

AFRO-CUBAN MUSIC - A brief description

This music, designed to uplift the spirit, has its roots in West Africa. Through the slave trade, it was taken to Cuba, where the African traditions were maintained. African musical styles continue to connect Cuba to the motherland, as reflected in the hallmarks of call and response songs, driving rhythms and passionate dances, designed to create a public celebration, where all are invited to participate. Drum, voice & dance containing *aché* (power of command) explode into evocative spirit that heals, transforms and consoles.

We will be focusing on the music of the Yoruba people, whose spiritual traditions are celebrated through the use of drum, voice and dance, all integral components of praise. Each discipline holds an intricate and critical role in the ancient system of communicating with the deities (Orishas). The Orishas, acting as go-betweens, carry messages between mortals and a mono-theistic being.

Each Orisha has their own unique songs, rhythms and dances designed to summon their presence among the people and guide, teach, assist, heal and inspire. The complex pantheon of the Yoruba religion contains multitudes of Orishas. I have chosen to teach one of numerous songs of a major Orisha called Elegua, because it is he who acts as an intermediary between human beings and all the other Orishas.

ELEGUA

Saint: The Holy Child of Atocha.

Colors: Red and black

Number: Three

Ornaments: Elegua is never without his "garabato", the shepherd's hook (sometimes only a crooked stick or club) with which he clears the roads and metes out punishment.

Elegua is the guardian of entrances, roads and paths. He is the first Orisha to be invoked in a ceremony and the last one to be bid farewell. He has to be first in anything, just like a spoiled child. The first rhythms of the drums belong to him. He must be petitioned before all the oracles.

He is the trickster, and is feared because, with so much power controlled only by his whim, great harm may result from his practical jokes. Like a very large and powerful child, he is ruthless with those who cross his path when he is in the midst of a tantrum.

Elegua appears to travelers as a small child with the face of an old man, wearing a Panama hat and smoking a good cigar. He takes on other guises in order to play his tricks and to measure the level of charity and compassion among human beings.

Elegua is one of the fiercest warriors in the Yoruba pantheon. When joined with Ogun, Oshosi and Osun in battle, nothing can stand in their way.

INSTRUMENTATION:

This music is based on drums, clave (two small wooden sticks), bell (hoe blade called guataca) and shekere (large, round gourd with a beaded net). Ensembles containing some or all of these instruments serve as a rhythmic bed for song and dances in religious and non-religious contexts.

QuickTime™ and a decompressor are needed to see this picture.

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Conga Drum

Clave

Bell (Guataca)

Shekere