PERFORMANCE PRACTICE OF THE DAGARA-BIRIFOR GYIL TRADITION THROUGH THE ANALYSIS OF THE BEWAA AND DAARKPEN REPERTOIRE

by

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Michael Biagio Vercelli

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ABSTRACT

This analysis of the *Bewaa* and *Daarkpen gyil* repertoire is designed as a blueprint to create a culturally accurate performance of the xylophone music of the Dagara-Birifor. By producing a tangible archive to this historically rich music, previously only passed on through oral tradition, I hope to foster greater awareness of this music to audiences outside of Ghana. Preliminary research for this project began in May, 2002 at the Dagara Music Center located in Medie, Ghana, and continued with the fieldwork conducted from January through June of 2004 principally at the Dagara Music Center and augmented with study throughout the Upper West region of Ghana. Included are transcriptions of the repertoire as well as suggestions for the performance practice and organization of an ensemble. All music discussed was taught by master musicians Bernard Woma and Tijan Dorwana and supplemented by xylophonists Jerome Balsab, and Isaac Birituro.

CHAPTER 1. INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND OF THE DAGARA-BIRIFOR GYIL

A. Introduction

The Dagara-Birifor xylophone, known as the *gyil*,[1] is one of the least academically explored instruments in Ghana. While the basic organology of the instrument is well documented, both the traditional and contemporary performance practices have not been addressed. The instrument remains common for both the Dagara and the Birifor[2] but, the repertoire of music is dramatically different in nature. I have selected two contrasting pieces: *Bewaa*, the popular recreational dance from the Dagara tradition, and the funeral music of *Daarkpen* from the Birifor tradition. To cite ethnomusicologist David Locke's model of the Ewe festival dance, *Kpegisu*, the scope of this project is three-fold:

> 1) Archival—to document a portion of humankind's heritage; 2) educational—to teach about [the gyil's] cultural and musical meanings; and 3) artistic—to encourage creative engagement with its forceful surfaces, including sensitive appreciation, composition, and re-creation through performance.[3]

It is my intent through thorough explanation and transcription of these selections to give the reader a historical and ethnographically accurate performance guide to this instrument and its repertoire for further reproduction in the percussion ensemble. Besides stressing the cultural diversity implications of performing Ghanaian music in the western percussion ensemble, this repertoire also challenges

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[1] As the focus of this document is the performance practice of the gyil, the word itself; its plural form, gyile; and the gyil player, gyilimbwere; once introduced will no longer be italicized in the text.
[2] Referred to collectively as LoDagaa by Jack Goody, the Birifor and Dagara represent two individual tribes residing in the Northern and Upper West regions of Ghana.
[3] David Locke, *Kpegisu A war Drum of the Ewe* (Reno: White Cliffs Media Company, 1992), 9.

the performer with many technical possibilities. The music demands considerable concentration and listening skills of all players and, with its variety of compositional intricacies, creates a very specialized form of chamber music. The performer must learn to listen to the composite musical texture at all times, continuously relating to the other instruments of the ensemble, the dancers, and listening for cues to change, or embellish parts.

This document creates a written realization of the music of both *Bewaa* and *Daarkpen* ensembles, including performance suggestions relating to the associated dance movements. The transcriptions will serve as a medium for recording the oral tradition, specifically attentive to the instrument's historical and contextual prominence, resulting in an ethnographic performance guide for those interested in re-creating gyil performance.

Additionally, there is a growing concern among elder gyil players in Ghana that the local youth are becoming increasingly disinterested in their own traditions. Many of Ghana's younger generation are abandoning their traditional music and dance in favor of popular Western styles. Contemporary organized religions are encouraging followers to renounce their customary "pagan" rituals. Both master gyil players Bernard Woma and Tijan Dorwana have responded to this concern by assisting the music education of their surrounding communities, but also through raising the awareness of gyil performance outside of Ghana. It is their hope as well as my own, that the increased Western interest in the gyil also helps to promote the significance of the repertoire among the Ghanaian youth.

B. Review of Literature

While African drum ensembles have flourished throughout the academic world, the prospect of incorporating African xylophone has remained relatively untouched. In particular, the Ghanaian xylophone, or gyil, has had little exposure to audiences outside the African continent. The reasons for this are simple. The gyil has had few written transcriptions of its repertoire therefore being transmitted almost exclusively through oral tradition. With relatively few gyil players residing outside of Ghana to transfer this information, the transmission of the repertoire to western audiences has suffered.

While there is truly no complete substitute for learning this repertoire from a master Ghanaian musician, a project such as this can both become a quality introduction and increase the exposure of the music to western audiences. Just as David Locke's 1979 dissertation entitled *The Music of Atsiagbecko*[4] set the groundwork for teaching the traditional music of Ghana's Ewe people, this document can be used to facilitate the music of the Dagara-Birifor in traditional percussion ensembles. I have followed similar models of the non-western transcription process, in particular the work of John Amira and Steven Cornelius.[5] In their analysis on the music of Cuban Santeria, they have devised a method of transcription through the numerous variations of the Bata drums that allows the student to "improvise" the overall form of the music much as a Santeria *Batalero* would. The variations found

[4] David Locke, "The Music of Atsiagbecko" (Ph.D. diss., Wesleyan University, Middletown, CT, 1979).
[5] John Amira and Steven Cornelius, *The Music of Santeria* (Crown Point, IN: White Cliffs Media Company,1992).

in the *Daarkpen* and *Bewaa* repertoire will follow a similar transcription model. By outlining the underlying structure of the Dagara-Birifor repertoire and the improvisatory variations that occur, the reader will have a starting point in the performance practice for replication of this complex music.

The existing transcriptions of this repertoire give only a very brief introduction to the gyil repertoire or arrange the music to be performed on other instruments. The work by Trevor Wiggins and the late Joseph Kobom is designed for use in primary music education and does not give an accurate representation of the performance of the literature by completely ignoring the rest of the gyil ensemble.[6] Transcriptions by Valerie Naranjo apply the traditional repertoire of the gyil to the western marimba and give a brief cultural reference, but do not explain the transcriptions' adaptations.[7] Francis Kofi and Paul Neely look briefly at the rhythms found in *Bewaa*, but their attention is focused on the drum patterns and do not give any gyil transcriptions or reference the musical culture.[8]

An extreme amount of physical dexterity and independence is required to coordinate both hands of the gyil players. Mitchel Strumph discusses the nature of learning independence in his *Ghanaian Xylophone Studies* and gives a step-by-step approach to learning basic polyrhythms commonly found in the gyil repertoire.[9] His exercises give the reader a brief sample of how these polyrhythms are heard in the

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[6] Trevor Wiggins and Joseph Kobom, *Xylophone Music From Ghana* (Reno, NV: White Cliffs Media Company, 1992).
[7] A complete listing of Valerie Naranjo's transcriptions are available at www.mandaramusic.com
[8] Francis Kofi and Paul Neely, *Traditional Dance Rhythms of Ghana* (Everett, PA: Honeyrock,. 1997).
[9] Mitchel Strumph, *Ghanaian Xylophone Studies* (Legon, Ghana: Institute of African Studies, University of Ghana, 1970).

traditional repertoire, but similar to Godsey, the exercises do not address the entire ensemble. Royal James Hartigan, who studied this music under Ewe master drummer Abraham Adzenyah, applied the gyil's rhythmic elements first to Ewe drums then to the western drum kit, showing how this repertoire can be beneficial to non-mallet players, but does not give any gyil transcriptions or ensemble suggestions.[10]

Detail must be added in the analysis of the transcription process to include the significant meanings behind what is played on the gyil. In many situations, in particular the Birifor funeral music, the melody has actual text that is understood by the community. In some cases the text may simply identify the gender of the deceased, but more often, complex messages and proverbs are performed. Anthropologist John Goody mentioned the musical implications of the gyil, but a musical analysis of the funeral was not included in his tome.[11] Likewise, Malidome Patrice Somé paints a beautiful literary picture of his own grandfather's Dagara funeral, including mention of Dagara mythology and the gyil, but does not go into musical specifics.[12]

Prior research has been conducted in two other noteworthy volumes, by Mary Seavoy[13] and Larry Godsey,[14] which give an in-depth look at both the organology and

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[10] Royal James Hartigan, "Blood Drum Spirit: Drum Languages of West Africa, African-American, Native American, Central Java and South India" (Ph.D. diss., Wesleyan University. Middletown, CT, 1986).

[11] John R. Goody, *Death, Property and the* Ancestors (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1962). This text investigates and reports the complete cultural context surrounding the Dagara funeral ritual. While stating the importance of the gyil to the funeral, Goody does not discuss any of the musical meaning or repertoire.

[12]Malidoma Patrice Somé, *Of Water and the Spirit* (New York: Penguin Books USA Inc., 1994).

[13]Mary Hermaine Seavoy, "The Sissala Xylophone Tradition" (Ph.D. diss., University of California, Los Angeles, 1982).

ethnographical usage of the gyil. While Seavoy gives a very detailed account of the use and context surrounding the gyil, the Sissala musical repertoire greatly differs from their Dagara-Birifor counterparts. Godsey's work is currently the most comprehensive resource available discussing the gyil, including some translations of the Birifor texts associated with the funeral music, but does not discuss any of the recreational repertoire, such as *Bewaa*, or the arrangement of the work for a performance ensemble. The beauty of Godsey's volume lies in his transcriptions of performances by elder xylophonists such as Belimbee Deri and Kakraba Lobi, creating a truly invaluable archive.

[14] Larry Dennis Godsey, "The use of the Xylophone in the Funeral ceremony of the Birifor of Northwest Ghana". (Ph.D. diss., University of California, Los Angeles, 1980).

C. Cultural Background

While it is easy to identify the geographical region in which the gyil is found, primarily the Upper West and Northern regions of Ghana as well as the surrounding area in Burkina Faso and Cote d'Ivoire, it is far more difficult to name the cultural groups who play the instrument. In 1962 Jack Goody uses the term LoDagaa to describe the inhabitants of this area, assuming a geographical homogeneity, and then breaks into the subgroups, LoWilisi (Lobi), Birifor, LoSaala, LoWiiili, DagaaWiili and LoPiel based on ethnographic similarities.[15] Larry Godsey (1980) uses the term Birifor, in agreement with Goody, as the cultural group found in the geographical area surrounding the town of Kaliba in the Northern Region.[16] More importantly, Godsey also acknowledges the fact that within the performance tradition he is observing, the practitioners choose to refer to themselves as Birifor.

Atta Annan Mensah's 1982 article *Gyil: The Dagara-Lobi Xylophone*, describes the "Dagaba (more commonly known as Dagarti), the Lobi and the Sisala, [as] the only xylophone producing groups in Ghana" but also acknowledges that within those three traditions there are communities which speak mutually unintelligible languages, therefore, "for the sake of convenience, the Dagara-Lobi xylophone heritage is being treated together here as the product of one culture cluster, bearing in mind possible divisions within it."[17] Mensah does mention the Lobrifor (Birifor) as a subgroup of the Lobi culture generalizing that the Birifor of Ghana

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[15] Goody, 4-5.
[16] Godsey, 1.
[17] Atta Annan Mensah, "Gyil: The Dagara-Lobi Xylophone," *Journal of African Studies* 9, no. 3 (Fall 1982) : 139.

share much of the same repertoire with the Miiwo-Lobi of northern Cote d'Ivoire therefore belonging to the same ethnographic tradition.

For the context of this document, I asked Bernard Woma to clarify these various ethnographic subdivisions in terms of gyil performance. He first agreed with the linguistic findings of Adams Bodomo by dismissing Goody's categories as outdated in favor of "Dagaaba" and dispelling the term "Dagarti" which as Bodomo states is, "certainly an Anglo-misnomer and not favored by most Dagaaba."[18] Bernard further clarified that there are five distinct gyil performance styles in Ghana, commonly referred to by the geographical area in which they are performed. These regions are: Nandom (Dagara), Kaliba (Birifor), Jirapa, Sissala, and Lawra and added that he is currently the only gyil player to perform in all five styles. The Lobi do have a separate performance practice but are found in Cote d'Ivoire and not in Ghana.

Tijan Dorwana and Kakraba Lobi were also in agreement with these ethnographic distinctions explaining that the Birifor are Ghana's Lobi. Their tradition can be called either Birifor or Lobi but for the sake of clarity and consistency with prior research, I have opted to use the term Birifor to distinguish this repertoire from their Dagara counterparts.

While the performance style and repertoire can differ greatly between the Dagara and Birifor, the mythology surrounding the origin of the gyil holds remarkable similarities. This mythology will play an important role in analyzing the structure and form of the Birifor funeral repertoire. (See Chapter 2) Direct references

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[18] Adams Bodomo, *The Structure of Dagaare* (Stanford: CSLI Publications, 1997), 2.

to the myth are quoted melodically on the instrument relating important cultural references to the participants at the funeral. Variations do exist as to the origin of the gyil, but they all stem from the forest. Below, I have summarized a common account of the gyil myth, see Appendix A for each complete version.

Gyil Myth

It is told, that there was once a great hunter, deep in the forest, searching for game, who heard an incredible sound coming from the trees. Upon investigation, the hunter witnessed a ceremony of the mythical *kontomble* utilizing a pair of *gyile* (plural). The *kontomble* are described as dwarfs, living in specific trees in the forest (*Ficus gnaphalocarpus*)[19] and thought to have magical powers, or even be descendants of the first humans. Infatuated by the sound of the music, the great hunter, having magical powers of his own, captured one of the *kontomble*. The hunter then bargained the life of the *kontomble* for the instruction of the gyil. The hunter learned the construction of the instrument, the repertoire of the *kontomble*, and brought the knowledge back to his people. To this day, the *kontomble* are still attracted to the sound of the gyil but also harbor animosity toward humans.

[19] Goody, 146.

D. Methodology

The preliminary research for this project started in May of 2002 at Bernard Woma's Dagara Music Center. I was first introduced to the recreational repertoire, *Bewaa*. Watching both Bernard's mastery of the instrument and the performances of his Dagara Bewaa Culture Group inspired this project. I wanted to create a resource for the percussionist and ethnomusicologist to better understand this music and its possible re-creation in a Western setting.

I returned to Ghana in January 2004, this time to remain for six months, conducting fieldwork for this project. I was able to use Bernard's center in Medie as a central base for my studies with further fieldwork done in the Upper West region surrounding the villages of Saru, Hiineting, and Kaliba. The music presented in this document was taught to me by my primary teachers: Bernard Woma, Tijan Dorwana, Jerome Balsab, and Tijan's son Isaac Birituro.[20] Supplemental gyil lessons were with Alfred Sagbaalu and drum lessons with Eddie Green. Lessons averaged from two to three hours a day and scheduled according to the availability of the teacher. Each piece was introduced to me in a slow and methodical manner and reviewed until the teacher was satisfied that I had learned it properly.

Interviews were conducted in the Upper West region with gyil masters: Sei in Gakuon; Sontii, in Vondeil; and Kaminyen, Belembe Deri, and his brother Tampor, in the village of Nasoltain. I conducted all of the interviews in English with the help of Tijan translating between Birifor and English when necessary. I was able to attend

[20] See Appendix F for photographs.

two *Bori* Festivals in Gakuon and Kpiriba-tain one wedding in Kumasi, as well as five funerals in Accra, one funeral in Medie, and the funeral for Bernard's brother Cletus in Hiineting. Festival performances and all interviews were recorded on Sony Mini-Disc MZ-R700 or Sony CCD-TRV608 Hi8 video.[21]

While both the Dagara and Birifor languages are not traditionally written, I have opted not to use the International Phonetic Alphabet. Instead, for the easy of reading comprehension, I have approximated the spelling of the words in English with the help of Bernard and Tijan. I have transcribed the repertoire into western notation to also help facilitate the learning process. Detailed descriptions of the instrument notation are found under the Instrument Performance Practice heading in this chapter.

[21] Copies of the audio and video recorded for this project are available for use in further research. Please contact the author at vercelliinghana@yahoo.com for information.

E. Instrument Performance Practice

The *Bewaa* and *Daarkpen* repertoire relies on the gyil ensemble.[22] Both genres require two xylophones playing either a lead or supporting role. The lead gyil, responsible for the main melodic material, will improvise between various songs in the repertoire and give aural cues to the participants about when to sing or dance. The support gyil will remain on an ostinato, often with one hand playing the main melodic accompaniment and the other hand a rhythmic time line (*kparo*) with only a stick, to give the lead gyil player a structure to improvise both in and around. Only one drum, the *kuor*, is used in the *Bewaa* ensemble, however in Mr. Woma's own Dagara Cultural group, he often employs a second drum if one is available. The *Daarkpen* funeral repertoire requires two different drums, the long cylindrical *ganga* and a pair of small kettle-shaped drums known as *lar*. It is important to note that while the drums in particular are difficult to obtain outside of Ghana, even within the country, instruments such as *lar* are rarely seen in performance outside of the village setting.[23]

Gyil

While there are many types of gyile found throughout the Upper West region of Ghana, I will focus on the fourteen-note instrument commonly referred to as the *logyil*. While this term denotes the Birifor origins of the instrument, for simplicity, I

[22] See Appendix F for photographs.
[23] To obtain quality Dagara-Birifor instruments, consult Bernard Woma's webpage at: www.bernardwoma.com.

will refer to the instrument as the gyil since the same xylophone is played in the *Bewaa* repertoire of the Dagara. To keep the focus of this document performance related I will only briefly discuss the gyil's construction.[24]

The gyil is constructed from four elements: rosewood, called *nirra* in the Birifor language, for the keys, a hardwood for the frame, gourds for resonators, and multiple strips of goat and sometimes antelope hide to secure the frame. The keys are the most crucial element in the xylophone's construction. There are four types of *nirra* used for the bars, red, white, brown, and yellow. A gyil built from the wood of a single tree will produce the most uniform sound. The white (*nirr-pla*) means the tree was not yet matured at the time it fell in the bush, but will yellow with age. The red wood (*nirr-giew*) is the recommendation for the best instruments, now that the brown form (*nirr-sela*) is very rare. As Tijan explained, dark color of the wood indicates its age and is favored for its ability to repel moisture resulting in more sustain and better tone. The mallets, or *gyilibie*, are built with a hardwood shaft and with either natural rubber wound around the end or a disc cut from a recycled automobile tire and attached to the striking end.

The technique for playing the gyil is straightforward. Since the instrument sits low to the ground (approx 9-15 inches) the player must be seated on a low stool of equal proportions. Proper playing technique requires the performer's arms to be bent at the elbow and parallel to the bars of the instrument. The mallets are held between the index and the middle finger with the thumb tucked under the index finger

[24] For a detailed account of the gyil's construction and tuning systems refer to Appendix B of Larry Godsey's dissertation.

and placed adjacent to the mallet, filling the space between the fingers for stability. The remaining two fingers are wrapped securely around the end of the mallet and serve as the source of power in the stroke, crucial for the forceful playing expected at an outdoor performance. Bernard Woma stresses the importance of keeping the last fingers wrapped securely around the end of the mallet therefore allowing a strong stroke and the instrument to vibrate at its full potential.

In striking the instrument the performer uses the power of the wrist and forearm. The gyil player, or *gyilimbwere*, (*gyilimbwebe* plural) keeps the wrists straight following the shaft of the mallet but unlike a matched grip on the snare drum, the forearms stay rotated keeping the thumbs up and wrists parallel to each other as one would find in a French timpani grip. Fred Hinger's forearm timpani technique parallels this motion of the gyil player by using the rotation of the forearm "in this relaxed fashion great speed can be obtained. The physical endurance accomplished by this technique is limitless."[25] The tucking of the thumb also eliminates tension within the grip allowing the wrists to rotate freely. This technique allows the gyilimbwere to keep the elbows close to the sides and rotate the wrist to strike the extreme ends of the instrument. The natural upward curve in the lower octave of the instrument helps facilitate the rotational movement of the wrists and increase the performer's accuracy. Tijan, often stressed the importance of the wrist rotation and not raising the arm or shoulder in striking therefore keeping the arms and elbows close to the player's side as an sign of controlled playing. The master *gyilimbwebe* (plural) I observed,

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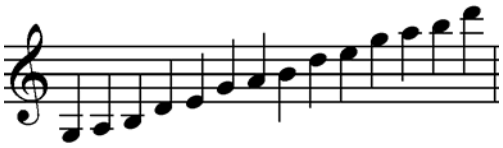
[25] Fred Hinger, *Technique for the Virtuoso Timpanist* (Fred Hinger, Jerona Music 1975), 4.

utilized this technique to stay very relaxed and seemed to play the instrument effortlessly even through hours of continuous performance at very loud dynamic levels.

Gyil Notation

It is a challenge to transcribe the gyil into traditional western five-line staff notation due to the pitch discrepancies from instrument to instrument. Rather then transcribe the notes at their respective frequency; I have followed the system of notation used by Michael Strumph to symbolically represent each note of the instrument.[26] Each key of the gyil is assigned one note of the G pentatonic scale. While the actual pitches of each instrument may deviate dramatically, the "system suffices for correlating any pitch with a particular xylophone key."[27] The range of the gyil can be seen in Fig. 1. 1.

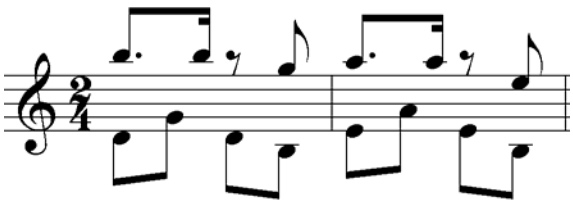
Fig. 1. 1. Gyil notation



[26] Strumph, 4.
[27] Godsey, 12.

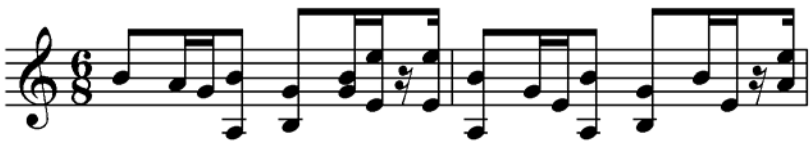
Similar to contemporary marimba or jazz drumming, the gyil demands great coordinated independence between hands. Depending on the repertoire, the left hand of the gyilimbwere will either double the melody of the supporting gyil, or work in conjunction with the right hand to create a dense musical composite. In situations where the two hands act independently, as in *Bewaa*, I have notated the left hand with the stems down. (Fig. 1. 2)

Fig. 1. 2. Hands working independently



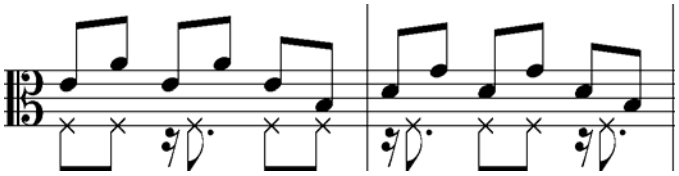
When the left hand is dependant upon the right hand and cannot be easily separated from the composite musical texture, I have kept all the stems grouped together, as seen in the *Daarkpen*. (Fig. 1. 3)

Fig. 1. 3. Hands working in composite



The support gyil is played the same way as the lead, but often requires the left hand to hold a rhythmic ostinato on the lowest key of the instrument. The back end of the mallet (wooden end) is tapped on the lowest bar creating a distinct timbre and easily recognizable time line called *kparo*. I have included the time line throughout the transcriptions as a point of reference for both performers by keeping the stems down and using the "x" note head. Since the tuning of the support gyil is the same as the lead and in order to preserve space, I have transcribed the supporting gyil patterns in the alto clef, keeping the stems up. This avoids the use of extensive ledger lines and allows the time line to be read easily. (Fig. 1. 4) The right hand of the supporting gyil will usually be the main melody of the song, doubled by the lead player's left hand. The supporting gyilimbwere may change to the middle octave during the performance as an improvisational element. Typically, the highest octave of the gyil is not used by the supporting player in order to leave sonic space for the lead player.

Fig 1. 4. Support gyil with stick time line



Kuor

The body of the *kuor* is made from a dry, hollow calabash. Only the top of the gourd is removed, leaving the bottom of the drum closed. The head, made from the skin of a monitor lizard, is stretched over the opening and tacked tightly into place. The lizard skin is very susceptible to moisture and must be dried in the sun before it is played.

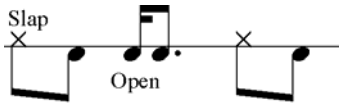
The playing position of the *kuor* can be very difficult to sustain. The *kuor* player also sits on a low stool keeping the ankles together and knees apart. (See Photo 7) The instrument is placed on the performer's heels with the head almost perpendicular to the ground. Using the inner thigh the player must secure the drum by pressing the legs together on the sides of the calabash. This instrument position often causes leg fatigue before the performer's hands tire.

The *kuor* uses two principal sounds, a high open tone and a sharp slap. The open tone is created by using only the index finger on the head. Keeping the index fingers relaxed and the remaining fingers somewhat rigid, the player strikes the drum near the edge of the head using the index finger with a whip-like motion. Approximately two-thirds of the finger should come in contact with the drum head, not just the fingertip. If the index finger is relaxed it will bounce off the head quickly, producing a clear tone.

Similar to the open tone, the slap sound uses the same whip-like motion of the hand only with the remaining fingers. Instead of striking near the edge of the drum, the performer aims for the center of the head and allows the fingers to remain loosely

on the head after impact. In contrast to the open tones, only the fingertips should come in contact with the head. It is important to remember the slap is a sound and not a volume. By using the proper technique, there will be no need to hit the drum with extra force. I have notated the slap with an "x" note head and the open tone below the line. (Fig. 1. 5)

Fig. 1. 5. *Kuor* notation



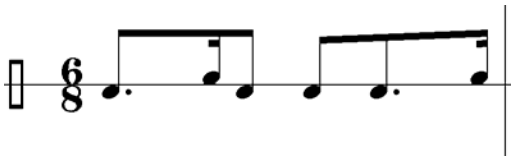
Ganga

The *ganga* is a double-headed, cylindrical drum played with sticks. The thick cowhide used for the heads creates a deep compliment to the gyile and the high *lar* counterpart in the funeral repertoire. The performer sits on a low stool with the head positioned closest to their dominant hand. The sticks are made from a hardwood approximately 11 inches in length with a 3/4 inch diameter. The length and thickness of the sticks becomes very practical when manipulating the pitch of the drum.

In the dominant hand, the *ganga* player holds the stick similar to a typical western drumstick, with the fulcrum between the thumb and index finger allowing the remaining fingers to wrap loosely around the stick. The motion comes from both the wrist and fingers and strikes just off center of the drumhead. It is important to keep the hand relaxed as it will produce most of the rhythmic activity.

While the dominant hand is responsible for the rhythmic articulation of the *ganga*, the other hand manipulates the pitch of the drum. The opposite hand holds the stick more like a baseball bat, keeping all the fingers wrapped tightly, just above the center of the stick, allowing the player to press firmly against the center of the drumhead. The stick must be pressed quickly and quietly into the head of the drum so that it does not alter the rhythmic pattern of the dominant hand. The hand may relax its grip on the stick when it used in articulating rhythmic variations. Some advanced players will also use this hand to strike the shell of the *ganga* in a rhythmic ostinato, leaving the dominant hand to strike the head, and their big toe pressing against the opposite head to switch between the high and low tones of the instrument. (See Photo 4) The high and low pitches are notated above and below the line respectively. (Fig. 1. 6)

Fig. 1. 6. *Ganga* notation

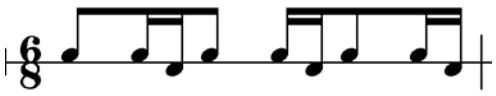


Lar

The *lar* are a pair of small kettle drums, closed at the bottom, and carved out of wood. A thin goatskin head is stretched over the openings (approx. 4-5 inches in diameter) and laced around the base of each kettle. In contrast to the *ganga*, they produce a high and very articulate sound. These drums are placed directly on the

ground with the performer seated on the ground beside them. The *lar* are struck with a long, thin stick or branch and provide a driving energetic element to the ensemble. The thin sticks are used in a whipping motion and should strike flat against the head. I have assigned the high and low kettles to their corresponding location on the single-line staff. (Fig. 1. 7)

Fig. 1. 7. *lar* notation



The *lar* are seen as easy to play, yet have suffered a general decline in their use.[28] Throughout my observations in the Upper West Region, I only witnessed the *lar* in performance after I had inquired. No one interviewed seemed to have a reason for the *lar's* disappearance, which might suggest that this instrument is optional to the ensemble. However, Tijan seemed adamant that the decline in usage stemmed from the local youths' disinterest in their traditional culture and encouraged me to preserve them in this manuscript.

[28] Godsey, 34.

CHAPTER 2. BIRIFOR FUNERAL REPERTOIRE: THE DAARFO

A. Overview and Origins

The Birifor funeral transcriptions are divided into two parts, *Daarfo*, representing the Birifor's heritage as hunters and performed on a solo gyil, and *Daarkpen*, featuring songs symbolic of mourning and performed by an ensemble encouraging the participants to dance. While the funeral repertoire could easily fill volumes, I have chosen the connecting point in the funeral ceremony at the reprise of the *Daarfo* preceding the *Daarkpen* where the solo gyil ends, the ensemble enters, and the dancing begins. This chapter will briefly outline the context of the Birifor funeral before moving to a closer musical analysis of the *Daarfo*.

Funeral Background

The traditional Birifor funeral requires three full days. Typically in cities such as Accra, the process is condensed into one twenty-four hour celebration lasting from 5 P.M. on Friday, until 5 P.M. the following day. This is designed as a convenient way for the mourners to participate while maintaining their contemporary, urban lifestyle. Despite the shortening of the funeral ceremony, the gyile are still responsible for providing continuous music throughout the twenty-four hour period. The best musicians take particular care in selecting appropriate songs, specific to the funeral. For example, the funeral songs for a man with many children will differ greatly from those of a woman with no children. The musicians, typically two gyil players, one drummer, and in the case

of Dagara funerals additional singers, will alternate performing; taking only short breaks to drink, eat, and often encouraging others to play with them.

Upon arrival, the guests will first pay homage to deceased then proceed directly to the musicians to throw coins. The gesture of throwing coins is performed even before the guests greet the family of the deceased, therefore stating the importance of the music to the ceremony. The musicians will divide the money evenly between themselves during short breaks. The money is not considered payment, but more of a compliment and "certainly bears some relation to the skill of the player; not all are so amply rewarded for their pains."[1] The musicians perform at the funeral ceremony, not for the money but because it is seen as their obligation to the greater community.[2] In a rare circumstance where there are not enough musicians for a funeral, others will come from neighboring communities to participate, but in a city the size of Accra, there is usually an abundance of respected musicians.

Piri, The Birifor Funeral Song Cycle

The funeral begins with a solo gyil player announcing the death through the performance of the funeral song cycle. The funeral music is divided into parts, varying in number according to the sex and age of the deceased and gradually performed in order over the duration of the funeral. Each section of the song cycle has an individual significance to the event and restrictions associated with it. (Fig. 2. 1)

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[1] Goody, 51.

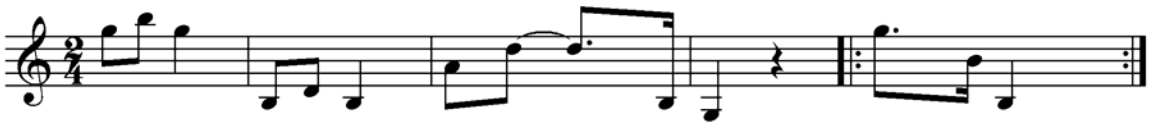
[2] For both the Birifor and Dagara, the gyilimbwebe hold additional employment. In rural areas, most are farmers and fishermen, while in urban areas, the gyil player may hold a variety of occupations from attorney to taxi driver. The "professional" gyilimbwere is a very contemporary idea, generally used only by those who have performed internationally such as Bernard Woma, Tijan Dorwana, and Kakraba Lobi.

Fig. 2. 1. Birifor Funeral Outline

Piri	The *Piri* is seen as the introduction to the funeral, performed by a solo gyil player and announces the death of the individual. No dancing will take place until the *Piri* is completed.
Daarkpen	The *Daarkpen* signals the beginning of the funeral dancing. There are an unlimited number of songs that can be played for this section. The songs range in meaning from mythological references to insults. Here the participants will offer more money to the gyil player if they feel a personal connection to the message or insult.
Chi Kobne	A section dedicated to the farmers. The Birifor place a special emphasis on the farmer and will perform this selection at all occasions. For the gyil player, the *Chi Kobne* is regarded as the most important piece in the repertoire. When performed at a festival, the host of the festival will pay the musicians according to how well they play the *Chi Kobne*.
Bin Kpen	The *Bin Kpen* is also played at puberty rituals. During this piece small children are not allowed to dance until they have participated in the puberty ritual. The *Bin Kpen* will not be played at a child's funeral; it is only for those who have undergone the puberty ceremony.
Bin Kpen Bli	Meaning "little" *Bin Kpen*, it is performed at a faster tempo and the rhythms are altered.
Na Kpan Binne	The *Na Kpan Binne* is only played at the funeral for a male, who is considered a master hunter. With the increase of domesticated herds among the Birifor, the number of master hunters has decreased. As a result this piece is performed less than any other. Only the elder xylophonists remember the *Na Kpan Binne* and it is on the verge of being lost from the tradition.
Guu	The *Guu* is final song in the funeral repertoire and played at a fast tempo. The focus is on the women's dance in which they run quickly around the gyil players and off into the surrounding bush. Its performance signals the end of the funeral.

Each gyilimbwere has a personalized melodic signature to warm up the instrument called the *piila*, sometimes referred to as *piira* or *damo* in other areas.[3] A.A. Mensah states that the *piila* "is an introductory warming-up piece which each player works out and develops for his own personal use on various occasions. You can identify a person by his *pilla* or *piira* if you know it; for he varies it little for different pieces."[4] Tijan explained that the *piila* is not only to warm up the instrument but also for the gyilimbwere to hear the pitch and tuning of the instrument. As gyil tunings often differ from village to village the gyilimbwere may need to adjust the range or octave of the desired musical selection. Musically, the *piila* is a very brief melodic device performed in an improvised rhythm. Figure 2. 2 shows the *piila* Tijan demonstrated to introduce the *Daarfo*. Systematically, Tijan's *piila* checks each register of the instrument, the tuning of octaves, and the important intervallic relationships needed in the *Daarfo*.

Fig. 2. 2. *Piila*



Master gyilimbwere Sontii, elaborated that this particular *piila* is also used to announce the funeral.[5] Two of the melodic figures are often repeated so that those who understand the language of the gyil will recognize that a funeral is taking place. Figure 2. 2a symbolizes "something dangerous" has happened and Figure 2. 2b represents

[3] Mensah, 139-154.
[4] Ibid. , 146.
[5] Sontii, personal interview. March 17, 2004. Vondeil, Ghana.

"something which you cannot bear." Both examples may be repeated at the player's discretion.

Fig. 2. 2a. *Piila* themes

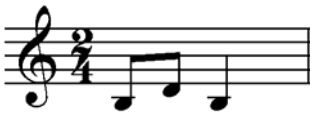
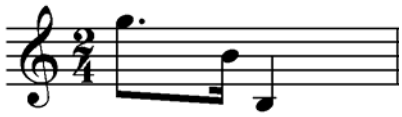


Fig. 2. 2b.



The song cycle begins with the performance of the *Piri*, featuring a solo gyil player. The *Piri* is further divided into six parts, each having significance to the event. (Fig 2. 3) The xylophonist takes his time through the *Piri*, emphasizing certain sections related to the deceased. The solo performance not only informs the mourners and guests of the nature of the event but also allows the performer an opportunity to "warm up" the gyil in order to make the sound resonate at its fullest.

Fig. 2. 3. *Piri* Sections

Daarfo	Played to indicate the death of a man
Po Kuobo	Played to indicate the death of a woman
San De Bie Ko	Reinforces the social values of the Birifor
Pir Kpon	Communicates messages regarding the funeral and death
Interlude	Bird songs from the banks of the Black Volta
Daarfo / *Po Kuobo* Reprise	The signal to the participants that the *Piri* has ended and the dancing can begin.

To begin the *Piri*, the gyil player first announces the gender of the deceased by playing one of two songs. If the deceased is a male, the gyil player is required to perform the *Daarfo*; if it is for a woman's funeral then *Po Kuobo* is performed. From the first soundings of these pieces, the mourners will know how the funeral will proceed. Next in the *Piri* is *San De Bie Ko*, a short piece used to remind the participants of the traditional values of the Birifor, such as the negative effects of divorce. The Birifor believe that if a woman divorces her husband, the ancestors will be upset and kill the children from the marriage. The *Pir Kpon* comprises the following two sections and relates messages regarding the funeral and death. Here the gyil player may perform "all will die, but someone will always follow in their footsteps." The gyil player can then stretch his improvisational skills in a short interlude used to represent the birds found along the banks of the Black Volta River where the Birifor believe they first settled. Finally, either the *Daarfo* or the *Po Kuob*o is repeated as a reprise to signal that the *Piri* has finished and that the dancing will soon commence as the drums enter in the next section of the funeral cycle. It is at this reprise of the *Daarfo* where I will begin my analysis.

Daarfo: The Struggle

Traditionally agrarians, the Birifor value and respect the forces of nature and honor the hunters who face the challenges of the bush. The image of the hunter, as a brave and courageous individual, is used in association with the *Daarfo.* Likewise, the gyil's relationship with nature, plays an important role in the Birifor oral history. The gyil symbolizes the Birifor's musical identity and creates a tangible link to their ancestral

beliefs.

The *Daarfo*, performed only at a man's funeral, is translated as the "struggle." This is the struggle the Birifor face in everyday life, and the struggle the deceased no longer faces. It is a symbolic reminder to the Birifor that everyone, at some point in their life, must face personal challenges and obstacles. Those who confront these challenges are considered strong and courageous, even if there is nothing extraordinary about what they do.

The most challenging musical element of the *Daarfo* is in its organization. The *Daarfo* is composed of numerous short phrases improvised by the gyilimbwere. In order to arrange a workable "score" for the *Daarfo*, I first compiled the various musical themes as taught by Tijan. Appendix A illustrates these musical themes and, where known, their cultural associations. Each section of the *Daarfo* can be repeated at the performer's discretion, but accurate and interesting performances only repeat specific passages frequently. The melodic passages associated with symbolic or textual references must make their musical statement but not become redundant. The performance of the *Daarfo* should unfold as if the performer were telling a story.

As the reprise of the *Daarfo* begins, the male participants of the funeral will line up to prepare for a dance reenactment of the hunt. They will often be armed with traditional bow and arrow, or a rifle to represent the hunt. The movement associated with the hunt, also illustrated by Larry Godsey,[6] is played as the main repetitive pattern in the *Daarfo*. (Fig. 2. 4a) Figure 2. 4b shows additional introductory material.

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[6] Godsey, 131.

Fig. 2. 4a. The Hunt

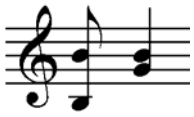
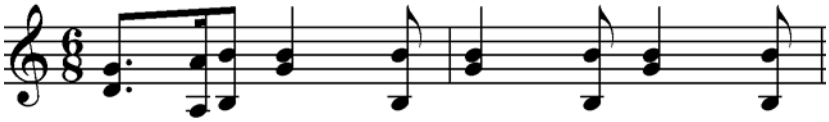


Fig. 2. 4b. The Hunt with added introductory material



This pattern is performed slowly, giving the underlying pulse to the dancers as they tread cautiously toward their symbolic prey. The gyil player will repeat the main theme of the *Daarfo* until the dancers have concluded their movements.

Within the primary repeated phrase of the *Daarfo,* the gyil player will interject symbolic, musical representations of myth and historical significance understood by the Birifor. The first example of these interjections represents the hunters' mode of communication in the forest. In the forest, the hunters use a subtle whistle to each other to be certain each hunter is in the correct position to surround the prey. The gyil player represents this whistle as a call and response motive within the main melodic phrase of the *Daarfo*. (Fig. 2. 5) The gyil player can relate the struggle in the forest and create musical tension, by repeating the call desperately, and lingering in silence until the response is played. (Fig. 2. 6)

Fig. 2. 5. Hunter's Whistle

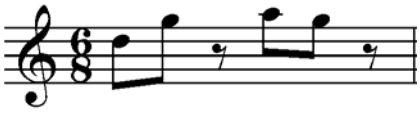
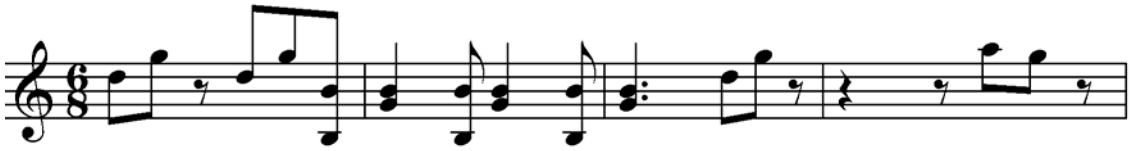
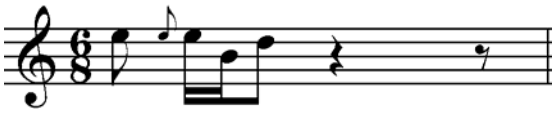


Fig. 2. 6. Delayed Call and Response Whistle



The gyil player may also invoke the musical name of the Great Hunter, responsible for bringing the gyil to the Birifor. (Fig. 2. 7) This musical gesture can be heard as a cry for help from those hunters, reenacting the funeral hunt. They are asking the Great Hunter to guide them through their struggles, both in the forest and in their lives. Often the Great Hunter motive will be used in conjunction with the previous call and response motive.

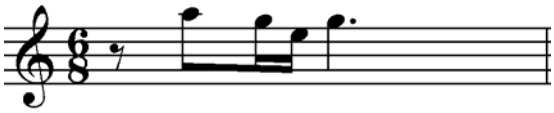
Fig. 2. 7. Great Hunter



Other symbolic representations that often occur in the *Daarfo* include additional hunting motives and a birdcall typically heard along the Black Volta to remind the Birifor

of their heritage. (Fig 2. 8) The gyil player improvises these musical symbols into the main melodic phrase of the *Daarfo*. The virtuoso gyil player is seen as someone who can weave the symbolic musical expressions into a cohesive and emotionally moving song. Through these musical gestures, the gyil player not only sympathizes with the desperation and struggle of the mourners, but also reinforces the traditional beliefs of the Birifor and assists in the transmission of their myths through oral tradition.

Fig. 2. 8. Short Bird Call



B. *Daarfo* Musical Characteristics

In order to create a workable score for the *Daarfo* I first compiled a list of thematic material.[7] As stated, the performance goal of the *Daarfo* is to integrate the themes as if they were lines of text in a story or poem. Repetition of themes, but not to the point of redundancy, is common. Two of the themes are typically not repeated as they have their own specific function in the piece: the introductory phrase only takes place at the beginning to signal the reprise of the *Daarfo*, (Fig. 2. 9) and a short transitional phrase (Fig. II.10) also serving as a link to the last phrase of the *Daarfo*.

Fig. 2. 9. Introduction

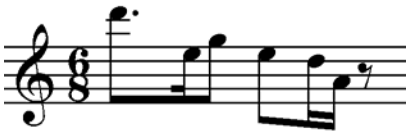
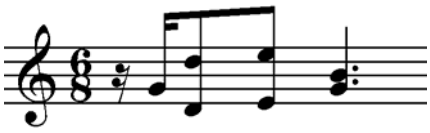


Fig. 2. 10. Transition



Liberties can be taken within each musical phrase as well such as the lingering call and response pattern of the Hunter's Whistle. The performer may also increase rhythmic interest by syncopating the phrase against the beat. I have notated each musical

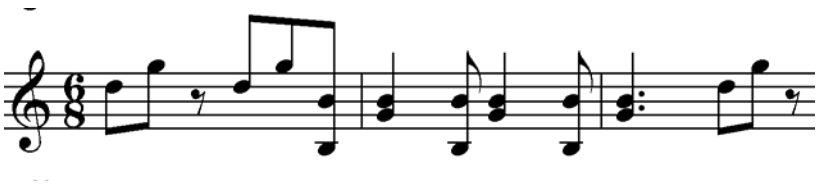
[7] See Appendix B for list of themes.

theme beginning on the downbeat for clarity, but since there is no regulating time line for the *Daarfo*, the performer is free to choose the placement of the phrase. Expressive elements such as dynamics and *rubato* are also left to the performer's discretion. Because of the solo nature of the *Daarfo*, most players will generally play it forcefully, but not at the *fortissimo* level of other pieces, such as *Bewaa*, in the gyil repertoire. Similarly, the experienced gyilimbwere will take this opportunity to relax the tempo of the *Daarfo* and utilize a little *rubato* to introduce the themes and elongate rests to increase the musical tension. The score I have created illustrates only one possible arrangement of the *Daarfo* taken from these themes and expressive ideas. (Appendix B)

C. *Daarfo* Arrangement Analysis

I begin the *Daarfo* forcefully with the introductory signal and move directly into the main theme of The Hunt (dotted quarter-note = 64 beats per minute). I choose to repeat it as a long phrase to establish my tempo and musically state its importance to the listener. I then state the Hunter's Whistle in measures 6 and 7 in its simplest form to again allow the listener to become acquainted with its idea of call and response. Immediately, I return to the main Hunt motive and when the Hunter's Whistle occurs again in measure 12 it is now in its elongated form. I repeat the first call of the whistle and delay the response by interjecting the Hunt motive to increase the musical tension and symbolize the forward progress of the hunt. (Fig. 2. 11)

Fig. 2. 11. Call without Response

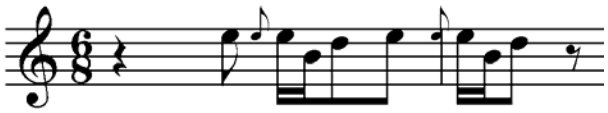


A measure of silence continues the delay before I play the response quietly on the downbeat of measure 16. The space gives the illusion the hunting party has moved further away from our focused hunter and he now has to call on the Great Hunter motive for help and inspiration.

The main theme of the Hunt now returns in measure 17. A slight increase in tempo of the Hunt theme creates the atmosphere that our focal hunter is indeed struggling in the forest. After two short repetitions in measures 20 and 21 the Great Hunter motive

is now invoked in measures 22 and 23. As the hero of the *Daarfo* continues to struggle, the tempo again increases slightly and the Great Hunter motive is repeated in quick succession without any interjections from the main motive. (Fig. 2. 12) As if to respond to the hero's request, when the Hunter's Whistle motive returns in measure 30 the reply is immediate, signaling that the hero has caught up to the rest of the hunting party.

Fig 2. 12. Great Hunter Repeated



The short Bird Call interjected into the main hunting motive in measure 33, introduces the next section of the *Daarfo*. I choose to play it only once before progressing into the longer musical phrases. There were no specific words associated with these longer phrases, but Tijan did explain that they relate to the Bird Call therefore naming it the Long Bird Call. While the preceding section of the *Daarfo* centers on the Hunt motive, this section focuses on the Bird Call. The first entrance appears in measure 37 (Fig. 2. 13) but the full statement of the phrase does not occur until measure 41. (Fig. 2. 14) I have chosen to delay the full statement until after a brief pause in the Hunt motive to emphasize the thematic change to the listener.

Fig. 2. 13. Long Bird Call Fragment

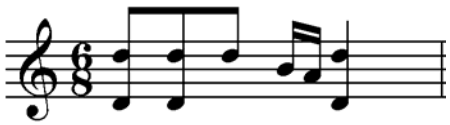
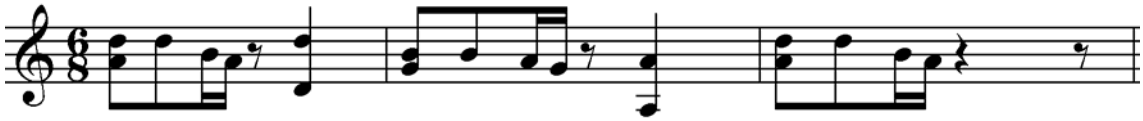
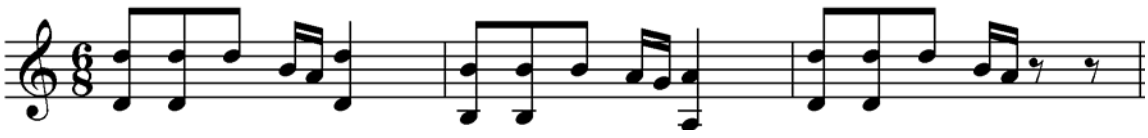


Fig. 2. 14. Long Bird Call



At the end of this phrase, the Hunt motive is briefly played and then the longer Bird Call phrase is repeated with its variation. (Fig. 2. 15) This leads into the final section of the *Daarfo* by omitting the Hunt motive.

Fig. 2. 15. Long Bird Call Variation



The main theme of the final section in the *Daarfo* is what I have named the Dirge. (Fig. 2. 16). Here *rubato* is often used as the dynamics decrease to a *mezzo-forte*. I have repeated the Dirge once in measures 49 through 50 and followed it immediately with the transition measure. (Fig. 2. 17)

Fig. 2. 16. Dirge Motive

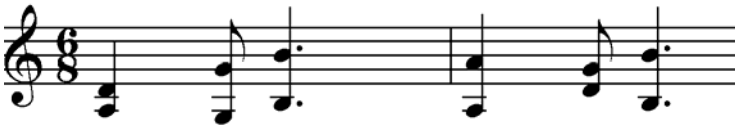
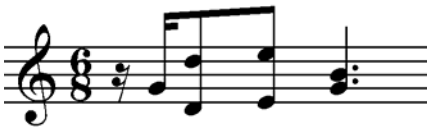
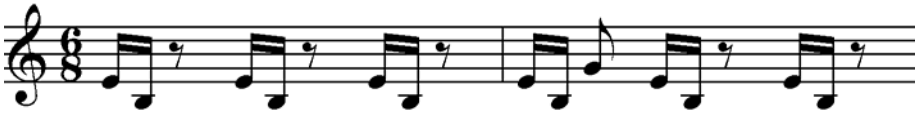


Fig. 2. 17. Transition to ending



The transition is followed by the closing motive, Hunt 2, again reminiscent of the hunter stalking his prey. (Fig. 2. 18)

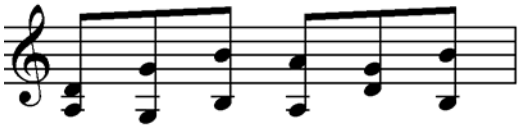
Fig. 2. 18. Hunt 2



This second Hunt motive will often close the *Daarfo*, but depending on how quickly the other musicians are arriving to the funeral site, the gyilimbwere may choose to repeat the previous two sections of the *Daarfo*. For a dramatic effect I chose to return once more to the longer Bird Call as a brief coda. Through the coda, I choose to *diminuendo* and gradually *rallentando* to bring the *Daarfo* to a close. Following the Bird

Call, the Dirge again appears and includes a short rhythmic variation in measure 59 to emphasize the gradually decreasing tempo. (Fig. 2. 19)

Fig. 2. 19 Dirge motive elongated



The transition phrase follows immediately, and the second Hunt motive, with subtle rhythmic variation, gradually takes the listener out of the *Daarfo*. After a brief moment of silence, I end the *Daarfo* with one last invocation of the Great Hunter.

CHAPTER 3. BIRIFOR FUNERAL REPERTOIRE: THE DAARKPEN

A. Overview and Origins

Through the *Daarfo* repertoire, we have seen how the gyil player can communicate with symbolic gestures to the participants of the funeral. In the following section of a man's funeral, the *Daarkpen*, the lead gyil player directly addresses the participants through the use of culturally recognizable phrases spoken on the instrument. The performance of understood phrases allows the gyil player to control the mood of the funeral. Certain selections may communicate sorrow, help deal with grief, or communicate insults to enforce social norms. Most importantly, the *Daarkpen* serves as the cue to include the instrumental ensemble and begin the dancing.

The *Daarkpen* is best analyzed as a medley or song cycle. Each section is based around short melodic songs which represent proverbs in the Birifor language. The *Daarkpen* repertoire contains hundreds of songs, each with specific relevance to a man's funeral. Songs may speak directly to the participants, the family of the deceased, or even the mythical *kontomble*. Tijan explained that while the *Daarkpen* repertoire is constantly evolving and new songs are composed to reflect themes of modernity; the songs taught to me and presented in this manuscript are thought to be some of the oldest in the repertoire. The text of these songs and their translations are illustrated in Fig. 3. 1.

Fig. 3. 1. *Daarkpen* texts

Text	Translation
"Ganda li vir ka dom la"	The strong man has died and his enemy is happy.
"Dom la vele ka vei wa"	Why has death come so early? Death should have waited another year so he could farm and feed his family.
"*Ganda li kachie"*	The man has broken the guinea corn. (He has died before harvesting his crop)
Kpil Kpala: "Kontomble a way, lam pulo Kontomble a way, gyil-saa ney"	Insults the *kontomble*'s appearance by comparing the size of their testicles to the *gyil-saa*, or largest gourd resonator on the gyil
"Nifa de na o beir" [1]	A bad person has died and taken his child with him. (The child will also die if there is no one to care for it)
"Namwine gon doya"	God knows the sufferers.
"Ganda yina"	The breadwinner is gone. What will you do tomorrow, how will you survive?
"Sa yina chena tem puolo"	The father is leaving the empty house. (He has no immediate descendants)

The *Daarkpen* immediately follows the reprise of the *Daarfo* with only a slight pause. The solo gyil player will begin by performing the first section of the *Daarkpen* and establishing a dancing tempo (dotted quarter note = 76 beats per minute). The beginning of the *Daarkpen* serves as an auditory signal for the other musicians to take their respective places at the other instruments. Musically, the first section of the *Daarkpen* serves as a transition for the solo gyilimbwere. Beginning with a dense musical composite between the two hands, the gyilimbwere gradually moves to a state of

[1] The text to this melody had been forgotten by Tijan and others when interviewed in 2004 and presented as "transitional material" in my lecture recital May 1, 2006. On my return trip in June of 2006, Tijan's son Isaac remembered these words which were originally taught to him by Kakraba Lobi.

coordinated independence where the left hand plays an accompaniment pattern seemingly independent from the melodic material of the right hand. The second section involves the entire ensemble performing widely recognized melodies to encourage the funeral participants to dance.

B. *Daarkpen* Musical Characteristics

While other versions of the *Daarkpen* certainly exist, usually much longer versions depending on the gyilimbwere, the solo section of the *Daarkpen* examined here can be best seen in a three part form which I will label sections A, B, and C. Section A begins with the soloist using a dense musical composite to set the tempo of the *Daarkpen*. Here the gyil player is very limited in terms of variation and improvisation. A short transition to section B separates the gyilimbwere's hands between the melody and accompaniment, allowing for variations in both the right and left hand patterns. The separation of the hands in section B is used to introduce the Birifor text as listed in Figure III.1 as well as additional symbolism. The texts performed in section B will only take place once to avoid redundancy. Section C serves as the last transition into the *Kpil Kpala* and signals the ensemble to begin. Generally the solo section of the *Daarkpen* moves very quickly in order to start the participants dancing.

The support gyil, *ganga*, and *lar* all enter with the beginning of the *Kpil Kpala*. From this point, the lead gyil player is free to choose songs appropriate for the funeral. Unlike the *Daarfo*, the songs of the *Daarkpen* cycle are often repeated various times, allowing both the lead gyilimbwere and the *ganga* player to stretch their improvisational skills. Here the musicians must inspire the funeral participants to both dance and mourn by the songs they choose and the energy in which they perform them. It is not unusual for the musicians to return to a particular song if the dancing component is seen as exceptional or there is a noticeable increase in wailing. For this *Daarkpen* arrangement, I have introduced each song, including principal variations in the lead gyil, and then

moved sequentially to the next leaving the number of repeats up to the discretion of the performer.

In terms of tempo and dynamics, the *Daarkpen* songs test the endurance of the entire ensemble. Each song should be performed at a strong *forte*, leaving only enough sonic space for the lead gyil variations and the improvisations of the *ganga* to pierce the musical texture. In order to properly inspire the dancers, the tempo must always remain constant, especially through song transitions. Any decrease in tempo would be seen by the participants as laziness in the musicians and the dancing would cease so they could be replaced.

