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Aesthetics of Yoruba Recreational Dances as Exemplified in the *Oge* Dance

Omofolabo Soyinka Ajayi

Among the Yoruba-speaking people of Nigeria recreational dances are a popular art form usually performed at purely social gatherings such as weddings, funerals (of elderly people), or child-naming ceremonies. They are distinct from the more symbolic dances which may accompany such social events, or even from the more formally structured and often public events such as historical festivals, initiation rites, and ancestral remembrance ceremonies. The recreational dances, which are performed mainly for relaxation and entertainment, are also opportunities to express and communicate emotions arising from the occasion being observed. Social ceremonies in Yoruba society are simply inconceivable without recreational dances.

Social festivities are of course not the only occasions for these dances; they are also performed on non-specific occasions for purely aesthetic fulfillment or as an expression of general well-being. At the end of a day's work, for example, friends or relatives get together to relax, or as they say, "*múfàáji*"—'catch relaxation.' At such *fàáji* evenings dance performances feature prominently alongside story-telling and riddle contests, games, poetry chants, or merely sharing anecdotes. Occasionally, too, a popular dance form may find performance space at the end of a successful symbolic ceremony, when the inclusion of a different form, both thematically and conceptually, is no longer a distraction from the desired goals of the ceremony. At such times recreational dances produce a cathartic effect following the tension of the event's significant symbolism.

The recreational dances of the Yoruba can be broadly divided into two categories: 1) *àlùjó*—social leisure dances, and 2) *ijó-ìtàgé*—theatre entertainment dances. The division is rather fluid, for it is permissible for *ijó-ìtàgé* to be performed as *àlùjó* and vice versa, although the former situation is more frequent. Essentially distinguishing *àlùjó* dances from *ijó-ìtàgé* are basic structure and performance techniques. While *ijó-ìtàgé* are formally created and structured for an audience interested in being entertained, a situation which enforces a certain level of professionalism, *àlùjó* have no special commitment to a specific audience: they are more for the personal enjoyment of the performers, who are either social club members or just creative individuals.

Ijó-ìtàgé performances usually have a three-tiered performance structure comprising *ìjubà*—salutation, *eré-ijó*—main dance performance, and *ijó à mú re' lé*—the "take home" dance or the finale (1). The chanted poetry of *ìjubà* is a warm-up performance which briefly welcomes the spectators and pays lengthy homage to known master artists (dead or living) in the field. Depending on the significance of the occasion *ìjubà* can be rendered by the most senior members of the troupe or by young artist trainees. In the *eré-ijó* section each seasoned artist gives a solo performance, while junior artists perform in groups of three or four. With some theatre troupes the main performance is given by the entire group. This happens mainly in an all-female or a male-female group. There is, however, a "star" performance when gifted or senior members of the group display their special talents in solo performances. This provides an opportunity for free individual improvisation which is usually kept to a minimum during group performances. Given the active encouragement for improvised movements within the dance format it becomes obvious that the Yoruba value individualism in their dance artists.

With the structured form of *ijó-ìtàgé* there is conscious striving for dramatic effects and aesthetic appeal through performance techniques such as spectacular costumes, masks, choreographic formations, and symbolic body movements.

Ijó-ìtàgé performances usually range from rigorous acrobatic displays to the aesthetic pleasure lying in the fast manipulation of the body in motion with the most intricate patterns, soft mellow dances with an emphasis on rhythmic response, and appropriate movement interpretations of the music. Examples of *ijó-'ìtàgé*, or theatre entertainment dances, include *Bíripo*, *Bàtá*, *Bòlòjò*, *Obitun*, *Àgéré-Ode*, and the revues of the popular *alárìnjó* troupes (groups of itinerant dancers). Each of these dances has its own stylistic structure which makes it readily

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recognizable. *Bírípo*, for example, starts very slowly with a gently swaying body, the swaying turns into swings to the left and right, and finally culminates in a fast whirl. The dance derives its name from this climax, *bírípo* meaning 'whirl around.' It is performed by middle-aged men and women, and its origin is associated with harvest celebrations in the Ikale/Okitipupa community, a riverine area of Yorubaland.

Bàtá, on the other hand, is a fast, highly energetic dance, rarely performed by women (2). It is characterized by sharp, quick body jerks and twists, and intricate footwork. Because of its near acrobatic movements, *Bàtá* costumes are simple in order to allow for free, fast movements. The form of this dance is very closely related to the dance of possession during the worship of Sango—the Yoruba god of thunder and lightning (3), and the Egungun ancestral memorial institution. It is an essentially northern Yoruba dance form. The revues of the *alárìnjó* troupe (4) often use *Bàtá* dance forms and the masked technique of the Egungun in their displays, but the troupe's dances are distinguished by their satirical sketches of both topical and historical events. The masked performers are all male.

