

MUSIC OF THE ARARÁ SAVALÚ CABILDO: SONGS AND RHYTHMS FROM MATANZAS, CUBA

By Joseph C. Galvin and Michael Spiro

Lessons with the Masters

Master Drummers

Francisco Enrique Mesa Céspedes

Pedro “Pello” Pablo Tapanes

Luis “Luisito” Cancino Morales

Leonardo “Totico” Victor Suárez Echeverría

Ojasinos

Zulima Echeverría Rodríguez

Maritza Garriera Rodríguez

Alida Leicea Jiménez

Lázaro “Lazarito” Callarga

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Forward

By Michael Spiro

I began studying the conga drum in 1971 at the age of 19. I soon became thoroughly absorbed by Afro-Cuban music, and in 1982 I was initiated as an *Omo Aña* (priest of the *batá* drum) in Los Angeles, California by the legendary master drummer Francisco Aguabella.¹ Two years later in 1984 I decided to travel to Cuba with the specific intent of furthering my knowledge of *batá* drumming from the *Lukumí* musical tradition. It had become abundantly clear that the only way I would really learn the music that had become my life's passion was to put myself inside of it. Regardless of the political blockade and the fact that I did not know a soul on the island, I flew to Mexico City and bought a ticket to La Habana at the airport.

After two and half days traveling from San Francisco, I found myself in the city of Matanzas at the home of the legendary Cuban drummer Esteban Vega Bacallao (better known in the Afro-Cuban music world as “Cha-Cha”). At that time, Cha-Cha was considered throughout the island as the most knowledgeable and important folkloric drummer in Cuba. I soon realized that he was the head of a *batá* lineage that went back many decades, and amongst his cadre of musicians were some of the most elite drummers on the island: Pedro “Pello” Pablo Tapanes González [*Oggún Bi*] (co-founder and musical director of Grupo Afro-Cuba de Matanzas), Jesús Alfonso (*ibae*) (the quinto player for Los Muñequitos de Matanzas), Francisco Enrique Mesa Céspedes [*Obbá Leye*] (*ibae*) (drummer and singer for Grupo Afro-Cuba de Matanzas), Daniel “El Maestro” Alfonso [*Ada Nike*] (*ibae*), a very young Luis “Luisito” Cancino Morales [*Afresi Foddemi*] (now the current musical director of Los Muñequitos de Matanzas), and the list continued.² For two weeks I spent every waking hour with them trying to retain all the information they so graciously shared with me of the *toques*, the *cantos*, the *lenguaje*, and the larger context of the vast *Lukumí* tradition. I was profoundly moved by their generosity and the degree to which they were willing to teach me what, historically up to that point, had been secret knowledge.

I had embarked on what would become an annual pilgrimage to *ara oko* (the *Lukumí* word for “the countryside,” which the Afro-Matanceros use to contrast themselves from the capital city of La Habana) to deepen my understanding. Although my primary interest was always to further my *batá* learning, it soon became apparent that Cha-Cha and his drummers were part of a much larger musical and cultural paradigm than I could have ever imagined. I was certainly aware that there were many forms that made up the Afro-Cuban folkloric musical landscape. But these gentlemen exposed me to a world that was astounding in its richness and variety, one within which the *batá* drum was only a single component. There were seemingly endless forms of sacred musics under the umbrella of Afro-Cuban culture, and these musicians were masters of not only *batá* drumming, but also of *bembé*, *Olokun*, *güiro*, *iyesá*, *Palo*, *makuta*, *yuka*, *Abakúa*, and *Arará*.³ Cha-Cha and his colleagues could be found playing drums at any number of different *cabildos* (houses of worship) on any given day, and I was overwhelmed by the amount of information they possessed in so many different musical arenas. It did not take long to realize that the study of Afro-Cuban music would be truly a lifelong effort; especially because these sacred musical forms represented only one component of the many African religions that survived the Atlantic crossing: la Regla de Ocha (*Lukumí*), Palo Monte, *Fodu* worship (*Arará*), and *Abakúa* were the four major faiths that survived the institution of slavery in Western Cuba. To be a master musician required not only musical skills and knowledge but also deep *conocimiento* of all aspects of the religion: the rituals, prayers, painting, carving, sowing, beadwork, extensive knowledge of the African language, and so forth. The conundrum for me was only too obvious and more

¹ All terms and language specific to this text are defined in the glossary at the end of the book and are in italics the first time they appear in the forward and introductory chapters.

