



Ancient Text Messages of the Yoruba Bata Drum: Cracking the Code (SOAS Musicology Series)

Amanda Villepastour

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The bata is one of the most important and representative percussion traditions of the people in southwest Nigeria, and is now learnt and performed around the world. In Cuba, their own bata tradition derives from the Yoruba bata from Africa yet has had far more research attention than its African predecessor. Although the bata is one of the oldest known Yoruba drumming traditions, the drum and its unique language are now unfamiliar to many contemporary Yoruba people. Amanda Villepastour provides the first academic study of the bata's communication technology and the elaborate coded spoken language of bata drummers, which they refer to as 'ena bata'. Villepastour explains how the bata drummers' speech encoding method links into universal linguistic properties, unknown to the musicians themselves. The analysis draws the direct links between what is spoken in Yoruba, how Yoruba is transformed into the coded language (ena), how ena prescribes the drum strokes and, finally, how listeners (and which listeners) extract linguistic meaning from what is drummed. The description and analysis of this unique musical system adds substantially to what is known about bata drumming specifically, Yoruba drumming generally, speech surrogacy in music and coded systems of speaking. This book will appeal not only to ethnomusicologists and anthropologists, but also to linguists, drummers and those interested in African Studies.

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