Bòlòjò, a dance from Egbado, a coastal Yoruba area, is performed by both men and women. It is characterized by simultaneously twisting and swaying the torso very slowly and taking short forward and backward steps. It gives the distinct impression of a gracefully moving corpulent body, the effect which the name '*bòlòjò*' attempts to capture onomatopoeically. The *Bòlòjò* dance form can be traced to the Gelede dances performed to aesthetically appeal to the witches to channel their "powers" to beneficial ends (5).

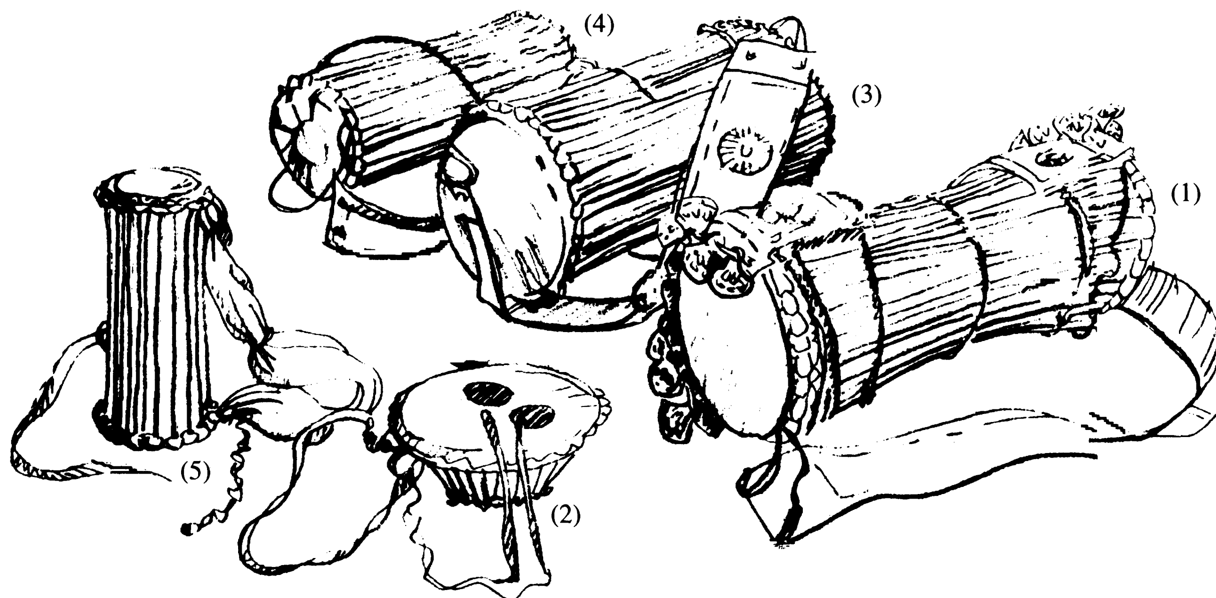
Àgéré-Ode is rooted in the *àlùjó* dances of the hunters which bear the same name. It attempts to capture the salient movement characteristics of the hunting profession—crouching, stalking, and making rapid darting movements. It is performed by men who may not necessarily be hunters. *Obitun*, meaning 'new woman,' emanates from the dances performed during the rites of passage of young girls into womanhood in the Ondo district of Yorubaland. This dance is remarkable for the elaborate coiffures of its dancers, its symbolic costume and jewelry, and the highly synchronized body movements of its performers. The "star" performance is an intensive display of dexterity in balance, body coordination, and timing. It involves balancing a set of ceramic or china plates on the head, the palms of the hands, and/or the nape of the neck, and spinning around very fast. Sometimes an abrupt change of direction is made mid-way through a spin without coming to a complete halt, or even losing balance. At the end of the spin(s) the featured dancer falls in step with the rest of the dancers, who have not stopped dancing.

It seems that *ijó-ìtàgé* dances derive from either social or religious ritual, or from professionally-related dances. Both ritual and professional dance types have established repertoires of movements which tend to fit into theatrical forms and aesthetics. Rituals consist of coded signs whose efficacy depends on prescribed and established procedures of performance, and the dances related to them necessarily have similar structures. Various professions also have some established movements from which the dances created by the workers naturally (consciously or unconsciously) draw.

