

# African Songs and Drum Beats

**Unit design:** Zozo Shuiabu and Kevin Hamel

**Performers:** Zozo Shuiabu and Sam Maitland

**Video and Still photography:** Chris Holmes

*'Working with drum patterns involves the use and development of aural and temporal thinking. These learning modes have their own languages and sets of skills – similar to visual and verbal thinking. Some students excel in aural and temporal activities who otherwise face difficulties in the learning approaches emphasised in conventional educational settings'*  
*The Algebra Project*

## About the Unit

African Songs and Drum Beats Drum introduces a one-year programme of West African drumming and song. This is taught by Sierra Leone master drummer, Zozo Shuaibu, and is offered by Cumbria Music Service as part of the *First Access* instrumental learning initiative at KS2.

A complete CD resource to support the programme is available from Cumbria Music Service, and is made up of the following sections:

Drum Beats  
Drum Language  
African Songs  
African stories  
Exploring percussion

Children learn to sing African and Caribbean songs and play Djembes and other percussion instruments in solo and ensemble contexts. They learn improvising skills, and develop fluency and accuracy through accompanying singing, dancing and storytelling. Rhymes and rhythms are drawn from Africa and the Caribbean, and children are encouraged to invent, develop and perform their own cyclic patterns.

The unit is taught through school-based workshop sessions supported by extensive video instructional materials on CD rom.

## Children

- learn to work together as a team
- gain confidence in performing solo and in an ensemble
- develop greater self-esteem and esteem
- gain knowledge and understanding of music from different traditions

## **African Songs**

African Songs introduces popular action and sociable songs from West Africa and the Caribbean. The examples are drawn from the Cumbria Music Service *West African Drumbeats* Wider Opportunities programme.

The songs should be accompanied with African and classroom percussion.

### **Che Che Kule**

A popular singing game from Ghana, including nonsense words from a number of West African languages.

- *Kofi* is a Ghanaian name meaning 'born on a Friday'.
- '*Abele*' is a popular West African social dance. In many other versions, Compare and perform other action games like. 'Heads, shoulders, knees and Toes'

### **Home again**

This song is very popular in West Africa. Soldiers and sailors frequently sang it when returning home. There are versions in several African languages.

Sailors on long voyages made decorative boxes from shells and other materials for sweethearts at home. Sometimes, the words 'Home Again' made up part of the design.

Ask children to imagine they are going on a long journey. What would they miss most about home?

### **Everybody likes Saturday Night**

Africans sing this at weekends while relaxing and having fun.

This song was a favourite of the Sierra Leone musician, Ebenezer Calendar.

However, his most popular song was 'Fire! Fire!' He is said to have sung this to entertain passengers on board ship. The tale goes that as soon as he began to sing, other passengers raised the alarm thinking the ship was in danger!

### **Ranky tank**

This song tells a funny story about a pig and a mouse. Although the story originated in Africa, the song is Caribbean. Accompanying movements and rhythm patterns are to be found on the West African Drumbeats CD rom. See example lesson plan below

### **Koko-rio-ko (*Cock-a-doodle-doo*)**

This African folk song is sung in Creole:

Cock-a-doodle-doo!  
Cock-a-doodle-doo!  
Cock-a-doodle-doo!  
Cock crows in the day.

A cockerel crowing during daylight is considered unusual, and may mean something strange is about to happen!

## **Drum Beats**

Zozo Shuaibu explains the correct way to hold and sit with the Djembe, along with open, bass and mute tones.

The CD resource demonstrates how tones may be combined to create an extensive range of rhythmic patterns. These include

- *Kpanlogo*: a popular dance rhythm from Ghana
- *Koroso*: associated with the Hausa people of Nigeria
- *Soca*: Soul and Calypso rhythm from the Caribbean
- *Juju*: A Yoruba dance rhythm, characterised by the call and response:  
*Ju Ju!*  
*Ay Ju Ju!*

Below is an example of a lesson plan based on Ranky-Tank from the complete resource.

## **Ranky-Tank**

### ***Vocabulary***

structure, call, response

### ***Learning Objectives***

Children should learn

- to identify simple musical structures
- to perform a Caribbean singing game
- to explore and combine parts within a musical structure

### ***Learning Outcomes***

*Children*

- sequence and perform movements to *Ranky-Tank*

## **Teaching Activities**

### ***Activity 1***

- Listen to *Rank -Tank*

- The song tells a story. Can the children retell it in their own words?
- Can they identify the repeated response? (*Ranky-tank* sung by Sam)
- Do children notice the *Ranky-tank* 'call' (Zozo) differs from the *Ranky-tank* 'response' (Sam)? Can they say/show how it differs?
- Sing and clap the *Ranky-tank* response while Zozo and Sam sing the song
- Practise the response on djembes using different combinations of tones (Bass, Open and Mute)
- Learn to sing the first part of the song as call and response  
Call: *Ranky-tank!*  
Response: *Ranky-tank!*  
Call: *Ranky-tank!*  
Response: *Ranky- tank!*  
Call: *Ranky-tank!*  
Response: *Ranky-tank!*  
Call: *Oh! Oh! Ranky-tank!*  
Response: *Ranky-tank!*
- Perform accompanying the sung response with different combinations of djembe tones and percussion instruments

### Activity 2

- Watch Zozo perform *Ranky-Tank* as a singing game. **CD AFRICAN STORIES >DANCES>Ranky-Tank**
- Learn and practise the song and actions
- Listen to the clave rhythm accompanying the dance. Clap along with this.
- Appoint
  - a timekeeping group
  - a djembe group to drum the response (see above)
  - player/players to maintain the clave rhythm
  - dancers
  - singers
- Prepare and practise a performance of Ranky-Tank for an audience