as ton café, cacao, et tu n'arrives pas à l'exploiter, quelqu'un d'autre va venir l'exploiter [...] Mais au niveau de la musique, je ne peux pas dire qu'il y a une exploitation. C'est une échange des cultures.⁷⁷ (ibid)

The view he articulates here is the one I have found to be prevailing among musicians in Africa who are not connected to academic institutions. It is a view that a Western observer might find surprising, especially in an era of postcolonial discourse, but I have seen it articulated repeatedly by people in many contexts in Africa.

My conversation with Wende was interesting in that he was a member of both projects; the same also applies for Maï, but Wende's tenure with Beta Foly was significantly longer. Below are excerpts from our conversation.

Lukas: Dans Burkina Electric, que fait, tu penses, la spécialité, c'est-à-dire comment le groupe diffère d'autres groupes [...]?

Wende: [...] avec Burkina Electric [...], ce qu'on est en train de faire [...], je n'ai jamais vu ça nulle part ailleurs [...] je me suis dit que voilà, ça c'est quelque chose de très nouveau qu'il faut vraiment expérimenter et voir jusqu'où ça va aller. Parce que je pense ça prendra le monde [...] il y en a même qui vont se mettre aussi à vouloir faire comme nous [...]

⁷⁷ "That, those are the people who don't know what's happening, who don't know the relations – they could believe that there is an exploitation. We have exchanges; I don't see the exploitation there. Maybe it's something that could send me outside [i.e. to other countries]. We try to discover, we exchange ideas. It's a fusion of research [...] We don't have total independence, but I see that the fault is on the part of Africa. If you have coffee, cocoa, and you don't manage to exploit it, someone else is going to come and exploit it [...] But in music, I can't say that there's an exploitation. It's an exchange of cultures." [My translation]

Lukas: [...] on avait d'abord Beta Foly, comment tu vois la différence entre les deux?

Wende: Oui, Beta Foly, en fait c'est pour moi à peu près la même chose, c'est le même esprit, sauf que dans Beta Foly le groupe était beaucoup plus grand et quand un groupe est grand - je veux dire le nombre de musiciens – [...] c'est [...] difficile à gérer quand c'est beaucoup de gens.

[...]

Lukas: Pour toi comme musicien, comme guitariste, ce travail dans Beta Foly et puis maintenant Burkina Electric, comment est-ce-que tu penses que ça a changé ta façon de jouer à la guitare?

Wende: Ça a beaucoup changé ma façon de voir même [...] le monde de la musique parce que pour moi avant, alors il fallait jouer comme les grands stars qui existent déjà dans ce monde pour se dire qu'on fait de la bonne musique, alors que je pense que chacun de nous, même étant petit, on a quelque chose de très bien au fond de nous qu'il faut valoriser. Et c'est ce que Burkina Electric est en train de faire et ça fait qu'individuellement ça nous change. Même je peux prendre l'exemple de Zoko et Vicky qui n'étaient que des danseurs, mais ils sont venus dans Burkina Electric et alors Burkina Electric a fait d'eux de vrais musiciens!

[...]

Lukas: Est-ce que ça t'a donné des idées créatives que tu peux apporter dans ton jeu de guitare dans d'autres groupes [...]

Wende: Si je joue avec un groupe je ne pense pas trop à la chose conventionnelle mais je me dis que j'ai des idées que je peux faire véhiculer dans un morceau même si c'est pas avec Burkina Electric [...] Après Burkina Electric j'ai aussi la chance de temps en temps de jouer avec d'autres groupes, mais c'est pas moi qui le dit, c'est les gens qui disent qu'en fait tu joues maintenant beaucoup différent de ce que tu jouais avant.⁷⁸ (Private conversation, August 2017)

⁷⁸ "Lukas: In Burkina Electric, what do you think makes its specialty, in other words how do you think it differs from other groups [...]"

Wende: [...]with Burkina Electric [...] what we're doing [...] I've never seen it anywhere else [...] I said to myself, this is something very new that you have to experience and see how far it will go. Because I think it will take over the world [...] some people will decide they want to do what we are doing [...]

Lukas: [...] we first had Beta Foly, how do you see the differences between the two?

Wende: Yes, Beta Foly, in fact for me it's almost the same thing, the same spirit, except that in Beta Foly the group was much bigger, and when a group is big – I mean the number of musicians – [...] it's [...] difficult to organize when there are many people.

[...]

Lukas: For you as a musician, a guitarist, how do you think this work in Beta Foly and now in Burkina Electric has changed your way of playing the guitar?

Wende: It greatly changed my way of seeing even [...] the world of music, because for me at an earlier time, you had to play like the big stars that already exist in this world so that one can tell oneself that one is making good music,

Wende's remarks suggest to me that these projects have given him a sense of freedom, of encouragement to develop his artistic personality. I can discern from his comments a certain preference for the work in Burkina Electric over Beta Foly, owing to Beta Foly's complexity caused by the size of the group. It is unclear whether this remark is targeted more at the musical or the organizational difficulties surrounding Beta Foly, but at another point in the conversation, he stressed how the experience of playing in Beta Foly expanded his horizons as a musician:

Lukas: En commençant avec Beta Foly, comment as-tu trouvé cette musique?

Wende: La musique qu'on faisait, c'était une musique assez spéciale déjà [...] Il s'agissait de créer [...] Donc c'est d'abord ce qui m'a beaucoup intéressé. Je vais prendre un petit exemple: je parlais de l'improvisation polyrythmique [...] c'est quelque chose que [...] je n'avais jamais connu [...] je n'avais jamais pensé un jour qu'on pouvait [...] dans la même musique [...] avoir plusieurs tempos [...] Comment est-ce que c'est possible qu'on puisse jouer comme ça [...] Si on m'a raconté ça, j'allais dire que c'était pas possible. Mais personne ne me l'a raconté, j'ai vu que c'est vrai. J'étais là avec toi et ça m'a fait quelque chose. Et je n'arrivais toujours pas à comprendre. Mais j'ai cherché à comprendre justement. Et quand on a fait l'improvisation polyrythmique, c'est quelque chose que j'ai toujours gardé dans ma tête que je ne peux pas oublier.⁷⁹ (ibid)

but I think that each one of us, even as an everyday person, has something very good deep inside that has to be appreciated. And that's what Burkina Electric is doing, and this leads us to change as individuals. I can even cite the example of Zoko and Vicky, who were only dancers, but they joined the group and Burkina Electric made them into real musicians!

[...]

Lukas: Did this give you creative ideas that you can bring into your playing in other groups [...]

Wende: If I play with a group, I don't think too much of the conventional things but I tell myself that I have ideas I can implement even if it is not in Burkina Electric [...] After Burkina Electric, I sometimes have the chance to play in other groups, and it's not me who says this, it's the others who say that I now play very differently from before."

[My translation]

⁷⁹ "Lukas: When you started with Beta Foly, what did you think of this music?