On the other hand, *àlùjó* dances lack a common source of movement repertoire. Performers come from different backgrounds, each drawing on distinct creative experiences. Even though a kind of structured pattern can be established for social leisure dances, they are flexible enough to accomodate new styles. The dances, therefore, have a high turn-over of rapidly changing forms. Old ones are easily discarded and new ones created, just as others are constantly adopted and adapted as they move through time and space. The detailed discussion of *àlùjó* dances which follows gives some generally recognizable features of this dance type.

Àlùjó: Social Recreational Dances (6)

Literally translated as 'drum and dance,' *àlùjó* is a generic name for any recreational dance which does not require special virtu-



The dùndún *ensemble: (1)* ìyá-ìlù*; (2)* gúdúgúdú*; (3)* keríkerì*; (4)* ìsájú*; (5)* kànàngó.

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oso skills in its execution. The basic requirement for a dancer of *àlùjó* is the ability to move well to basic rhythms provided by the music. In fact, the music, also known as *àlùjó*, is fundamental to the creation of the dance. The importance of the music to the dance becomes obvious when the word '*àlùjó*' is fully examined. *Àlùjó* is actually a one-sentence word made up of one subject and two verbs.

à lù jó	*à*	subject
	lù	verb
	jó	verb

"*À*" can be translated as 'what is,' "*lù*"means 'to beat,' and "*jó*" 'to dance.' Although the object of the sentence is not expressly stated, it is understood, the verb 'beat' being used in a musical context. Thus what is beaten is the rhythm. "*Lù*," therefore, fully translated, means 'beat out the rhythm.' The full import of *àlùjó* then becomes 'beat out the rhythm and dance it.' Hence, the name *àlùjó* is a clear indication of the close relationship between the dance and the music to which it is done, and the dependence of the dance on the music.

Àlùjó dances are generally easy and relaxing, although a few involve strong movements and vigorous performance. Without exception, however, they are essentially free—open to spontaneous improvisation, provided the improvisation is in rhythm with the music. The beauty of the dance, in fact, lies in the richness of the improvisation and the smoothness and subtlety with which the music and the dance blend. Because of this freedom to elaborate within the basic form of the dance at any time, *àlùjó* dances are highly individualistic. No two people dance alike, for even though the dancers may be performing together in a group, their movements are neither synchronized nor necessarily in the same direction; "everyone does his or her own thing."

The rules guiding *àlùjó* dances are rather general: the dancer must have a keen sense of rhythm, a supple body, an inexhaustible repertoire of improvised movements, and—the all important criterion—balance. No matter what posture the dancer assumes during the course of the dance, balance is a crucial factor. Its importance will become clear when the assessment of one of the dances is considered below.

There are many *àlùjó* dances, such as *Wóró*, *'Eló*, *'Ewó*, *Àgéré-Ode* (already mentioned), and *Oge*. Each dance is usually named after the concept it embodies or the form it takes. For example, the peace and coolness which *Wóró* embodies is aptly reflected in its dance movements. *Wóró* is executed in slow, rhythmic cadence with gentle, sweeping movements of the arms, and small forward and backward steps. Even when the tempo increases, the totality of the movement does not disintegrate into abrupt jerky movements; movements must still flow smoothly into one another, and throughout the dance a calm, serene facial expression is maintained. In *'Eló*, which means 'twist,' the torso contorts into various difficult shapes, while *'Ewó*—'drag'—is characterized by dragging the feet, one after the other, as far as they can go away from the rest of the body.

Oge Dance

Oge incorporates within its meaning fashion, trendiness, and generally being with the times; it is basically a dance of vanity in which the dancer blatantly flaunts and displays qualities valued in society. In a society in which physical fitness, strength, and body flexibility are among the qualities most valued and sought after, *Oge* provides an opportunity to display these attributes. This is not to say, however, that physical resilience is the only quality displayed and appreciated in the dance; others, such as beauty, coyness, or bashfulness (particularly in women) are also part of the display of vanity. Although not crucial, material wealth as reflected in the dancer's dress is also appreciated. In short, the guiding concept of *Oge* is vanity and showing off; immodesty is clearly an accepted virtue of the *Oge* dancer, who proudly announces, "Here am I, look at me," or, "See and appreciate my worth."