² Throughout the book religious names are placed in brackets following an individual's given name.

³ It is essential to note here that these musicians were, of course, brilliant *rumberos* and *timberos* who played Cuban secular folkloric percussion at the highest level imaginable. After all, Cha-Cha was truly legendary for his quinto playing with El Guaguanco Matancero, Jesús was at that time the musical director of Los Muñequitos, and Pello was a founding member of Afro-Cuba de Matanzas and invented the style of folkloric music known as *bata-rumba*, and so forth.

than daunting: how could one learn something that had been kept secret for generations and taught only within specific lineages?

Therefore, in order to explain how a book of sacred Arará music emerges in the year 2019, it is necessary to place Afro-Cuban religious worship in its historical context. Arguably the most important factor to consider is that Afro-Cuban religious practices took place in secret out of necessity. The oppression of the Africans and their descendants at the hands of the Spaniards throughout the institution of slavery included the reality that any non-Catholic worship would be punished severely, even with death. Due to the racism within Cuban society from the time of abolition up to the revolution of 1958, Afro-Cuban worship and ceremonial practices needed to be underground occurrences, as practitioners were threatened with severe punishment and imprisonment. Cultural survival demanded that Afro-Cubans intensely guard their spiritual and ritual practices, thus maintaining a high degree of secrecy. This reality did not change suddenly when the Cuban revolution took place. Racism did not simply disappear because Fidel Castro came to power. Furthermore, Fidel's revolution was overtly atheistic in its stated theological philosophy; in essence, all religious practices (not just African) were illegal. It was not really until the late 1970s that Cubans could practice their respective faiths.⁴

Therefore, it should come as no surprise that many of the musical forms delineated above were historically secretive. Only initiated practitioners were allowed to learn and acquire the knowledge of the rhythms, songs, and dances. There were certainly musical exceptions (bembé and güiro were public forms, for example), but the truly sacred forms were carefully guarded secrets. These included the Olokun tradition, the Lukumí batá tradition, and the Arará tradition. To be allowed to play these drums, the drummers within these lineages were required to go through a very difficult and demanding initiation. The toques were taught only to those who had successfully completed this ordeal, proving their dedication. There were strict rules about when the student would be taught, how much they were taught, and when they could proceed to learn more material. An extreme example of this secrecy comes from the oral lore told by people within the culture, which describes the lead drummer in the Olokun tradition as turning his back to the congregation to prevent anyone from learning or even seeing what he was playing. It is not surprising then (though a profound tragedy as expressed by even those within the cabildo) that this particular lineage of music may be lost soon because the elders have preferred to take their knowledge to their graves rather than teach the next generation the secrets of Olokun and its profundities.

For some reason, Lukumí practitioners began to change their thinking in this regard. As their religious world started to come out of the shadows in the mid- to late 1970s, so did their music. In much the same way that Western society came to see the music of the Catholic church as art in addition to its function as sacred adoration, the idea gradually emerged within the Lukumí followers that large parts of the liturgy could also be played and enjoyed purely as music outside of a religious context. Cuban society thus witnessed the emergence of Yoruban music and dance classes at the ENA (Escuela Nacional de Arte) for the young generation of students. Furthermore, as Fidel realized he could generate income for his government by marketing Afro-Cuban sacred culture as art, institutions such as the Conjunto Folklórico Nacional began to offer workshops in Afro-Cuban folklore. My personal experience as a foreign music student in Cuba at that time is further testimony to the openness that had come to pass within the Lukumí tradition by the mid-1980s. My entrance into Cha-Cha's house was certainly predicated on the fact that I was already an Omo Aña when I arrived in Matanzas, but in an earlier era I would never have been exposed to the same depth of information. What was once entirely hidden had emerged into the public realm, and today the Lukumí tradition (and by extension its music) thrives not only in Cuba but throughout the world: there are practitioners and musicians throughout the US, Europe, Japan, and South America.