C. *Daarkpen* Arrangement Analysis

The *Daarkpen* presented in this document is only one possible representation of the repertoire. Additional songs may be added, variations may repeat at different lengths, or the same songs can be presented in a completely different order than given here. For my arrangement, I have introduced each song in the order Tijan taught me. I have included the respective lead gyil variations as they would occur against a static time line created by the supporting gyil, *ganga*, and *lar*, even though in performance the drums may choose to highlight the lead gyil by playing variations of their own. I will first discuss the melodic arrangement between the two gyile and then give a representation of possible drum variations at the end of the score analysis.

The gyil player begins The *Daarkpen* with an introductory flourish, reminiscent of the *Daarfo*. (Fig 3. 2) The introductory statement ends in the first half of measure 2 allowing it to resolve into the main melodic motive for this first section of the *Daarkpen*. As stated, the *Daarkpen* starts with the soloist and will be analyzed in three parts. The main melodic motive of section A shows the hands working in a dense musical composite. (Fig. 3. 3)

Fig. 3. 2. Introduction

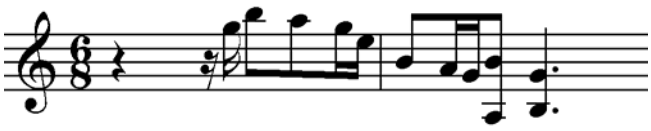
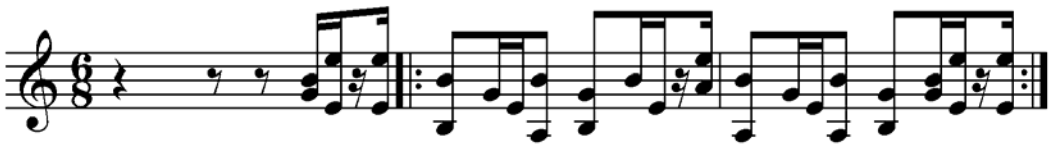


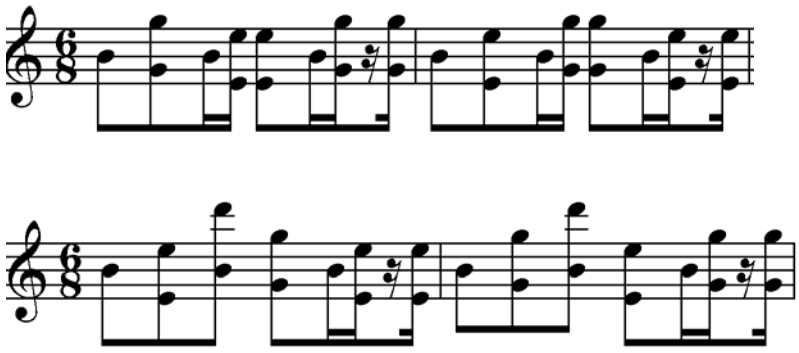
Fig. 3. 3. *Daarkpen* Section A Motive



Tijan also remarked that although the introductory flourish is seen as "professional," or the way a master gyilimbwere would begin, the *Daarkpen* could begin directly on this main motive as seen in Fig. 3. 3.

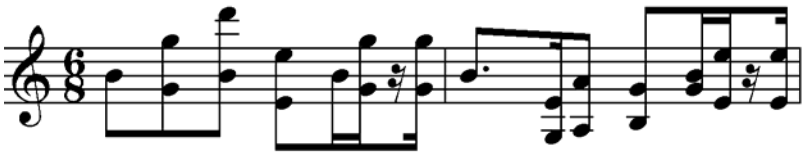
I repeat the main motive twice to establish the tempo and then move directly to the first variation to avoid redundancy. This variation, in two distinct sections and separated by a transitional measure, is seen in measures 7 through 11. (Fig. 3. 4) Here again the number of repetitions are left to the performer.

Fig. 3. 4. Variation in two sections



The variation then concludes with another transition at the end of the principal motive, analogous to the introduction. (Fig. 3. 5)

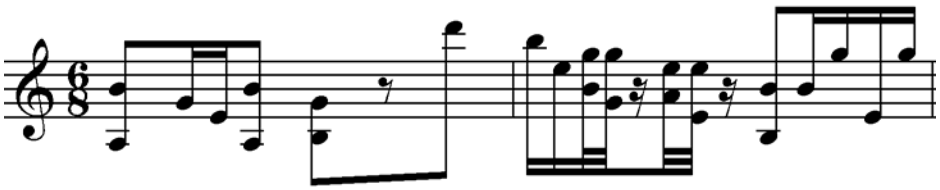
Fig. 3. 5. Return to principal motive



The remainder of the first *Daarkpen* section follows in a similar fashion. The principal motive is again stated from measures 14 through 17 and the variant appears once more in measure 18. I choose to shorten the variation in the second statement and move quickly back to a brief final statement of the principal motive in measures 24 through 28.

Section B of the *Daarkpen* begins with a striking transition in measure 28, jumping to the highest octave of the gyil. (Fig. 3. 6)

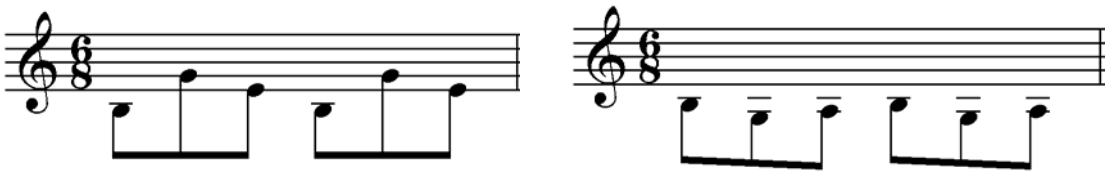
Fig. 3. 6. Transition to section B



This transition splits the two hands from their composite musical structure into a coordinated melody and accompaniment pattern. From measure 30 until the *Kpil Kpala*, the performer will keep an ostinato in the left hand. The performer has two melodic options to choose from, and may switch from one to the other at any time during sections B and C of the solo. (Fig. 3. 7) I have chosen to notate one ostinato for the first song of

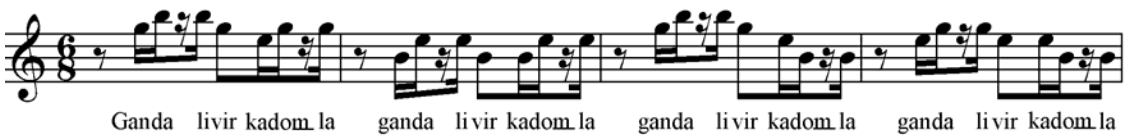
this section and the other for the second text, but the two can easily be interchanged. Skilled players will often smoothly alternate between patterns under any given melody. It is beneficial to practice all the melodic figures against one ostinato before applying them to the second.

Fig. 3. 7. Left hand options



The B section of the *Daarkpen* solo begins with the introduction of a familiar Birifor melody. (Fig. 3. 8) The melody is split into an antecedent and consequent phrase within itself. The first two measures are heard to the Birifor as a question, with the response in the two subsequent measures.

Fig. 3. 8. *"Ganda li vir ka dom la"*

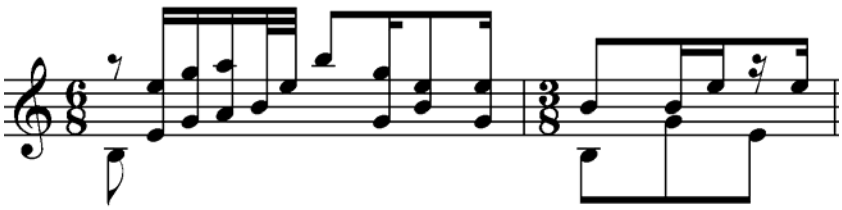


Interestingly, the response is customarily given before the question is asked and again after, thus elongating the phrase. This juxtaposition occurs in measures 30 and 31

with the repeat in measures 34 and 35. Tijan emphasized that because the response is already heard twice, repeating the entire phrase would be redundant.

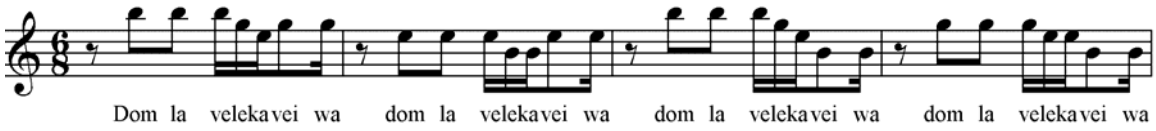
Another short transition appears in measures 36 and 37 before the new text is introduced. (Fig. 3. 9) Here, the left hand briefly breaks from the ostinato and joins the right. Rather then using a measure of nine-eight for the transition, I have scored one measure of three-eight to better illustrate where the left hand renews the ostinato. This also allows the new melodic idea to be seen completely in measure 38 and not split into the next measure.

Fig. 3. 9. Transition



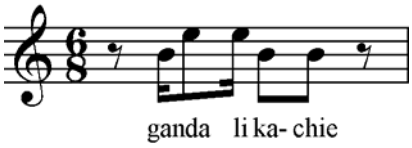
The next Birifor melody, beginning in measure 38, is structured the same as the first. (Fig. 3. 10) The entire phrase lasts six measures before moving into new melodic ideas, again stressing the idea to avoid redundancy and begin the dancing. While I have used the second left hand ostinato for this melody as a contrast, either ostinato can be used.

Fig. 3. 10. *"Dom la vele ka vei wa"*



The middle section (B) of the solo *Daarkpen* concludes with a number of gestures played in the right hand over the previous two left hand ostinatos. The gestures are primarily symbolic melodies separated by one recurring theme associated with the text *Ganda li kachie,* "the man has broken the guinea corn." (Fig. 3. 11)

Fig. 3. 11. "*Ganda li kachie"*

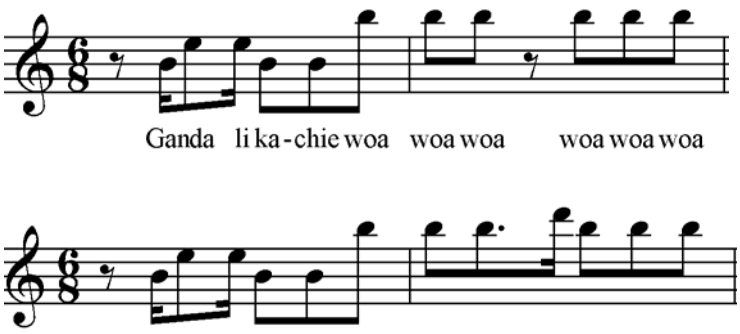


There are three main melodic gestures represented in this section, each with their own variation. All three gestures are performed in the uppermost register of the gyil to be easily heard against the left hand ostinato. The gyilimbwere is free to improvise the order of each gesture and their variations. Usually, a variation will not immediately follow the original gesture, but be interspersed among the other gestures. Tijan purposefully instructed this portion of the *Daarkpen* first. As the student becomes more comfortable with the left hand ostinato, it will be easier to improvise the order of the individual gestures. I learned each gesture against the same ostinato before switching the

left hand. This enables the student to focus on one hand or the other until both parts are mastered. Once the three gestures and their respective variations are learned it is much easier to go back and learn the longer phrases illustrated in Figures 3. 8 and 3. 10.

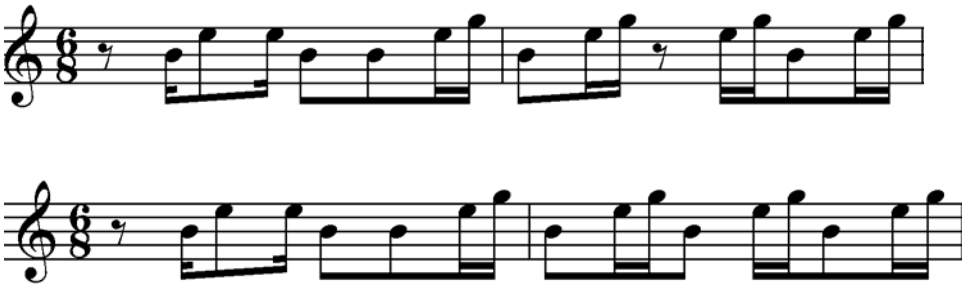
The first gesture, presented with its variation in Figure 3. 12, is the sound of ritual wailing expressed by the mourners at the funeral site.

Fig. 3. 12. Ritual wailing and variation



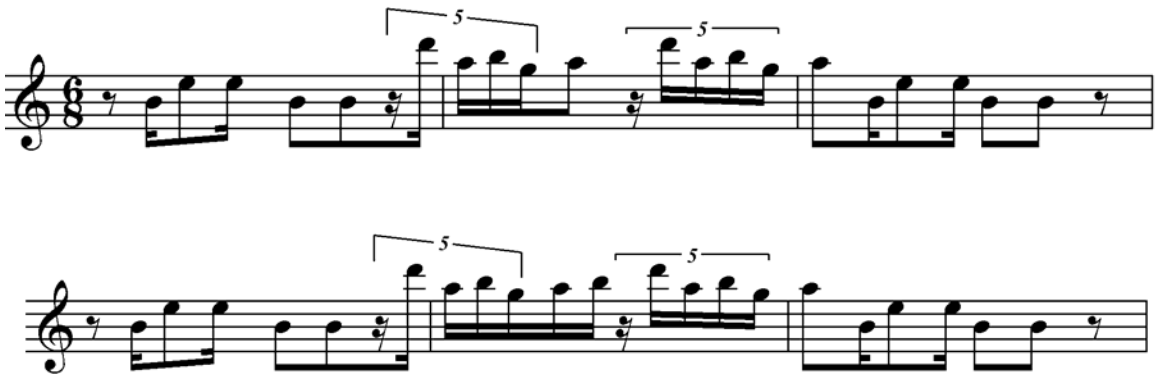
The second gesture, appearing in measures 46 and 47, is also thought to have an associative text, but could no longer be remembered by those interviewed. (Fig. 3. 13) Like the first gesture, the variation only differs by the addition of one note.

Fig. 3. 13. Second gesture and variation



Similar to the *Daarfo*, the third variation is recognized as the birdsongs found along the banks of the Black Volta River. (Fig. 3. 14) This gesture immediately looks very difficult, given the quintuplet grouping, but at tempo falls quite easily in the performers hands. When practicing this gesture it is important to understand the 5:3 relationship, keeping the hands separate until aligning simultaneously on the last note of the figure. Again, the variation consists of only one additional note giving the listener the illusion of one continuous bird call. Rhythmically, the performer may wish to delay the placement of the added sixteenth note to help sonically join the two quintuple groupings.

Fig. 3. 14. Birdcall and variation



In the score, I have alternated each of these melodic gestures as well as their respective variations from measures 44 through 59. The performer may repeat any or all of the gestures in any order. Again, the performer my choose either of the two left hand ostinatos to accompany each gesture.

The final section of the *Daarkpen* solo (Section C) occurs in measure 60 with the same transitional figure we have seen in measure 36. This last section is the final cue for the ensemble to enter. At this point, the gyilimbwere is gradually working down to the lowest register of the gyil to establish the tempo for the ensemble entrance. The left hand adds one new pattern to the original two ostinatos (Fig. 3. 15) while the right hand subtly improvises. The right hand changes into the middle register of the gyil until the two hands move in a parallel motion, during measures 78 through 81. The gyil player will often crescendo to the introduction of the new pattern, the *Kpil Kpala*, and the ensemble enters.

Kpil Kpala

The *Kpil Kpala* is the first in the series of ensemble songs within the *Daarkpen* repertoire. The ensemble, consisting of a support gyil, *ganga*, and *lar*, waits to hear the shift in the lead gyil player's ostinato to enter. The audible cue occurs in the lead player's left hand. The right hand remains on the eighth note pattern from the previous section while the left changes to emphasize the two against three feel. (Fig. 3. 15a) Another variation which Tijan refers to as the "professional" way of playing this 2:3 ostinato, is to add an additional note in the left hand part. (Fig. 3. 15b) I have introduced this variation as the ostinato in measure 94, but it should be noted that the variation can be used at the player's discretion. Some advanced players may use this variation as the main ostinato only interchanging it with example Fig. 3. 15a as the alternate. The support gyil joins the lead player, initially on the same pattern, and the drums begin their rhythmic accompaniment. This discussion will now focus on the lead and support gyile in relationship to the *Daarkpen* songs. The *ganga* and *lar*, crucial to the energy and time line of the ensemble, will be discussed at the end of the chapter.

Fig. 3. 15a. *Kpil Kpala* 2:3 ostinato

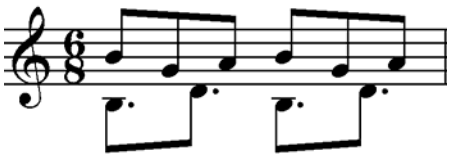
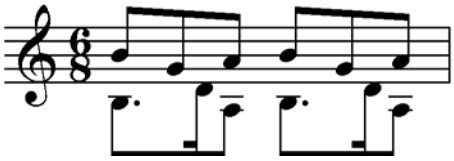


Fig. 3. 15b. 2:3 variation



The *Kpil Kpala* is played at the beginning of the *Daarkpen* cycle directly insulting the mythical *kontomble* to keep them away from the funeral celebration. Here the gyilimbwere reminds the listeners of the origins of the gyil and intensifies the animosity between the *kontomble* and the Birifor. As stated, the *kontomble* are dwarfs but they are also said to have grotesquely large genitalia. During the performance of the *Kpil Kpala*, the gyilimbwere will play the words: *"Kontomble a way, lam pulo, Kontomble a way, gyil-saa ney"* insulting the *kontomble* by saying that their testicles are the size of the largest gourd used as a resonator on the gyil, known as the *gyil-saa*.

Unlike other songs in the *Daarkpen* repertoire, the full text of the *Kpil Kpala* can be stated on the lead gyil but is most often arrived through a composite of the lead and support gyil patterns. The complete text can be heard on the lead gyil, as in Figure 3. 16 or as an overlapping call and response pattern between the lead and supporting gyile. (Fig. 3. 17)

Fig. 3. 16. Complete phrase

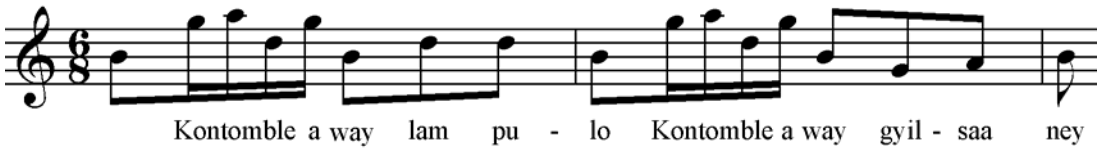
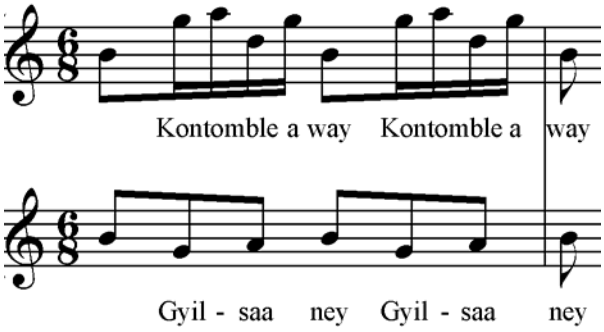
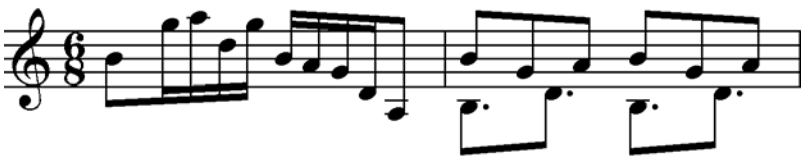


Fig. III.17. Composite phrase



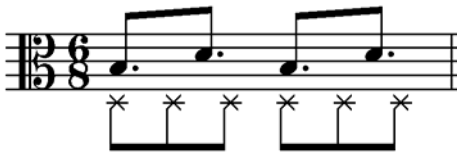
Often in the performance of the *Kpil Kpala*, the two gyil players may wish to reverse roles, allowing the support player to take over the lead melody and improvise through the variations seen in measures 89 and 90. To signal the role reversal the lead gyil player must play the descending passage in measure 92 and join the support player on the ostinato. (Fig. 3. 18) This will permit the support gyil to quickly move into the upper register of the instrument and take over where the lead player has left off. When satisfied, the support player also returns to the main ostinato using the same descending transition as seen in Figure 3. 18.

Fig. 3. 18. Descending transition



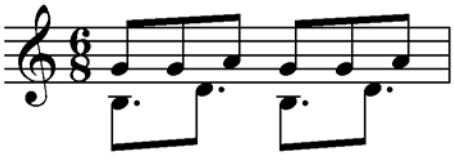
Once the support player has had an opportunity to take the lead and returned to the ostinato, he must now resume the supporting role and keep the *kparo* (time line) on the last bar of the gyil. The right hand of the support player moves lower on the instrument, switching to what the left hand played previously, while the left hand moves to the *kparo*. (Fig. 3. 19) It is now the support player's obligation to keep the basic melodic structure of the chosen songs as well as the time line for the duration of the song cycle.

Fig. 3. 19. Support with *kparo* (time line)



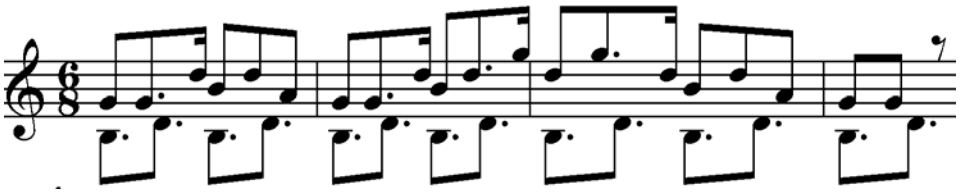
Once the support gyil has established the time line, the lead gyilimbwere has two options. Using a short melodic transition the lead gyil player may choose to add one additional melody to the *Kpil Kpala* or continue with the rest of the song cycle. This transition as first seen in measure 98 and can be repeated, allowing the lead player time to prepare for the next melody. (Fig. 3. 20)

Fig. 3. 20. Melodic transition



I have included an additional melody to the *Kpil Kpala*, seen in measures 99 through 104. (Fig. 3. 21) Similar to the other melodies heard in the *Daarkpen* repertoire, this melody also has textual associations but could not be remembered by Tijan. The melody is introduced in the same fashion as Fig. 3. 8. *"Ganda li vir ka dom la"* where the response pattern is performed first. Unlike the performance of the solo *Daarkpen*, here the gyilimbwere may choose to repeat the melody before returning to the main ostinato.

Fig. 3. 21. Melody



Instead of returning to the main ostinato, I have chosen to return directly to the melodic transition in measure 105 and move quickly to the next song of the *Daarkpen* cycle. With all the song transitions in the *Daarkpen*, it is very important for the lead xylophonist to pay close attention to the *ganga* ostinato. The transition out of the *Kpil Kpala* can be challenging because of the short melodic transitional motive. Other songs analyzed here will be the same length as the *ganga* rhythmic cycle, therefore easier to align at transitional points. As with all chamber music, clear eye contact between the performers or a subtle gesture from the lead player will help create a smooth transition and keep the tempo steady.

Upon the completion of the *Kpil Kpala*, the lead gyilimbwere may choose the order of the *Daarkpen* songs specific to the funeral. I have presented the following songs in the order they were instructed to me. Future performers may wish to rearrange the order of songs, repeat certain melodies, or not play individual songs. Further suggestions for programming will be given in the final chapter of this document.

"Nifa de na o bier"

The next song in the cycle, *"Nifa de na o bier"* translates as "A bad person has died and taken his child with him," meaning that the child will also die if there is no one to care for it. It is a very common song in the repertoire and would be played if the deceased has very young children or if he has many children and very few relatives to care for them. Another popular translation of this song can be heard on Kakaraba Lobi's album *Song of Legaa,* where Valerie Dee Naranjo interprets the song as "*Jon Plek Ple,"* meaning "a blind man is busy trying to tell me how much he has seen, yet since he is not able to see as I can, what can he possibly tell me?"[2] While I will focus on Tijan's translation, this notion of multiple interpretations within the same oral tradition certainly raises questions for future study regarding the frequency in which these multiple interpretations occur as well as the relationship between performance setting and textual meaning.

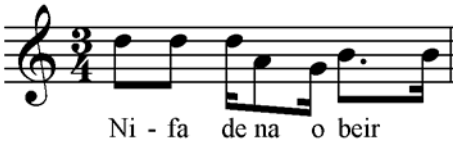
When the ensemble makes the transition from the *Kpil Kpala* in measure 106, I have changed the meter to three-four to simplify the notation and to also emphasize the

[2] Kakraba Lobi, *Song of Legaa,* Liner notes by Valerie Dee Naranjo, Lyrichord Discs, LYR-CD-7450.

shift from a compound to simple metric pulse. Birifor performers do not recognize a change in meter, but they do respect the consistency of the eight note pulse in the *kparo*. The supporting drum parts should not be affected by the change in meter and should continue to propel the forward motion of the ensemble.

The melody for "*Nifa de na o bier*" last only one rhythmic cycle of the *ganga* and is doubled in the supporting gyil. (Fig. 3. 22) The lead gyil will often play the melody doubled in octaves and switch between the instrument's registers as seen in measures 106 through 110. While keeping the *kparo* consistent, the support gyil must double the main melody of the song in either of the lower two octaves on the instrument.

Fig. 3. 22. "*Nifa de na o bier"*



The lead gyil variations start in measure 111 and are presented in only one possible order. There are four individual variations which can be interchanged throughout this song and alternated between statements of the main melodic phrase. The first three variations can be played individually such as Figure 3. 23a, or combined to create a longer "call and response" phrase. (Fig. 3. 23b.)

Fig. 3. 23a. Individual variations

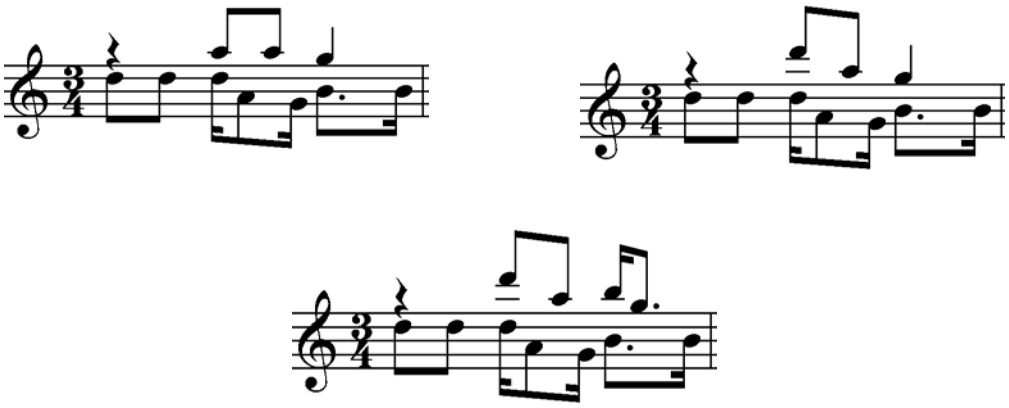
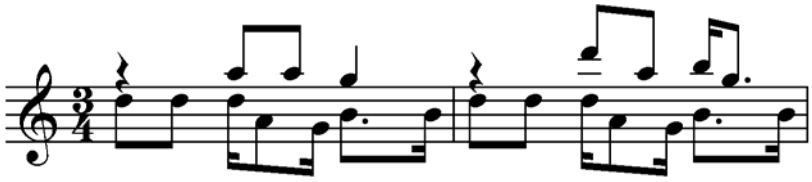
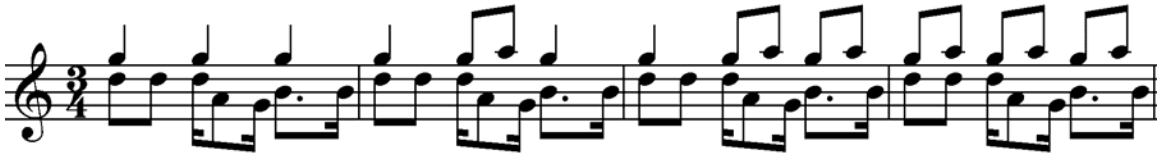


Fig. 3. 23b. Call and response phrase



The longer variation, seen in measures 114 through 118, (Fig. 3. 24) can be stretched by repeating each individual measure, building tension between the lead and supporting parts. Often the lead gyilimbwere will create a crescendo over the course of this variation, and giving extra weight to the off-beat eighth notes in the last measure of the variation. The continuous eighth notes at the end of the phrase are seen as a climax, often encouraging the *ganga* player to improvise as well. This measure may be repeated, especially if it excites the dancers, before returning to the main melody of the song.

Fig. 3. 24. Variations

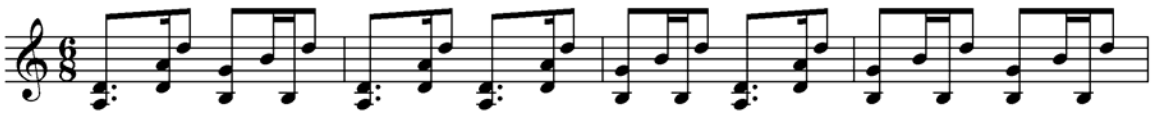


I have chosen to end this longer variation and move directly back into one of the shorter variations as seen in measure 119. Before moving on into the next song of the *Daarkpen* cycle, the main melody for "*Nifa"* will be repeated in the middle register of the gyil. The repetition of the main melody serves as the cue as well as the transition for the support xylophonist. Once visual confirmation has been established both players can move directly into the next *Daarkpen* song.

"Namwine Gon Doya"

An accurate transition into "*Namwine gon doya*" is crucial between the two gyilimbwebe due to the comparatively long ostinato cycle. I have chosen to return back to the six-eight meter of the *Kpil Kpala* to better emphasize the metric pulse of the melody. As with the previous transition, the time line and support drums must remain constant. The textual phrase itself is short, only one measure, but the entire phrase lasts over the course of four measures. (Fig. 3. 25)

Fig. 3. 25. Complete phrase



The text, "*Namwine gon doya*" or "God knows the sufferers" speaks directly to the mourners of the funeral and aligns in each measure of the phrase in both the lead and supporting gyil parts. (Fig. 3. 26)

Fig. 3. 26. "*Namwine Gon Doya*" Lead and support gyil

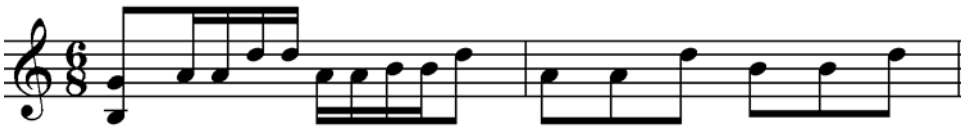
Looking closer at the four measure phrase reveals a typical pattern found in Dagara and Birifor gyil music. By splitting the first measure according to the metric pulse we have two melodic units which can be labeled as A and B. (Fig. 3. 27) Following the phrase seen in measures 123 through 126 we can label each measure getting the formula: A-B, A-A, B-A, B-B. The lead gyil player must be able to coordinate the principal melody with the accompaniment pattern just as a jazz soloist must regard a given chord progression.

Fig. 3. 27. Sections A and B of the "*Namwine*" phrase

A B

The lead gyilimbwere must make a brief transition to the upper register of the instrument before improvising an additional melody. While the lead gyil player can choose how many times to repeat the main phrase, the transition to the upper register must take place during the B-B segment of the phrase. The transition serves as a quick flourish into the upper register followed by one measure establishing the lead player's left hand ostinato. (Fig. 3. 28) The lead gyil player keeps this left hand pattern in conjunction with the support gyil's main supporting ostinato.

Fig. 3. 28. Lead gyil transition to upper register



I have included two complete cycles with an "improvised" melody. While the left hand continues playing the supporting ostinato, the right hand is obligated to follow the melodic contour of the left hand's phrase. The pitches I have indicated in measures 132 through 142 illustrate the melodic shape with slight variation in the rhythm. The

rhythmic element here coincides with the 2:3 polyrhythm, again to encourage dancing. The lead player's right hand should play forcefully emphasizing the polyrhythm and not become convoluted by trying to be too rhythmically active.

Returning to the main melodic idea of the "*Namwine*" phrase requires no extra melodic transition. Similar to the entrance of the song, the lead gyilimbwere should jump from the improvisatory melody to the main melody at the beginning, the AB segment of the phrase. Once returned to the main melodic phrase, the lead player can decide to use the previous melodic transition and continue to improvise, or make the transition into the next song of the *Daarkpen* cycle. In the score, I have notated one complete cycle between the melodic improvisation and the next song. In an ensemble setting, at least one more repetition may be required before the support player anticipates the song change. At the end of the melodic cycle the gyil player can move directly into the next song of the *Daarkpen*.

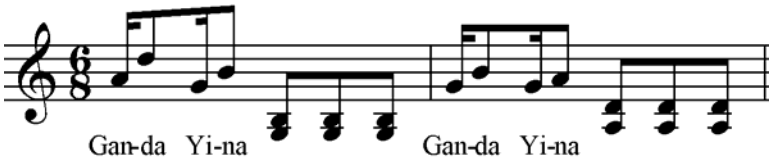
"Ganda Yina"

"*Ganda yina*" is one of the more popular songs in the *Daarkpen* repertoire, even outside of the Birifor culture. To the Birifor, "*Ganda yina*" is a very important song at the funeral confronting the mourners with "The breadwinner is gone. What will you do tomorrow? How will you survive?" The funeral participants will often respond with increased crying and fervent wailing, characteristic to the funeral ceremony. The Dagara understand the cultural significance of the melody but also appreciate the song for the musical dexterity required to perform it. Despite the song's complexity, it is one of the

few Birifor songs taught at Bernard Woma's Dagara Music Center and specifically addresses right hand improvisation against a left hand ostinato.

"*Ganda yina*" is structured in a two measure antecedent-consequent phrase, with the last three eighth notes of each measure creating a repeating melodic structure for multiple variations. (Fig. 3. 29) The support gyil is again responsible for keeping the phrase consistent while the lead gyilimbwere coordinates the melodic variations with the phrase structure.

Fig. 3. 29. "*Ganda Yina*"



The lead gyil player will usually begin "*Ganda yina*" with both hands playing the main melody, seen in Figure 3. 29. Once the support gyil has joined the melody and the song has been established, the lead player will keep the left hand on the ostinato and begin adding melodic variations with the right. (Fig. 3. 30a). The basic two-handed lead part is seen in Figure 3. 30b.

Fig. 3. 30a. Left hand ostinato

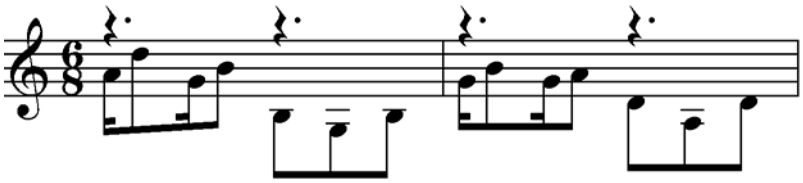
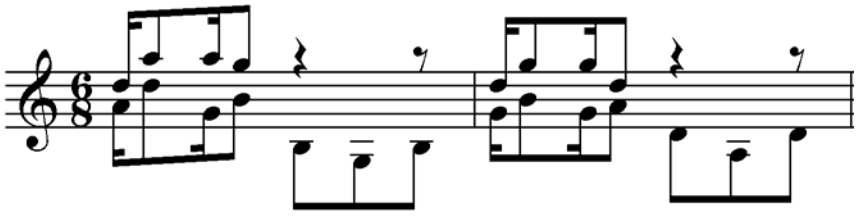


Fig. 3. 30b. Two-handed lead

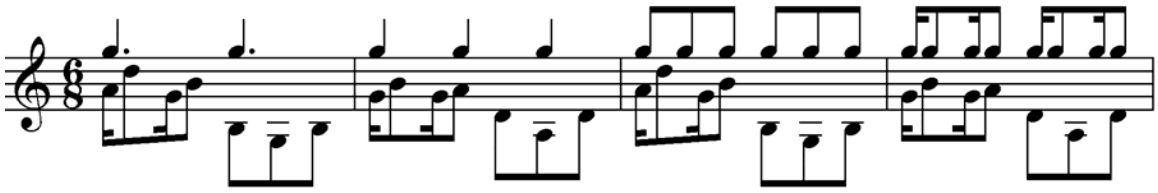


This left hand ostinato is often very challenging for students and becomes increasingly complex as variations are added. Tijan's teaching strategy was to show me each variation slowly in isolated segments and always in combination. Bernard uses this ostinato to facilitate coordinated independence between the two hands by allowing the student to improvise basic rhythms in the upper register of the gyil. I have found that the combination of the two teaching styles works very well.

As a preparatory exercise, it is helpful to first explore the rhythmic relationships possible against the left hand ostinato. A helpful approach is to choose any note in the upper octave of the gyil and practice each rhythm in the following exercise. (Fig. 3. 31) Repeat each rhythm until comfortable before moving on to the next. Focus on keeping the left hand constant before changing pitches with the right hand. Once the left hand is

“free” from the right, work through each song variation, at a slow tempo, and coordinate both hands.

Fig. 3. 31. Coordination exercise



I have included four variations beginning in measure 151 of the arrangement. Two of the variations function as call and response melodies which can be repeated before moving to other variations. (Fig. 3. 32a) The gyilimbwere must play the entire variation, the call and response, before progressing to any other pattern. The shorter variations can be interjected in any order but must fall in the proper location against the melodic phrase. (Fig. 3. 32b) The lead player may also choose to switch back to the original two handed melody, seen in Figure 3. 29, as either another variation or used as a cue to move into the next song as it functions in measure 164. The lead player must finish the “*Ganda yina*” melodic cycle completely in order to begin the next song properly on the next downbeat as seen in measure 167.

Fig. 3. 32a. Call and response variations

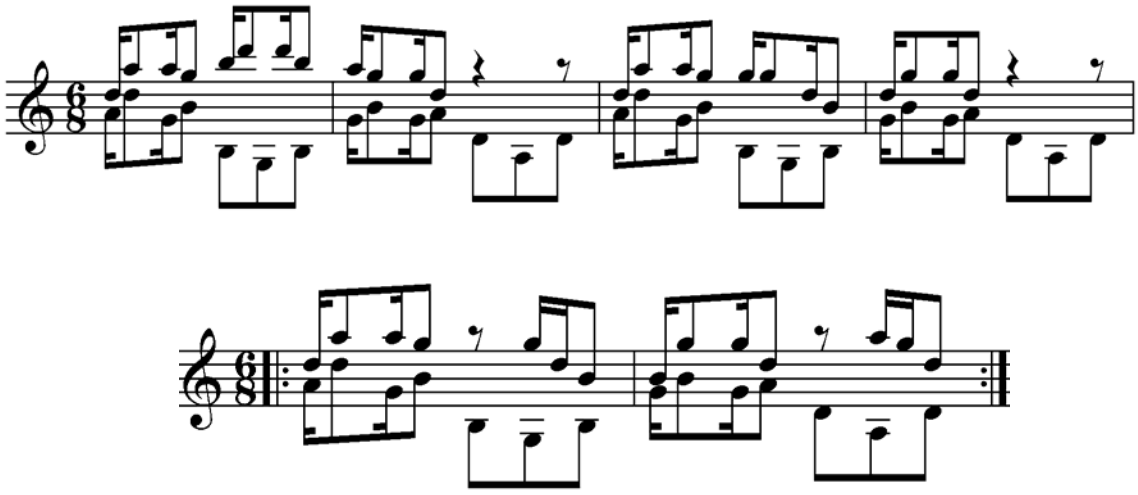
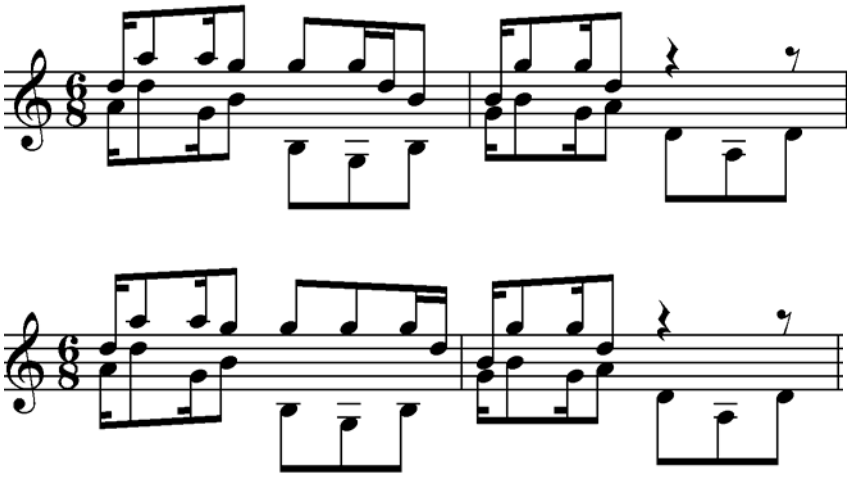


Fig. 3. 32b. Short variations

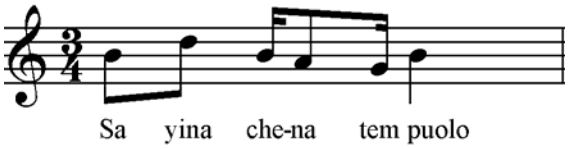


"Sa yina chena tem puolo"

The final song analyzed "*Sa yina chena tem puolo*" translates "the father is leaving the empty house" meaning that the deceased has no children to care for his home or farm, and is commonly used to end the *Daarkpen* cycle. (Fig. 3. 33) Musically, it is

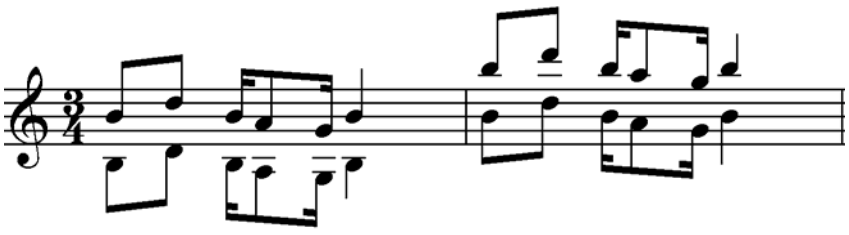
very similar to "*Nifa de na o bier*" and an experienced gyilimbwere will alternate between the two songs. The left hand ostinato is less complex then "*Ganda Yina*" and like "*Nifa*" has a shorter melodic cycle. The support gyil can also alternate between the lower and middle register of the instrument to provide some variation.

Fig. 3. 33. "*Sa yina chena tem puolo*"



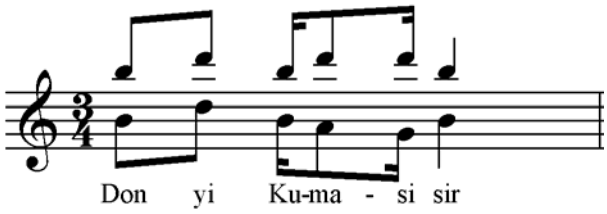
The transition into "*Sa yina*" is immediate with the lead player emphasizing the melody in octaves. At the transition point, measure 167, I have changed the meter again to three-four to emphasize the change in metric pulse. The lead gyil player will establish the song in octaves alternating between the upper and lower register of the instrument. (Fig. 3. 34) Once comfortable, the lead player will then keep the melody as a left hand ostinato allowing the right hand to improvise.

Fig. 3. 34. Alternating registers



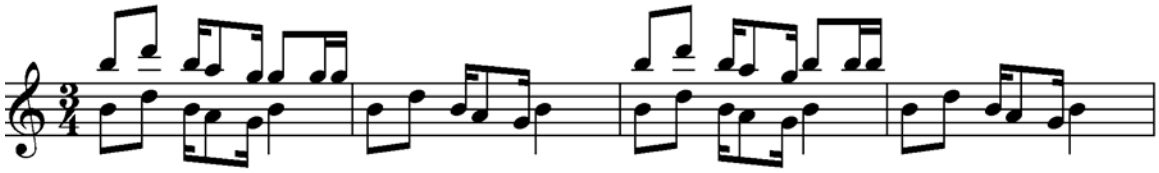
The first variation heard in "*Sa yina*" in measure 170, is also a variation on the text of the song. Here the lead gyil keeps the ostinato in the left hand but with the right hand performs "*Don yi Kumasi sir*" translating as "Take the lead to Kumasi." (Fig. 3. 35) This text references the deceased as if they were going on a trip. In the Northern Region, anytime someone makes a trip to the south of Ghana, they claim to be heading to the city of Kumasi even if it is not their intended destination. The deceased has now "taken the lead" on this final trip and the gyilimbwere reminds the participants that inevitably, everyone will follow.

Fig. 3. 35. "*Don yi Kumasi sir*"



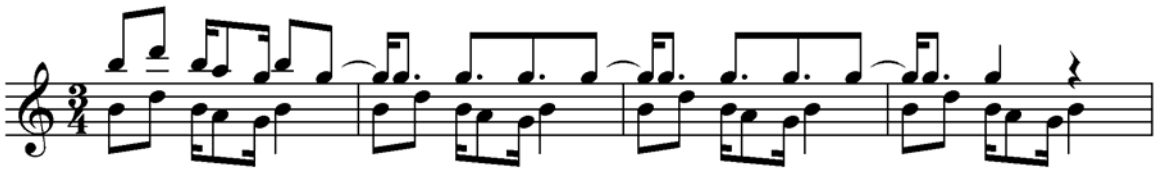
Other variations in "*Sa yina*" allow the lead player to leave space, especially for the *ganga* to improvise. The next variation occurs in measure 173 and features the familiar call and response formula of previous songs. This variation lasts through four measures and can be repeated. (Fig. 3. 36) The call and response alternates between measures of silence, leaving space for the drum to improvise or for the support gyil to change registers. The entire four measures should be completed before changing right hand variations.

Fig. 3. 36. Call and response



The final variation seen in "*Sa yina*" begins in measure 177 and highlights a 2:3 hemiola[3] in the upper register. (Fig. 3. 37) Here again, the support gyil alternates between the low and middle registers of the instrument and the *ganga* is encouraged to improvise. This hemiola particularly elicits an enthusiastic response from the participants as it signals one of the last times to dance *Daarkpen* at the funeral.

Fig. 3. 37. Hemiola variation



The lead gyilimbwere might want to simply allude to the hemiola by introducing only one note at a time, (Fig. 3. 38a) or alternate the notes to disguise the figure. (Fig. 3. 38b) While I have chosen to resolve the hemiola figure on the second beat of the measure, where the hands align, the gyilimbwere is free to stop at any point in the variation.

[3] For this document, I will use the term "hemiola" in an African context, referring to either a 2:3 or 3:2 polyrhythm.

Fig. 3. 38a. Hemiola entrance

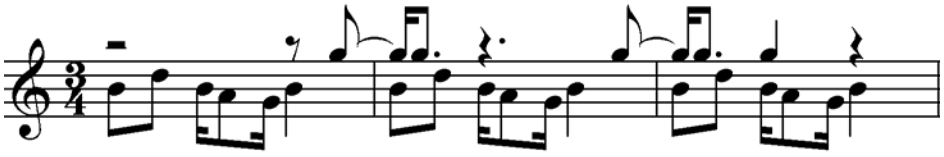
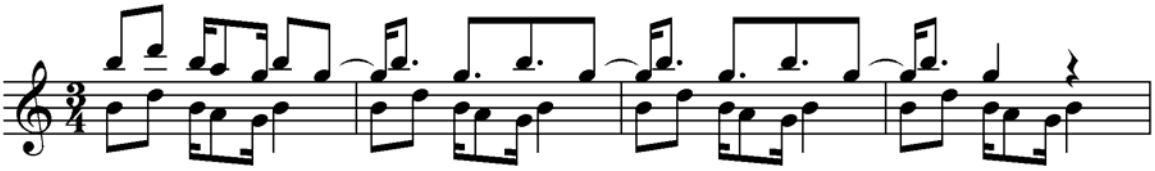


Fig. 3. 38b. Alternating notes



"*Sa yina*" ends with the same octave displacement as the beginning. Repetition of the main melodic pattern in the lower registers of the gyil creates an easily recognizable cue for the ensemble. For a staged performance, I have ended the final song of the *Daarkpen* cycle with a *ritard*, so that the ensemble will end in unison on the final note. A true *Daarkpen* performance at a Birifor funeral will usually end when the lead player simply stops playing. The rest of the ensemble will stop abruptly and leave the instruments for a short break or libation before resuming the funeral ceremony.

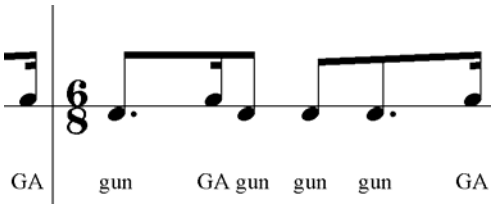
The *Daarkpen* Drums

The *Daarkpen* drums, the *ganga* and *lar*, form an integral element in the dynamic and energy of the funeral ensemble. Since the playing technique of these instruments was discussed in Chapter 1, here I will discuss their rhythmic cycle and variations. As the focus of this document is on the gyil, there are only a few drum variations presented with the *Daarkpen* repertoire.[4]

Each drum has a basic ostinato rhythm which creates a time line for the *Daarkpen*. Both the lead and support gyil players must regard and understand each song of the repertoire in accordance to this basic underlying feeling of pulse. Just as the *gankogui* bell dictates the feeling of Ewe drumming, the *ganga* and *lar* drive the rhythmic energy for the gyilimbwere and dancers. For the drummers, rather then simply counting the cycle in a westernized "1-2-3," they internalize the rhythmic pattern by vocalizing the *ganga* part using syllables to represent the pitch inflections of the drum. I can adopt David Locke's approach to learning the basic rhythmic cycle for each of drum pattern by "always try[ing] to establish your feeling for timing and groove by concentrating on this *sounded* phrase."[5] The basic *ganga* pattern can be heard with an anticipation of the down beat: GA-gun, GA-gun-gun-gun. (Fig. 3. 39) While not necessarily counting, the *ganga* player must be cognizant of this phrase during variations and not lose where the cycle begins.

[4] See Appendix C for further drum variations.
[5] David Locke, *Drum Gahu* (Reno, NV : White Cliffs Media, 1998), 16

Fig. 3. 39. Basic *ganga* pattern



The *ganga* variations have many rhythmic possibilities. As mentioned under the *ganga* performance practice, the expanded technique using the toe of the master drummer can free up the hands to also play an additional bell pattern. Tijan has mentioned some of the *ganga* parts are also symbolic of text, similar to the gyil songs. Here and in Appendix E, I have presented the few variations Tijan taught me. The deep oral tradition surrounding the *ganga* still needs to be explored.

The *ganga* variations can either help define the pulse of the ensemble or create a rhythmic tension between parts. (Fig. 3. 40a and 40b) In terms of technique, the variations are not demanding, nor are they fast and flashy. The goal is to propel the momentum of the ensemble forward and provide a solid rhythmic foundation for the dancing. Once the ensemble is established at the beginning of the *Kpil Kpala*, the *ganga* is free to improvise variations as the player sees musically appropriate.

Fig. 3. 40a. *Ganga* variation helping the pulse

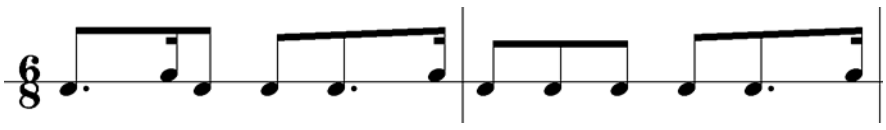
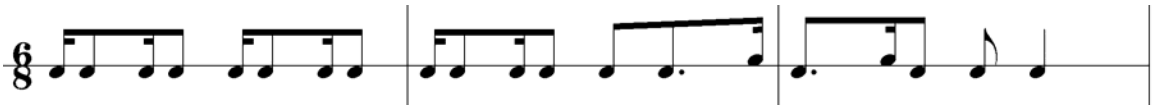
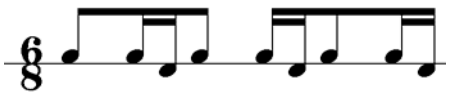


Fig. 3. 42b. *Ganga* variation creating rhythmic tension



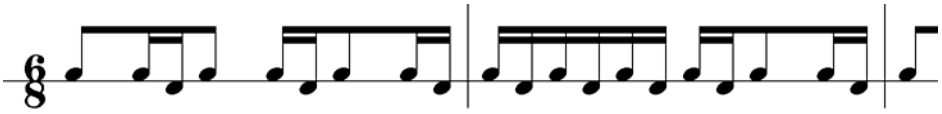
The *lar* plays a much simpler basic pattern and helps to drive the ensemble by filling in the *kparo* of the support gyil. Since the high drum matches exactly to the stick part of the supporting gyil, a slight emphasis is given to the lower drum of the pair. (Fig. 3. 41) The contrast between the low *ganga* pattern and high *lar* creates an energetic rhythmic time line for the gyil ensemble.

Fig. 3. 41. Basic *lar* pattern



The *lar* variations are generally very simple, keeping the high drum constant and adding notes to the lower drum. (Fig. 3. 42). As with the *ganga*, the *lar* player can play a variation at anytime always keeping in mind that it is still a supporting instrument to the ensemble and not the featured performer.

Fig. 3. 42. *Lar* variant



While the *lar* are experiencing a decline in use among the Birifor, Tijan highly recommended their use in the ensemble. The sharp attach of the drums adds a wonderful vigorous and driving quality to the musical fabric of the Birifor funeral repertoire. It is Tijan's hope and mine that increased awareness and subsequent research into the playing of the *lar* will help prevent the instrument from falling into obscurity.

CHAPTER 4. DAGARA RECREATIONAL REPERTOIRE: BEWAA

A. Overview and Origins

Bewaa represents the recreational music of the Dagara people and is commonly heard in almost any festival setting. Primarily associated with the harvest, *Bewaa* is often performed at a variety of occasions such as official matters of the chieftaincy, naming ceremonies, weddings, or simply played while relaxing on a hot afternoon drinking *pito*, the local millet beer. As the nature of the repertoire is often playful and humorous, Dagara funerals are perhaps the only ceremony where *Bewaa* is not commonly heard, instead replaced by the complex and mournful funeral repertoire of *Binne*. However, if the deceased was known as a *Bewaa* musician or dancer, an impromptu performance may be arranged at the end of the funeral ceremony.

Originally seen as frivolous, *Bewaa* was only performed on the *kpan kpul* or pit xylophone. The *kpan kpul* is thought to be the predecessor to the gyil because of its basic construction.[1] The instrument uses the same tuning and similar construction as the gyil, but instead of a frame or gourd resonators, the bars are placed on two straw rails and positioned over a shallow trench in the ground. Though the trench does not match the projection of the gourd resonators, the portability of two straw rails and a set of bars allows for much easier transportation.

Today the *kpan kpul* is primarily a children's instrument. When the Dagara traditional signs appear to indicate that a newborn will grow to be a gyilimbwere, such as

[1] See Appendix A for the role of the *kpan kpul* in the history of the gyil.

being born with clenched fists, the parents are to construct the *kpan kpul* at once. The child will grow up playing the *kpan kpul* and learning the traditional Dagara repertoire in the evening with other children of the surrounding village, before the parents invest in a pair of gyile.

In the last fifty years, *Bewaa* has made the transition from the *kpan kpul* onto the gyil and the repertoire is being recognized as culturally significant. Bernard Woma, born in 1963, can remember the transition taking place during his childhood. He considers himself fortunate, for his father encouraged him to play the entire Dagara repertoire on the gyil, even though some members of the Dagara community still thought *Bewaa* as inappropriate.[2] Historically, only the serious repertoire, such as *Binne*, was performed on the gyil. The Dagara traditionally believe the gyil holds great spiritual power and would not risk damaging the instrument at a common festival. Originally, the Dagara performed exclusively on the larger eighteen-note gyil which was far more susceptible to damage when transporting then the *kpan kpul*. With the adoption of the smaller fourteen-note gyil from the Birifor and the shift from traditional beliefs to larger organized religions, the *Bewaa* repertoire was able to make its gradual transition from the *kpan kpul* onto the gyil.