The blatant self-advertisement of *Oge* dancers is not solely for the purpose of innocent relaxation. A very important reward is associated with the dance, particularly among the young, for whom the dance is most popular and who are believed to have originated the dance; the oblique unstated aim of the dancers is to announce their eligibility and thereby hopefully to secure marriage partners. The relaxed atmosphere of the evening market, where the *Oge* is frequently done, is the most ideal place for this purpose, and the young exploit it to the fullest.

Although initially an exclusive preserve of the young, *Oge* has permeated the rest of Yoruba society, catering to other interest groups as well. There are now several adaptations of *Oge*, such as *'Ilù-Àgbà*, for elderly people, and *'Ilù-Ayaba*, for royal women. Probably protesting this apparent take-over of their dance by the rest of society, some young people have created yet another youth-adaptation of *Oge*—an extremely fast type known as *Gèse*. There is no fundamental difference between the original *Oge* dance and its subsequent derivatives, however. What has transpired is simply that the original form is slightly modified to incorporate certain characteristics and mannerisms of the performers. For example, in *'Ilù-Àgbà* the dancers, comprising elderly people from sixty-five years upwards, move slowly, sedately, and elegantly, as is expected of the elderly in Yoruba society. At the same time, however, the dancers show off their dancing skills and proclaim that they are still useful to their community. *Gèse*, on the other hand, is agile, energetic, and full of youthful exuberance. Thus, even though there is a general form and pattern to which all *Oge* variations must conform, and upon which they can be assessed, each has its own distinctive style.

Before going on to discuss the general form of the dance, the accompanying music which, as indicated earlier, is crucial to any *àlùjó* dance, will be discussed to provide the background against which the dance can be assessed.

Alujo Music

Generally, any combination of Yoruba musical instruments can be used for *àlùjó*, but the most popular in recent times, particularly for the *Oge* dance, is the *dùndún* musical ensemble, often referred to as the "Yoruba talking drums." A standard *dùndún* ensemble consists of *ìyá-ìlù*, *ìsájú*, *kànàngó*, *aguda* or *keríkerì*, and *gúdúgúdú* or *omele*. All but the last, *gúdúgúdú*, are hourglass shaped drums, each with two membranous ends linked

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'Ilù Àgba *dance movement.*

together through a number of adjustable tension thongs. These thongs can be used to control and regulate the pitch of the drums to imitate very closely the glides and tones of Yoruba speech, causing the *dùndún* drums to be labelled one of the most "talkative" of African drum groups (King 1961:51). Either of the membranous ends is beaten with a question mark-shaped stick called *kòngó*. The *gúdúgúdú*, on the other hand, is a kettle-shaped drum, and is beaten with two leather thongs.

The tonality of the Yoruba language, which employs three basic tonal pitches—low, middle, and high—easily lends itself to imitation by the drums. The pitches, often indicated by three musical notes—d: m: s:—are reproduced on the drums by exerting varying degrees of pressure on the tension thongs. To produce music the tension thongs of *ìsájú*, the starter or lead drum, and *kànàngó* are tied so that each produces a fixed pitch—*ìsàjú* producing a high pitch (s:) and *kànàngó* a low pitch (d:). No pressure is exerted on the *aguda*, and thus it takes care of the middle pitch (m:). *'Iyá-ìlù*, which means 'mother drum,' is the most versatile and the most coherent speech imitator, for its thongs are left loose to be regulated and controlled by the master drummer to produce any of the three pitches and the talking effect. *'Iyá-ìlù* has the lowest sound resonance, while *gúdúgúdú* or *omele* produces two different pitches—high and low—made possible by virtue of the tuning paste at the center of its only membranous end (Euba 1977:121). *Gúdúgúdú* is played very fast and its function is to maintain the rhythm of the music—to serve as the music pacer. Meanwhile, *ìsájú* and *kànàngó* are arranged so each is played half a note below the corresponding pitch of *gúdúgúdú*.

Àlùjó music is polyrhythmic. The basic tempo is determined and sustained by *gúdúgúdú*, since it plays two different pitches which can be arranged in various rhythmical combinations. Each pitch is repeated by the appropriate drum at half-note intervals. All these, combined with the steady middle-pitch rhythm of the *aguda* and the deep and versatile tone of the *ìyá-ìlù*, may produce as many as eight different rhythms at the same time (7). These different rhythms are, however, arranged in what Thieme calles "terracing" manner, with

> the rhythms combined with one another producing a 'heard' rhythm as if it were being played by a single instrument rather than a combination of the rhythms being played by two or more instruments. (1967:35)

The same idea is expressed by Akin Euba, who describes the effect thus produced as "a harmonic structure" (ibid:126). It is principally upon this "heard rhythm," or "harmonic structure," that the dancer bases most of his or her movements.