In contrast to this emerging theological openness, The *Arará Savalú* religion from the city of Matanzas had steadfastly remained underground. Its secrets have been closely guarded to this day and the members of the cabildo have been entirely unwilling even to talk about their rituals, let alone share any musical information. So, imagine my surprise when on one of my trips in the early 1990s, as I was learning songs to Babalú Aye that the Lukumí borrowed from Arará (*Asojano* is the Arará equivalent of Babalú Aye in the Lukumí world), Pello said

⁴For a detailed history of Cuban religion during the revolution please reference Armando Hart and Frei Betto's book, "Fidel & Religion: Conversations with Frei Betto on Marxism & Liberation Theology."

⁵The Lukumí tradition had long ago adopted specific Arará songs into its liturgy (primarily for *Asojano*, but also for *Ebioso*, *Afrekete*, and *Makenu*), but the drummers of course had to invent toques on the batá drums in order to accompany them.

he wanted to show me the “real” Arará toques that accompanied those songs.⁵ For whatever reason, Pello had decided he wanted to demonstrate to me the beauty and complexity of the actual Arará toques. The next day, Pello, his wife Zulima Echeverría Rodríguez [*Oñasuleri*] (born into the Savalú cabildo), and Luis Cansino took my godbrother Mark Lamson and me into a neighbor’s back yard and gave us our first exposure to an Arará *Oru*. There really were no true instruments available; all we had was a bucket, an old conga drum with only two tuning lugs remaining, a table top, and a rusty six-inch steel pipe that we used as the *Ogán* (cowbell). Zulima methodically sang for each Fodu as Pello and Luisito demonstrated the parts on the makeshift percussion instruments. It was an unforgettable afternoon, punctuated with the following admonition from them: “You may not give this information to anyone. We are giving it to the two of you because you have become members of our religious family, and we have trust in you. We want you to have this, but you may not show it to anyone.” Mark and I left feeling overwhelmed on every level.

Upon returning to the US, I frequently listened to my recordings of that afternoon, but since I couldn’t share it with anyone, I never had a chance to actually play the Arará drumming patterns with a group. A few years later, however, at an Afro-Cuban folkloric workshop in Banff, Canada, Enrique Mesa and Luisito took a group of the drummers aside and proceeded to play some of the publicly known *Foduces*, such as Masé, Ebioso, Afrekete, and Asojano with real instruments. They taught us how to play the parts, and then repeated the same admonition, “for your eyes only.” By then I had a significant amount of material to study on my own, and with each trip back to Cuba, Pello would help clarify parts of the music that I did not understand. Eventually I was given permission to show the material to those peers and/or students with whom I had complete confidence. This led to a bright young student Neeraj Mejah (currently professor of percussion at Queensborough Community College/CUNY in New York) coming to my house in California to help transcribe the many hours of cassette recordings. In turn he went to Matanzas on his own to study as well. When I accepted my position as professor of percussion at Indiana University in 2008, I oversaw the work of some truly brilliant young percussionists, including Michael Mixtacki (currently an instructor at UTSA), and Joe Galvin (recent DM recipient and a music instructor at the Jacobs School of Music, Indiana University). We all traveled to Matanzas together in 2013, and collectively studied intensely with Pello Tapanes, Luisito Cancino, Zulima Echeverría Rodríguez, and her sister Maritza Garriera Rodríguez [*Odaiweto*]. We were also able to learn more cantos from the matriarch of the cabildo, Alida Leicea Jiménez [*Sob-bó Siré*], who was one of the few remaining *Ojasinos* (lead singers) of the cabildo since the passing of Francisca “Panchita” Rodríguez García [*Afralejo*] in the early 2000s. Before we returned the US, we asked if we could teach some (not all) of this material to our students on campus, and we were granted permission to do so.

