

Fusion

Fusion is a major work that was composed with the intention of fusing the rhythmic styles of Ghana with the musical development and tradition of Western European music. It is written to be performed by eight or nine players using a combination of West African untuned drums struck either by the hand or with a stick, and European/North American tuned percussion: glockenspiel, vibraphone, xylophone and two marimbas with the addition of a kick bass drum from a drum kit. The score includes suggestions for Western alternatives in case of difficulty obtaining African drums.

The orchestration is for eight or nine players, each at a very accomplished level, in three sections:

1. Lead (one player): boba/floor tom-tom (see figure 1) and atsimevu/large tom-tom (see figure 2);
2. Tuned (three players): glockenspiel, xylophone, vibraphone, two marimbas;
3. Untuned (four or five players): sogo/medium tom-tom (see figure 3), kidi/small tom-tom or large conga (see figure 4), kaganu/small conga (see figure 5), gankogui/cow bell (see figure 6), atoke/small timbale (see figure 7), axatse/ cabaça or shaker (see figure 8) and kit bass drum played with a pedal.

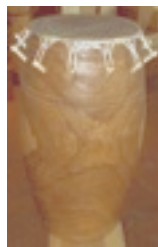


Figure 1 – Boba



Figure 2 – Atsimevu



Figure 3 – Sogo



Figure 4 – Kidi



Figure 5 – Kaganu



Figure 6 – Gankogui



Figure 7 – Atoke



Figure 8 - Axatse

The metallic glockenspiel and vibraphone provide different sounds from the wooden instruments. The vibraphone is a jazz instrument rather than a traditional African instrument; its use, along with that of the glockenspiel, is to enhance the notion of “fusion” as well as for musical and artistic variety. The vibraphone’s motor is off throughout to blend better with other instruments.

The performers are expected to vary the rhythms of the untuned instruments’ parts at will, at any time. Specifically, the metre can be fluid (even more than one may expect by marking *sempre rubato*), that is to say whilst the predominant metre is four in a bar, the bars need not always consist of four beats of equal value. At the micro-level there is often a four bar structure which has been chosen to reflect the dance nature of the African rhythms. This helps to ensure that the music sounds composed rather than a set of random rhythms. The fluidity introduced by the improvisations, in addition to compositional techniques discussed later, avoid a “foursquare” feeling to the music.

The untuned instruments can be played in three ways, with the open or closed hand or with a stick. The indications on the parts are:

- Play with the open hand
- + Play with the closed hand (on the side of the fist)
- Play with a hard wooden drumstick

The markings are usually only written the first time that a sticking indication is specified. For example, if two bars in succession are the same, sticking is only indicated on the first bar.

From time to time, players, in particular the lead player, are expected to put down and pick up the drumstick or sticks within a short amount of time. Care was taken to bear in mind the practicality of the finite time that these actions will take. For example in bar 16, where the player will need to take the sticks, a short rest has been added to allow him or her to pick up the sticks. During these beats three members of group

three take over the rhythm from the lead drummer. While there are practical reasons for the change, there is a musical benefit in places such as this because the brief change of orchestration provides a change of timbre.

Fusion comprises five movements, each with its own mood and character. The order of movements has been planned to ensure a large contrast of mood, form, tempo, style, tonality and texture between consecutive movements. The large contrast is a consequence of the breadth of development into different Western European traditions, which is the aim of the work.

The instruments played by the lead player are the same in each movement, giving a sense of completeness to the work. The instruments in the two other groups vary only slightly from movement to movement.