Ethnomusicologist Trevor Wiggins cites one man, Polkuu Paul, as the leading force behind the development of *Bewaa* in the 1950s. Polkuu Paul, from the linage of Nandom chief Naa Imoro, had organized a performing group known as Nandom Sebkpere, specializing in traditional recreational and fetish dances of the area. In the

[2] Woma, Bernard. Personal interview. April 2, 2006. Tucson AZ.

early 1950s Naa Imoro arranged a gathering of regional chiefs, all of which brought groups of musicians and dancers for entertainment. It was at this assembly where a group from Jirapa performed a recreational dance known as *Bawa*. Wiggins notes:

> This [*bawa*] was quite similar to the Nandom *sebkper* dance so the local people liked it. Polkuu decided to teach this dance to his group. In West Africa such a process always involves making some changes so that the music and dance becomes personal, not just a copy of what is done elsewhere. Thus *bawa* became *Bewaa* in Nandom, the new name recalling the Dagaare word *Bewaa*re (they are coming). *Bewaa* also became faster than its parent so that it was more exciting. Songs were written or adapted to the new style and the dance format was also changed.[3]

While Bernard does not deny the circumstances in Wiggins' testimony, he does clarify that Polkuu was the probably the first to present a choreographed version of the *Bewaa* dance. As stated, *Bewaa* was traditionally performed on the *kpan kpul* most often by non-traveling groups. The terms *Bawa* and *Bewaa* are also very similar and could be easily perceived as contradictions in dialect between the Nandom and Jirapa groups. Bernard does insist that the *Bewaa* dance did not evolve from *Sebkpere*. *Sebkpere*, meaning "someone who contracts/dances well," is still regularly performed. It can be heard today, with or without its religious connotations, and requires the *ganga* drum as accompaniment rather then the *kuor*. Although popular festivals in the Upper West Region now celebrate *Bewaa*, including the festivals of Kobine in Lawra, Kakube in Nandom and Bernard's own Kukur-Bagr in Fielmuo, further research on the repertoire's origin is still needed.

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[3] Trevor Wiggins, Liner notes for *Bewaare/ They are coming: Dagaare songs and dances from Nandom, Ghana.* Field recordings from Ghana's Upper West Region 1994-1995 (Pan Records: Pan 2052CD), 6.

The *Bewaa* repertoire is constantly evolving. The basic structure of *Bewaa* is simple and recognizable allowing non-gyil players to compose new songs. While women do not commonly play the gyil, as it was originally taboo, they are responsible for most of the new repertoire performed on the instrument. Wiggins states "The people who write the songs are highly regarded. New songs are often to some extent adaptations of existing songs continuing the circle. Many of the songwriters are women, but the men who write are generally better known."[4] New songs are often composed to take the mind off of hard labor, and when heard by the gyilimbwere, are arranged for the *Bewaa* repertoire. It is important to note that the songs in the Jirapa style presented here are compositions by Bernard, designed specifically to teach non-Ghanaians. Thematic material is diverse and can include topics such as work, leisure, love, sex, insults, proverbs, and the supernatural. The musical delivery of these songs can range from thoughtful and poignant to vulgar and humorous and can often be directed at a particular individual participating at the event. The *Bewaa* songs and themes discussed in this document can be seen in Figure 4. 1.

[4] Ibid, 10-11.

Fig. 4. 1. *Bewaa* Songs

Songs	Interpretations
1. *Kpan Maa* *Kpan maa, be ma le fo sa na bele* *Kpan maa, be ma le fo sa na bele*	"Your head is not straight" A silly insult to someone who does not listen to advice
2. *Te Waa Na* *Te waa na yee, te waa na* *Te waa na yee, te waa na* *Te waa na yee, te waa na* *Te waara, te waana te waa bin gbele e kule*	"We are coming to show you our legs and go home" Meaning we are coming to dance and not be a burden
3. *Sebru Bam Bala Bala* *Sebru bam bala bala, sebru naak yaa be wai* *Sebru bam bala bala, sebru naak yaa be wai*	"The great dancer didn't come yet that is why the dance is not stable" An excuse to say the dance could be better
4. *To Me Na* *To me na, te to me na, te to me na* *Te saa yir puo* *To me na, te to me na, te to me na* *Te saa yir puo*	"That is our work in our father's house" Everyone must work to the best of their abilities
5. *Saa Be Waa Na* *Saa be waa na yee* *Be waa na yee* *Saa be waa yee* *Be waa na te na koi*	"There is no rain for us to farm" An excuse to relax and dance

B. *Bewaa* Musical Characteristics

Although *Bewaa* is indigenous to the Dagara there are two different performance styles based on geographical region, the Nandom style and Jirapa Style. Both styles share the same instrumentation, themes, and musical characteristics but differ slightly in their overall structure and their interaction with the dancers. This document offers an analysis of both styles. The first three songs in Figure 4. 1 are in the Nandom style, while songs four and five, "*To Me Na*" and "*Saa Be Waa Na*" are in the Jirapa style.

Bernard regards the Nandom style as the "older" style compared to the "newer" Jirapa style but also acknowledges that is this is how he was introduced to them and does not necessarily reflect their chronological order. This may also coincide with the evolution of *Bewaa* from the *sebkpere* and *bawa* traditions previously mentioned by Wiggins. Metrically, the Nandom style is based in triple meter while the Jirapa style, analyzed here, is based in duple. Unfortunately, this metric differentiation does not always hold true. The newest Nandom style of *Bewaa*, known as *Piru*, will often be in duple meter, such as the popular song "*Yaa Yaa Kole*." As the songs presented here in the Jirapa style were composed as a teaching tool by Bernard in duple meter, they may not necessarily be representative of all songs from Jirapa.

In terms of form, both styles share the same four section, compositional structure: the time line or *kparo*, the bass line melody or *yagme*, the song or *yiilu*, and the solo or *yangfu*. The main difference occurs in the solo passages where the lead gyilimbwere interacts with the dancers. In the Nandom style, the lead player is free to improvise a solo resulting in less stylized movements by the dancers. The Jirapa style, in

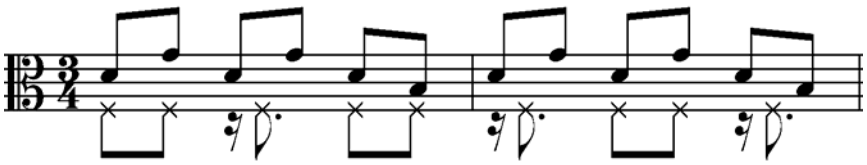
contrast, has a very specific solo for each individual song resulting in a choreographed response from the dancers. Other subtle differences will be mentioned in the following description of *Bewaa*'s musical structure.

Kparo

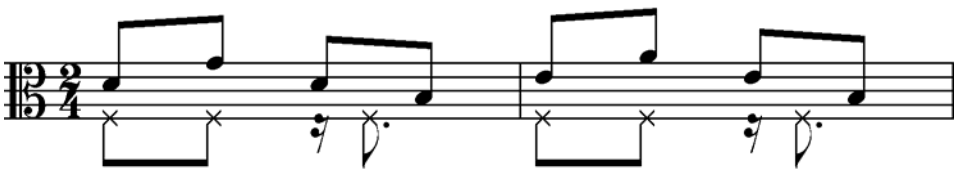
As seen in the Birifor funeral repertoire, the *kparo* serves as the time line in the overall musical structure, tapped with the shaft of the mallet on the lowest note of the gyil by the support player. Interestingly, the rhythmic ostinato is the same for both the Nandom and Jirapa styles, causing a hemiola in the Nandom style. (Fig. 4. 2) In both styles, the *kparo* coordinates closely with the *kuor* drum and will be discussed at the end of this chapter.

Fig. 4. 2. *Kparo*

Nandom Style



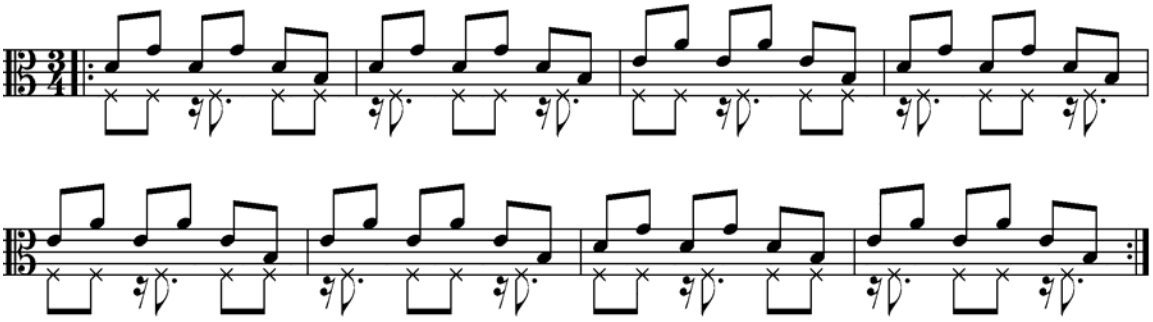
Jirapa Style



Yagme

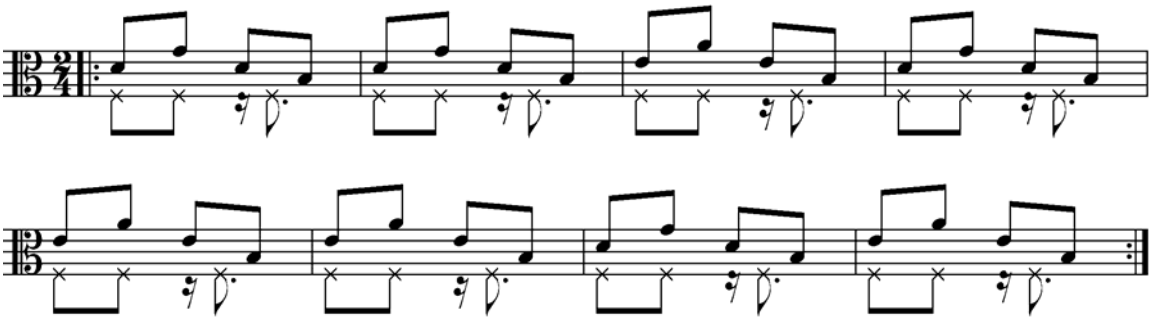
The *yagme* is the bass line, referred to as the "melody" by Bernard, and specifically defines the *Bewaa* repertoire.[5] It is performed in conjunction with the *kparo* by the support gyil player and will be kept in the left hand of the lead player in the Nandom style. The *yagme* provides the harmonic form of *Bewaa* and features the same AABA BBAB form analyzed in "*Namwine Gon Doya*" of the *Daarkpen* repertoire. While Bernard teaches the AA repetition as the beginning of the *yagme* cycle, the individual song may start anywhere in the pattern. It is important to practice the Nandom style with the *kparo* in order to coordinate the *yagme* pattern against the left hand hemiola. Figure 4. 3a and 3b give the complete *yagme* with *kparo* for the Nandom and Jirapa styles respectfully.

Fig. 4. 3a. *Yagme* with *kparo*, Nandom style



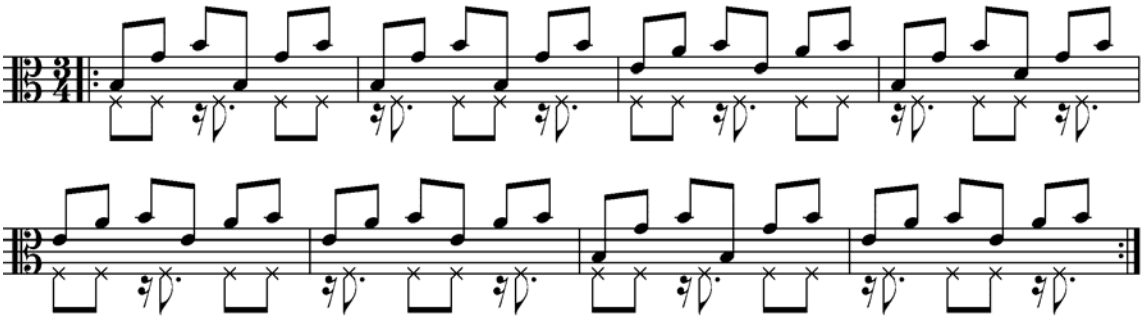
[5] The *yagme* can also be referred to as the *lenu* by the Dagara. This also references the Dagara *dalari* drum ensemble where the lowest pitched drum providing the fundamental ensemble rhythm is called *lenu*.

Fig. 4. 3b. *Yagme* with *kparo*, Jirapa style



While the support gyil has very little room for variation, alternate patterns for the *yagme* do exist in the Nandom style. The variation in Figure 4. 3c can be substituted by the support gyil player at the beginning of any *yagme* cycle throughout the *Bewaa* performance, always observing the relationship to the *kparo* with the left hand.

Fig. 4. 3c. Nandom *yagme* variation



Yiilu

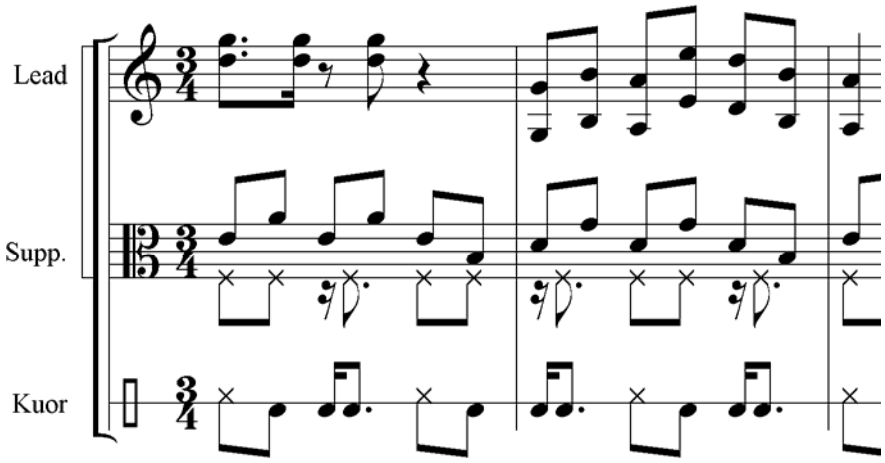
Yiilu is a general term referring to the entire *Bewaa* song genre, just as the term "aria" would refer to any number of compositions in the opera repertoire. The individual

song, referred to as the *zog par*, is performed on the lead gyil and sung by the dancers and participants. The singers will match the pitch of the gyil and occasionally harmonize with the individual song. Each *zog par* has a specific manner in which it must synchronize with the *yagme*. The relationship between the five *zog par* and *yagme* presented in this document will be discussed under the Musical Analysis section of this chapter.

Yangfu

The *yangfu* section of *Bewaa* features the lead gyilimbwere as a soloist, and is where the dance actually takes place. During the *yiilu*, the dancers will circle the instrumental ensemble and sing until hearing the cue from the lead gyil to begin the dancing. In the Jirapa style, each individual song has a specific *yangfu*, or solo, which the dancers will immediately recognize and begin their choreographed movements. The Nandom style allows the lead gyil player freedom to improvise on the highest two pitches of the instrument. The dancers will recognize the register change as an aural cue to begin the dancing. As the lead gyil improvises, the dancers in the Nandom style have freedom to improvise or use more personalized movements. To exit the *yangfu* and return to the *yiilu*, the lead gyil will give another cue to stop the dancing. In the Nandom style, the same cue is used after each solo in order to return to the *yiilu*. (Fig. 4. 4) The choreographed nature of the Jirapa style requires each *yangfu* a specific cue to return to the *yiilu*. Each *yangfu* and cue will be further discussed in the Musical Analysis section of this chapter.

Fig. 4. 4. Nandom style cue to return to the *yiilu*

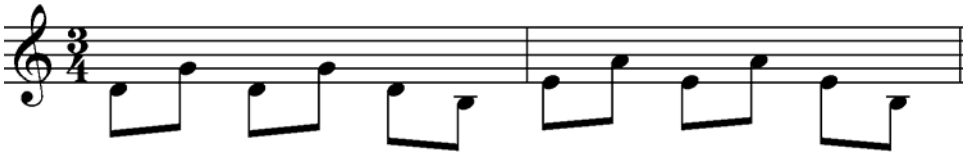


C. *Bewaa* Arrangement Analysis

The musical analysis for the *Bewaa* repertoire is straightforward. Since the support gyil remains on the *kparo* and *yagme*, I will focus on the lead gyil part, specifically alternating between the individual songs (*zog par*) and the solo (*yangfu*). The role of the *kuor* and possible variations will be discussed at the end of the chapter. The *Bewaa* song repertoire can be performed in any order, generally grouped within the respective Nandom and Jirapa styles, therefore keeping the meter changes to a minimum. This analysis will first focus on the Nandom style.

The lead gyil begins the ensemble by introducing the *yagme* in the left hand. The gyilimbwere is free to start anywhere within the pattern, and upon recognition of the form, the support gyil and *kuor* will enter. I have selected to start with a two measure introduction, which I consider to be the beginning of the *yagme* cycle.[6] This beginning point will not necessarily be suitable for all songs in the *Bewaa* repertoire but will work well for the three Nandom style songs analyzed here. (Fig. 4. 5)

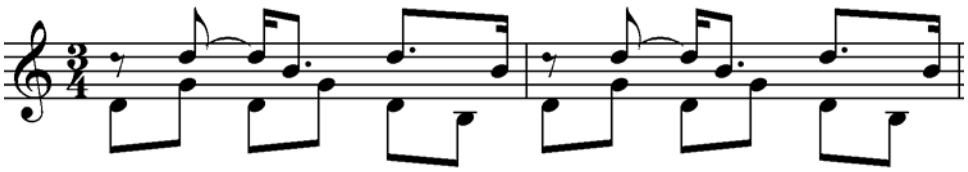
Fig. 4. 5. Introduction



[6] Bernard teaches the *yagme* cycle beginning with AA in the AABA BBAB pattern, allowing non-Dagara students more time to hear the pattern before joining the ensemble.

Immediately following the introduction, I have included what Bernard refers to as "filler" or what could be considered as a holding pattern. As the left hand continues to play the *yagme*, the right hand is engaged by creating a 2:3 hemiola starting on the second eighth note of the measure. (Fig. 4. 6) I have notated how the right hand ostinato functions through one full course of the *yagme*, but often this pattern will be used in smaller sections, between phrases of the individual songs. This pattern is especially useful at the beginning of the performance as an introduction of the instrumental ensemble, and used to give the singers/dancers time to assemble and make their entrance. While it is possible to use this pattern as a transition between *Bewaa* songs, Bernard feels that a long transition, spanning one cycle of the *yagme*, will take away the energy of the performance.

Fig. 4. 6. Right hand 2:3 hemiola "filler"



Nandom Style: *Zog par*

The basic structure of these three *Bewaa* songs is simply an alternation between the song (*yiilu*) and solo (*yangfu*). In order to avoid redundancy, neither the *yiilu* nor *yangfu* should be repeated too many times. I have chosen to repeat the *zog par* followed by the *yangfu* four times each, and then repeat the structure allowing the audience to hear

each complete song twice. The second transition from the *yangfu* should move directly into the new *zog par*.

The first two *Bewaa* songs analyzed are of similar structure, "*Kpan Ma*" and "*Sebru Bam Bala Bala*." "*Kpan Ma*" translates as an insult meaning "your head is not straight" directed to someone who does not listen to advice. "*Sebru Bam Bala Bala*," or "the great dancer has not yet come, that is why the dance is unstable" is a joking excuse for any errors or inconstancies in the performance. Structurally, both songs consist of two lines of text separated by the 2:3 "filler" in the right hand. (Fig. 4. 7a and 7b) The gyilimbwere must pay close attention to where the text occurs in regard to the bass line *yagme*. In Figures 4. 7a and 7b, I have deleted the *yagme* to illustrate the connection between the gyil and the text, but in performance the *yagme* should be performed throughout. As a general rule, since the singers are matching the pitch and rhythm of the gyil, the melody of the text should be dynamically emphasized by the performer to assist the singers.

A quick transition is required to start the *yangfu* on the beginning of the accompaniment cycle. For a song such as "*Sebru Bam Bala Bala*," on the last repeat of the song, the lead gyilimbwere will often leave out the last note(s) of the melody in order to clearly cue the *yangfu* for the singers. (Fig. 4. 8)

Fig. 4. 7a. "*Kpan Ma*"

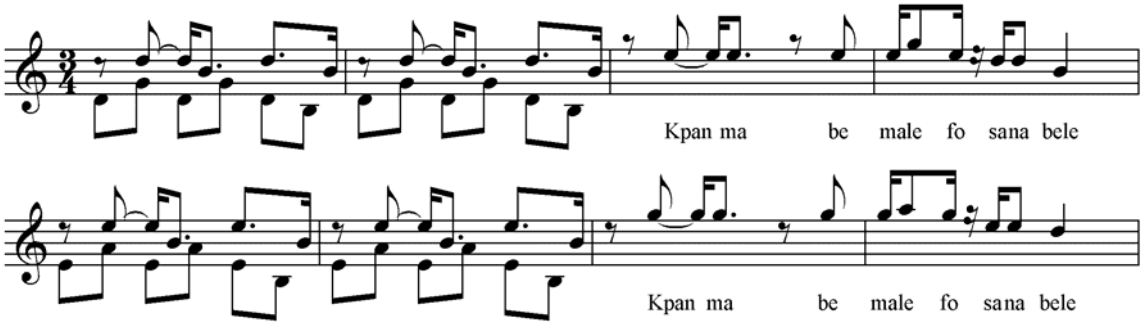


Fig. 4. 7b. "*Sebru Bam Bala Bala*"

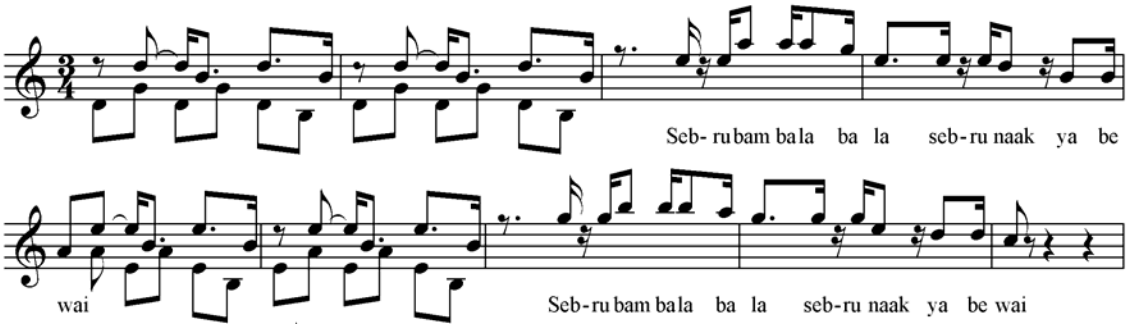
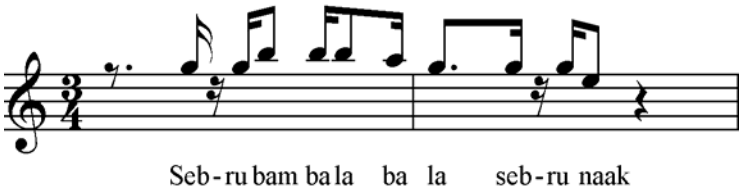


Fig. 4. 8. Abbreviated melody to cue *yangfu*



The third *Bewaa* song presented, "*Te Waa Na Ye*," translates "We have come to show you our legs and go home" meaning that the performance is meant for entertainment and not to be a burden on those hosting the event. "*Te Waa Na Ye*" poses a

different challenge to the gyilimbwere. Rather then alternate between song text and the 2:3 hemiola, the lead gyil performs four lines of text corresponding with the *yagme*. (Fig. 4. 9) In the *Bewaa* transcriptions, Appendix D, I have arranged "*Te Waa Na Ye*" between the other two Nandom style to better distinguish the difference in song structure to the listener. As with "*Sebru Bam Bala Bala*", the lead gyilimbwere may choose to omit the last notes of the song to allow for a clear, audible transition from the *zog par* to the *yangfu*. (Fig. 4. 10)

Fig. 4. 9. "*Te Waa Na Ye*"[7]

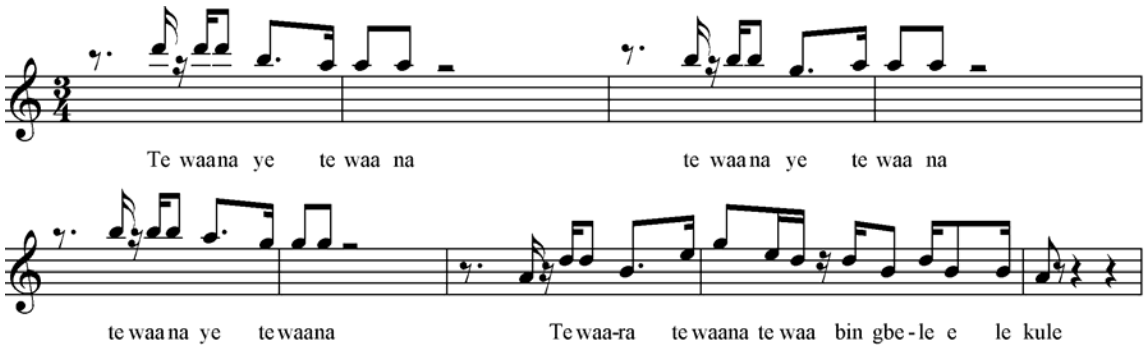
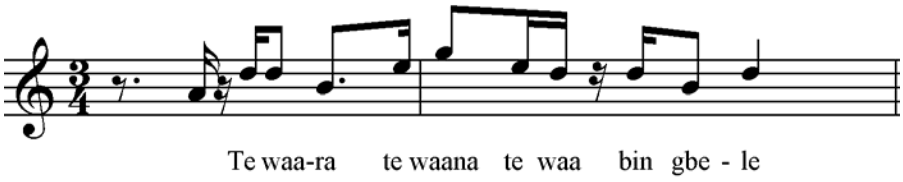


Fig. 4. 10. Abbreviated melody to cue *yangfu*



[7] Again for the example I have omitted the *yagme* to clearly illustrate the text associations with the melody. The performance would include the *yagme* played in conjunction with the song as seen in the transcriptions.

Nandom Style: *Yangfu*

The *yangfu* is the most musically challenging section in the Nandom style of *Bewaa*. In addition to the lead xylophonist's responsibility to direct the ensemble, the lead player must also be able to improvise while interacting with the dancers. The lead gyilimbwere is responsible for organizing the number of repetitions between the *zog par* and the *yangfu*, but if the dancers feel the lead gyil player is repeating the *zog par* too many times, they may incite the transition by shouting "*Yang*!" short for *yangfu*. At the end of the *zog par*, the gyilimbwere will announce the *yangfu* with an abrupt register shift to facilitate the dancing.

To begin the dance, the lead gyilimbwere will improvise on the two highest sounding notes of the instrument. The register change by the lead player serves as an auditory cue to the dancers to begin. The left hand may either remain on the *yagme* as before, or also change to the middle register of the instrument to reinforce the solo. (Fig. 4. 11) It is important to note that as the left hand jumps to the middle register to support the right hand solo, there is still a strict adherence to the underlying *yagme* played by the support gyil.

Although the right hand is free to improvise on the upper two notes of the gyil, Bernard has recommended three specific and commonly acceptable patterns to experiment with, each creating a similar hemiola to that of the supporting gyil's *kparo*. (Fig. 4. 12) These patterns are best used as a learning aid, individually coordinated with the supporting hand, before the performer attempts to interchange them. In the transcriptions, I have illustrated each pattern as its own *yangfu*, coordinated with either

the middle register supporting pattern, Fig. 4. 11, or with the original *yagme*. Once comfortable with each pattern, the performer may choose to improvise the *yangfu* based around these variations.

Fig. 4. 11. Lead gyil support hand for solo

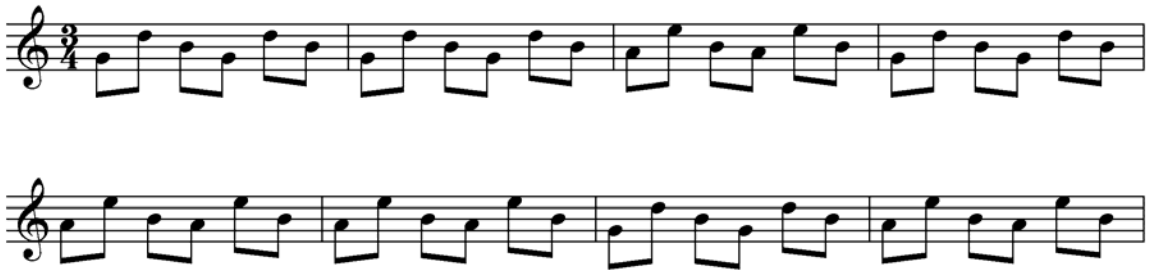
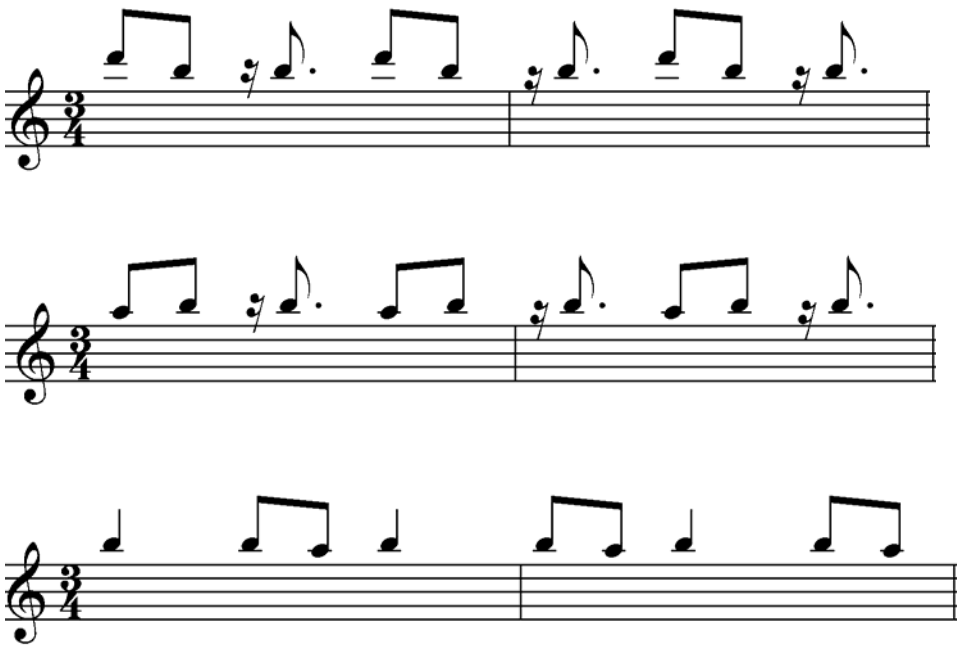
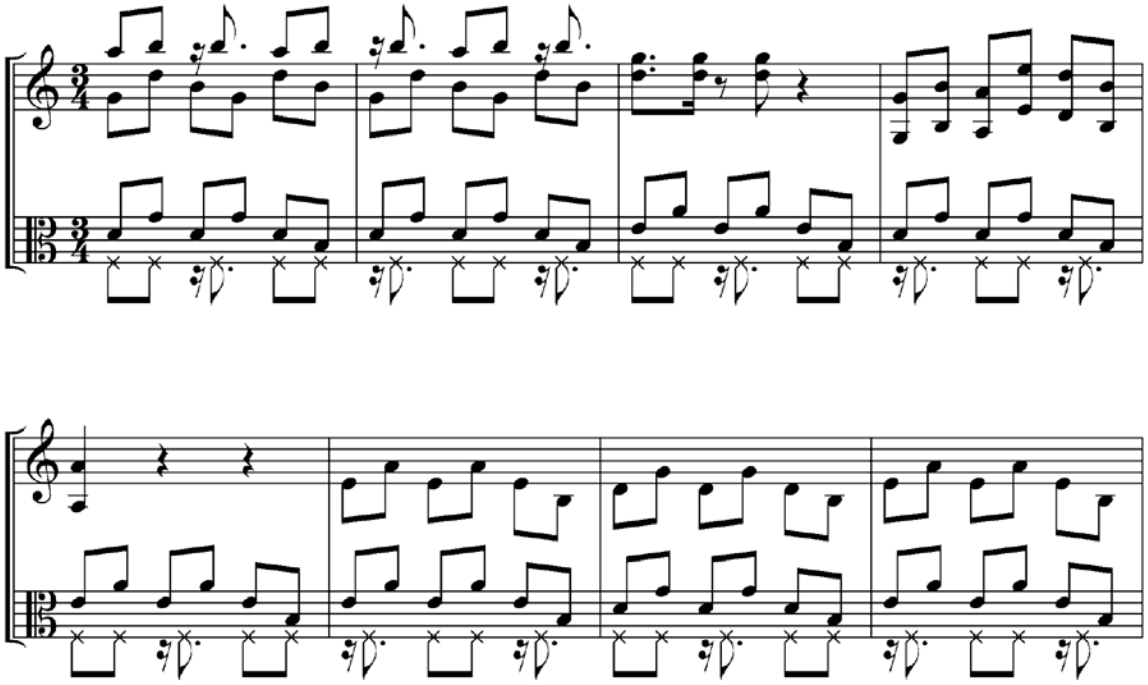


Fig. 4. 12. Three possible right hand *yangfu* patterns



The lead gyilimbwere must also control the transition from the solo back into the song. The *yangfu* should be short and energetic, inspiring the participants to dance. If the *yangfu* goes for too many repetitions, the ensemble becomes tired and the performance loses its energy. Bernard recommends playing the *yangfu* for approximately four cycles of the *yagme*. On the fourth repetition, the lead gyilimbwere must give the cue to the dancers to stop the dance and return to the song. The audible signal must be played forcefully so the immediate jump to the lowest octave of the gyil can easily be heard by the dancers. The cue is always played in the exact spot of the *yagme* as seen in the third measure of Figure 4. 13. An early entrance or delay of the cue could offset the rest of the performance from the *yagme* and *kparo*. Upon correctly finishing the cue, the gyilimbwere may immediately enter again with the left hand supporting *yagme* and "filler" or simply wait to play the next song at the beginning of the *yagme* cycle.

Fig. 4. 13. Cue to end the *yangfu* in relation to the *yagme* and *kparo*



In the transcriptions (Appendix D), I have chosen to perform the Jirapa style of *Bewaa* second. The cue to end the Nandom solo also can be used to create a clean transitional point before changing meters to the Jirapa style. Rather then coordinate the sudden metric shift within the support gyil part, simply stopping the pattern on the end of the cue works very well. The lead gyilimbwere can accentuate the last note and alert the dancers by using the shaft of the mallet to give a swift *glissando* up the range of the instrument. The support gyil player may immediately resume the *kparo* in conjunction with the new *yagme* in the duple meter to begin the next *Bewaa* selection.

Jirapa Style: *Zog par*

As mentioned, Bernard uses these two Jirapa style songs as in introduction to *Bewaa* for Westerners. The structure of the songs is very similar to the Nandom style of *Bewaa*, but with the exclusion of the "filler." These two Jirapa examples are identical to their Nandom counterparts, each following the same alternation between *yiilu* and *yangfu*. The songs, "*To Me Na*" and "*Saa Be Waa Na*," have been simplified so that the beginning gyilimbwere performs the main *zog par* with both hands and leaves the accompaniment pattern strictly to the support gyil. (Fig. 4. 14a and 14b)

Fig. 4. 14a. "*To Me Na*"

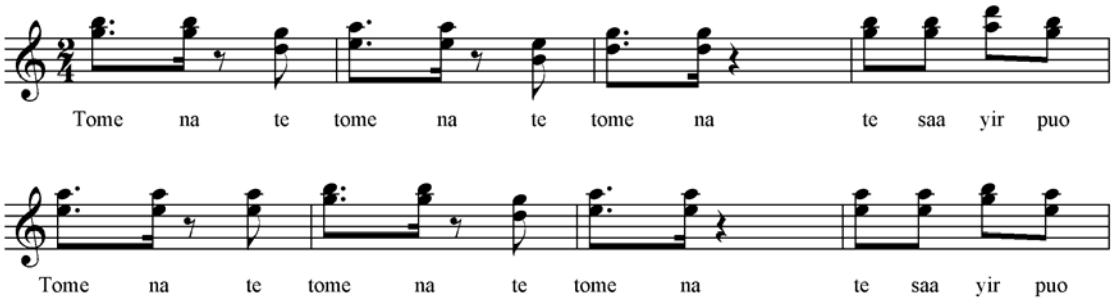
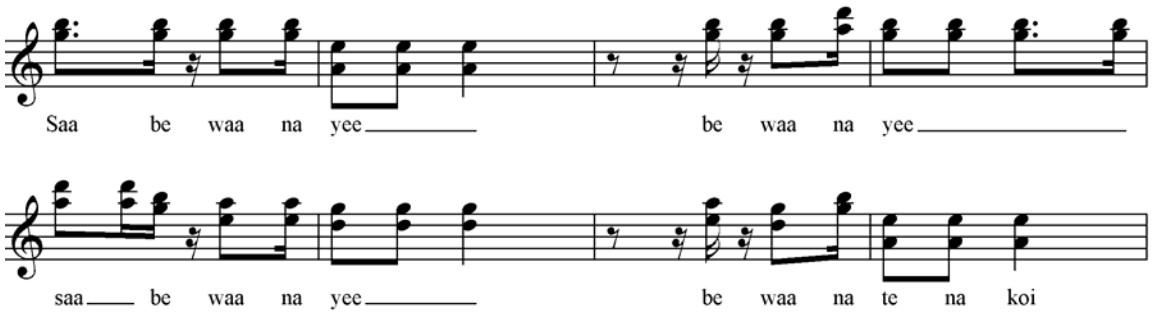


Fig. 4. 14b. "*Saa Be Waa Na*"



Conveniently, both songs begin in the same place against the *yagme*. As with the Nandom examples, Bernard gives the order of the *yagme* cycle as AABA BBAB but both songs begin on the last AB of the cycle, thus rendering the *yagme* pattern: ABAA BABB. (Fig. 4. 15a and 15b)

Fig. 4. 15a. "*To Me Na*" with *yagme*

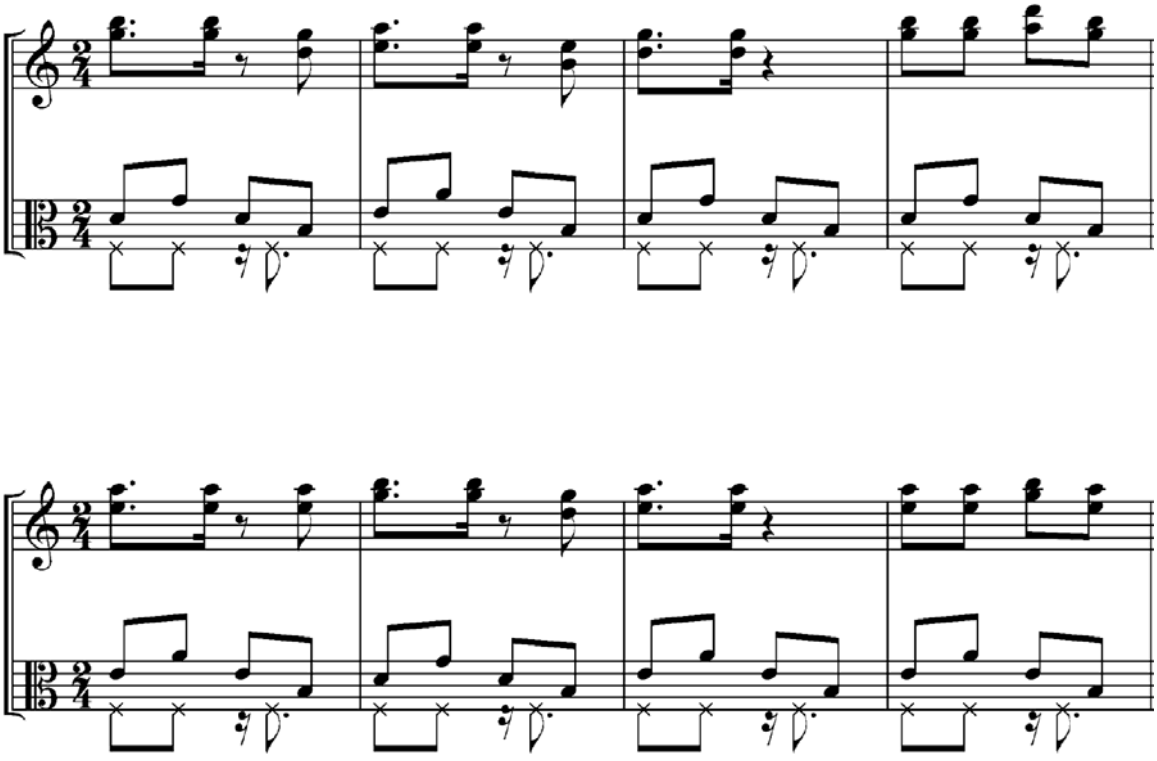
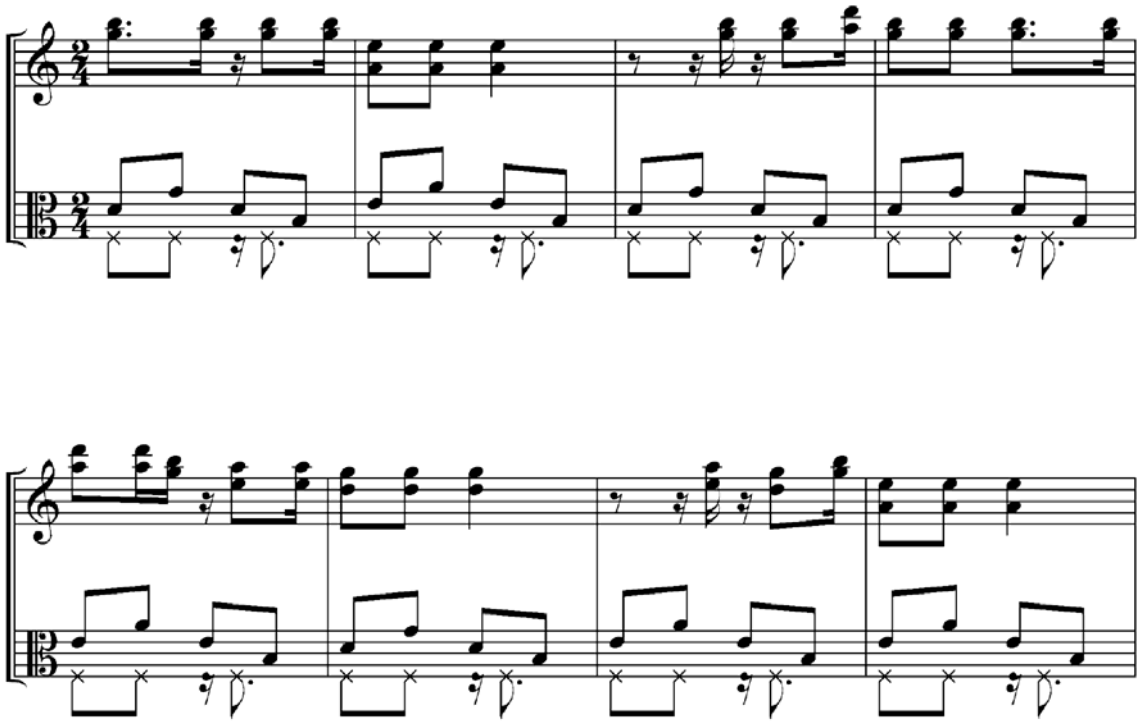
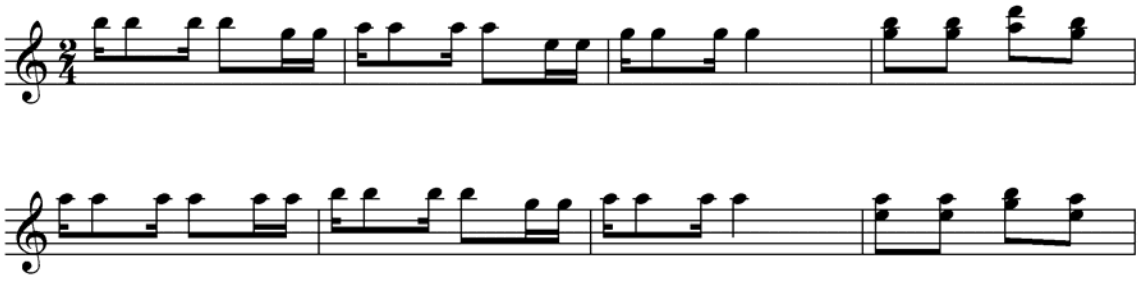


Fig. 4. 15b. "*Saa Be Waa Na*" with *yagme*



In performance, the Jirapa songs also alternate with the *yangfu* sections just as in the Nandom style. In "*To Me Na*," Bernard introduces the gyilimbwere to what he calls the "rolling" variation, where rather then play the two handed *zog par*, the xylophonist will embellish the song by changing the rhythm of the original melody, all the while retaining the song's correlation to the *yagme*. (Fig. 4. 16) This variation will occur twice in the middle of the original *zog par* creating a total of six *yagme* cycles before beginning the *yangfu* as seen in the transcriptions. **"***Saa Be Waa Na*," without a variation pattern, will only repeat for four *yagme* cycles.

Fig. 4. 16. "*To Me Na*" variation



Jirapa Style: *Yangfu*

The *yangfu* in the Jirapa style is much more specific and stylized then the improvisatory Nandom *yangfu*. Functionally, the *yangfu* in "*To Me Na*" and "*Saa Be Waa Na*," again serve as an aural cue for the participants to begin the dancing section of *Bewaa*. Both solos analyzed here are again in the uppermost register of the gyil and create a strong rhythmic contrast to their respective songs. Similar to the Nandom *yangfu*, both solos also feature a specific cue to return to the song.

The "*To Me Na*" *yangfu* begins immediately at the end of the song, corresponding with the ABAA BBAB pattern in the supporting gyil. (Fig. 4. 17) The right hand will remain on the uppermost note of the solo pattern emphasizing the downbeat for the dancers and allowing the left hand to play the rest of the pattern. (Fig. 4. 18) Although the right hand consistently plays on the beat, it is often confused by Western students as sounding on the upbeat. Should this problem arise in performance, the gyilimbwere should focus on the *yagme* pattern and *kparo* of the supporting gyil or the visual aid of the dancers' movement emphasizing each beat.

Fig. 4. 17. "*To Me Na*" *yangfu*

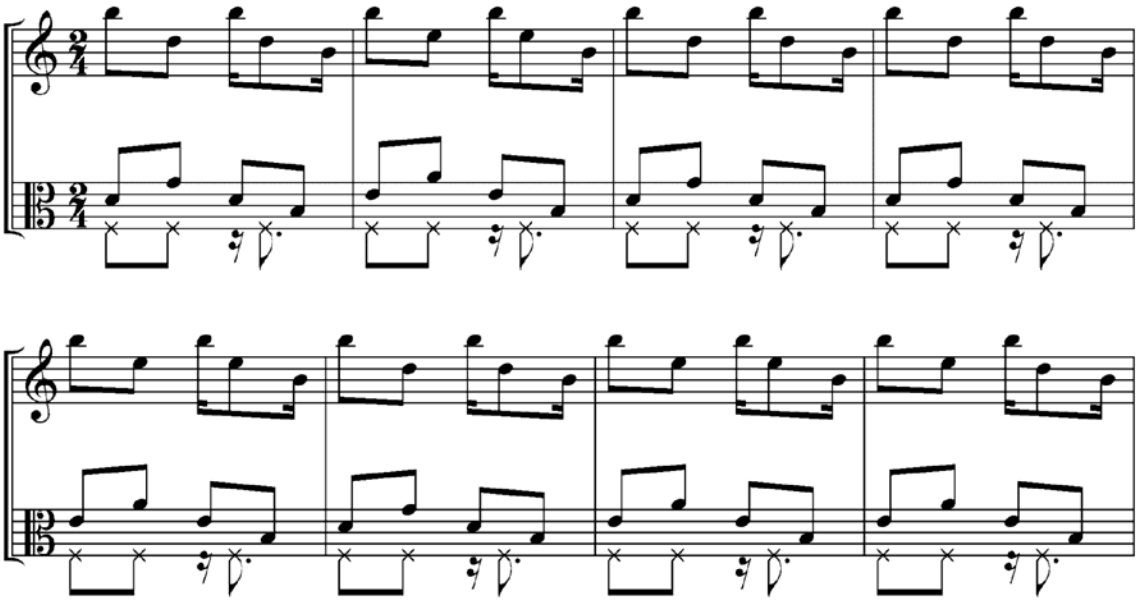
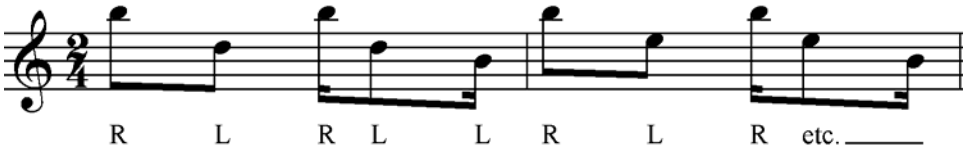
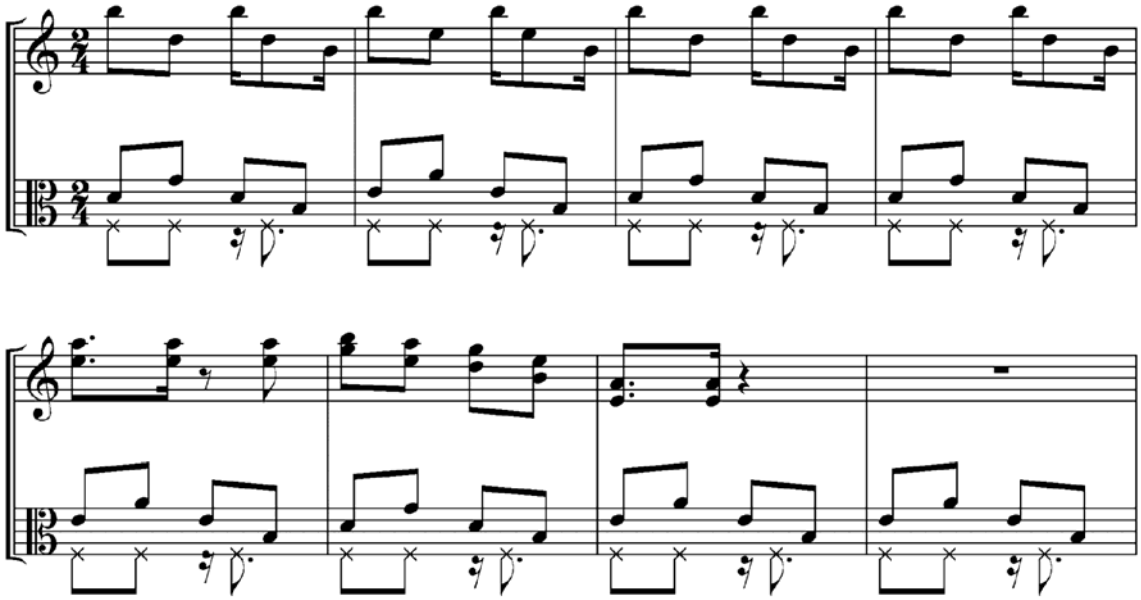


Fig. 4. 18. "*To Me Na*" *yangfu* sticking pattern



Just as the Nandom *yangfu* can be repeated multiple times, Bernard's arrangement again is only four repetitions. The fourth time through the *yangfu* the lead gyilimbwere signals the dancers to stop and return to the *yiilu*. The cue in "*To Me Na*," occurs in the second half of the *yagme* pattern, analogous to the cue used in the Nandom style. (Fig. 4. 19) When the cue is finished, the gyilimbwere again waits until the end of the *yagme* cycle to begin the chosen *zog par*.

Fig. 4. 19. Cue to end "*To Me Na*" *yangfu* in relation to support gyil



The *yangfu* for "*Saa Be Waa Na*" occurs in an identical manner to that of the previous example. Here, instead of emphasizing the downbeat for the dancers, the *yangfu* uses double stops on the anacrusis of the *yagme* cycle to create an interesting syncopation. (Fig. 4. 20) The remainder of the *yangfu* follows with the same syncopation against the *yagme* and *kparo*. The sticking used on the notes between the double stops follows in a logical Left-Right-Left progression. (Fig. 4. 21)

Fig. 4. 20. "*Saa Be Waa Naa*" *yangfu*

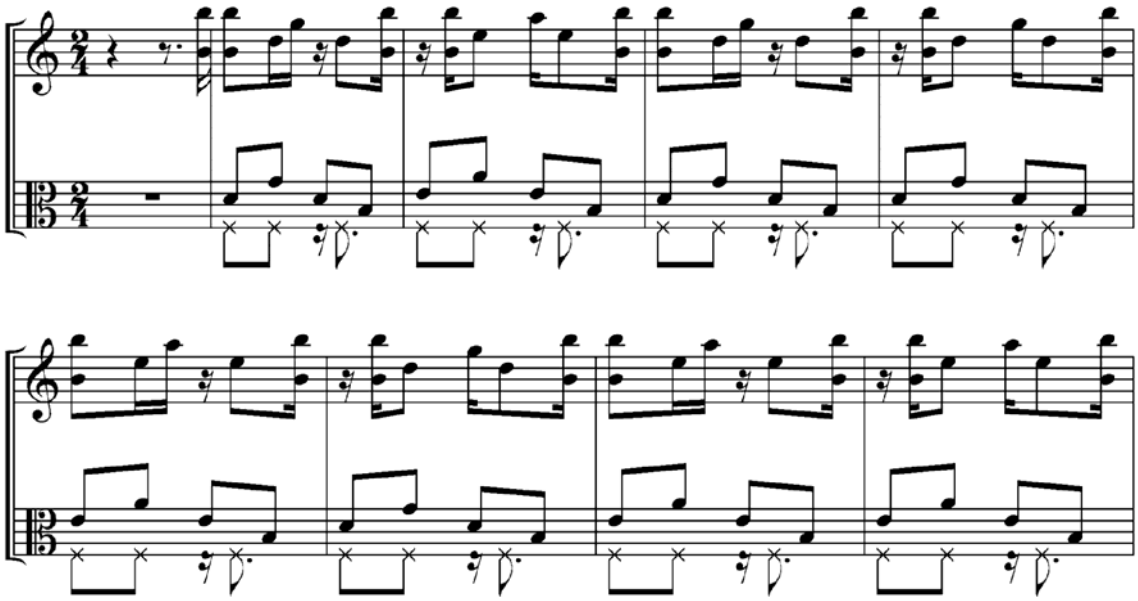
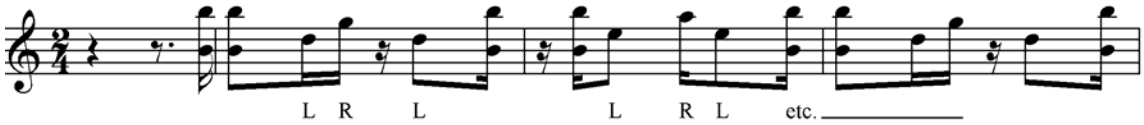


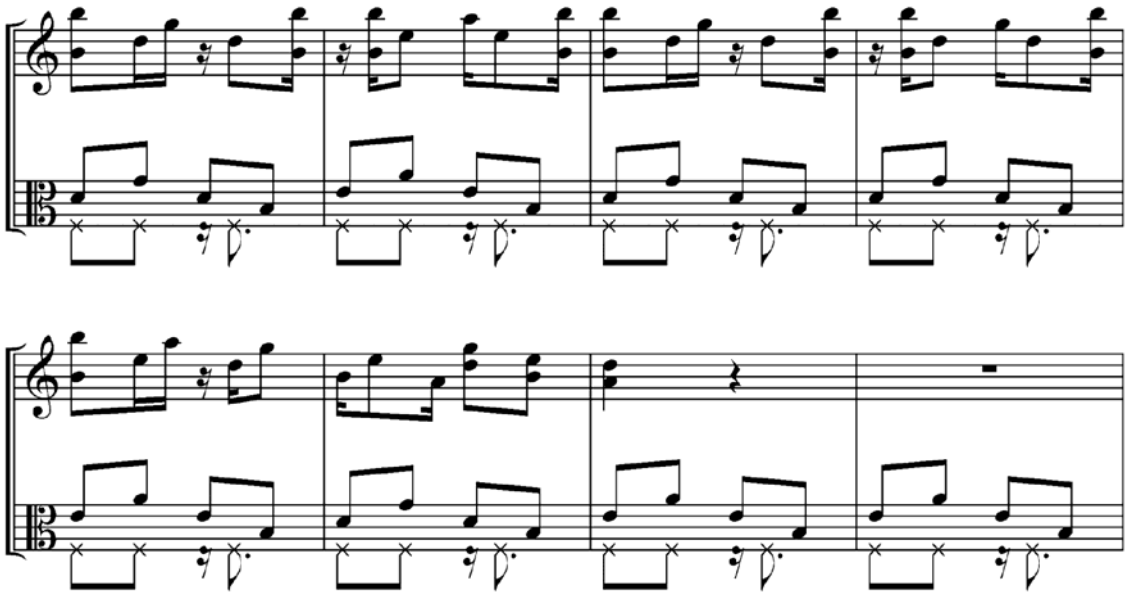
Fig. 4. 21. "*Saa Be Waa Na*" *yangfu* sticking



The cue to end the *yangfu* section of "*Saa Be Waa Na*" occurs in an identical location to the "*To Me Na*" example. Bernard's arrangement of four *yangfu* repetitions is the same. The cue begins subtly with the same syncopation pattern as the solo, but ends with a clear accent on the downbeat for the dancers to hear. (Fig. 4. 22) These last three eighth notes of the cue should be emphasized by the lead player to ensure audible recognition from the ensemble. As with the other *yangfu* endings, after the cue has been given, the lead gyilimbwere has until the end of the *yagme* cycle to rest before returning

to the *yiilu*. If this is the last selection performed, as it is in this arrangement, the entire ensemble will end on the final note of the cue, creating a unison ending.