Following our seminal 2013 trip, Joe and I returned several more times over the next five years to continue our work with Zulima, Maritza, Pello, Luisito, and Alida. We had the opportunity to correct mistakes, clarify uncertainties, and learn new material we did not yet know. Another of my students, Eli Edelman, also began studying Arará drumming with Luisito on his own trips to Cuba. His research, which coincided with ours, also added to our drum transcription work. These lessons over the subsequent trips led Joe and I to meet two young and upcoming figures in the cabildo: lead drummer Leonardo “Totico” Víctor Suárez Echeverría [*Addedei*] (described below) and Lázaro “Lazarito” Callarga [*Iye Miye Miya*], who is Alida’s nephew and quite knowledgeable about Savalú songs. At this point, Joe decided to undertake transcribing the songs we had learned over the course of these trips, first with lyrics alone and then with Western music notation.

This is what led us to the present work. The grandson of Panchita, Leonardo “Totico” Víctor Suárez Echeverría, has been a major factor in this endeavor, as he is now the owner of his own Arará *fundamento* drums, and is a driving force in the Savalú cabildo. He is Pello’s godson, and the two of them (along with Alida, Zulima, and Maritza), have agreed that it is time for the music of the cabildo to become public knowledge. This is their book. Joe and I are simply the compilers and publishers. We are humbled that they have entrusted us with over 100 years of tradition, and we hope that the outside world will come to see the profound beauty and sophistication of their music.

Introduction

Historical context of the Arará Savalú cabildo in Matanzas, Cuba

Arará Savalú is a distinct religious tradition that resides solely in the city of Matanzas, Cuba. Although closely-related forms exist in other areas of Cuba, as well as more distant relatives from Arará's parent belief structures in Africa, the subset known specifically as Savalú is truly unique. The origins of this vastly complex religion and its music come from the Dahomey nation of West Africa (in the physical regions now known as Benin and Togo). Benin and Togo are located west of the large country of Nigeria, which was once the kingdom of the *Yoruba* people. As bordering neighbors, the Yoruban and Dahomean kingdoms shared many cultural similarities, while still retaining their own identities. We can use the comparison of the countries that make up the European Union, or the similarities between the United States and Canada. The two share many commonalities, but a resident from either will make sure you know which one they are. For the Yoruban and Dahomean nations, some of these similarities reside in their religions. The belief structures between the *Oricha* and *Fodu* pantheons contain many of the same deities with consistent characteristics and sacred stories. Nevertheless, each deity is represented through the cultural lens of its home nation. Therefore, Yoruban Orichas are named and worshiped in Yoruban, while similar deities in Dahomey are known as Fodu and worshiped in the Dahomean language of *Fon*. As the languages differ, so too do the rhythms, drums themselves, and the songs used to venerate the Orichas and Fodu respectively.

In the New World, however, these distinctions became more muddled as the Afro-Cuban experience began to unfold. For example, whereas in the home countries of West Africa the Oricha *Babalú Aye* and the Fodu *Asojano* were worshiped independently, in Cuba these boundaries began to meld.⁶ Slaves from both cultures forcefully brought over to Cuba via the trans-Atlantic slave trade found themselves in close proximity and in need of retaining their heritages. Sacred drummers began playing ritual drums from several different practices, singers began utilizing songs from both faiths to praise the gods, and religious rites began to take on aspects of each culture as needed. For this reason, today we hear many Arará songs in Lukumí music rituals, particularly for deities that share strong common traits between the two nations.

