

music dances art



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ПРЕДГОВОР

African Mosaic е академично и културно списание, посветено на многообразието и богатството на африканския континент. Списанието представя есета, доклади и изследвания от студенти, изследователи, любители и практики по широк спектър от теми, свързани с Африка – от култура, изкуство, езици и литература до екология, история, човешки права и съвременни проблеми, с които се сблъсква континентът. *African Mosaic* създава пространство за споделяне на идеи и вдъхновение, насърчавайки междудисциплинарен и междукултурен обмен, който изследва миналото, настоящето и бъдещето на Африка в глобален контекст.

Първият брой на списание *African Mosaic* е посветен на музикалното и танцово наследство на Африка и изследва няколко уникални теми: глобалното значение и влияние на африканските ритми и танци като част от световното културно наследство, приликите между балканския фолклор и западноафриканските танцови форми, както и ползите от африканските ритми и танци като холистичен подход към здравето и благосъстоянието. Африканските ритми и танци се разглеждат и като терапевтичен инструмент за психично здраве, който създава мощно трансформиращо и лечебно преживяване, свързващо тялото, ума и духа.

Списанието е част от проекта „Африканска музика, танци и изкуство: ритмично пътешествие на разнообразие и влияние“ и беше предшествано от поредица културни и академични събития, проведени между май и ноември 2024 г., включващи:

- **Честване на Деня на Африка** с разнообразна програма от културни и академични събития;
- **Втори филмов фестивал за африканско кино в България** в партньорство с Националната академия за театрално и филмово изкуство (НАТФИЗ);
- **Серия от работилници и лекции** на теми като африкански ритми, традиционни барабани, съвременен и традиционен африкански танц;
- **Кръгла маса** на тема „Африканска музика, танци и изкуство: ритмично пътешествие на разнообразие и влияние“, целяща популяризирането на африканската култура в България;
- **Кръгла маса и работилница**, посветени на темата „Африканските ритми и танцова терапия като подход към психичното здраве“.

Дениза Георгиева, изследовател

INTRODUCTION

African Mosaic is an academic and cultural journal dedicated to the diversity and richness of the African continent. The journal features essays, reports, and research by students, scholars, enthusiasts, and practitioners on a broad spectrum of Africa-related topics, from culture, art, languages and literature to ecology, history, human rights, and contemporary issues faced by the continent. *African Mosaic* creates a space for sharing ideas and inspiration, fostering interdisciplinary and cross-cultural exchange that explores Africa's past, present, and future within a global context.

The first issue of *African Mosaic* is dedicated to the musical and dance heritage of Africa and explores several unique themes: the global significance and influence of African rhythms and dance as part of world cultural heritage, the similarities between Balkan folklore and West African dance forms, and the benefits of African rhythms and dance as a holistic approach to health and well-being. African rhythms and dance are also examined as therapeutic tools for mental health, creating a powerful, transformative, and healing experience that unites body, mind, and spirit.

The journal is part of the project "*African Music, Dance, and Art: A Rhythmic Journey of Diversity and Influence*" and was preceded by a series of cultural and academic events held between May and November 2024, including:

- **Celebrations of Africa Day**, featuring a diverse program of cultural and academic events;
- **Second African film festival in Bulgaria** in partnership with the National Academy for Theatre and Film Arts (NATFA);
- **A series of workshops and lectures** on topics such as African rhythms, traditional drumming, contemporary, and traditional African dance;
- **A roundtable discussion** on "*African Music, Dance, and Art: A Rhythmic Journey of Diversity and Influence*", aimed at promoting African culture in Bulgaria;
- **A roundtable and workshop** dedicated to the theme "*African Rhythms and Dance Therapy as an Approach to Mental Health*".

Deniza Georgieva, Researcher

The art to dance community: approaches to a ritual dance pedagogy with live music

Stephanie Bangoura

Abstract: This article explores the significance of ritual elements in contemporary dance education, presenting the method of “Ritual Dance Pedagogy”. Developed over the past decade, this approach combines African dance and music traditions with Gestalt therapy principles, as well as insights from medicine and psychology. Through live music and symbolic action, ritual dance pedagogy aims to enable dancers to experience the power of transformation and healing within a communal space. The methodology emphasizes the formation of an inclusive environment where dancers and musicians engage in an energetic exchange, fostering support, empowerment, and self-expression. Key ritual elements—such as intention, transition, symbolic actions, and the circle—are reinterpreted to serve modern educational needs. The collective energy generated in ritual dance facilitates connection, self-discovery, and healing, presenting a unique avenue for transformative learning.

Keywords: *dance education, Gestalt therapy, African dance, healing, transformation*

Резюме: Тази статия изследва значението на ритуалните елементи в съвременното танцово обучение, представяйки метод, известен като “Педагогика на ритуалния танц”. Разработен през последното десетилетие, този подход комбинира африкански танцови и музикални традиции с принципите на гещалт терапията, както и прозрения от медицината и психологията. Чрез жива музика и символични действия, педагогиката на ритуалния танц има за цел да позволи на танцьорите да изпитат силата на трансформацията и лечението в общо пространство. Методологията акцентира върху създаването на включваща среда, в която танцьори и музиканти се ангажират в енергиен обмен, който насърчава подкрепа, овластяване и самоизразяване. Ключови ритуални елементи – като намерение, преход, символични действия и кръг – се преосмислят, за да обслужват съвременните образователни нужди. Колективната енергия, генерирана в ритуалния танц, улеснява връзката, самооткриването и лечението, представлявайки уникален път за трансформиращо обучение.

Ключови думи: *танцово образование, гещалт терапия, африкански танци, изцеление, трансформация*

The dance class as ritual

This article is an approach to the importance of ritual elements in contemporary dance education. Over the last ten years, I have developed a method that combines basic elements of

African dance and music traditions with Gestalt therapeutic approaches and insights from medicine and psychology¹. I have called this Ritual Dance Pedagogy. In this paper, I will explain how ritual elements in dance can be made fruitful with live music as part of this approach. The aim is to make it possible to experience the meaningfulness of dancing, what moves us and the healing power of dance.

The concept of ritual is broad: as early as the 1960s, the Scottish ethnologist Victor Turner argued for interdisciplinary and process-based ritual research. He described religious ritual as “prescribed formalized behaviour for occasions which have not yet become routine and which have a reference to belief in mystical [...] forces or beings which are regarded as causative of the desired effect” (Turner cited in Bowie, 2000, p. 153, translated by the author). In contrast to the French ethnologist Émile Durkheim (1981), who ascribed a system-preserving function to ritual, Turner was of the opinion that rituals have the potential to generate new ideas that challenge the social order and can therefore lead to (revolutionary) changes in culture, society and politics under certain circumstances (cf. Alexander, 1997). In contemporary cultural studies, humanities and social sciences (Wulf, 2006), too, increasing efforts are being made to view rituals in a transcultural context. Bobby C. Alexander describes two qualities in particular: “Ritual in its most general and basic sense is planned or improvised performance that affects a transition from everyday life to an alternative context in which everyday life is transformed” (Alexander, 1997, p. 139, translated by the author).

I would like to highlight a few characteristics of ritual that I believe are particularly relevant for dance education practice:

- Every ritual is based on an intention, a purpose.
- Rituals celebrate and secure transitions (e.g. transformation of identity, social roles, status and competence).
- Symbolic actions can make the invisible visible and tangible.
- Ritual focuses and channels energy.
- There are no spectators in the ritual, only participants.

¹ When I talk about *African dances* in this paper, I refer primarily to the West African Yoruba and Mandinka traditions. I am particularly familiar with these through my long experience in various African countries and with dance theater and music groups from Dakar, Paris, New York, Havana, Salvador, Hamburg and Munich.

- The ritual opens the perception for the unconscious, the magical, the mythical to unfold and take effect.

Regardless of specific elements, every dance class can be celebrated as a ritual that can be described in three phases – separation, transformation and re-integration into everyday life (cf. Van Gennep, 1986, p. 50). Secular societies lack meaningful, collective frameworks that could accompany and support the individual in phases of upheaval. The dance class is therefore of enormous importance, especially in times of social atomization: the space created in the ritual offers an important pole of calm, concentration and community in phases of speed, distraction and disorientation. It is therefore important for leaders and teachers to support and accompany this process in such a way that it can be carried out in an orderly manner.

Many dance forms, including European ones such as classical ballet, have developed from ritual contexts.² It, therefore, makes little sense to copy the outward form of rituals, as these have developed in a singular context. Ritual dance pedagogy sees itself as a transcultural approach that looks for new ways to make traditional, ritual dance forms fruitful for today's situations and needs. A dance can only be experienced as meaningful and effective if it is adapted to the needs and situation of those who dance it, which also manifests a gestalt-therapeutic attitude:

The perception, voluntariness and self-determination of the participants/dancers are always respected. The dance ritual lives from the resonances between dancers and musicians – both support, stimulate and challenge each other in an ongoing dialog. The basis for spontaneous individual dance interludes is formed by long, repeated movements, rhythms and songs of the group. This shared energy gives rise to what I call a *supporting group*. Dancing together can create the intersubjective experience of being carried by the group as well as being a supporting member of this group³.

Ritual dance pedagogy synergistically combines African traditions with contemporary movement concepts and forms of training, including concepts from Gestalt therapy, voice training, rhythm training, theater pedagogy and contemporary dance improvisation, as well as individual elements such as trance journeys, self-massage, yoga and Pilates exercises. The leading dance

² In her cultural history of ballet, Dorion Weickmann (2002) describes, for example, how ballet developed from the social dances and physical techniques of the European courts. This opens up a new perspective on dance: it is not seen as a staged art or aesthetic form in itself, but as a cultural and socio-historical product, at the center of which are the body and ritual forms of collective togetherness and discipline.

³ In my book “Rituelle Tanzpädagogik - Die Kunst, Gemeinschaft zu tanzen” (2024), I explain how these elements can be brought together in educational practice.

educators develop a ritual structure in resonance with the dancers and musicians and use its elements as appropriate to the situation. It is important that one's own perception is focused on the here and now: on the musical sounds, the group and one's own body. This prevents actions from being mechanically or even dogmatically linked to one another; individual actions (playing music, clapping, sounding, shouting, singing, screaming, shaking, laughing, crying, dancing, walking) become part of a creative, open whole.

The contact offer, as taught in Gestalt therapy, culminates in spontaneously improvised dance, the *danse individuelle*: a dancer dances alone in the middle of the circle in dialog with the live music. Music and the presence of the group provide support, strength and orientation so that the dancer can follow their impulses for self-regulation. The leaders have to pay close attention to the dynamics in the group. The principle of participation applies; the ritual should be created together rather than passively consumed.

The entry and exit (beginning and end) of the ritual represent a sensitive phase that needs to be guided and shaped by the teachers. In these transitional phases, it is important to pay attention and slow down so that they can be carried out safely. The individual is separated from their familiar environment and needs time and trust to become part of a new community or to return to their old environment with new experiences. When the dancer moves from the circle to the center, they leave the group. They are alone – the only thing that counts in the center of the circle is the courage to be singular, the courage to break away from the group. From a cultural-historical perspective, the overcoming of basic fears is acted out here.⁴ In the dance ritual, the primal human fear of being abandoned and lost, of loneliness, ridicule, weakness and failure can be experienced. In this essential confrontation lies the potential to create something new: new movements and experiences, which in turn can lead to independence, freedom, happiness, change, transformation and healing. The ritual clapping after the individual dance accompanies the dancer back into the community. Feedback rounds make it possible to share special moments with the group, to verbalize them and to support the individual awareness process.

⁴ “Against death and hardship, the great parents of fear, everything that mankind has at its disposal in terms of intelligence and technical skills is brought to bear. All positivity, the joy of life and its thousandfold celebrations, requires relief and the absence of fear. Overcoming and dispelling this is the first task of all cultures. Cultural surpluses, which serve to increase pleasure and delight, can only arise when death and hardship, when fear no longer determines the activities of the community alone.” (Böhme, 2000, p. 223, translated by the author)

Embodied symbols

For Turner, the symbol is the smallest unit of the ritual (cf. Turner, 1967, p. 19). Embedded in a larger symbolic network, it creates a meaningful social action. He describes symbols as polymorphic, i.e. multifaceted and ambiguous elements. Turner's research into rituals in southern Africa, Mexico, Brazil and Ireland made an important contribution to identifying physical symbolism as a basis for the organization of the social world.

