

4

NIGERIA: OLOKUN

Francis Awe, Rebecca Slavin and Jill Beck

4.1 EXCERPTED SUMMARY

Olokun is the goddess of motherhood in Yoruba cosmology. A traditional belief of the Yoruba people, who live primarily in the southwest area of Nigeria, is that Olokun, the mother of all the universe, lives at the bottom of the ocean. The goddess is symbolized by water, cleansing, and purity. In some Yoruba villages, Olokun is also seen as a male deity, since to the Yoruba people, both masculine and feminine traits are clearly apparent in the joint parental responsibilities of child-rearing. Dances in praise of Olokun are performed primarily by Olokun worshippers, but the entire audience can participate, and any dancer may learn the dances as part of his/her repertoire. The dance presented in this chapter is recently choreographed, but is representative of the long tradition of dances created in honor of the goddess. Many performances occur throughout the year, but they are particularly numerous in August, which is the time of the Olokun festival. Performances may last many hours, as the energy and creativity of the dancers and musicians are renewed by their sense of the presence of Olokun. The dancers wear white, which is symbolic of cleansing and purity. The movements of the dance range from slow and fluid to quick and agitated. Through these varying movements and qualities, the dancers show the many aspects of both water and motherhood: calm and gentle; forceful and strong.

4.2 MATERIALS

Audio CD
Loose fitting white apparel for each performer
A white kerchief for the heads of the performers

4.3 OBJECTIVES

1. To experience a dance in which the purpose is to free one's thoughts and spirit in order to develop a benevolent attitude that will extend to others
2. To explore the effectiveness of gestures and body movements for conveying qualities associated with water and parenting
3. To understand that this dance is both for Olokun worshippers and the community (audience) to participate in and enjoy
4. To link stylistic aspects of the dance with Yoruba culture and cosmology

4.4 RECONSTRUCTION STRATEGIES

1. Introduce the theme and context of the dance.
2. Begin movement practice by learning and practicing the basic steps of each motif.
3. Practice the movements of the dance that are fluid, delicate and graceful. See motifs 10, 19.
4. Practice the movements of the dance that are forceful and strong. See motifs 2, 8, 9, 15, 16.
5. Discuss and practice the contrast between the two different kinds of movement. For example: compare the forceful movements in motif 2 with the softer movements from motif 10.
6. Learn a number of motifs in sequence. It is not necessary to learn the entire dance in order to gain a strong impression of the ways in which the body is used, and of the immersive quality that successful performance requires. Score readers and dancers of different abilities can select and arrange appropriate motifs.
7. Discuss the style of the dance, and how its movements are affected by what the dance strives to communicate. Practice the dance repeatedly, attempting to refine and perform clearly its style and intent.
8. Discuss potential elements of individual interpretation that would be appropriate in this dance.

4.5 ASSESSMENT

Students could be evaluated on the following:

1. Correct performance of the dance, in its movements and style
2. A written description of the focused intent and emotions that the dance requires and of the experience of performing it
3. A basic understanding of Yoruba culture and cosmology
4. Comparisons of this dance with another in the collection, such as *Viva Jujuy!* In the *bailecito*, dancers move with subtle restraint with an actual partner. *Olokun* is very different. How?