Fig. 4. 22. "*Saa Be Waa Na*" *yangfu* ending



While I have presented the Nandom style of *Bewaa* before the Jirapa style it is beneficial for the novice gyilimbwere to learn the Jirapa *Bewaa* first. As stated, Bernard uses these Jirapa songs as part of his teaching method at the Dagara Music Center. Learning them first in this fashion will help the beginning gyil player better understand the coordination between the lead parts and the supporting *yagme* and *kparo*. With both hands focused on either the *yiilu* or the *yangfu*, the beginning performer can also pay closer attention to the dancers and the communication between the members of the ensemble.

To make the jump into the Nandom style of *Bewaa* can first be overwhelming, combining the two hands between the *yagme* and the *yiilu*. While Bernard does not specifically teach an intermediate step, I have arranged a two-handed version of the Jirapa songs to help facilitate the coordination necessary to learn the Nandom repertoire. Bernard and Jerome Balsab use a similar version of this approach by initially demonstrating the *zog par* and *yagme* played together. Once the performer is comfortable with both the *yagme* and the *zog par* independently, the next step is to learn the just the *yagme* with the left hand. Gradually the songs can be combined with the left hand accompaniment using only the notes in the right hand from the Jirapa song examples. As the *yagme* becomes a comfortable ostinato in the left hand, the player may choose to also perform the *yangfu* with the accompaniment pattern or switch back to the original version for the respective song. Two handed arrangements are given in Appendix D.

Kuor

The *kuor* also plays an integral function in the *Bewaa* ensemble, providing rhythmic drive and variation to the overall musical texture. The role of the *kuor* is the same in both the Nandom and Jirapa styles, in fact keeping the same basic pattern against the *kparo*, again creating the hemiola figure in the Nandom style. (Fig. 4. 23a and 23b) In the Jirapa style the *kuor* also helps to reinforce the aural cue for the *yangfu*. On the first entrance of the *yangfu* from the lead gyil, the *kuor* will stop its rhythm abruptly, emphasizing the stop in the dancers' movement, before beginning a new pattern for the

solo section. (Fig. 4. 24) When the lead gyil gives the cue out of the *yangfu* back into the song, the *kuor* will resume its original pattern.

Fig. 4. 23a. *Kuor* and *yagme*, Nandom style

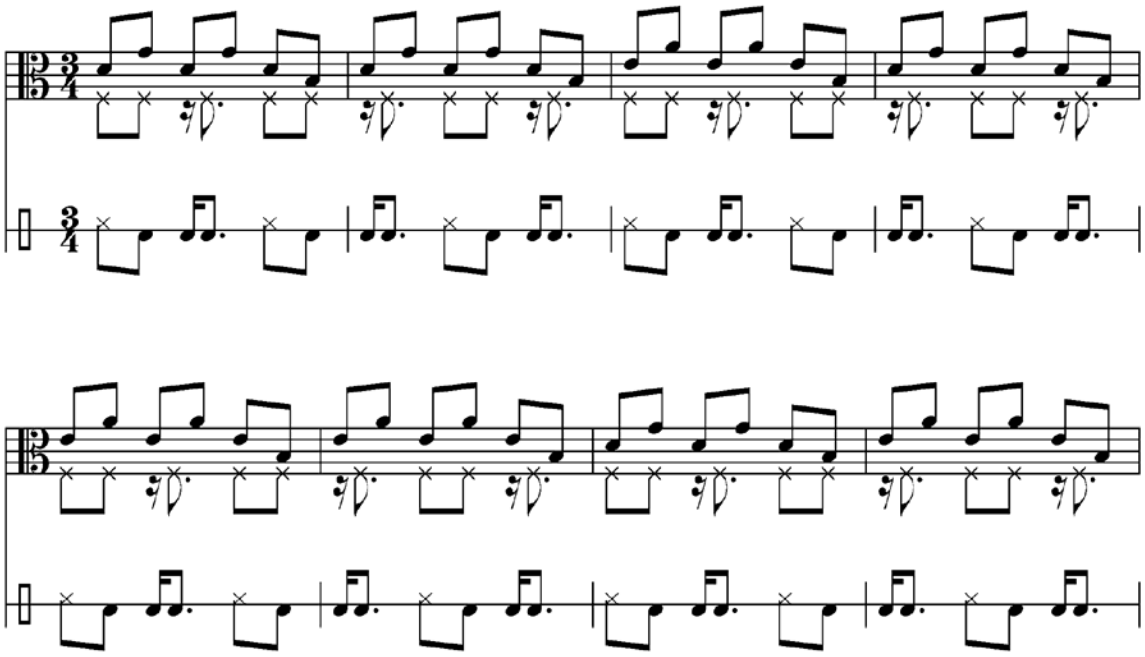


Fig. 4. 23b. *Kuor* and *yagme*, Jirapa style

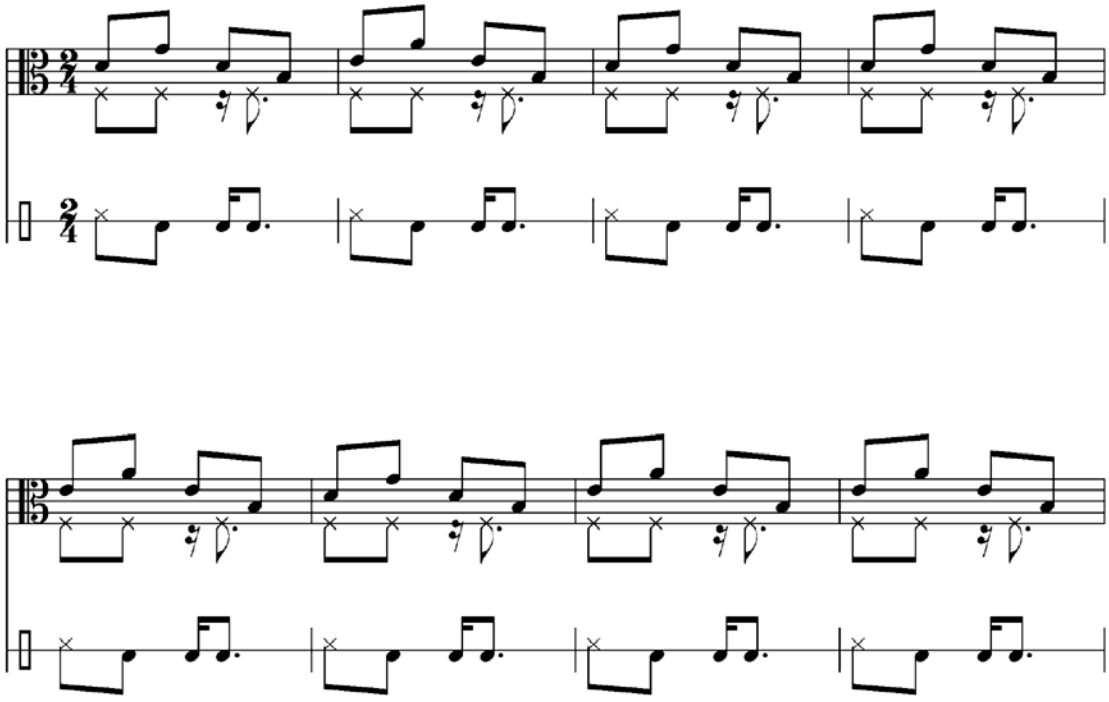
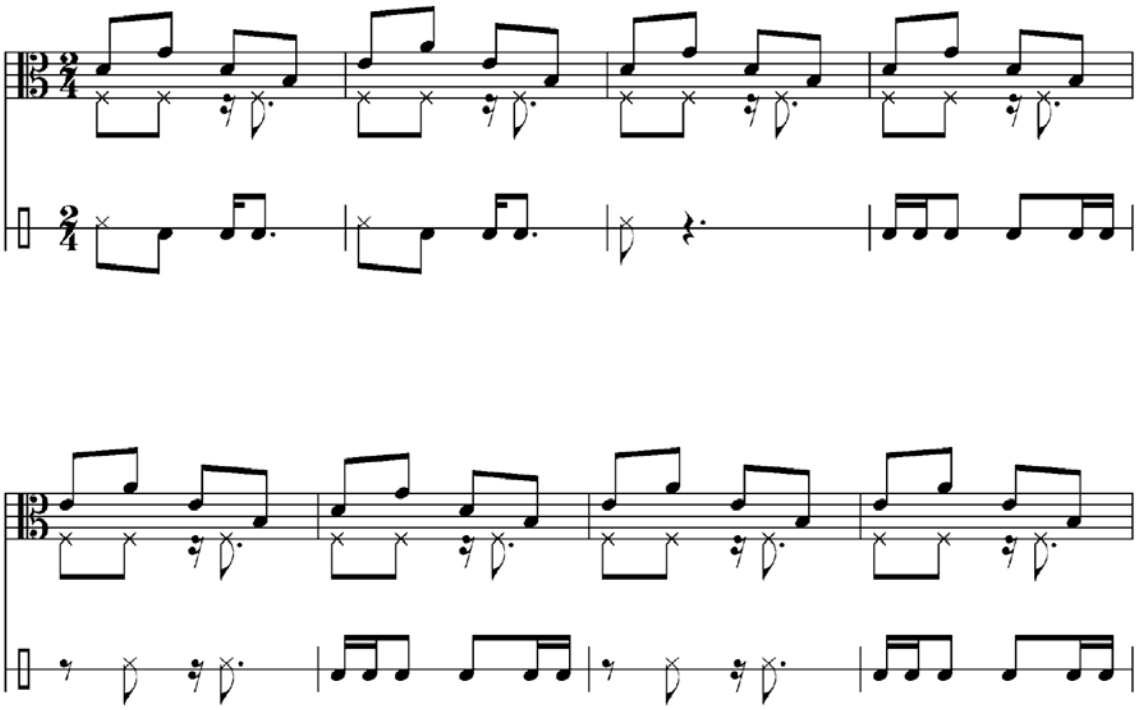


Fig. 4. 24. *Kuor* change in Jirapa *yangfu*



The *kuor* also plays a variety of variations throughout the *yiilu*. Generally abstract, these variations feature creative syncopations in the rhythmic texture rather then an abundance of notes. One of the most dynamic *kuor* players, Felix Putier of Bernard Woma's Dagara Bewaa Cultural Group, can raise the intensity of the performance simply by two well-placed slaps on the drum and his open-mouthed, ear-to-ear grin. I have given a few possible variations of the *kuor* pattern in Appendix E, but further research is needed on this instrument's performance practice and its deep rooted cultural implications.

CHAPTER 5. CHOREOGRAPHY

Having looked closely at the musical structure of the *Daarkpen* and *Bewaa* repertoire in the previous chapters, it is now necessary to discuss their associated dance elements. Just as dance is integral to the aesthetic of West African drumming, dance is equally important in understanding the performance practice of the gyil. The true performance nature of the master gyilimbwere is approached once the music has been internalized to the extent where it can be performed in a relaxed and almost improvisatory manner to fit the needs of dancers.

Even though this document gives programming suggestions for a staged performance, the true cultural context surrounding the performance practice of the Dagara-Birifor gyil is meant for community participation where the master gyilimbwere demonstrates his ability to adapt to any dancer. John Miller Chernoff eloquently states the aspiration for including these dance elements within their musical performance setting when, "The meaning of the music is externalized through an event in which participation parallels the musician's artistic purpose: an artist's coolness lends security to intimacy, and the rhythms of an ensemble become the movement of an event when people dance."[1] It would certainly be presumptuous to assume that this introductory document to the performance practice of the gyil will make anyone a master gyil player but hopefully through the recreation of these pieces, along with their dance element, the non-Ghanaian gyilimbwere might get a sense approximating that experience.

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[1] John Miller Chernoff, *African Rhythm and African Sensibility,* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1979), 143.

A. *Daarfo*

The *Daarfo* has no stylized choreography associated with it. While the solo gyil performs, the participants are generally assembling for the funeral. If the deceased is a respected hunter within the community, a dramatic reenactment of a hunt may take place. Those taking part in the reenactment would gather together near the perimeter of the funeral ground, armed with the traditional bow and arrow. Cautiously, as if stalking prey, the hunters will slowly make their way toward the center of the funeral site following the tempo of the solo gyil. Along the way, the hunters may stop and whistle to one another, or crawl slowly through the funeral crowd, trying not to be seen. Occasionally dressed in traditional mud and leaf camouflage, the hunters may sneak up on children and purposefully frighten them to the amusement of the adults.[2] Upon reaching the gyil, the hunters respect the gyilimbwere by throwing coins and cowry shells and then pay homage to the deceased through the offering of money, crops, or libations, before participating in the remainder of the funeral.

This reenactment would take place at the very beginning of the *Daarfo* when the gyilimbwere may artistically develop upon an abundance of additional traditional themes. The transcriptions I have presented in this document are the reprise of the *Daarfo* and would generally not be an adequate length for a full reenactment, lasting up to fifteen minutes, to take place. If a reenactment were to take place, the gyilimbwere would be responsible for closely observing the hunting participants while playing the *Daarfo*. The gyil player can use melodic devices such as the Hunter's Whistle to encourage the

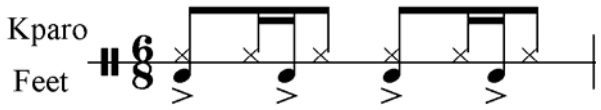
[2] See Photo 9 on page 196.

participants' interactions with one another. Musical themes could be repeated and elongated to suit the needs of the participants before their arrival at the gyil. As the last of the hunters reach the instrument, the gyilimbwere can make the transition into the *Daarkpen*.

B. *Daarkpen*

The *Daarkpen* dance is very spirited and energetic with specific movements interpreted by each dancer. The basic arm and upper torso movements of the dancer are closely coordinated with the feet and legs. The dancers' footwork is a simple alternation, right and left, but forcefully stomps out an important 2:3 polyrhythm against the support gyil's *kparo*. (Fig. 5. 1) The foot stomping adds additional rhythmic element to the *Daarkpen* and can be emphasized if the dancers are wearing leg rattles consisting of either seeds or tin cans filled with small stones, or iron scraps loosely sewn together around a leather leg band.[3]

Fig. 5. 1. Dancer's footwork in combination with *kparo*



The upper body movement follows the same 2:3 polyrhythm dictated by the feet. Keeping the arms outstretched and hands hanging loosely, the dancer will contract the upper torso in rhythm with the feet, allowing the hands and arms to shake vigorously. Here the dancer may use small improvisations to personalize the dance. Women may keep their arms lower to their sides or cover their breasts with one hand. Men will often carry a curved hunting stick, bow, or horsetail to shake as a signal of strength and power.

[3] While no taboo has been expressed, in the performances I witnessed only male dancers would wear the leg rattles.

Improvisations may also include a sudden stop to hold a pose, and then resume the dance again in rhythm.

The dancers will wait until the ensemble entrance during the *Kpil Kpala* before beginning to dance. Once the ensemble enters, the participants, either individually or in groups, may dance at any time usually as a reaction to a specific song or melody. The dancers may simply run up to the ensemble and begin to dance, or coordinate their movements with others to form a single-file processional, dancing their path through the funeral until they reach the instrumental ensemble. Additional participants may spontaneously join the dance by either matching or moving independently from the others. While the overall impression of the dance may seem disorganized, the dancers' spontaneity along with melodic recognition reinforces the social dynamic necessary for a "single aesthetic concern, the realization of community."[4] Amidst the dust filled air of the frenzied dancers, important interpersonal interactions take place which strengthen the Birifor sense of community and social identity.

The length of the dance is improvisatory and will last until the individual dancer decides to take a break. In the case of a processional, once the dancers have filed past the gyile the leader of the procession will arbitrarily stop their movements and the others in line will follow. Participants dancing directly in front of the ensemble may stylize their movements with syncopated starts and stops before finally holding a pose to end their dance. On the completion of the dance, some dancers may rest and wait for another

[4] Chernoff, 149.

familiar song from the gyilimbwere, while others immediately return to the gyil and continue to dance.

C. *Bewaa*

The *Bewaa* dance is far more structurally organized then either the *Daarfo* or *Daarkpen*. Special performing ensembles, such as Bernard's Dagara Bewaa Culture Group, often demonstrate highly choreographed versions of *Bewaa*. While impromptu performances by community groups may seem very loose and improvisatory, the underlying framework of the dance remains the same. Corresponding with the music of the lead gyil in both the Nandom and Jirapa styles, the *Bewaa* dance is divided into two parts, the song (*yiilu*) and the solo (*yangfu*). During the *yiilu*, the dancers move in a circle surrounding the instrumental ensemble while the actual dance movement, either improvisatory or choreographed, takes place in the *yangfu*. As the intricacy of each dance can vary between groups and individual songs, I will use the two songs in the Jirapa style, choreographed by Bernard, as representative models. Further examples of complex choreography can be viewed in Bernard's commercially available Dagara Bewaa Culture Group[5] video and are best learned through the instruction of a Ghanaian teacher.

For the *yiilu*, the dancers proceed in a single counterclockwise circle around the instrumental ensemble, alternating male and female. The basic travel around the circle is usually a simple walking pattern emphasizing the underlying pulse of the music, but can grow in complexity depending on the skill level of the group. Leg jingles worn by the male dancers contribute to the overall polyphonic texture and not only reinforce the physical variation in the dancers' movements but also add sonic, rhythmic variation to

[5]Dagara Bewaa Culture Group featuring Bernard Woma. *Xylophone Music and Dance of Northern Ghana.* (Accra, Ghana: Spectrum 3 Ltd., 2001).

each song. The arms are kept at a comfortable level at the dancers' side and move freely in coordination with the feet. Variations on the basic movement are often made for each individual song and can be gender specific such as men holding a horsetail or playing an accompaniment pattern on a small metal castanet.

The basic circular *yiilu* movement is different for the two Jirapa style songs represented here. "*Saa Be Waa Na*" keeps a simple walking pattern on each beat, starting with the left and alternating left-right-left-right. (Fig. 5. 2) The motion continues counterclockwise until the cue for the *yangfu*. "*To Me Na*" begins the circular movements also with the left foot, but first, turning the torso into the circle and taking a small step backward. The feet then continue the alternating pattern in the counterclockwise motion including the one "backward" step every four beats until the cue for the *yangfu*. (Fig. 5. 3)

Fig. 5. 2. "*Saa Be Waa Na*" walking pattern

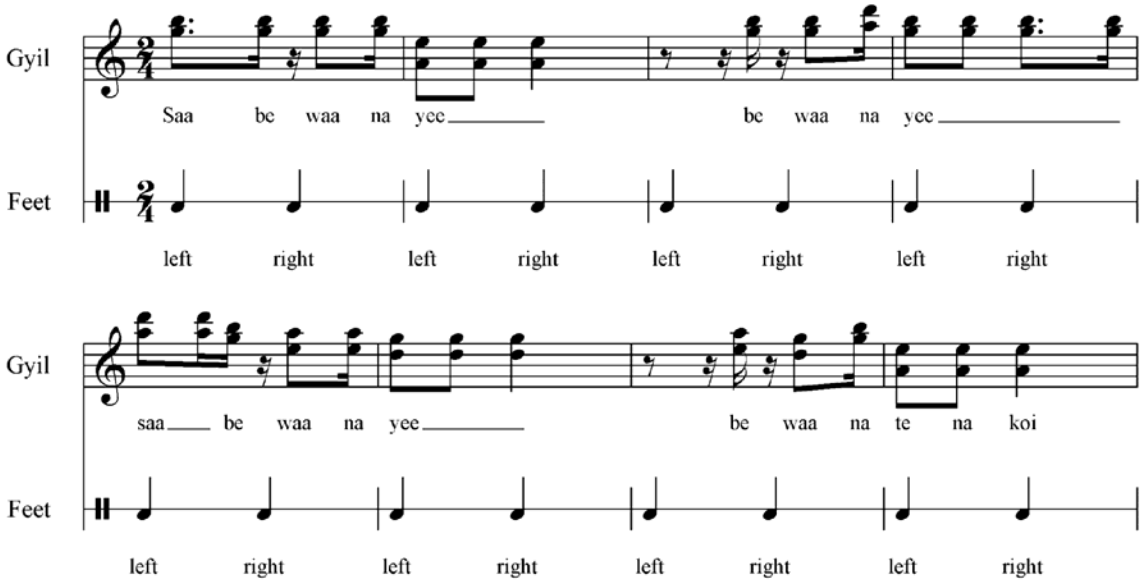
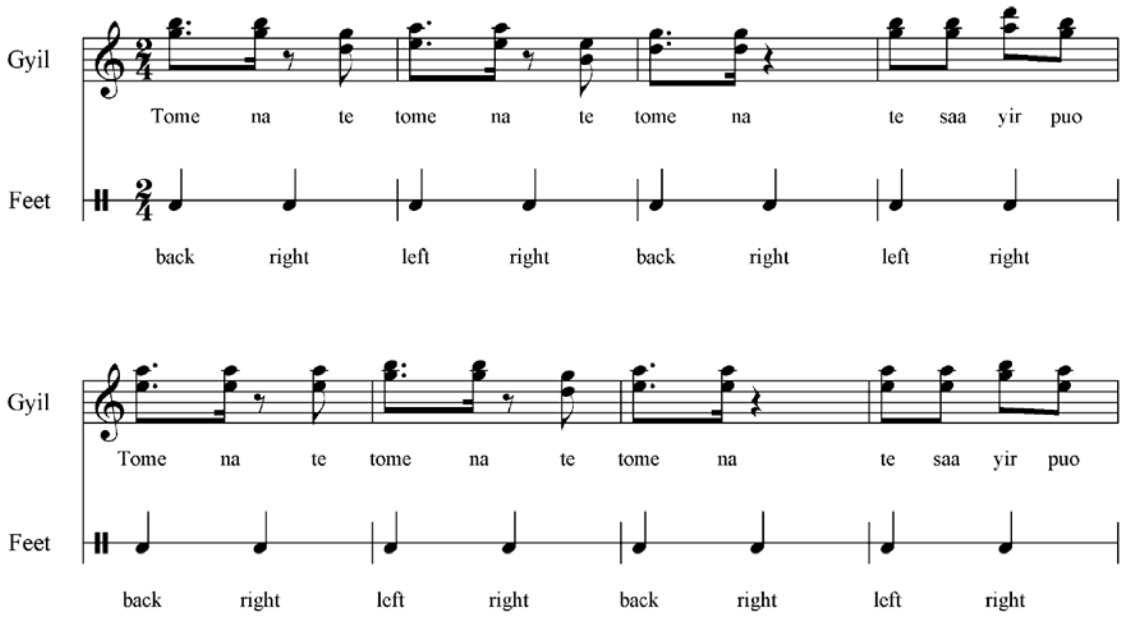
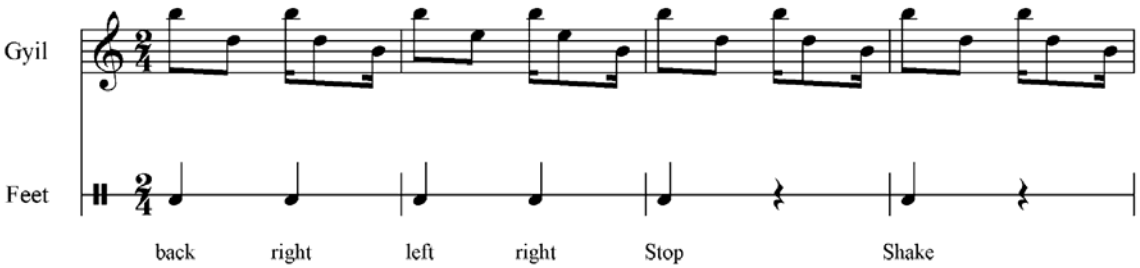


Fig 5. 3. "*To Me Na*" walking pattern



The entrance into the *yangfu* also varies slightly between the two songs. For both songs, the dancers will stop their circular motion when the *yangfu* cue is played. In "*To Me Na*," the dancers will first shake their body, kick with the right foot into the circle, and then kick their left foot out of the circle before beginning the *yangfu* movement. Similarly, when dancing "*Saa Be Waa Na*," the dancers will also stop their circular motion on the cue, but instead of a shake, will proceed directly to the right and left kick causing the dancers' pattern to begin in the middle of the gyil phrase. Figures 5. 4a and 5. 4b illustrate the entrance to the *yangfu* according to the respective solo gyil patterns.

Fig. 5. 4a. Entrance to "*To Me Na*" *yangfu*



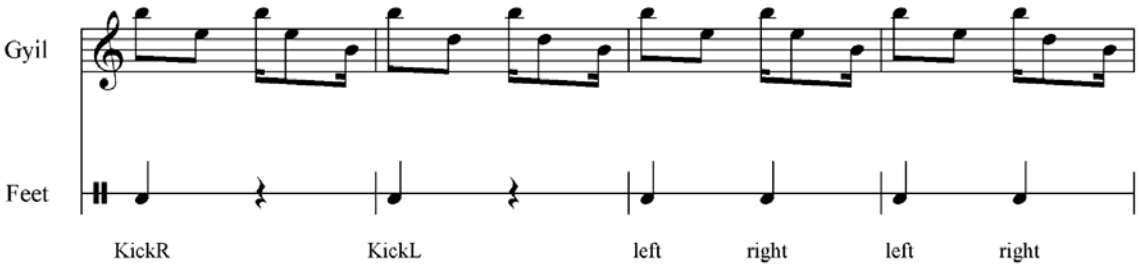
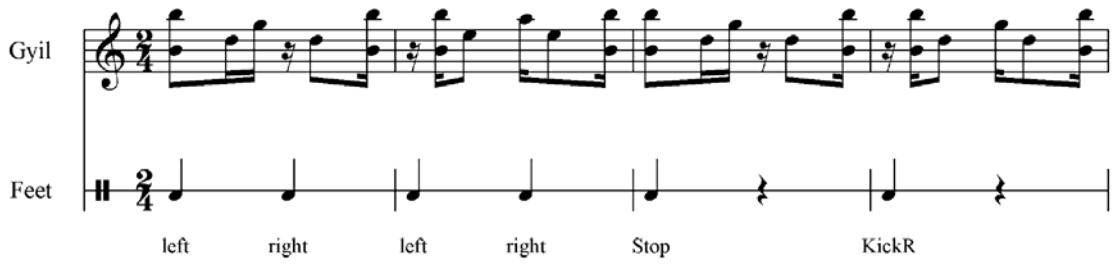
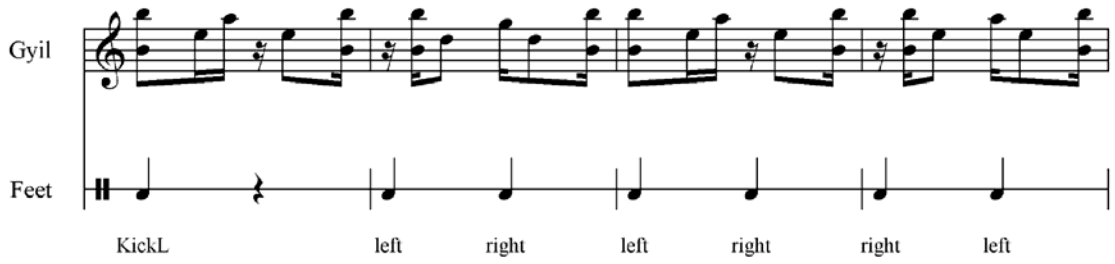


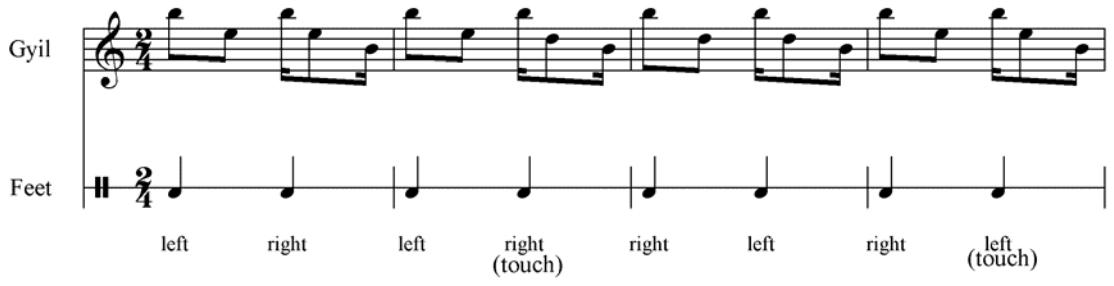
Fig. 5. 4b. Entrance to "*Saa Be Waa Na*" *yangfu*





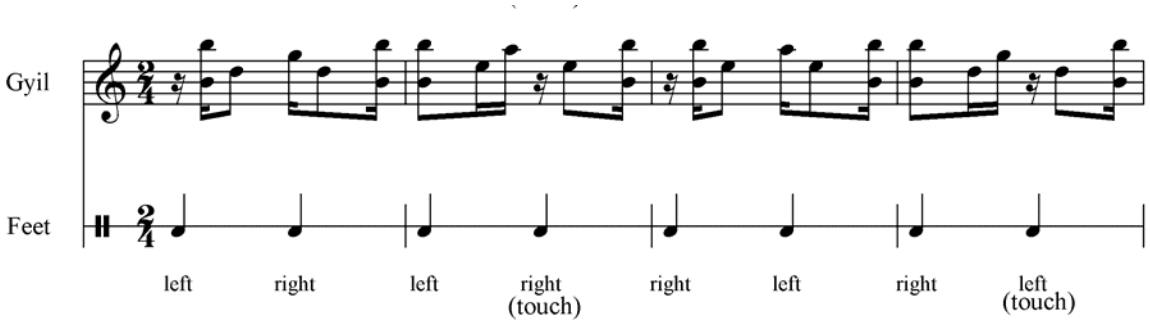
After the entrance to the *yangfu*, both songs are identical in their dance movements. The basic solo movement of the dancers is a chest/back contraction allowing the shoulders to move forward and back or a motion David Locke describes as "the basic unit of Ewe dance vocabulary, a folding and unfolding of the back and chest."[6] The arms remain bent at the elbows and perform a subtle pushing motion with the hands to emphasize the motion of the shoulders. The feet remain on the underlying pulse of the ensemble and the dancer will move side to side, into and out of the circle. As the dancers move to the left, or into the circle, they begin with their left foot. When moving out of the circle, to the right, they will begin with their right foot, creating the foot pattern for the solo: left-right-left-right, right-left-right-left. (Fig. 5. 5a and b) During this movement the feet never cross, causing the fourth step to simply touch the ground where the opposite foot is placed, therefore the directional movement in and out of the circle only occurs on the first three steps. The resulting pattern can also be thought of as: step-step-step-touch, in coordination with the previous foot pattern.

Fig. 5. 5a. "*To Me Na*" *yangfu* foot pattern



[6] David Locke, "The African Ensemble in America," in *Performing Ethnomusicology.* ed. Ted Solis (Berkley: University of California Press, 2004), 174.

Fig. 5. 5b. "*Saa Be Waa Na*" *yangfu* foot pattern (entrance in middle of gyil phrase)



The ending of the *yangfu* dance movement is signaled by the lead gyil. The dancers must be responsible for aurally understanding the lead gyil's *yangfu* so that they will continue with their movement until the last note of the gyil cue. The cues for both songs end directly on the basic pulse allowing the dancers to easily end rhythmically with the lead gyil. Wherever the dancers may be in the *yangfu* movement, they will simply stop with both feet together on the emphasized beat, pause, and then return to their circular movement for the respective *yiilu* at the beginning of the yagme cycle. (Fig. 5. 6a and b)

Fig. 5. 6a. "*To Me Na*" *yangfu* ending

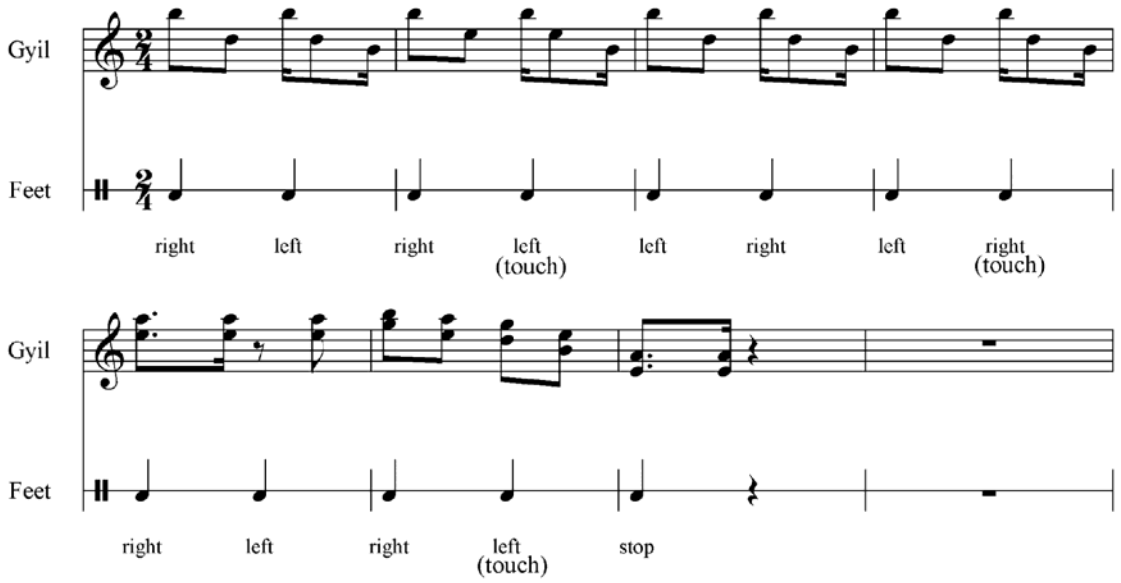
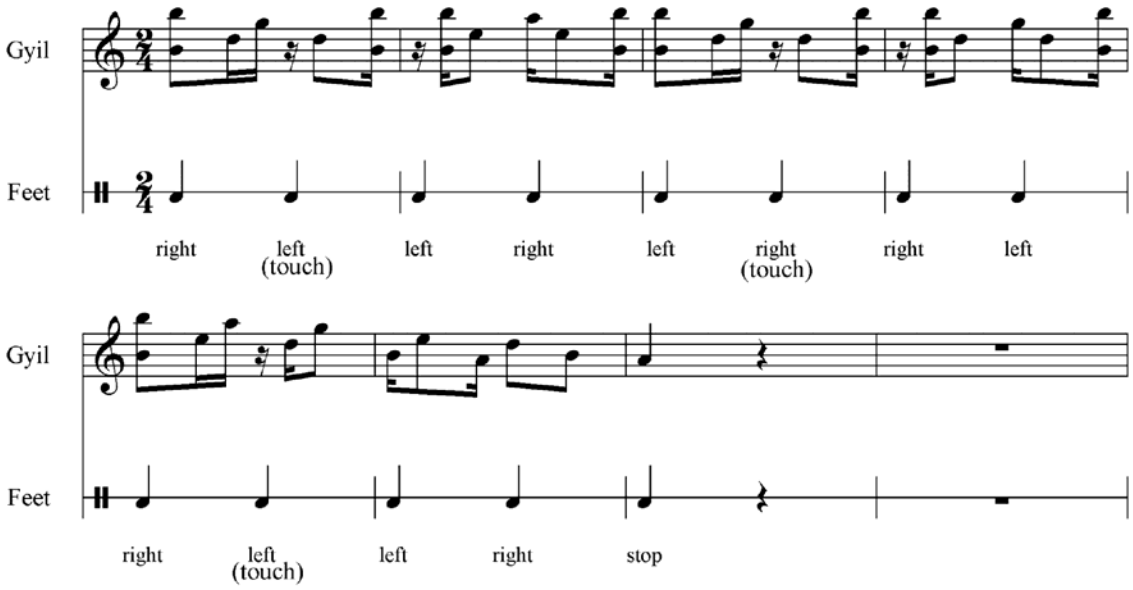


Fig. 5. 6b. "*Saa Be Waa Na*" *yangfu* ending



These two versions of *Bewaa* dance mark only the beginning of choreographic possibilities. Bernard has created these two versions specifically to give Westerners a taste of the Dagara dance culture. Dances in the Nandom style will add complex foot work during both the *yiilu* and *yangfu*. Variations will often include partner dances between men and women, or opportunities for solo expression and improvisation. In performance, the Dagara Bewaa Culture Group strives for displays of athleticism, exaggerating even the smallest gestures for the audience. Recreational dancers also take great liberties with the basic movements and timings to reflect their own personal expression. As Sidra Lawrence explains "Dagara dancers do not think about the precise timing of their motions. The music and dance are two worlds that operate simultaneously, but each is an individual sphere of expression. The more experienced the dancer, the farther they can stray from the rules without breaking the connection between the two worlds."[7] These two versions are presented for the aspiring gyilimbwere to have a greater concept of how *Bewaa* is organized. As the non-Dagara dancer becomes more competent in the *Bewaa* style, the more important it is to find a suitable Dagara teacher.

[7] Sidra Meredith Lawrence, "Killing My Own Snake: Fieldwork, Gyil, and Processes of Learning" (Masters Thesis, Bowling Green State University, 2006), 93.

CHAPTER 6. SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

In summary, I will conclude this document with my own reflections on the performance of the Dagara-Birifor gyil music outside of Ghana. In particular, I will discuss the musical preparation of my lecture recital and offer a few performance suggestions. The challenges the non-Ghanaian faces in preparation for an ensemble performance in which musical culture will be represented can at first be overwhelming, but with the right preparation and an enthusiastic ensemble, the rewards of an inspired and culturally representative performance are even greater.

The preparation for the musical portion of this document, presented on May 1, 2006, began with my fieldwork experience in Ghana, 2004. It is easy to point out the individual lessons and interviews where I learned very specific knowledge to transfer into this document, but the idea of trying to capture the performance practice of this repertoire took the entire six-months-in-Ghana *experience*, the two years afterward in Arizona, and is still evolving. Likewise, it is one aspect to present historical fact, mythological stories, decipherable transcriptions, and re-creatable scores to help others understand the cultural significance of what to play, but the challenge lies in relaying the nature of how to perform this repertoire with the precision, fluidity, intensity, and joy of the Ghanaian musician. I can only recount my own experience.

In Ghana, I found that to be respected as a musician, a performance can take place anywhere, anytime, and should always represent the best of your abilities on the instrument. This concept was first realized in my "private" lessons with Tijan, Jerome,

and Bernard. Even within the seemingly private and enclosed compound of the Dagara Music Center there is always an audience. An individual lesson with any teacher would on average draw at least two to three interested onlookers, but if it was the right time of day, a familiar song could attract an onslaught of thirty to forty elementary school children on their way home. While this impromptu performance may be governed by the children, whatever the situation, the musician does not stop. It is wonderful if you can perform their requests, but if you only know one song, your abilities as a musician are being determined by whether or not you can play it well enough to match the energy level of thirty children, directly out of school.

This intense energy is required by the gyilimbwere at any cultural event. Near the end of the *Bori* festival I attended in Gakuon, the principal musicians for the festival return to the instruments to play the *Chi Kobne*, the most complex and demanding music in the Birifor repertoire. The musicians took their seats at the instruments in the clearing near the main festival house without any shade from the heat and sun. As they played, the crowd gathered and began dancing, feverishly kicking up an impenetrable cloud of dust. The musicians calmly wrapped scarves over their noses and mouths and continued. The performance went on for hours, with little or no sign of fatigue from the musicians. While they played as if their livelihood depended upon it, all three remained poised and controlled, for the quality of the *Chi Kobne* directly determines how well the musicians will be compensated for the festival.

In a similar situation, I arrived midday with Jerome at a Dagara funeral in Accra. The sun was directly overhead, no one was dancing, and while I could not understand the

language, I could tell the mourners were very glad Jerome had arrived. After the customary greetings and funeral formalities, the participants eagerly encouraged Jerome to have a seat at the lead gyil. As he began to play, a crowd of men gathered near the ensemble to sing the Dagara dirges. Shortly thereafter, there were upwards of thirty men singing and others lining up to dance. Over the course of the next two and a half hours Jerome continued to play, switching off from time to time on the support gyil, always keeping up the energy of the funeral, sweat pouring down onto the instrument, and encouraging the participants to dance in the hot afternoon sun. When he was finished playing I congratulated him on his amazing display of musicality and endurance. He simply responded "We [musicians] are the funeral" and then went to drink *pito*, the local beer. For him, the funeral was part of his obligation to the community and was not anything extraordinary.

The nonchalant attitude from both the *Bori* musicians and Jerome, comments on how engrained the music must be in the performer. Even though the music may be demanding, it should not look difficult. Alfred Sagbaalu demonstrated that the gyilimbwere must be able to look at the crowd to interrelate properly. The gyilimbwere cannot be so involved in playing the instrument that they forget to interact with the dancers. Tijan would reinforce this idea by having me look away from my hands in a difficult passage. Instead of focusing on the instruments while I played, he would have me try to hold a conversation with him or anyone else that happened to be observing the lesson. Bernard repeatedly, epitomizes this in his performance practice by rarely looking

at his hands or the instrument, instead creating a constant connection between the participants and his audience.

Upon returning to Arizona, the most challenging part of gyil performance is retaining the energy and endurance developed in Ghana. There, the Ghanaians constantly try and push the limits of your ability to match their own endurance. The hardships many Ghanaian musicians face on a daily basis directly influence their musical performance, resulting in relentless tempos and commanding volume, turning their frustrations into recreation. Even as I try to maintain this energetic style of performance in myself and my ensemble, gradually, calluses soften and tempos relax. When Bernard visited the University of Arizona in the spring of 2006, once again I found myself taping up my fingers to prevent further blistering and I was immediately reminded of how much physical endurance it takes to perform on the instrument, and how much more it takes to keep up with Bernard.

To teach this repertoire to an ensemble takes much more cerebral and less physical approach to the instrument. The first step is understanding the music well enough to teach another individual the supporting gyil parts. Rather then handing them my transcriptions to practice, I attempted to instruct in the same aural method learned from my Ghanaian teachers. While I had the luxury of spending six months solely to study gyil, my students in Arizona have busy, complicated schedules, in which learning the instrument could only take a small percentage of time. My resulting method was to demystify some of the more complicated patterns and phrases (the ones that originally bewildered me in Ghana) by presenting the material in a more Western approach, such as

marking the beginning of the phrase, clarifying the beat structure, or giving a clear "count." As a result, my students learned much quicker then I initially did, but only partially experienced the decoding process.

While it was musically more challenging to teach the *Daarkpen* repertoire to a small ensemble of musicians, teaching *Bewaa* to my large ensemble created obstacles I had not anticipated. I realized that there is another completely new dimension to musical understanding when trying to give chorographical instruction, keep an instrumental ensemble together, and play the lead gyil all at the same time. First the dancers must recognize and understand the *kparo*, *yagme*, *yiilu*, and *yangfu* of *Bewaa* in order to properly respond to the cues and keep the correct timing. This can be done simply by demonstrating each element first by itself, then in combination with the other elements.

The songs texts pose issues of language and memorization. Since I still have a very limited Dagara vocabulary and struggle with pronunciation, I gave handouts with the words and translations to facilitate the learning process. The ensemble was able to match the pitch of the gyil without much difficulty and the handouts enabled the dancers to follow the song texts as they moved around the circle.

The movement of the *yangfu* was relatively easy to teach, as most of the ensemble has performed similar motions in other repertoire, but the beginning and ending the movement from the gyil cue was another problem. Despite my efforts I could not give verbal directions and play the respective yangfu patterns. Instead, I sang the yangfu lead part while demonstrating how and when to start and stop the dance. This proved very

effective, but now with other students in the ensemble who can play the yangfu patterns while I demonstrate, the method is no longer needed.

While this repertoire is deeply imbedded in the Dagara-Birifor culture and must be respected, the resulting performance must be your personal expression and interpretation. Each performance I observed in Ghana was noticeable different according to the musicians and context. Even within the Dagara Cultural Group, the *Bewaa* performance would vary depending on the participants, creating a unique experience every time. With my ensemble I have tried to capture the Ghanaian aesthetic by fostering a sense of community, mutual learning, and a connection to my teachers and performers of this musical lineage. Our performance with Bernard in March, 2006 at the University of Arizona was certainly full of excitement and enthusiasm for sharing a stage with the master musician, but what Bernard admired the most was how we had respected the music and yet made it our own.

Final Thoughts

The most difficult part of this project was coming to terms with the end. In Ghana, my six months simply ran out, and I was constantly devising a way to return and "finish." Through the writing process of this document and with a return trip to Ghana in May of 2006, I realized that even with the completion of this project the work is never "finished." With my introduction to the *Binne*, the Dagara funeral repertoire, this past May, it is even more obvious to me that this project is only scratching the surface of the Dagara-Birifor gyil tradition. It is my aspiration that this document will encourage further research into this vast and complex musical world.

Constantly throughout this project I wrestled with the question "what is enough?" In Ghana my concern was with the musical repertoire, am I learning fast enough? Have I learned enough pieces? Shouldn't I be learning more material? While writing this document I struggled with how much information to include, and if it was comprehensive. One night in Ghana, I shared my concerns with my friend Felix Tibo. He responded with an Akan proverb, "*Nipa be yee bi, W'abe ye ni nyi naa*." The proverb translates: "Man came to do some, he couldn't do all," meaning that nothing can be fully accomplished without the help of others. I realized then, that one document cannot possibly summarize the entire Dagara-Birifor repertoire, nor can one person absorb it in six months, one year, ten years, or maybe even a lifetime.

Instead of trying to quantify how much I have learned and presented, I have a much better understanding of what I have accomplished with this project. I have felt the weight of cultural accountability in trying to present the material as an accurate model. I

have experienced the benefits of apprenticeship with two master musicians, Tijan Dorwana and Bernard Woma, who I can also graciously call my friends. And finally, I recognize that I am now included in this long standing oral tradition as "the white-man-who-played-at-the-*Bori*-festival," "the one-who-is-learning-*Binne*," or simply "Landlord" and that I am responsible for serving my respective place within the lineage. In the end, regardless of whether or not the reader of this document decides to learn the gyil, it is my hope that they, as musicians, are inspired to look into the greater cultural identity and performance practice surrounding their instrument and realize where they stand within its traditions.

GLOSSARY

Bawa—recreational dance from Jirapa, similar to Bewaa.

Bewaa—recreational music of the Dagara people, originally played for the harvest.

Bin Kpen—puberty repertoire of the Birifor.

Bin Kpen Bli—meaning "little" *Bin Kpen*, is performed at a faster tempo then the *Bin Kpen* and with altered rhythms.

Binne—the complex traditional funeral music of the Dagara.

Bogyil—used primarily at a *Bori* festival. The *bogyil* is also fourteen keys, but tuned to a four-note scale. Two "bad notes" are included on the instrument to keep the spatial relationship the same as its pentatonic counterpart. These "bad notes" do not have a gourd resonator and are not played.

Bori festival—puberty festival for the Dagara-Birifor where the *bogyil* is played.

Chi Kobne—The Birifor gyil repertoire emphasizing the importance of farmers.

Daarfo—the first piece performed in the *Piri* of a man's funeral.

Daarkpen—Large body of repertoire performed after the *Piri* at a Birifor funeral. The *Daarkpen* will usually last for hours, allowing the participants to dance.

Ganga—long cylindrical wooden drum with calf-skin heads, played with sticks, used to accompany the Birifor gyil repertoire.

Guu—the final body of repertoire performed at a Birifor funeral.

Gyil—The general term for the Dagara-Birifor, fourteen key, pentatonic xylophone, also called "*logyil*." Instruments often differ in tuning and range depending on their use and builder.

Gyil-saa—name for the largest gourd resonator on the gyil.

Gyile—plural form of gyil.

Gyilimbwere—gyil player.

Gyilimbwebe—plural form of gyilimbwere.

Gyilibie—gyil mallets; translates as "child of the gyil."

Kakube—annual traditional arts festival held in Nandom in late November.

Kpan Kpul—pit xylophone thought to be the predecessor of the gyil. The xylophone bars are placed on two straw rails across a shallow trench to act as a resonator. Today the *kpan kpul* is used primarily as a children's instrument.

Kparo—time line tapped with the shaft of the mallet on the lowest note of the gyil, sometimes performed on a separate piece of metal or farming tool.

Kpil Kpala—the first in the series of ensemble songs within the *Daarkpen* repertoire.

Kobine—annual traditional arts festival held in Lawra at the end of the harvest season.

Kogyil—abbreviated name for "*kuor gyil*" referring to the eighteen key gyil used specifically for Dagara funerals.

Kontomble—mythical dwarves which live in the forest and are thought to be responsible for bringing the gyil to humans.

Kukur-Bagr—annual traditional arts festival organized by Bernard Woma held in Feilmuo in late December.

Kuor—drum constructed for a dry, hollow calabash, with a lizard-skin head, used to accompany Dagara gyil repertoire. *Kuor* in the Dagara language also translates as "funeral."

Lar—small wooden kettle drums played with sticks to accompany the Birifor gyil repertoire.

Lead gyil—responsible for leading the gyil ensemble and performing the primary melodies of the repertoire

Logyil—abbreviated name for "Lobi gyil." Fourteen key, pentatonic gyil used by the Dagara-Birifor.

Na Kpan Binne—Birifor funeral repertoire for a male who is considered a master hunter.

Nirra—rosewood used for making the gyil bars. *Nirra* is divided into three categories depending on the color and age of the wood: *nirr-pla*, white/yellow wood from a young tree; *nirr-giew*, red wood from a mature tree; *nirr-sela*, brown wood from an old tree, the rarest form.

Piila—the personalized melodic signature to warm up the gyil before a performance. Also referred to as *piira* or *damo*.

Pir Kpon—played in the Birifor funeral *Piri* to communicate messages regarding the funeral and death.

Piri—the introduction to the Birifor funeral, performed by a solo gyil player and announces the death of the individual.

Piru—the newest Nandom style of Bewaa.

Pito—millet beer originally brewed in the Upper West Region of Ghana

Po Kuobo—first piece played in the Birifor funeral *Piri* to indicate the death of a woman.

San De Bie Ko—played in the Birifor funeral *Piri* to reinforce social values.

Sebkpere—meaning "someone who contracts/dances well" also a traditional Dagara fetish dance.

Support gyil—responsible for playing the melodic and rhythmic ostinatos which accompany the lead gyil.

Yagme—repeated ostinato, played primarily by the support gyilimbwere or in the left hand of the lead player. The *yagme* functions as the bass line, and referred to as the "melody" by Bernard Woma.

Yangfu—the solo section of Bewaa featuring the lead gyilimbwere and the dancers.

Yiilu—meaning "song" in the Dagara language refers to any song within the given genre.

Zog par—the individual song played within the *yiilu* or song genre.

APPENDIX A

GYIL MYTHOLOGY

Gyil Myth: Sei

Translation from Birifor to English by Tijan Dorwana

Interview conducted 3/16/04 in Gakuon, Ghana

The xylophone came to us through the dwarves, the *kontomble*. There was a hunter called Nam Kpan[1] who came across some *kontomble* in the bush. They were playing this thing like you see here [points to gyil]. The hunter went and hid himself. You cannot see the *kontomble* with naked eyes, if you have special powers you can see them in different ways. After watching them play the gyil, he was able to copy what they were doing and bring it back to the village. So the *kontomble* were playing the xylophone first.

The songs that the they [*kontomble*] were playing when the hunter came across them, that was the songs they were also hearing. They copied them and developed their own ideas, creating their own music. The original music that the hunter copied, is what we are still playing. (Sei demonstrates *borda* festival songs on the *bogyil*.) The songs translate: "the *kontomble* see the killing of fowls for the festivals and also want to come and enjoy. These [the *borda* songs] are the most important songs to learn on the *bogyil*. The *Daarfo* and *Po Kuobo* are the most important pieces to learn on the *kogyil*

[1] Nam kpan is also a general term for hunter.

Gyil Myth: Sontii

Translation from Birifor to English by Tijan Dorwana

Interview conducted 3/17/04 in Vondiel, Ghana

We are young people,[2] as we grew up we saw the gyil around us being played. It was here long before us. The instrument came from the antelope. A hunter went to the bush and saw a small antelope playing the instrument. What my fathers and grandfathers told me, was that a small antelope, known as the *och-wie*, was found playing this instrument in the bush. The antelope had the idea to make the instrument from the spider. Through games between the two animals, the spider showed the antelope all the materials to build the gyil including the best wood to use for the keys. The spider instructed the antelope which wood to use for the keys by leaving his mark in the wood of the fallen trees. [Rosewood] The first gyile were on the ground, like the *kpan kpul*. On return trips into the bush, the hunter saw how the antelope used the spider's ideas to build a frame and use the gourds. The hunter also brought these ideas back to the people. Today some good xylophonists and certain clans of women do not eat this animal (antelope) and out of respect, they do not use the antelope skin in the construction of the gyil.

[2] Sontii regards himself as "young" compared to the gyil. In his early to mid-sixties, Sontii is regarded as an elder both in the community and among gyilimbwere.

Gyil Myth: Belembe Dari

Translation from Birifor to English by Tijan Dorwana

Interview conducted 3/20/2004 in Nasoltain, Ghana

The elders have said that the gyil was given to us by the *kontomble*. Some of our people had gone to the bush and saw these *kontomble* playing the gyil. One hunter hid and watched them play the instrument to learn. When the *kontomble* heard the hunter's movements, they were frightened and ran off leaving the xylophone for the hunters. The man who watched the *kontomble* in the bush and learned the music was named Dari. Dari is a strong name and is a generally a name for a person who has died prematurely then came back as a younger sibling. He was responsible for collecting the instrument from the bush and bringing it back to our people generations ago. It was Dari and another hunter, Warfa, who helped spread the gyil through the rest of our community.

Gyil Myth: Kaminyen

Translation from Birifor to English by Tijan Dorwana

Interview conducted 3/20/2004 in Nasoltain, Ghana

The xylophone was here from our birth. We grew up seeing it. We believe that the *kontomble* brought us the xylophone; that is what we have heard from our parents and our grandparents. The *kontomble* have special powers and can arrest somebody and take them somewhere. Once, they arrested a hunter from the bush for over three years. I never met the man so I do not know his name. I only know about him from the stories my parents told me. Everyone thought this man was dead and gone but after three years, he came back with the xylophone. The *kontomble* had showed him how to carve the xylophone and also how to play. The *kontomble* arrested and taught the hunter so that human beings could inherit the gyil.

The oldest pieces for the gyil were the original pieces taught to the person who was arrested. These *kontomble* showed him the *Daarfo*, *Daarkpen*, the *Chi Kobne* for the farmers, the *Po Kuobo* for the women, and then the *Guu*. We still play these pieces the same way the hunter taught us.

Nothing of the instruments has been changed since the *kontomble* showed the hunter. The hunter who was arrested watched and copied how the gyil was made. The *kpan kpul* was in existence before the gyil. The understanding is that the drum [*ganga*] is always there on the ground. [possibly in existence before the gyil] The *kontomble* originally brought the *kpan kpul* but no one would play it properly on the ground. They

would beat it with sticks like the drum. The second time, [the hunter was arrested] the *Kontomble* showed them how to build the frame. They were helping. The *kontomble* added the gourds [for resonators] and made the holes covered with the spider webs. The *kontomble*‘s original instrument was still 14 keys and smaller for them but the tuning remains the same. Both the *bogyil* and *kogyil* were brought to the hunter at the same time, since then nothing had changed.