Meanwhile, as these distinct religions began to blend and fuse, the Spaniards made every effort to keep Africans of the same ethnic origin as physically separated as possible. Slaves could not leave their plantation, let alone travel provincially to other areas of the island. So, although different cultural groups from African nations existed side by side in any one location, they were cut off from other members of their own society on distant Cuban plantations. This separation continued past the abolition of slavery well into the 20th century through government control. One of the most obvious means of accomplishing this was to prevent travel from one province of the island to another, making it difficult for Cubans to travel without formal government papers. This physical isolation caused individual growth of the original African traditions in unique ways across the island of Cuba. Overall, this meant that religious rites, customs, and music grew apart from their West African origins over the course of several hundred years. It also meant that Afro-Cuban music and religion were not (and are not) monolithic practices, but a near endless variety of West African cultures, split and melded over time with the wide range of peoples coexisting on the small island.

Specifically for the Dahomean religion on the island, Arará grew into three separate forms. Each form existed in the larger province known as Matanzas, but in three separate towns: *Arará Dahomey* from Jovellanos, *Arará*

⁶ A note on pronunciation: This book extensively uses Arará and Lukumí words, where we must use transliterations for the English text. Therefore, many of the words can have multiple spellings. As these religions exist in the Cuban paradigm, we have consciously opted to use the Spanish spellings of these words when appropriate. Words such as “Asojano,” “Wardejano,” and “Ojasino” contain a Spanish “j” that is pronounced with an equivelant English “h” sound. Yoruban words such as “Orisha/Oricha,” and Osha/Ocha” also use the Spanish spelling, replacing the “sh” sound with “ch.” “Lukumí” could alternately be spelled as “Lucumí.” We have chosen “Lukumí” to avoid any confusion with the English soft “c” and hard “c” sound. In the music transcriptions where each word is broken down by syllable, we have used English spellings when appropriate, making it easier to read in a musical context.

Majino from Perico, and *Arará Savalú* from the city of Matanzas itself. Over the course of approximately two hundred years, each of these *Arará cabildos*, or religious houses, developed their own songs and rhythms to venerate the Foduces.

Arará songs and rhythms also exist outside of the Matanzas province, primarily in the capital city of La Habana. But this form of Arará is a further amalgamation of the three Matancero forms, borrowing and blending rhythms and songs from each *cabildo*. La Habana forms of Arará are an interesting cultural phenomenon in their own right, but in our opinion the heart of Dahomean culture in Cuba exists in the province of Matanzas.

During the latter third of the 20th century, as the country began to relax its views of religious practices in general and, specifically, African-derived religions, practitioners of Afro-Cuban religions began to emerge from secrecy. Music from the Lukumí faith, *Bantú* faith, and *Abakúa* faith slowly started to make their way into popular culture. The advent of government-funded folkloric ensembles with mission statements aimed toward demonstrating the breadth of traditions on the island certainly aided this public exposure. These groups performed Afro-diasporic music throughout the island, including a few selections from the Arará tradition. However, beyond these few pieces deemed acceptable for public stage performance, Arará maintained its secrecy far longer than the other religions, not emerging to the public until the last ten to fifteen years.⁷

Today, the Arará community is going through a full revitalization in Cuba, in part due to the more public nature of Arará's customs. A new generation is getting initiated through the sacred consecrations in Arará as opposed to Lukumí, creating new growth in Arará's numbers and a new interest in learning the songs and drums. With an upswing in younger practitioners comes the resulting adaptation of rituals for a new generation. Arará is still a living tradition, so as new members join the community, they bring their modern sensibilities with them. Over the course of our studies with Arará masters from both old and new generations, we have witnessed rhythms and songs adapt with the times. For that reason, among others explained at the end of this chapter, the contents of this book may not precisely resemble the music heard in an Arará Savalú *cabildo* depending on day and place. However, this text resembles the amalgamation of our studies as best as we can demonstrate up to this point.

Overview of book materials

The Savalú ceremonial structure

We have divided this book into several sections based on the typical needs of a Savalú musician participating in a traditional *tambor* (music ceremony). Therefore, as this introduction explains the overall structure of an Arará Savalú *tambor*, it also explains this book's format and vice versa. The remainder of this text conforms to this overarching structure, with explanations of these elements at the beginning of each respective section.