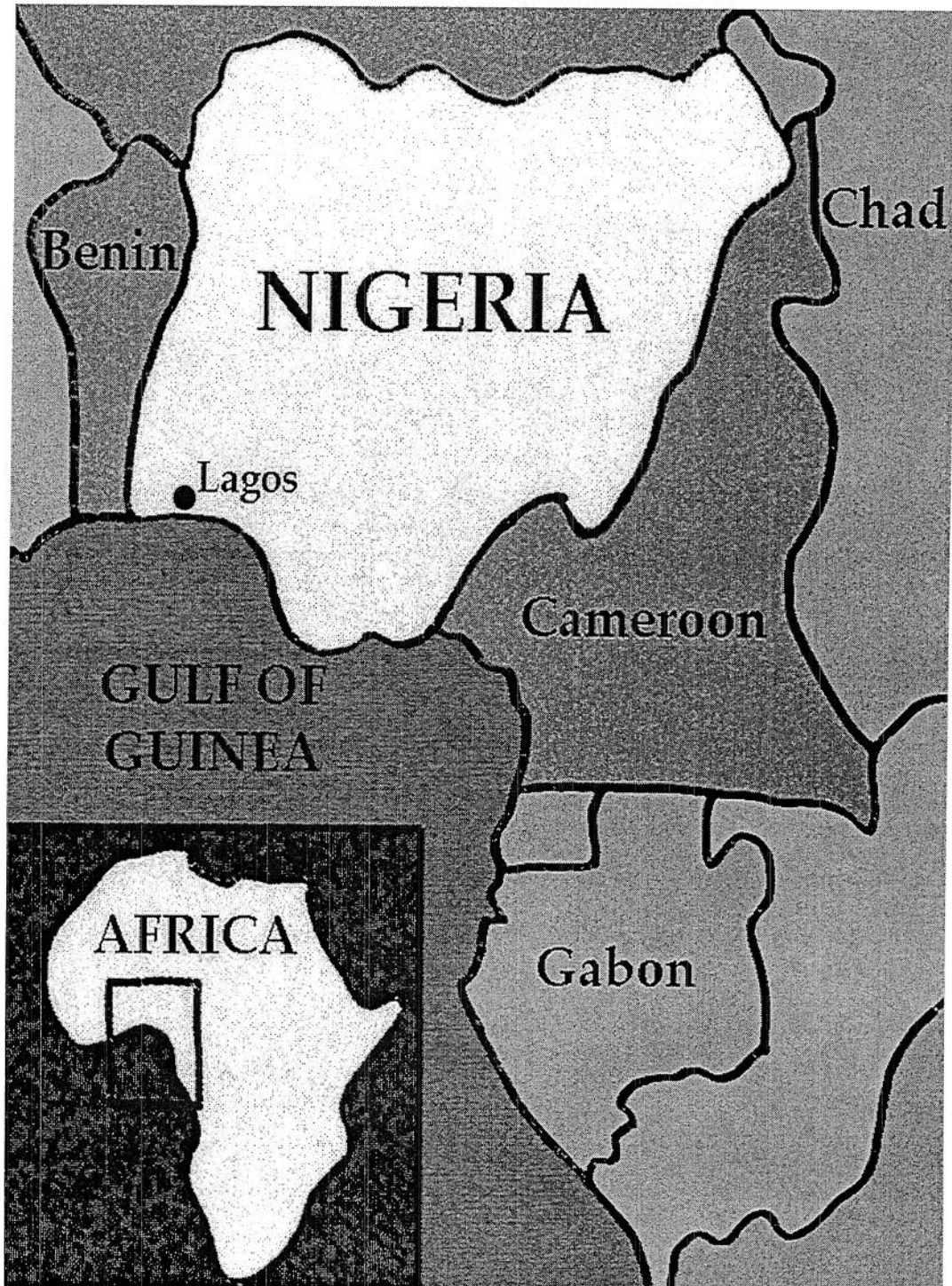


Illustration 45
MAP OF NIGERIA

Showing the former capitol of Lagos. The Yoruba people live primarily in the southwest of Nigeria.

4.6 NIGERIA: OLOKUN

Olokun is the goddess of motherhood in Yoruba cosmology. A traditional belief of the Yoruba people, who live primarily in the southwest area of Nigeria, is that Olokun, the mother of all the universe, lives at the bottom of the ocean. The goddess is symbolized by water, cleansing, and purity. In some Yoruba villages, Olokun is also seen as a male deity since to the Yoruba people, both masculine and feminine traits are clearly apparent in the joint parental responsibilities of child-rearing.

There exist a number of dances dedicated to Olokun, and they share certain characteristics. Dances in praise of Olokun are performed primarily by Olokun worshippers, but the entire audience can participate, and any dancer may learn the dances as part of his/her repertoire. Many performances occur throughout the year, but they are particularly numerous in August, which is the time of the Olokun festival. Performances may last many hours, as the energy and creativity of the dancers and musicians are renewed by their sense of the presence of Olokun. The dancers wear white, which is symbolic of cleansing and purity. The movements of Olokun dances range from slow and fluid to quick and agitated. Through these varying movements and qualities, the dancers show the many aspects of both water and motherhood: calm and gentle; forceful and strong.

Omowale Orisayomi* arranged the dance in honor of Olokun that is presented here. The dance is attributed to her experience of the deity coming to her in a dream one night and, in Francis Awe's words, "the song of Olokun was dedicated to her when she was asleep." She awoke the next morning and told Francis to write her remembered images down immediately. Omowale takes no claim or credit for the notated dance because, as Francis states, she "did it the way it was dictated to her," as an inspiration from Olokun.

In the first section of the dance, the dancers gently express the nurturing qualities of Olokun and of motherhood in general. Movements are fluid, graceful and calm, very much like the behavior of still water.

At a certain moment in the dance, the dancers symbolically go to the water to wash themselves, cleansing their hair as they also cleanse their minds and spirits. Traditional belief decrees that at a certain point in Olokun dances, if the dancer is free of internal conflict and negativity, he/she may hear Olokun and be motivated by her to improvise dance steps and gestures. The improvised movements in the dance documented in this chapter became forceful and agitated, showing the alternate side of water and mothering, forces both awesome and deserving of great respect. The dancers chanted "The mother is dancing; forcefully, vigorously."