During my many years in Senegal, I was repeatedly fascinated by the uniformity of the greeting rituals and how they are embodied. The Senegalese greeting aims to clarify the hierarchy between those present and the peaceful and well-meaning intentions of the person being greeted. This is done each time in a detailed, patient and equal manner⁵. From a European perspective, it is a speech without content relevance, without *truth*. But here it's all about attitude – about answering in an appropriate way and thus creating a respectful atmosphere. Direct questions are avoided in the course of the conversation and it is left to the (usually male) higher-ranking person to decide how to discuss or approach topics. I also experienced this dynamic in the dance dialog with the musicians, who played around my movements musically without directing them too strictly. “It's all a question of respect,” a musician once said to me.

The complex symbolism of African dances seems overwhelming to outsiders. In my work, I have concentrated on movements that deal with existential human themes and can be understood beyond the African context. These are movements that not only represent liberation, recharging and connection, but actually *create* them. The energetic bath of the Orisha dances is an example of symbolic action that creates a reality and allows it to be experienced. In ritual dance pedagogy, it can be experienced by the musicians through the execution of dipping, showering, stroking and shaking movements. *Bathing in the music* promotes awareness of the live music and its energy. Through the repetition at the end of each dance unit, it becomes an organizing element that supports the ritual framework.

⁵ The question: “ana wa kergi?” is always answered with “nungi fa”. Translated, this means: “Where are the people of your home?” “They are there.” To the question: “nangadef?” (What are you doing?) is usually answered with “I am here.” Such a dialog can continue for up to 15 minutes.

The circle in the dance ritual

“Why in a circle? A circle is an ingenious form. There is no top and bottom, no important and unimportant, no boss and subordinate, no hierarchy or pecking order. Everyone is equal. Anyone who joins a circle is part of the whole. This corresponds to the natural order on this earth, which is also round and makes no distinction of rank. A ritual in a circle dissolves value judgments.” (Francia, 2011, pp. 8-10, translated by the author)

Characteristic forms of movement and formation in many traditional African dance rituals are the circle, semi-circle and spiral. A semi-circle allows another semi-circle to be added and the spiral also describes a circle at its core. In ritual dance pedagogy, the performers arrange themselves in a semi-circle, while the spectators and participants form a complementary semi-circle. Individually improvised dance interludes are often introduced by a spiral run. The dancers make eye contact with the audience. Spirals can also be danced collectively or drawn on the floor with leaves, sand or flour. On a symbolic level, the circle and spiral represent an archetypal pattern. They can be associated with the cycle of the earth, the cycles of death and life, ecological food chains or water cycles. The circle is a motif of transformation – nothing remains as it is, nothing disappears and everything reappears in a different guise.

In ritual dance pedagogy, the circle means both protection and concentration. Anyone who dares to step into the center of the circle receives the attention of the group and stands in a field of tension. Dancing in a circle ideally supports the participation, belonging, perception and appreciation of all those present, without exposing or exposing anyone. At the same time, it enables self-initiated stepping out and showing oneself. It is about taking up the space at the center and expressing what has been held back until now, what has not (yet) been allowed to be expressed. The group and musicians perceive where the dancer is holding back (traumatic trace) or letting go (erotic trace). They reflect this through shouts, sounds, clapping, drum beats or other gestures. Everyone takes part, whether by watching, clapping or shouting – everything serves to generate energy for the event and for each individual. The contrast to the conventional spectacle is obvious: there is no passive, anonymous mass that sits motionless in the dark and watches. Conversely, in ritual, the performers are “always also the audience of themselves” (Wulf & Zirfas, 2004, p. 27, translated by the author).

In capitalist and patriarchal societies, hierarchies are constantly (re)produced. In the circle, these boundaries can be experienced, acted out and at the same time suspended. In my pedagogical practice, I repeatedly experience the liberating and healing role of the circle. It counteracts imitation, comparison, competition, exclusion and hierarchy and encourages eye contact, encounters, participation, cooperation, belonging and integration. Dance therapist Alexa Junge writes: “Dancing is not only a sociable and socially equalizing activity, but also often marginal and abnormal. It creates a contrast to everyday life and transports the dancer into a timeless state outside of their structured routine” (Junge, 2010, p. 6, translated by the author).

Teachers of ritual dance pedagogy therefore take care to form a circle without *energetic holes*. The dancers are encouraged to feel their neighbors, to dance shoulder to shoulder, to include the musicians, i.e. not to turn their backs on them. The circle is a central form – but it is just as important to dissolve it again, to use diagonals and other possibilities. Dancing means enlivening and experiencing the space in a variety of ways.

Energy and energetic rules

Friendly rituals are based on reciprocity and a mutually activating energy: I give and receive. In every culture there are rules which – even if the social actors are not aware of them - help to direct attention and energy. Dance events, such as those I experienced in Senegal, be it concerts, festivals, workshops, rehearsals or a wedding, are a good example of how money is handled in a non-European context. In contrast to the often opaque transactions of the Western market economy, musicians in Senegal are always paid in cash and on the spot: they are given banknotes in front of everyone, pinned to their foreheads or given to them in some other way as part of a performative act, with banknotes often flying through the air. Money is energy and its visible handover signifies public appreciation and motivates people to continue playing.

Another phenomenon is that guests often go on stage at the end of a concert to show off their improvised dances. They enjoy being on stage next to the stars, giving and receiving appreciation, and stepping out of the audience increases the energy of the dancers and everyone present.

Ritual rules are not to be confused with politeness. “In a ritual, all politeness can be discarded. Once you have drawn the line that encloses the sacred space and invoked the spiritual

forces, there is no lying, no hypocrisy” (Somé, 1999, p. 91, translated by the author). It is the line, the protective circle, the decision and inner alignment that give rise to a dance ritual.

Outlook

From a Gestalt therapeutic perspective, every crisis is associated with an opportunity (see Hartmann-Kottek, 2011, p. 162). Illness, discomfort or dissatisfaction are often the beginning of a movement, in the literal and metaphorical sense. Becoming aware of one's own emotions (Latin *emotus* for English *moved, shaken*) and transforming them into movement, moving out, provides good conditions for an energy-rich dance ritual. This is where the interests of artists and therapists meet: they welcome emotions and transform them. It is important to find out which question or which desire should be at the center of the joint ritual. Not only allowing emotions, but also showing them and working on them collectively requires trust and a safe space that does not arise spontaneously, but only over a longer period of time. In ritual dance pedagogy, I therefore prefer to work with a core group over several years.

Every ritual is based on a desire for change. At the same time, the ritual enables reconciliation with what is. Its potential lies in the tension between pause and movement: only what has been accepted, named and seen can change. This stabilizing ground is created in the ritual.

Dancing in ritual dance pedagogy means establishing a ritual connection with oneself and the other person. The counterpart is the live music, the moment, the group, the earth, the neighbor, the ancestors. Ritual dance pedagogy creates ritual spaces to carry out these processes safely. Dancing thus becomes a powerful means of transformation. It enables an actual transformation of the self and reality: nothing changes until I change myself. And then everything changes!

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Dancing together to get back to (the) one self: Bulgarian and West African dance culture

Dilyana Kurdova

Abstract: The paper aims to present a brief comparison between Bulgarian and West African dances by taking rituals and ritualistic symbolism as a focal point. Whether discussing the body of a sole dancer or the common body, consisting of the many moving as one, dance is a part of the culture of human movement where being together in one motion and rhythm synchronizes body and brain waves thus creating feelings of connection and unity among those dancing (Ehrenreich, 2007). Moreover, it has been and still is crucial to rituals as the main protagonist in healing practices. Bulgarian dance tradition largely represents the principle of chain and circle dances where dancers join hands as one living and moving organism. West African dances mostly appear to be on the other end of the “single–common” polarity. How do bodies move in different contexts? What does it mean to be a part of the common body within traditional Bulgarian and West African dance culture? Who, what and how is healed? This research is an initial pursuit to present a point of view towards the dancing body as a tool and repository of past-present-future symbolism. I base my research on the works of ethnochoreologist and anthropologists, as well as on my observation and fieldwork concerning the analysis and description of human movement, trying to illuminate the ritualistic background of dances often lacking in the present-day interpretation of traditional dance. Finally, the paper brings forth the idea of dance as intercultural language synchronically (within the context of two distant dance cultures) and diachronically (past-present-future connections).

Keywords: *Bulgarian, West African, ritual, healing practices, dance*

Резюме: В статията се прави начален опит за кратко сравнение между българските и Западноафриканските танци, като за отправна точка се взимат ритуалите и ритуалната символика вътре в самото движение. Независимо дали говорим за танцуващото тяло на индивида или на общността, танцуваща като едно цяло, танцът е част от културата на човешкото телодвижение. Съвместното движение и ритъм синхронизират тялото и мозъчните вълни като по този начин се създава усещане за връзка и единство между танцуващите (Ehrenreich, 2007). Освен това танцуването е било и все още е от решаващо значение за ритуалите като главно действащо лице в лечебните практики. Българската танцова традиция до голяма степен се отъждествява с танците в кръг, при които участниците се хващат за ръце в един жив и движещ се организъм. Западноафриканските танци в по-голямата си част изглеждат като да са на другия край на полярността „индивид – общност“. Как се движат телата в различен контекст? Какво означава да бъдеш част от общото тяло в традиционните български и западноафрикански танци? Кой, какво и как се лекува? Настоящото изследване представлява първоначален опит да погледна на танцуващото тяло като един вид инструмент и хранилище на символи от минало, настояще

и бъдеще. Взимайки за отправна точка трудовете на етнохореолози и антрополози, както и мои лични наблюдения върху анализа и описанието на човешкото движение, темата опитва да осветли ритуалния пласт на модерните интерпретации върху традиционния танц, които често липсват в съвременната идея за традиционните танци. Статията разглежда танца като межкултурен език в синхрон (в рамките на контекста на две далечни танцови култури) и диахронно (минало-настояще-бъдеще).

Ключови думи: *български, западноафрикански, ритуал, лечебни практики, танц*

In her fundamental ethnochoreological work “*Past and Present in Field Research: a Critical History of Personal Experience*”, Anca Giurchescu notes that researchers should be glad for the presence of new phenomena and processes related to dance which offer challenging new areas and research, instead of condemning the gradual disappearance of folk heritage. According to her, there is an opportunity to uncover traditional patterns in the structure of urban dance contexts and to study dances among minority groups and in newly emerging subcultures, for example (Giurchescu, 1999). Seizing the opportunity to put this into practice, in the following pages I will offer an initial comparison between two dance cultures far away from each other geographically and with different body movements performed in seemingly extremely different contexts.

I am well aware of the fact that observers outside of a given context cannot interpret movement in culturally appropriate ways without knowing specific cultural and aesthetic ideas of the particular traditional setting. Except at the level represented by step patterns, dance cannot be comprehended cross-culturally without understanding individual dance frameworks in relation to the culture in which each tradition is embedded (Nahachewsky, 2012). As a Bulgarian dance teacher and researcher, I explore Bulgarian traditional dances based on extensive fieldwork I have done throughout the years. However, I consider myself an outsider to our Bulgarian dance culture since I have not been brought up into it but rather observe it looking into it from ‘behind the fence’. This constitutes common ground with my West African dance knowledge and research.

Dance therapy, women circles, African dances and ecstatic dances have been at the forefront of the so-called New Age cultural movement in Bulgaria which encompasses music and dance. However, my experience with West African culture and body movement started via an

Erasmus+ project called “*The Singing Body*”⁶, which I was managing on behalf of the Bulgarian partner in the *Erasmus+* consortium. The project concluded in Sofia (Bulgaria) on 10th-11th September 2022 with a weekend full of dance and music workshops, as well as a blast of a concert⁷ that featured ten professional musicians from six different countries performing on stage for more than two hours. Via this project I got to know movements, melodies, fables, etc. through the griot⁸ Massa Dembele⁹, various African and European musicians, as well as three superb dance teachers:

1) Stephanie Bangoura, the leader of the project. She is a German dancer, gestalt therapist and trainer for ritual dance pedagogy. Stephanie has been working full-time with West African music and its dance forms for over 20 years. She teaches them in various contexts, be it as a performer or lecturer in Salvador, Havana, New York and Paris or as a therapist in Hamburg.

