



(LAS 7315)

**AFRO-BRAZILIAN RELIGIOUS SONGS:
CANTIGAS DE CANDOMBLE/CANDOMBLE SONGS
from Salvador, Bahia, Brazil**

The city of Salvador, in the Northeastern state of Bahia, has become in recent years the holy city of Brazilian popular religions. It previously recognized importance as a major regional center of Afro-Brazilian religions now extends to the whole country, as the result of the vast multiplication everywhere of cult centers of various religious affiliations. Many cult leaders, from Porto Alegre in the South to Belem in the North, make pilgrimages to Bahia to pay their respect to such venerated maes de santo or Olga do Alaketo. Such leaders belong to the Ketu, or Gete-Nago group, the most African-related cult of the area, since they maintain the closest relationship to the religious belief system and practices of the Yoruba and Fon people of West Africa. Some of the oldest cult centers in Bahia (Gantois, Alaketo, Axe Opo Afonja, Casa Branca, etc.) are held locally as the most orthodox candombles (locale of the ceremonies, from candombe+ile, the “house of the dance”), and establish the models for proper ritual practice and behavior. But hundreds of smaller, more modest centers professing the same Gege-Nago affiliation proliferate throughout the city and often bring about changes considered improper by the members of the more established centers, who think of themselves as the “true” holders of the tradition. One example is the alteration of the Yoruba and Fon languages in the songtexts, resulting from a general lack of literal understanding of such texts by most cult members, although the overall meaning and function of a given song remain clear to all.

The music on this recording was selected from a large collection gathered in and around Salvador, Bahia, during the period 1967-1975. All selections were recorded in the context of the actual ceremonies studied, all in Ketu or Geg-Nago cult houses. The songs have Yoruba texts, with occasional Portuguese words used as exclamations. The present songs functioning in public ceremonies, known as Oro, which follow well-set sequence of songs. The oro is divided into two parts, the first one being a "Call to the Gods," the second the "Presence of the Gods." The main liturgical function of the first part is to bring about spirit possession which signifies the response of the gods (orishas or vodouns). This is done through ritual dancing and music exclusively. For the second part, the possessed initiates are paraphernalia for the various gods that they personify. They are expected to act and react to each other according to specific myths involving the major deities of the Yoruba pantheon.

TRACKS:

1. AVANINHA. This is a special drum rhythm, made up of three parts which is used for the entrance of the initiates (yawos) into the main ceremonial dancing room (barracao). The same rhythm generally occurs at the very end of the oro. Ketu drumming involves three drums of different sizes, cone-shaped, single-headed, played with sticks (the largest drum, rum, requires only one stick). The cowbell, known as agogo, is struck with a metal stick.

2. OSHOSSI. The hunting god, Oshossi, is called through special songs, like these always accompanied by the special rhythm known as aguere of Oshossi. In theory, seven songs should be performed with the aguere rhythm in the oro, but in practice the number of songs depends on the special occasion of a particular ceremony, on the presence or not of initiates to that particular deity, and on the soloist leader. Song texts (that cannot be given here) refer to Ode, the "hunter" and to Omorode, the "son of the hunter."

3. OSHUMARE. The Yoruba deity Oshumare who symbolizes the rainbow is invoked here through appropriate songs: "Oshumae, le le male, Oshumare" At the center where these songs were recorded, this deity is particularly important. Such an importance is apparent in the pressing rhythmic patterns of the rum (the largest, improvising drum) played by the master drummer. The words "arro boboi" represent a special greeting to Oshumare who manifested himself through the Fon people of Dahomey [now the Republic of Benin] as the Vodoun Dan, represented by a snake biting its tail, a symbol of universal life continuity. The Bahian song repertory maintains the identity of the Fon god, and this recognition is signified in the second song of this selection, when the rhythm of the drums switch to a typical Gege rhythm and the song text to the Fon language, referring to "Odan Isudan." This switch also signals to the yawos the change of choreography from Oshumare to Dan dance figures.