*Omowale Orisayomi is the wife of Francis Awe.

Musicians may also play their instruments according to inspiration from Olokun. All Yoruba dancers and musicians wish for this connection to happen. It is physically and spiritually a very energizing experience. Both dancers and musicians testify that they may be so moved by the spirit of Olokun that they may not even remember what they played or danced. However, they do know that the "possession," or extreme empathy with the powers of the natural world, have indeed happened.

Listen to the drumming on the audio CD that accompanies the Olokun dance, before dancing it for the first time. It will help you discover the changing moods of this dance, which are both gentle and forceful. This dance is one that could be performed by both Olokun worshippers and others in a Nigerian village. It may be repeated and improvised as long as desired. However, when the dance is performed in a formal setting, such as a theatre, the length is predetermined by the performers.

Francis Awe stresses the importance of the connection in the dance between its movements and water: "Olokun is water. And one thing is very, very true about water; it does not stand still. It moves. It moves. So, you move in your movement and if you see the Olokun dance, a lot of places simulate the flowing of movement of water. And those are very, very important. But the meaning of that in life is that we all know that nothing can block the way of water. Nothing ever stops water from flowing. It may not be able to maintain a straight path but nothing can prevent or block water from flowing. So, it always finds a way. This means that whatever we dance, nothing can stop it from happening".¹

4.7 COSTUMES FOR MEN AND WOMEN

The performers who dance for Olokun wear all white; the costumes are again symbolic of the purity of the goddess, of water, and of the quest for purity of mind and spirit. Both men and women wear fabric draped loosely around the torso and a kerchief wrapped around the head. Women wear a straight, wrap-around knee-length skirt. Men wear loose-fitting pants.

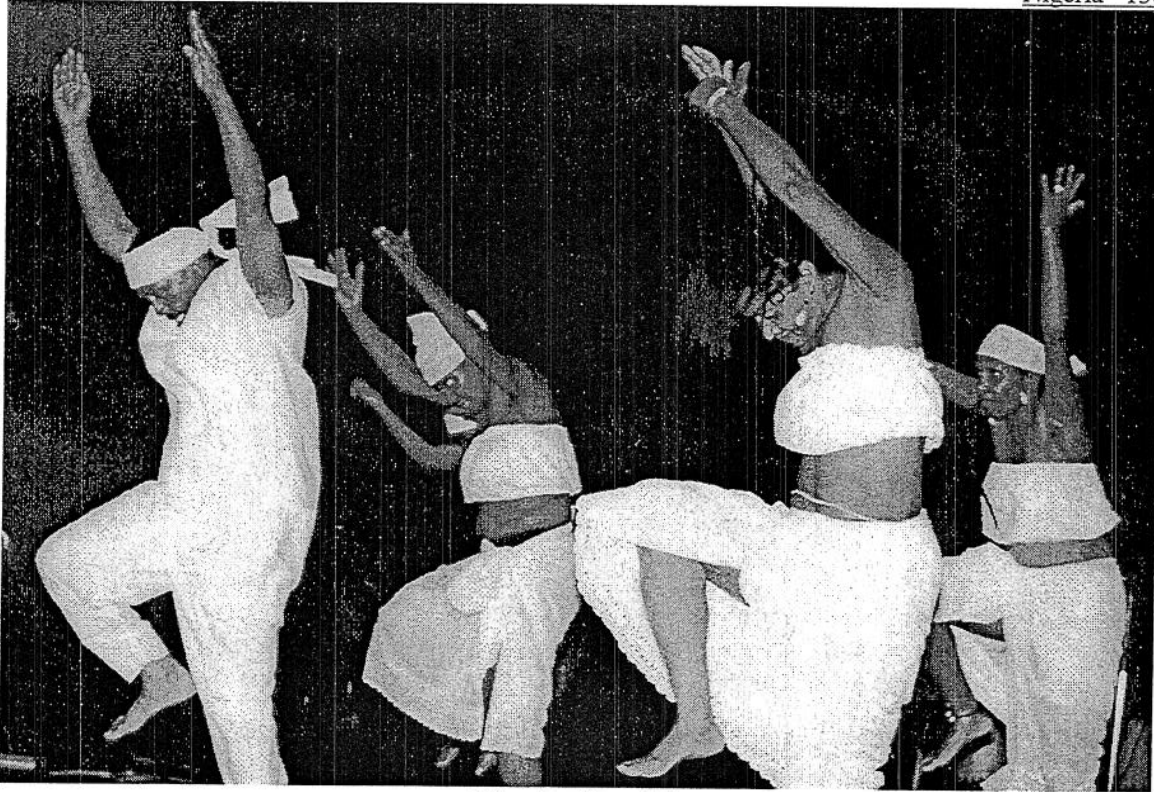


Illustration 46

Dancers performing in costume in honor of *Olokun*. Photo courtesy of Francis Awe

4.8 MUSICAL INSTRUMENTS

The music for this dance to Olokun incorporates the use of drumming as well as chanting. The beginning of the song opens with the literally translated words:

“My mother, my mother, this is my mother.”