2) Eva Azevedo, who sadly passed away a few days ago. From 2009 until 2024, Eva was developing research, training and artistic creation projects carried out in Europe, Burkina, Benin, and Brazil supported by her husband and musician Paulo das Cavernas¹⁰. She was a dance teacher on the West coast of Africa between 2003 and 2024, having created her teaching method “*Farisogo Sira-O Caminho do Corpo*”.

3) Miriam Del Barrio Escola (Miriamba Afrobarcelona) has been a teacher of African dance since 2008 in Catalonia. Trained since 2005 with the traditional African dance and percussion company “*Fôret Sacrée de Ziguinchor*”, she travels every year to Casamance (Senegal) to continue enriching herself and learning through fieldwork how to play instruments and dance.

Last but not least, I had the chance to immerse myself in one facet of the West African dance culture in July 2023 through a stay in Accra (Ghana) as a participant in the 47th ICTMD World Conference, organized by the University of Ghana, Legon¹¹. In Accra (Ghana) I had the

⁶ <https://afrikanischer-tanz.de/de/vergangene-erasmusplus-projekte/the-singing-body/>

⁷ Check here for the full concert: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=EQSx_x8-LFY

⁸ A person who preserves the memory of the ancestors by passing on the knowledge entrusted through music and verse.

⁹ A djembefola from Burkina Faso. He is a multi-instrumentalist and a student of Adama Drame.

¹⁰ https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=w_6w-0Ick2g

¹¹ <https://ictmusic.org/node/5755>

first urge to attempt and lift the veil of old ritualistic symbolism as a basic layer of cultures across the world, hidden within dances in plain sight.

What spiked my interest was a trip to the Cape Coast of Ghana. There we were cordially invited to visit a local chieftain and join him in his own home. Before even entering the village where he resides, we were met with music, dance and bread by his official speaker and his court musicians – a symbolic gesture heavily reminding a staple Bulgarian custom of greeting guests with bread and salt. One might think that both occasions constitute a simple act of politeness. Digging a bit deeper, the logic of balancing and neutralizing the danger the outsiders pose to locals is visibly embedded in this common thread weaving between Bulgaria and West Africa. The foreigner does not belong to the local society, and as such can be expected to do harm as well as to be benevolent. Bringing food to strangers outside the village or in front of one's home used to be an act aiming to neutralize any harmful influence. In return, guests were expected to pay so that the energy exchange would be completed, and the cleansing ritual – concluded. This was necessary to restore the universal order which was disturbed by the contact with a stranger (Decheva, 2000).

Would two seemingly different body movements within the traditional context of Bulgarian and West African dances also have anything in common? When I started researching the topic I considered the negative result quite straightforward and searching beyond was a *causa perdata*. Nevertheless, in the next pages, an intriguing pattern will weave itself out and present as an initial base to nurture some food for thought. Dance in folk culture responds to differences in its environment with qualitative changes. After the dissolution of the syncretic trinity of music-text-dance (Ilieva, 2007), the ritualistic-magical nature of rites that have reached us today has gradually weakened in Bulgaria and the Balkans. Today we may witness codes and knowledge of rituals passed down to the next generation to some extent, the aim being rather the preservation of traditions for the future with an emphasis on the element of spectacle and entertainment – for both participants and spectators. This is partly due to the specificity of folklore itself, which as a system develops in forms reminiscent of the theatre with a stage (choir, home, ritual places), obligatory publicity in performance, and social involvement (Zhivkov, 1982).

On the other hand, according to Kealiinohomoku, old traditional dance cultures have a large context compared to the small context of newer dance traditions (Kealiinohomoku, 2005). Changing dynamics often introduces activities and behaviors that differ significantly from the

older traditions of the large context. Even though an outsider would refer to dances of the West African countries under the same generic umbrella term, for sure there are many differences and similarities. The pace of internationalization and inner changes happening in West African dances are also linked to the emergence of nation-states on the continent as well as the agenda behind every newly appointed government. The processes of decolonization of West African societies and culture include among other things the main-streaming of traditional dances (i.e. those transmitted traditionally amongst generations) and placing them on stage as an art form. The Sovietization of traditional Bulgarian folklore after 1945 shows similar patterns, such as flag-shiping Bulgarian folklore as a recognizable ID card for the Bulgarian nation towards the outside non-Socialist world.

Throughout the present paper, I am not researching the overall development of dances or concentrating on the visible step patterns that are totally different at first glance. This would be a waste of pages leading to the obvious unlinking of Bulgarian and West African dance culture and setting them in two opposite corners of the ‘nothing-in-common’ stretch. Instead, I will show the commonalities and proceed to make my bold claim – that in its core traditional Bulgarian (Balkan) circle dances performed in a closed or open chain have the same general principle that the West African dancer has as a single moving body: i.e. in the Bulgarian/Balkan context the principle unfolds itself through the common dancing body, whereas in West African setting it is visible through the individual dancer.

Let’s state the obvious – most Bulgarian and Balkan dances are danced in a circle holding hands in different positions (on the shoulders, palm in palm, on the belt, etc.). A circle is also the form which is a common way of movement/formation in many traditional African dance rites, albeit the fact that dancers do not hold hands but rather dance on their own in the middle of it, surrounded by others or many dance at the same time but separately. A circle could be perceived as a kind of an *ouroboros*, a snake which has bitten its own tail. In both West African and Bulgarian traditional culture, the snake has an inherent duality of being the bridge between the material world and the ‘other’ world; the up and down; the left and right; the female and male; the life and death. In Bulgarian dances a snake is represented by the movement of the common body, whereas in West African dance culture it might be literally enacted by the dancers.

To give a more precise description while comparing the two dance cultures in question, I would need to present the terms *microform* and *macroform* according to the ethnochoreologist

Anna Ilieva in her book from 2007. The study of the question of the antiquity of dance structures and their principles, or the historical-typological study of dance, requires the introduction of these two broad categories around which the unfolding of Bulgarian folk dance (from here on: *choro*) is realized. The *microform* is a relatively complete construction that can be a cell, a motif, a phrase, a section, but it cannot have an independent existence because it does not have sufficient duration. That is why most often through the principle of repetition, the microform repeats itself again and again (i.e. as the rings of a chain would connect to form it). A *macroform* is the overall flow, the overall build-up, which includes the dance form, the appearance, the spatial figures, i.e. the spatiotemporal coordinates in the unfolding of the whole. To put it in simple and quite generalized ideas, the microform is the step pattern, whereas the macroform is the drawing that the common dance body draws on the ground by means of the step pattern. For a more vivid illustration let us take the example of the so-called “Krivo horo” danced in an open circle with its microform constituting a simple three-measure phrase in 11/16. In the large Srednogorie Area in Bulgaria very often after one or two rounds, the chain of players is led livelier with the one-bar microform and wound into a snail shape. Depending on a player's position in the chain the direction of movement varies – forward, left, right, back, etc. In this way, the entire coiled chain swings and describes a circular motion on the ground ¹².

When the choro dance is no longer a circle but a chain of dancers shifting in space, we could say that it is perceived as a moving snake with a ‘head’ and ‘tail’ and can be seen all over Bulgarian under various rhythms¹³. In a traditional setting, when this choro is performed by a large group of people, the directions of movement of the participants in the different parts of the chain are not the same. If we conditionally divide the chain into three parts, in the first third people dance in the direction forward to the right and backwards, in the second third they begin the movement exactly to the right and in the third part of the snake, movement is kept to the right while pulling a bit to the left. The dancing body of the choro has the middle necessarily in a calmer pace as compared to the head and tail of the snake. This middle part is responsible for keeping the whole chain together while balancing between the pulling of the head and the curving of the tail.

¹² A similar choro can be seen here on my foundation's official Meta page: <https://www.facebook.com/PhoenixPerpeticum/videos/151909231083939/>

¹³ An outright visible choro microform can be seen here: <https://www.facebook.com/PhoenixPerpeticum/videos/1757718681248766>

In modern terms, the center of the dance chain is in a way an *isolation*, a movement separate from the rest of the action which to the naked eye seems almost like an inaction. It is an important form of control. In West African dance tradition, the body is attuned to the music performed mostly on drums and/or ngoni. Each body part reacts to different layers of the polyrhythmic music, but one part is always in isolation – moving, but in a calmer manner so that it can be the balance between the *left-right* or *upper-lower*. Both dance traditions in question have a polycentric principle with one part of the body – single or common – kept in ‘isolation’ in order for the macroform to unfold in space. Such a deeply embedded principle echoes an ancient cosmic order that balances the outside world with the dancing body, thus bringing it to unity within and without it, a process of healing, a return to oneness and oneself.

Dancing is a kind of ‘safety valve’ through which the ‘steam’ is released. Nowadays dancing Bulgarian/Balkan choro is a favourite pastime in the form of recreational dances. Such is the case with West African dances. Practical implementation of dance must go hand in hand with a deep understanding of cultural knowledge and the symbolism behind dance patterns to fully experience the healing force of moving together as one. The theory offered briefly in this paper was conceived during the recent project “*Dance Goes Digital*” within the frame of the *Erasmus+* Programme of the European Commission. It is yet to be developed and deepened so any comment and input is welcome to enrich and further the discussion of the triptych *dance-body-healing* beyond borders.

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Drum circle: The healing power of unity

Deyan Petrov

Abstract: The article draws attention to the specifics of the "group drumming" method. The main characteristics and the positive effects of this practice on the physical and mental health of the participants are presented. Key factors in the development of "drum circles" are brought out from a historical perspective and examples from different cultures are given.

Keywords: *drum circle, group drumming, art therapy, drum therapy, physical and mental health, traditional cultures*

Резюме: Статията насочва вниманието към спецификите на метода „групово барабанене“. Представени са основни характеристики и положителни ефекти на тази практика върху физическото и менталното здраве на участниците. Извеждат се ключови фактори за развитието на „барабанните кръгове“ в историческа перспектива и се посочват примери от различни култури.

Ключови думи: *барабанен кръг, групово барабанене, арт терапия, барабанна терапия, физическо и ментално здраве, традиционни култури*

What is a drum circle?

The sun was already beating down on the sacred hills around the valley when the village came alive. Young and old people were moving excitedly. A strange vibration could be felt in the air, carried only by light gusts of wind. Suddenly the wind picked up, went round every hut, blew up the festive clothes in which the people had drenched themselves, danced with the leaves of the trees, overturned several carelessly placed calabash vessels, and before it subsided, gave the children of the village a refreshing hug. There was a commotion, people talking loudly and hurrying to the wide meadow. The direction of the wind that day had not changed for countless summers, and it was a sure sign that the ceremony could begin.

Every year at the same time the *Baga* people (Guinea, West Africa) pay respect to their ancestors, contact the spirits and make offerings for a fruitful year. The day was special because the sun changed its course, and if the spirits were not properly honored, the evil forces would take the food from the field, the animals from the forest, the fruit from the trees and the goodness from

the hearts. Fires were already burning, while people lined up in a huge circle. The musicians, who had already cleaned and tuned their drums around the fire, settled in the middle. The elders were dressed in lavish clothing and painted with tattoos that covered their bodies. The decoration seemed to transform them into sacred animals, giving them both a fearsome and beautiful appearance. They collectively gave the signal to begin.

There was only one way to begin - the lead musician played a powerful signal on the djembe drum and the others followed. The rhythm invited the spirits into the circle, and they joyfully began to dance among the people. The spirits of the ancestors had waited a whole year to return to their homeland. Their powers possessed the people and dancing began ecstatically in the circle. At first they were calm, but gradually the rhythm became so fast that the feet of the dancers stopped touching the ground, and everyone fell into a euphoric trance-like state.