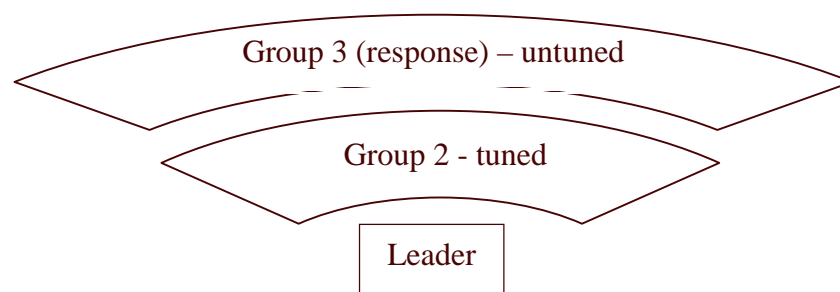


Figure 9 – layout of the performers on the stage

The problem of keeping the interest and imagination of the listener and performer during the performance of a work solely for percussion was one of the challenges that Fusion has overcome with the use of visual interplay between the groups of players in addition to the aforementioned fluidity of rhythm. Therefore, the layout of the players (see figure 9) is vital to the performance. During extended times when the leader plays alone, for example in bars 417-428 in the last movement, the eyes of the audience will be focussed on the lead player which is why s/he must be placed at a visual focal point at the centre of the two concentric semi-circles of the other performers. In addition, to help with this focussing, the stage would work best if the groups were also to be tiered vertically, that is to say that group three is higher than group two, which in turn is higher than the leader so that all players are highly visible to the audience.

Fusion is developed from a number of rhythms as documented by Locke (1998) with some additional rhythms documented by Martinez and Roscetti (2003). These rhythms are then developed to give an underlying mood to which a Western melody or approach of writing is added. Therefore, each of the five movements has its own characteristic mood. Once the mood has asserted itself through the underlying rhythm, the movement's form and melodies follow. Since the rhythms are dance rhythms, the tempo does not vary within a movement. However, the last movement includes more thematic and rhythmic development in a Western style, so the tempo in that movement does vary, this variance adds to the overall shape of the work.

Often several rhythmic patterns appear concurrently, and the resulting rhythm or polyrhythm creates a sketch of motif for the main theme. From this sketch comes a

character for the movement; it is this character that is then developed into the final version of the music. For example, each rhythm that is parts of the polyrhythm of the main section of the first movement appears in turn during bars 48-55, and in the third movement they are introduced in turn in bars 247-253.

When writing for melodic instruments, the method of modulation from one key to the next is usually via a bridge passage or pivot chord. The challenge here is how to modulate from one rhythm to the next between and within movements of well-defined sections with differing rhythms. The primary technique devised and implemented is to hand the baton of the rhythm from one section to the next in a process of “rhythmic modulation” which performs a similar function to modulation from one key to another. Where possible, this method of modulation is effected by introducing the new rhythmic section layer by layer, starting with one rhythm and adding cross rhythms part by part until all of the layers are playing; see for example bars 116-127. Sometimes the listener is deliberately deceived. Bar 452 for example, has the atsimvevu appearing to lead into the next section starting at bar 453 with a different tempo and rhythm than is actually used; where a similar change occurs later at bar 565 the same instrument plays the same trick, but this time it is in keeping with the new tempo and rhythm. Devices such as this can be used to move smoothly from one section and rhythm to the next where there is no equivalent to a pivot chord.

With each of the movements, the form comes from the motif or rhythm that is the germ of the movement. The material is not chosen or modified to suit the form; rather it is the other way around.

The first movement, marked *fast*, is in free form; it has simple, related melodies that are not widely developed and do not reappear, placed on top of a complex polyrhythmic structure. It is the rhythm that is the focal point of the movement, not the melody - which is why the layout of the performers is so important. This movement opens with a long introduction during which the leader and group three players introduce a number of rhythms consecutively and then maintain concurrently on a variety of instruments with differing tone colours, timbres (by using different hand/sticking marks and different instruments) and dynamics. This shows the complex polyrhythm of the music and to establishes its large scale.

At bar 56 the vibraphone introduces section ‘A’ (see figure 10) the short and simple principal melody of the first movement. The vibraphone plays the melody twice, *forte* then *mezzo piano*, to give the music a sense of memorability – it also helps the large scale structure by ensuring a good balance of proportion between the phrases; otherwise the importance of the first time that any melody appears in the music could be lost. The dynamic contrast also gives a sense of direction to the music and is an important feature of the work (for example this device is used again at bar 128). The melodies do not undergo rigorous melodic transformation or development; altering the rhythms achieves musical development since the principal nature of the piece is percussive. The melodic development that does take place is on a simple scale so as not to detract from the underlying rhythm.



Figure 10 – vibraphone bars56-61

After a short bridge passage in the untuned parts, the 1st marimba introduces section 'B' at bar 68 (figure 11), which is repeated in bar 70 with the marimbas playing in 7^{ths} then 9^{ths}.