Wende: The music we made, it was already a very special music [...] It was about being creative [...] So it's that which initially interested me. I'll give you a small example: I spoke about the polyrhythmic improvisation [...] that's something [...] I'd never encountered [...] I never thought on any day that one could [...] in the same music [...] have several tempos [...] How is it possible that one could play like that [...] If one told me about this, I'd have said it's impossible. But no-one told me about it, I saw it's true. I was there with you and it did something to me. And I still

In reading these comments, it is important to remember that Wende joined Beta Foly in 1996 when the Group's development was already well underway. But I can identify with his comments: while he was surprised and intrigued by my idea for a polytempo improvisation, I was similarly surprised and intrigued by many of the concepts and ideas my African colleagues brought into our creative practice.

It was also interesting to talk to Madou Dao, though two circumstances must be considered. First, Madou was never at the center of Beta Foly's creative process; he came in as a sort of session musician in 1996 and stayed on, but not unlike Maï Lingani, he became a core member only during the last tour in 1999. Second, he is modest and humble to a fault, an absolute gentleman, always reliable in person and on whatever instrument he plays, but not someone given to easily voicing negative feelings. Having been originally brought to the group by Tiémoko, he made a very interesting comment during our conversation, which I had not been aware of during our collaboration in Beta Foly:

Tiémoko m'a fait savoir qu'il y a un groupe [...] du nom de Beta Foly dont il est membre lui-même. Ce groupe pratique un style de musique ouvert et que lui Tiémoko artiste mandingue évoluant au sein du groupe avait besoin d'un guitariste imprégné de cette musique. Alors il a souhaité que je tente ma chance [...] ⁸⁰ (Private conversation, August 2017)

Outside of Beta Foly, Tiémoko played traditional Malinké (Mandé) music, though by 1996 he had also become interested in pop music. According to Madou's comment, Tiémoko asked Madou to become involved with Beta Foly less for the sake of Beta Foly than for the sake of his own projects, for which he wanted a guitarist who had 'soaked up' the spirit of Beta Foly. This demonstrates in a remarkable way that a group member was not only influenced by our collaborative work, but wanted to include this approach, in some way, as part of his own individual work.

wasn't able to understand. But I tried to understand. And when we did the polyrhythmic improvisation, it's something I kept in my thoughts that I can never forget." [My translation]

⁸⁰ "Tiémoko told me that there is a group [...] called Beta Foly of which he himself is a member. This group's style of music is open, and that he, Tiémoko, Mandé artist performing as part of this group, needed a guitarist influenced by this music. So he wished that I try my luck [...]" [My translation]

When I asked Madou whether he ever felt that Kurt and I had come to Africa with some kind of exploitative motive, he forcefully argued the contrary:

Lukas: Avais-tu l'impression que les européens que nous sommes étions venus piquer dans votre culture et partir?

Madou: Non! Pas du tout, au contraire j'ai aimé cette démarche artistique qui était la vôtre. Ça m'a permis de découvrir des instruments que je n'aurais jamais vus autrement [...] C'étaient des échanges artistiques et culturels très enrichissants de part et d'autre. Cette collaboration a suscité en moi une véritable passion pour la recherche musicale. Ça m'a même donné envie d'apprendre le solfège [...] tu as toujours fait preuve d'une ouverture incroyable, et nos liens sont passés du professionnel à des liens amicaux. Tu as toujours été transparent avec nous, tu ne nous cachais jamais les contenus des contrats, ce que chacun gagne et tout. Tu percevais les mêmes cachets que nous. Tu n'avais jamais usé de ton statut de patron, de chef pour t'arroger la meilleure part de cachets. Tu étais équitable, ce qui n'est tout à fait pas très courant dans ce milieu⁸¹ (ibid).

These flattering comments require a response. Madou is correct in saying that I always shared all financial information with my colleagues (indeed, I did not sign any contract before receiving their go-ahead). He is also correct that my principle, *a priori*, was to divide all income equally between all group members, including myself. In reality, however, this was not always the case. In 1994, before Madou joined the group, Kurt and I were paid honoraria by the Goethe Institute, while the local workshop participants only received money for transport. On the other hand, once the group began touring, I rarely received a fee as I used my share to resolve the budgetary shortfalls that inevitably presented themselves.

⁸¹ "Lukas: Did you have the impression that the Europeans we [Kurt and I] are had come to steal something of your culture and leave?

Madou: No! Not at all, to the contrary, I liked your artistic approach. It allowed me to discover instruments I would otherwise never have seen [...] These were artistic and cultural exchanges that enriched both sides. This collaboration gave me a real passion for musical experimentation. It even made me want to learn *solfège* [...] you always proved your incredible openness, and our connection went from a professional one to friendship. You were always transparent with us, you ever withheld information about contracts, how much everyone is paid, and so on. You received the same fees we did. You never abused of your position as the leader to keep most of the money. You were equitable, which is not very common in this field." [My translation]

Furthermore, I never regarded myself as the bandleader. I probably *was* the bandleader in practice, but an important aspect of my nascent approach was that I refused to recognize this. I believe that it is through this deliberate refusal that I was able to engender a creative environment where everyone's input was, at least in theory, equally valid and respected. Also, if there was an official bandleader, it was Lamine; however, his function rather was that of a spokesman. Other than the *chef de groupe*, roles were never clearly defined; they grew organically out of the circumstances and our collegial interactions. If I was regarded as the project leader by my colleagues – which certainly was the case, though to varying degrees by different ensemble members – then Madou's feelings in this regard may have been especially strong owing to the fact that his entire career had been as an accompanist who does not seem to harbor any ambition to be a solo artist.

In conversation with Maï, I asked how she feels Burkina Electric differs from other groups, and, specifically, from other intercultural projects. She replied,

[...]chacun vient avec son idée, nous mettons les idées ensemble [...] sans avoir une idée d'où [...] on va, et à la fin on se retrouve avec quelque chose, un matériel avec lequel on peut avancer [...] Burkina Electric c'est vraiment une innovation musicale, c'est une nouvelle façon d'explorer la musique. L'intention est de faire comprendre qu'il n'y a pas de limites dans la musique. Tout vient de l'âme de tout un chacun, tout vient vraiment naturellement.

[...]