This opening phrase refers to Olokun, Goddess of the Sea, regarded in the Yoruban culture as the spiritual mother of the universe.

In general, Yoruba dances use several different drums as accompaniment. Some of these drums are specifically used for certain tribal dances. Though all of them “talk”, none are as clear as the Talking Drum, or lead drummer. Francis Awe believes that “listening to the drummer and making sure that you are speaking the language of the lead drummer” is most important.



Illustration 47

Francis Awe, playing the Talking Drum, with his daughter
Photo courtesy of Francis Awe

The Nigerian Talking Drum is the main instrument used by Awe. In fact, “the Nigerian Talking Drum Ensemble was formed by Awe in response to the growing interest in the Talking Drum. Audiences, both young and old, are often amazed by the size and sound of the drum. The drummer hangs the drum on his shoulder and beats it with a curved stick. Thus, the drummer is free to move about during the performance. Also, the master drummer is able to control the tonal sounds of the drum by varying the pressure on the tensions that cover the drum. Young audiences are particularly delighted by the drummer who makes his instrument “talk” in various tones.”²



Illustration 48

Francis Awe playing the Talking Drum with a curved stick

The Yoruba name for the Talking Drum is Dundun, which means “sweet sound” and the drum is very versatile in its tones. It is called the Talking Drum because of its ability to emulate exactly the tonal sounds of the Yoruba language.

4.9 TERMINOLOGY

These terms are pronounced in Selection 13 of the audio CD.

Olokun: Goddess of the Sea, Lord of the Sea, The one who knows

Deity: Godhood; state of being a god or goddess; divine quality or nature

Ojúbo: the Olokun shrine

Àla: white loin cloth that the men and women wear

Bubá: white blouse that the women wear

Ilékè: coral beads

Dundun: name for the Talking Drum which means “sweet sound”. The first syllable “Dun” means sweet and the second syllable “dun” means sound.

4.10 ON DANCING THE OLOKUN, with quotes from Francis Awe

Olokun can be danced either as a ritual dance, performed at the shrine, or as a ceremonial/celebratory dance, performed at a festival.

“Before you start to dance, whether you are in the shrine or in a social gathering, there must be happiness. A dance, particularly in the shrine, must be done according to what brought you there. If you come to request something (a gift), let’s say the gift of childbearing, or you want to be prosperous, or you want to be healed from something (disease), let your energy indicate those. Because the more serious you dance, the more hope you have for the kind of things requested”.³

For non-Yoruban dancers, the question of how to interpret the movement is unavoidable. Although there is much room for personal interpretation, it is very important not to disrespect in any way the original purposes and dedication to higher powers of *Olokun*, and to try to become immersed in the movement.

“In this type of dance, you must dance whole-heartedly. No pretense. You dance with your full energy, with your full concentration, with your motivation. You dance not only to convince the god you are there...but for all those who are present so that they will know that no matter how difficult the situation for you, your request has been granted to you. They will be doubly sure. You’re worshipping so you must give yourself *totally*, in the dance you are portraying”.⁴

When dancing *Olokun* at the shrine, the Yoruba dancer must dance in relation to the deity whom he or she is honoring. This is not a dance in which the dancers have actual partners; they are attempting to relate as directly as possible to *Olokun*, and in effect, to make the goddess their dancing partner. Striving to create an atmosphere in which the deity finds ease in coming to the dancer is vital. Therefore, the dancer must be in good health, dressed in the appropriate costume, have a clean body and have the right music. Under these conditions, the dancer who totally submits himself/herself to the deity may receive a blessing from the god, who will then possess him/her and also offer blessings to all who witness the possession. *Olokun* as a ritual dance is done only by those who are worshippers of *Olokun* or invited guests.