Figure 11 – marimbas bars 68-71

There then follows a development section from bars 76-127, opening with the 1st marimba playing a diminished version of section 'B' which leads, without a recapitulation, to an extended coda section during which the tension eases as the music moves *segue* into the second movement with the indication *attacca*. The easing of tension is effected by a long, gradual diminuendo and by repeating shorter phrases from the start of the development section. This *segue* is smoothed by differing dynamic changes. The lead player, who will take the lead at the start of the second movement, has a crescendo to move the focus to that part at the same time as the rest of the players have a diminuendo, therefore the focus of the audience is drawn to that player at the centre of the stage.

The second movement, marked *slow*, is built upon a 12-tone row introduced twice by the vibraphone on the second beat of bar 187 (see figure 12) and re-introduced in an extended form by the 1st marimba at bar 195. The figure starts on the second beat of the bar to avoid a foursquare feeling to the music, which could easily happen because the underlying structure lasts four beats. By avoiding this feeling the rhythm, and hence the piece as a whole, does not sound predictable.



Figure 12 – vibraphone bars 187-189 (beat 1)

The tone row is a strong melodic figure that gives the second movement a different mood from the first thereby demonstrating the variety of atmospheres that a percussion ensemble can create. Use of a vibraphone in a prominent melodic role further underlines the mood of this movement because of its tone colour compared with the wooden instruments. Furthermore, the second movement differs from the first in that the melody from the second group of instrumentalists provides the basis of the movement, whereas the first movement grows from the *rhythm* of the lead player and the third group.

Following a brief bridge passage in the untuned group three at bar 205, the 1st marimba and vibraphone use short figures from the tone row and its inversion to move the music toward a recapitulation section which begins at bar 217, then to a coda which imitates the introduction.

The second movement closes in a deliberately non-final way to lead the listener on to the third movement, *moderato*, which begins at bar 247 with a building of layers that

recalls the introduction of the first movement, but uses different rhythms for the leader and third group.

In the third movement, the second (tuned) group has an ostinato rhythm, first played by the 1st marimba at bar 254 which is section 'A' (see figure 13). With the exception of bridging passages such as bars 262-264, this ostinato persists until near the end of the movement at bar 330. In contrast to the serialism of the second movement, the third movement is tonal and is in D major (the G# being a chromatic note).



Figure 13 – 1st marimba bar 254

A modified section 'A', 'A*', begins at bar 265, with the vibraphone playing a series of tone clusters against the melody in the 1st marimba. After a bridging passage at bar 270, section 'A' appears in an inverted form (figure 14).



Figure 14 – 1st marimba bar 273

This inverted version is then extended, leading to a modulation to E major at bar 277 and B major at bar 285 leading into section 'B', based on new material, at bar 294. In this section the ostinato rhythm of the marimba is used as a support to the melody played by the vibraphone (see figure 15).



Figure 15 – vibraphone and 1st marimba bars 293-296

A bridging passage, with new material from bar 301, modulates back to D major ready for the recapitulation of section 'A' at bar 315 and coda at bar 326. The recapitulation of section 'A', at *piano* rather than *mezzopiano*, gives the movement a sense of balance and of completeness.

The fourth movement, *andante moderato*, is in ABA form with an introduction and short coda. The 'A' section begins with an ostinato accompaniment in the 1st marimba (see figure 16) before the xylophone plays the melody at bar 346 (see figure 17).



Figure 16 – 1st marimba bars 341-342 this needs changing as the rhythms been changed



Figure 17 – xylophone bars 346-349

Section B, which starts in the 1st marimba at bar 361, forms a short, three-part fugata. The subject (see figure 18) is given a real answer, initially by the xylophone against the countersubject in the 1st marimba (see figure 19).

Figure 18 – subject: 1st marimba bars 361-362Figure 19 – first countersubject: 1st marimba bars 365-366

The xylophone answers the countersubject tonally; as does second counter subject, heard first in bar 365 (see figure 20).

Figure 20 – second countersubject: 1st marimba bars 367-368

There then follows a development section, starting at bar 369, in which an arpeggio figure, which is developed from the third and fourth beats of the subject, is played in a sequence in counterpoint against a figure derived from the first and second beats of the countersubject. This leads to the final section and coda.

The fifth, and final, movement, *allegro*, begins at bar 390, using the same build up of rhythms as in the first movement, though to avoid a repetition of ideas this time the build up takes fewer bars and the rhythmic structure built from the cross rhythms is less complex.