Les collaborations interculturelles, ce que je peux dire c'est que les gens ont tendance, par exemple tu veux parler d'une fusion euro-africaine, la plupart de ces musiciens-là ont tendance à rentrer dans la musique de l'autre, essayer de s'adapter à la musique africaine. C'est à dire qu'on ne voit pas vraiment cette fusion [...] c'est qu'il y a une sorte de vouloir à s'adapter à l'autre en oubliant sa propre identité [...] [dans] Burkina Electric chacun vient avec vraiment son identité [...] on ne dit pas envoie-moi ta musique, moi je vais mettre la basse, moi je vais mettre la guitare, moi je vais mettre la batterie. Dans Burkina Electric [...] je ne m'adapte pas à ce que l'autre a envoyé, j'ajoute quelque chose de ce que moi-même je sais de ma culture [...] Ainsi de suite chacun vient avec son idée dans une façon vraiment libre [...] ⁸² (Private conversation, August 2017)

⁸² “[...]everyone comes with their idea, we put the ideas together [...] without having a notion of where [...] we’re going, and in the end, we have something, material with which we can progress [...] Burkina Electric is a real musical

It seems that Maï is touching on the question of identity in all its complexity. She remarks that Burkina Electric is an unusual intercultural collaboration in that there is no pressure to adapt to the 'other'. (Of course, it is hard to know whether there even is such a thing as an 'other' given the long-term nature of the collaboration.) She says that many cultural exchanges lead to an abandonment of identity on the part of some participants and appears to consider that a disadvantage. Yet it seems that she finds that in the encounter of two relative 'others', Africa tends to prevail musically. She does not elaborate on whether that is desirable. Could Africa's power in these exchanges be the result of the monumental influence African music has had on popular music worldwide, so that African structures find their way into the dialogue not only via the African participants but also the Western ones? Is Maï expressing the opposite of Leye, who talked about music being imposed on the African participants in exchanges? I think perhaps not, as this music that was imposed may itself have contained African elements. And what is, ultimately, the meaning of 'identity' in a cultural exchange, especially when done long-term? I will return briefly to this topic in Chapter 7, but also plan to explore such questions in greater depth in future conversations with colleagues in intercultural collaborations.

innovation, a new way of exploring music. The intention is to make [people] understand that there are no limits in music. All comes from the soul of each [member], all really comes naturally.

[...]

With intercultural collaborations, what I can say is that people have a tendency, for example if you speak of a Euro-African fusion, most of these musicians have a tendency to enter into the music of the other, trying to adapt to the African music. So you don't really see the fusion [...] it's that there is kind of a will to adapt to the other and to forget your own identity [...] [in] Burkina Electric, everyone really comes with their identity [...] we don't say give me the music, I'll add a bass, I'll add guitar, I'll add drums. In Burkina Electric [...], I don't adapt to what someone else brought in, I add something I know about my culture [...] And so on; everyone comes with their idea in a free manner [...]"

[My translation]

CHAPTER 7

Reflections on Cultural and Social Implications

7.1: Locating Myself in the Intercultural Discourse: A Musician's Response to a Musicological Article

Questions about appropriation and decontextualization inevitably arise in the type of work I am describing in this thesis, and discussion of these issues is complicated by the presence of a multitude of ideologies and approaches concerning the attribution and commodification not only of intellectual property, but also of culture itself. Depending on one's environment, the dominant narratives and ideologies can vary, and the more closed the circle or context – for example, academe –, the greater the expectation to adhere to this dominant ideology. For instance, during the age of colonialism, the officially prevailing viewpoint of those in power was that African culture is primitive and inferior to that of the colonists; not only was this position held by most colonists, it was also a foundational concept in the upbringing of most of the colonized people and was thus adopted by numerous African social and cultural influencers of the time. By contrast, in today's academic discourse, postcolonial theory has become the dominant philosophical and sociological framework. Among musicians, belief systems vary. To speak in admittedly very general terms, my impression of the discourse among working musicians is one of a tendency not to want to philosophize much, the practical act of musicking being seen as more productive than theoretical discussions. While many practicing musicians are influenced by postcolonial thought and identity politics, it seems to me that this comes less often from reading philosophical and musicological literature than from political discussions with friends, the writings of critics reviewing (their) concerts, and, in recent years, most often of all, from social media. This dislike of theoretical/intellectual discourse seems even greater among music industry professionals.

After the more general remarks provided earlier in this thesis and an analytic review some of my work, I feel the need to interrogate my own position in these complex debates. In an attempt to

reveal a personal framework of viewpoints and beliefs, I will critique sections of an article by Steven Feld, *The Poetics and Politics of Pygmy Pop* (Feld 2000: 254-279), wherein he discusses political implications of several CDs published primarily in the 1990s and featuring hybridizations of Pygmy and Western music. While none of my collaborations have included pygmies, there are commonalities between my experimental intercultural work and some of the recordings Feld describes, most notably the presence of African-Western syncretisms and hybridizations done with a modern, largely technology-friendly stance, and the use of traditional music outside of its home environment for purposes other than ethnomusicological research. The article raises various questions – and provides some reactions – that should also be addressed in a discussion of my work, thereby providing a useful structural framework for such a discussion.

Simultaneously an anthropologist, an ethnomusicologist, and a creative, experimentally-minded musician, Feld occupies an unusual position in both academe and industry. His collaboration with musicians in Ghana in the group Accra Train Station, described in detail in *Jazz Cosmopolitanism in Accra: Five Musical Years in Ghana* (Feld 2012), bears some similarities with the approach of Beta Foly in that Ghanaian and American musicians came together to create improvised music with a distinctly progressive musical agenda. While I would nevertheless ultimately regard Feld as more scholar than artist, he is clearly not a researcher who merely dabbles in music. He has immersed himself in a variety of cultural environments in locations ranging from Papua Niugini to Italy to the aforementioned encounters in Ghana. Unlike many academics, he has also sought to sell his creative output in the world-music marketplace through recordings and concert tours. All of these experiences give him personal, authentic insights into both the theoretical and the practical side of intercultural creation. Yet, as we will see, his ideology is strongly colored by a postcolonial narrative dominant in academia today, an ideology I subscribe to, at best, only in part. I believe that by questioning some of Feld's opinions, I can describe some of my own.

Feld devotes a section of his article (Feld 2000: 256-261) to Herbie Hancock's appropriation (or, shall we say, plagiarism) of music of the BaBenzélé pygmies on his 1973 album, *Headhunters*, and describes how Hancock justified this through his African-American identity, implying that being

of African ancestry automatically bestows on him the right to use (or copy) music from Africa. In Hancock's eyes, all Africans are "'brothers... the people who've lost the most, who've had the most stolen from [them]'" (Feld quoting Hancock, *ibid*: 258). Disapproval of this form of plagiarism resonates between Feld's lines, and he does not quite seem to accept Hancock's justification. But rather than voicing outright dissent, he proceeds with a more wide-ranging discussion of the "Afrocentrism of African-American artists" (*ibid*: 260), then extending his purview to jazz in its entirety, whether or not the creator is African-American:

Yet, as all jazz musicians know, the bounds of mimesis are wide open, and what constitutes a small, imitative mutation in one instance appears more as artistic transformation in another... It is also a tradition with a long history of celebrating Africa, including parts of Africa to which it has no direct historical connection. And because the jazz aesthetic of citation can be orally constituted at any point in improvisation and composition, the term 'theft' does not apply when taking from oneself, when revitalizing one's own tradition. Or at least that's the way almost all jazz players, white and black, young and old, have phrased it to me... (*ibid*: 260).