“Because you are dancing in the shrine, to request all those things that are very necessary in your life, the moment you are dancing, is not a good time for you to see a variety of things around you. For example, you cannot be dancing this type of dance and be thinking about a type of food you want to eat at the same time you are dancing. You cannot discover who is beautiful or ugly or who is not in the right position (physically). Your mind must be 100% on the deity you are dancing for and on the movement you are doing for that deity. The more perfect your steps, the more assurance you have in getting those things. It is not a time to knock your foot against anything and if you are holding anything at that particular

time, it is not a time to fall or to spill or to drop. Each of those is a bad omen that your mind is not completely on what you are asking for. Therefore, to secure and to make sure you obtain everything you are requesting in the shrine, everything must be done in detail. This is how the god on whose name you are calling will know that you are serious. See, the gods are not like people. We as people cannot see beyond what we can see with our eyes but the god can see everything surrounding us. They can see inside and outside and they know what our plans are and they know how those plans should be carried out. So, you are judged by that god who knows everything. Therefore, as soon as you enter, getting ready to in fact, you must prepare yourself even before you step out of your house on the way to the shrine. You have to cleanse yourself and whatever problem you have, you forget because of what you are doing the dance for. You don't want to be divided so that your request will also not be divided".⁵

Students learning Omowale's dance for Olokun might do best to learn the steps that are notated, and then explore personal approaches to performing the material. The movements can be performed by a group or by an individual. The phrasing may be alternated and the movement motifs can be arranged in differing sequences, but refrain from re-defining the dance's meaning. By changing the meaning, for example embellishing the movement in competition to call attention to one's self, dancers move outside the intent of the culture, which is to create (or receive inspiration for) dances that develop intense, respectful communion with higher forces of nature. The dance, however configured from its movement motifs and improvisations, is both highly inner-directed and aspiring.

It is very important for the dancer to pay close attention to the rhythm of the drumming and to try to speak the language of the drummer. A good dancer can isolate a part of his/her body to the lead drummer, and move another part to the rhythms of another drummer.

"We can't talk about dance, we can't talk about the worshipping without talking about the drumming. What does the drum do? The drum talks. (It) plays rhythm. It gives regular pulses. And apart from that, the lead drummer talks. Sometimes there are things the dancer can forget. It becomes the duty of the drummer who has played all sorts of dances, to remind, to prepare our mind, prepare our soul, get ready our spirit and give us the timing when to do something, how to do it, and where to do it. This is what drumming means in our society. Not just playing a pattern. It is instructing, it is advising, and it is encouraging the dancer as well as pleasing the god that you are worshipping. (In) this case, the *Olokun*, for example, the Talking Drum can be speaking *Hey! Our Universal Mother*. Whatever the drumming says, the movement carries it out.... That is one of the reasons why we say in Africa, 'You cannot separate the drumming and the dancer'. The movement totally depends on the drumming. The drum dictates sometimes and the movement interprets or translates. So, drumming and movement are the two that complement each other. So, without one there is no other".⁶

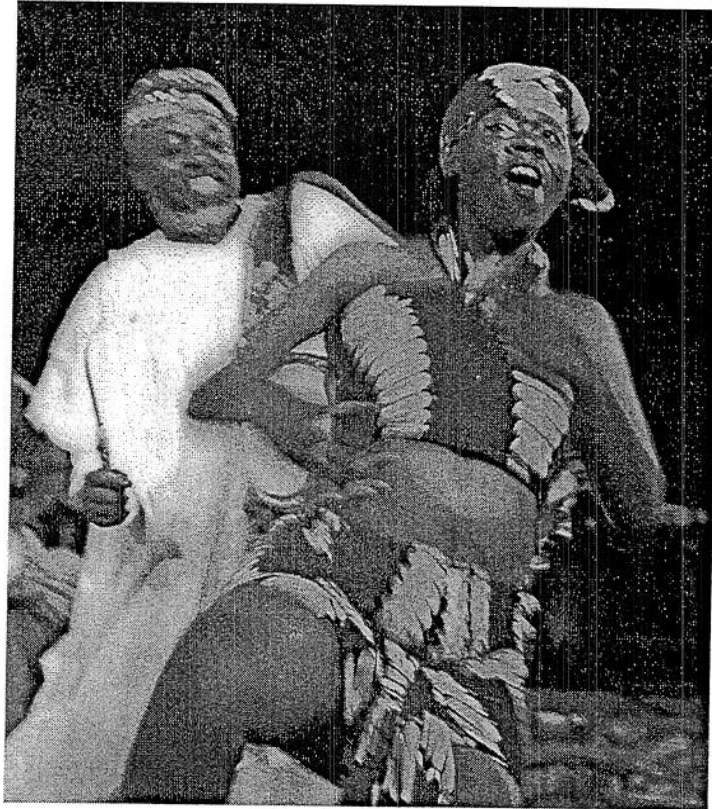


Illustration 49

Francis Awe with the Talking Drum and a dancer performing a dance from Nigeria

Isolations and undulations should be performed in constant motion. Recalling that Olokun is the Goddess of the Sea, this ceaseless motion represents the importance of water. The isolations of the separate parts of the body, such as the undulation of the pelvis and the chest, represent fertility and a source of food, rather than a form of sensuality, as is sometimes interpreted in Western cultures. Both men and women perform the dance to the best of their ability, with the only difference being in the choice of strenuous and flexible movement motifs, which can be tailored to the individual's abilities.