Gyil Myth: Bernard Woma

Interview conducted 4/2/06 in Flagstaff, AZ

The hunter went to the bush to hunt and heard the fairy, or dwarf, (*kontomble*) playing the gyil in the forest. He got very close and said "I want to learn this instrument." But, the dwarves said "we are not going to teach you this."

The hunters in my community have spiritual powers too. So he went home and organized his fellow hunters then went back into the bush and captured the dwarf and told him "if you do not show us how to play this, we are going to kill you."

So the dwarf took them to the riverside and showed them how to build the authentic xylophone, made from three important elements of nature. The poles of the frame are made of ebony and will never rot. The flexible wood for the frame is called *yiili*. The *su-sule* is a medicine tree and used for the frame where the bars rest. The dwarf told them "if you go home and make this instrument, be sure to honor these three trees."

After the dwarf had showed them all the history and the mystery, and how to play the gyil, they still killed the dwarf. The used the dwarf's blood to purify the instrument and make the sacrifice he had described.

When they got home they were scared and started to play. The women came out and were bewildered because they had never heard this before. The hunters told them that this is the traditional instrument passed down by our ancestors and did not tell them about the dwarf.

The women were the first to dance and danced elegantly and did not jump. When the men danced they also jumped for happiness and joy.

The dwarf played an important role in the history of the gyil and that is why the instrument needs to be purified.

Gyil Myth: Kakraba Lobi

Interview conducted 6/15/06 in Accra, Ghana

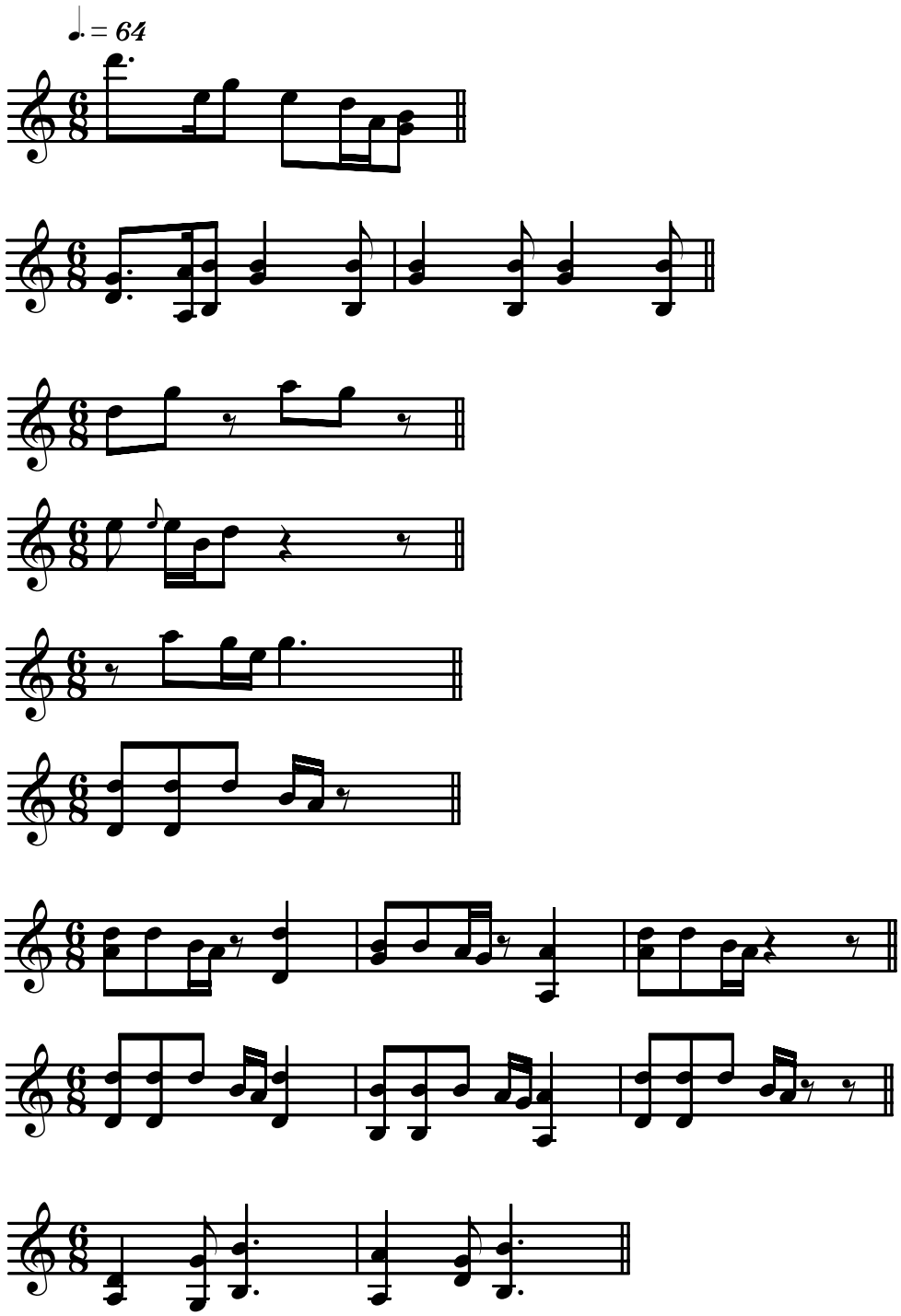
I was born and I saw the xylophone, I don't know how old it is. What my grandfather told us, and his grandfather told him was that before we go to get the xylophone, a hunter goes to the forest to kill an elephant. He sees dwarves, *kontomble*, playing the xylophone. He hides and listens. When the dwarves leave, he runs and collects the xylophone and brings it to the house and puts it down for everyone to try. They try and try and try, and then they know. He stole it away and was the first composer.

The first people starting xylophone, started *Daarkpen*. They played that first because they did not know anything else. Now they know too much and they play more, more, more. Everyone learns it first, A,B,C,D. You learn *Daarfo* and *Daarkpen* first, *Po Kuobo* and then *Chi Kobne*. The *Daarfo* and *Daarkpen* are very old songs, but I have composed many, many, many. It is still *Daarkpen* music but it can be new. Just like rock and roll. It can be new or old.

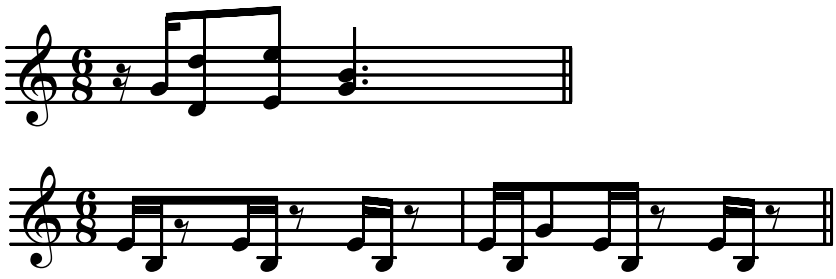
APPENDIX B

DAARFO ARRANGEMENT

Daarfo Musical Themes



Daarfo Musical Themes



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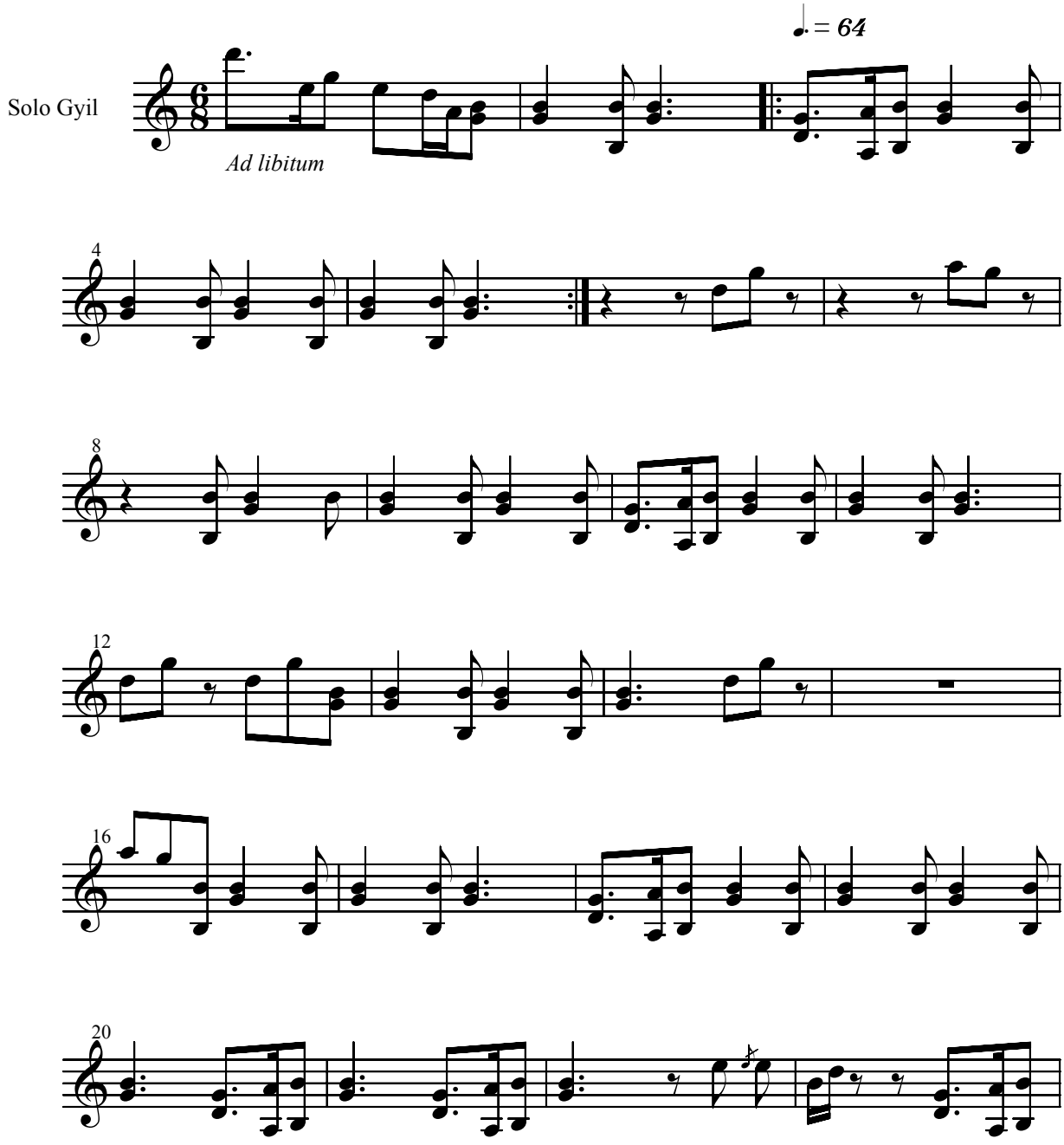

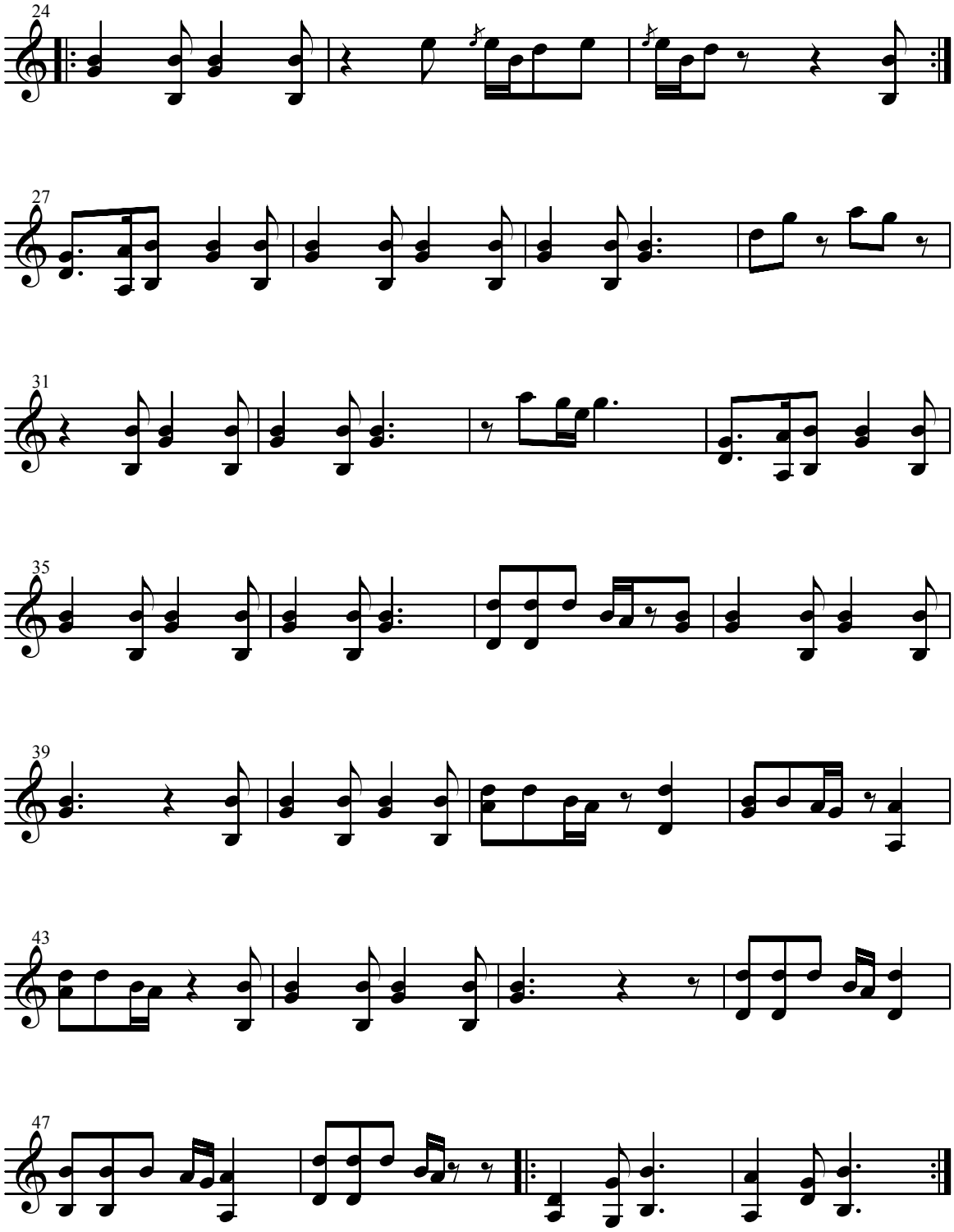
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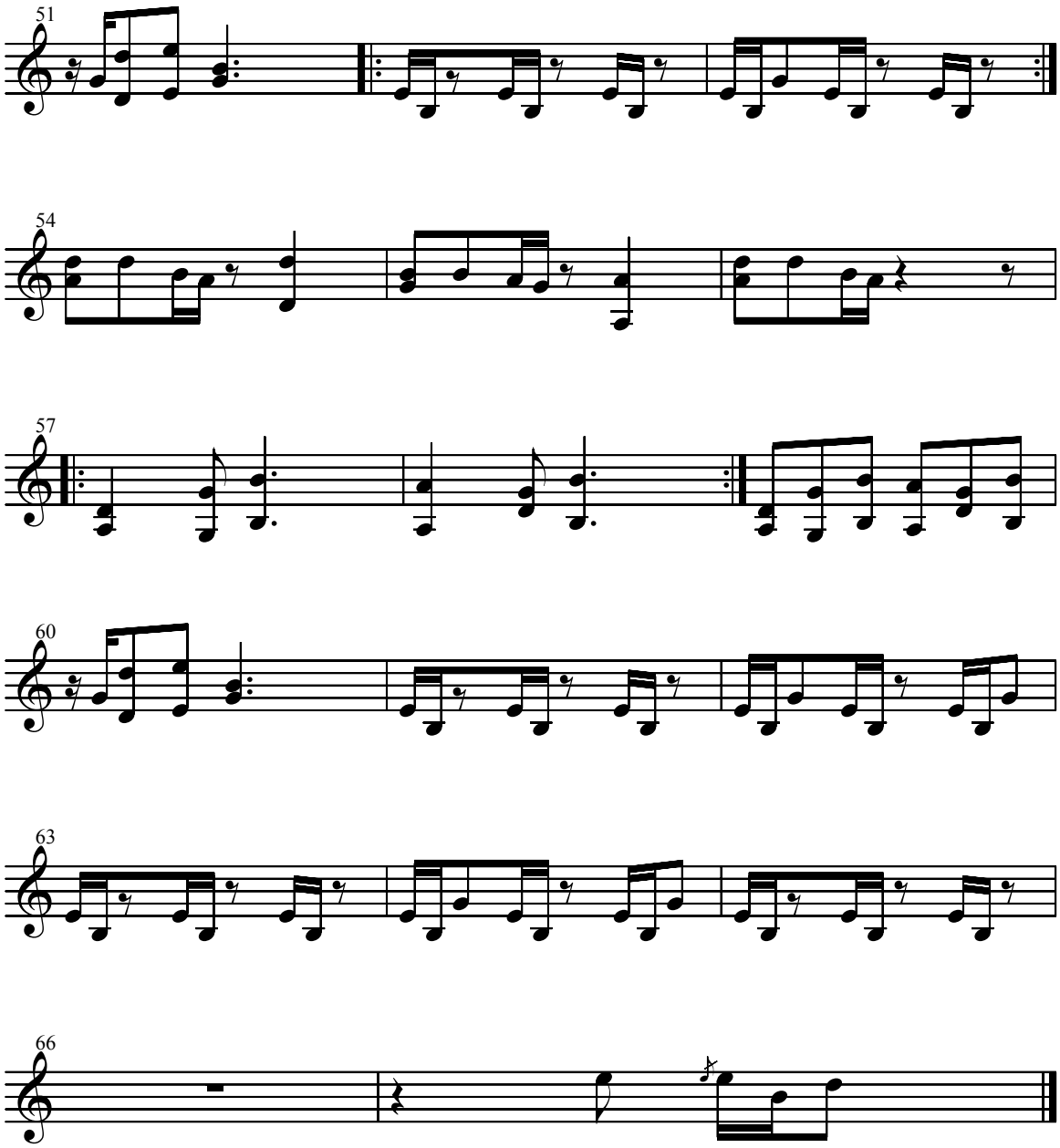
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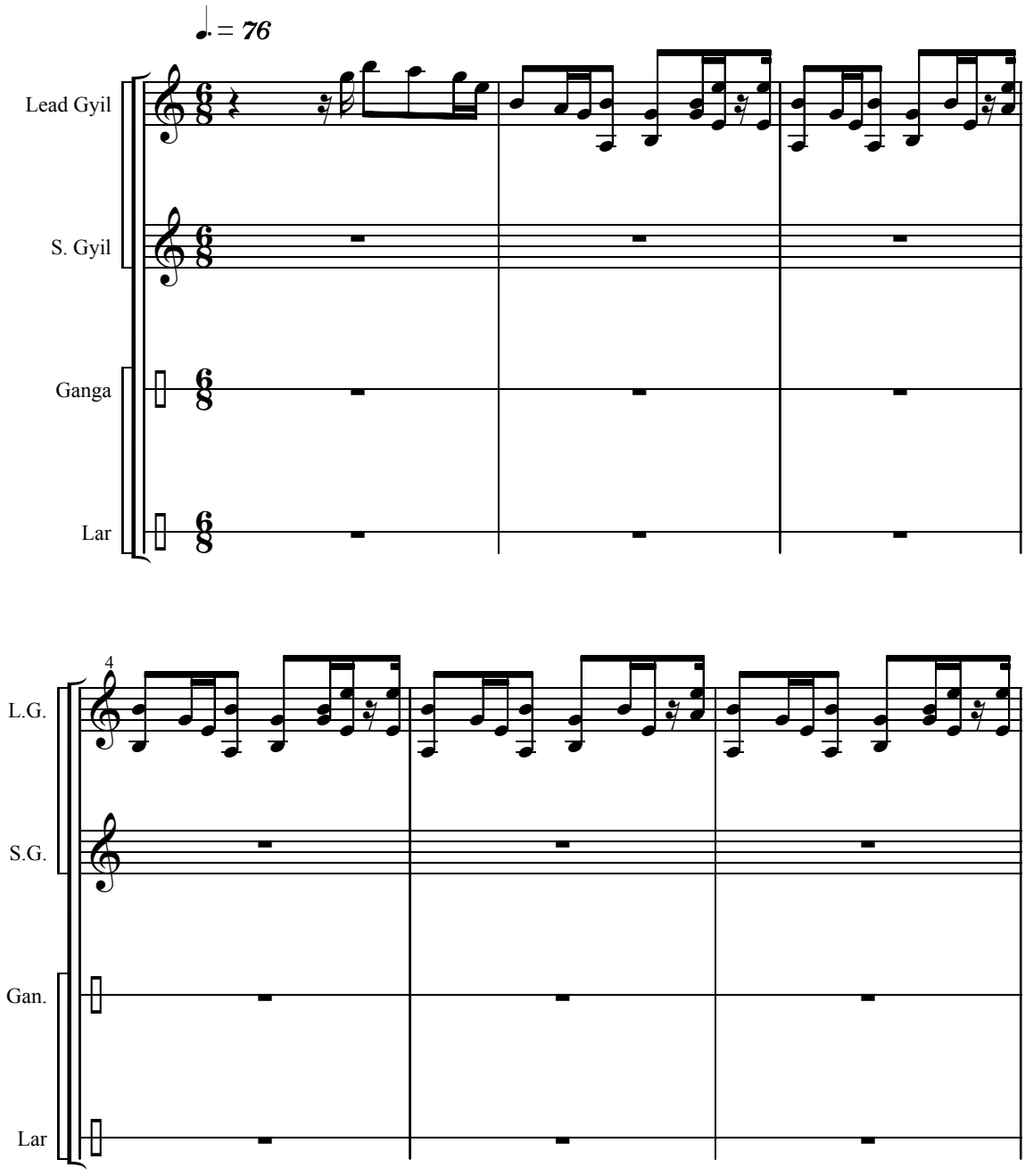
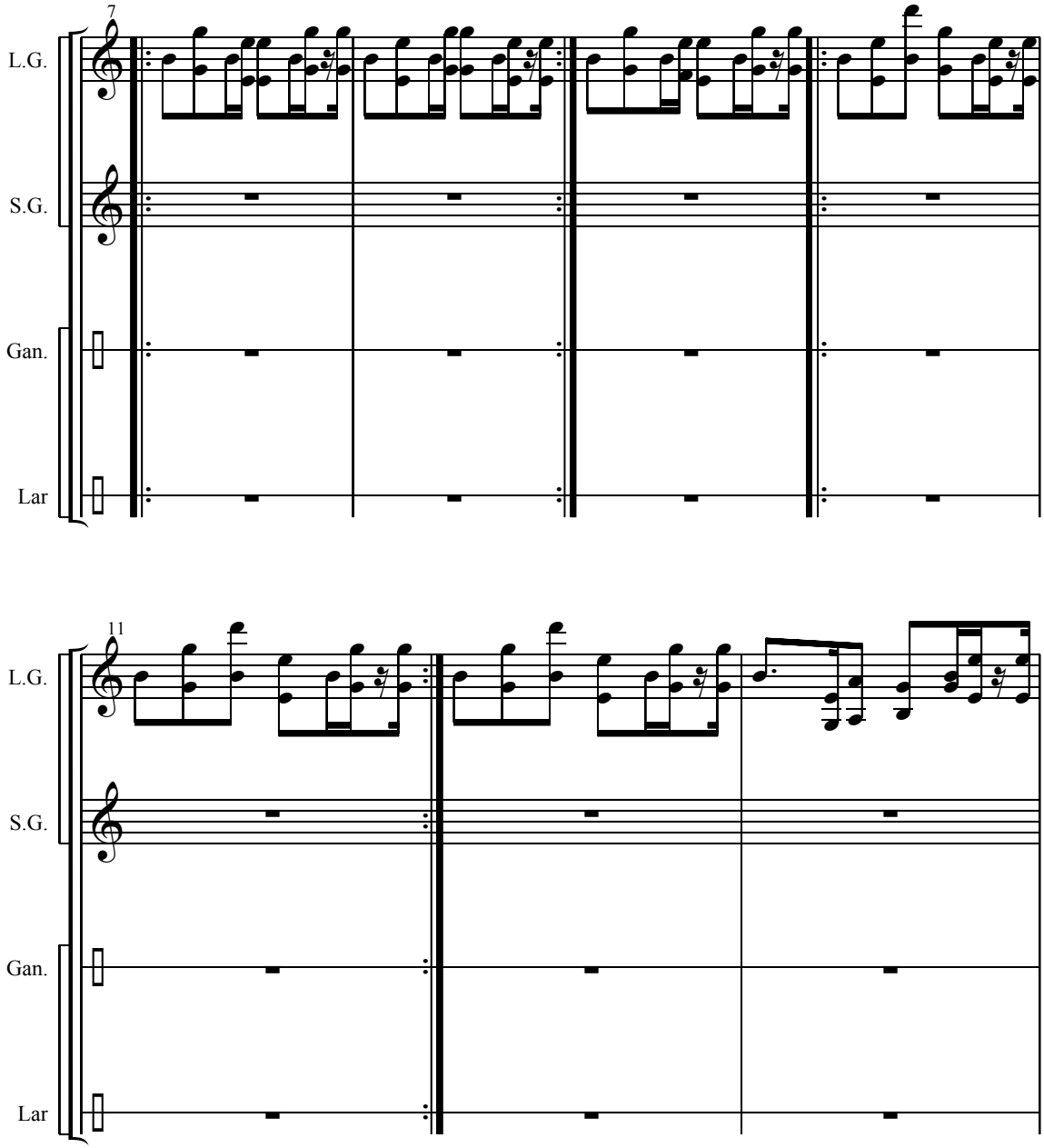
APPENDIX C

DAARKPEN ARRANGEMENT

Daarkpen

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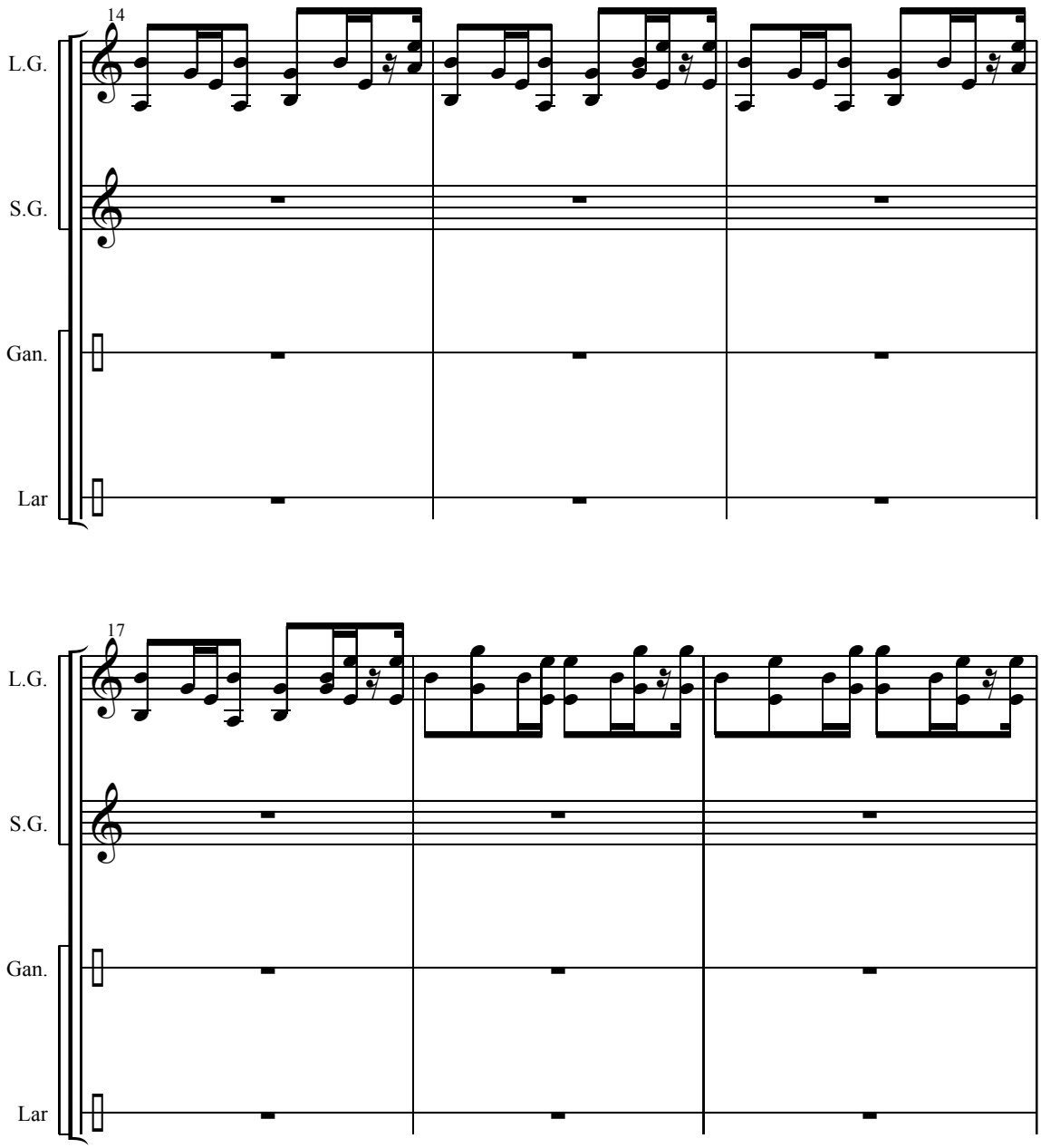
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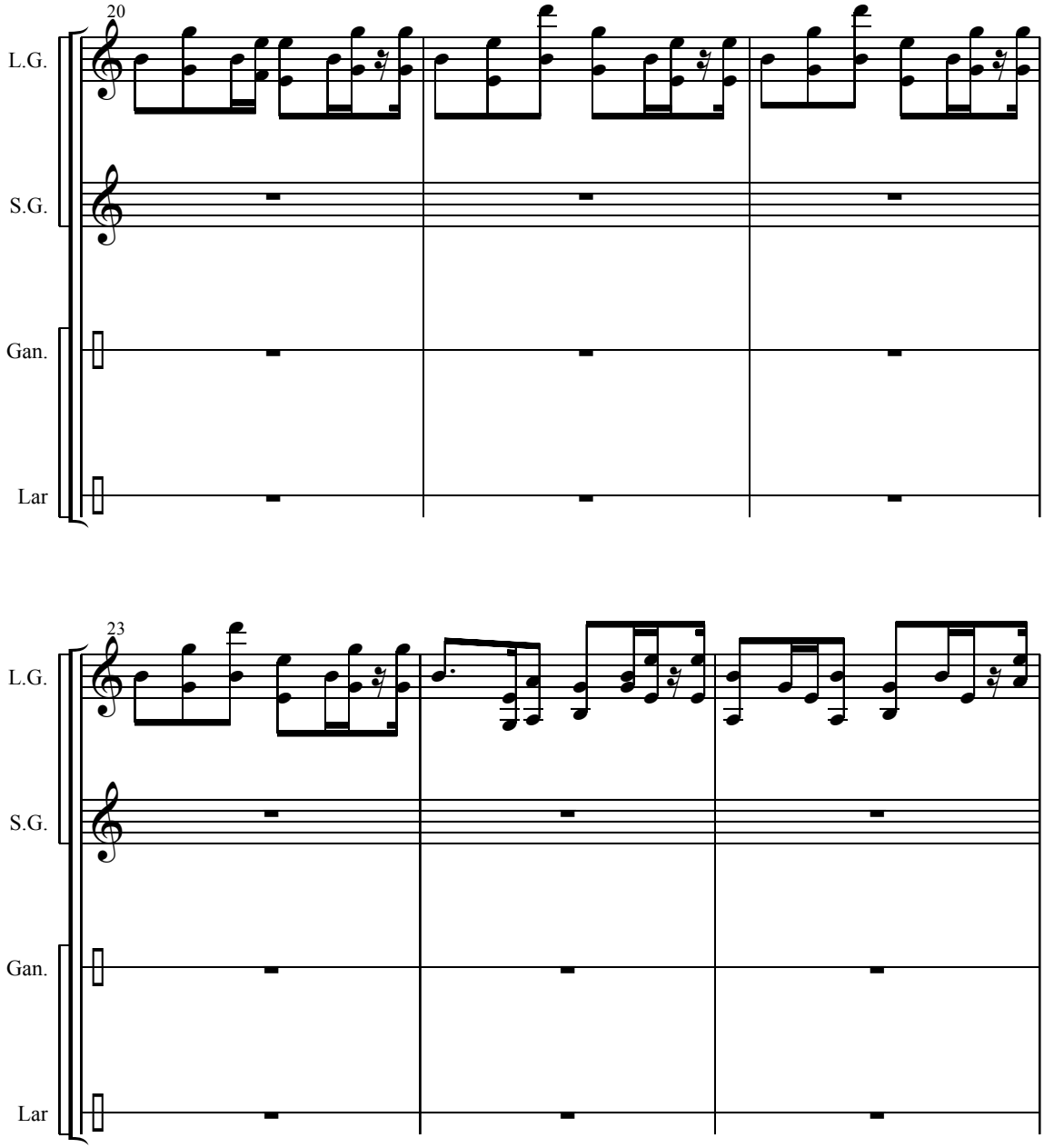
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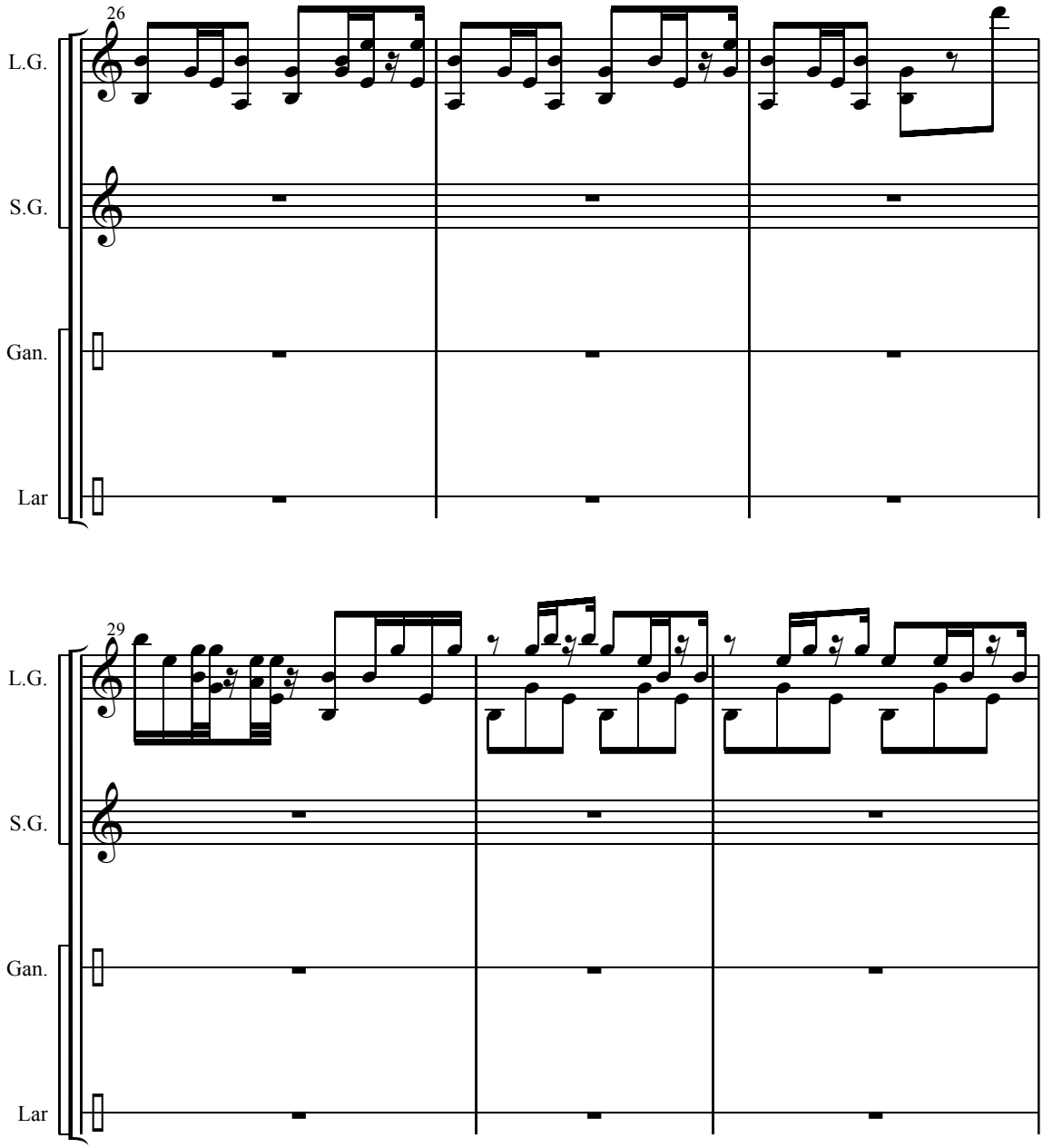
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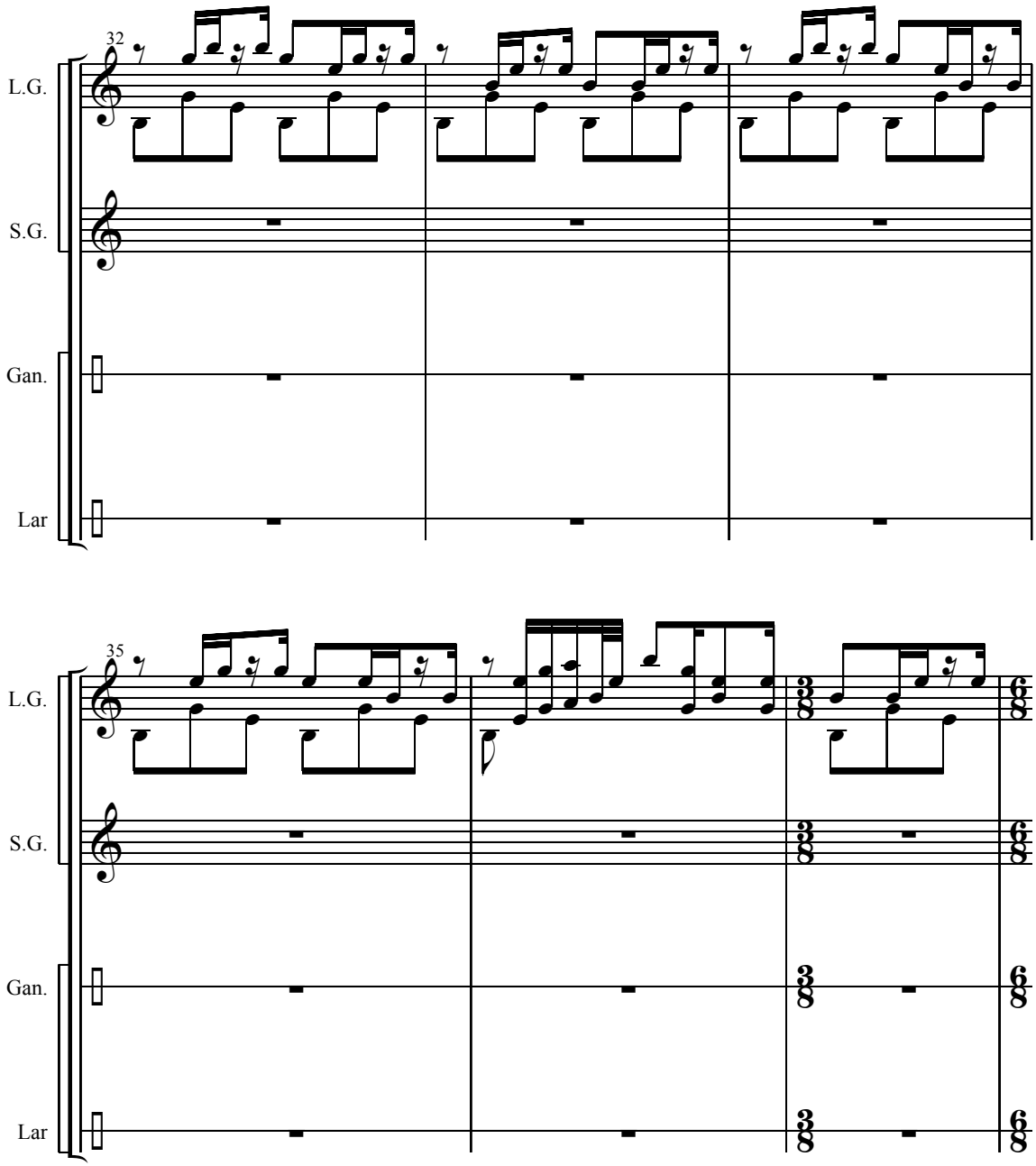
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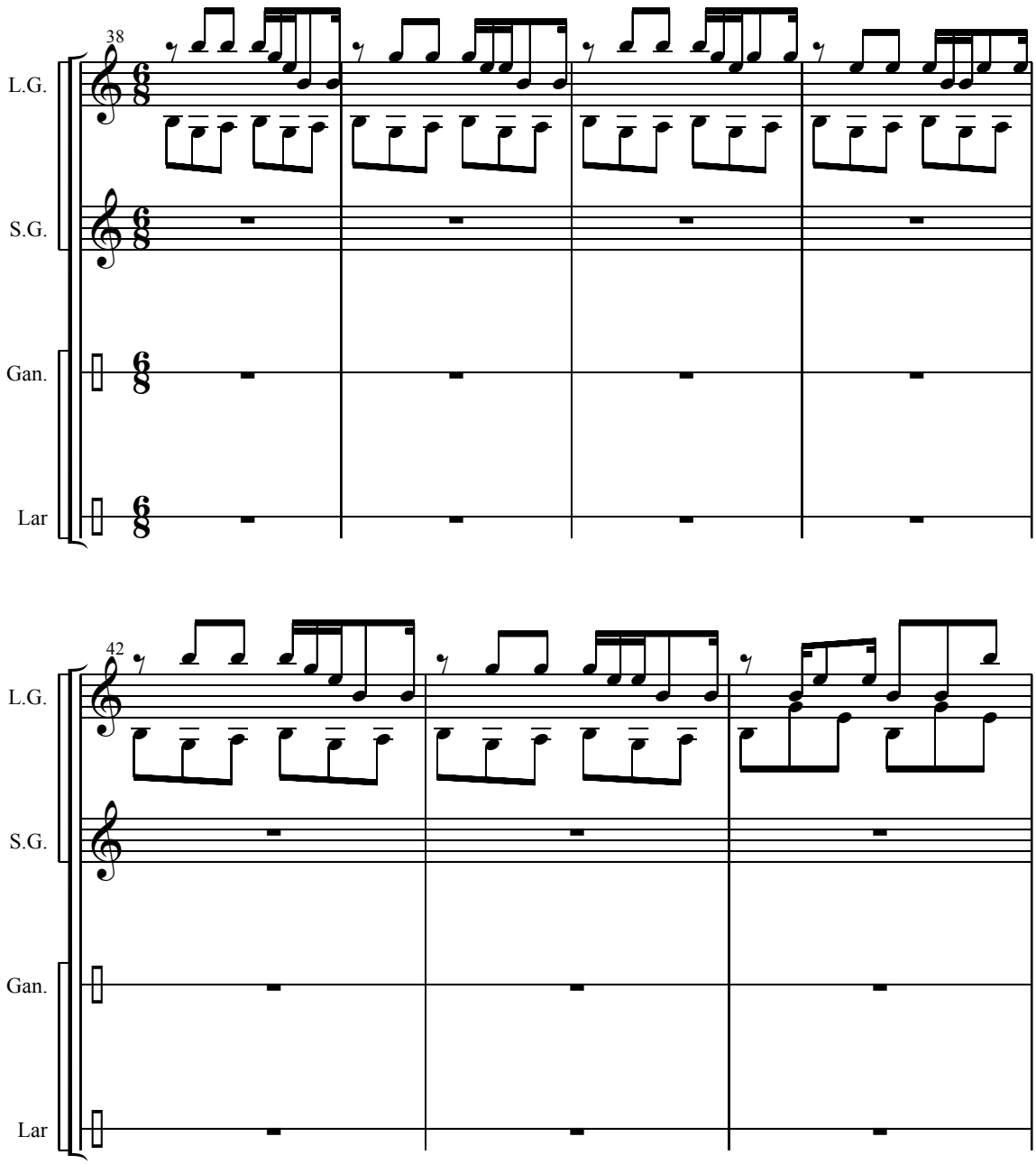
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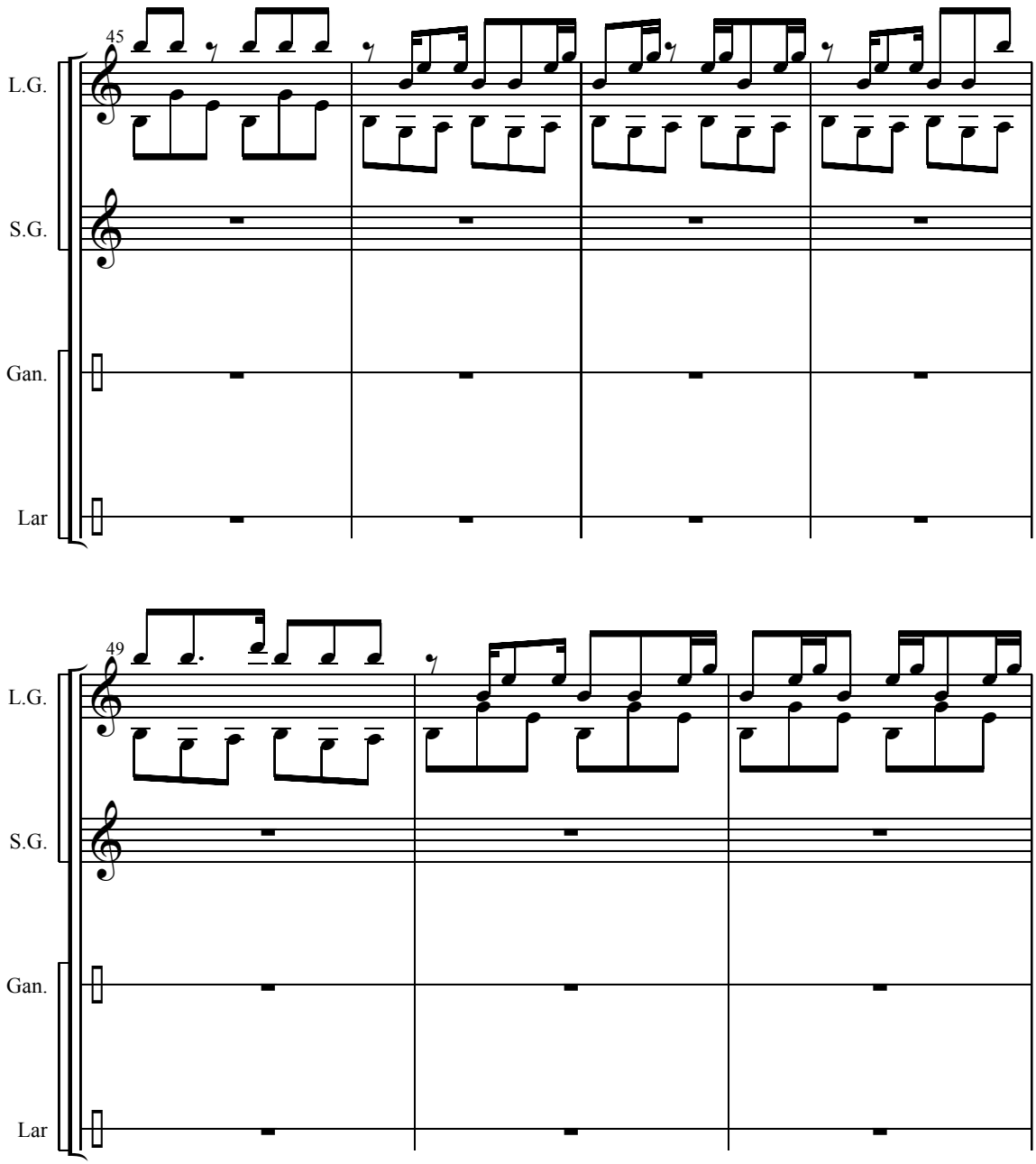
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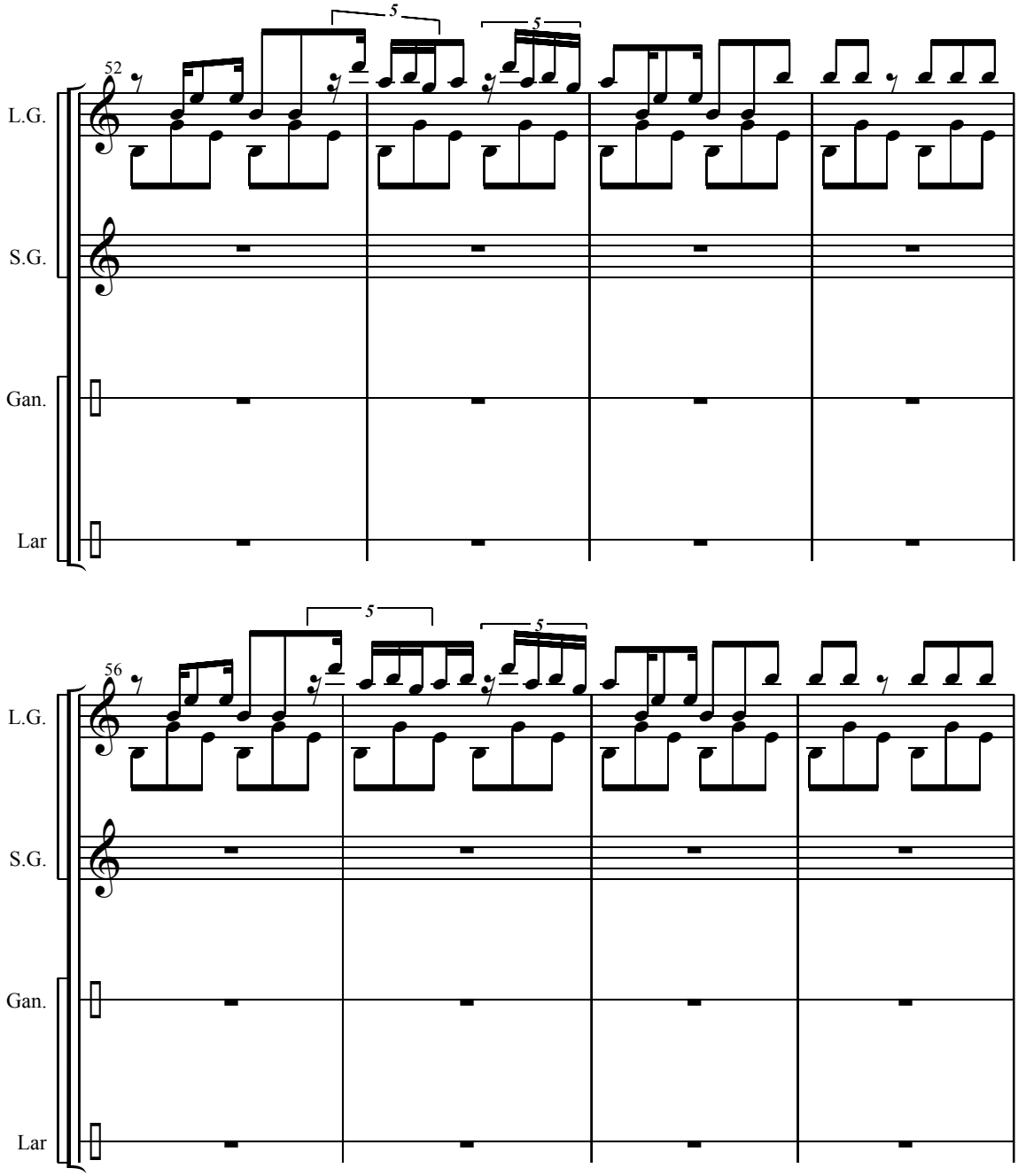
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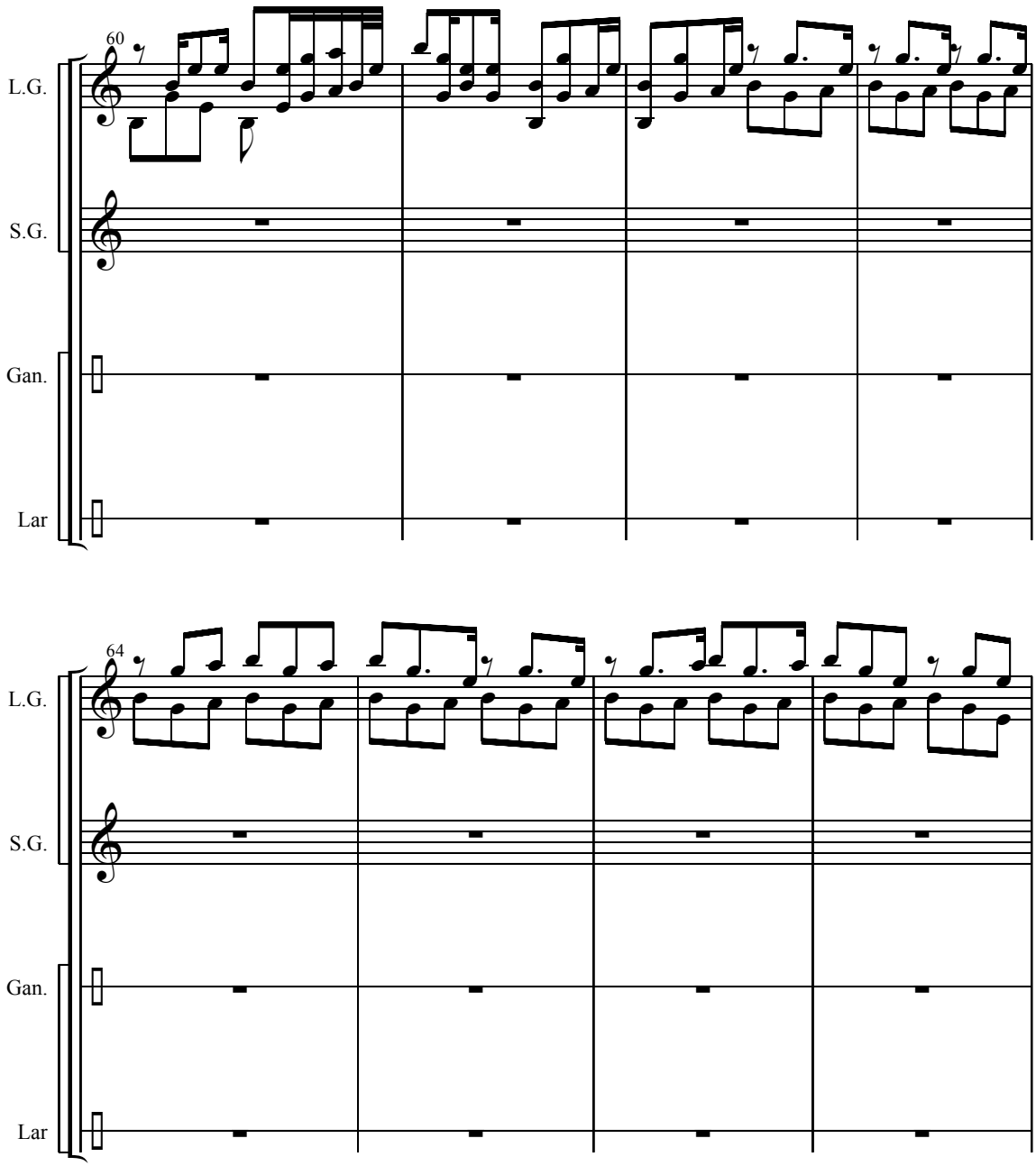
60
L.G.
S.G.
Gan.
Lar
64
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S.G.
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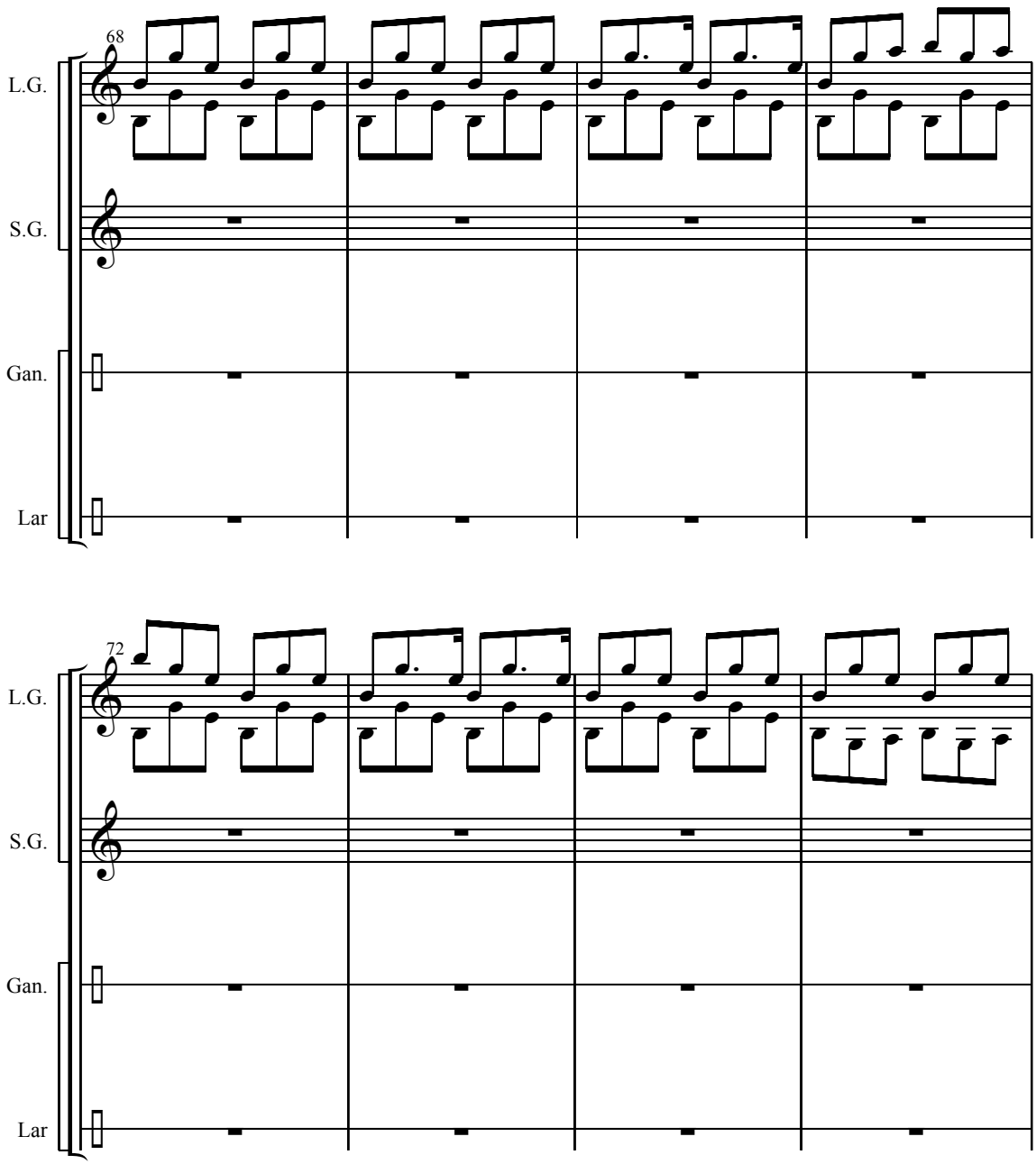
Lar