An Arará Savalú *tambor* contains three primary sections. It opens with an *Oru Seco*, meaning the drums play alone without singing. The *Oru Cantado* follows the *Oru Seco*, where drumming and singing combine to praise all the Fodu. Just as the ceremony ritualistically opens, it must also close, therefore a *tambor* has a specific cycle of songs and rhythms to complete a *tambor*.

The instruments and drumming techniques of an Arará Savalú battery

Arará Savalú drums

The Arará Savalú percussion battery consists of a large bell and five drums played in different combinations depending on the specific needs of each *toque*. However, no *toque* requires all five drums simultaneously. Therefore, a total of five musicians can play the battery and cover all the interlocking parts, switching drums periodically when necessary. Typically, it is the lead player who moves between drums, while the supporting players stay with their own drum.

⁷ As Michael Spiro explains in the forward, with his own exposure and experiences studying Arará.

All the drums are constructed from wood with conical shaped resonating bodies of varying sizes. They are mono-membraphones, meaning the drums have only one head for the playing surface, which is taut goat skin. The Arará drumheads are secured to the shell with wooden pegs sewn into the skin and hammered into the shell, like other West African derived drums. A similar example is Ghanaian Kpanlogo drums. The skin pegs must be hammered periodically to maintain proper tuning and skin tension.⁸

The size of each drum corresponds to its relative pitch in the ensemble. From highest to lowest the drums' names are: *Wewé*, *Aplití*, *Yanáo*, *Yonofó*, and *Oklotó*. The bell is called the *Ogán*. The *Wewé*, *Aplití*, and *Oklotó* are the support drums, playing interlocking ostinato patterns. The *Wewé* and *Aplití* are smaller and higher pitched than the lead drums, however, the *Oklotó* is a bass voice pitched lower than the lead drums. Depending on the physical construction of the *Oklotó*, it can be much wider than the other drums, but it is not tall. The sound of the *Oklotó* is nearly subsonic, felt more as a rumble than heard as a pitch. The *Wewé*, *Aplití*, and *Ogán* are used for all the toques in Arará Savalú. Alternately, the *Oklotó* is only used on specific rhythms. The *Oklotó* primarily adds a low off-beat pattern during fast toques, but there are a few unique instances where it can play a lead line as a substitute for the lead drum, the toque for *Afrekete* as one example.

The lead part of the battery is played by one person, but it is split between two drums. The *Yanáo* is approximately the same size physically as the *Aplití*, but it is pitched lower. The lead drummer sits and plays the *Yanáo* exclusively during the *Oru Seco*, which is described in the following section. This drum acts as the lead voice in the *Oru Seco* while the *Yonofó* stays covered by a cloth and is unused. At times during the *Oru Seco*, the lead drummer will reach across to play the *Yanáo* and *Aplití* together, such as in the toques for *Bereché* and *Makenu*. During these toques the *Aplití* player does not play. After the *Oru Seco*, the lead player switches to the *Yonofó*, leaving the *Yanáo* unused. For the rest of the ceremony the *Aplití* drummer plays the toques mentioned above that require the *Yanáo* and *Aplití* at the same time while the lead player sits out.

The *Yonofó* is the largest drum physically, requiring the lead player to stand to play the drum. Totico's *Yonofó* (as we are most familiar with this drum) requires him to tie the drum around his waist so he can tilt the drum to get the appropriate opening of the sound hole at the bottom of the instrument.⁹ The lead drummer plays the *Yonofó* for the remainder of the ceremony, and the drum has a commanding sonic and visual presence in the battery.¹⁰

The *Ogán* covers the timeline pattern, much like many West African and Afro-diasporic rhythms that reside in Cuba and beyond. However, the *Ogán*'s timelines have a unique difference from typical bell patterns in that the *Ogán* pattern can change based on the toque. The bell pattern for Arará Savalú is unique for its *cabildo*. Likewise, the other *cabildos* of Arará have their own bell patterns that differ from what we might call "standard 12/8 bell."¹¹

