

### Chapter Three Voices: Layered Tone Colors

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#### Timbre in African Music (pp. 47-52)

Timbre (the color or texture of a sound) is an essential element in creating the palette of sounds associated with African musics. This element can be used to identify a specific person's voice, distinguish between instruments, serve as a mnemonic teaching device for instrumental performance, and give meaning to words. Thus, African music is not only layers of rhythms, but layers of sound colors. This concept is also found in art and cloth patterns.

#### Timbre in Kutindingo Performance:

AA

When playing the kutindingo, a conical drum used in West Africa, players create a range of tone colors through use of a variety of strokes. The voice of a drum may be changed through use of such strokes as well as by changing where the drum is struck, and what part of the hand is used to strike the drum. In kutindingo playing, each stroke is assigned a mnemonic syllable to guide the player in learning typical patterns.. Handout/Overhead 3.1 offers a brief description of the basic strokes, how they are produced, and the abbreviation used in "notating."

#### Handout/Overhead 3.1

Stroke	Abbreviation	Technique
Kum	K	Open hand strikes drum and rebounds
Ba	B	Hand strikes drum and dampens head
Ding	D	Stick strikes drum and rebounds
Da	d	Stick strikes drum and dampens head

1. Compare this system of mnemonic notation (whether written or oral) with similar systems used in India, jazz performance, conga playing, etc.
2. Create rhythmic patterns using kutindingo stroke mnemonic notation. Place the letter representing the stroke within a TUBS (Time Unit Box System) grid to notate the pattern. Handout/Overhead 3.2 gives a simple example of how this project may be completed. Students may use the remaining TUBS grids may be used to create their own patterns.
3. Using classroom drums, perform patterns for class.

**Handout/Overhead 3.2**

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12
K		B		D		d		K	B	D	d

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12

CD 6: Voice Disguise Using Drum Head

AA

Listen to CD 6, then complete the following activities.

1. Describe at least four different timbres or sound effects the performer creates by placing his voice near the drum head.
2. How are these sounds similar to or different from the sound of the transverse horns played on CD 3?
3. Using classroom drums (Orff-style hand drums, conga, bongos, etc.), experiment with several techniques to produce different timbres. Place voice close to head, farther away from head, change opening of mouth, vowel placements, etc. In plain language, describe how each effect sound

Meaning Through Sound

AA

In the Kpelle language, the sound of words or phrases often indicates the meaning or provides an aural cue to the meaning. For example, the month coinciding with February is known as Nyéngnyéng, the sound made by dry leaves as they are walked across. In English, this linguistic technique is known as onomatopoeia (the formation of words that imitate what they denote). In Handout/Overhead 3.3, list several Kpelle words used in the text and add examples of onomatopoeia using familiar English word giving their meaning or describing what is indicated by the sound. The table may be expanded to allow a greater number of examples

**Handout 3.3**

Word	Meaning or Explanation
Fa, fa, fa	Sound made by boiling water
Kíli, kílí, kílí	Way a boy runs
Yuu-yuu	Confusion in a crowd

CD 7: “Giing”AA(1-2), S, C/U (3)

“Giing” derives its name from the English word “game” and, in many ways, is a vocal depiction of a contest or game. There are a number of “alternating sounds which could be said to “compete” with one another: the male and female soloists, the different instruments, the call and response section, and the addition of the spontaneous sounds of the “owl-raising-people” in the later half of the recording.

1. Compare the two major drums used in this performance. Handout/Overhead 3.4 provides a model of how some elements may be compared.

**Handout/Overhead 3.4**

<b>Feli</b>	<b>Gbung-gbung</b>
Mid to high range pitches	Lower range of pitches
Penetrating sound	Less resonant
Played with hands	Played with sticks

2. Listen to CD 5, then use the following table to describe how each facet of the performance adds to the layering of sounds and timbres. Consider rhythms, entrances, tone quality, etc.