Olokun

Notated by
Mary Corey
as taught by
Francis Awe and Omowale Orisayomi
at
University of California, Irvine, 1996

Music: traditional, arrangement by
Francis Awe

Dance score checked by
Ilene Fox
and
Ray Cook

Labanotation Reading Level:

Motifs vary from Intermediate to Advanced

Theory and Score-reading Elements:

Contraction of torso
Shifting of the chest
Foot hooks and track pins
Deviating paths
Movements of the pelvis in isolation
Body key and stance key
Tilts, twists, and wheeling of the torso and its parts
Design drawing

4.11 NOTES ON PERFORMANCE

In approaching these motifs, it may be helpful to begin with those that are simplest to read and perform. Motif 5 may be used to introduce the characteristic timing of the torso movement in relationship to that of the supports. Begin by coordinating the movements of the supports and torso, then add the notated arms.

This same relationship of torso timing to support timing exists in many of the motifs. Motifs 6, 7, 11, and 19 are also relatively simple. Motif 3 employs several of the same movement concepts with the addition of a chest shift.

Once you have gained a kinesthetic sense of this dance form, explore some of the more complex motifs, such as Motif 12 (which includes Motif 7), Motif 17, and Motif 23. In reading the more advanced notation, you may wish to ignore such details as contact bows, deviations on a path, and the precise manner of stepping until you have grasped the supports, torso, and arms. Then simply add in more elements as you feel comfortable.

The number of times that the motifs were repeated varied from performance to performance. In performance, the dancers were cued by a four-count rhythm from the lead drummer to change to the next motif. Therefore, the motifs have been notated separately with an indication to repeat *ad lib*. The dance is performed in the motif order presented here, beginning with Motif 1 and ending with Motif 23. The drum rhythm to cue the dancers to change motif is not included on the Audio CD.

A simulated possession was performed between Motif 15 and Motif 16. The simulated possession is not notated.


An abrupt change to a much faster tempo occurs at Motif 16. In the performance of the work, this change was cued by the lead drummer; it mirrors the general excitement of Olokun's arrival (by means of the "possession"). During Motif 16, the lead drummer called, "*Eye mo i jo*" ("Mother is dancing"), and the dancers responded, "*Gbere ke ye o gberé*" ("Powerfully, vigorously"). This faster tempo on the Audio CD is used for Motif 16-22. The call and response is not included on the Audio CD.


Floor plans that show the patterns for the performed dance are included after Motif 23.




See Ann Hutchinson's book, *Labanotation*, 3rd ed., rev., p. 280, ex. 399d. In addition, the ankle is relaxed, not stretched, when the leg gestures.

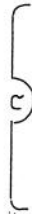
∧ Cancellation; previous symbol no longer in effect.

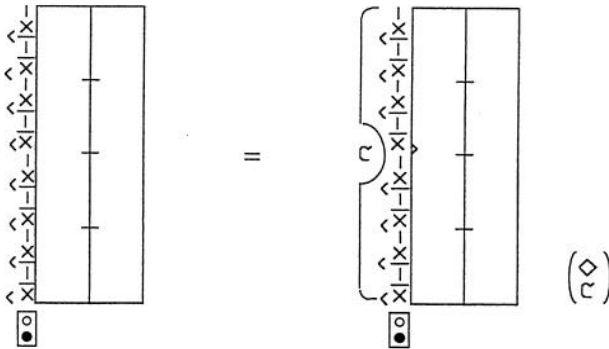
 Torso contracts one degree over the front.

 Torso contracts one degree over the back.

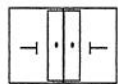
 Intermediate directions: halfway point and third way point. See Hutchinson, p. 434 - 440.


≡ Lateral symmetry (reverse the phrase). See Hutchinson, p. 357.


 Exclusion bow. The head is excluded from the movement enclosed by the exclusion bow.

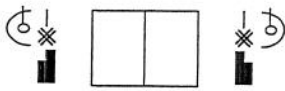


An abbreviated notation for torso movement and its relationship to the head is used throughout the score. Unless otherwise indicated, the head is not carried along in torso contractions. Instead, the head has an unwritten space hold in the same major direction as the torso.

 Feet are separated slightly, below the hips. See Hutchinson, p. 441.

 Elbow facing. When followed by a direction symbol, elbow facing indicates the facing of the back surface of the elbow joint.

 Final ending for ad lib. repeats. FINE is used to indicate the final repeat, the transition to the next motif. See Hutchinson, p. 355, ex. 531b.