It is worth asking whether Feld is merely describing a status quo or attempting to put forth personal reactions to, and criticisms of, the various Pygmy-Western hybrid recordings he mentions in his article. While it seems to be mostly the former, he directly or indirectly injects enough of his personal viewpoint to also include the latter approach. And thus, the above-quoted passage raises concerns for me in several ways. First there is the superficial way in which, as he claims, jazz musicians (probably primarily African-American ones if Hancock's opinion is assumed to be representative) claim a connection to an 'Africa' they have for the most part never visited, completely ignoring that continent's cultural diversity. Feld does address this, but does not make any further remarks about it, which seems odd given that he is an anthropologist and not a journalist. Then there is the questionable observation about "taking from oneself, revitalizing one's own tradition", which raises questions not only about the ownership of culture but also about personal identity as it is difficult to construe that an American jazz musician would simultaneously also be a pygmy living in the rainforest of Central Africa. Finally, after spending much time discussing the Afrocentricity of *African*-Americans, he now includes white musicians as well, without commenting on whether these musicians would be included in Hancock's 'brotherhood' of victimization. This bending of the concept of identity to fit whatever point one is trying to make is quite common, if not prevalent, in the academic humanities, and when terms

are defined so vaguely, substantive discussion tends to quickly evaporate in favor of an exchange of attacks and outrages, as the second generation reared on postcolonial theory often demonstrates. Most often, race (as opposed to gender) is posited as immutable and racial identity (like gender identity) is understood to determine inclusion in or exclusion from a social or cultural scene or narrative; now suddenly, however, black or white identity is secondary to a shared culture. This about-face can happen, as it does here, within the space of a single page of writing. Also, rather than attempting to predominantly analyze African culture in terms of an African context, Hancock and Feld share an awareness of race and its affordances that is deeply steeped in the American context and apply it, each in their own way, to their interpretation of African culture. It is worth asking whether this is another act of cultural imperialism, separate and distinct from the act of plagiarism.

Continuing his remarks about the use (or exploitation) of pygmy music in various Western-initiated projects, Feld writes:

Schizophonic makeovers of musics originating from Central Africa's rainforest peoples are particularly striking because the small physical stature of the people involved resembles their unempowered and disempowered material position. I say 'unempowered' because they have been historically dominated by various outsiders to their forest homes [...] But they are also disempowered, precisely because they have never gained control over how they are discursively represented. (ibid: 262)

This statement is problematic in several ways. While many people might intuitively associate small physical stature with powerlessness, especially since pygmies are indeed very small (roughly 150cm on average), is the analogy truly productive? Scandinavians are, on average, taller than people from Mediterranean Europe, yet what of the historical power of the French and Spanish kingdoms, or the proverbial prowess of Italian men in the seduction of women? If we are to deal in such clichés (and 'height equals power' certainly is a cliché), Scandinavians can boast of neither. Does their greater average height compensate? Many powerful politicians were small, such as Napoleon or Winston Churchill; in music, a famous example is the composer Maurice Ravel, who was not much taller than the average pygmy.

Regarding material position, I would posit that people of any culture or ethnicity prefer being rich to being poor and would readily embrace the material trappings that come with affluence. Yet spiritual aspects, connection to nature, family life, and other such perhaps less tangible concepts are also of great value to most people. Is it correct to say that pygmies, despite or perhaps because of their infrastructural poverty, are more spiritually or naturally connected than Westerners? Based on some clichéd images, one might answer this question in the affirmative; I have no way of knowing, and, frankly, neither does Feld. But I do wonder, despite the continued existence of slavery to Bantu people, whether pygmies uniformly perceive of themselves as victims leading lives of deprivation and disempowerment.

Regarding “outsiders to their forest homes”, one must ask at what point a more recently arrived group becomes an insider. The Bantu have lived in these forests for a very long time. Are they still outsiders, or would it be more realistic (though less conducive to Feld’s argument) to say that Bantu and pygmies complexly and interdependently cohabitate in the forest?

And regarding the statement that “they have never gained control over how they are discursively represented”, I ask,⁸³ has any group of people? For example, do Americans have control over how they are discursively represented? In many parts of the world, Americans are regarded as naive, not well educated, loud and boisterous, uncultured. At the same time, depending on the beholder’s political persuasion, they might be seen as liberators or oppressors. How do Americans view themselves? Do countries that cultivate ‘brands’, running advertisements with recognizable fonts and logos to attract tourism (Spain, Canada, or Malaysia come to mind among others), truly control the way their people are represented? The one country that does, perhaps, control this somewhat more successfully is Switzerland, but the clichés of banking, watches, and chocolate paint an incomplete picture, with most outsiders unaware of their unique system of governance that, perhaps, enables this control. As for the pygmies, could any unifying

⁸³ Assuming that ‘discursive representation’ is intended to mean how they are thought of or spoken about in discourses by outsiders, and is not intended to refer to ‘discourse representation’, an area of formal linguistics.

representation of them be correct, given their diversity and their complex interaction with Bantu peoples? In fact, is it even desirable for a people to be discursively represented, or to control such representation? Might such a notion deny the individual representation as a unique entity in his/her own right?

Additionally, one might ask whether the proposed inequities occur exclusively in the context of schizophonic makeovers (to use Feld's expression). What, for example, of ethnomusicological research, even in its purest forms, such as a physiological analysis of Aka Pygmy yodeling by Susanne Fürniss (Fürniss 1992)? Does making the pygmies the subject of a research project not infringe upon their power as much, albeit differently from, an intercultural recording project; does their payment (or lack thereof) from research budgets not parallel the way the royalties from record sales reach (or do not reach) them? And does this research not create a discursive representation most pygmies might not be able to read or understand, lacking access to the publication or the ability to speak the language (in Fürniss' case, German) in which the publication was written? Perhaps, to some measure, such problems haunt all encounters between people of different backgrounds, unless concerted efforts are undertaken to equalize the relationship?

Later in the essay, Feld differentiates between 'world music' and 'world beat', commenting on "how celebrations of global heterogeneity marketed as 'world music' are now dynamically interdependent with the parallel musical homogeneity marketed as 'world beat'" (ibid: 264). I concur with this, but have difficulty with Feld's assertion that the accelerating exchange between traditional music and popular music based on these traditions (the latter often made with Western participation) leads to a situation where "This escalation – of difference, power, rights, control, ownership, authority – politicizes the schizophonic practices artists could once claim more innocently as matters of inspiration, or as a purely artistic dialogue of imitation and inspiration." (ibid: 264). Is a purely artistic dialogue between cultures truly impossible today (meaning from ca. 2000 onwards) due to power dynamics? And if that is so, is it merely a consequence of the recording industry – were such issues not already present in colonial times, before the recording industry existed? And is it not possible for Africans and Westerners to come

to a consensus regarding issues of control, ownership, authority, and work in a situation of quasi-equilibrium? In other words, is it impossible for individuals to unfetter their relationships from the constraints of wider socioeconomic developments and historical imbalances?