To further enhance the rhythmic fullness of the music a set of three rattles—known as *sèkèrè*—is usually added to the basic talking drum set. The *sèkèrè* consists of *ìya-ajé*, *omele-ajé*, and *aró*. *'Iya-ajé* ('mother rattler') is a fairly large gourd (with a diameter of about 14 inches) encircled by a cord strung with cowry shells, seeds, or beads, while *omele ajé* ('junior rattler') is a smaller version of *ìya-ajé*, and *aró* ('sonorous') is a metal rattle in the shape of a closed horse-shoe. All three are shaken harmoniously with the *dùndún* ensemble, giving a rich percussive rhythm to the music.

Although mainly instrumental, *àlùjó* is sometimes given a full choral backing by either the *sèkèrè* players when they are included in the musical ensemble, or by the dancers, particularly in *Oge*. Even when no choral accompaniment is provided, the *ìyá-ìlù* is always talking, and occasionally members of the regular *dùndún* ensemble give a chanted refrain of some of the "sayings" or "proverbs," as they are usually called, of the *ìyá-ìlù*. When dancers sing, the *ìyá-ìlù* joins in repeating some key phrases of their compositions while interjecting its own comments at regular intervals. Some examples of *Oge* choral singing and proverbs of the mother drum are given in the Appendix.

The Form and Assessment of *Oge* Dance

The characteristic posture of an *Oge* dance emphasizes a slightly forward inclination of the body. Technically, the body is divided into two parts—upper and lower, the "two-unit" system Bartenieff and Paulay refer to, and regard as "the most dramatic and outstanding feature of African dances" (1968:236). The torso is inclined from the pelvic joint about 80 degrees from its normal upright placement, and the knees are bent. From the bent position the dancer moves rhythmically to the music, involving every part of the body in the dance in response to any of the rhythmical combinations of the music or to one general heard rhythm. An adept dancer can isolate as many as four different rhythms and then incorporate each in movements of different parts of the body. The shoulders, for example, can respond to the beat of *aguda* through alternate shrugging movements and the hands in wave-like movements, while the arms slowly inscribe circular patterns in the air to the beat of *isaju*. The *sèkèrè* percussion may provide the rhythmic base for shaking the buttocks or hips, and the feet shuffle along with the heard rhythm. Robert Thompson describes this ability to isolate the

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movement of different parts of the body in relation to different rhythms as "multiple meter in the dance." He observes further:

> It is a means of articulating the human body more fully than is possible in other discourse, it makes a person blaze as a live entity at the center of understanding. (1974:16)

The qualities emphasized in *Oge* are body flexibility, balance, rhythm, and timing—the basis for the assessment of the dance.

A common practice among dancers is to "*mú etí aso*"—'dance the dress,' that is, use the dress as a dance property (see cover illustration). On social occasions the woman usually wears a wide-sleeved loose blouse—*bùbá*, a wrapper—*ìró*, and a head tie—*gèlè*. The wrapper is tied to the left side over the blouse at the waist, and the head tie is wound in elaborate patterns over the head. On her feet are a pair of slippers. The man's dress consists of a big flowing gown—*agbádá*, under which is worn its smaller version—*dànsíkí*, or a longer version of the woman's blouse, also known as *bùbá*, and a pair of trousers—*sòkòtò*. His dress is topped with a cap and a pair of slippers. Both men and women wear jewelry. On ordinary *fàájì* evenings, the woman's dress may be the wrapper only, tied to the left across the chest, and the man may do without the flowing gown and the cap.

To "dance the dress" the woman either pulls at the neck of her blouse or at the tied end of the wrapper. Pulling at the blouse neck is humorously referred to as *fa tí ò le*—'pull what is not difficult.' This is probably in reference to the almost imperceptible, but very strenuous, shoulder movements which invariably accompany the gesture. With her head turned towards or away from the *fa tí ò le* side (the side on which the blouse has been pulled), she dances, leaning alternately forward and backward. Before pulling the blouse, she probably pushed her head tie forward, delicately balancing it on her forehead. When she uses the tied end of her wrapper, she ends up untying the wrapper half-way and dancing with it before tying it back. The man holds the two sides of his *agbádá* or *dánsíkí*, thereby exposing the beautiful embroidered patterns on his dress. He may dance leaning backwards and accentuating his shoulder movements, or he may twirl around, making his dress, especially the *dànsíkí*, fan out around him.