At that moment, the main deity Kakilambe came out of the forest dressed in a huge cloth mask. The people gave a shout of joy and began to sing songs that hailed their guardian spirit. If Kakilambe is already here, it means that they have been virtuous and can hope for a good and fruitful year. The mask and the musicians went around the village and gave a blessing, banishing evil eyes and powers. People were very happy, and dancing and singing continued throughout the evening.

In the morning, everyone woke up with a smile and rushed to do their tasks for the benefit of the village. For another year the harvest was secured, the spirits honored, and the elders happy. Today, the beat of the drums was calm. The rhythm timed the steps of men as they tilled the land. They worked together as one. In the evening, they will dance and chant again.

It was a good day overall, but I was really bothered by the work report. It was supposed to be ready by noon tomorrow, and I was just getting started. I left work thinking about it and decided to dispel my worries by walking in the park “Borisova Garden” (Sofia, Bulgaria). The colors of the forest captivated me. With the first steps in the park, my mood lifted and I calmed down. Suddenly, in the distance, I heard the beat of drums. What was going on? How did drums appear in the park?

My feet drifted off in an unknown direction, and the sound grew louder. I found myself in a small clearing where several dozen people were stationed, frantically beating the drums with their hands. Subtly, my body began to move with the rhythm, and I danced in a way that had never happened to me before... spontaneous and intuitive. I was not alone, people joined in from all directions, dancing, humming and cheering happily. We did not know each other, but it was as if we had been friends for years. We danced until sweat broke out all over our bodies and until our legs were tired.

Suddenly I saw a free drum. I picked it up without much thought and tried to grasp the rhythm that made us move. I had never played a musical instrument before and I was very clumsy at first. However, the general rhythm and the collective energy carried me and I quickly found my place next to the other drummers. I don't remember how long we played, but it must have been several hours, as the sun had already set, and we continued under the lights of the park lamps.

At some point, it all ended as it had begun. The meadow gradually emptied, the rhythm slowly died down and quietly stopped. I felt like an empty vessel – my worries were gone, my body felt burning and tired, but my mood was more than uplifted. I don't like crowds, but among the musicians and dancers, I felt part of a whole, even though we didn't say a word to each other. Being in the park made the experience very powerful.

On his way out, one of the lead musicians said: *“Hey, did you like it? You are always welcome in the drum circle. The rhythm we played is from Africa and it's called ‘Kakilambe’. It is played to thank nature and the forces that protect us and keep us away from evil.”* I barely answered, *“Thank you!”* and thoughtfully headed home.

Powered by the drum circle, I felt awakened and strong. I finished the pending report in a few hours that very evening. I rarely did this in my life, but in the morning I decided to play my favorite song, danced and thanked “Kakilambe” for the shared experience and the strength that came to me. The next day I headed cheerfully to the forest one more time¹⁴.

¹⁴ This part of the article is inspired by the book of Terence McKenna: *“Food of the Gods: The Search for the Original Tree of Knowledge A Radical History of Plants, Drugs, and Human Evolution”*.

Image 1: Open drum circle in South Park (Bulgaria, Europe)



Why can drums move us?

We all know that feeling. The moment our favorite music plays, we spontaneously start moving, following the beat of the drums. This happens no matter whether we are in a bar or a disco, at a concert or casually enjoying our favorite songs at home. Moreover, this drumming effect can be traced back deep to the dawn of the first human cultures. Playing percussion instruments finds a place in almost every culture known to scientists. It spreads to all corners of the world and occupies an important role in modern civilization as well. Therefore, it should come as no surprise

that, immediately after the voice, percussion instruments are among the first musical instruments known to humankind (Giyom, 2000).

While the oldest known drum dates to 5500 B.C. in China, it is widely understood that the greatest explosion of drum knowledge and drum rhythms came from Africa and this knowledge has been promulgated by the African diaspora all over the world. These rhythms and music pulsations deeply shaped contemporary music. Genres like “jazz”, “swing”, “funk”, “blues”, “soul”, “rock”, „reggae“, “hip-hop”, “world fusion”, “electronic music”, would hardly exist if they did not follow the rhythms of Africa. The rhythms and drums from the Middle East, Europe, India and Asia spread widely through the Silk Road trading routes and migration waves (Abrashv, Gadzhev, 2000).

However, their role cannot be reduced solely to entertainment and creating a pleasant musical atmosphere. Drums were deeply connected to community rituals and tribal practices, important for the reproduction, development and preservation of the tribe/community. Examples of this relationship are drawn from every human culture. In **China**, red drums have always been a symbol of the power of the ruler and the destiny of the army. Drums were brought out whenever there were ceremonies or festivities. They called the gods’ attention to the petitions of worshippers.

Image 2 – Red drum ceremony (China, Asia)



During the **Sufi worship**, groups of drummers play a simple rhythm repeatedly to accompany the whirling dervishes, helping them achieve a trance-state. In **Hinduism**, the “Damaru” drum is associated with the god Shiva and the creation of spiritual power. Some **North American Indians** use rattle drums, kettledrums, frame drums and occasionally water drums for shamanic and other magical practices. In addition to ceremonies in Buddhist temples in **Japan**, the great “*Taiko*” drum (which was used as a samurai war drum in the Middle Ages) is also used in concerts at international performances nowadays. In the **Balkans**, the “*Tapan*” drum is used in many rituals, usually leading the movement of people from one secret space to another during ceremonies. In **Africa**, drumming was a part of everyday life. Groups of drummers played (while people were dancing) at harvest rituals, solstice gatherings, fertility rituals, marriage ceremonies, initiation rituals, and at all kinds of celebrations. Drums were used for communication and healing. Drummers (musicians) were usually part of a spiritual caste charged with important functions for the reproduction of community knowledge and beliefs (Blanc, 1997).

Image 3 – Celebration ritual (Burundi, Africa)



Similar examples are drawn from a wide variety of cultural contexts. Regardless of the differences, drums all over the world are produced using similar technology, they perform important community functions, and their key role remains to this day, despite the modernization changes. How can we explain this historical phenomenon? What is the quality of percussion instruments that makes them widespread and meaningful to people?

If we focus on the sound parameters of drums, we will find that this instrument covers a huge palette of low, medium and high frequencies that have an impact on the human body and consciousness. Neurological research in recent decades provides evidence that playing and listening to drums increases brain activity, regulates heart rate and metabolism, stimulates the sense of time, increases blood circulation, awakens the immune system, increases the levels of happiness hormones and develops interlimb coordination. In addition, playing techniques are derived from basic biomechanical movements of the human body, which makes this practice extremely accessible and intuitive for many people (Northrup, 2016).

A person's ability to focus is deployed to such a degree during the act itself, that the human mind detaches from extraneous or anxious thoughts. A process that in psychology is referred to as “venting emotions” and “reducing anxiety levels”. Furthermore, this activity permeates our entire body down to the cellular level. For example, our bodies are mainly made of water, and the water molecule actively interacts with environmental sounds. Our bone system has an acoustic function and vibrates when sound is emitted and received. That is why research in this direction seeks to discover healthy uses of playing the drums and manages to register positive effects on patients with diseases such as Alzheimer’s, Parkinson’s, cardiac arrhythmia, disorders of the vestibular apparatus, addictions and mental disorders (Friedman, 2000). It is no coincidence that in Germany a person with a specific health condition can ask his general practitioner to prescribe him drum therapy, the costs of which are covered by the state budget.

These studies are of the utmost importance because they consider the effects of drumming on the individual's body, using the most advanced tools for the study of human neurology and biology. However, they cannot explain why this activity has emerged and managed to engage so many people throughout human history. There is no way to consider all the factors and connections here, but it is appropriate to distinguish two main social characteristics.

Drums don't just create attractive and loud sounds that can be heard for miles in all directions. They represent a specific means of communication that deploys a non-verbal **language** understandable to the community. Drum tones mimic the sounds of nature and the range of human voice, allowing the individual to express their emotions within a group context. Unlike verbal communication, where one party is always actively listening and the other actively speaking, in the drum circle everyone speaks their own individual language, but in a continuous connection with the others. Moreover, this language is enhanced by everyone's participation, creating a transcendent bond between everyone in the group. The circular form of organization creates equality and empowerment by reducing the differences between people and the power hierarchies during this act. Individual voices merge into a common rhythm that expresses the state, thoughts and intentions of the group, thereby developing a sense of unity and cohesion (Hull, 1998).

“Typically, people gather to drum in drum “circles” with others from the surrounding community. The drum circle offers equality because there is no head or tail. It includes people of all ages. The main objective is to share rhythm and get in tune with each other and themselves. To form a group consciousness. To entrain and resonate. By entrainment, I mean that a new voice, a collective voice, emerges from the group as they drum together”.

Mickey Hart, drummer of *The Grateful Dead*,
Opening speech to the 20th UN General Assembly

Taken in their own right as objects, drums are the most ordinary of the cultural artefacts. Getting sound out of them is also not enough to explain their social functions. The binding center of the drum is the **rhythm**, not the individual sounds. Rhythm separates “chaos from order”, and that is why this musical instrument plays an important role in the mythological systems of many cultures (Sokolevich, 1990). Order here is achieved by active integration and fusion of separate rhythmic lines into a common pulse. The rhythm is a predictable cycle that has no end and can be sustained for a very long time. In these repetitive practices, order is built and maintained. The beat is recognizable to the whole community, who can clearly trace its cycle in addition to dance steps and ritual songs. In this way, rhythm instills trust and stability in tribal life. Namely, **trust** is an essential characteristic of human culture. The rhythm accompanies and synchronizes every community activity, not only the festive and ritual culture. Mowers mow the fields in common

steps, blacksmiths forge iron in rhythm, warriors march together, and cooks prepare food in rhythmic actions. Where there is a human movement and a group interaction, a rhythmic pattern is found (Olatunji, 2005).

Ancient people also had a very strong sensitivity to natural cycles – the alternation of day and night, tides, seasons, the movement of the sun and stars, etc. The **cyclicity** in traditional societies and the perception of time also coincides with the cyclicity in drum patterns. It is as if the full blood of life is captured in the threads of the rhythm, and with its transmission from generation to generation, the collective wisdom, knowledge, technologies and labor activities are preserved. No wonder that rhythm masters are among the most respected people in the community, charged with spiritual functions and often forming a special caste (Blanc, 1997). The fact that rhythm is an essential principle of social relationships is evident even in modern societies, where the palette of activities provokes us to constantly balance between the divergent rhythms of everyday life. The need to synchronize human activities also gives rise to the rhythm of standardized clock time, which mercilessly fragments our lives into small and rationally ordered chunks of time, putting each of us in the largest rhythm circle that humanity has ever created (Rosa, 2013).

Group drumming as a method in art therapy

If we summarize what has been said so far, we can reasonably conclude that the drum circle is an informal or formal gathering of people who meet for the purpose of playing drums, singing and dancing together. Participants gather in a circle (dancers are often seen in the center) using their listening and playing skills to make musical connections and express themselves in a creative way. Drum circles often attract both regular and spontaneous participation, and they can range in size from a handful of players to circles with hundreds of participants. Defining values of a drum circle include “unity”, “equality”, “autonomy”, “creativity”, “inclusivity” and “freedom of expression”. Despite the described variations, several leading characteristics can be traced and expected in almost every drum circle act:

- Musical instruments and rhythms from different world cultures;
- Group rhythm activation through body movements and voice;
- Mastering the basic technique of playing authentic tribal instruments;
- Forming a common group pulse and improvising freely around it;

- Merging several rhythmic lines into one beat – “All as One approach”;
- Weaving group and organizational values and messages into group rhythms;
- Finding a common rhythm and pulse of the group;
- Various and flexible drum circles, according to the goals and needs of people.

In that line of thought, drum therapy is a type of music therapy (led by an educated facilitator) which uses drums and other percussion instruments to help people in treatment. Drumming therapy is inspired by traditional drumming but is used as a tool and resource for stimulating the positive impact on the physical and mental state of the participants (Burt, Stevens 1997).

The rapid course of social development creates difficulties in adjusting the multitude of human activities, which leads to the continuous reproduction of individual and group crises. This gives rise to the need for daily adjustment of social and individual time, as well as for the restoration of vital human forces and control of emotions (Rosa, 2013). Therefore, art therapy methods occupy an increasingly key role in modern society and organization, as they engage participants holistically in contrast to traditional therapy, which is highly verbalized and focused on conscious and rational awareness of the mental state (Friedman, 2000).