Feld then proceeds to discuss several pop-oriented recordings containing copies of or influences from Pygmy music. He concludes a passage on the piece *Ba-Benzélé*, on the LP *Fourth World Vol. 1: Possible Musics* by John Hassell and Brian Eno (the same Eno referred to earlier in this thesis in a quote from Robert Christgau as someone Beta Foly had “something to teach”), by arguing, “But there is an additional appropriation to consider: ‘Ba-Benzélé’: a people are now a song title owned by another” (ibid: 267). Albeit poetic, this seems like an exaggeration. Does naming a song imply taking ownership of this name as well as who- and whatever else might be referred to by it? Is Bill Frisell’s piece *Jimmy Carter* (from his album *This Land*) or Toumani Diabaté’s *Cheikh Oumar Ba* or *Aminata Santoro* (both from his album *Djelika*) an assertion of ownership over these people? Does a people hold copyright of its collective name; do they even refer to themselves by that name? Does a composer hold copyright over his or her composition’s title? And perhaps more crucially: Is it not far more likely that such titles are intended as homages, and is it productive to project a different intent into them? These are philosophical questions that may not have unequivocal answers.

Feld later quotes Brian Eno from an interview with *Wired* magazine (Kelly 1995):

‘Do you know what I hate about computers? The problem with computers is that there is not enough Africa in them... Do you know what a nerd is? A nerd is a person without enough Africa in him or her... You know why music was the center of our lives for such a long time? Because it was a way of allowing Africa in.’ (Feld 2000: 267)

While Feld allows these remarks to stand without further commentary other than stating that “Eno’s avant-gardism [...] involves a particular use of and attitude toward Africa” (ibid: 267), I have trouble not responding. I do not know how Eno arrived at the opinion that computers don’t have “enough Africa in them”, but my position is the exact opposite. Take, for example, the fact that much (though not all) music in sub-Saharan Africa is, as previously mentioned, based on a steady, fast pulsation. This is confirmed by many ethnomusicologists; for example, David

Temperley writes, invoking “Waterman, who suggested that African music involves a ‘metronome sense,’ an underlying pulse which is felt but not constantly expressed (1952)⁸⁴” (Temperley 2000:68),

each unit of which can carry either (the attack of) a sound, or silence. Now take the basic functionality of a computer, based on a steady, fast subdivision of time, each unit of which can either carry current, or not (hence the binary 1s and 0s of machine language). It follows that, on some conceptual level, much African traditional music is inherently digital music, even when played on ancient drums in villages devoid of electricity. In light of this, it is hard for me to imagine which continent computers contain *more* of than Africa! As for the remark about nerds, I will not comment on such a ludicrous assertion beyond saying that African computer ‘nerds’ have invented various important uses of digital technology (think no further than Kenya’s M-Pesa). And finally, the idea that Africa is somehow more musical than the West is an unfortunate platitude that, if anything, only contributes to a reinforcement of the colonialist cliché that Africans are more natural, primitive but rhythmic, uncouth but endowed with primal musical and physical talents, denying them, to use Feld’s words once again, “control of how they are discursively represented”.

The suspicion that Feld’s lack of accompanying commentary when quoting such statements might suggest tacit agreement is reinforced by the fact that he does explicitly voice an opinion at times, such as in his description of the album *Zap Mama: Adventures in Afropea* by the all-female all-vocal group Zap Mama. All members of this group are of mixed heritage; the leader, Marie Daulne, is half Belgian and half (Bantu) Congolese. Of the song *Babanzélé* from said album, which once again builds on the same BaBenzélé music as Hancock and Hassell/Eno, Feld writes:

⁸⁴ Referring to: Waterman, Richard Allan (1952): "African Influence on the Music of the Americas." In *Acculturation in the Americas (Proceedings of the 19th International Congress of Americanists)*, (ed.: Sol Tax), 207-218. Chicago: Chicago University Press

What is striking about this Zap Mama performance is that it is a far more detailed, nuanced, and complete vocal mimesis of BaBenzélé vocalization than anything previously recorded. Treating BaBenzélé music as music, as fully articulated practices and pieces, Zap Mama copies the repertory object and develops its techniques [...] An authenticity is guaranteed to mimesis here in light of Daulne's invocation of her own physical, cultural, and historical hybridity. In other words, invoking hybridity as one's own identity position, one then becomes licensed to claim the full spatiotemporal terrain of that identity as an artistic palette. (Feld 2000: 269)

I have no problem declaring that I find Hancock's plagiarism of BaBenzélé music unacceptable - not so much because of any factual or imagined power differential, but instead because he neglected to cite the source - and that I find his justification deeply unconvincing. But the above quote suggests that Feld, while also alienated by Hancock's plagiarism, might disagree with me regarding his justification, as he claims that Daulne's hybrid identity entitles her to appropriate pygmy music. But perhaps this is not an appropriation after all? Perhaps it is, unlike Hancock's copy, a creative reinterpretation of existing music? And perhaps that is altogether preferable to plagiarism? In that case, however, why invoke Daulne's identity as legitimization, rather than simply the fact that it was (to Feld) an artistically more successful treatment, a new take on old music rather than wholesale copying? And if identity is relevant, why is the fact that Daulne, while part Congolese, is not of Pygmy origin not a matter of concern? Does the fact that she has genetic and cultural ties to a country (one as large and ethnically diverse as Congo) where pygmies live give her increased license to use Pygmy music, even though that country's borders are a result of colonization? Is Feld's assertion about Daulne not fundamentally similar to Hancock's justification in that they both suggest that being of (spaciotemporally distant) African origin provides this license? Do such arguments not reveal a strongly deterministic mindset, basing an artist's license to express him/herself on ethnic or national identity rather than on philosophical, emotional, and creative predilections? In my opinion, such an attitude creates a repressive atmosphere in which people are relegated to a limited purview based on factors they themselves can hardly influence – a profoundly illiberal stance that stands in stark (but oddly often unnoticed) contradiction to the multiculturalist mindset many of its proponents purport to endorse.

But Feld does ultimately find his way to a viewpoint more similar to my own:

Yet there is still, [...] with Zap Mama, not to mention Herbie Hancock [...] a lingering issue, which is the place of condescension, even subjugation, within a sphere overtly marked by inspiration and musically coded as homage. Which is to say that polemics of race and cultural theft do not feature in critical discourses surrounding Zap Mama [...] or the African American musicians' pygmy kind of thing the way they feature more immediately in relation to [...] Hassell and Eno's pygmoid kind of thing. Clearly the subject positions of African Americans, Afropeans, and Africans tend to discourage a particular kind of moral and political scrutiny here, instead foregrounding an aesthetic rewarding of schizophrenic mimesis as musical ambassadorship. Nevertheless, the power differentials separating cosmopolitan African Americans, Afropeans, and Africans from their forest pygmy muses cannot be elided. (ibid: 270)

Where I differ from Feld is my hesitance to foreground power dynamics to this degree. If I am inspired by a composer who is now deceased, what are the power implications? Beethoven dominates the orchestral repertoire, but hugely powerful as he is (by proxy) in that segment of the music industry, he is also paradoxically disempowered by being dead and therefore unable to exert any influence on how he is discursively represented. If we are to put such great emphasis on power, is it still possible to create art at all?