Arará drum techniques

The playing techniques for Arará drums resemble other Cuban sacred traditions, such as the playing of *bembé* drums, in which the support drums utilize two sticks, and the lead drummer plays with one stick and one hand. The use of two sticks on the *Wewé*, *Aplití*, and *Oklotó* provides a strong backbone for the lead drum. All three of these drums use a combination of open and closed strokes. Open strokes occur when the player strikes the drumhead and allows the stick to rebound off the drum, letting the striking surface resonate. Players use two different forms of closed stroke on the support drums. The first method requires the player to strike the drumhead and keep the stick on the surface after the stroke, stopping the vibration of the membrane. The second method uses one stick to mute the drumhead by lightly pressing into the skin while the other stick strikes the drum as one would with an open stroke. Due to the construction and materials of the drums, specifically the thin and pliable goat skin membranes, muted strokes are not completely dead sounding, but rather create a short tone that is raised in pitch

⁸ Refer to picture (Example 10) on page 90 for a detailed example of the tuning pegs.

⁹ At the time of writing this book, we are not sure if this is standard practice for all *Yonofós* regardless of differences in construction, or if it specific to Totico's *Yonofó*.

¹⁰ Refer to picture (Example 16) on page 165 for an example of Totico playing the *Yonofó*.

¹¹ Refer to pages 12-21 for examples of the various bell patterns used throughout the *Oru Seco* and *Oru Cantado*.

from the more resonant open stroke. This gives each drum the ability to create bi-tonal melodies, and when in combination with the full battery, together they can create intricate composite melodies. Within the support drums, the Oklotó has one more stroke the player can use: the rim or shell click. The Oklotó plays an offbeat ostinato pattern that alternates muted strokes with open strokes. As a possible sonic variation, the player can opt to play the first muted stroke as a click on the rim of the drum or on the shell.¹²

Stick and hand technique on the Yanáo and Yonofó provides a wide range of sonic possibilities for the lead drummer. The lead player needs the extended range of tones as the Yonofó parts change far more than any of the other parts and must speak over the rest of the battery. If the drummer is right hand dominant then he typically holds the stick in his right hand, while the left hand acts as support. The stick hand can play open strokes, muted strokes (similar to the other drums), and rim shots or slaps. The slap sound is created by placing the other hand on the drumhead to deaden the sound and by striking the skin with the flat of the stick across the face of the drum. This stroke creates a loud and high pitched cracking tone. The stick hand can also use a buzzing tone by letting the stick strike the head and bounce, and although not frequently used, this tone will show up, such as in the call for Oda Iro Wero.

The support hand played without a stick is equally important for a lead drummer's sound, and a student of Arará drumming should not overlook it. The support hand provides all the nuance to the lead part. The lead drummer can play open and muted strokes with his support hand just as he would with the stick. Beyond that, the support hand plays all the bass tones on the Yanáo and Yonofó. The size of the Yonofó allows for substantial bass tones, a crucial element of lead parts. Finally, the support hand embellishes the stick hand's strong tones by adding touch strokes and flams, giving the Yonofó a unique "swing."

Reasons for this book

Our intent with this book is several-fold, ideally reaching a varied audience. A primary reason for transcribing and archiving the Arará cabildo's music (aside from our own edification) is to give a written copy of their own music back to them, as most of the members of the cabildo do not read or write music notation, and they asked us to transcribe their songs and rhythms as a memento of their cultural traditions. We have taken this request to heart, while doing our best to avoid the "anthropologist-as-savior" or "cultural gray-out" complex that can be easily associated with such a project. It is our privilege to offer this contribution to our mentors as best we can within our current understanding of the music.

Beyond this reason of cultural repatriation, we also hope to inspire a wider audience of musicians, ethnomusicologists, and Afro-diasporic religious practitioners alike to delve into the rich heritage of Arará Savalú with this text as a central learning tool. Although a handful of other music method books cover Arará music in a general manner, this is the first text to catalog Arará Savalú specifically. Our hope is this text will help open the door for a larger audience to this wonderful music.