Another way to dance the dress, one which is commonly practiced by both men and women, is to bend down from the waist and slightly raise the hem of the dress with the fingertips. The dress is then flipped back and forth and moved in the same direction in which the dancer progresses. To dance the dress is to use the costume as an extension of the body in motion. Quite often, especially when the hem is used, dancing the dress is a transitional moment to the next stage of the dance, known as *bèrè-mólè*—'bend-down.' It is also a signal for the master drummer handling the *ìyá-ìlú* to move on to the *bèrè-mólè* sequence. He responds with a distinctly different pitch from the general heard rhythm.

To '*bèrè-mólè*' is to get as close to the ground as possible, and the dancer achieves this stance by slowly bending the knees. To reduce the strain on the knees and help maintain balance, the body weight is gradually transferred to the balls of the feet. The dancer stays down, resting on his or her haunches with heels slightly raised off the ground and the weight of the body balanced on the toes. In this almost squatting position the performer keeps rhythm with the music, dancing mainly with the upper body leaning sideways, backward, forward, or even turning 360 degrees on the same spot. At other times, the dance is concentrated in shoulder or stomach movements. The shoulders are shrugged, flipped, or rolled, alternately or simultaneously, and the stomach movement is usually a continuous, rapid contraction and release of the stomach muscles. To further lessen the strain and to keep balance in the "bend-down" position, the body weight can be transferred from one leg to the other by rhythmically raising and lowering each leg.

The bend-down stance can be maintained for as long as ten minutes before "dancing up" to the original posture. At no time does the dancer lose balance, for balance is the strong point of this performance. Whether dancing up or down in the *bèrè-mólè* sequence, the original forward-inclined posture must be maintained, even though it can be quite strenuous on the knees. Throughout the journey either way, rhythm and balance must consistently be maintained. One does not fall over through loss of balance, nor go down or come up abruptly, because the knees have become weak. This would nullify any claims to flexibility, balance, and endurance—the real test of the *bèrè-mólè* section. It is equally unacceptable to proceed directly from dancing the dress by the hem to the bend-down sequence, since this would be bending from the waist rather than from the knees—the aesthetic ideal. The practice is to return first to the conventional posture. Failure to do so ruins the form of the dance and detracts from the quality of the dancer.

The *bèrè-mòlé* sequence is the climax of the performance, both for the dancers and the drummers, particularly the master drummer, who seizes the moment to display his expertise on the *ìyá-ìlù* At this point also he singles out the person he considers to be the best dancer by moving closer and drumming for him or her exclusively for a while, before moving on to the next best. As Thompson notes, "getting-down" is a virtuosic feature of West-African dance which

> structurally, it would seem, correlates with solo dancing as opposed to choral, with an important part of the dance as opposed to an indifferently selected moment in transition with vigor and intensity. (1974:14)

For *àlùjó* dances which are usually performed in groups, this may well be the nearest thing to a solo performance, for the other dancers discreetly move back so the spectators can enjoy the chosen "best" dancer. Strictly speaking, however, the moment is really a "duo" between the dancer and the master drummer which sometimes develops into a little contest, each trying to surpass the other in excellence and skill.

An accomplished dancer distinguishes himself or herself not by following the talkative *ìyá-ìlù*, but by keeping steady rhythm with the other drums. Normally one is expected to respond when the *ìyá-ìlù* talks or when it changes the rhythm of the music and to accentuate these moments with special movements. The expression, "*omele l'à ˊnjó, a kìí jo ìyá-ìlù*"—'the dancer responds to *omele*, the rhythm pacer, and not to the

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mother drum'—sums up the aesthetic assessment of the dance. Thus when the master drummer suddenly stops drumming—a frequent device—the skilled dancer does not lose a step.

One last detail in the form of the dance is the eye contact, or rather, the lack of it, during performance. This is a reflection of Yoruba culture in which it is considered extremely rude for a young person to look directly at the face of an elder. In the dance, the female dancer seldom looks up: her eyes are downcast most of the time. This reaffirms the coyness and bashfulness expected of her as a female. For the woman, who is invariably the junior partner in a marriage, it is important to display such a quality in a dance, which may possibly attract an eligible man. The man, on the other hand, in deference to elders present, does not sustain eye contact with anything or anybody. He stares straight ahead, and by doing so proclaims his courage, particularly to the young women and their parents, who take this as an indication that the man is responsible and ready enough to start a family.