Finally, Feld describes some of the positions unifying the broad range of pygmy-inspired pop:

Everyone – no matter how exoticizing, how patronizing, how romanticizing, how essentializing in their rhetoric or packaging – declares their fundamental respect, even deep affection, for the original music and its makers.

Concern for the future of the rainforests and their inhabitants is now central to the genre. This heightening is paralleled by romantic and patronizing renditions of an old theme, the pygmy as timeless primal other. (ibid: 273)

While such concern is obviously commendable, what of the possibility of concern and respect for individuals and their artistic voices? Would the patronizing othering of this demographic not be reduced were one to recognize that each and every note sung, yodeled, whistled, is the contribution of an individual, with his/her individual mind? It is indeed a complex, time-consuming proposition, but my hypothesis, proven perhaps by my personal experience, is that this 'classical-liberal' recognition of the individual before and above group identity is a key that

can open the door to some degree of reduction of power differentials and other undesirable aspects of intercultural encounters and to a greater mutual sense of collegiality and justice.

7.2 Further Considerations

I do not want to comment on the intersection of the musical and the political in intercultural encounters exclusively in response to Feld, and two other examples from musicological literature might supply further insights. Whenever I tell people in Africa unfamiliar with my work about what I do, virtually anywhere on the continent I am asked if my music is like Paul Simon's. While I do see some very superficial similarities, I still answer this question with a confident and resounding "no". Nevertheless, Louise Meintjes' description of musical syncretisms in Paul Simon's *Graceland* suggests stylistic and cultural fusions not entirely unlike those I described in chapters 3 and 4. Yet it quickly becomes clear that the thrust of the musical explorations of Simon and his South African collaborators pushes in an entirely different direction than what my collaborators and I aimed to accomplish in Beta Foly and continue to try to accomplish in Burkina Electric. And it is also quickly evident that Meintjes' investigations of *Graceland's* collaborative process serve a different interest than do my descriptions in the earlier chapters of this thesis. Meintjes writes:

Musical style in this sense is an intuitive, felt, social feature expressing, forming and representing a social coherence system. This concept of style is essential to understanding how the political becomes embedded in the musical.

Musical styles on *Graceland* can be read as collectively intertwined. The way distinct styles are structurally integrated rather than merely juxtaposed is illustrated by the instrumental break of the album's hit song, *You Can Call Me Al*. The featured instruments of this instrumental break – the pennywhistle and bass guitar – index or reference three Black South African genres [...]

In order to appeal more strongly to *Graceland's* international audience, the [...] pennywhistle sound [...] is 'cleaned up.' Its pitch is more exact and its tone production purer [...] Furthermore, the instrument, played originally by Black street youths, is played on *Graceland* by an exiled White South African. (Meintjes 1990:43-44)

It is, of course, challenging to separate the musical from the political in as charged an environment as a major American pop star's sanction-defying musical project in late-stage

apartheid South Africa. However, as Meintjes explains, the musicians themselves (and Simon in particular) were – or at the very least purported to be – preoccupied primarily, or perhaps even exclusively, with the musical. Similarities between the lasting effects of *Graceland* and, say, Beta Foly are difficult to assess since my projects were not in a position to give the participating musicians even a fraction of the exposure and (potential) financial security to which *Graceland*'s musicians subsequently had access (though not in equal measure, as can be seen from the fate of Ladysmith Black Mambazo vs. Ray Phiri). Yet even Meintjes' musical description, with the 'westernized' pennywhistle sound (notwithstanding the added complexity that the pennywhistle in its current form originates from the British Isles and that the pennywhistles used in South Africa were mostly manufactured by Hohner, a German company), 'sanitized' to appeal to consumers in the parts of the world where income for the record label could be generated from sales, can lead one to infer a seemingly inevitable imbalance of power and property between the Western musician or interests and the African invited collaborators' considerations. Such an issue would not be unimaginable in my own collaborations, but it seems there to have been successfully mitigated.

Why is this mitigation so rare and apparently difficult? Certainly, existing organizational and infrastructural systems play a strong role. But, once again, I caution against underestimating the degree to which individuals' mindsets are able – and more empowered than one tends to realize – to make a tangible difference. The main challenge seems to be how to leave behind the assumption that inequalities cannot be prevented in the first place. And particularly in a context influenced by postcolonial circumstances, this means questioning the apparent *fait accompli* that this differential will inevitably manifest along the assumed lines, with the Western participants in a stronger position than those from elsewhere. How a musician in a theoretically powerful position can fall victim to such assumptions and thus reinforce these power differentials in an experimental musical collaboration (in this case between two [male] musicians from Sweden and two [females] not from Africa but from Vietnam who were invited to Sweden to teach at the Malmö Academy of Music) despite his own constant wish to overcome them is vividly described by Henrik Frisk in his essay *Improvisation and the Self: To Listen to the Other*:

[...] is Western art music the norm and traditional Vietnamese music the exotic other? [...] Is it at all possible to communicate on equal terms in a context that contains so many economic and social inequalities? Are we as Westerners able to rid ourselves of the colonial heritage that in many respects still govern [sic] our interactions with the East? [...]

I found it extremely difficult to balance my own initiatives while leaving enough space for the input of Thuy and My. One reason was the fact that neither Thuy nor My spoke English well, and another was the social asymmetry [...] As Thuy and My are both women the geographic origin of the four members was parallel to their gender made the collaboration saturated with disparity and inequality [sic]. Although music can be seen as a neutral form of communication with the potential of compensating for social differences, it may equally well disguise them. While we were in the known environment [...] – at home musically, culturally and socially – they were foreign visitors without language or cultural context. (Frisk 2014:158-159)

In reading these lines, it seems to me as if Frisk was making some significant assumptions both about himself (and his Swedish colleague) and about his Vietnamese collaborators. Simply put, Europe is powerful and East Asia is powerless; male is powerful and female is powerless. Consequently, by analogy, Europe represents the masculine and East Asia the feminine (“the geographic origin [...] was parallel to their gender”). None of this has anything to do with music *a priori*, yet music can “disguise” – and, it is implied, thereby reinforce – these deterministic truths. The question is, then, to what extent Frisk’s assumptions become a self-fulfilling prophecy.

However, as Frisk soon began to realize,

[...] instead of letting them *speak for themselves*, I leaned on my preconception of what it means to be a female Vietnamese visitor in Sweden. While trying to compensate for what I perceived as vulnerability, I accomplished the opposite: I subjugated them to my own understanding of the world, the context, the music, and our interaction. [...] Much later I learned that I was wrong in my assumptions of Thuy and My. [...] initially they had no problem with our interactions, *other than my behavior* [my emphasis]. After all, they were not only foreigners; they were also professional musicians ready to get involved in a new project. (ibid:159)

Later, the two Swedish musicians traveled to Vietnam to continue the collaboration. As Frisk recounts,

To work with Thuy and My in their own country made a tangible difference, reinforced by the temporary reversal of roles as [we] were now the visitors in a foreign country with little understanding of the codes and the culture.