Image 4 – Modern drum circle with students and their parents (Sofia, Bulgaria)



Drumming allows everyone to express and “vent” their emotions and thoughts in an atypical, authentic and intuitive way, exploring ancient world cultural traditions. Rhythm allows people to get to know themselves and others better, to communicate simultaneously in a common drum language, and to create together a group “pulse” that drives them forward, regardless of what they do and where they come from. It supports the team’s development during long periods of isolation and detachment from the general social and work environment. It is for this reason that managers of large companies have begun to engage their staff in art initiatives to motivate teams after the periods of remote work and social crisis that occurred because of pandemic effects, for example. Often, drum therapy is also conducted in risky and stressful work environments (schools, social centers, police, army, hospitals etc.), where the preservation of mental health is considered a primary goal. In recent decades, similar forms of drum therapy aimed at risk groups (such as refugees, emigrants, prisoners, drug addicts, elderly people, people with disabilities, etc.) have been increasingly observed (Hull, 1998).

Image 5 – Modern drum circle class (Sofia, Bulgaria)



Drum therapy is an evolving method that was established in the 1980s and is still in its early stages of development. However, several health benefits could be inferred from group drumming, and research in this direction continues and expands. Here are a few of the main benefits for which data and research have already been accumulated (Northrup, 2016):

- Experiencing drum circles improves **positive mood** and **energy levels**;
- Drumming activates both hemispheres of **the brain** and the whole **brain activity**;
- It induces **deep relaxation** and **reduces stress** and **anxiety levels**;
- Active music-making **increases pain tolerance**;
- Drumming improves **physical health**;
- It stimulates positive **group dynamics**, as it creates a sense of **connectedness, reciprocity, community** and **empathy** in the group;

- It allows new horizons of **self-awareness, well-being** and **group reflection** in an **interactive way**;
- It improves **interpersonal connections**, based on non-verbal and creative communication;
- It develops skills such as: **decision-making, multitasking, sense of time, emotional intelligence, coordination, communication**;
- It involves participants in creating a **common rhythm and pulse**, a **sense of togetherness** that carries over into **everyday work and life**.

In conclusion, the roots of drum circles can be traced back to the dawn of human culture and in all corners of the world. In modern societies, they continue to exist in various forms – from master classes for a specific rhythm tradition, through therapeutic groups, to neo-pagan rituals, work team-building activities or spontaneous forms of gathering in the park or a community hall. Regardless of the forms and methods, the important thing is that drumming has a positive effect on the participants and fills their lives with inspiration and joy while improving their health. In addition to what has been said, drum circles allow people to get to know their own and the world's cultures more deeply, accept cultural and ethnic differences and ultimately build a more humane and joyful environment based on one of the most ancient known cultural practices of mankind.

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IMAGES

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Данни за автора: Деян Петров – “Dizzy” е барабанист, преподавател и социолог с дългогодишен опит на родната и международна сцена. Той е сред първите български артисти, които популяризират традиционни африкански ритми и музика, инструменти и барабанни кръгове в България. През есента на 2024 г. се присъединява към катедра „Африканистика и Индо-тихоокеански изследвания“ като преподавател и изследовател. Неговите интереси са свързани с африканското изкуство, култура и митология.

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Not Appreciating Your Appropriation: On the uses of Afrobeats in contemporary K-pop

Martin Lukanov

Abstract: In recent years, Nigerian and Ghanaian-influenced music, mostly from the genres known under the umbrella term *Afrobeats*, has been used in hit K-pop songs by boy bands and girl groups like *TOMORROW X TOGETHER*, *Le Sserafim*, and numerous others. Decontextualized, made into an aesthetic prop for the idols performing it, and de-Africanized, the music is recontextualized as an element in a multicultural pastiche, while its African creators are deprived of their agency. Taking the practices behind the use of contemporary African music in K-pop, this text aims to theorize a new, broader understanding of the practice of cultural appropriation.

Keywords: *Afrobeats, K-pop, cultural appropriation, politics, cultural studies*

Резюме: През последните години съвременната африканска музика, най-вече от жанровете, известни под общото наименование *афробийтс*, се използва в хитови *кейпоп* песни на момчешки и момичешки групи като *TOMORROW X TOGETHER*, *Le Sserafim* и много други. Деконтекстуализирана, превърната в естетически реквизит за идоли, които я изпълняват, и деафриканизирана, музиката бива реконтекстуализирана от корейската музикална индустрия като елемент в мултикултурен пастиш, а африканските ѝ създатели биват лишени от правото си на глас. Разглеждайки практиките, които стоят зад използването на съвременна африканска музика в кейпопа, този текст има за цел да теоретизира ново, по-широко разбиране на практиката на културно присвояване.

Ключови думи: *афробийтс, кейпоп, културно присвояване, политика, културни изследвания*

In early 2023, the K-pop boy band *TOMORROW X TOGETHER* released the song “*Tinnitus (Wanna be a rock)*”. Written by an international team of twelve composers, many of whom American and European, the song has the distinctive beat of the plethora of Nigerian and Ghanaian music genres and subgenres contentiously known in the past decades under the umbrella term *Afrobeats*. Though not the first Korean song to use this type of rhythm, it was the first one to become a viral hit on Spotify, catapulting the extended play (EP) it was a part of to number one on Billboard, making it the first release to reach the top of the American charts.

Naturally, the popularity of the song led to a flurry of Afrobeats and Afrobeats-adjacent songs in the Korean music industry, some of which include the Dara-written “*Rover*” by Kai and this year's divisive Amapiano track “*Smart*” by the girl group *Le Sserafim*, among many others.

Along with that, idol K-pop Afrobeats girl bands have appeared, like the rather insensitively named *TRI.BE* (Cho, 2024), and there were even governmental promises from South Korea to strengthen its relationship with Nigeria by the use of more Afrobeats in K-pop songs (Olufemi, 2024).

On the surface, the use of Africa-created and centered forms of popular culture in Korean products can be seen as just another result of globalization and the spread of culture supported by the ascendance of social media platforms like TikTok; or, even, it can be taken as a form of cultural appreciation, of enriching your culture through the implementation of foreign modes of expression. After all, the Nigerian and Ghanaian popular music genres have found their way to American popular culture, resulting in numerous collaborations between Black artists and Nigerian stars, such as Wizkid and Chris Brown's "*Call Me Every Day*", Davido and Nicki Minaj's "*Holy Ground*", and many others. These have not only helped African artists enter the American music industry, but even created a separate Afrobeats chart in Billboard in 2022 and a Grammy Award category for African performances in 2024. How appropriate such a racialized categorization of music is concerns another subject.

However, as a Cultural Studies scholar, in this text it is my contention that the Korean use of contemporary African music is a form of cultural appropriation that consciously or subconsciously erases the political uses, meanings, and contexts of Afrobeats. This happens through the depoliticization of music by its commodification and aestheticization and the marginalization, and even erasure, of the African artists by depriving them of their voice.

But before we continue, we must first answer important questions: what do we mean by "*cultural appropriation*", and is Afrobeats political in the first place?

As the name for this African music category suggests, it is a term used for a variety of contemporary music genres that have originated in Africa, mostly Ghana and Nigeria, and have spread to the USA and Western Europe through African diasporas and the Internet (Akpan, 2023). It is a contested umbrella term, as Jaana Seres shows, that includes numerous genres with different African and Western dance music influences, made possible through the democratization of media and music creation in Nigeria at the beginning of the century (Serres, 2023).

But here I would like to suggest another reading of the term, one connecting it ideologically with the Afrobeat genre pioneered by the anti-colonial activist Fela Kuti. Though subject to debate, I believe that the choice to name these modern Nigerian genres after Kuti's political music, together with their possible economic benefits, positions the contemporary African genres as

ideological descendants of his music activism (Olaleye and Osuagwu, 2020). As such, they are modern emissaries of anti-colonial movements like *Negritude* (Adewumi, 2018). Thus, even if not fully political, or at least openly so, Afrobeats has the potential for being so, especially considering it is one of the few forms of African popular art in which people represent themselves.

Cultural appropriation, as it might be surmised, is an even more complicated, misunderstood, misused, and under-theorized concept, not least for the fact that it has not been discussed meaningfully in academia outside very small circles and almost exclusively in relation to white Western culture (Rogers, 2006; Lenard and Balint, 2020). Mostly seen as the binary opposite of cultural appreciation, cultural appropriation is commonly understood to be the stealing of practices, signs, and artefacts of one cultural group by members of another. The discourses around cultural appropriation often ignore the hierarchy of structural power that is at the core of the practice, instead understanding it in terms of personal borrowing based on interest and/or lack of proper understanding of a given culture. Moreover, it has also been viewed as only the domain of white Western culture, almost absolving members of other cultures, especially post-colonial ones, from practicing it. Building on Oh's work on the topic, through this text, I aim to propose that cultural appropriation is an act of forceful intercultural borrowing by a more powerful culture from a less powerful one, irrespective of geographical location or previous history (Oh, 2024). In short, having once been colonized does not absolve one from practicing cultural appropriation or its reverse, cultural imperialism.

Though the question of the appropriative nature of Black culture in Korean popular culture has existed in popular discourse at least since the popularization of K-pop outside of Asia, until recently it has been in relation to the culture of Black Americans (Hong, Cho and Kinney, 2023; Cruz, Seo and Scaraboto, 2024). This has immensely complicated the discussion of possible appropriation by the music industry due to the neocolonial power imbalance between South Korea and America, making the use of Black culture in contemporary South Korea the result of both cultural appropriation and American cultural imperialism.

It is the opposite with regard to Afrobeats, where the power imbalance between South Korea, a member of the Global North and one of America's closest and strongest allies, and Nigeria and Ghana, members of the Global South and countries with historically racially and culturally marginalized populations. This imbalance has been strengthened through the depoliticization and deprivation of voice, as was mentioned earlier.

Listening to any Afrobeats-inspired K-pop song, one immediately notices that the former is used as nothing more than an ornament for the latter. The specific beat of the song is nothing more than that, a beat, divested of its historical lineage and context. It is an aesthetic flair to a decidedly Korean production, a prop through which the Korean idols and their producers can dazzle the audience with technical mastery, be it in the form of impossible slimness, army-like collective dances, or impossibly high budgets.

This turning of the Nigerian popular music into nothing more than an aesthetic not only decontextualizes it, but more dangerously, it depoliticizes and de-Africanizes it. The end result is nothing more than a husk, existing as a mere prop for the culturally (and economically and politically, because the three are interconnected) more powerful to use and discard as they please. This type of appropriation through commodification is at the core of K-pop.

The cultural appropriation of Afrobeats in contemporary South Korea not only commodifies and depoliticizes, but also robs the African creators of the potential to raise their voices, as a result marginalizing them even more. This is because none of the Afrobeats songs in Korea are performed by or even feature artists from Africa. They are all performed by idols working in the Korean music industry. The same applies for songwriting, as well. They are almost never created by actual Africans, always either by Koreans, Korean-Americans, or white Americans or Western Europeans. None of the songwriters of the *TOMORROW X TOMORROW* or *Le Sserafim* songs I mentioned at the beginning of this text are African, only a very few of them are Black Americans. The result is complete de-Africanization of the culture and its recontextualization as an element in a meaningless, tedious pastiche that is what Kukhee Choo calls “*yellow washed*”. This robs the African creators of an Africa-based and centered form of popular culture to be known about by a large percentage of K-pop listeners, marginalizing them even more.

Despite my critique of the cultural appropriation of *Afrobeats* based on the structural inequalities of cultural power, I do not advocate for cultural isolation. Such a thing is unnatural and impossible. Rather, I wish for the fostering of more nuanced ways of intercultural borrowing, ones predicated as little as possible on power imbalances, decontextualization, depoliticization, and marginalization.

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Данни за автора: Мартин Луканов е докторант в катедра „История и теория на културата“, където пише дисертация върху екранните култури на съвременна Корея и връзките между екран и власт. Научните му интереси включват трансмедиаалността, глобалните културни потоци, пресечните точки между популярните култури и властта, както и йерархиите в рамките на популярната култура. Води курсове по култура, медии и популярна култура в Софийски университет „Св. Климент Охридски“ и Нов български университет. Извън академичните среди издава музика и организира концерти с експериментална музика като част от *Amek Collective*.

