

Notes on the Sound Installation (by Andrew J. Eisenberg)

Track A. *A sound collage composed of field recordings from Ghana, Kenya, and Mali.*

In this composition I combine excerpts of my own field recordings with those of Steven Feld, David Novak, and Ryan Thomas Skinner. Some of the recordings feature musical sounds; others feature environmental sounds. All the recordings, even the musical ones, offer a vivid sense of a momentary “soundscape.” Aside from a small amount of overlapping and cross-fading (and a touch of looping), I have not manipulated the sounds of original recordings. Aesthetically, the piece is meant to offer a sense of expansion: shorter clips are featured in the beginning; by the end, longer excerpts are introduced. But whatever this composition might say is to be found in the juxtapositions of geographically and culturally distinct soundscapes from sub-Saharan Africa.

In order of emergence, the featured excerpts are as follows:

- ***Morning Walk, Noumbouri* (recordist: Ryan Thomas Skinner; Dogon Country, Mali, 2007).** “At four in the morning I awoke to a cacophony of other-worldly sounds in the village of Noumbouri along the Bandiagara cliffs in the Dogon Country. I never saw the frogs, but their low-pitched vibrating croaks seemed to surround our mudbrick compound, inside and out, echoing off the cliff walls in the distance.”
- ***M.V. Labadi* (Steven Feld; Ghana, 2005).** This recording is from the commercial release *THE TIME OF BELLS, 3: Musical Bells of Accra, Ghana* (VoxLox 2005, used by permission). Performed by John Boye “Hello Joe” Mensah and the La Driver’s Union Por Por Group, this song is “dedicated to the late Ataa Anangbi Anangfi... [It is] about the life of drivers on the road. M.V. Labadi, owned by pioneer transport operator Ataa Anangbi Anangfi... was a famous *trotro* [public minibus] on the Accra to Takoradi (Ghana’s first harbor) route in the 1950’s and 1960’s... The piece uses the Ewe *agbadza* rhythm, and Nii Otoo Annan accompanies the group on *sontin adeka* (‘something box’), a wooden box seat mbira with three keys” (from the liner notes to *THE TIME OF BELLS, 3*).
- ***Dogon Greetings* (David Novak; Mali, 2006).** “Traveling by foot in ‘Dogon Country’ in the central/southern plains of Mali on market day, passersby hail each other on the road with long strings of ritualized phrases in elaborate greetings. These begin with “*Seu?*” (How are you?) and go on to “How’s your mother?” “How’s your father?” etc. Here I splice together three different instances of greetings including a few unison responses by groups of women. As they greet each other, neither party pauses in their forward progress, but completes the formula over their shoulders as they pass.”
- ***Boat Making* (Ryan Thomas Skinner; Mopti, Mali, 2007).** “The lifeworld of Mopti is the Niger River. It is where people fish. It is re-directed to irrigate fields of rice and grain. It is used to wash clothes, fetch water, and service any number of daily activities, salubrious or not. Here, I walk into a boat-making workshop

- on the sandy banks of the Joliba, or Niger. The sounds are of iron and wood, creating everyday rhythms so complex and redundant that they hover at the cusp of expressive culture.”
- ***Reggae G 10* (Andrew J. Eisenberg; Watamu, Kenya, 2006).** An innovative “reggae” performance on traditional Mijikenda instruments (including the *kayamba* shaker) by members of a cultural organization (MADCA). The composition was put together for a local festival that honors a female hero of the anti-colonial struggle, Mekatilili wa Menza. The lyrics speak of national (Kenyan) heroes in the same breath as local Mijikenda heroes.
 - ***Maskani ya 2006* (Andrew J. Eisenberg; Mombasa, Kenya, 2006).** A Hadrami Arab *tarab* song performed at a men’s wedding celebration. Hadrami men’s wedding celebrations are traditional events centered on the ritual preparation of the groom for the consummation of the marriage. They are also quite raucous, as is clearly audible. The oudist and singer here is Zein L’Abdin, who is better known as a performer of Swahili music than Hadrami Arab music. His Swahili accent is noticeable, but it doesn’t much matter in this song that celebrates the linguistic pluralism of the Kenyan coast: the lyrics switch between Arabic, Swahili, Somali, Hindi, Italian, and English.
 - ***Medina Coura Marriage* (Ryan Thomas Skinner; Bamako, Mali, 2006).** “Walking the city in Bamako, the mechanized noise of traffic meets the animated signal of expressive culture, itself amplified by the beaten-up circuits of Third World sound systems. Technology extends as much as it degrades urban aurality in Bamako today. Here, I approach and listen in to an outdoor wedding party which had blocked off a residential block in the Medina Coura neighborhood in central Bamako.”
 - ***Powerful Bells: Performance at National Arts Centre* (Steven Feld; Accra, Ghana, 2004).** Also from the commercial release *THE TIME OF BELLS, 3: Musical Bells of Accra, Ghana* (VoxLox 2005, used by permission). “Nii Darku Ankrah leads on a double bell *gankogui*, and the three supporting parts are played by Benjamin Kotei on the second *gankogui*, Joseph ‘JoJo’ Kisseh, playing *dawuro* banana leaf bell, struck with an iron rod, and ‘SS’ Appiah Patrick Yeboah playing *ododampo*, a two-piece finger bell. Nii Darku and Benjamin illustrate a range of interlocking double bell patterns in the kpanlogo rhythm (Ga), creating diverse timbres by damping the larger bell on the thigh, and using stick techniques for striking different points inside and outside the bell. The songs are sung alternately in Ga and Akan... Applause from an enthusiastic crowd set off a danced tag for bells and *donno* ‘talking’ drum” (from the liner notes to *THE TIME OF BELLS, 3*).
 - ***Maulidi Zefe* (Andrew J. Eisenberg; Lamu, Kenya, 2005).** Every year thousands of Muslim pilgrims and a few tourists and ethnographers come to the small island of Lamu on the Kenyan coast for the festivities associated with the local *Maulidi* (festival in honor of the birthday of Prophet Mohammed). The *zefe* (procession) happens at the waterfront. Madrassas from all over East Africa come to participate, singing their maulidi songs while accompanying themselves on *matwari* frame drums. I made the recording while standing with other spectators on the roof of a small building, the procession passing below.

- ***In and Out of a Bar* (David Novak; Bamako, Mali, 2006).** “We walked into an impromptu open-air bar where the Dakar-Niger rails meet the road out of N’Tomikorobougou, on their way to Kati. Initially curious, the piercing praise song proved too intense for our tired ears. We followed the rails back into town” (Ryan Thomas Skinner).

Track B. Excerpt of a lecture by Melville J. Herskovits (from the archives of Northwestern University).

The lecture, entitled “The Negro in America,” was delivered on March 26, 1937. The excerpt exemplifies Herskovits’s attempt to bring historical and anthropological methods to bear on the question of “African retentions” in African American culture.

Track C. Chinua Achebe on Biafra and “Myth-Making” (from the archives of Northwestern University).

In 1969, writer Chinua Achebe visited Northwestern University to discuss African art and politics with the University’s Program of African Studies. At the time, he was a representative of the secessionist Biafra state in southeastern Nigeria, which would soon be dissolved in a violent civil war. In this excerpt, we hear Achebe in the role of a skillful yet intellectually honest national ambassador.