This was emphasized by learning about the gender roles in Vietnam, different from those in the West. A striking number of the positions held by women in Vietnam are in Europe traditionally held by men. [...] whether or not there had ever been good reason to treat Thuy and My cautiously as fragile, sensible [sic], and subordinate women, seeing them in their home country made it clear that some of our assumptions had been based on prejudice. [...] I was to some extent able to break free from my preconception of them as foreigners, victimized by definition – to break free from the standard response, the habit. I was now able to listen. (ibid:162)

Reading about such a breakthrough is extremely encouraging, but the difficult process Frisk experienced might have been unnecessary had he avoided to introduce his preconceived notions – or prejudices, to use his own term – into the collaboration. Perhaps this could be an opportunity to question these notions on more general terms, and not just within the scope of a creative intercultural collaboration? Could it be that the West, or Westerners, are in reality not inevitably dominant everywhere and at all times (the prominent position of African musical concepts in today's globalized popular music might be a hint)? Could it be that conventional Western stereotypes about gender (and other demographic categories) are not valid in all contexts, or for all people? Might it be that categorizing people along national, racial, gender-based, or even cultural lines (i.e. the 'we' vs. 'them' of which Frisk seems to have been unable to completely cure himself even after his Vietnamese epiphany) is inconducive to relations across such categories, particularly when working towards a shared creative goal?

It is quite possible that the fact that my creative collaborations with African musicians began and matured in Africa (though Burkina Electric composed many of its songs in Pyrolator's AtaTak studio in Germany and has spent extensive periods rehearsing and creatively collaborating in the U.S.) permitted us to avoid some of the difficulties Frisk described. And my own approach, assuming similarity while not negating difference and attempting to eschew power differentials by refusing to uphold structures that promote inequality, is undoubtedly informed by my life story, coming as I do from a multifaceted and complex sociocultural background that conspires against feelings of belonging and ownership that would allow me to represent a 'we'. Certainly, too, the fact that I was able to communicate extramusically with my African collaborators was

significant: my French was weak at first, but I was helped by the Abidjan Goethe Institute's able translator Issa Kourouma; after two or three years, I was fluent. And much credit must go to all of my collaborators, as they, too, dispensed with or at the very least suppressed prejudice, opened themselves up to musical experimentation, and engaged with one another and with me based on a true will to share, explore, and create.

On a more practical level, one aspect that undoubtedly aided in the maintenance of successful relations with my intercultural musical partners in Beta Foly and Burkina Electric is that we collectively and intuitively opted for a type of self-governance that could perhaps be described as 'sociocratic'. While the term was coined in the mid-19th century by the French philosopher Auguste Comte, my understanding of the concept is based primarily on the approach laid out roughly one-hundred years later by the Dutch educator Kees Boeke (Boeke 1945⁸⁵) and described succinctly on Wikipedia as:

...a form of governance or management that presumes equality of individuals and is based on consensus. This equality is not expressed with the 'one man, one vote' law of democracy but rather by a group of individuals reasoning together until a decision is reached that is satisfactory to each one of them. (<https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sociocracy>)

I did not know about the concept of sociocracy until relatively recently, so the similarity to our group practice can be considered coincidental; it is a practice that evolved over time, based on the willingness of everyone involved to 'make it work'. Of course, such willingness can never be assumed, and this type of self-governance is time-consuming and complex, and when consensus breaks down, insisting on such an approach can lead to stagnation. That this never actually happened in the two ensembles described here can be ascribed to the enthusiasm and tenacity of all participants.

As an example of our self-governance, I could perhaps give the following example, not unrelated to the problems discussed by Feld:

⁸⁵ Available on the internet at <<http://worldteacher.faithweb.com/sociocracy.htm>>

Composer and arranger credits were a topic of some discussion in Beta Foly, and could have led to disagreements or ruptures. Some group members, for example Leye, felt that it would be fair to cite individual authors as little as possible since so much of the creative process was shared. Even though I ultimately received more composition credits than any other group member, I actually agreed with Leye and would have happily renounced my individual authorship citations, though perhaps deep down I did feel that I would like to receive some form of individual recognition for my conceptual contributions. However, others argued strongly in favor of individualized composer, lyricist, and arranger citations with the rationale that those who contributed compositions also deserved the royalties, and that it would be too tedious to divide up royalties if all credits were shared. This latter group won the argument for two reasons: first, they were the majority, and second, they felt more strongly about it than the 'sharers', who were ultimately happy to go along with the idea of individualized credits. As for the CD's title, *Lukas Ligeti & Beta Foly*, it came about through a variety of circumstances: My visit to Côte d'Ivoire was the original impetus that led to the formation of the group; while I was certainly a group member, Beta Foly rehearsed and performed as an entity even when I was absent; I contributed more compositions and concepts than any other member; I did the bulk of the administrative work and identified most funding opportunities as well as being responsible for finding the record contract; I was the lead producer. Thus, in some ways, though we all emphasized the collaborative aspect, I may have been regarded as a *primus inter pares*.

On the other hand, Beta Foly always had a *chef de groupe*, a spokesperson; this form of organization was not my wish but came at the initiative of my African colleagues. Dramane was the initial *chef de groupe*, but when he left after the first year, Lamine took over the position and retained it until the group was disbanded. In some way, the *chef de groupe*'s mandate might also have been to represent the interests of the African group members to (or even against) me as I had the most concrete institutional backing. But this aspect never became relevant as there was never a difference of opinion or dispute that positioned me, or Kurt and me as the European members, against the others, or, indeed, the Goethe-Institut and me (or the Goethe-Institut and Kurt and me) against the African group members. When there were differences of opinion in the

group, the division was never along those exact lines. Also, I always stressed that I regarded all group members as equals, and this was fully embraced by everyone, and all decisions were made by general consent though without an outright voting process.

When we toured internationally, I tried to avoid being singled out, and when we were presented as 'Lukas Ligeti and Beta Foly', I always corrected the presenters and said that we were 'Beta Foly' and that Lukas Ligeti was a group member. That was understandably difficult for some presenters to grasp given the CD's title, but it was important to me because of the group's collaborative nature and because I wanted to demonstrate that it was possible for people of different cultural and ethno-racial backgrounds to work together as equals for all practical intents and purposes. Was Beta Foly, then, actually a collaboration of equals? In theory, we considered it as such. In practice, it was one in many, but perhaps not all, ways. Yet I can say with certainty that no group member was ever disregarded in a decision-making process, and that I was overruled more than a few times by my colleagues, the composer credits being one example of this, even if being overruled paradoxically worked to my advantage.