**Handout/Overhead 3.5**

<b>Sound Produced by:</b>	<b>Description</b>
<b>Instruments</b>	
Tone produced by hands	
Tone produced by stick	
Effect on tone by type of skin used for drum head	
Effect on tone of tightness of drumhead	
<b>Vocal</b>	
Male Solo	
Female solo	
Chorus	
Owl-raising-people	

3. Listen to CD 5 beginning at 3:00 (timing may vary with different playback devices).
  - a. Write down syllables added by owl-raising-people and note time each first occurs.
  - b. Clap rhythms you may identify in percussion and owl-raising-people phrases.
  - c. Advanced students may wish to notate short rhythm patterns or melodic phrases.

**Instruments** (pp. 52-55)

Two seemingly simple Kpelle instruments produce a rich palette of tone color, the triangular frame-zither (koning) and the musical box (gbong-kpala). Although both use a resonating chamber (a gourd for the frame-zither and the human mouth for the musical bow) and strings for tone production, each is unique in its range of sounds. The frame-zither is shown in Figure 3.3 (page 53 in the text).

CD 8: Triangular Frame-zither

AA (1-5\_, S, C/U (6)

1. Identify and describe the three parts of the triangular frame-zither used in tone production.
2. What reason does one frame player cite as the reason for placing rattles (nyeng-nyeng) to his instrument?
3. How does a frame-zither player use the resonator to change timbre?
4. What names are given to the strings on the frame-zither? Why do you think these names were given? How does this reflect parallels with Kpelle social structures?
5. Listen to CD 8, then answer the following:
  - a. Note the alternation of playing in high and low register. How frequently does the player alternate? How often does the player perform in both registers simultaneously?
  - b. How does the shifting of registers resemble call-and-response?
  - c. Are there parallels with the use of owl-raising-people in “Giing”?
6. Compare this recording of the Kpelle triangular frame zither with those featuring other instruments such as the Kora and Mbira.. What similarities and differences exist in the performance techniques and musical structures?

CD 9: Musical Bow

AA

1. In plain language, describe the technique for playing the musical bow.
2. How are overtones used to create unique timbres and effects on musical bow?
3. Explain how the shape of the mouth is used to create timbres and effects.
4. How does the musical bow communicate lexical meanings? Compare this technique to those of other instruments sometimes used for communication. (Examples: talking drums of West Africa, bagpipes from Scotland, etc.) as talking drum or bagpipes
5. Listen to CD 9, then describe changes in tone color noting, if possible, the first instance where each technique occurs.
6. While listening to CD 9, identify times in which overtones most frequently occur.
7. Using a homemade musical bow or a jaw harp, experiment with producing different timbres by changing the shape of the mouth. Describe each effect and how the shape of the mouth was changed to produce that particular sound.

**Timbral Dimensions and Symbolic Associations (pp. 61-63)**

The African musician’s well-developed analytical vocabulary for timbre extends beyond musical applications into daily life. For example, pitch, timbre, and duration may be used to describe a malfunction in a machine. (Not unlike an American trying to describe what is wrong with an automobile through a series of unusual sounds and clicks!) Musical sounds are related to nature, as well, with specific devices for teaching performance drawn from bird sounds or other natural sources.

CD 15: “Kee, Kee zi-kee”

AA (1-3); S,C/U (4)

1. Kpelle musicians associate colors of sound with a variety of spheres of everyday life including distinctive bird calls. Listen to CD 14 focusing upon the timeline played

by master drummer Kao. Try clapping the drum rhythm while saying “kee kee zi-kee pronounced: kay-kay-jee-kay-jee-kay). This is a bird call used by the drummer to learn this rhythm.

2. Musicians in many cultures associate musical sounds with the sounds of nature. In *Music In North India*, George Ruckert cites a story linking each note of the raga to a specific animal’s sound. Native American musicians often associate music with birdsong, running water, heartbeats, etc. Western composers Mozart and Messian used bird calls in their compositions. Explore these connections identifying specific composers, performers, and compositions incorporating natural sounds or basing melodic structures or timbres on natural sounds. Prepare a report for class presentation.
3. Returning to musical applications, a sudden shift in timbre may signal a change in character or event. After reading the information on pages 62-63, explain the significance of the following timbral changes in a Kpelle performance:
  - a. Vocal change to muffled voice:
  - b. Vocalist shifts to falsetto voice and use of “Oo”:
4. Discuss how textures of colors relate to textures of music in Kpelle society.