Deviation from the path. See Hutchinson, p. 443 - 445.

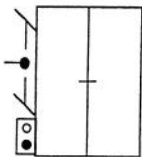
↑ Both arms

’ Emphasized

e Relaxed

⊕ Cross of Body Axes. See Hutchinson, p. 416 - 420.

◆ Stance Key. See Hutchinson, p. 425.



Torso Wheeling. See Hutchinson, p. 315 - 317.



Design Drawing. The duration of the design is indicated by the length of the path sign. The black dot indicates the starting point of the design. The design is traced in space by the body part indicated.



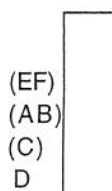
The neck.



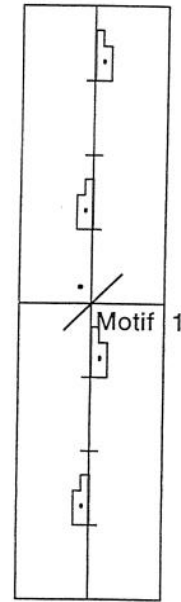
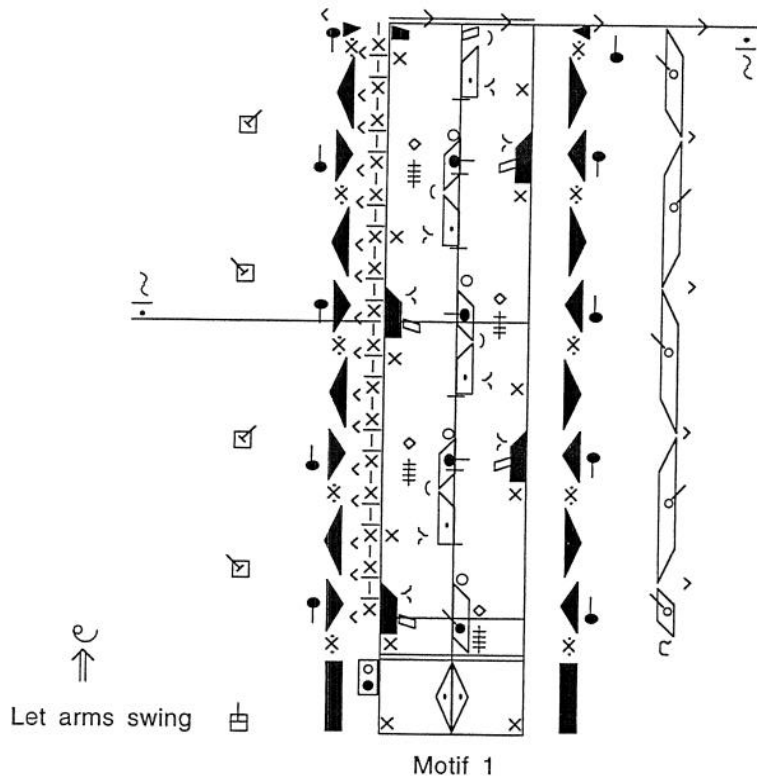
Inverted pelvis. The free end is the hip line, and the fixed end is the waist. See Hutchinson, p. 273.



The inverted pelvis tilts slightly to right side low (●) and then to left side low (◐). Very fast, repeated ad lib.




Reverting canon staff. The movement is performed in canon, with the dancers entering the canon in this order: D, C, A and B, E and F. The floor plans for Motif 15 illustrate and explain the canon in this notation. See Guest, Ann Hutchinson and Rob Van Haarst, *Canon Forms*, Advanced Labanotation, Vol. 1, Part 1, Harwood Academic Publishers, 1991.