68
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S.G.
Gan.
Lar
72
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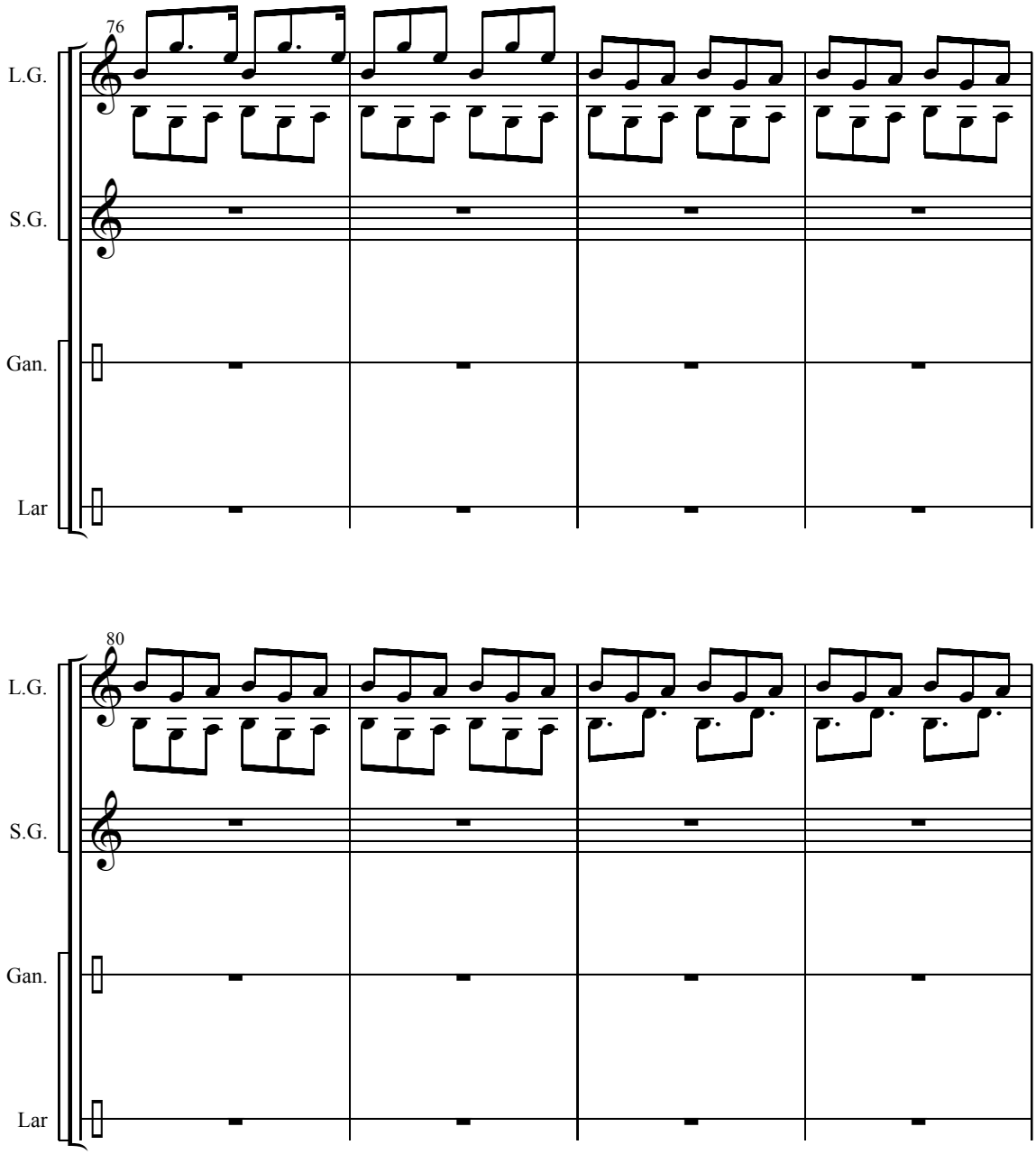
S.G.
Gan.
Lar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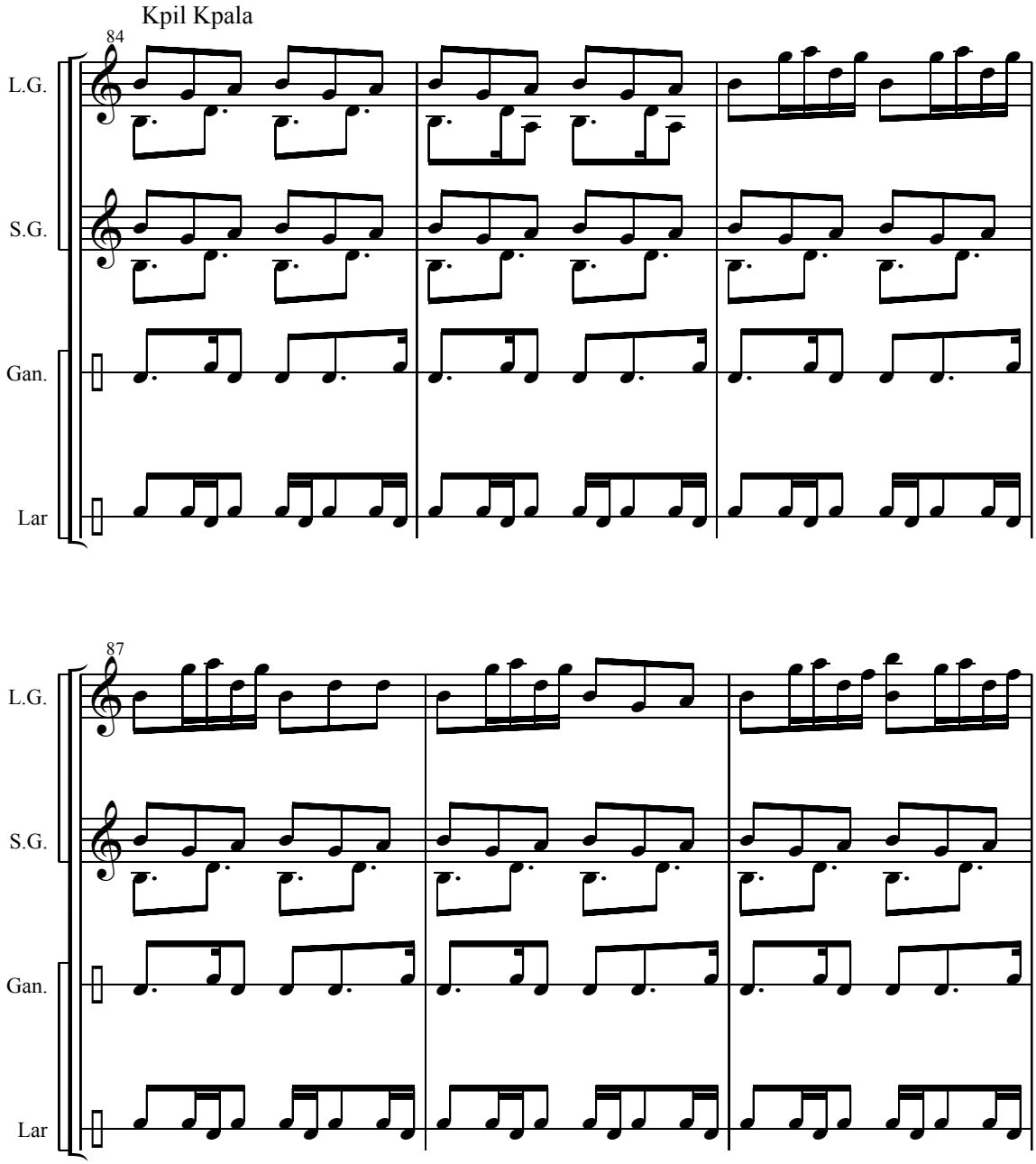
L.G.
S.G.
Gan.
Lar
80
L.G.
S.G.
Gan.
Lar


Kpil Kpala
84
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Lar
87
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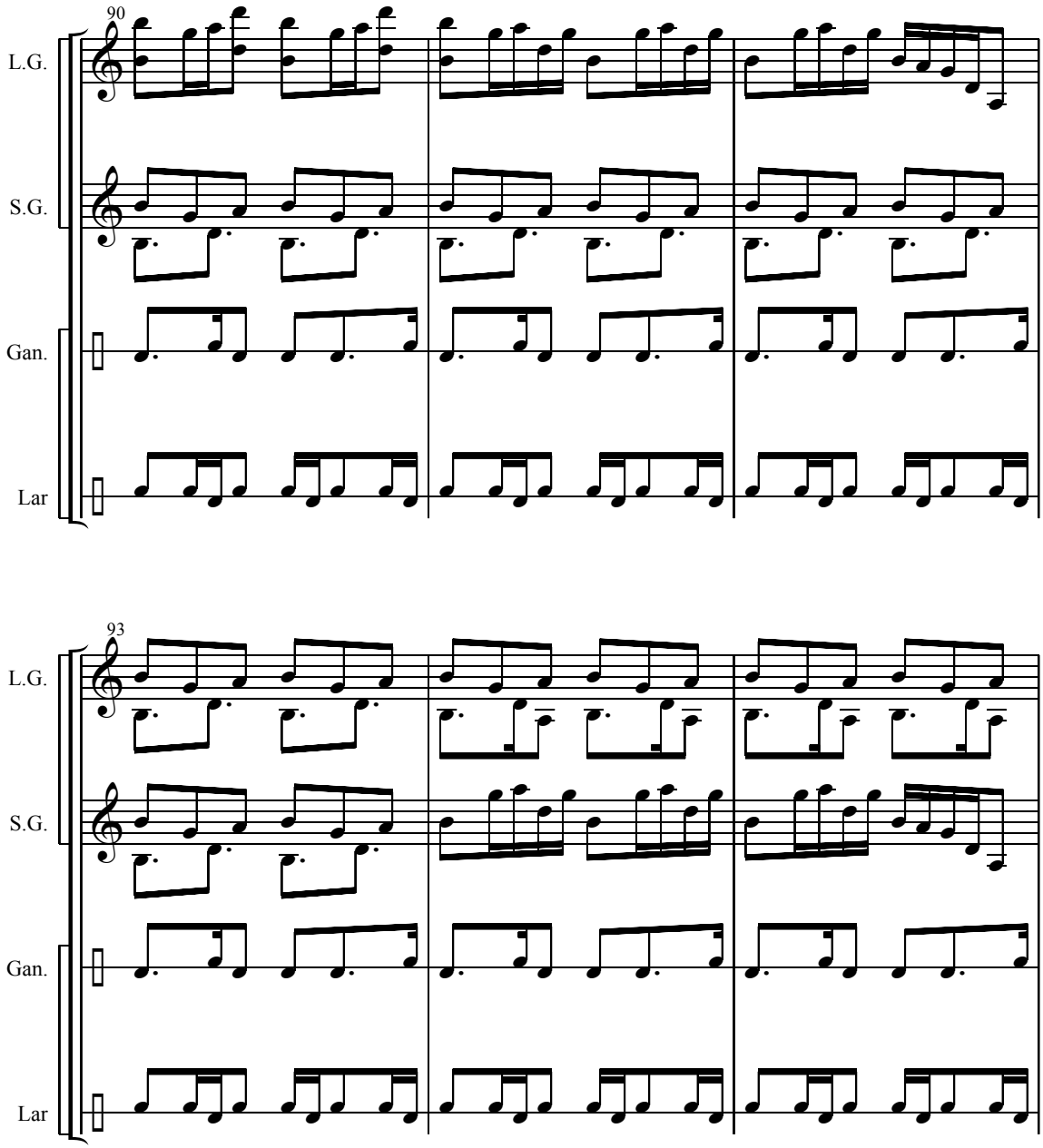
Gan.
Lar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Gan.
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93
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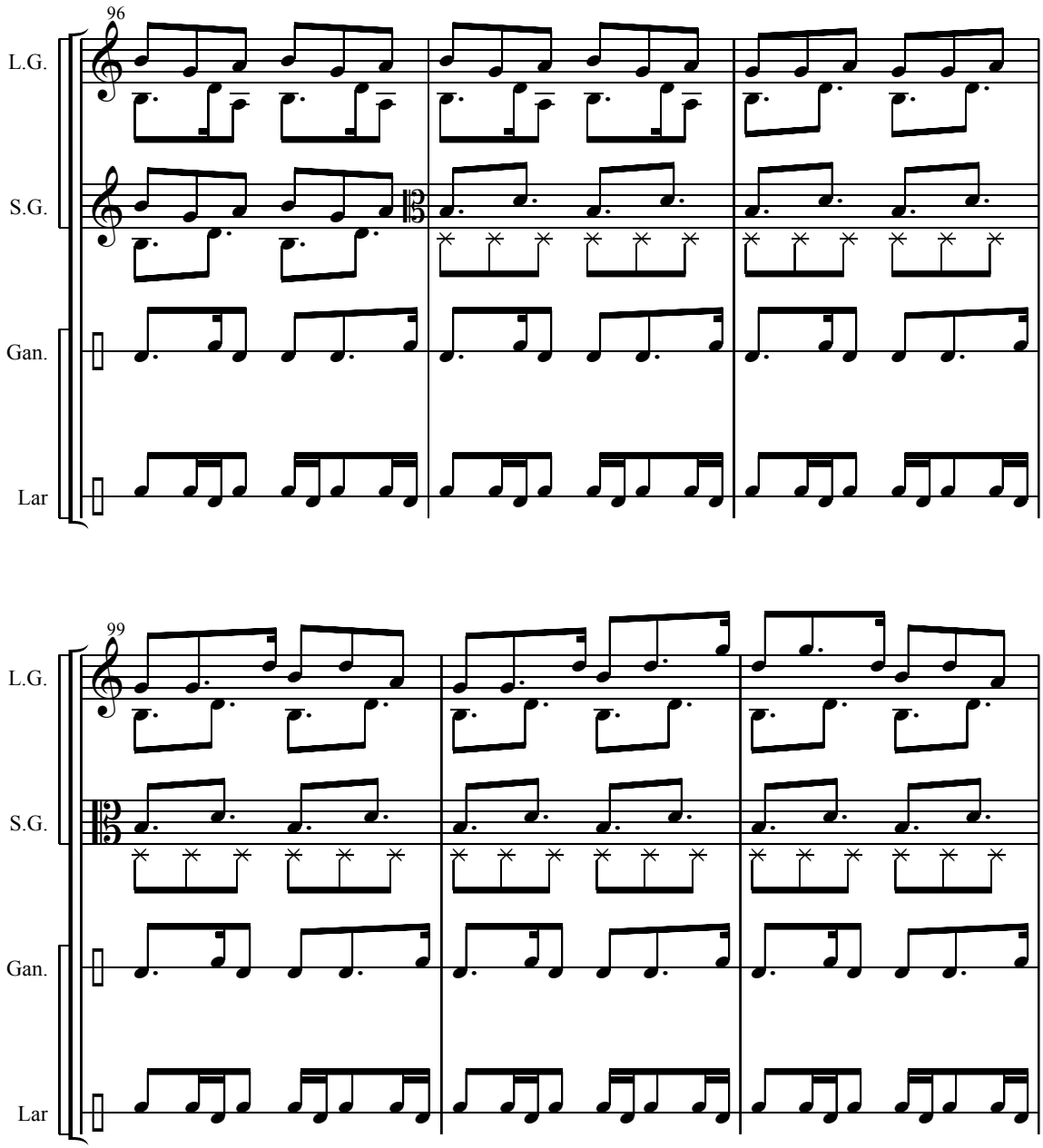
S.G.
Gan.
Lar


96
L.G.
S.G.
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99
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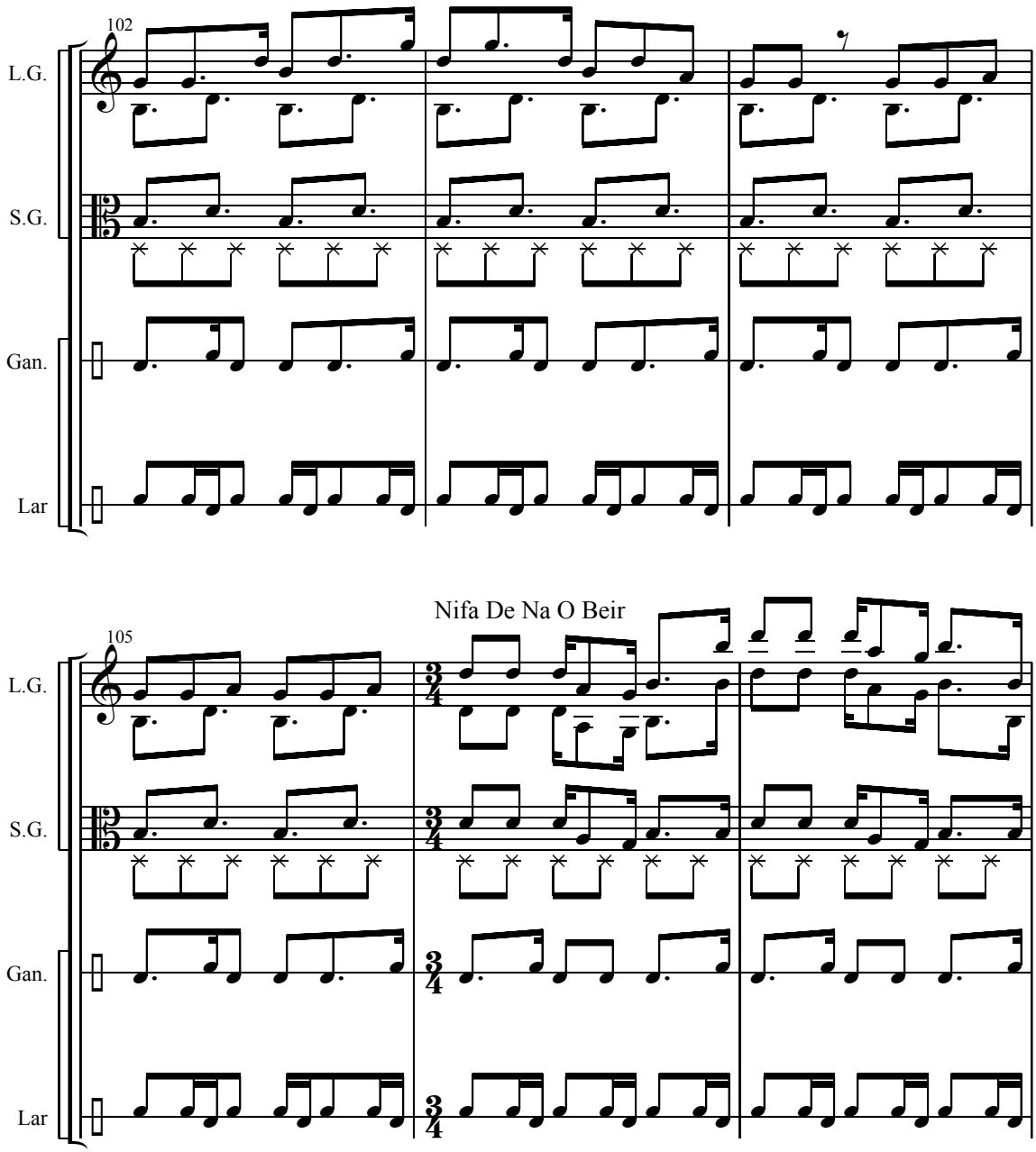
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S.G.
Gan.
Lar
Nifa De Na O Beir
105
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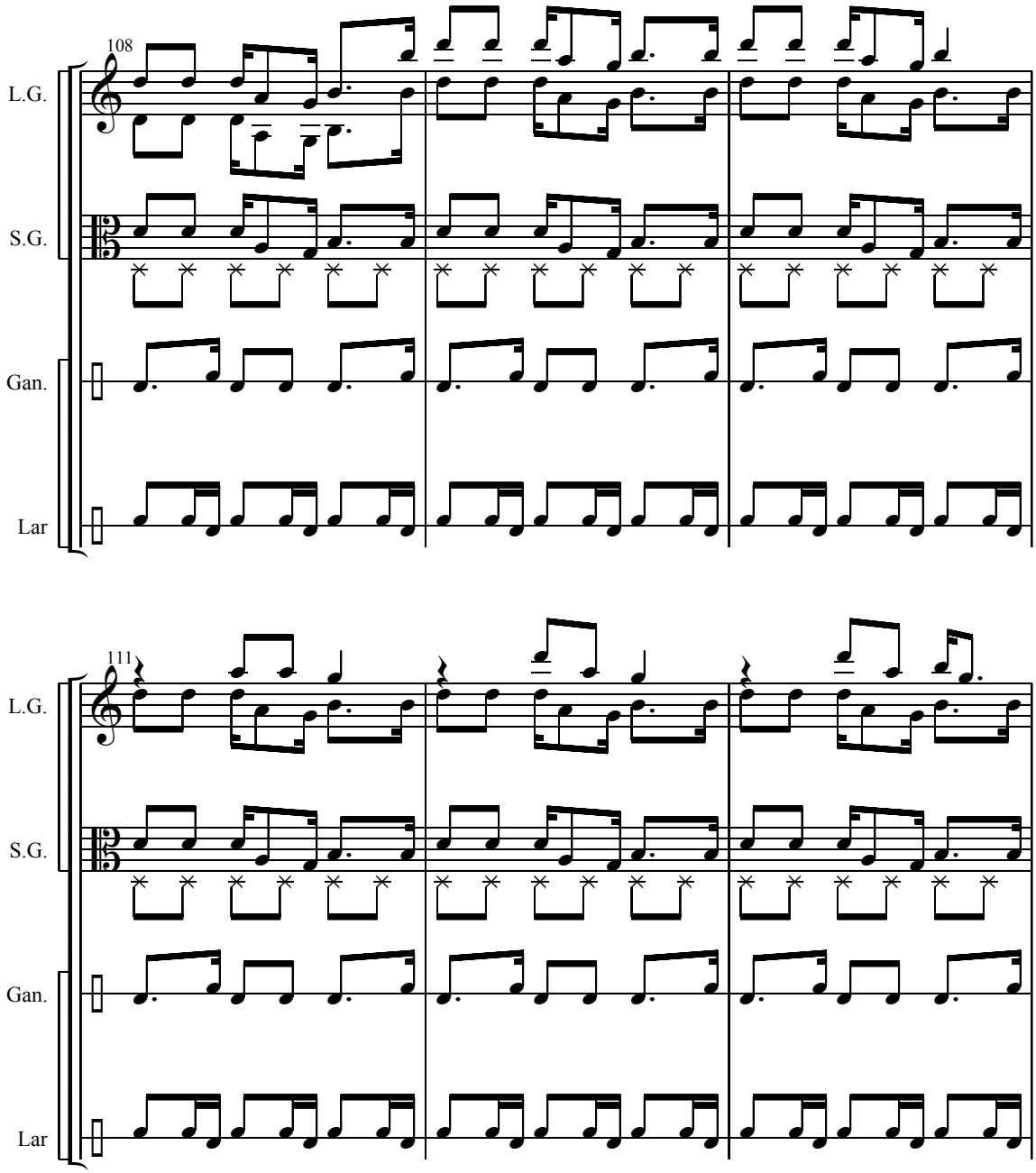
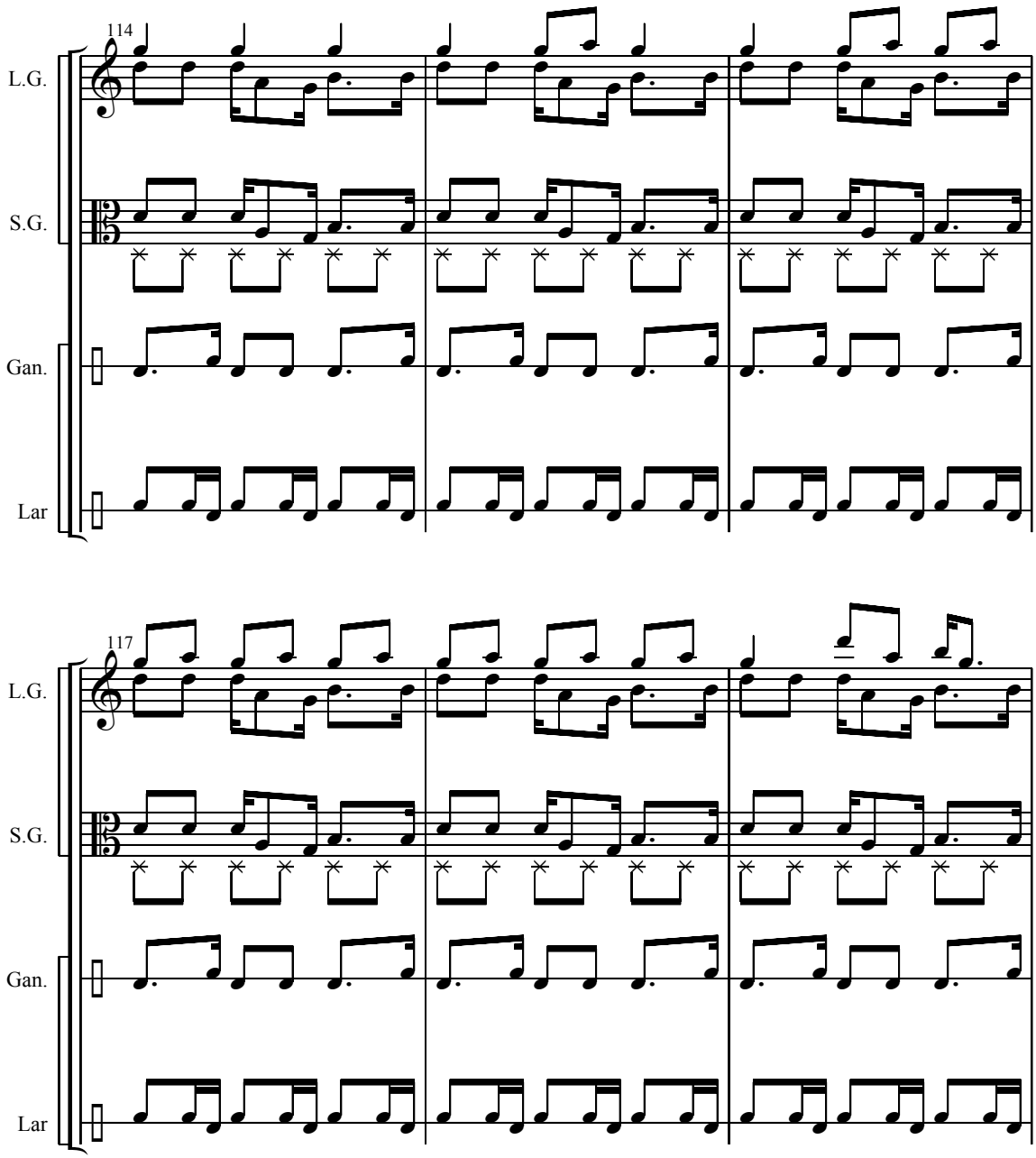
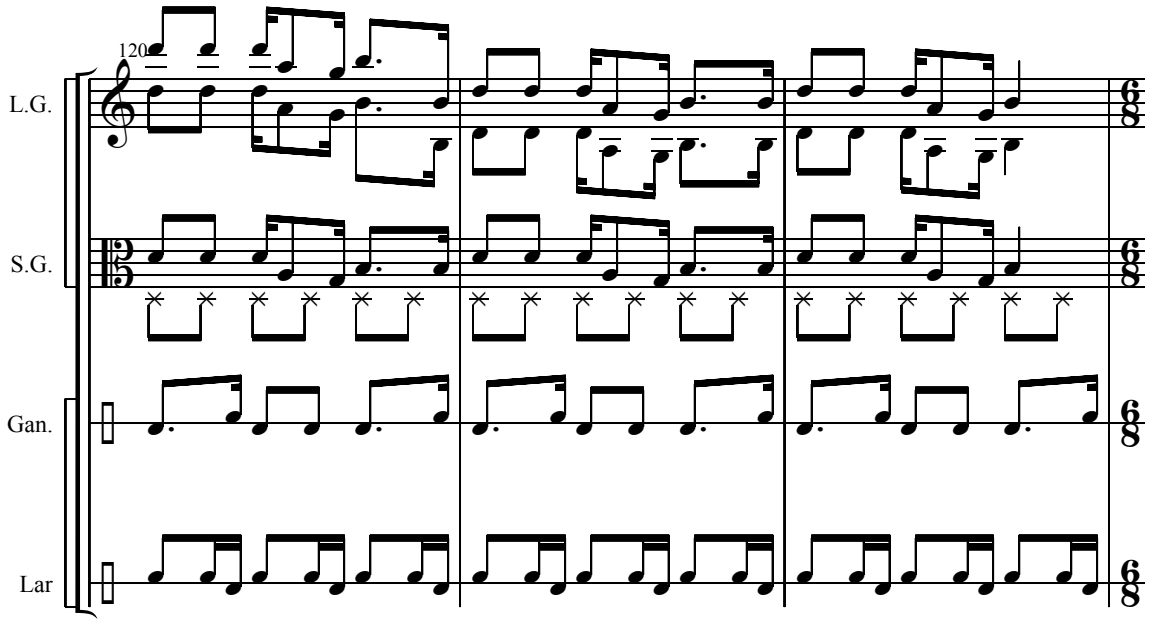
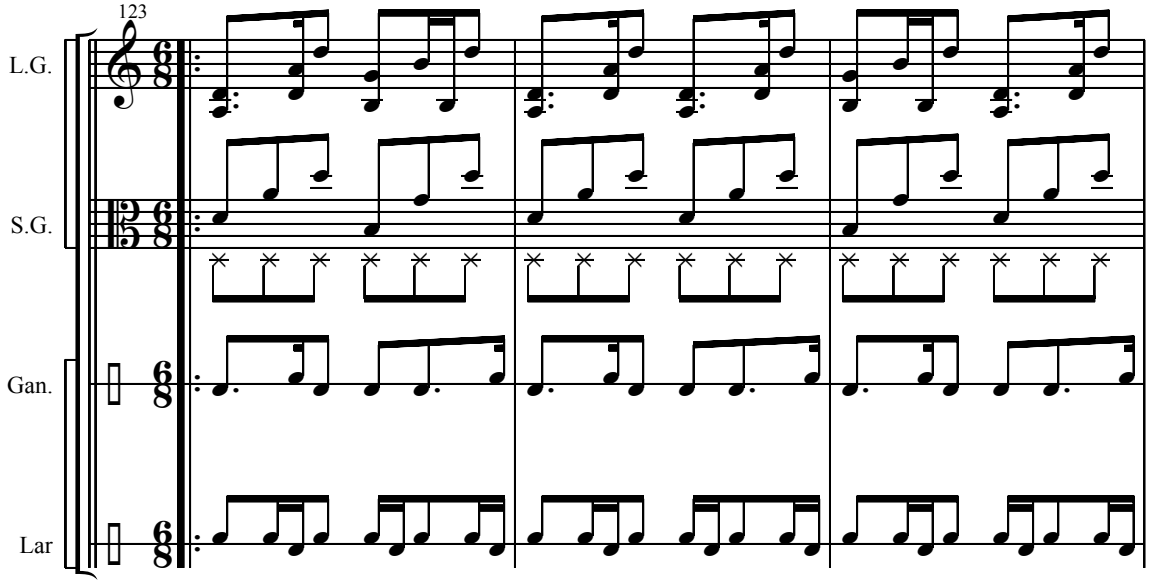
S.G.
Gan.
Lar

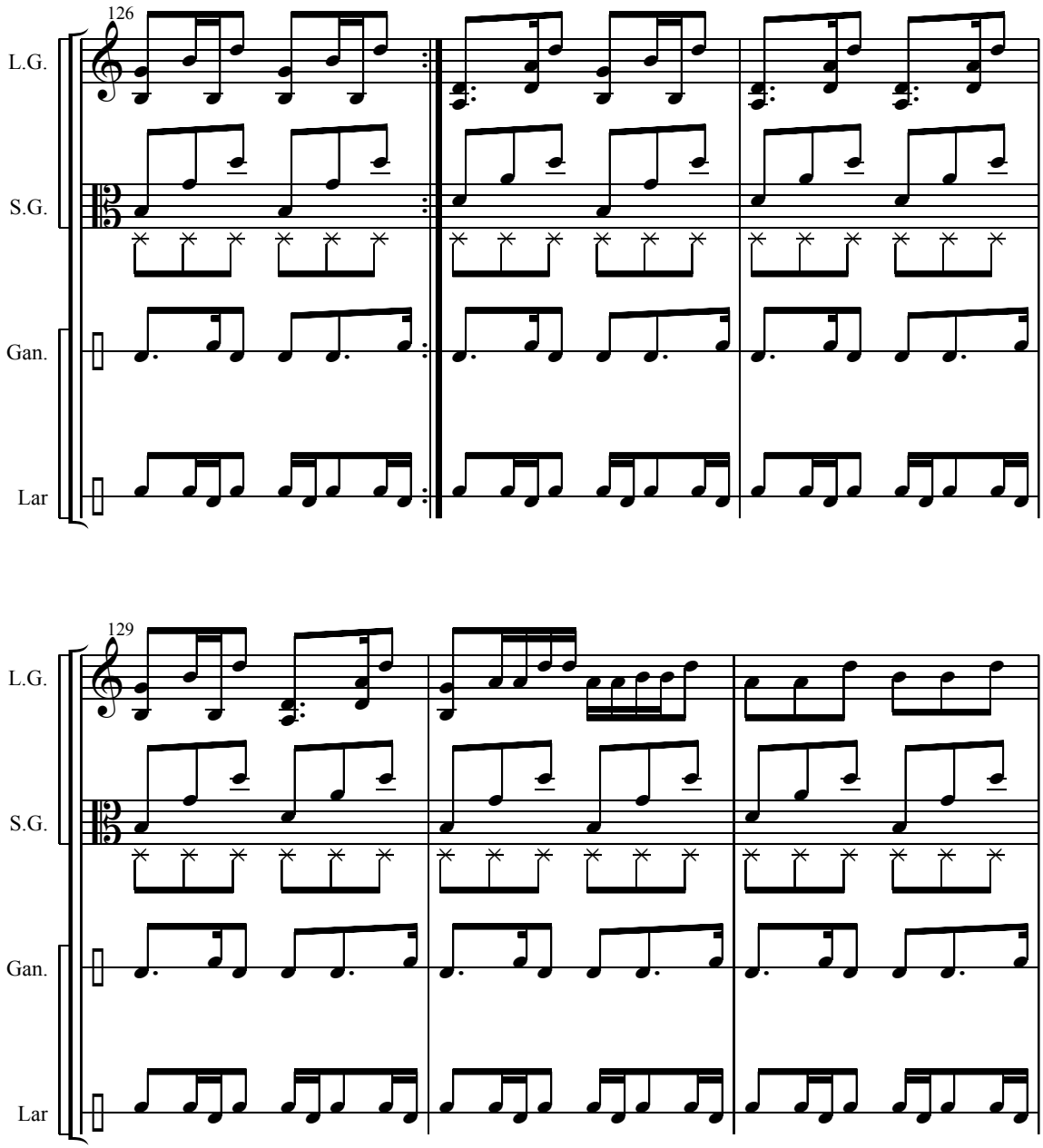

108
L.G.
S.G.
Gan.
Lar
111
L.G.
S.G.
Gan.
Lar


114
L.G.
S.G.
Gan.
Lar
117
L.G.
S.G.
Gan.
Lar



Namwine Gon Doya

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L.G.
S.G.
Gan.
Lar
129
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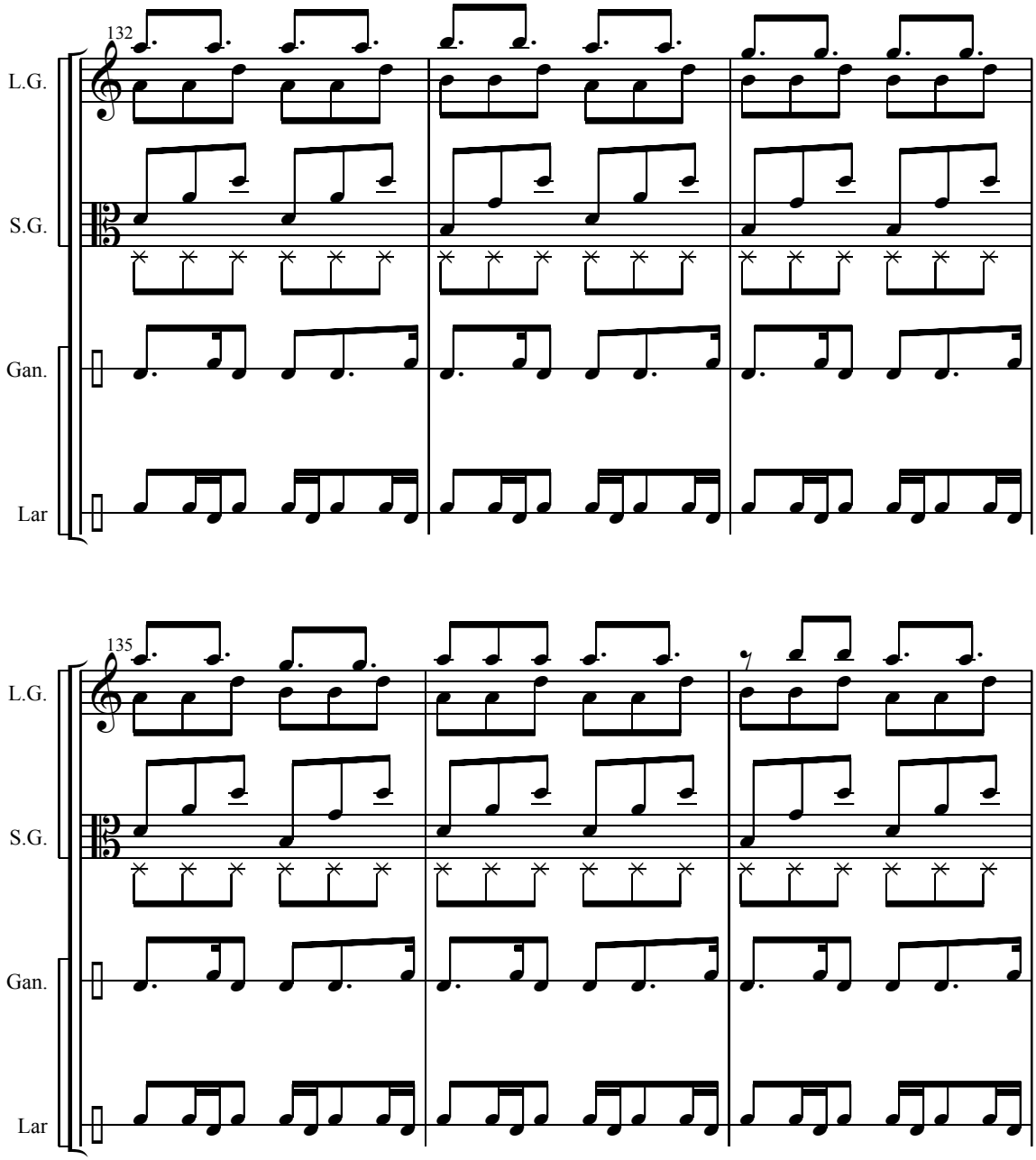
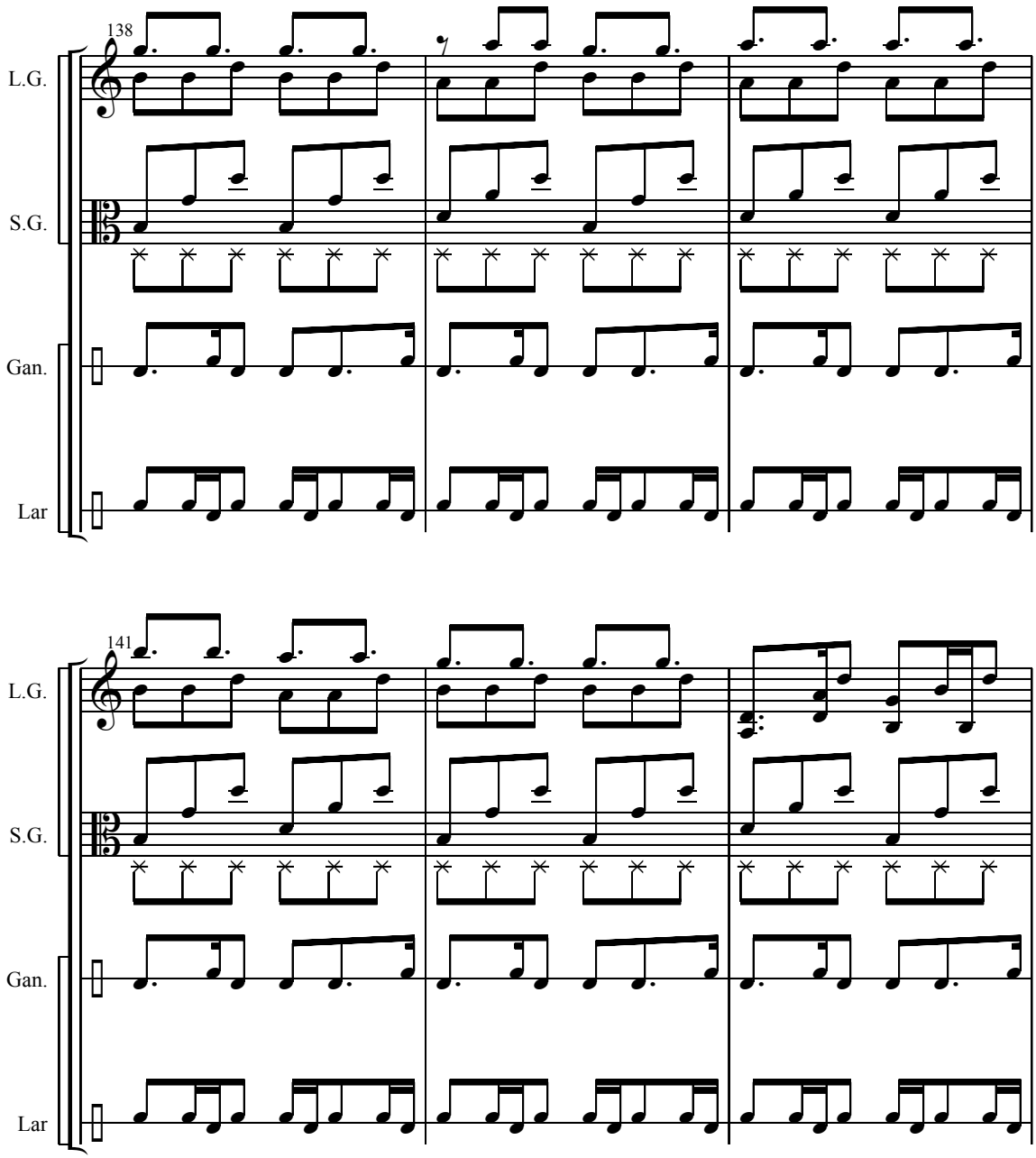
S.G.
Gan.
Lar


132
L.G.
S.G.
Gan.
Lar
135
L.G.
S.G.
Gan.
Lar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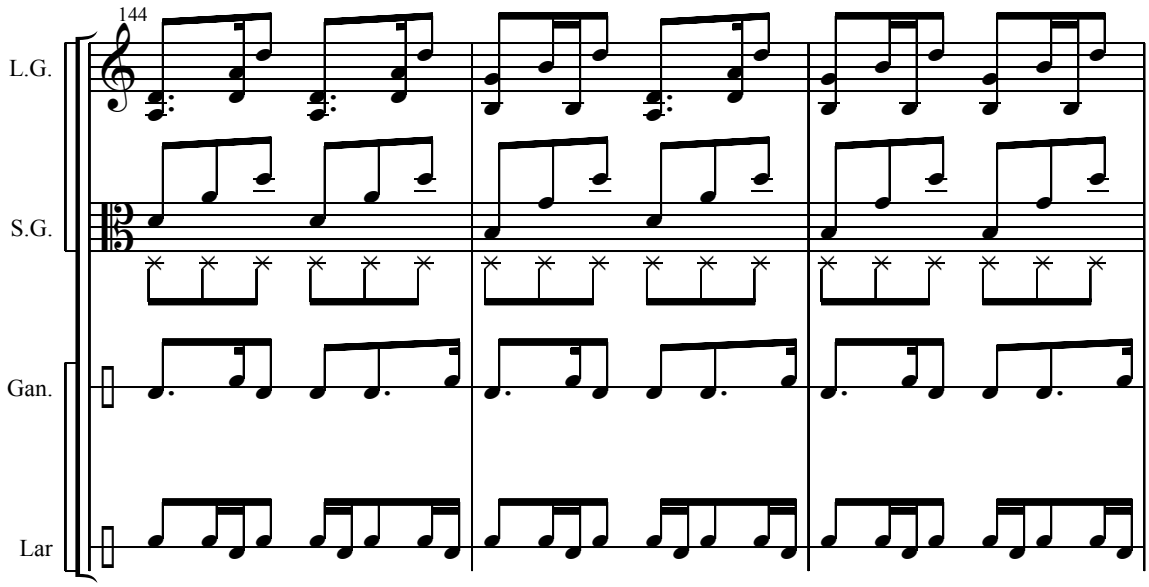
L.G.
S.G.
Gan.
Lar
141
L.G.
S.G.
Gan.
Lar


144
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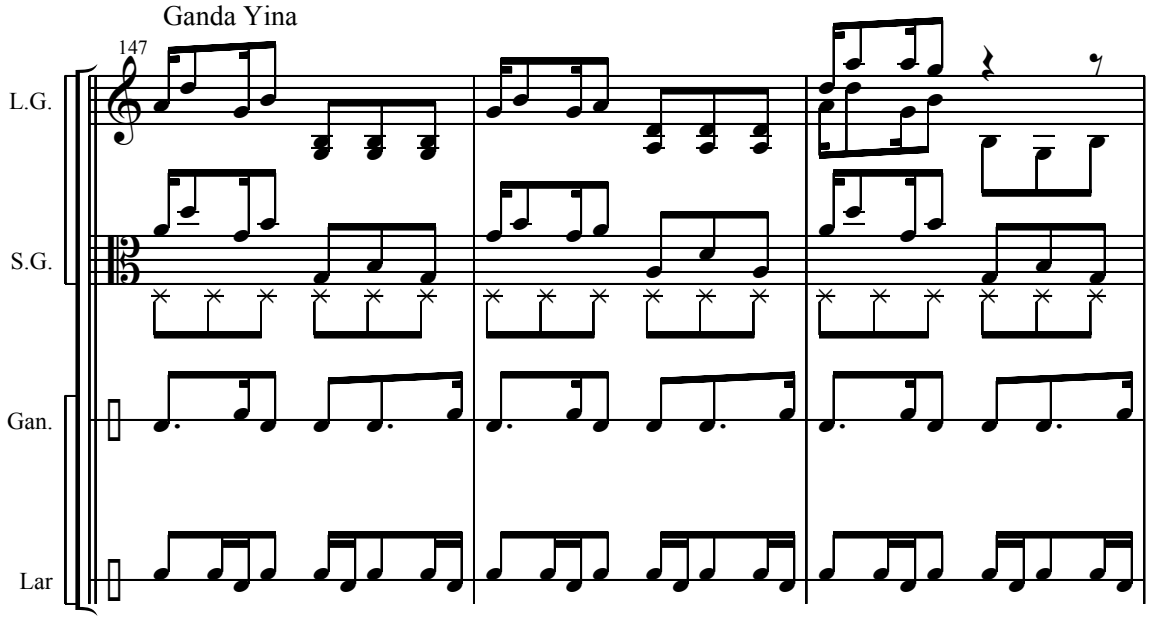
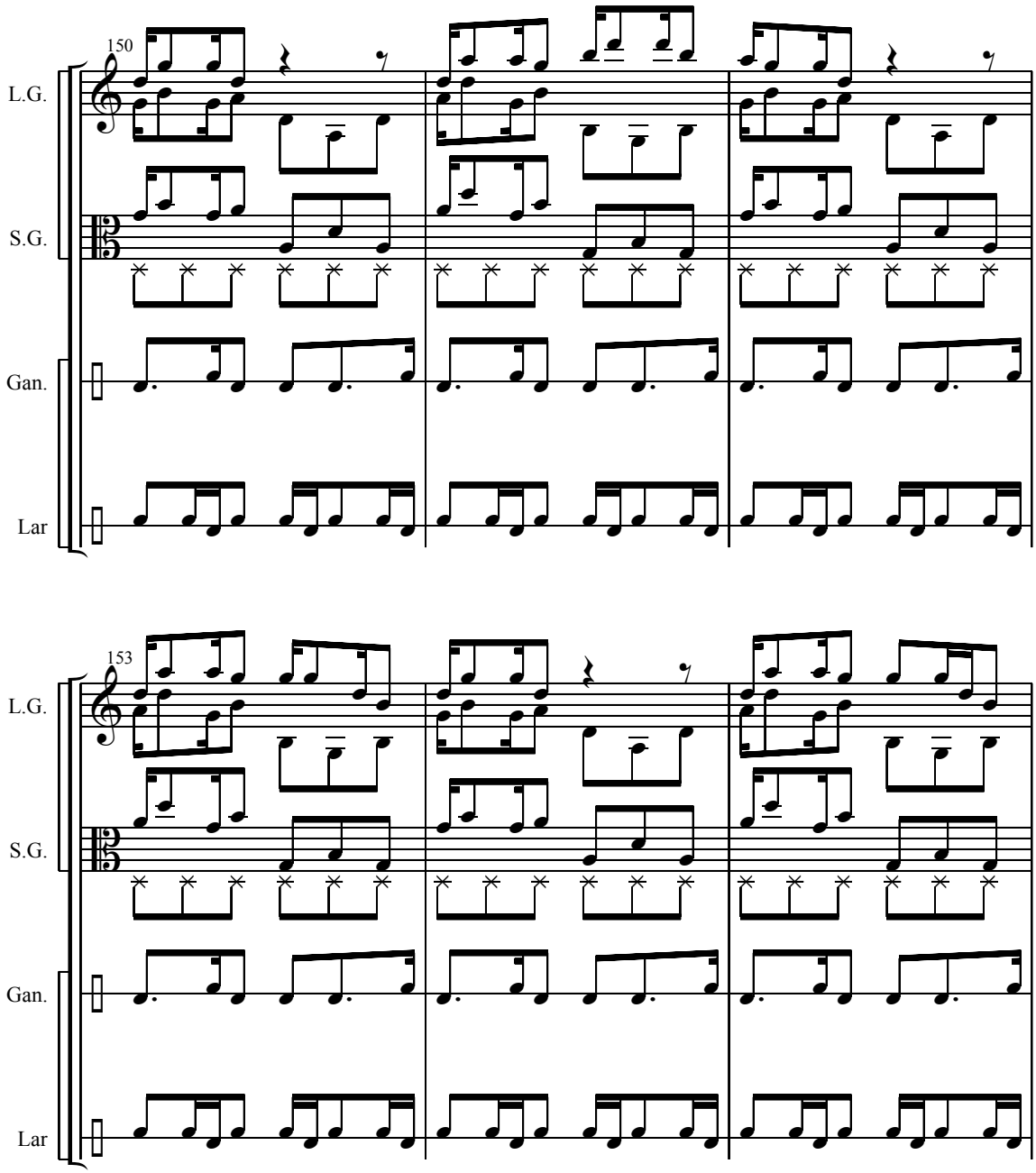
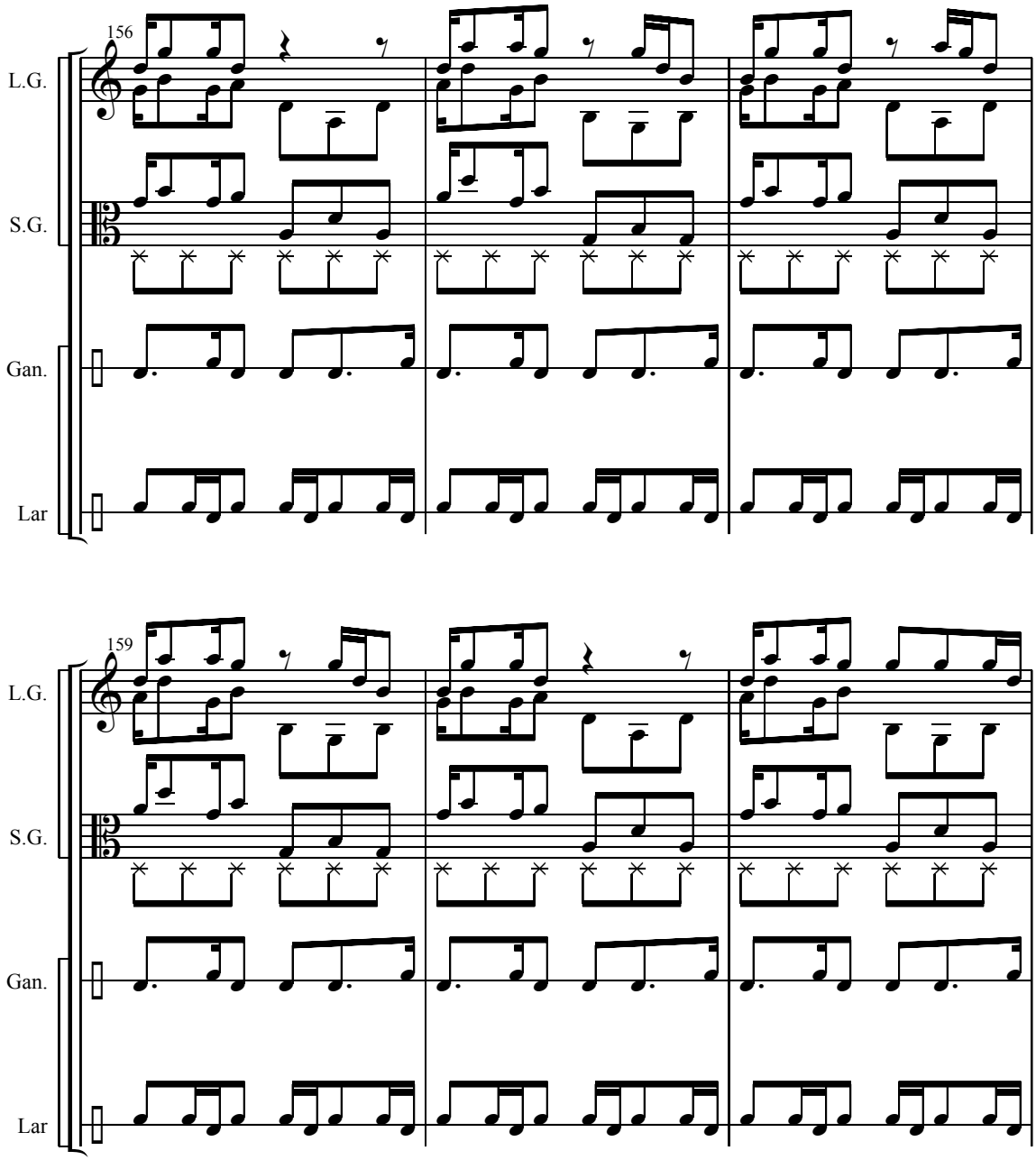
S.G.
Gan.
Lar