It is obvious that such discussions and negotiations would have been impossible had the individuals involved not encountered each other with a fundamental attitude of curiosity, benevolence, and trust. Such initial conditions are necessary for experimental intercultural collaboration to be viable, not least because the reduced potential for commercial success inherent in such projects lends them little effective in the accumulation of anything other than creativity, knowledge, and intellectual satisfaction. Or so it might seem, going by general wisdom. Personally, I have yet to see convincing reasons why a project such as Burkina Electric could not be highly successful commercially. Were such success to occur too quickly, it might lead to ruptures in trust between collaborators, but Burkina Electric is, by now, not just a group, but also a family, with friendships so deep that I believe consensus can always be found.

It has always been my deep wish that the modes of collaboration my colleagues and I have demonstrated in the projects described here might have some effect on problem-solving outside

of music. I remain convinced of the potential of this unconventional music to open people's minds and prompt them to think in unconventional ways themselves, aiding them in pursuits unrelated to artistic creation. I cannot honestly say that I can name examples of this occurring, but I hope it will yet come to this. Likewise, I believe in the potential of this work to promote equality, mutual respect and joint problem solving also on a political level. While music is often used in cultural diplomacy, the actual musical content is often quickly forgotten in such contexts. I believe that the opposite approach - the deliberate inclusion of experimental compositional thinking in cultural diplomacy - might be a worthwhile area of pursuit. In the words of Chris van Rhyen:

From [...] [a literature overview of diplomacy with/through music] it is clear that this discourse has thus far not contemplated how international diplomacy can be exercised through composition (in other words, through a consideration of exact musical content, rather than through general references to genre) or 'developing nation diplomacy' exercised by musicians who have moved to the 'centre' (rather than on cultural imperialism exercised by developed nations). (van Rhyen 2016:139)

Despite all of these considerations, experimental intercultural collaboration is not a cultural or social theory; it is an approach to joint creativity. It cannot make power differentials disappear, but it can reduce their negative effects by engendering interdependence instead of imbalance.

While I have obviously long been most grateful for the ethnomusicological analyses of Gerhard Kubik for reasons explained in detail in this thesis, I was moved to discover that Kubik appears to espouse views similar to my own regarding the relationship between cultures and people from different cultural backgrounds:

[...] individuals constantly change their cultural profiles during their lifetimes in processes of inner cultural reconfiguration; that is, individuals are not necessarily life prisoners of *one* culture learned during early enculturation. However, societal pressure may prompt individuals to demonstrate forms of behavior and 'cultural identities' ultimately prescribed from the outside (Kubik 1992)

and, harkening back to cases such as Herbie Hancock's described by Feld:

In this sense, cultural action precepts in the Americas, deliberately or unconsciously, may find themselves manipulating (present-day) African materials to create a semblance of historical continuity. Researchers provide, sometimes involuntarily, the materials for such aims. (ibid)

The best way to avoid such issues is to steer clear of appropriation, even though that might mean different things to different artists. If the aim of a project is experimentation rather than replication, the danger of appropriation is reduced, though examples cited by Feld, making use of avant-garde jazz concepts or new technologies, demonstrate that even experimentalism is not a certain recipe for the avoidance of appropriation. Collaboration on equal terms, however, definitely helps.

I have searched for projects by other artists demonstrating an approach similar to my own and have not found many examples, particularly in Africa. Steven Feld's work in Ghana has already been mentioned. Another unusual and interesting project was *Lambarena*, a 1993 CD in which the Gabonese composer Pierre Akendengué and the French producer and musician Hughes de Courson came together to render homage to Albert Schweitzer and his work in Gabon by re-interpreting works of J.S. Bach in combination with traditional music of Gabon. The result is innovative already through the disparate combination of backgrounds involved. But I feel that, overall, the surface of what could be done through collaboration between artists from different cultural backgrounds has thus far only been scratched, especially with regards to African music. Globalization, advancing continuously, makes this pursuit as much more difficult as it makes it easier, but all impediments notwithstanding, I plan to undertake much more work of this nature in the coming years.

CONCLUSION

Reflecting on my thus-far thirty-some-year journey interfacing with African music and 25 years in what I have come to call experimental intercultural collaboration, one discernible trajectory has led from theory (the initial inspiration from ethnomusicological research) to practice (working with African musicians) back to theory (in writing this thesis, but without ceasing to engage in the practical aspect). Even if my creative practice includes research and much reflection on theoretical issues, as a composer and musician my ultimate objective is a practical result: art, manifesting as performed music. The ideas, impressions, and positions presented in this thesis exist because of, and at the service of, the process of creating art which I hope is innovative yet gratifying to listen to (and perform). Nonetheless, the more deliberate and central role research has begun to play in my life in recent years as a PhD student and simultaneously a professor has become part of this gratification for me.

However, given that my ultimate objective skews more toward the practical than the theoretical, the goal of my research is not to arrive at conclusive answers; rather, it is to ask questions that are, then, answered in and as music, giving rise to more questions – an eternal feedback loop between theoretical research and musical practice. Thus, if this thesis provides few answers, my ultimately practical orientation might be the reason. Yet I hope that the stories I have told about my experimental-intercultural-collaborative experiences, about the unusual premises of this work and its unusual results, and the insights I have provided into the inner workings of some of my compositional concepts, their sources, and how they relate to the music and thoughts of some of the people I work with, can be considered to describe a concrete artistic and humanistic orientation. I believe that it is worthwhile to learn about ‘other’ cultures, and that long-term engagement with such ‘others’, to the point where they are not ‘others’ anymore but where our thought-worlds become mutually accessible and enter a state of constant cross-pollination, can lead to new and worthwhile music, thoughts about the human condition unfettered by prescriptive ideologies, and productive new modes of understanding across initially-perceived cultural and social boundaries.

Writing about his experience learning music in Ghana, Steve Reich (2002:65) stated that it gave him, above all else, confirmation. During my work in experimental intercultural collaboration, I, too, have received confirmation. But even more, I have received the impetus and encouragement to launch myself on a path of constant discovery and personal and artistic rejuvenation.

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APPENDIX

Links to Videos

While audio files of the CDs *Lukas Ligeti & Beta Foly* and *Paspanga* are included in the materials sent via the file transfer or the data CD accompanying this thesis, below are several links to videos of relevant concerts that might be informative.

Beta Foly in St.Johann in Tirol, Austria, in 1998: <<https://vimeo.com/378156676>>

Beta Foly in Strasbourg, France in 1999: <<https://vimeo.com/378206912>>

A sample of a Burkina Electric performance (in Vienna, Austria in 2013; excerpts from *Gom Zanga* @ 0:00, *Ligdi* @ 1:12, *Mdolé* @ 10:21): <<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=csejVVdROLw>>

Premiere performance of the *Suite for Burkina Electric and Orchestra* in Leipzig, Germany in 2016
Haïdara @ 0:01, *Mdolé* @ 9:51, *Ligdi* @19:05 , *Gom Zanga* @ 32:57):
<<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mgCoV6TrOJ0>>

Curtain: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rX-8zTs5q_Q>

Incandescence: <<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jVqwsNt6EPQ>>

Language:PROUN:music: <<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SpQhAbAm3Ms>>

Thinking Songs: <<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=e0le1dKDg-o>>