

Birifor Bori: Bori Music of Ghana and Côte d'Ivoire GCIA Collective

Liner Notes
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The Birifor people live along the banks of the Black Volta River, divided among the countries of Ghana, Côte d'Ivoire, and Burkina Faso. Divided through colonialism, the Birifor retain similar cultural customs despite language and political separation. This recording features Birifor musicians Tijan Dorwana from Ghana, and Gindar Chofitey from Côte d'Ivoire presenting the music of the Birifor Bori celebration. As the Birifor in both countries are geographically isolated, this recording is the first to showcase the virtuosity required to perform the Bori music, but also to highlight the differences between the separated communities.

The principal instrument of the Birifor is a fourteen-key xylophone called the *gyil*. While the pentatonic instrument is reserved for funeral performances, the tetratonic *bogyil* heard on this recording, is used for primarily for Bori festivals and recreation. The Bori festival serves as a puberty ceremony and an initiation into the adult Birifor community. Due to the substantial planning and financial support required to hold the elaborate celebration, a village will typically host the Bori once every seven years.

Culturally, the Bori is celebrated similarly on both sides of the Black Volta River, but musically is performed with subtle variations. As the Birifor in Côte d'Ivoire identify themselves as “Lobi”, the selections *Lobi Gon Prri* and *Lobi Kpi Kpala* are version typically heard in Côte d'Ivoire. The *Bor Da*, *Bori Drumming*, and *Festival Highlife*, are versions typically heard in Ghana. The most striking difference can be heard in the *kparo*, or accompaniment played by striking the back of the *gyil* mallet on the lowest note of the *gyil* – the Ghanaian *kparo* uses a short rhythmic ostinato while the *kparo* from Côte d'Ivoire often consists of longer rhythmic phrases.

The musical ensemble on this recording includes two *bogyille* (plural), a pair of *kuor* (calabash drums), and *kparo* (rhythmic timeline).

Personnel: Tijan Dorwana Edmund
Isaac Birturo Dorwana
Gindar Chofitey Benjamin
Cho-ob Malpoma Matthew
Michael B. Vercelli

Recorded by Michael B. Vercelli. May 3, 2017 in Medie, Ghana
All engineered and mastered by Mark Benincosa, West Virginia University
This project was generously funded in part by a 2016-17 West Virginia University
Research and Scholarship Advancement Grant.

Tracks:

- 1. Lobi Gon Prri:** Gindar Chofitey – lead bogyil; Tijan Dorwana – support bogyil; Isaac Birturo – lead kuor; Cho-ob Malpoma – support kuor

The title *Gon Prri* in the Birifor language describes these songs as the oldest in the Bori repertoire. These songs, lead by Gindar Chofitey, are from Côte d'Ivoire.

- 2. Bor Da:** Tijan Dorwana – lead bogyil; Co-ob Maploma – Kparo; Isaac Birturo – lead kuor; Michael Vercelli – support kuor

The *Bor Da* is the first piece played at a Bori festival. Typically performed by two *bogyille* players this version highlights Tijan Dorwana's virtuosity on *bogyil* and the instrument's interaction with the *koi* drums. (plural of *kuor*)

- 3. Lobi Kpi Kpala:** Gindar Chofitey – lead bogyil; Tijan Dorwana – support bogyil; Isaac Birturo – lead kuor; Michael Vercelli – support kuor

Also performed at funerals, the *Kpi Kpala* would be played before the burial to ease the emotional atmosphere and encourage funeral attendants to dance.

- 4. Bori Drumming:** Gindar Chofitey – vocals/support kuor; Isaac Birturo – lead kuor; Tijan Dorwana – kparo; Michael Vercelli – support kuor

Bori drumming can be heard throughout the festival, but most importantly as it accompanies the new initiates through the village. The procession travels door-to-door announcing the new initiates and giving everyone in the village a chance to celebrate.

- 5. Festival Highlife:** Tijan Dorwana and Isaac Birturo – bogyille; Michael Vercelli – kuor

Highlife or other recreational music is often performed on *bogyille* during the Bori festival to serve as general entertainment.

- 6. Bor Da (alternate take):** Tijan Dorwana and Isaac Birturo – bogyille

This version of the *Bor Da* is performed without *koi*, specifically to focus on the complex dialogue between the leading and supporting *bogyille* players. The lead player performs the full version of the song using both hands melodically while the supporting player "follows" the melody by slightly displacing the melody rhythmically. The supporting player's left hand is responsible for keeping the *kparo* on the lowest note of the *bogyil*.