

## **Pitch and Tuning in Beninese Brass Bands**

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Kofi Agawu has argued that scholarly fixation with African rhythm and disinterest in tonality and pitch has precluded musicologists from critically thinking about Western tonal rule as a colonizing force (2003). Indeed, existing scholarship on pitch and tuning in African music emphasizes traditional styles, scales, and instruments, and often fails to interrogate the extent of Western influence on African tonal expression. In reaction to Agawu's provocation, and in contribution to that scholarship, this paper discusses factors influencing the pitch and tuning of imported aerophones, brass instruments, in urban Benin. Drawing from recordings and interviews made during ethnographic fieldwork, I compare pitches produced by individual players across time and space, tuning consistencies within ensembles, and pitches sounded in both Beninese traditional songs and Western hymns. In analysis, I consider how brass instruments' material designs motivate, or demand, Western tonality yet how material conditions—such as instrument disrepair, temperature, climate, and players' ability—limit and constrain it. I argue that perceived “inconsistencies” in pitch and tuning of brass instruments do not suggest an indigenous tonality or conceptual root to tuning and pitch adjustment that resists Western tonal rule, but rather are technical, performative, and sometimes involuntary.