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Global influence of the African music and dance

Andreya Georgieva

Abstract: African music and dance have significant impact on global culture, influencing different genres of music and various dance styles across the majority of the continents. Music has deep roots in African culture, history and traditions. African music is characterized by rhythmic complexity, communal participation, and unique instruments, while African dance emphasizes expressive movements and a close connection to rhythm. These traditions have shaped genres like jazz, blues, reggae, and Afrobeat, and influenced dance styles such as salsa, samba or jazz dance. Nowadays, African music and dance continues to inspire artists and audiences, without dividing cultures and focusing on the importance of this legacy in the world of art.

Keywords: *African music, African Dance, jazz, blues, musical genres*

Резюме: Африканската музика и танци имат значителен принос в световната култура, повлияли на различни музикални жанрове и множество танцови стилове на различни континенти. Със своите дълбоки корени в африканската култура, история и традиции, африканската музика се характеризира със сложността на ритъма, групово участие и уникални инструменти. Африканските танци от своя страна поставят акцент на изразителни движения и тясната връзка с ритъма. Тези традиции формират жанрове като джаз, блус, реге и афробийт и влияят на танцови форми като салса, самба и джаз танци. В наше време, африканската музика и танц продължават да вдъхновяват артисти и публики, като обединяват култури и подчертават важноста на наследството, което са оставили в света на изкуството.

Ключови думи: *Африканска музика, африкански танц, джаз, блус, музикални жанрове*

African music and dance hold an enduring legacy and impact as some of the world's most vibrant, colorful and influential forms of art. The unique rhythms, dynamic movements, and strong roots in the culture, have impacted the global music and dance in more than one way. By studying African music and dance we can trace back the road of this influence on diverse genres and artistic expressions across many continents: from the jazz style in the United States to the beautiful Latin rhythms and contemporary pop music. This essay explores the history, key characteristics and global impact of African music and dance, examining how they have shaped different artistic movements and social practices in North and South America.

African music and dance are deeply embedded in the history of the African continent and in the cultural practices across it. Each region has its own ethnic groups that have developed their

distinctive forms of musical expressions and dances. They are often connected to the social situation or have spiritual and ceremonial meaning. Music in African societies is not only a simple form of entertainment – it is a form of storytelling, it is a focal point in rituals and social events. The Yoruba people, a West African ethnic group, use drums in order to communicate, with certain drums like the talking drum capable of imitating the tones and rhythms of spoken language (Agawu, 2016).

Dance is just as central for African culture as the music is. The two go hand in hand. Dances often serve as communal activity rather than an individual one. Typically, the African dance performed in groups, with dancers moving in response to the rhythm of the drums and other percussion instruments. This communal aspect of dance reflects a shared cultural experience, connecting individuals to their communities and histories. And it is a common occurrence to find a variety of dances in many religious practices. The themes of African dance range from celebrating harvests and rites of passage to honoring ancestors, as the dead are highly respected in African society. Dance is thus an extension of everyday life and values, not just a performance art (Nketia, 2005).

Renowned for its rhythmic complexity, African music achieved this characteristic through the layering of different percussive elements. Instruments like djembe, congas and thumb piano called kalimba are commonly used to create these specific rhythms. String instruments such as the kora and balafon add the melodic depth needed. One hallmark of African music is the so-called “call-and-response singing”, which allows people from the audience to participate and strengthen the communal aspect of the performance.

Likewise, African dance is mostly improvised, with the use of the whole body and keeping close relationship with the music. Dancers often mirror the rhythm, intensity and tempo of the music played, which creates a beautiful, complex synchrony between sound and movement. Ground movements are emphasized, with dancers using bent knees and low stances as a symbol of the close connection to the earth, mimicking the act of harvest. The freedom of this improvisation within structured rhythms allows dancers to express personal interpretations while contributing to the larger group narrative (Stone, 1998).

The influence African music has on global music genres is profound and far-reaching. In African-American communities, for example, which developed due to the close connection slaves

and owners had, are the birthplace of jazz, blues and gospel music. They carry distinct African elements, such as syncopation, the call-and-response already mentioned, and the use of blues scales (Southern, 1997). Jazz, in particular, emphasizes on improvisation and rhythm, as learned both central to African music traditions, while blues vocal styles convey emotion and storytelling in a manner similar to African folk songs.

African music traditions reached the Caribbean and Latin America as well as a result of the extensive slave trade network. They influenced genres like reggae and salsa. African slave communities in these regions preserved their musical traditions, which blended with local sounds to create entirely new genres. Reggae music, for example, incorporates African drumming patterns and syncopated rhythms, while salsa's rhythm and percussion reflect African roots. Today, a genre like Afrobeat, pioneered by musicians like Fela Kuti, is globally popular, combining African rhythms with elements of funk, jazz, and contemporary pop (Veal, 2000).

Lastly, in a similar manner to the way music influences music, dance influences dance and new styles forms. In the Americas, African dance tradition has left a lasting legacy. Latin dance styles such as samba, rumba or mambo (the influence is visible even in the names) evolved through a blend of African rhythms and European dance styles. These dances have rhythmic footwork, energetic and expressive movements as a reflection of their heritage.

In North America, African dance helped to shape styles including jazz dance and tap dance. Jazz dance is characterized by fluid movements, improvisation and smooth, close synchronization with the music. Tap dance is another distinctly American art form that has African components in it. Dancers create percussive sounds through footwork in a manner that mimics African drumming techniques (Gottschild, 1996). More recently, viral dance moves such as *the Azonto* from Ghana and *the Gwara Gwara* from South Africa have gained international attention, showcasing the appeal of African dance to contemporary audiences worldwide and connecting young people from all regions of the planet.

This essay is one simple attempt to follow the global influence of African music and dance, their origins and cultural significance as a part of it, which is undeniable. From jazz to salsa, African rhythms, instruments, and dance styles have enriched and diversified the culture in the nowadays communities in North America and South America. Through the years of interaction, adaptation, and celebration, African music and dance have evolved to become integral to the global

arts scene, bridging cultural divides and inspiring creativity worldwide, with the amounts of freedom African music traditions provide. As African music and dance continue to gain visibility on international stages, they offer both a powerful link to cultural heritage and a dynamic force for artistic innovation. More people are getting familiar with this part of the world as another result of the globalization of the 21st century. The global impact of African music and dance highlights the value of preserving and promoting these traditions for future generations.

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Les rythmes et les danses africaines en tant que pratiques de guérison

Alexandra Todorova

Essai académique

L'Afrique est le berceau de rythmes et de danses uniques qui ont une signification et une fonction profondes. La danse n'est pas seulement une forme de divertissement, c'est l'élément le plus important du cadre social et spirituel d'une société. Outre le rôle majeur qu'elle joue dans les rituels, les célébrations et les cérémonies, la danse est également un moyen de guérison et de thérapie.

Les rythmes et les danses, qui font partie intégrante de l'art continental, offrent une approche unique de l'intelligence physique, mentale et émotionnelle de chaque personne, tout en servant d'expression de l'identité sociale. En libérant le stress et les émotions accumulés, les mécanismes de guérison du corps sont activés. Cela prouve que l'art et la thérapie ne sont pas seulement de puissants moyens de purification, mais qu'ils vont de pair.

Je soutiens l'idée que les rythmes et les danses africaines peuvent être efficaces en tant que pratiques de guérison. Le rythme est l'un des éléments fondamentaux de la danse et de la musique. Il affecte à la fois l'état physique et l'état émotionnel. Par exemple, certains mouvements rythmiques peuvent rétablir la synchronisation avec le rythme biologique du corps, aider à réduire le stress, réguler le rythme cardiaque et même augmenter les niveaux d'énergie. Bien sûr, cela ne veut pas dire que les rythmes et la danse africains peuvent remplacer les pratiques médicales modernes, en particulier dans le cas d'affections physiques graves. Ils peuvent être une sorte de méthode complémentaire pour créer un espace plus propice à la libération émotionnelle, au soutien social et spirituel, et rendre le processus plus holistique et efficace.

Rappelons que dans de nombreuses cultures africaines, les maladies physiques et mentales sont censées être causées par des esprits maléfiques ou des ancêtres mécontents (Nevhudoli, 2018). Selon ces croyances, les maladies, en plus d'être le résultat de facteurs génétiques ou « corporels », reflètent également un déséquilibre spirituel. Les rituels et la structure des danses utilisées pour exorciser les esprits consistent en des mouvements assez spécifiques (lutte ou une sorte d'épreuve), ainsi que des incantations et des prières pour appeler les esprits ancestraux à l'aide, et les chamans sont les principaux acteurs qui interprètent les visions.

De plus, les rites de passage, par leur nom même, indiquent clairement qu'il s'agit d'un rite de passage à travers les étapes de la vie. Il englobe les moments de la naissance, du développement et de la mort et, outre ces moments importants, il renforce l'identité culturelle. Dans la tribu Maasai, par exemple, les cérémonies de jeunesse ou « cérémonies de culte » représentent le passage de l'enfance à l'âge adulte, impliquant des épreuves et des mouvements dynamiques (symbole de courage) (cf. 100 Humanitaires International). L'effet de guérison, sert à préserver l'esprit et agit également comme une catharsis, aidant à exprimer les peurs et les espoirs. Toute la communauté

participe à la cérémonie. Les rituels de naissance impliquent la transmission des traditions et des croyances à la génération suivante, tandis que les rituels de mort honorent les défunts et perpétuent leur mémoire en partageant des histoires pour préserver leur identité.

Les rites de passage renforcent l'identité culturelle, créent un espace pour l'expression de la libération émotionnelle et spirituelle et, dans le même temps, la participation de l'ensemble de la communauté conduit à un soutien mutuel. Des liens sociaux forts sont créés et les traditions sont préservées pour les générations futures. D'un autre côté, ces rituels peuvent s'avérer difficiles pour les gens d'aujourd'hui, en particulier dans le contexte de la mondialisation et du modernisme. Face aux défis contemporains tels que l'aliénation et la perte des traditions, ces pratiques offrent des leçons précieuses sur la manière dont les liens sociaux peuvent être préservés. Leur rôle peut être considéré comme une source d'inspiration pour le monde contemporain, qui cherche des moyens différents pour faire face aux crises de toutes sortes.

Il existe de nombreux autres exemples de rituels de guérison. D'une manière générale, la chorégraphie est souvent conçue pour activer certains centres d'énergie dans le corps du participant, la musique fournie par les tambours et les chants facilite l'entrée dans une transe qui active l'énergie de guérison, et les guérisseurs prononcent des prières, voire des incantations.

La danse a donc de nombreuses propriétés curatives, notamment physiques, psychologiques et spirituelles. Les bienfaits physiques comprennent la libération d'endorphines - des hormones (« l'hormone du bonheur ») qui provoquent un sentiment de joie. La condition physique est améliorée, en particulier l'endurance cardio, la force, la flexibilité, la coordination et l'équilibre. Les avantages psychologiques sont quant à eux liés à la réduction du stress, à l'amélioration de l'humeur et, bien sûr, à l'effet thérapeutique qui implique le traitement des émotions et des traumatismes - les mouvements de danse aident à exprimer des sentiments plus lourds et plus difficiles. Les aspects spirituels sont la transe et la connexion avec soi-même, parfois la connexion avec la communauté (la danse est souvent pratiquée en groupe) et enfin l'identité culturelle et spirituelle, à savoir la préservation des traditions, des croyances, qui permet de se relier à son héritage et de découvrir le sens du chemin qu'il a dû parcourir.

La danse est extrêmement bénéfique et constitue donc une partie importante de l'expérience humaine, non seulement pour les avantages énumérés, mais aussi pour la façon dont elle enrichit notre intelligence émotionnelle. Bien que tout le monde ne ressente pas les effets de la danse de la même manière, et que cela dépende des caractéristiques individuelles, il s'agit d'un outil thérapeutique universel. Bien qu'il ne s'agisse pas d'un remède (prescrit par un médecin), c'est l'un des meilleurs moyens d'entretenir la santé mentale, physique et spirituelle. Malheureusement, tout le monde n'a pas accès à des studios de danse ou à des groupes thérapeutiques, mais il existe heureusement de nombreuses ressources en ligne, des cours, qui permettent aux gens de pratiquer chez eux (cf. Monteiro, N. & Wall, D., 2011).