The fifth movement is in a free form using three melodic sections. Group two builds up from bar 398 section 'A' (see figure 21) in three tiers played on the two marimbas. The rhythm of this figure is chosen to reinforce the 12/8 metre, which given that it lasts exactly 8 beats could easily lead to a foursquare feel as it is extended and developed, so the figure starts after a quaver's rest, and finishes on the first quaver of bar 400. Against this, the uncertainty of the harmony gives an edge that drives the music. The key is G minor but the use of E naturals as one would find in the Dorian mode also pull toward F major; it is this which gives an edge to the harmony.

Figure 21 – 1st marimba bars 398-399

The music is written to suggest that the build up from bar 398 will be repeated from bar 408. However after six bars the build up is interrupted by an interlude for the untuned instruments, starting with the lead drum, which leads to a real recapitulation of section 'A' at bar 430, though with a faster rhythm in the bass drum where

crotchets replace minims to give a sense of forward direction and momentum to the music.

A bridging passage leads to a 3/4 section in the untuned instruments. This section is repeated to give the listener a sense of the metre and to instil an unsettling feeling (a feeling caused by the 3/4 feel in the *atsimevu* against the 2/4 feel in the *gankogui*) before a calmer section in common time, marked *meno mosso*. The juxtaposition of the 3/4 section and the reduction in tempo emphasises the sense of relaxation at bar 453

The *meno mosso* section starts with untuned instruments alone until the start of section 'B' at bar 490. Since this is a long passage of rhythm only, interest is maintained by varying the rhythm, timbres and dynamics, in a similar way to the introduction to the first movement. By introducing a number of bars at *pianissimo*, a section of expectation is created leading to the entry of the 1st marimba with a one bar motif which is a common-time development of the opening melody (see figure 22).



Figure 22 – 1st marimba bar 490

Extra layers of counterpoint are added one by one in the 2nd marimba (see figure 23), 1st marimba (see figure 24) and, finally, the xylophone (see figure 25) as the music has a slight crescendo from *pianissimo* to *mezzo piano*.



Figure 23 – 2nd marimba bar 493



Figure 24 – 1st marimba bar 495



Figure 25 – xylophone bar 497

The faster tempo at bar 514 marked *più mosso*), a move from G minor to G major, a dominant pedal and the use of semi-quavers in the xylophone and 1st marimba combine to give a feeling of exuberance. This is the only optimistic passage of all the movements; an optimism that is emphasised by the use a new melody, section 'C' in the xylophone (see figure 26) at bar 528



Figure 26 – xylophone bars 528-531

After a bridge passage, group two recapitulates section 'B' (from bar 490) at the new tempo at bar 538, leading to a reprise of section 'C' from bar 543. The reuse of material from sections 'B' and 'C' at the faster speed consolidates the movement, reduces tension, gives a sense of completeness and helps to continue to drive the music forward and reinforces the jubilant mood.

The 3/4 section from bar 444 is reintroduced at bar 553 but whereas the 3/4 time signature was previously used to unsettle and to give contrast prior to a calmer section, here it is used to continue to drive the music on, this time to the increase of tempo to *allegro vivace* at bar 566. This difference of expectation and direction comes from the crescendo in the *atsimevu* in bar 565 compared with its slower figure in bar 451.

The *vivace* section forms the coda to the movement, with both figures 'A' (represented in the major in simple 4/4 compared with the earlier minor key in compound 12/8) and 'C' being presented in counterpoint. The section is extended with an *accelerando* to a final, brief, recollection of section 'C'.

The *sogo* part is marked optional at bar 568. Fusion calls for eight players; however, it is recognised that it will be easier to perform with nine, hence the marking in the *sogo* part at the end for use if there are nine players.

Acknowledgments

Figures 1-8 were taken from the website <http://www.thedrummerslounge.com/>

Many rhythms were taken from, or derived from, rhythms found in Locke (1998) and Martinez and Roscetti (2003)

Bibliography

Locke, David. 1998. *Drum Gahu* (Tempe, AZ, USA: White Cliffs Media)

Martinez, Maria and Roscetti, Ed. 2004. *World Beat Rhythms, Beyond the Drum Circle Africa* (Cheltenham East, Victoria, Australia: Hal Leonard)