

Structural Analyses of Poly-Ensemble Music of the Asante of Ghana

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This paper addresses the conceptualization of poly-ensemble music in Ghana and the means by which relationships of ensembles may be analyzed. Poly-ensemble music is many ensembles performing simultaneously irrespective of each other, the performance of different songs temporally uncoordinated in the same acoustic space. Such performance simultaneity has been little explored in ethnomusicology (Kaminski 2012, 2014). Poly-ensemble music of the West does exist in twentieth century polytonal works, but in many non-western cultures, particularly Ghana, the randomness of the ensembles maintains a purpose to create sound barrages at rituals. Dissonant barrages made by the poly-ensembles function within the contexts of ancestral veneration of which the Akan peoples take part. Ensembles make staggered entrances, beginning songs that eventually result in simultaneity. Transcriptions of individual polyphonic ensembles reveal the relationships of parts in one ensemble, but constructing a transcription that shows the relationships between the poly-ensembles would be useful. In a sound barrage, layers of sound textures form background, middle-ground, and foregrounds. A Schenkerian analysis may at first seem doubtful arousing skepticism; Schenkerian analysis deals with tonal music, while the sound of poly-ensembles in Ghana is an antithesis. However, layer analyses may represent entrances and time allotments of ensembles within a barrage, further revealing tonal relationships of overlapping themes as well as depth of texture. Linear analyses of sound barrages may show structural aspects of the sound and the tonal relationships of dissonant themes.

References

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