Appreciation for the best dancer or dancers is shown by placing money on the performer's forehead, where it is left for some time before being removed in a movement incorporated into the dance. Sometimes the gift is completely ignored until it drops and another member helps pick it up. It is also customary for an admirer to go up and wipe the sweat off a dancer's face with a piece of cloth, or fan him or her. It is not unusual for a spectator to perform a few steps with the dancer, in appreciation, before going back to the side lines. By far the best compliment is paid when the master drummer plays exclusively for a dancer. This is an opportunity to really show off, and both the dancer and drummer are showered with more monetary gifts. These complimentary actions are invariably accompanied by verbal praises. Comments such as "Good," or "Here is a true dancer" are often heard in addition to descriptions of, or calling attention to, whatever the dancer is doing so perfectly.

For the less skilled dancer disapproval is equally swift in coming, although it is mainly verbal. Comments are made regarding the specific area of shortcoming. For example: "Is this one deaf?" "Has she no ears for the music (rhythm)?" "It is doubtful if this one can even walk or stand straight." "Whatever has he been doing with his body (balance)?" "Stiff neck." "Stiff shoulders." "Knock-knees." "Flat buttocks." "Lazy drone." The latter all refer to flexibility. When the overall performance is absolutely disasterous, the dancer is dismissed as "*elésè òsì méjì*"—'two left-legged individual,' and other dancers in the group are seriously warned never to make the mistake of presenting such a "stiff body" to the public again. Even long after the performance, references are made to how badly or how excellently an individual danced.

The guidelines used in assessing *Oge* as described above are broadly applicable to most other *àlùjó* dances, with only a few modifications. For example, in *Obitun*, where the climax is in the plate dance, the concept of balance goes beyond body coordination alone. It is externalized to incorporate balancing the plates, including how many and where they are balanced. Body flexibility in *Bàtá* is determined by the jerky, angular, and almost a-rhythmic movements rather than by flowing movement, as in *Wórò*. *'Ewó*, on the other hand, bases its use of rhythm on restrained body movement, whereas in *Bíripo* the aim is to match, syllable for syllable, body and musical rhythms.

The strong element of improvisation present in almost all Yoruba dances, and most pronounced in *àlùjó* dances, makes possible a broad-based aesthetic evaluation. Improvisation as a highly valued factor in Yoruba dances becomes evident in the saying, "*àpónlé là nwò ninu ijó*"—'embellishment is the key to dancing.' The more a dancer improvises, the better appreciated are his or her dances. The crucial criteria for embellishments are that they must be pleasing, appropriate, and within the form, content, and concept of the dance. The importance of improvisation in Yoruba recreational dances means that new types are constantly evolving, providing a rich and dynamic outlet for a people's creativity.

NOTES

1. This structure is typical of traditional popular performances—drama, dance, choral singing, and poetry chanting. For a more detailed discussion of the structure see Adedeji 1978:44-48.

2. Female relatives of the members of the *Bàtá* and *alárìnjó* performing troupes and female members of the Egungun ancestral institution (female triplets are natural members of the institution, an essentially male society), are able to perform a less agile version of *Bàtá*. However, they are not known to give public performances.

3. See Adedeji 1978:44 and Thompson 1974:219-225 for more on the relationship between *Bàtá* and Sango dance of possession.

4. An extensive treatment of the *alárìnjó* theatre is given in Adedeji 1978.

5. Euphemistically referred to as "our mothers," the witch in Yoruba society is primarily about innate female powers: it is a concept of a "force" associated with the female reproductive organs. The ability of the woman to give and sustain life through childbirth and subsequent nourishment makes her alternately feared, revered, ridiculed, and viewed with suspicion and awe. See Drewal 1973, Drewal and Drewal 1985, and Thompson 1974:199-207.

6. Examples of *àlùjó* dances presented here are mainly from northern Yoruba towns—Oyo, Ikirun, Iseyin, Ilorin, Ibadan, and Osogbo.

7. In his book *African Rhythm and African Sensibility*, Chernoff deals at length with the polymetric nature of African music, and in particular with the cross-rhythm of the Dondon (*dùndún*) musical ensemble (see pp. 43-47).

