

YIRI

AS RECORDED BY KOKO

Instruments/ensembles/types of instrument

Balafon—similar to a xylophone (there are two—the second is lower in pitch)

African Drums:

- **Djembe**—played with the hands
- **Donno**—hour-glass shaped 'talking drum'
- **Dundun**—double headed drum played with sticks

Drumming Techniques:

Playing with the hands on the skin (different sounds are made if the fingers are open or closed)

Damping the skin when playing

Playing with hands on the wooden edge of the drum

Using sticks

Common features of African Music:

- Repetition/Ostinato
- Improvisation
- Cyclic Structures
- Polyphonic Textures

Melodic/Musical Devices:

- Call & Response
- Ostinati (on balafon and drum)

Rhythmic Devices:

Polyrhythmic—many different rhythms occurring in different layers i.e. uses polyrhythms

Cross-rhythms—rhythms that 'cross' the beat i.e. are very **syncopated/off-beat**

Purpose and Musical Style

Singing is a vital part of everyday life and is heard at religious ceremonies, rituals and celebrations—everyone takes part.

Oral tradition—passed on by mouth/learning by ear and copying, it is never usually written down

The group **Koko** are from Burkino Faso in West Africa—the leader sings and plays the balafon.

African drums were used to send messages from one village to another before telephones!

Structure

Intro:

1. Solo balafon
2. 2nd balafon joins in
3. Drums join in

Main Section:

1. Chorus 1—voices in unison
2. Short instrumental break
3. Chorus 2 —voices in unison
4. Call and response vocal sections with instrumental breaks/sections
5. Chorus again

Coda/Outro

1. Coda—5 repetitions of a riff with short, dramatic rests and then a final bell 'ting'



Three musical points about this song that I like/don't like:

Justify your points and use musical vocabulary

How are elements used?

There are three clear strands (groups) in the music:

1. **Balafon ostinati**—at various pitches according to the size of the instrument—in combination, these produce a **complex polyphonic texture**. The patterns are based on the **key of Gb**. The piece starts with a solo balafon (**monophonic texture**), with the 2nd balafon joining in after about 20 seconds. They also have short, improvised **balafon breaks** in between the sections that feature fast **tremolos** (rapid repetition of one note) etc. The balafon also joins in the 'response' with the singers in the call & response section.
2. **Drum ostinato**—between them, drums play a relentless one-bar pattern based on the rhythm **quaver—semiquaver—semiquaver** but occasionally **drop out of the texture to create variety**. The drums are at different pitches and include djembe, talking drum and dundun
3. **Vocal line**—at first the singers are all **unison** but later sing in a **call and response style**. This includes a solo 'call' (improvised) answered by a chorus (again in unison). The same music is used for each verse, with slight variation to fit the different lyrics. The vocal melodies are based on a **pentatonic scale**. Sometimes the chorus singers make vocal 'interjections' of the word *Yiri*

The leader of the group signals the initial tempo and rhythm of the piece and then controls changes of dynamics and texture.

What makes this music suitable for dancing/celebration?

- Steady tempo
- Constant time signature
- Strong and repetitive rhythms
- Call and response (everyone can join in)