4. OGUM The orisha of metal (iron), the warrior, Ogum of the Yoruba is known as Gu by the Fon. He enjoys a wide popularity in Bahia, as a powerful, male deity. The particular song here ("Cola, cola") was performed in the context of the oro to bring about the presence of Ogum. Again, the lowest drum's improvised variants of its established

rhythmic patterns become faster and shorter in time as the drum makes its calls to the god more insistent. Particularly characteristic here is the well achieved balance in the call-and-response effect between the chorus and the soloist. Also typical are the rejoicing shouts of the participants when possession becomes imminent.

5. ADARRUM. A very long passage of the oro (hence the fade-in and fade-out techniques in this excerpt) is the appearance of possession that may affect part or all of the yawos. If by the end of the first part of the oro only a few possessions have occurred and a special rhythm known as adarrum is performed in certain cult houses. The function of such a rhythm is to call the supraliminal intensity and the fast tempo of the rhythm. In this recorded example, one can clearly notice how the adarrum was suddenly brought about. The timing of the leader was perfect -- from his singing to the deity Ohum, he immediately cued the initiates by calling for the adarrum, so that they would know that this was the final call for spirit possession. Thus, religious behavior was dictated through musical means alone.

6. AGOLONA. This particular song, Agolona signals the beginning of the second part of the oro, the "presence of the gods." With the drum accompaniment of a bata rhythm (reserved for some of the most important liturgical moments), this song is performed for the entrance of the orishas (all dressed up with their appropriate garments and holding their sacred tools) into the main dancing room of the cult center. It is a very solemn moment as it represents the expected fulfillment of the occasion, i.e., the coming on earth of the African gods.

7. OGUM. One by one, the gods present during the second part of the oro will dance to a series of songs appropriate for each of them. The number of songs for each god varies according to the occasion; for example, if the oro is being held for a specific yawo's rite (Portuguese "obrigacao"), more songs will be performed for her or his god. This and the next excerpts were recorded for an Ogum obrigacao.

8. OGUM Two songs (the second with considerable repetition, hence the presence of the fade out) for Ogum with Ijesha drum accompaniment. Among the Geg-Nago groups, drumming is done with sticks. The only exception to this general practice is the so-called Ijesha drumming, done exclusively with bare hands. The tempo of Ijesha rhythms is generally much slower than this performance.

9. OXALA. This is part of the Oxala Round which takes place in general at the end of the oro. Oxala or Obatala is the orisha of creation, one of the most venerated gods of the Bahian people. Once more, the Oxala Round is accompanied by the bata rhythm.

10. OXALA. Another example of songs with Ijesha rhythmic accompaniment. Prayers (orikis) and words of praise are added to the songs by the babalorixa.

11. EXU. The Legba (or Elegaba) of the Fon has the same attributes of the Yoruba Exu, the messenger of the gods, often associated with the devil because of his tricking nature. Almost all ceremonies of Ketu or Gege candomble begin with an offering to Exu, in

order to “send him away” (Portuguese “despacho do Exu”) and thus to assure the proper course of the ceremony. For the “despacho” three to seven songs are performed. All follow the agogo (bell) 12-beat pattern and reveal the prevailing pentatonic scale D-B-A-G-E.

12 & 13. SAIDA DE YAWOS. The Saida (literally “exit”) is part of the initiatory rites. After several weeks or months of seclusion, the initiating persons come out of the runko (or convent) to dance in the barracao. The first song here, Yawa, bewao (Yawo, come and dance) (Band 6), accompanies the initiates’ entrance into the barracao. The song Yawao, eto Gege entrance into the barracao. The song Yawo, eto Gege (Band 7) is a special greeting sone to the initiates, while the other, Kole, kile, mixare Ogum-O, is for Ogum, the god of the first yawo of this particular group of initiates.

14. DRUM “BAPTISM.” The sacralization of drums is another important ceremony of Bahian condoble, since they are the main vehicle of communication with the gods. Oriki or prayers are said at the beginning of the ceremony concurrently with the consultation of Ifa, the West African god of divination,. The applause at the end of the oriki indicates a positive sign of the divination game. The “baptism” is one of the few musical occasions in which singing is accompanied by the agogo alone or the adja or xere (rattles).



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