La thérapie par la danse combine des éléments de psychologie et d'art. La danse offre aux participants un vaste espace pour exprimer des sentiments qui sont souvent difficiles à exprimer verbalement. Cette forme d'expression est particulièrement utile pour les personnes souffrant de stress post-traumatique, de dépression ou d'anxiété, car elle leur offre un espace sûr pour explorer

et libérer les émotions refoulées. Elle favorise également une connexion avec le corps qui peut aider à résoudre les problèmes d'estime de soi et d'identité. De nombreuses personnes ayant subi un traumatisme se sentent étrangères à leur propre corps, certaines allant même jusqu'à se détester. Le programme se déroule en groupe, ce qui renforce les liens sociaux : les participants partagent leurs problèmes et se soutiennent mutuellement, ce qui crée un sentiment de proximité, d'appartenance et de continuité.

Il s'agit là d'une autre caractéristique qui reflète bien le pouvoir de la musique, de la danse et du rythme comme moyen d'expression des émotions, entre autres. Les tambours et les rythmes ne sont pas de simples instruments, ce sont des canaux de communication vivants. Chaque tambour a sa place et sa signification dans les différentes régions d'Afrique. Chaque instrument est porteur d'une histoire culturelle qui montre que la musique n'est pas seulement un moyen d'expression des sentiments, mais aussi un moyen d'interaction entre les hommes, et parfois même entre les animaux et le monde non vivant (plantes, arbres, etc.).

Dans la musique africaine, les tambours ne sont pas seulement des instruments de musique, mais aussi un moyen d'exprimer l'identité, les émotions, les sentiments, etc. Il existe une grande variété de tambours, chacun provenant d'une région différente. Par exemple, le didgeridoo en Australie, le tambour en Afrique de l'Ouest et le tambour dundun au Mali. Les rythmes des tambours et les messages ne donnent pas seulement le tempo de la danse, ils transmettent aussi des messages spéciaux qui peuvent signifier différentes émotions ou événements. Il existe des rythmes de joie utilisés lors des mariages ou de certaines célébrations, mais aussi des rythmes de tristesse souvent utilisés lors des funérailles, des rythmes de tremblement qui signalent une forme de danger, et des rythmes thérapeutiques qui affectent la santé intérieure et extérieure. En plus de toutes ces utilisations, les tambours sont utilisés pour rassembler les gens (cf. Momentslog, « African Drumming Traditions : Rhythms, Instruments, and Cultural Connection », 2023).

La musique rassemble les gens. La danse permet aux gens d'exprimer ce qu'il est difficile d'exprimer avec des mots ou des gestes. Nous avons la possibilité de nous exprimer par le mouvement du corps et nous nous voyons offrir une nouvelle perspective : n'a-t-on pas dit que le matin est plus sage que le soir, et appliquons cette parabole ici. Enfin, c'est l'unité qui renforce les relations entre les personnes. La communauté sociale est extrêmement solidaire, faisant les personnes partager leurs expériences et surtout communiquer les uns avec les autres. Elle joue un rôle très important dans le traitement des maladies mentales, et pas seulement. En effet, c'est le réseau social qui apporte le réconfort, la compréhension, l'inclusion et le partage d'expériences avec les autres.

En conclusion, la danse et les rythmes en Afrique représentent selon moi bien plus qu'un simple divertissement ; ils sont au cœur de la vie sociale, spirituelle et thérapeutique des communautés. À travers des rituels de guérison, des rites de passage et des cérémonies collectives, la danse permet non seulement d'exprimer et de célébrer l'identité culturelle, mais d'offrir également des bienfaits physiques, psychologiques et spirituels inestimables. Les danses traditionnelles, en résonance avec des croyances ancestrales, facilitent la connexion entre les individus et leur communauté, tout en ouvrant la voie à une catharsis essentielle pour la santé

mentale et émotionnelle. De plus, l'influence des rythmes africains sur les musiques contemporaines souligne l'importance et la richesse de ce patrimoine culturel, témoignant de la capacité des danses africaines à transcender les frontières et à toucher à des vies à travers le monde. Ainsi, la danse demeure un puissant vecteur d'unité, de guérison et d'expression, ancré dans l'histoire et l'avenir des sociétés africaines et au-delà.

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Танц “Ларакарака” (Уганда)

Деян Петров

Резюме: Видео материалът представлява кратък откъс от традиционен за културата на племето Баганда (Уганда) празничен ритъм, наречен „Larakaraka“. Той се изпълнява обикновено по време на празнични церемонии и се свързва с харесването и ухажването между мъже и жени. Танцьорите се опитват да покажат своите качества, сила и финес по време на церемонията. В танца и музиката се използват важните за цяла Африка съдове от калабаш и ансамбъл от традиционни барабани – “Embuutu” (голям барабан), “Engalabi” (дълъг барабан), “Namuŋjoloba” (двойни малки барабани), “Empuunyū” (бас барабан), “Djembe” (солов барабан от Западна Африка) и шейкъри от калабаш. Материалът е заснет през лятото на 2024 г. Танцьорите са деца и младежи от „Khule Charity Foundation“ и „Joyful Hearts of Hope“ – фондации в гр. Кампала, Уганда, които работят с непълнолетни хора и младежи в риск. Основна роля в развитието на двете организации има българката Пламена Богданова. В изпълнението участва и българският барабанист Деян Петров.

[ВИДЕО](#)

Данни за автора: Деян Петров – “Dizzy” е барабанист, преподавател и социолог с дългогодишен опит на родната и международна сцена. Той е сред първите български артисти, които популяризират традиционни африкански ритми и музика, инструменти и барабанни кръгове в България. През есента на 2024 г. се присъединява към катедра „Африканистика и Индо-тихоокеански изследвания“ като преподавател и изследовател. Неговите интереси са свързани с африканското изкуство, култура и митология.

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“Larakaraka” Dance (Uganda)

Deyan Petrov

Abstract: The video is a short excerpt from a festive rhythm called “Larakaraka”, traditional to the culture of the Baganda tribe (Uganda). It is usually performed in festive ceremonies and is associated with love and courtship between men and women. That is why the dancers try to show their qualities, strength and finesse during the ceremony. The dance and the music use calabash vessels that are important for all of Africa and an ensemble of traditional drums – “Embuutu” (big drum), “Engalabi” (long drum), “Namunjoloba” (double small drums), “Empuunyi” (bass drum), “Djembe” (solo drum from West Africa) and calabash shakers. The video was filmed in the summer of 2024. The dancers are children and young people from Khule Charity Foundation and Joyful Hearts of Hope, organizations based in Kampala, Uganda, which support kids and youth at risk. Bulgarian social entrepreneur Plamena Bogdanova has a major role in the development of both organizations. Drummer Deyan Petrov also took part in the performance.

Link: https://youtu.be/I3iDz_dV6Dw

Author Details: Deyan Petrov – “Dizzy” is a drummer, educator and sociologist with many years of experience on the domestic and international scene. He is among the first Bulgarian artists who popularized traditional African rhythms and music, instruments and drum circles in Bulgaria. In 2024, he joined the Department of African and Indo-Pacific Studies as a lecturer and researcher. His interests are related to African art, culture and mythology.

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Традиционен ритъм „Шему“ – Маса Дембеле и група “Foli Ba”

Деян Петров

Резюме: Видео материалът е заснет през есента на 2024 г. по време на арт резиденция, проведена в с. Бакъово, България. Цел на събитието бе да се представят основни елементи и подходи, свързани с лечебната сила на африканските ритми и музика в съвременен контекст. По време на обучението популярният музикант от Буркина Фасо, Маса Дембеле, показва на музиканти от България и Канада традиционния за неговата култура ритъм – „Шему“. При изпълнението се използват автентични африкански барабани, характерни за ансамблите на Западна Африка – “Djembe” (солов и акомпаниращ барабан), “Dundunba” (бас барабан), “Sangban” (среден басов барабан), “Kenkini” (висок басов барабан) и “Shekere” (шейкър). Клипът представя първото изпълнение на „Шему“ веднага след неговото разучаване в България. Ритъмът е празничен, за радост и сплотяване, и се представя в Европа за първи път.

[ВИДЕО](#)

Shamu Rhythm – Massa Dembele and Foli Ba band

Deyan Petrov

Abstract: The video was shot in the fall of 2024 during an art residency held in the village of Bakevo (Bulgaria). The aim of the event was to present essential elements and approaches related to the healing power of African rhythms and music in a contemporary context. During the training, the popular musician from Burkina Faso, Massa Dembele, showed to musicians from Bulgaria and Canada the rhythm traditional to his culture – "Shamu". Authentic African drums typical of West African ensembles are used in the performance – Djembe (lead and accompanying drum), Dundunba (bass drum), Sangban (medium bass drum), Kenkini (high bass drum) and Shekere (shaker). The clip presents the first performance of "Shamu" immediately after his study in Bulgaria. The rhythm is celebratory, for joy and unity, and is performed in Europe for the first time during the residency.

Link: <https://youtu.be/iSd1oCg2lbQ?si=FQosUHO9jzeCbwJo>

България среща Африка

Деян Петров

Резюме: Видео материалът представя творческия процес на двама музиканти и танцьор, които разучават заедно българско фолклорно произведение. Намерението им е да се адаптират български традиционни ритми към западноафрикански барабанен ансамбъл и по този начин да се осъществи обмен между културите посредством езика на музиката. Видеото е заснето през лятото на 2022 г. по време на арт резиденция, проведена в Хамбург като част от проект „Singing Body“, воден от немската организация „Tanz der Kulturen“. Танцьор е българският фолклорист и културен мениджър – Диляна Курдова. Произведението разучават музикантите Деян Петров – “Dizzy” (България) и Doudou Rose (Сенегал).

[ВИДЕО](#)

Bulgaria meets Africa

Deyan Petrov

Abstract: The video presents the creative process of two musicians and a dancer who study together a Bulgarian folk piece. Their intention is to adapt Bulgarian traditional rhythms to a West African drum ensemble and in this way to carry out an exchange between cultures through the language of music. The video was shot in the summer of 2022 during an art residency held in Hamburg as part of the project: “Singing Body” led by the German organization “Tanz der Kulturen”. The dancer is the Bulgarian folklorist and cultural manager - Dilyana Kurdova. The work is explored by the musicians Deyan Petrov – “Dizzy” (Bulgaria) and Doudou Rose (Senegal).

Link: <https://youtu.be/2Kj3XAhNSsE>

ОБЗОР НА ПРОЕКТНИТЕ ДЕЙНОСТИ /

PROJECT ACTIVITIES REVIEW

*Честване на Деня на Африка на 26 май 2024 г.
в Софийски университет „Св. Климент Охридски“*

На 26 май катедра „Африканистика и Индо-тихоокеански изследвания“ и Африканско-карибският културен център към Факултета по класически и нови филологии на Софийския университет „Св. Климент Охридски“ отбелязаха Деня на Африка с тържествено събитие в Аулата на Ректората.

Денят на Африка, честван ежегодно на 25 май, символизира основаването на Африканския съюз и неговата мисия за единство и културно разнообразие на континента. През 2024 г. темата за Деня на Африка е *„Educate an African Fit for the 21st Century: Building resilient education systems for increased access to inclusive, lifelong, quality, and relevant learning in Africa“*, с акцент върху образованието за 21 век.

Събитието бе организирано в партньорство с Н. Пр. г-жа Закия Ел Мидауи, посланик на Кралство Мароко, и други африкански представители: посланиците на Алжир, Египет, Либия и Южна Африка, както и почетните консули на Етиопия, Мавриций и Сейшелите. Националната академия за театрално и филмово изкуство също беше сред партньорите на събитието.

Празникът започна с официални приветствия от заместник-ректора на Софийския университет проф. Мадлен Данова, Н. Пр. г-жа Закия Ел Мидауи и г-жа Мария Ангелиева, заместник-министър на външните работи.