Ganda Yina
147
L.G.
S.G.
Gan.
Lar


150
L.G.
S.G.
Gan.
Lar
153
L.G.
S.G.
Gan.
Lar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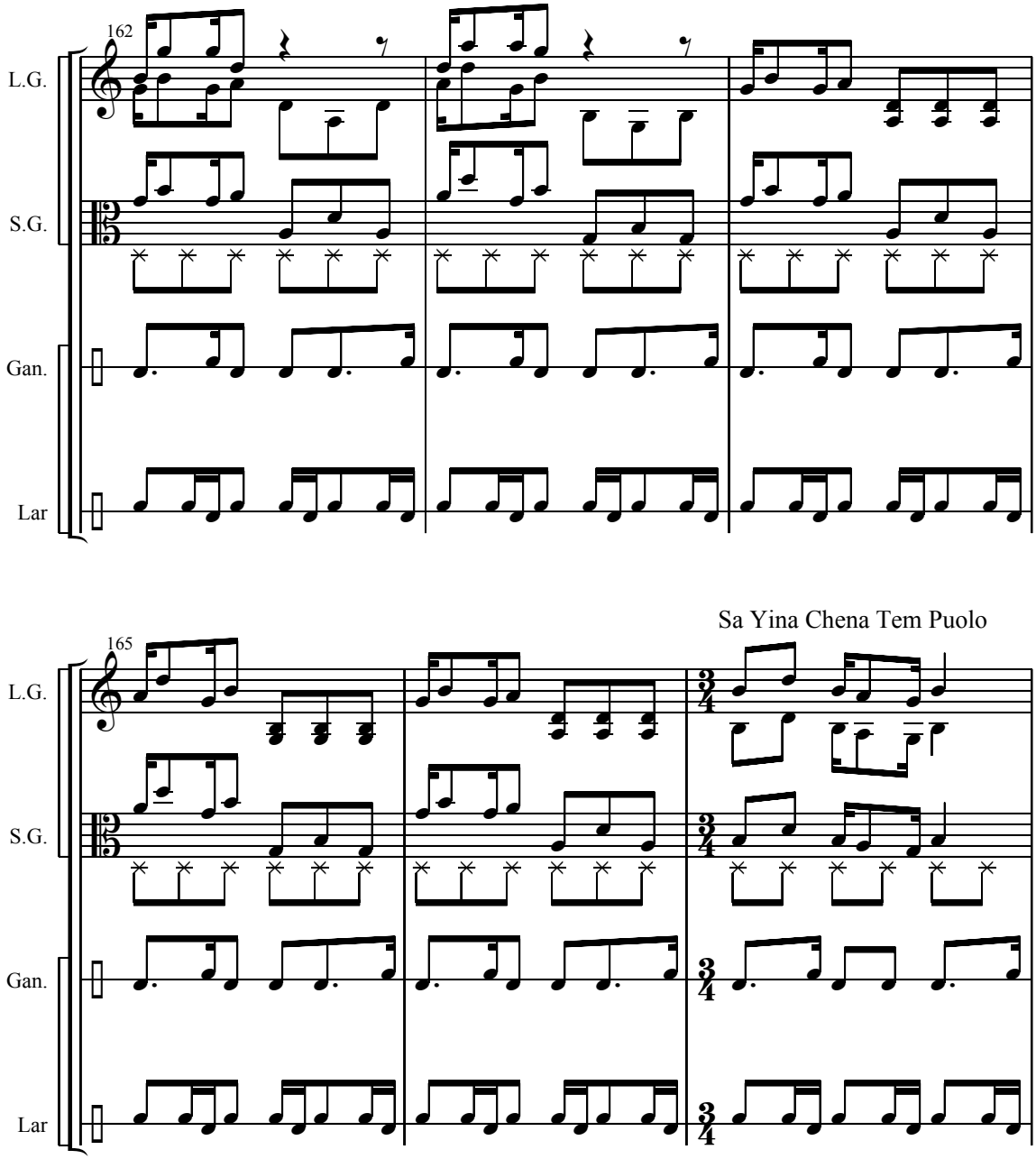
L.G.
S.G.
Gan.
Lar
159
L.G.
S.G.
Gan.
Lar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Gan.
Lar
Sa Yina Chena Tem Puolo
165
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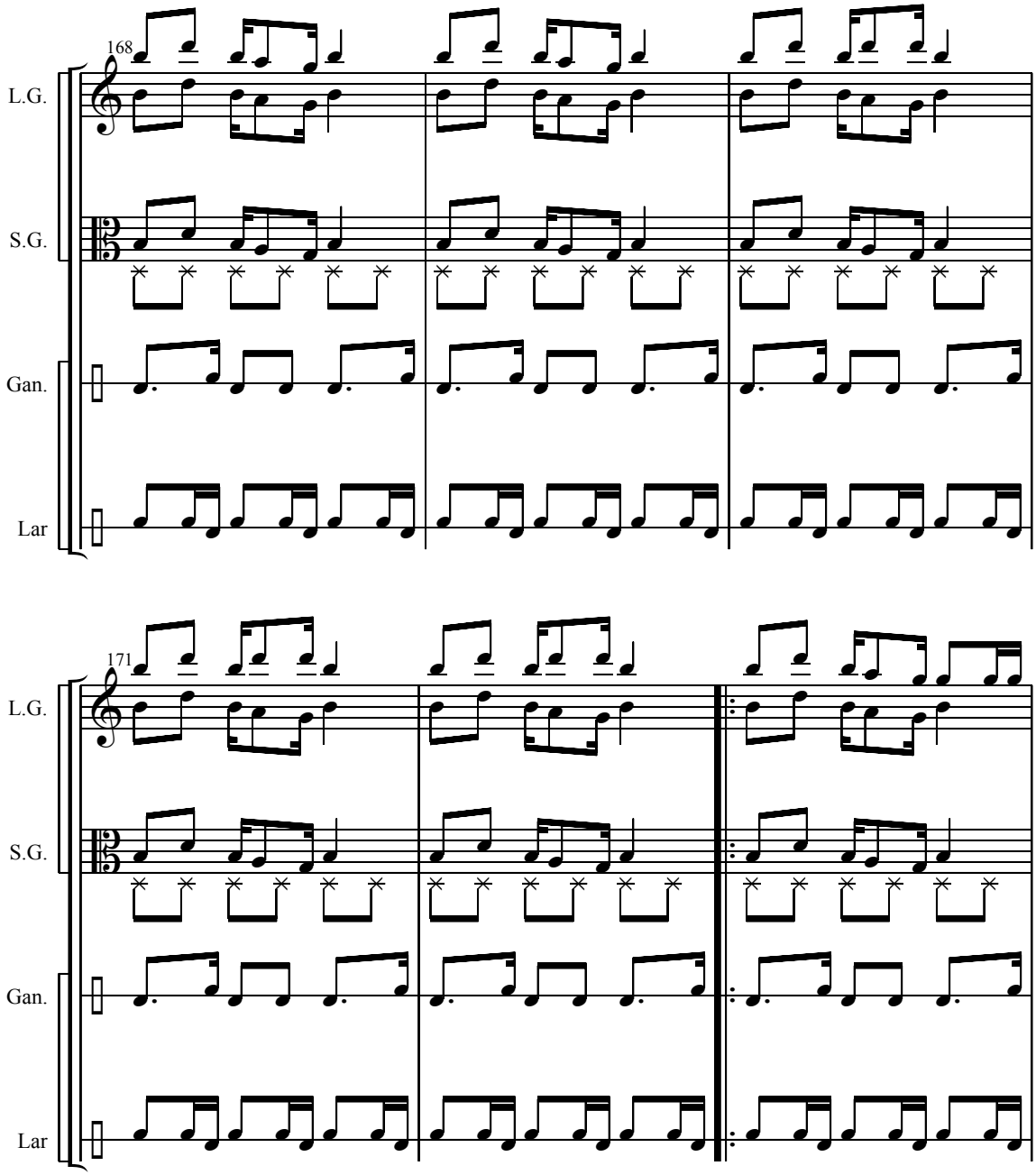
S.G.
Gan.
Lar


168
L.G.
S.G.
Gan.
Lar
171
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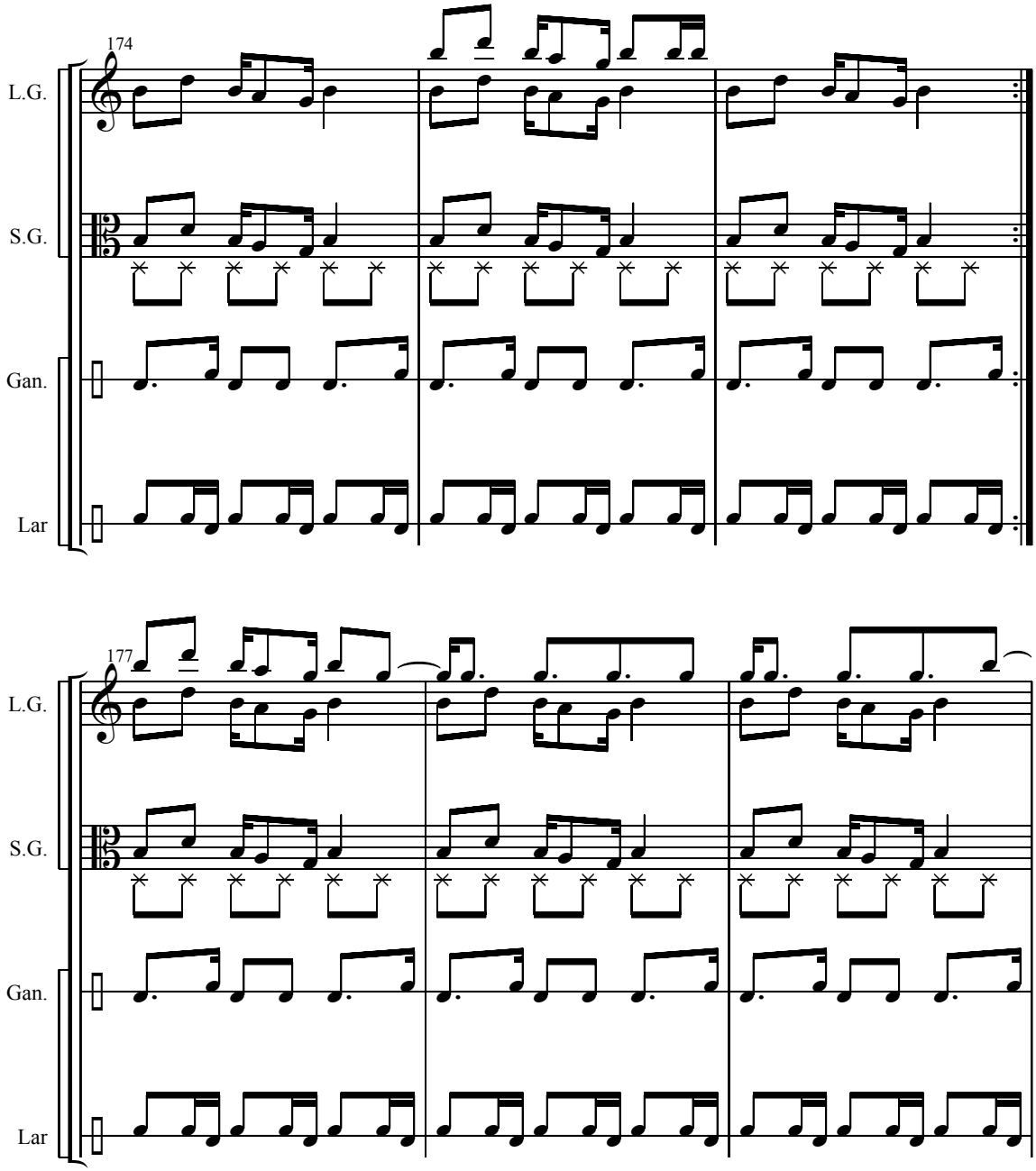
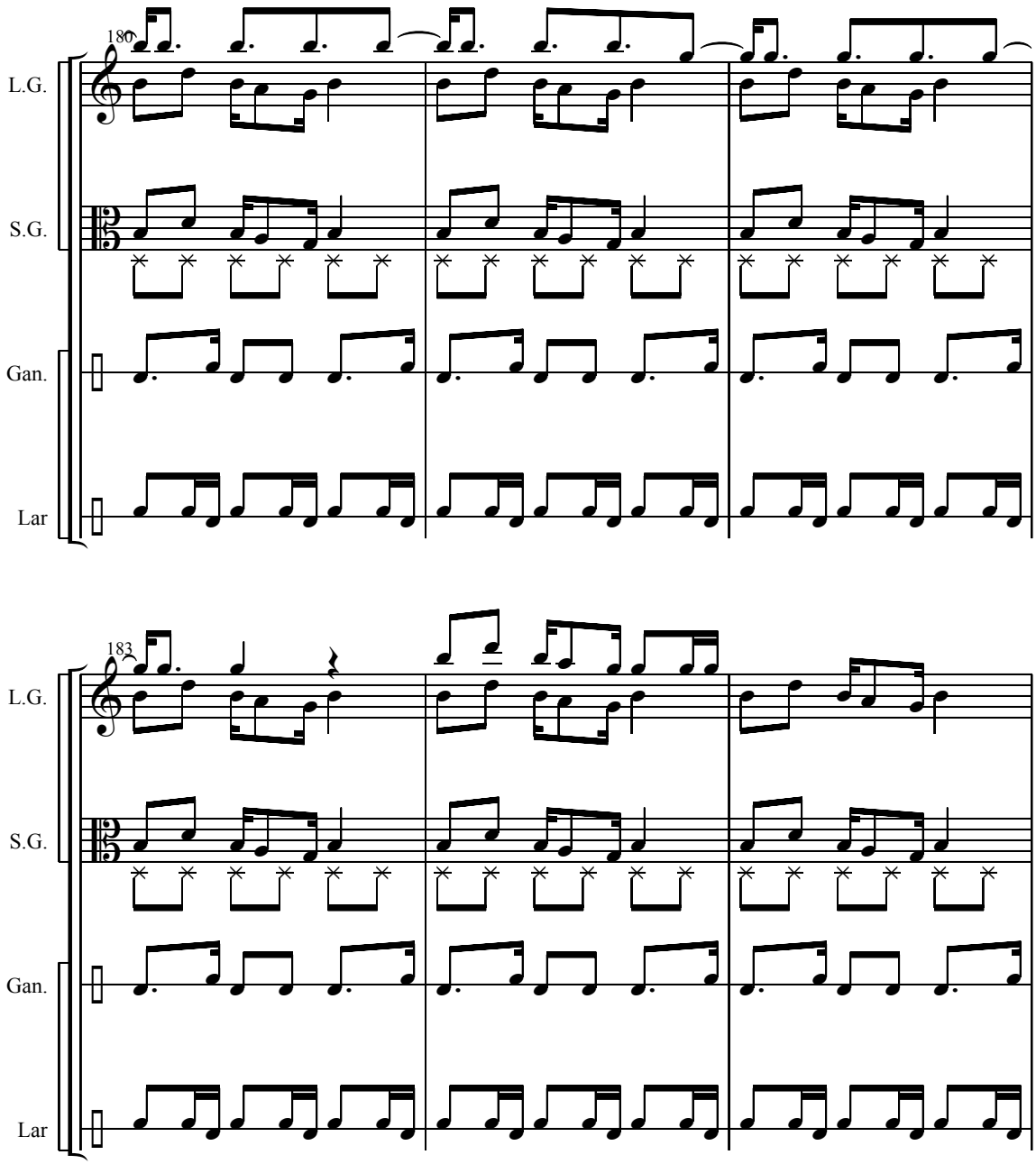
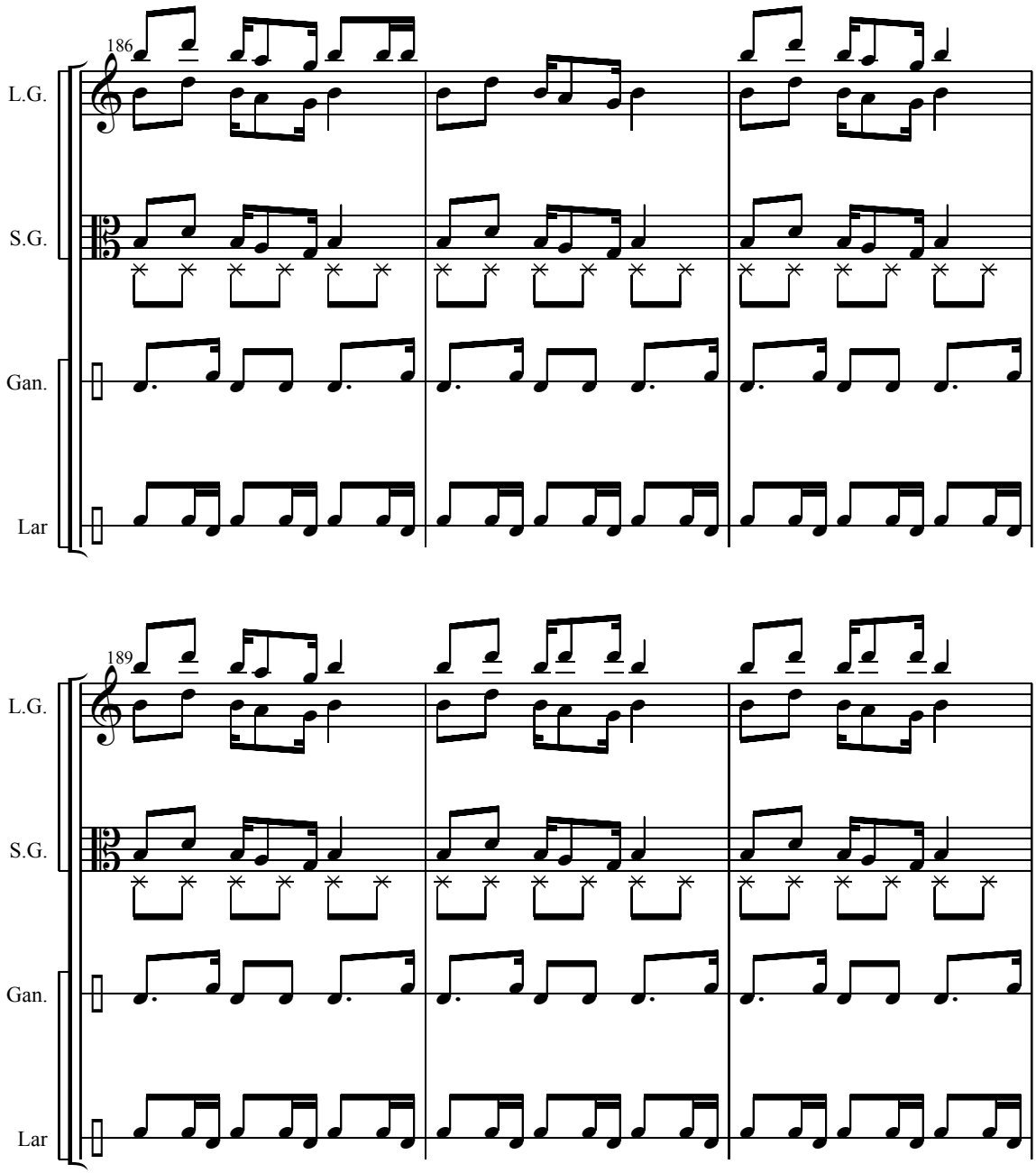
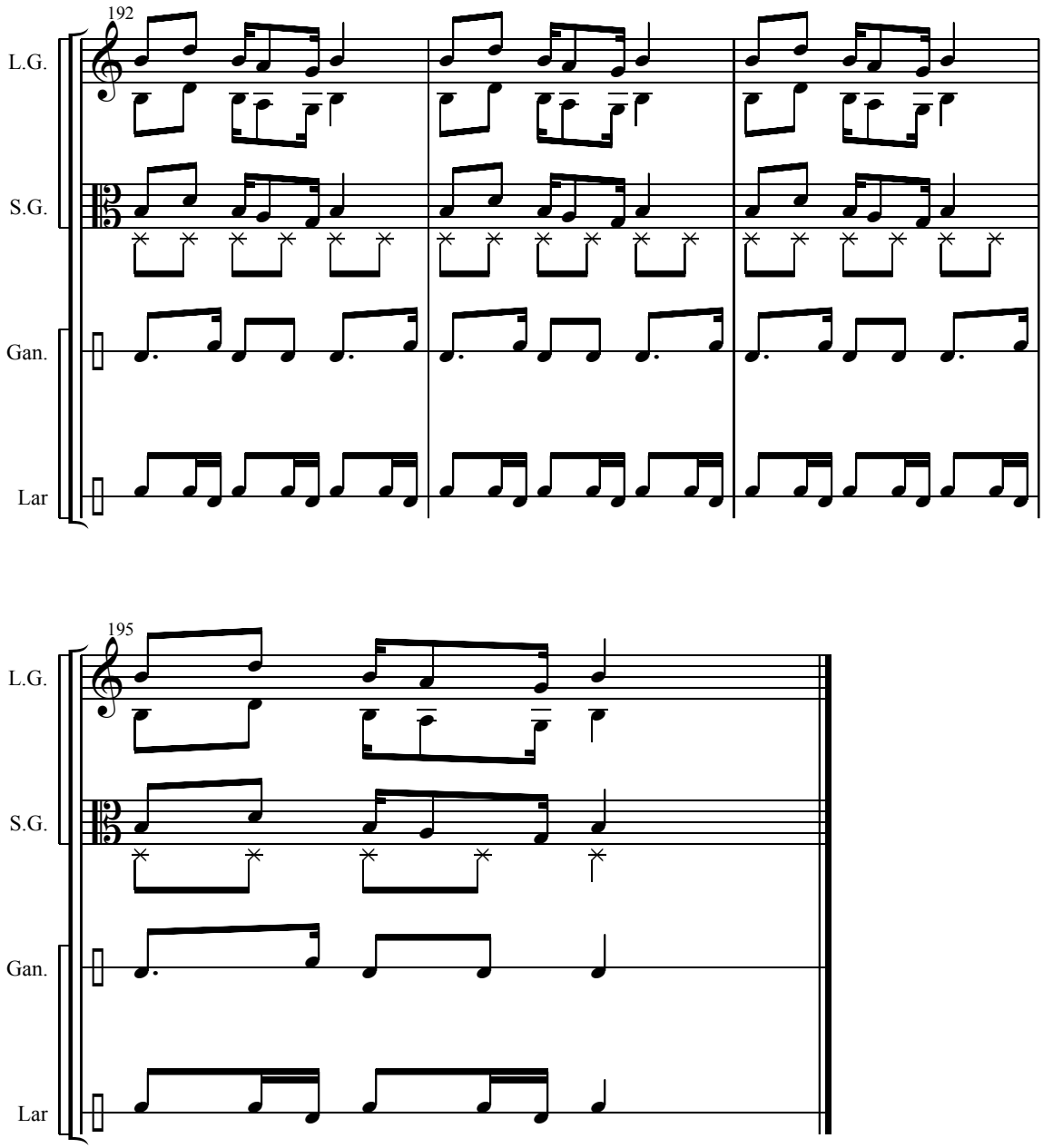
S.G.
Gan.
Lar


174
L.G.
S.G.
Gan.
Lar
177
L.G.
S.G.
Gan.
Lar


180
L.G.
S.G.
Gan.
Lar
183
L.G.
S.G.
Gan.
Lar

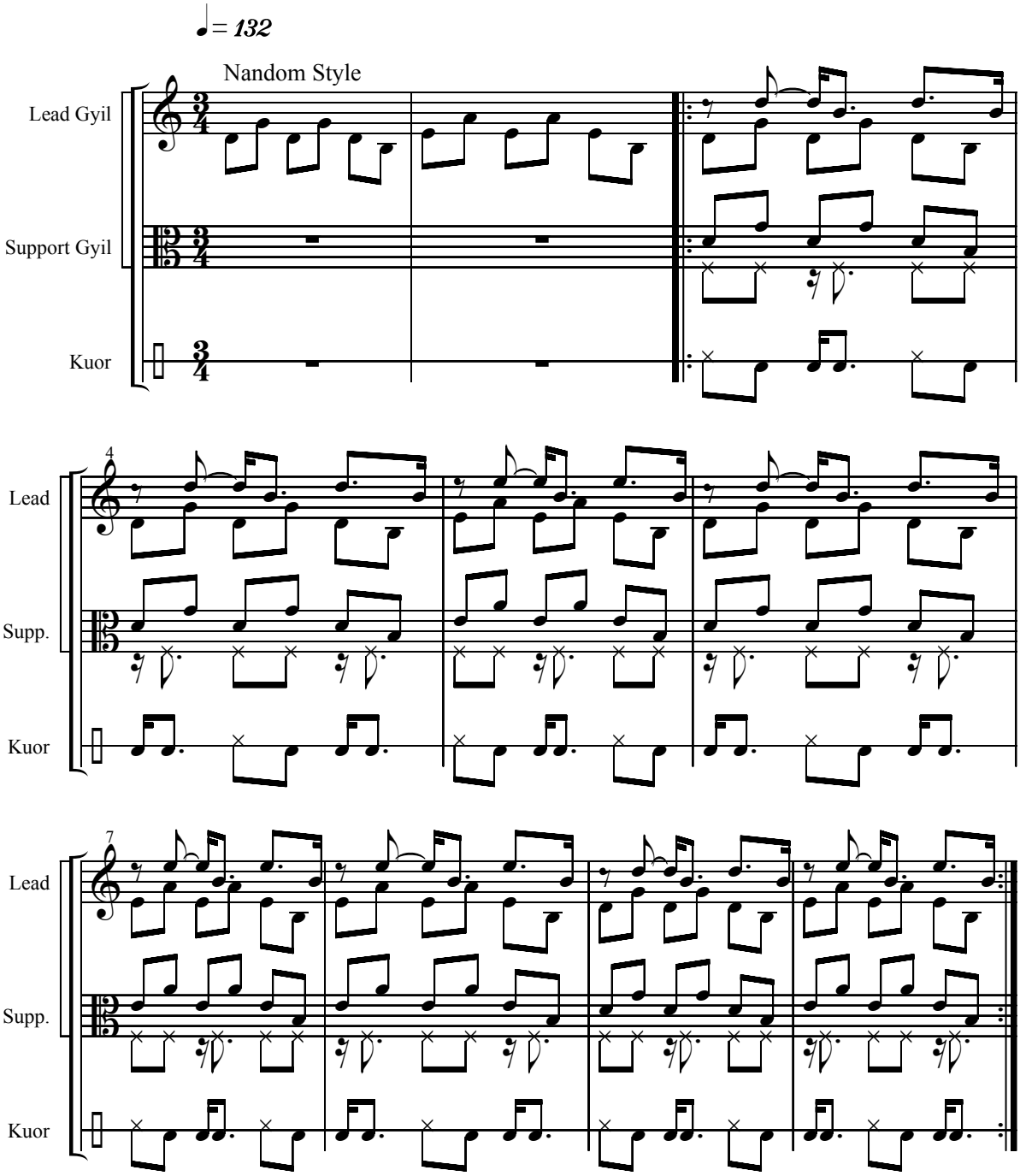

186
L.G.
S.G.
Gan.
Lar
189
L.G.
S.G.
Gan.
Lar

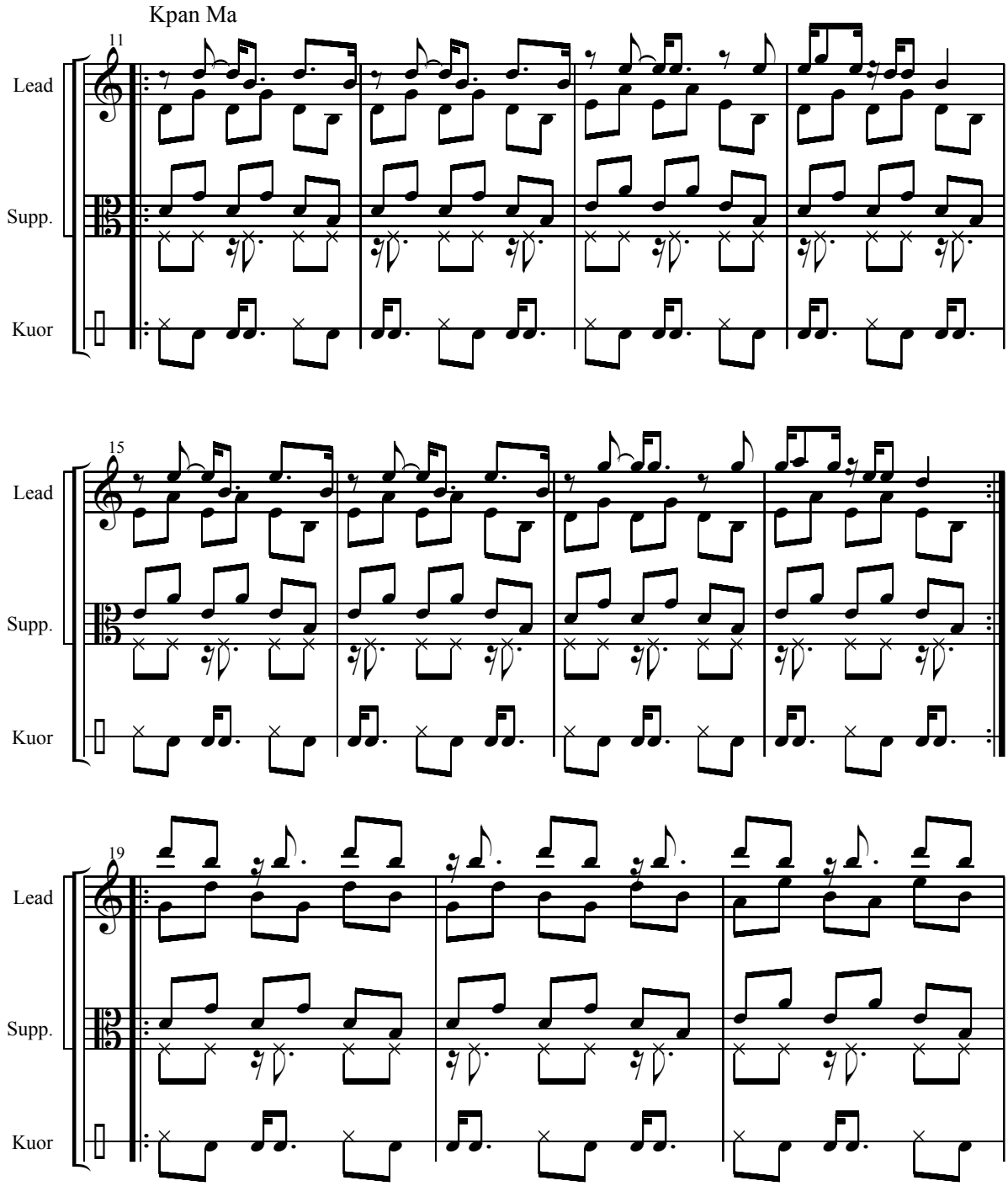

192
L.G.
S.G.
Gan.
Lar
195
L.G.
S.G.
Gan.
Lar

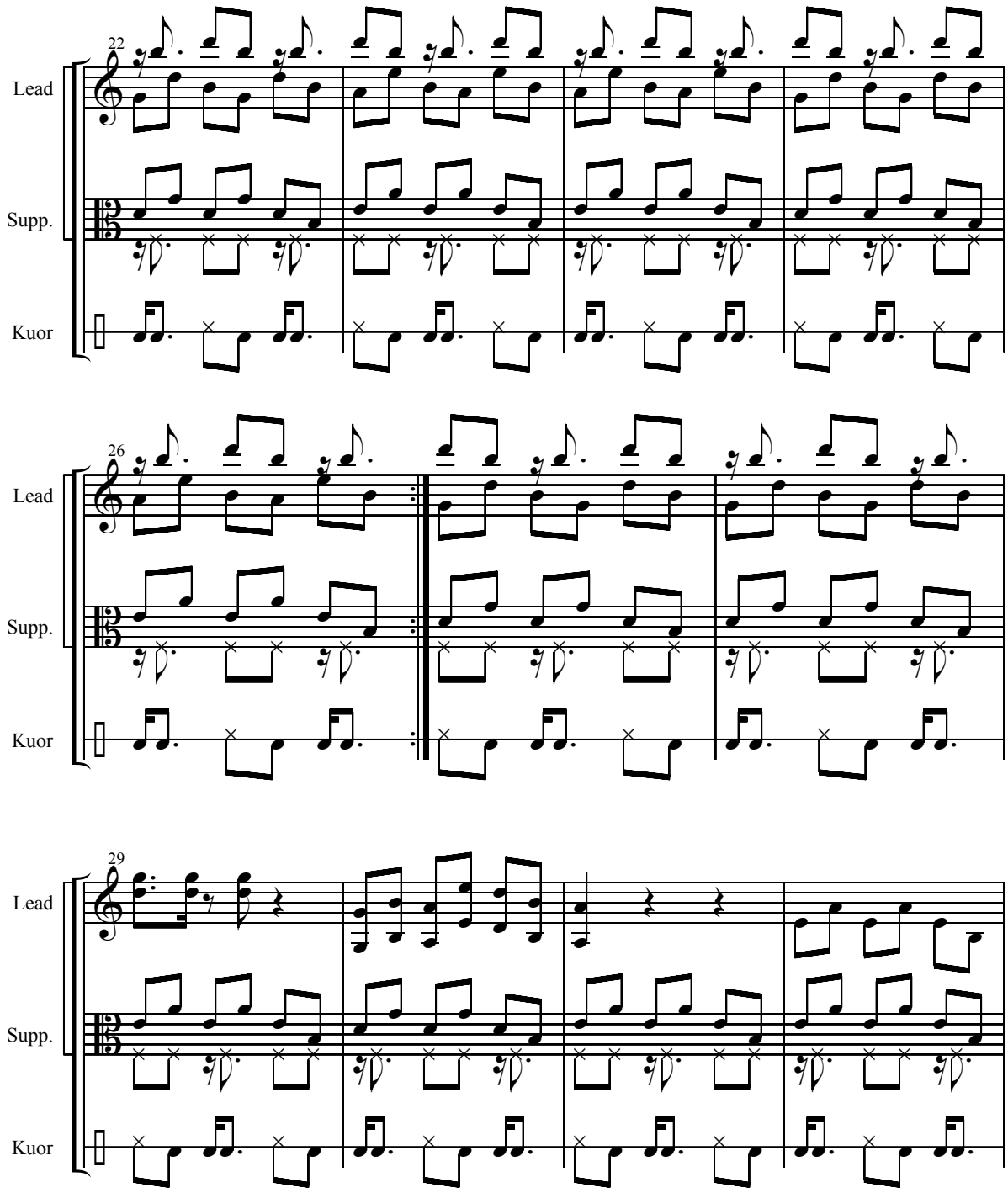
APPENDIX D

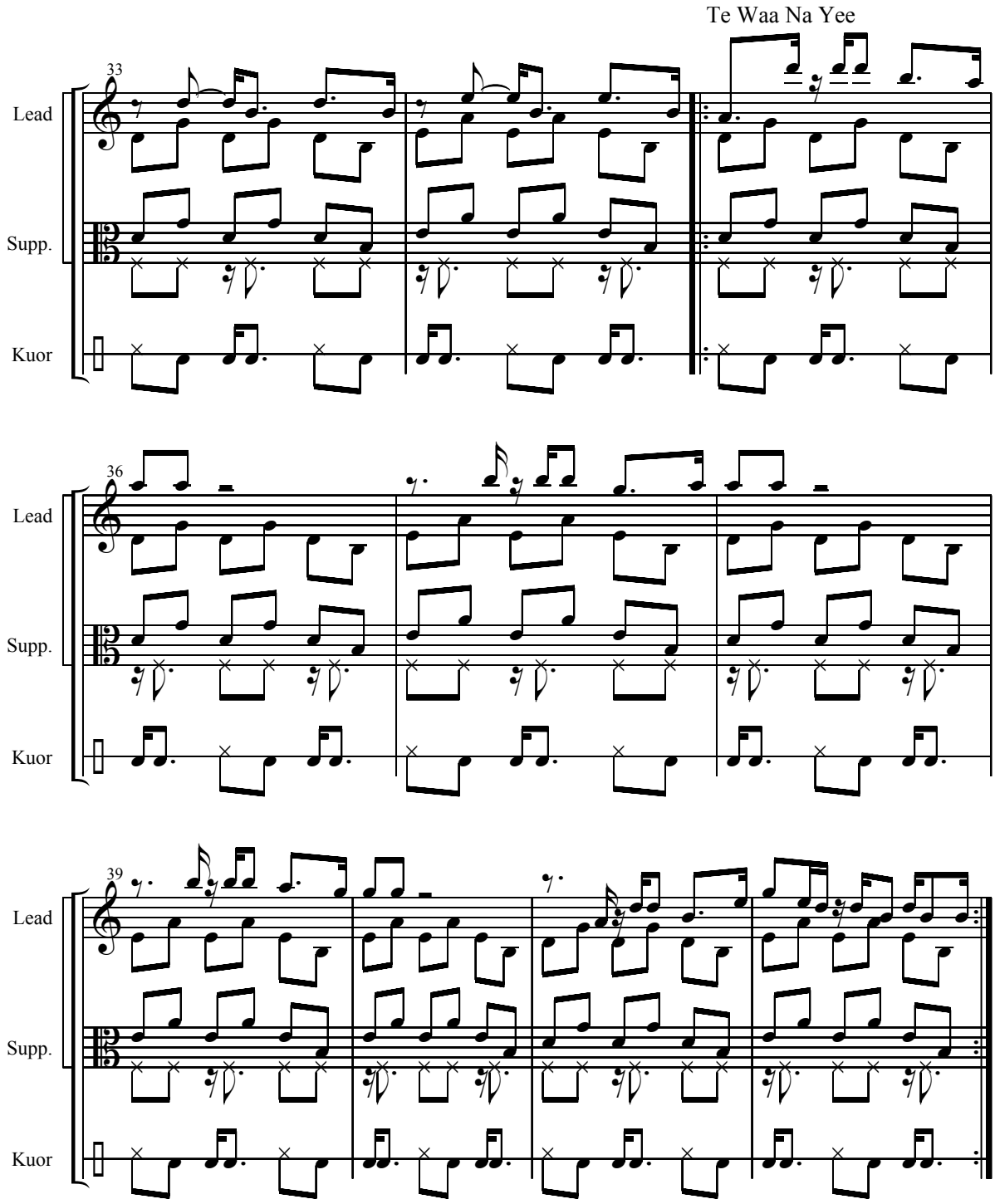
BEWAA ARRANGEMENT

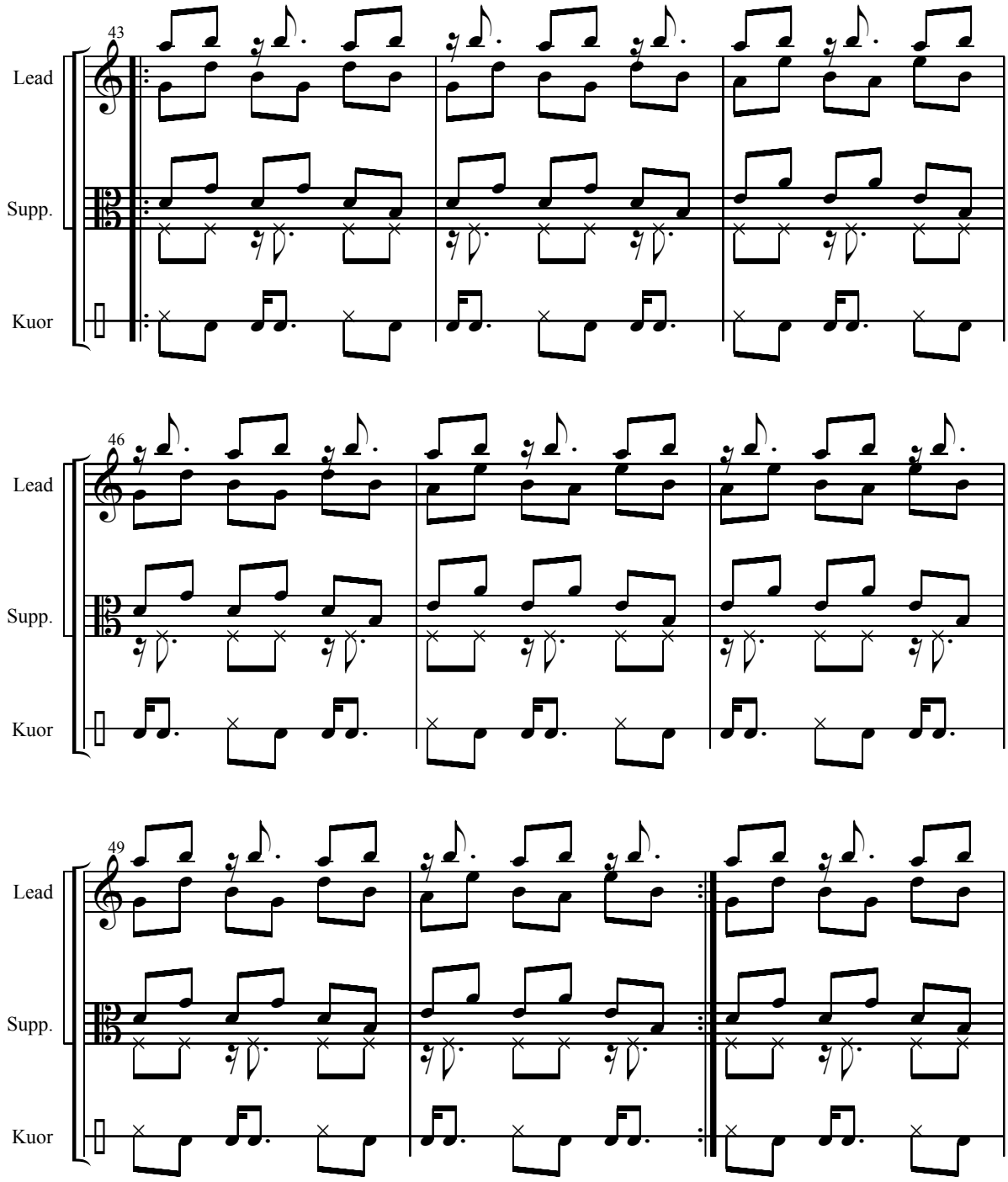
Bewaa

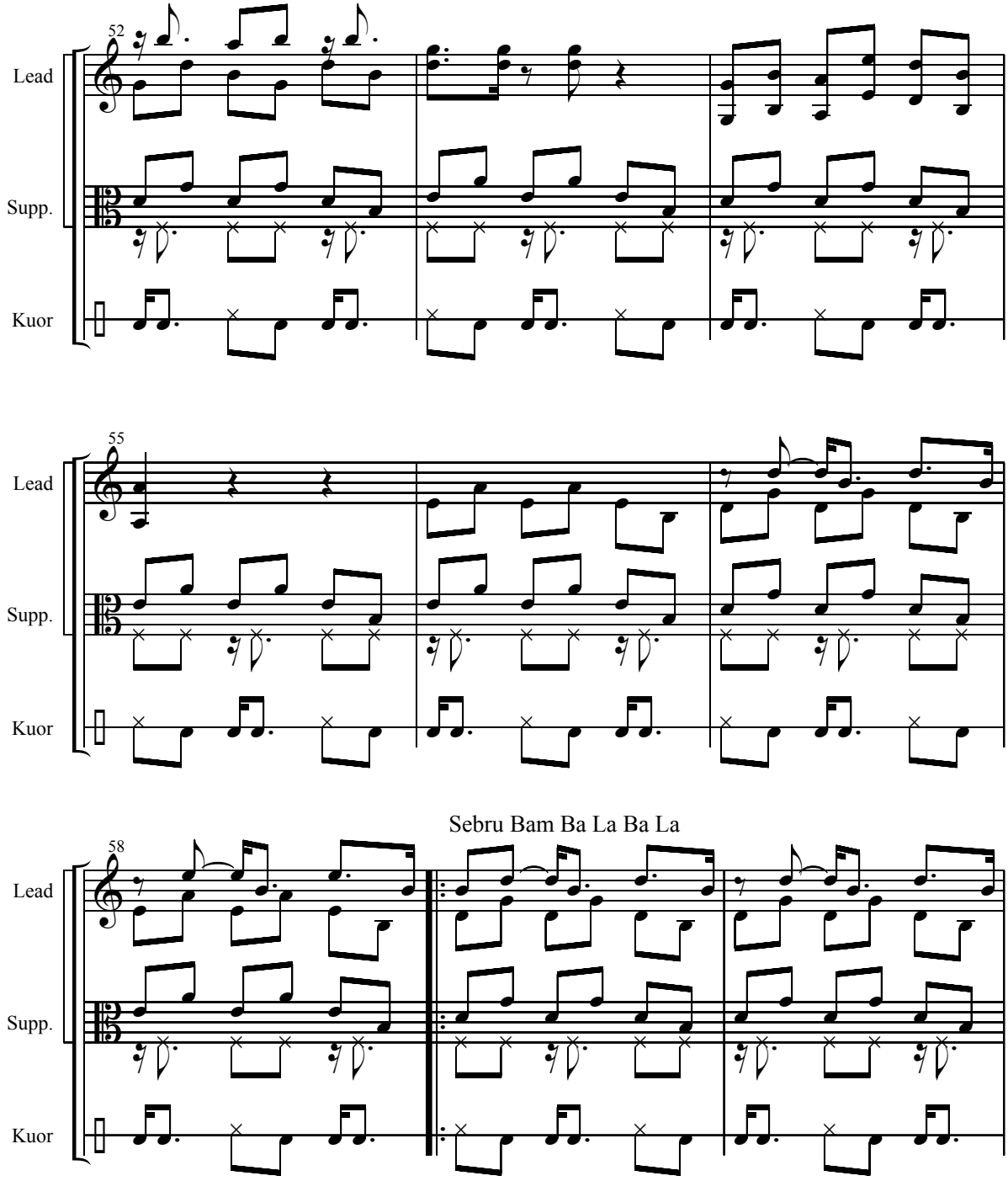

♩= 132
Nandom Style
Lead Gyil
Support Gyil
Kuor
4
Lead
Supp.
Kuor
7
Lead
Supp.
Kuor