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APPENDIX: SAMPLE OGE DANCE SONGS
(translations are by the author)

A. CELEBRATORY SONGS

1. Praise Song

Iya-ilu:	*Olódún yi dà?*	Where is the celebrant?
	O ti na wo de 'bi won na' wo de	He/She has been quite generous (in feeding the guests)
	Apo re ko no gbe	May the source never dry
	Iwaju, Iwaju, lo o ma lo	May his/her sun never set
	Owo araiye ko ni te o.	May spoilsports never cross his/her path.
Refrain:	*O ti na wo o.*	She/He has been quite generous.

2. Political Commentary

Iya-ilu	*B'aiye ti nyi la o ba yi*	We move with the times
	Igbayi a tu wa l'ara	These times will be peaceful
	Yiye n'i ye'ye'le	Honor, as always for the pidgeon
	Riro ni r'adaba l'orun	Peace, as always for the dove
	Igbayi a tu wa l'ara	These times will be peaceful
Refrain:	*Eyin l'emo.*	That's your business.

B. SONGS OF YOUTH CLUBS

1.

	Pade mi lo'oja ale	Meet me at the evening market
	Pade mi l'oja ale o	Meet me at the evening market, I say
	Ba' o ri'ra	If we do not see each other
	Ba' oo ri'ra l'oja Akesan	If we do not see each other at the ninth day market,
	Pade mi l'oja ale.	Meet me at the evening market.

2.

	Awa l'egbe odomode	We are the youth club.
	Egbe Alafe	The recreational club.
	Awa ki ise egbe olosi	We are not a club of ne'er do wells,
	A f'aro tara	Playing all day long.
	Awa ki ise egbe olosi	We are not a club of fools
	Alaimokan.	And idiots.

3.

Iya-ilu	*Kumolu o,*	Kumolu I say (to you)
	Ko ro ko	does not go to the farm
	Kumolu o	Kumolu, I say (to you)
	ko ro 'do	does not go to the stream
	Bo o ji a gbo'be ka'na	He wakes up only to prepare his food
	A j'eba tan	And after his meal
	A se 'kun rondo	He exposes his well fed stomach (he relaxes)
	Omo oloro ni j'eyin awo	Only the child of the wealthy can eat guinea fowl eggs.
	Omo oloro ni j'eyin awo	Only the child of the wealthy can eat guinea fowl eggs.
Refrain	*Ko r'oko*	No farming
	Ko r'odo	No fetching water

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The examples given cover the general topics for the songs and music of a typical *Oge* dance. The first song in type A is self-evident, being in honor of a celebrant who has seen to the general welfare of the visitors, particularly the musicians. It is usually instrumental, although sometimes the refrain can be vocalized by the drummers. The second song is typical of songs used during, or immediatley after, a period of division in the society, by the faction which has emerged victorious. The "*Eyin l'emo*" ('that's your business') refrain is an elliptic allusion not only to the various intrigues that might have been used by the opposing faction during the period of contention, but also to any future machinations. The evocation of the pidgeon and dove imageries, along with their associated attributes of honor and peace, imply that the victorious groups will always overcome any future obstacles just as they have done in the past. Although essentially instrumental, some performers like to give vocal renditions of the *ìyá-ìlù* sayings just to reiterate the message.

Type B consists of some favorite songs among the young. It can be seen that unlike type A songs, which are primarily instrumental, this category has full choral backing composed and sung by members who seize the occasion to display creative skills other than dancing. The first song here not only informs members about the meeting place, it also serves as a form of advertisement for the club's evening show, and as a kind of open invitation to whoever is interested. The second song then proceeds to inform spectators that if it appears they (the dancers) are always enjoying themselves (like wealthy people), it is because they can afford to, having worked hard when they should. Commenting further on their air of affluence are the words of the *ìyá-ìlù* in the third song, which compares the dancers with the children of the rich. (The song is also a favorite nursery rhyme. Any other name can be substituted for "*kumolu*.") However, not all the words of the *ìyá-ìlù* should be taken literally, for they usually have two meanings: one is literal and the other may be satirical or allegorical. It is, in fact, for this reason that the content of *ìyá-ìlù*'s message is better known as a proverb.

The refrains in *àlùjó* music, which are repeated throughout the proverbs, seldom consist of more than two pitches of Yoruba speech form, and these are either in the combination of high and middle (s:m:) or low and middle (d:m:) played among the remaining four drums—*ìsájú, aguda, kànàngó*, and *omele*, the music pacer. Thus, the pitches of the refrains are as follows.

Song A1	*O ti ná wó o*	s:m: s:s: m:
Song A2	*Èyin l'emò*	d:m: m:d:
Song B2	*Kò r'oko*	d:m: m:
	Kò r'odo	d:m: d:

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