Гостите се насладиха на разнообразна програма с африканска музика, танци, традиционни ястия, фотоизложба и филмова прожекция. Сред изпълнителите бяха музикалната група FOLI BA, танцовата формация „Софистик-живо“, Боряна Димова от Софийския университет и хорът на 9-а Френска гимназия „Алфонс дьо Ламартин“.

Фотоизложбата представи различни африкански страни с традиционни облекла и аксесоари, предоставени от африканските посолства в България, както и автентична африканска кухня.

Celebration of Africa Day on May 26th, 2024 at Sofia University

On May 26, the Department of African and Indo-Pacific Studies and the African-Caribbean Cultural Center of the Faculty of Classical and Modern Philology at Sofia University "St. Kliment Ohridski" marked Africa Day with a celebratory event in the Aula of the Rectorate.

Africa Day, celebrated annually on May 25, commemorates the founding of the African Union and its mission for unity and cultural diversity across the continent. The 2024 theme for Africa Day is "Educate an African Fit for the 21st Century: Building resilient education systems for increased access to inclusive, lifelong, quality, and relevant learning in Africa," with a focus on 21st-century education.

The event was organized in partnership with H.E. Zakia El Midaoui, Ambassador of the Kingdom of Morocco, and other African representatives: the ambassadors of Algeria, Egypt, Libya, and South Africa, as well as the honorary consuls of Ethiopia, Mauritius, and the Seychelles. The National Academy for Theatre and Film Arts (NATFA) was also a partner of the event.

The celebration began with official greetings from the Vice-Rector of Sofia University, Prof. Madlen Danova, H.E. Zakia El Midaoui, and Ms. Maria Angelieva, Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs.

Guests enjoyed a diverse program featuring African music, dance, traditional dishes, a photo exhibition, and a film screening. Among the performers were the music group FOLI BA, the dance formation "Sofistik-Zhivo," Boriana Dimova from Sofia University, and the choir from the French Language School No. 9 "Alphonse de Lamartine."

The photo exhibition showcased various African countries, traditional clothing, and accessories provided by African embassies in Bulgaria, as well as authentic African cuisine.





Африканско-карибска кино панорама 2024 г.

Честванията продължиха на 31 май и 1 юни с второто издание на Фестивала за африканско и карибско кино, проведен в партньорство с Националната академия за театрално и филмово изкуство. В програмата бяха включени двудневна панорама на африканско-карибското кино, лекции, работилници и майсторски класове с участието на международни лектори като Алаедин Алджем от Мароко и Джордж Босомпим от Гана.

Специален гост на фестивала беше Елена Панайотова, която сподели своя опит от работата с уязвими групи деца и младежи в България и Африка. Панайотова е театрален режисьор и вдъхновител на филма „Майка“ (2022) на режисьора Зорница София.

Програмата на фестивала включваше и две безплатни работилници по африкански ритми и танци, водени от барабаниста Деян Петров - Dizzy и хореографа Петя Стойкова, последвани от концерт на реге групата Roots Rocket в двора на Софийския университет.

Филмовата селекция включваше късометражни документални и художествени филми от Гана, Южна Африка, Гватемала и Колумбия, както и два пълнометражни филма от Мароко, отличени на престижни фестивали.

African-Caribbean Film Panorama 2024

The celebrations continued on May 31 and June 1 with the second edition of the African-Caribbean Film Festival, held in partnership with the National Academy for Theatre and Film Arts. The program included a two-day panorama of African-Caribbean cinema, lectures, workshops, and masterclasses with international guest lecturers such as Ala Eddine Aljem from Morocco and George Bosompim from Ghana.

A special guest of the festival was Elena Panayotova, who shared her experience working with vulnerable groups of children and youth in Bulgaria and Africa. Panayotova, a theater director, is the inspiration behind the 2022 film "Mother" by director Zornitsa Sofia.

The festival program also included two free workshops on African rhythms and dance, led by drummer Deyan Petrov - Dizzy and choreographer Petya Stoykova, followed by a concert by the reggae band Roots Rocket in the courtyard of Sofia University.

The film selection featured short documentaries and narrative films from Ghana, South Africa, Guatemala, and Colombia, as well as two feature films from Morocco, recognized at prestigious international festivals.



Гост лектори и изпълнители на фестивала



Аладин Алджем – мароканско-италиански сценарист и режисьор, носител на множество международни отличия и награди.



Джордж Босомпим – практикуващ режисьор и преподавател от Гана с богат опит в киното и телевизията.



Елена Панайотова – режисьор и продуцент, известна с театралната си работа с рискови групи деца в България и Африка.



Деян Петров - Dizzy – изследовател на африканските ритми и създател на барабанни кръгове в България.



Петя Стойкова – световно признат хореограф и танцьор, популяризатор на африканските танци.



Roots Rocket – първата българска реге група с активно присъствие на международната реге сцена.

Guest Lecturers and Performers of the Festival

- **Ala Eddine Aljem** – Moroccan-Italian screenwriter and director, recipient of numerous international awards and honors.
- **George Bosompim** – Ghanaian film and television director and lecturer with extensive experience in cinema and television.
- **Elena Panayotova** – Bulgarian theater director and producer known for her work with at-risk children in Bulgaria and Africa.
- **Deyan Petrov - Dizzy** – researcher of African rhythms and creator of drum circles in Bulgaria.
- **Petya Stoykova** – internationally recognized choreographer and dancer, promoter of African dance.
- **Roots Rocket** – Bulgaria's first reggae band with an active presence on the international reggae scene.

АФРИКАНСКО-КАРИБСКА КИНО ПАНОРАМА

31 МАЙ-1 ЮНИ 2024

Катедра „Африканистика и Индо-тихоокеански изследвания“ и Африканско-карибският културен център към Факултета по класически и нови филологии в Софийския университет „Св. Климент Охридски“, в партньорство с Националната академия за театрално и филмово изкуство „Кр. Сарафов“, имат удоволствието да ви поканят на Африканско-Карибска Кино Панорама в Софийски университет.

Фестивалът е част от културната програма посветена на честването на Деня на Африка, който се празнува ежегодно на 25 май по целия свят, за да отбележи основаването на Африканския съюз и ролята му в обединяването на африканските нации, културното многообразие и богатство на континента.

NEW Програма
31 МАЙ



- 11.30 - 12.30** - АУЛА МАГНА, РЕКТОРАТА
„ПРИЛОЖЕН ТЕАТЪР: ТЕОРИЯ И ПРАКТИКИ ОТ БЪЛГАРИЯ ДО АФРИКА“ - ЛЕКЦИЯ НА ЕЛЕНА ПАНАЙОТОВА
- 14.00 - 14.30** - 63 АУДИТОРИЯ, ЮЖНО КРИЛО, ЕТ.3, ФИЛОСОФСКИ ФАКУЛТЕТ, РЕКТОРАТА
АФРИКАНСКА МУЗИКА: РИТМИЧНО ПЪТЕШЕСТВИЕ НА РАЗНООБРАЗИЕ И ВЛИЯНИЕ - ЛЕКЦИЯ, ДЕЯН ПЕТРОВ
- 14.30 - 15.30** - 63 АУДИТОРИЯ, ЮЖНО КРИЛО, ЕТ.3, ФИЛОСОФСКИ ФАКУЛТЕТ, РЕКТОРАТА
РАБОТИЛНИЦА ЗА АФРИКАНСКИ РИТЪМ - ДЕЯН ПЕТРОВ DIZZY GROOVE
- 15.30 - 16.00** - 63 АУДИТОРИЯ, ЮЖНО КРИЛО, ЕТ.3, ФИЛОСОФСКИ ФАКУЛТЕТ, РЕКТОРАТА
АФРИКАНСКИ ТАНЦ: РИТМИЧНО ПЪТЕШЕСТВИЕ НА РАЗНООБРАЗИЕ И ВЛИЯНИЕ - ЛЕКЦИЯ ПЕТЯ СТОЙКОВА
- 16.00 - 17.00** - 63 АУДИТОРИЯ, ЮЖНО КРИЛО, ЕТ.3, ФИЛОСОФСКИ ФАКУЛТЕТ, РЕКТОРАТА
РАБОТИЛНИЦА ПО АФРИКАНСКИ ТАНЦИ - ПЕТЯ СТОЙКОВА
- 17.45 - 18.20** - ДВОР НА СОФИЙСКИ УНИВЕРСИТЕТ, РЕКТОРАТ
АФРИКАНСКИ РИТМИ С ROOTS ROCKET
- 18.20 - 18.30** - 243 АУДИТОРИЯ, СЕВЕРНО КРИЛО, ЕТ.2, РЕКТОРАТА
ОТКРИВАНЕ НА ФЕСТИВАЛНАТА ПАНОРАМА
- 18.30 - 22.00** - 243 АУДИТОРИЯ, СЕВЕРНО КРИЛО, ЕТ. 2, РЕКТОРАТА
АФРИКАНСКО-КАРИБСКА ФИЛМОВА ПАНОРАМА

1 ЮНИ

- 15.30 - 16.30** - ЗАСЕДАТЕЛНА ЗАЛА 1, ЕТ.1, РЕКТОРАТА
"MAKING A FILM FOR INTERNATIONAL AUDIENCE WHEN WE COME FROM AN UNDERREPRESENTED COUNTRY" - КИНО МАЙСТОРСКИ КЛАС С АЛАДИН АЛДЖЕМ, МАРОКО
- 16.30 - 17.30** - ЗАСЕДАТЕЛНА ЗАЛА 1, ЕТ.1, РЕКТОРАТА
"DECOLONIZATION AFRICAN FILM HISTORY" - КИНО МАЙСТОРСКИ КЛАС С ДЖОРДЖ БОСОМПИМ
- 18.00 - 22.00** - 65 АУДИТОРИЯ, ЮЖНО КРИЛО, ЕТ.3, РЕКТОРАТА
АФРИКАНСКО-КАРИБСКА ФИЛМОВА ПАНОРАМА

African-Caribbean Cinema Program

31 MAY: FOCUS MOROCCO

18.30	GOLDFISHES	ABDESLAM KELAI	MORROCO	2022	90 MN	FICTION
20.00	THE UNKNOWN SAINT	ALAA EDDINE ALJEM	MORROCO	2019	100 MN	FICTION
21.40	RIVER SONGS FOR MISSING CRABS	ECYTV	COLOMBIA	2022	11 MN	FICTION
21.51	THE HOUSE OF WOOD	LPM	GUATEMALA	2024	8 MN	FICTION

1 JUNE: MASTERCLASS

15.30	"MAKING A FILM FOR INTERNATIONAL AUDIENCE WHEN WE COME FROM AN UNDERREPRESENTED COUNTRY"					
	ALAA EDDINE ALJEM, ESAVM, MOROCCO					

1 JUNE: MASTERCLASS

16.30	"DECOLONIZATION OF THE AFRICAN FILM HISTORY"					
	GEORGE BOSOMPRIM, NAFTI/GAFTA, GHANA					

1 JUNE: FOCUS GHANA & SOUTH AFRICA

18.00	DADZENGOR - THE SPIRITUAL SPOUSE	NAFTI	GHANA	2018	13 MN	DOCUMENTARY
18.15	DABARA	NAFTI	GHANA	2017	15 MN	FICTION
18.30	FIGHTERS OF A NATION	AFDA	SOUTH AFRICA	2023	24 MN	DOCUMENTARY
18.55	MISCELLANEOUS	AFDA	SOUTH AFRICA	2023	23 MN	FICTION
19.20	PARKOUR THE ART OF MOVEMENT	TUT	SOUTH AFRICA	2020	5 MN	DOCUMENTARY
19.30	MANDELA: LONG WALK TO FREEDOM	JUSTIN CHADWICK	SOUTH AFRICA	2013	2H 26 MN	FICTION

Подкрепа и финансиране

Културната програма за Деня на Африка беше реализирана с финансовата подкрепа на проект №80-10-198/23.04.2024 г. „Африканска музика, танци и изкуство: ритмично пътешествие на разнообразие и влияние“ към Научноизследователския сектор на Софийския университет „Св. Климент Охридски“.

Support and Funding

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