As we have stated throughout this chapter, Arará Savalú is a living tradition. The music is growing and changing within the cabildo, as is our own understanding of it as we continue our studies. This book is our first publication, and we aim to provide future editions as we learn of new variations and new songs. We also intend to record professionally the cabildo performing their music as a supplement to this written archive.

We consciously chose the versions of the rhythms and songs for this text after significant deliberation. Each player and singer has their own lineage of education and own interpretation of the words, rhythms, and melodies, which shows that there is no single correct way to play this music. Even within lessons with one master over the course of years there may be small adjustments with syllables or rhythmic placement of words within a song. Our decision process centered around our desire to pay respect to all our teachers in the cabildo. We hope you enjoy studying these transcriptions as much as we have enjoyed the process of collecting and compiling them for this book. May it help deepen your understanding and love of Afro-Cuban folkloric music.

- Joseph C. Galvin [*Omi Afukó*] and Michael Spiro [*Eguin Ejé*]

¹² See page 14 for musical notation of this technique.

Oru Seco

An Arará Savalú tambor begins with an Oru Seco consisting solely of drums without singing. This is similar to a Lukumí *fundamento* tambor with *batá* drums, but these two styles are unique in the larger Afro-Cuban folkloric world in that drums are rarely played without song and dance. As far we are aware of at the time of writing this book, the Lukumí *batá* and Arará Oru Seco are the only instances where this occurs, making drumming without song a unique practice set apart from the many different Afro-Cuban religious drumming traditions.

An Arará Oru Seco consists of all rhythms used to play for the Foduces played in relatively quick succession. The Oru opens a ceremony by announcing each Fodu with the sacred drums, playing the deity's individual rhythm before any singing occurs. This practice of playing drums *seco* is also the case with Lukumí *batá*, where the *batá* play in front of the altar to “call out the names” of each Oricha with the drums before moving into the main room to play for the community, accompanied by song and dance. Each Fodu represents a natural element and a humanistic trait. As the Oru Cantado contains the full list of the Foduces (as opposed to the abbreviated list in the Oru Seco), a detailed explanation for every deity begins each cantado chapter.

The musical transcriptions in this book also begin with the Arará Savalú drum parts outlined in the order of an Oru Seco as it was taught to us by Pello and his students Luisito and Totico. Different religious houses may have different orders of the Foduces, as well as differences within each rhythm. This is not to discount the variations between each lineage; rather, this book focuses on the specific lineage of the masters with whom we studied, as we discuss further in the next section of this chapter.

Bandera

Closed Road:

*Can go between Closed and Open

Ogán (bell) 

Wewé 2 Sticks 

Aplití 2 Sticks 

Yonofó RH Stick L Hand 

Also played to:

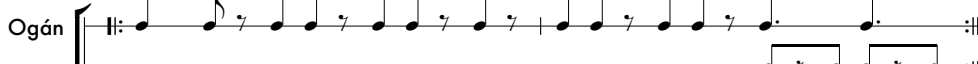
- Akarasa
- Auñoro/Makenu (Slower)
- Ohoho


Yonofó Call

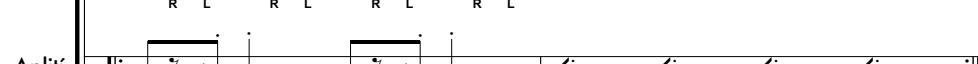



Open Road:

*Possible Lick

Ogán 

Wewé 

Aplití 

Yonofó 

Variation 1

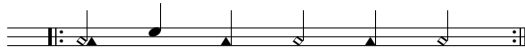



Variation 2

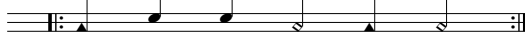



Yonofó Variations:

*Build back into basic

Yonofó 










*1st time bass on repeat - muff

Conversation:

Ogán 

Aplití 

Yonofó 

* Lick finishes second half

* Played twice starting on second half

Call-Out #2