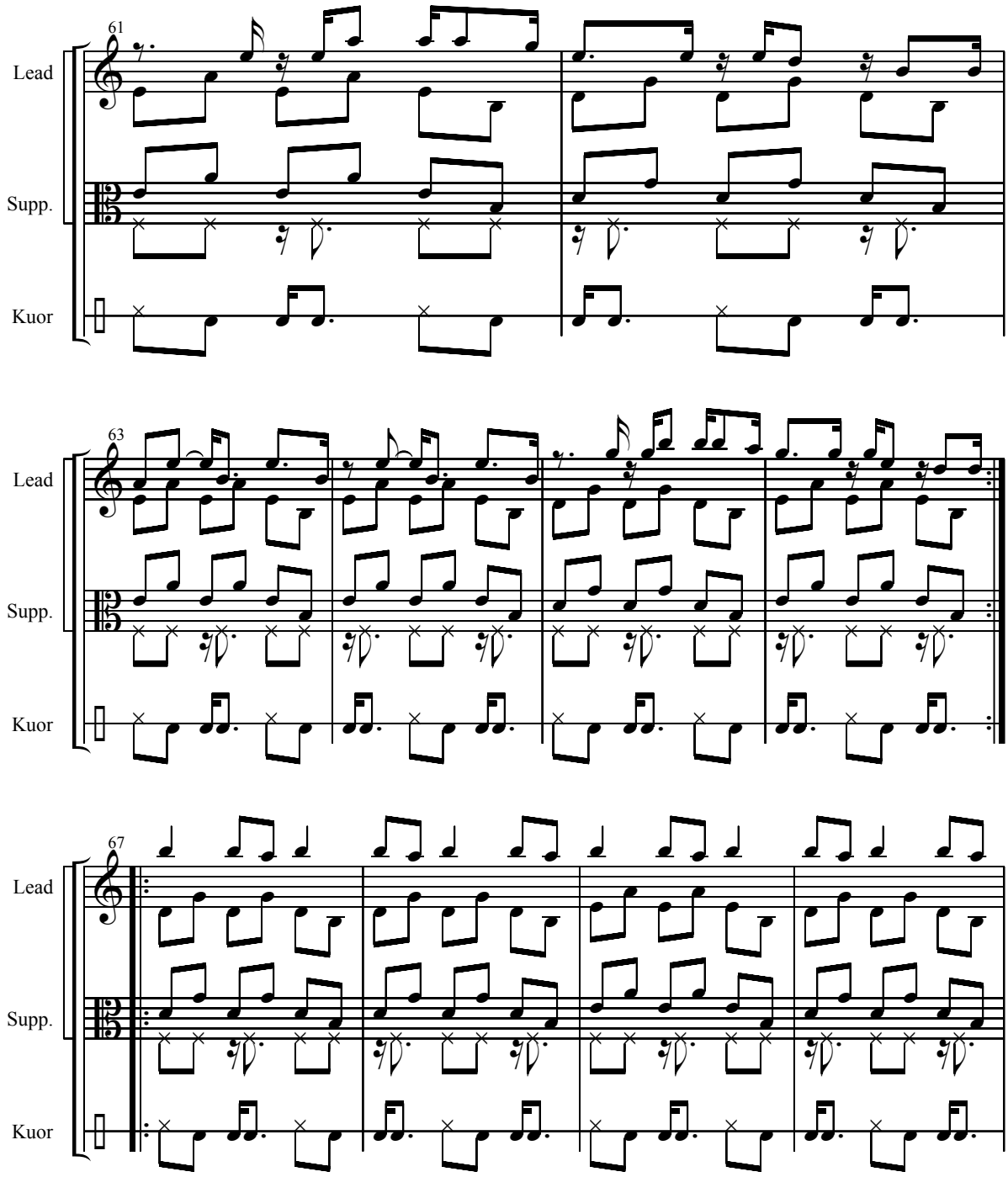

Kpan Ma
11
Lead
Supp.
Kuor
15
Lead
Supp.
Kuor
19
Lead
Supp.
Kuor

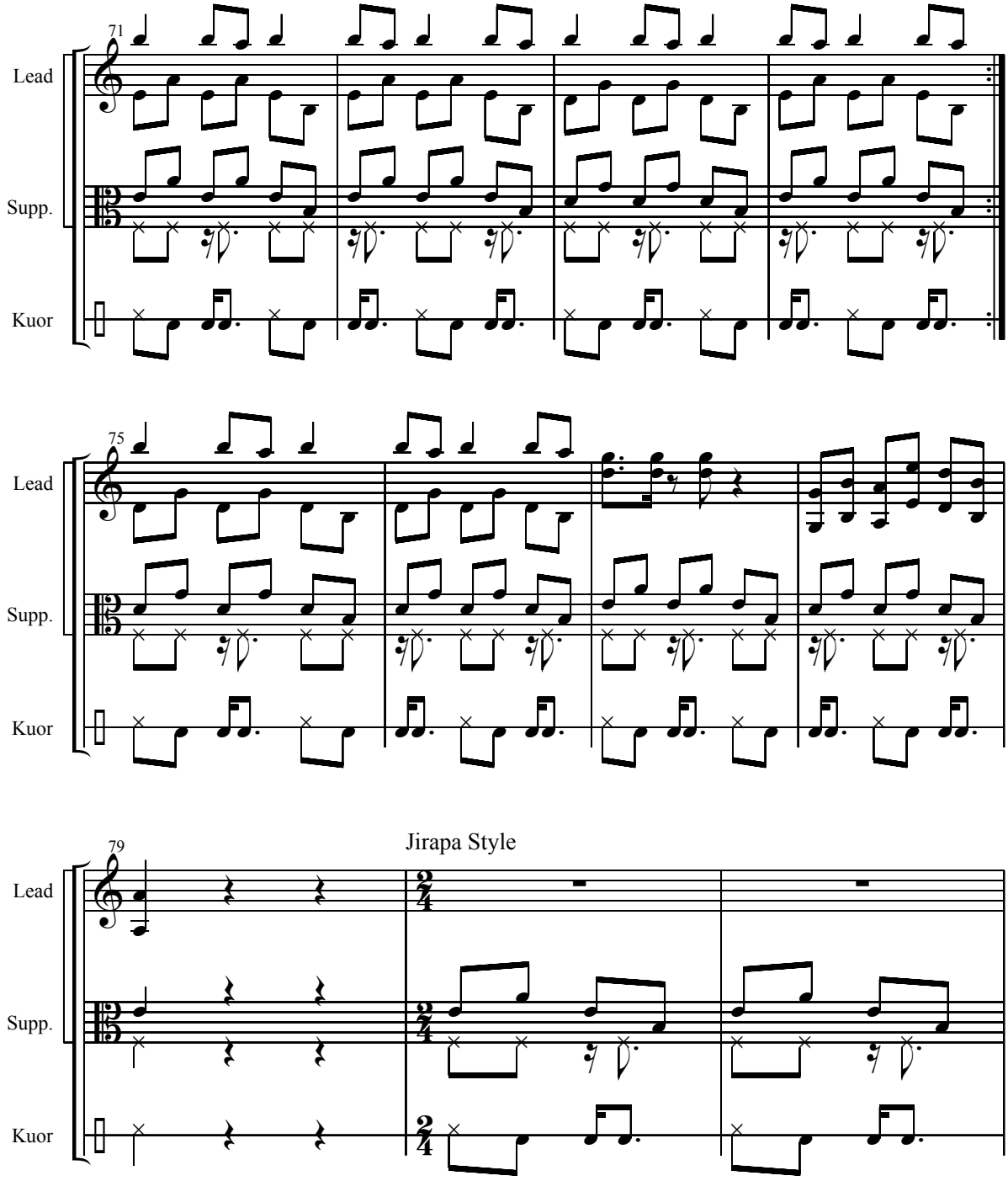

22
Lead
Supp.
Kuor
26
Lead
Supp.
Kuor
29
Lead
Supp.
Kuor

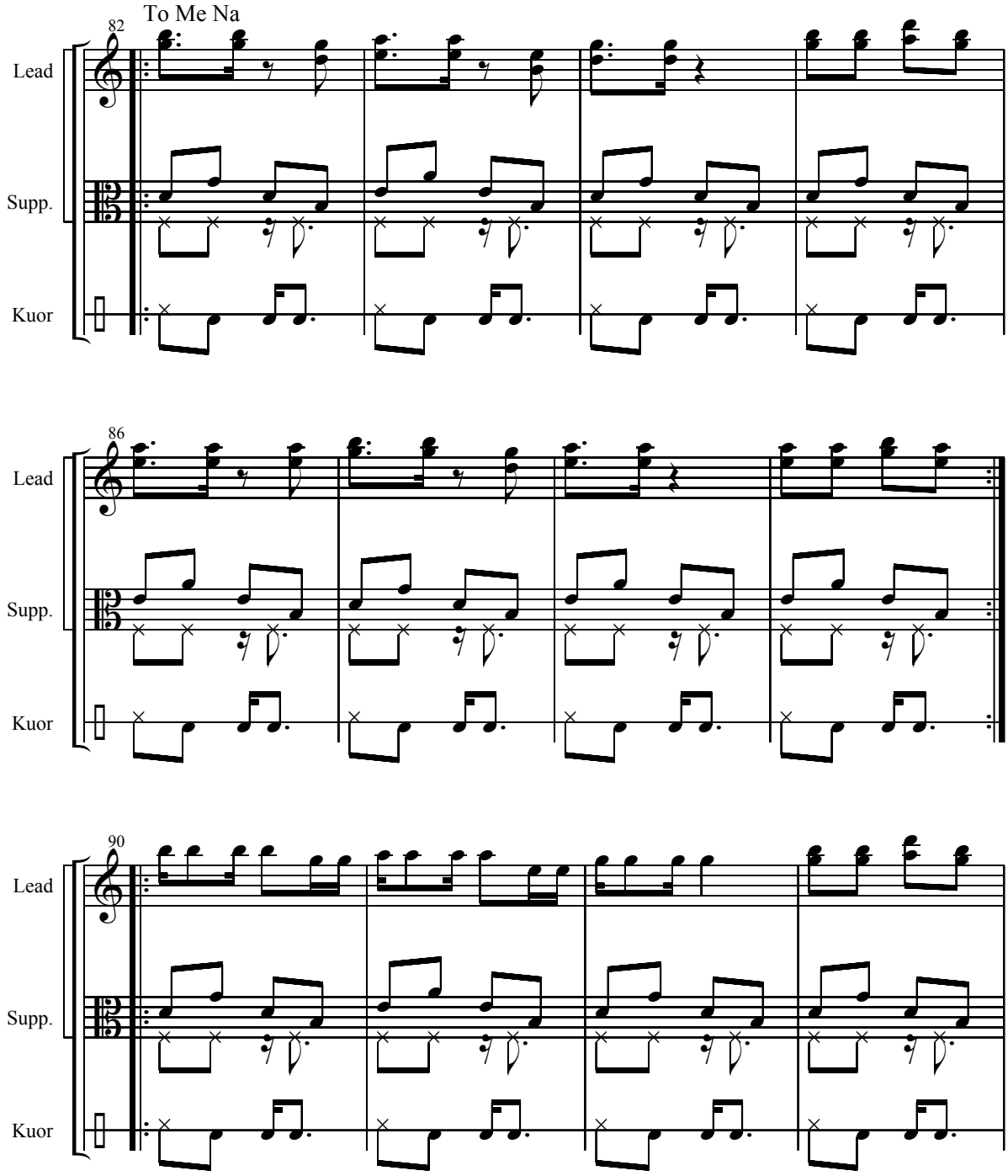

Te Waa Na Yee
33
Lead
Supp.
Kuor
36
Lead
Supp.
Kuor
39
Lead
Supp.
Kuor

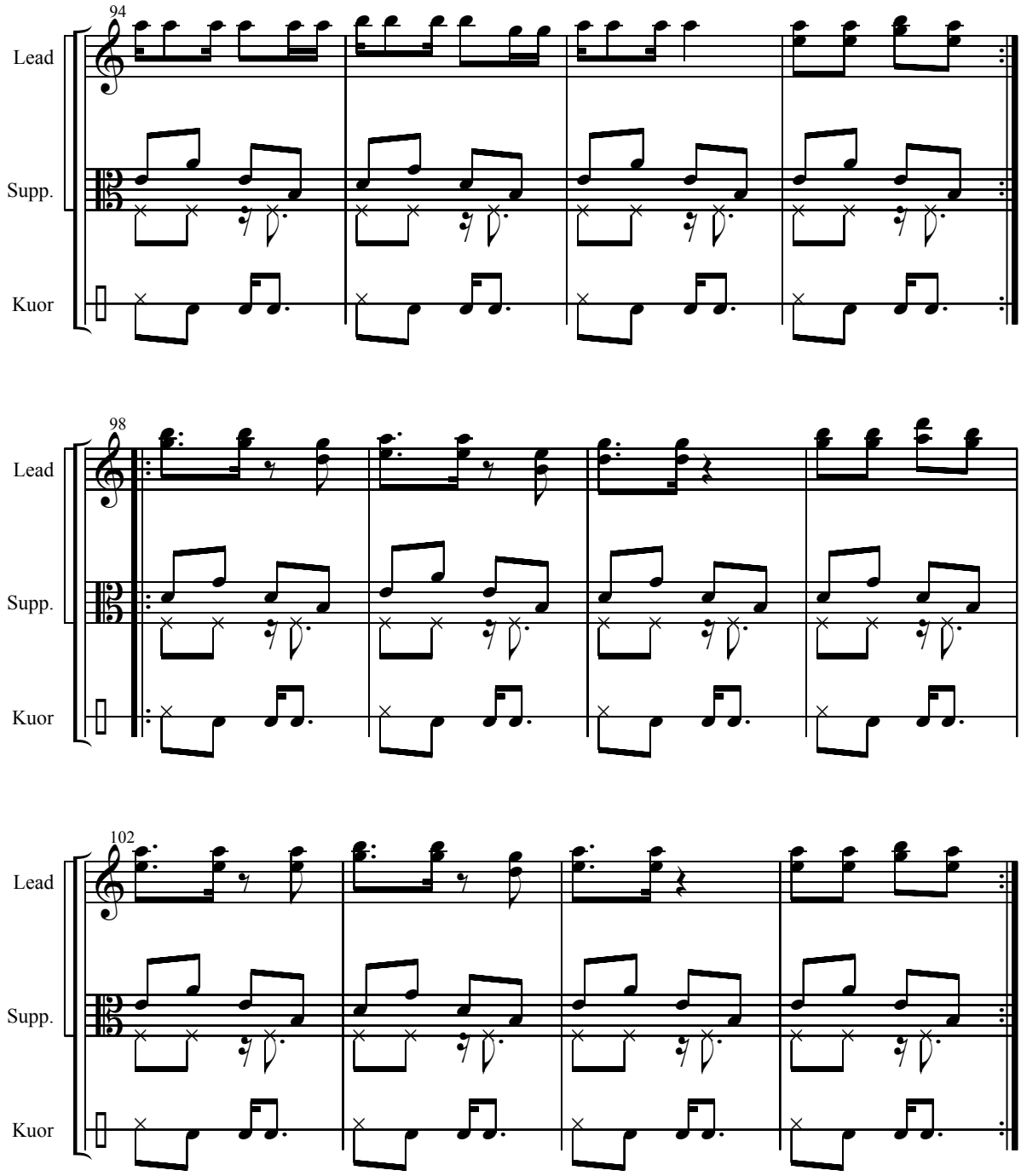

43
Lead
Supp.
Kuor
46
Lead
Supp.
Kuor
49
Lead
Supp.
Kuor

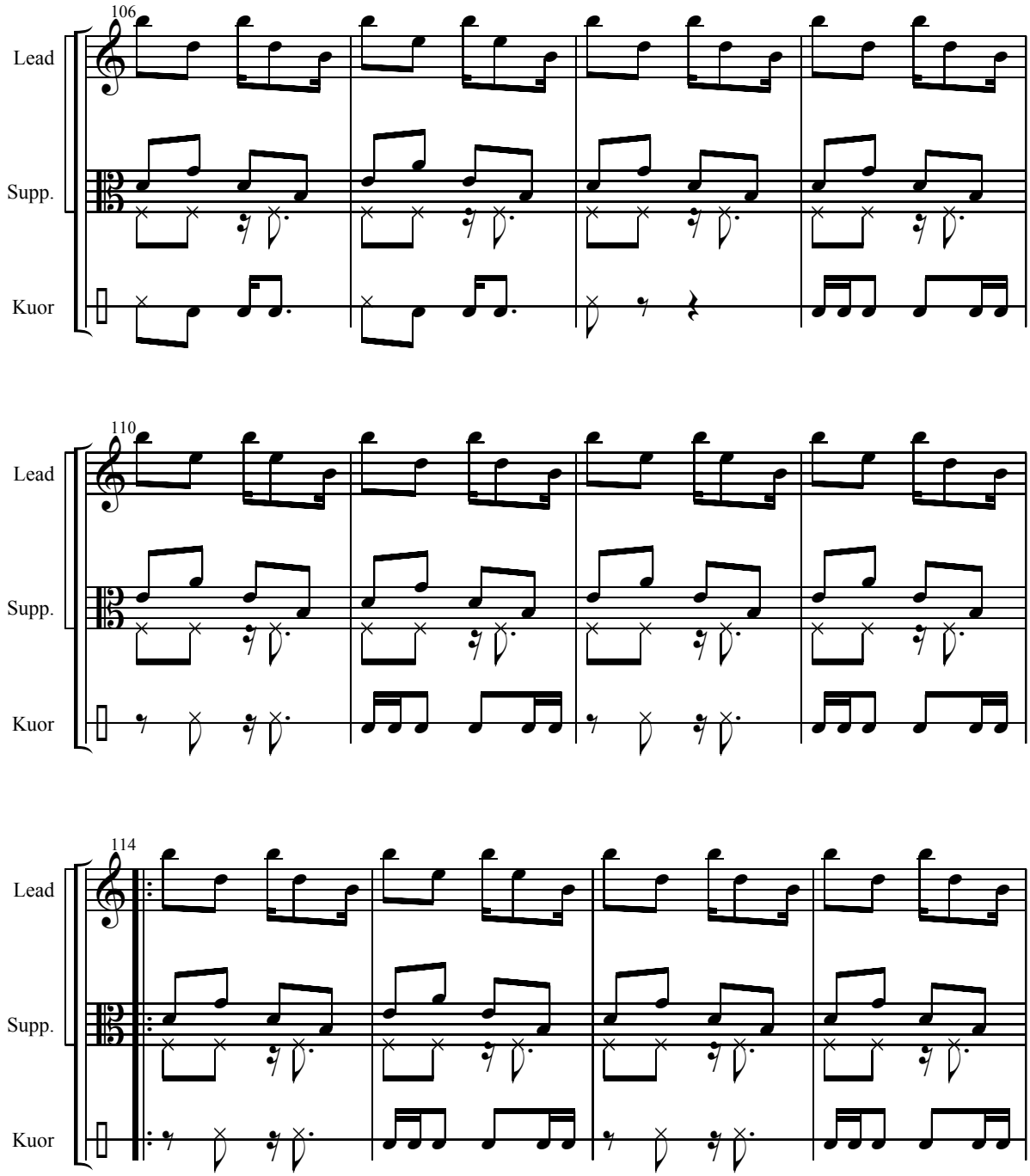

52
Lead
Supp.
Kuor
55
Lead
Supp.
Kuor
Sebru Bam Ba La Ba La
58
Lead
Supp.
Kuor

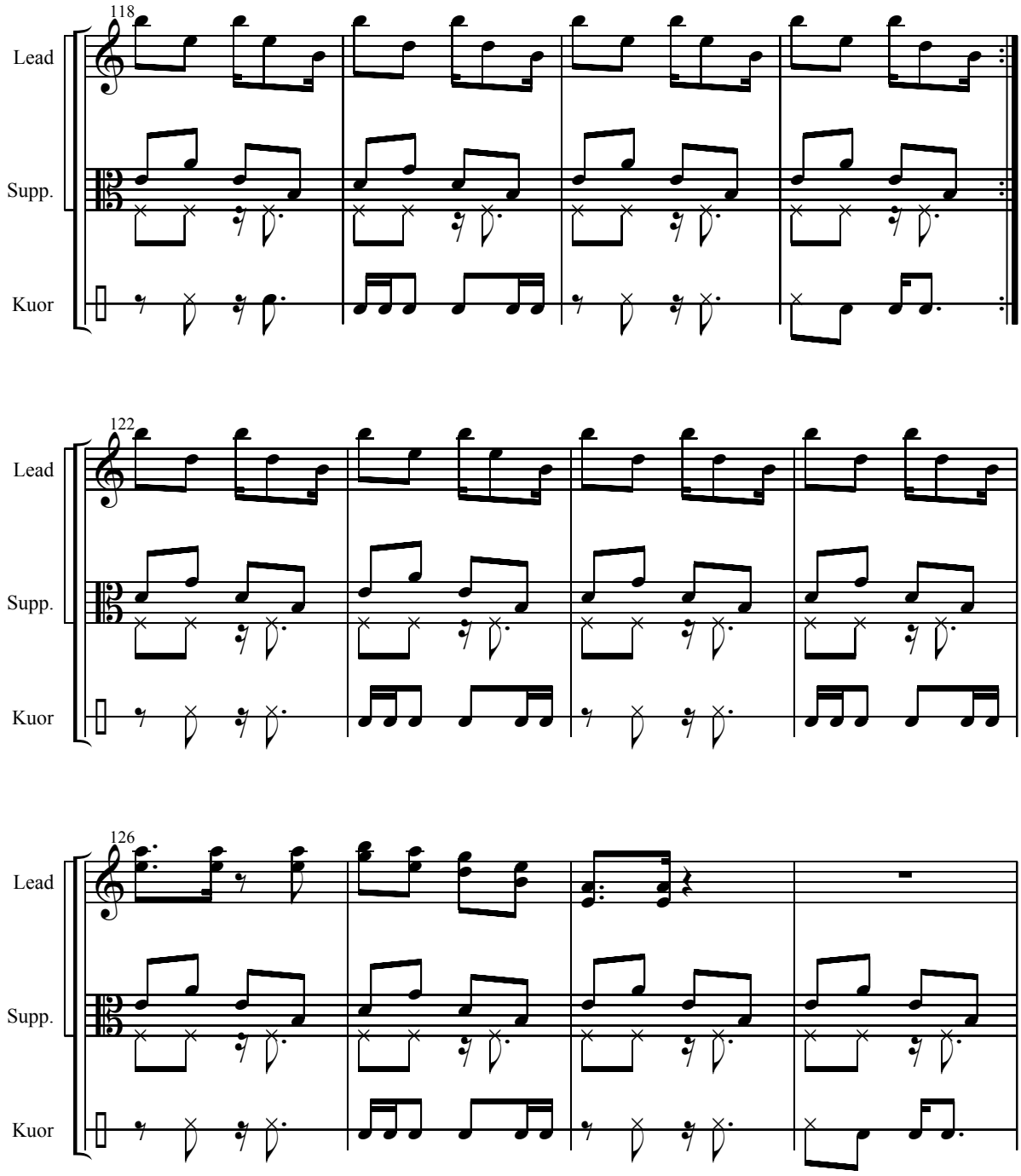

61
Lead
Supp.
Kuor
63
Lead
Supp.
Kuor
67
Lead
Supp.
Kuor


71
Lead
Supp.
Kuor
75
Lead
Supp.
Kuor
Jirapa Style
79
Lead
Supp.
Kuor

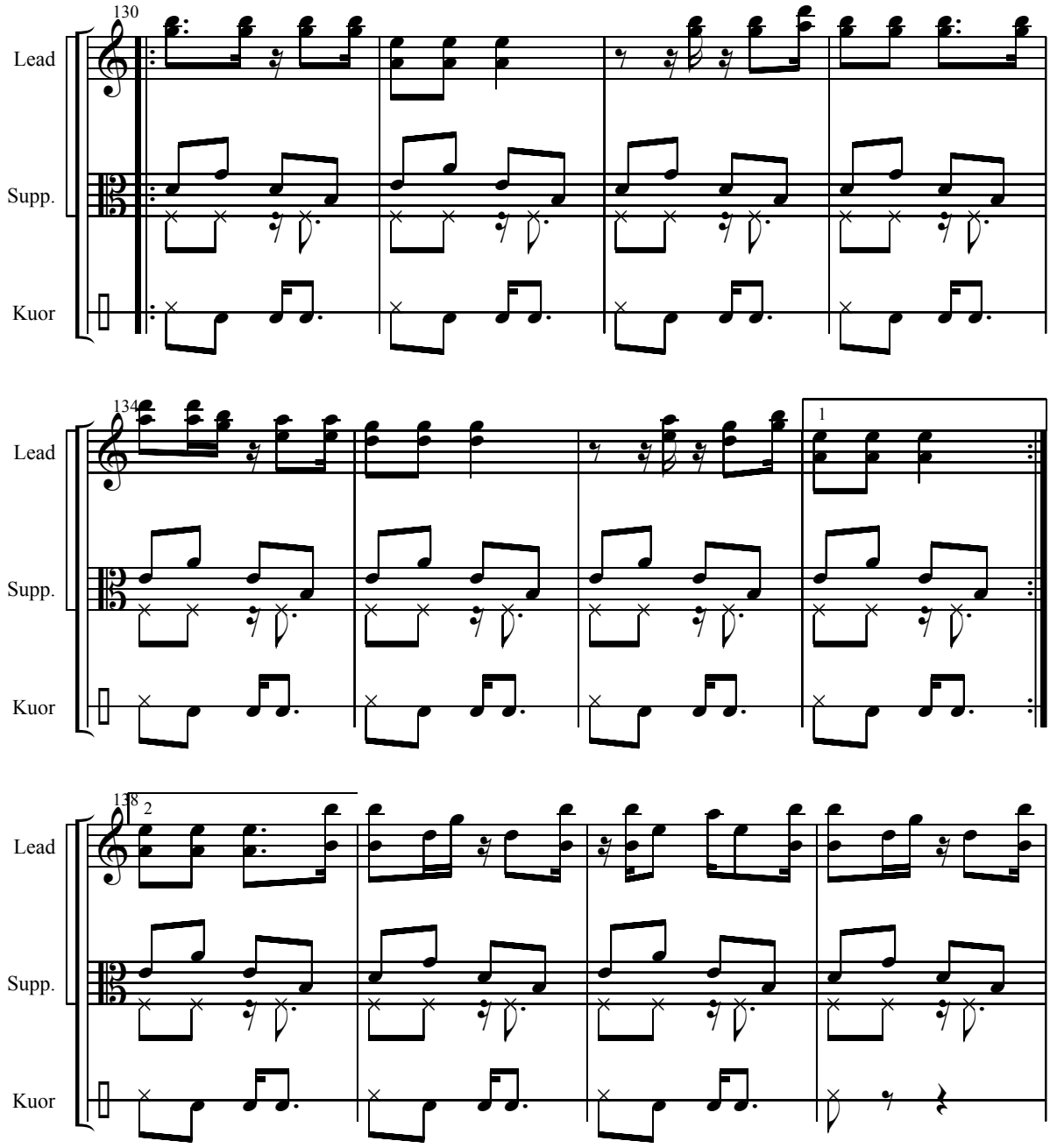

To Me Na
82
Lead
Supp.
Kuor
86
Lead
Supp.
Kuor
90
Lead
Supp.
Kuor

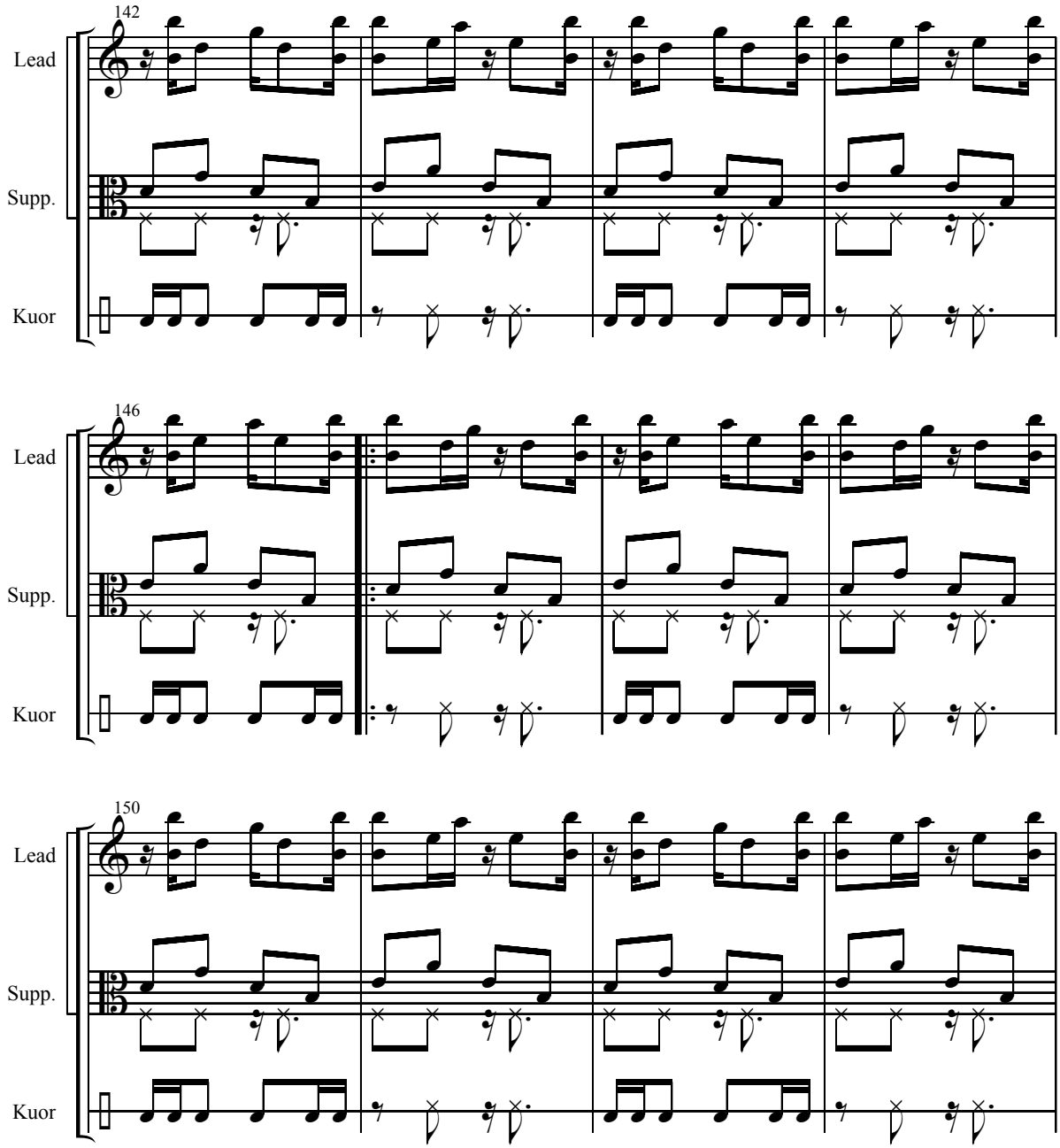

94
Lead
Supp.
Kuor
98
Lead
Supp.
Kuor
102
Lead
Supp.
Kuor


106
Lead
Supp.
Kuor
110
Lead
Supp.
Kuor
114
Lead
Supp.
Kuor


118
Lead
Supp.
Kuor
122
Lead
Supp.
Kuor
126
Lead
Supp.
Kuor

Saa Be Waa Na




142
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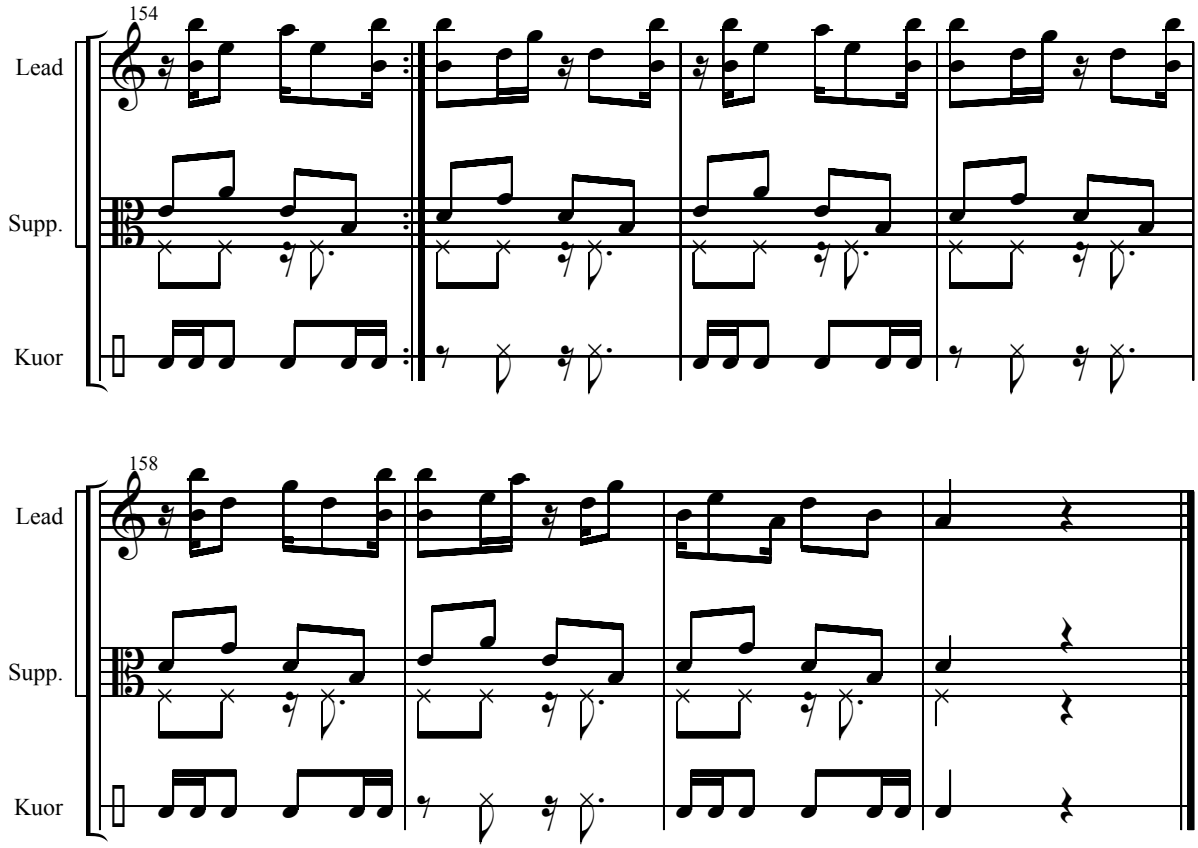
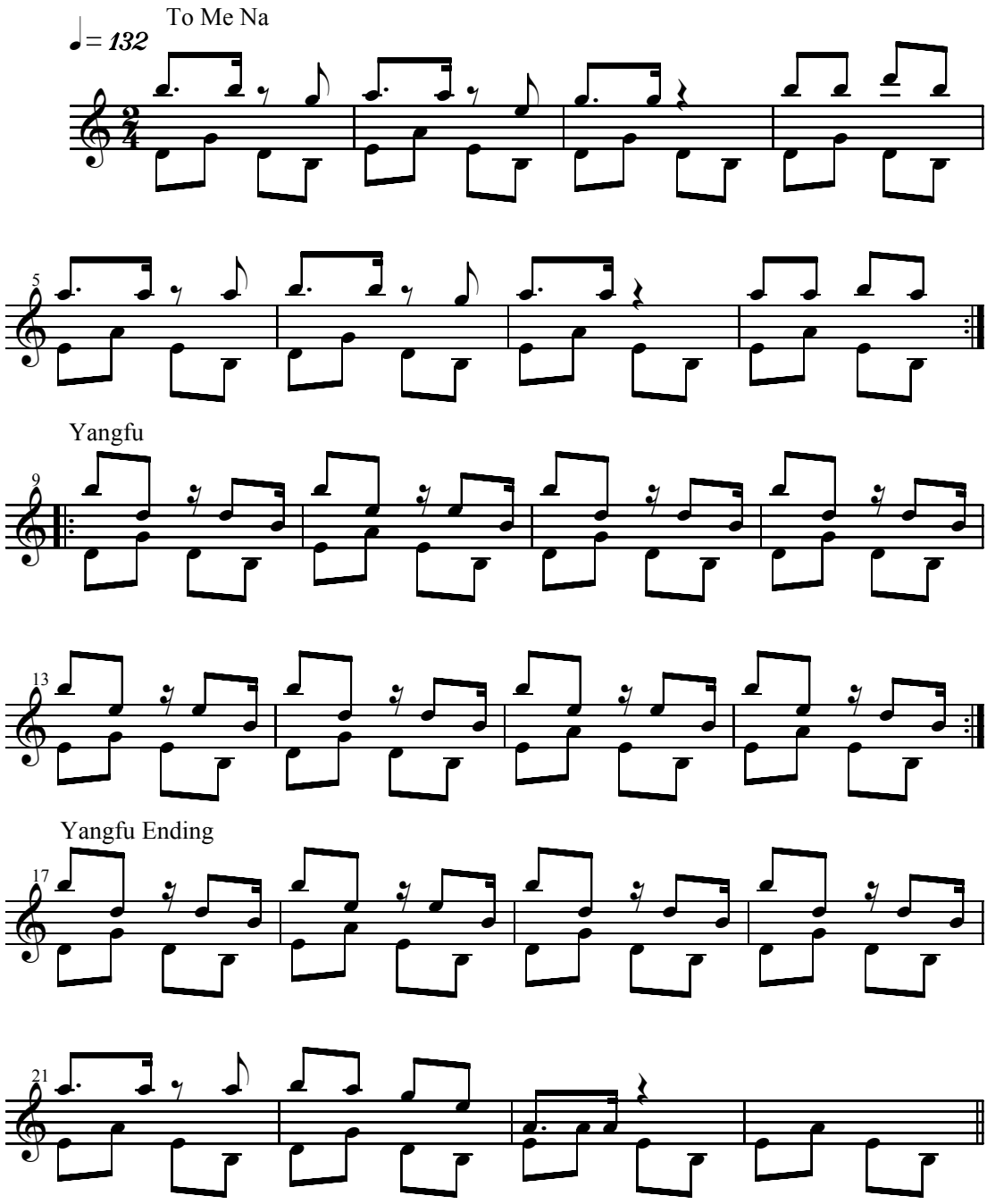
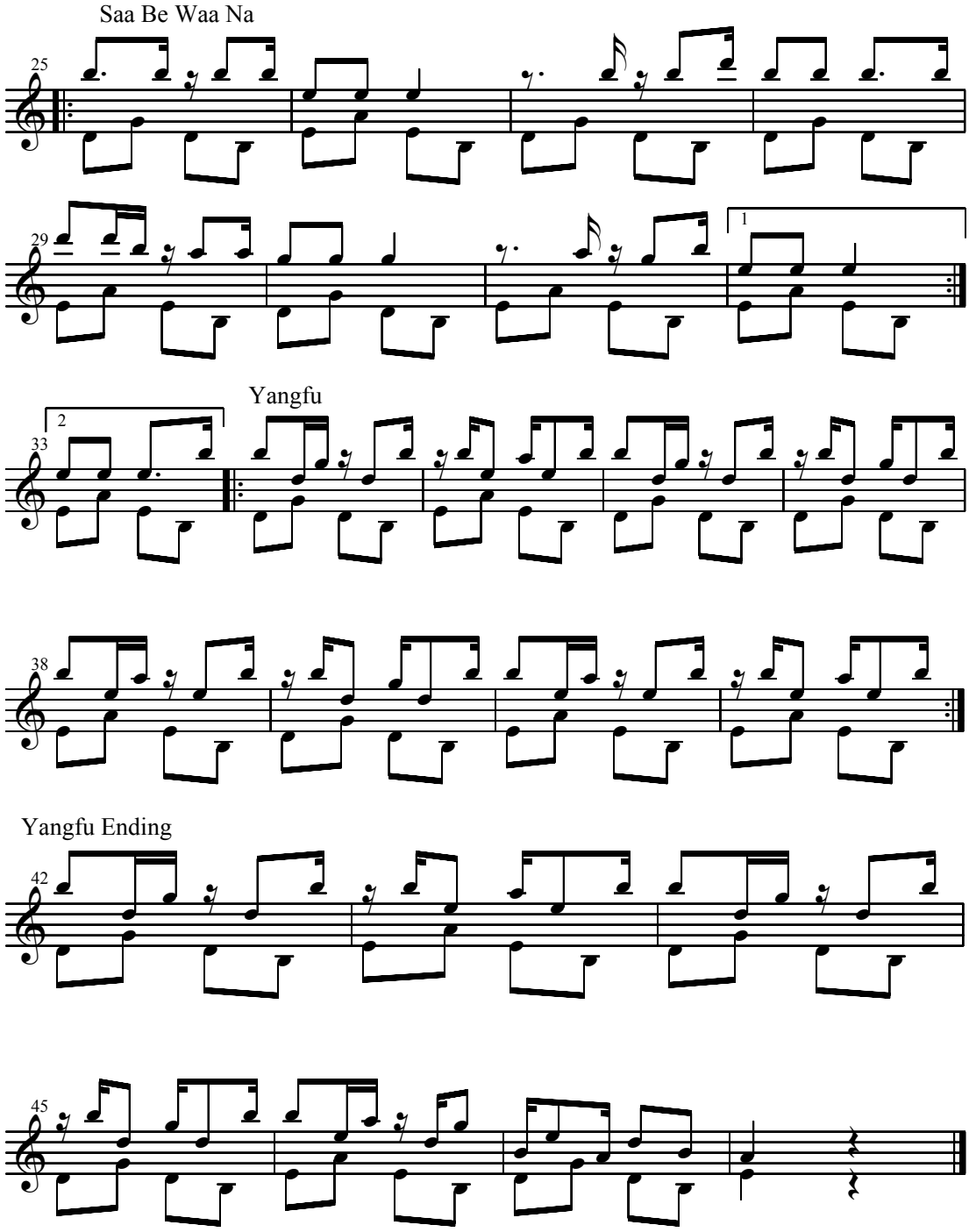
Supp.
Kuor
146
Lead
Supp.
Kuor
150
Lead
Supp.
Kuor


154
Lead
Supp.
Kuor
158
Lead
Supp.
Kuor

Bewaa: Solo Gyil Arrangement

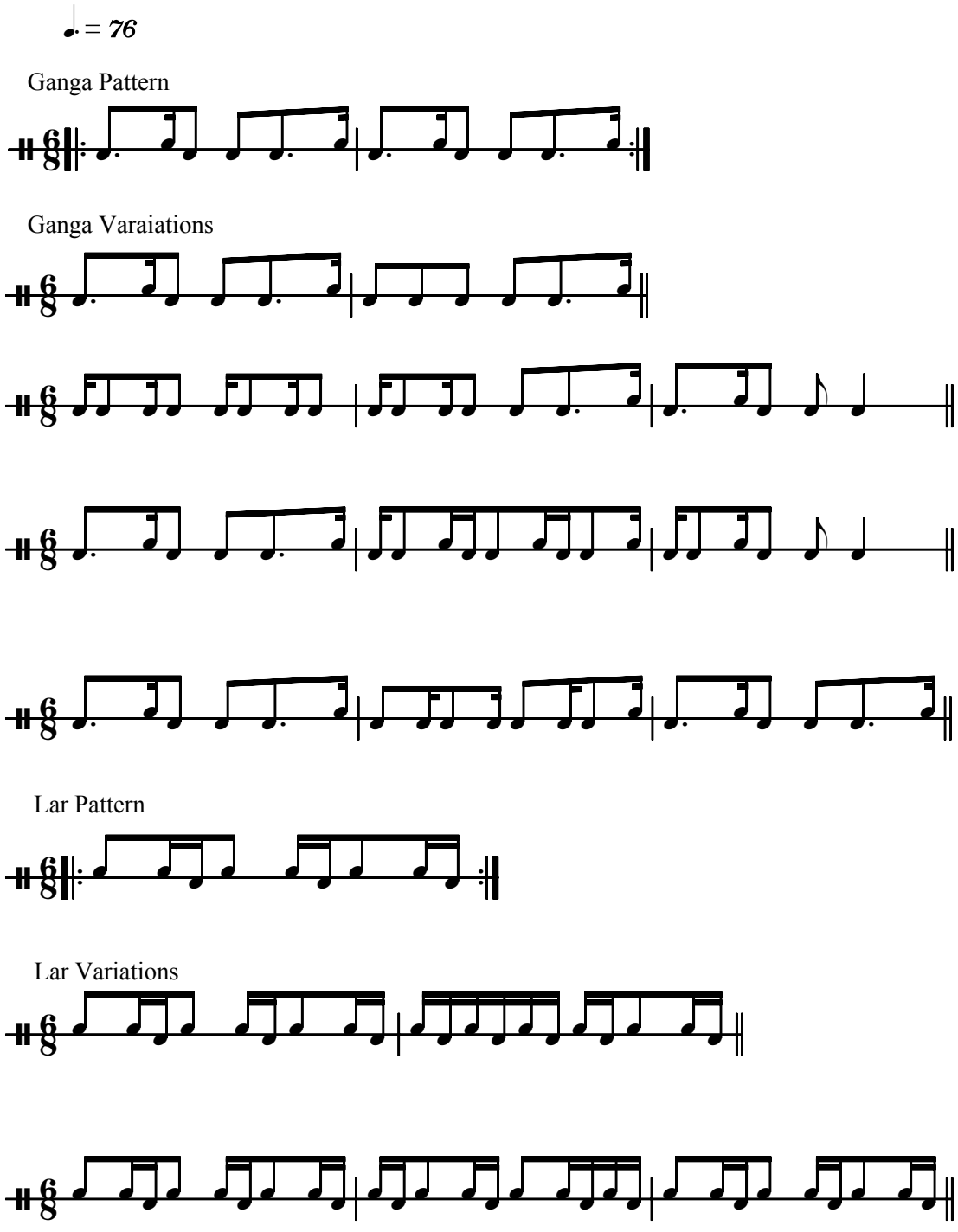



Saa Be Waa Na
25
29
1
Yangfu
2
33
38
Yangfu Ending
42
45

APPENDIX E

DRUM PATTERNS AND VARIATIONS

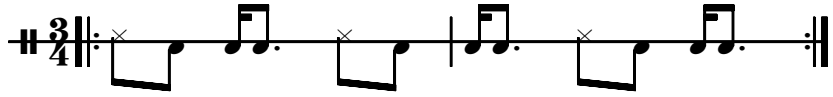
Daarkpen Drums: Ganga and Lar



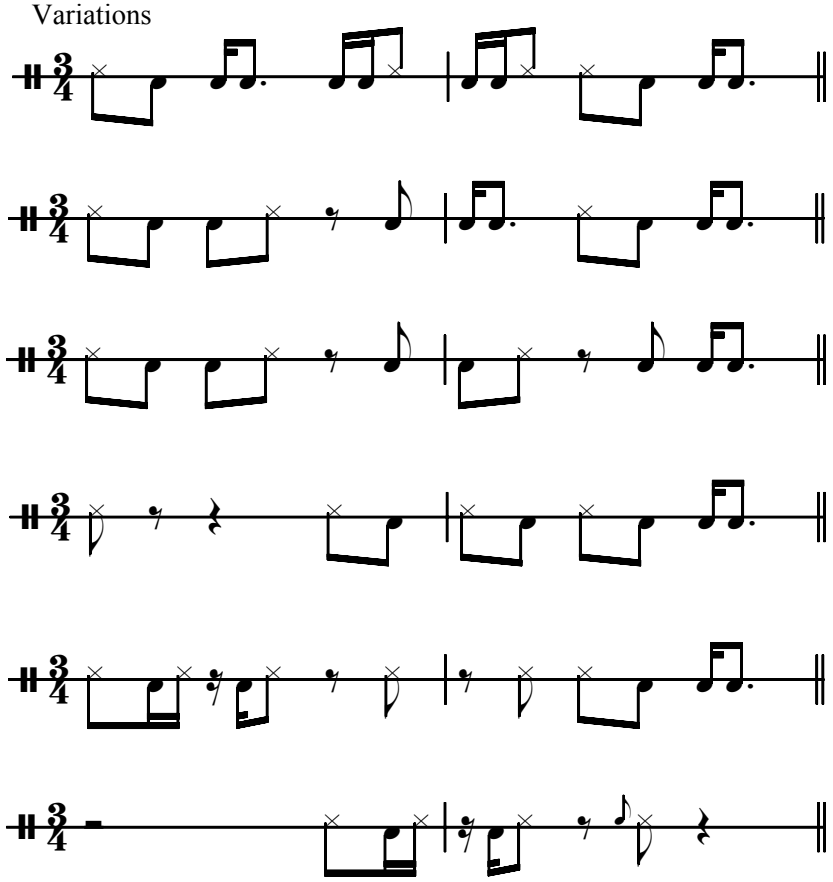
Kuor: Nandom Style

♩= 132

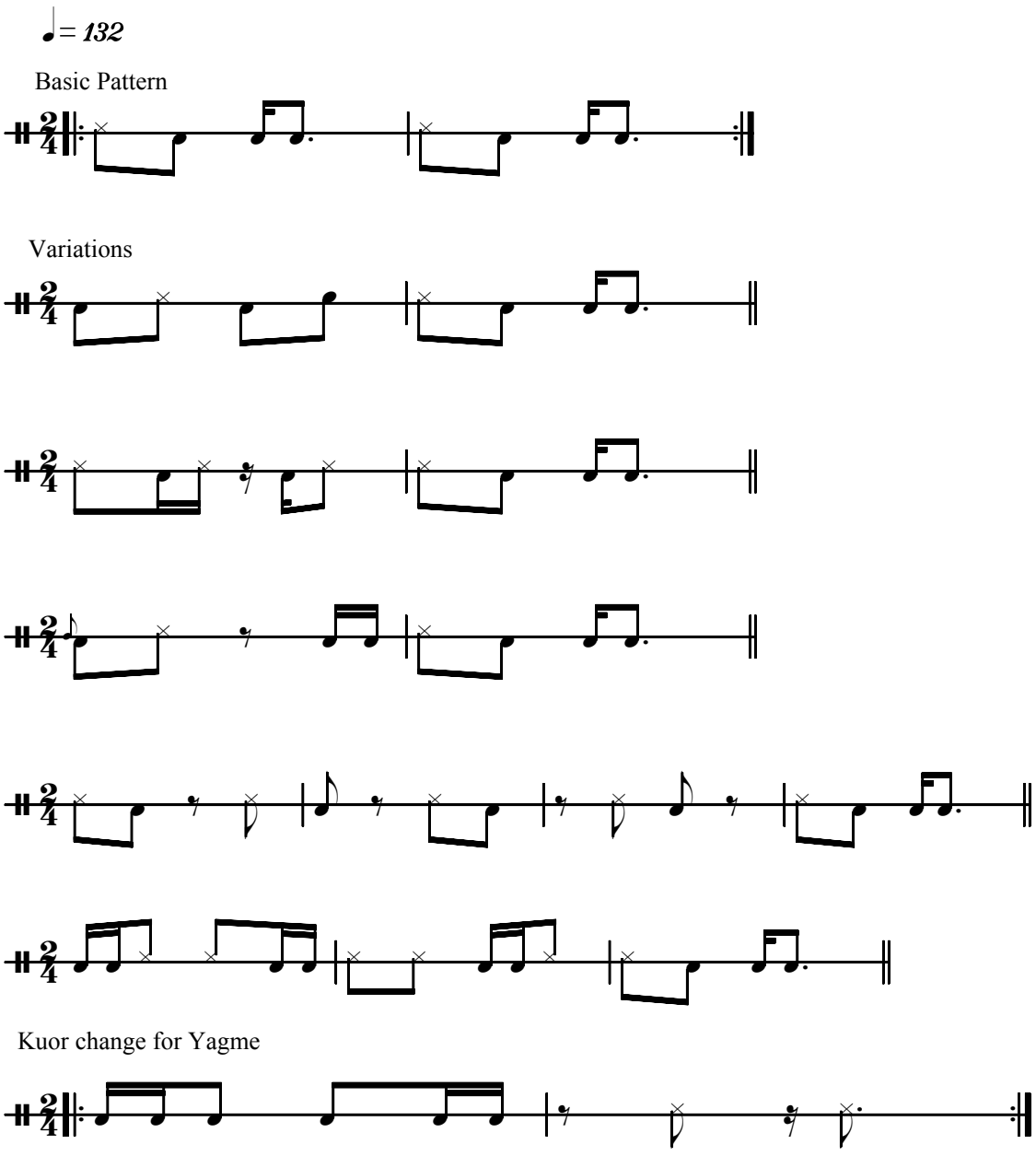
Basic Pattern



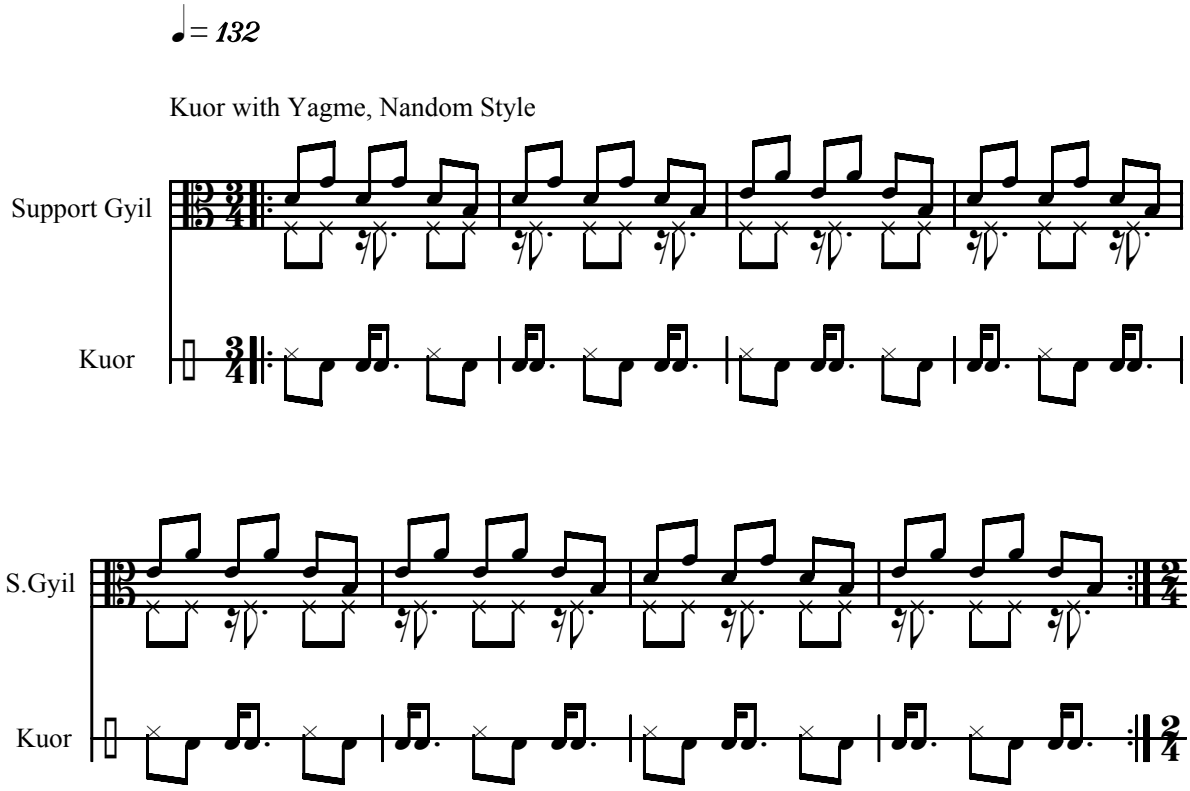
Variations

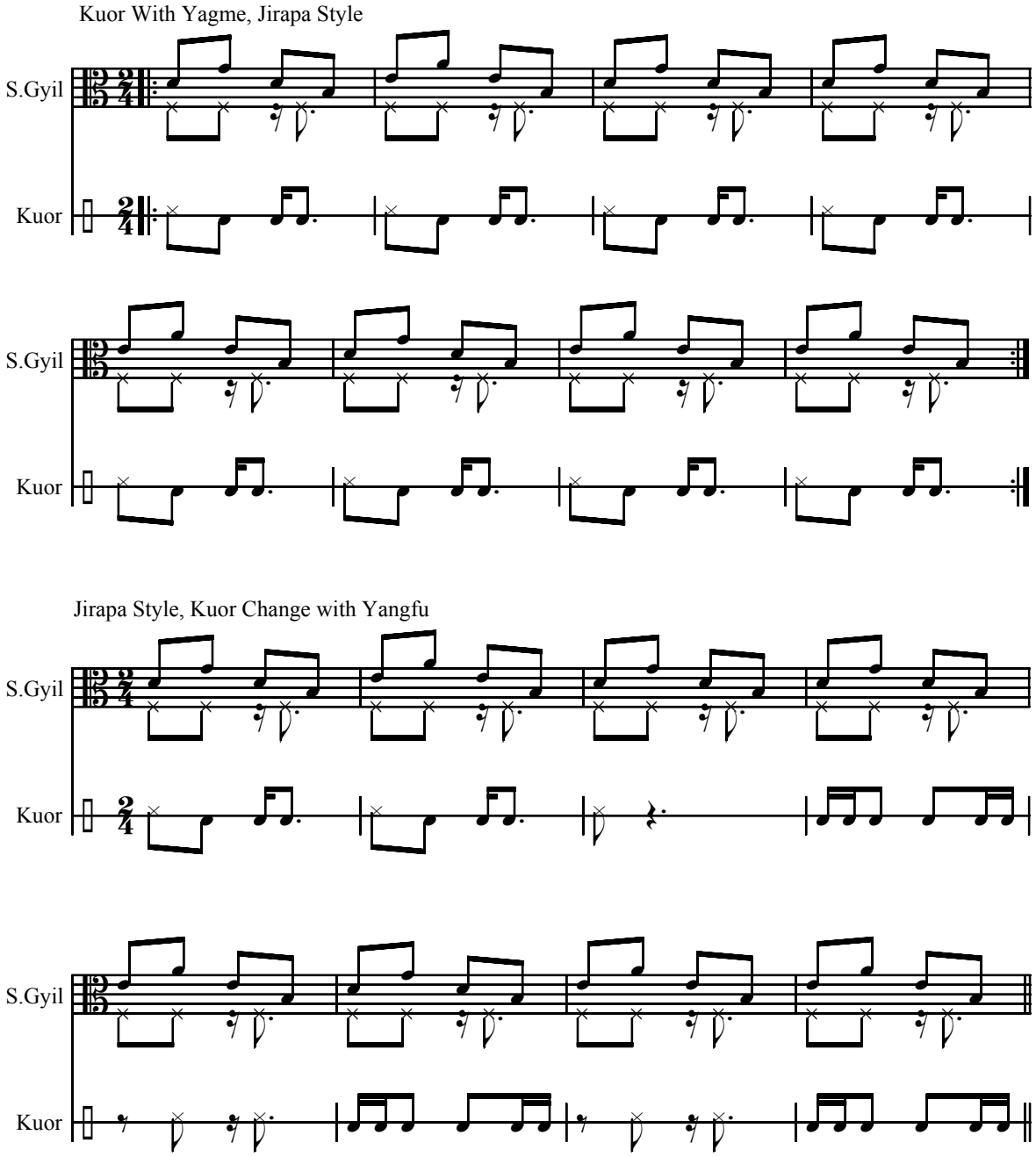


Kuor: Jirapa Style



Kuor with Yagme




Kuor With Yagme, Jirapa Style
S.Gyil
Kuor
S.Gyil
Kuor
Jirapa Style, Kuor Change with Yangfu
S.Gyil
Kuor
S.Gyil
Kuor

APPENDIX F

PHOTOGRAPHS

LIST OF PHOTOGRAPHS

Photo 1. Tijan Dorwana

Photo 2. Bernard Woma (left) at Dagara funeral

Photo 3. Jerome Balsab at Dagara funeral

Photo 4. Sontii with Birifor ensemble

Photo 5. Tijan with Sei

Photo 6. Dagara Bewaa Cultural Group dancers

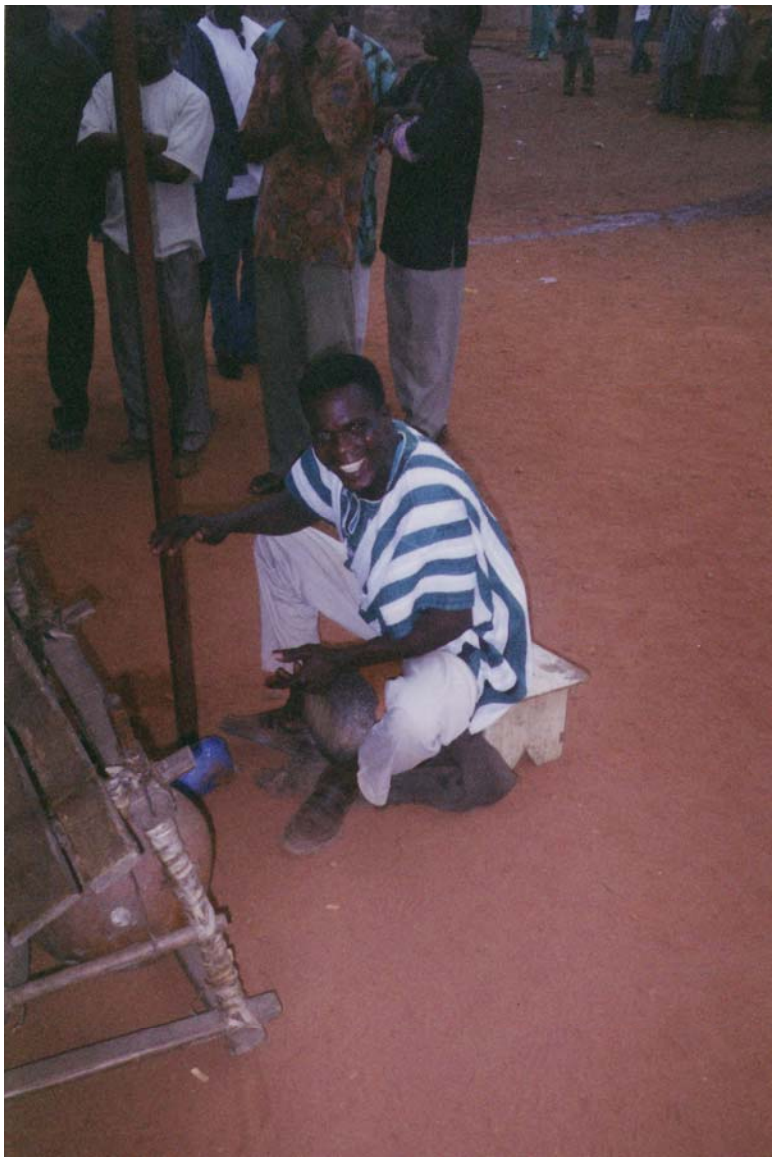


Photo 7. Felix Putier on kuor at a Dagara funeral

Photo 8. Joyce Bekyogre leading a dance at a Dagara funeral

Photo 9. Daarfo costumes for myth reenactment

Photo 10. Dagara Bewaa Cultural Group with Bernard Woma in performance

Photo 11. Fireplace for drying gyil bars

Photo 12. Tijan with fallen *nirra* tree (rosewood)

AUDIO AND VIDEO RESOURCES

Audio

Addy, Mustapha Tetty. *The Royal Drums of Ghana.* WeltWunder Records, CD WW 102-2.

Bewaare: They are coming, *Dagaare Songs and Dances from Nandom, Ghana.* Pan Records, PAN 2052CD.

Global Guaranty Orchestra. *Four Stars*. Ninth World Music, NWM 023CD.

Lobi, Kakraba, *Song of Legaa.* Lyrichord Discs, LYR-CD-7450.

Woma, Bernard. *Dagara Yielu.* (Accra, Ghana, 1998).

_____. *The Flow of Time.* (State University of New York, Freedonia).

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Video

Dagara Bewaa Culture Group featuring Bernard Woma. *Xylophone Music and Dance of Northern Ghana.* (Accra, Ghana: Spectrum 3 Ltd., 2001).

Field recordings used for this project can be made available for future study. Please contact the author directly at vercelliinghana@yahoo.com.

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