Motif 1,
travelling forward

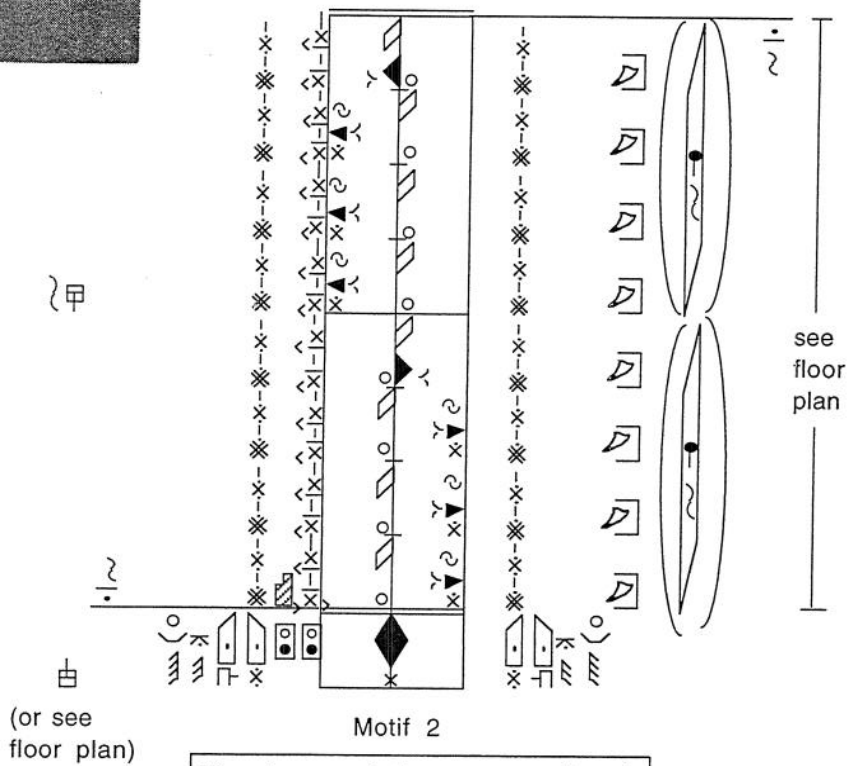
Presenting yourself
and your beauty.
Self-esteem.

Motif 1 - 15

♪ =  = approx. 120

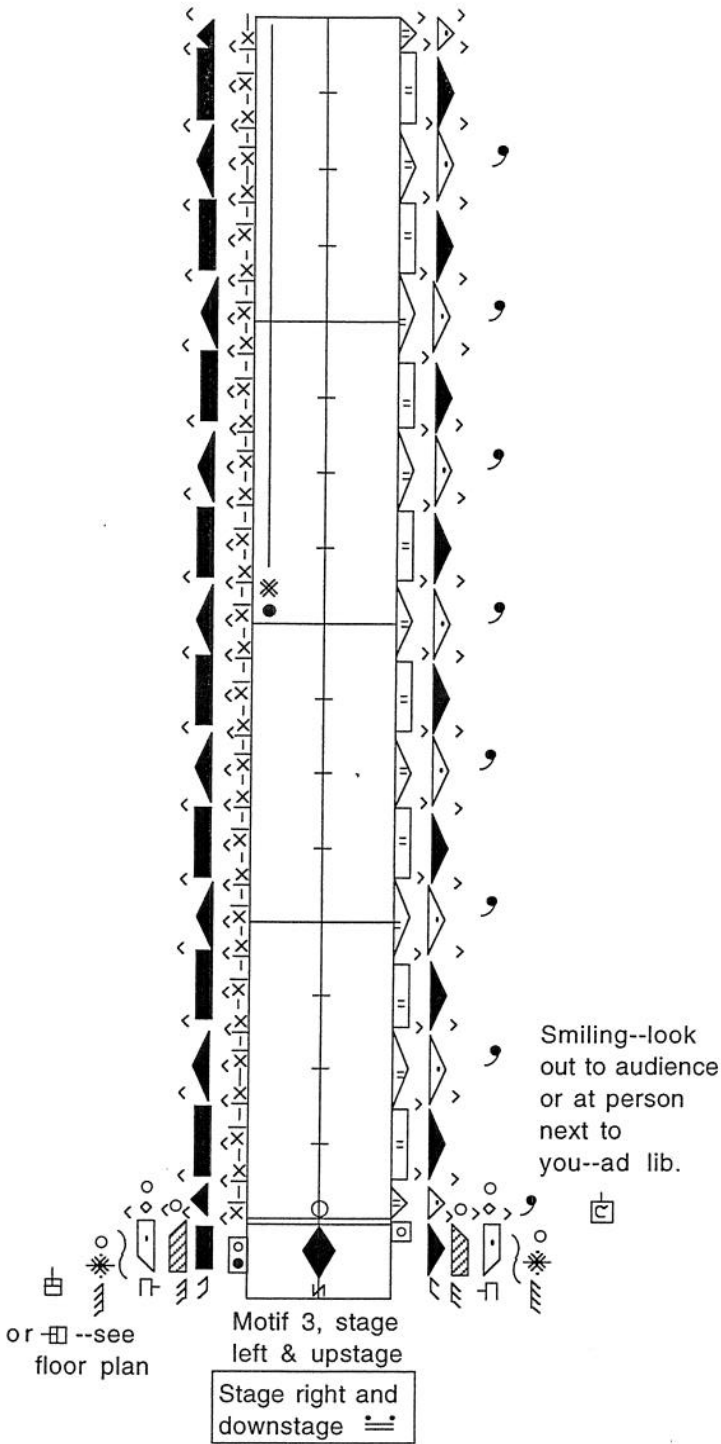


Motif 2, count 1:
Illustration 50

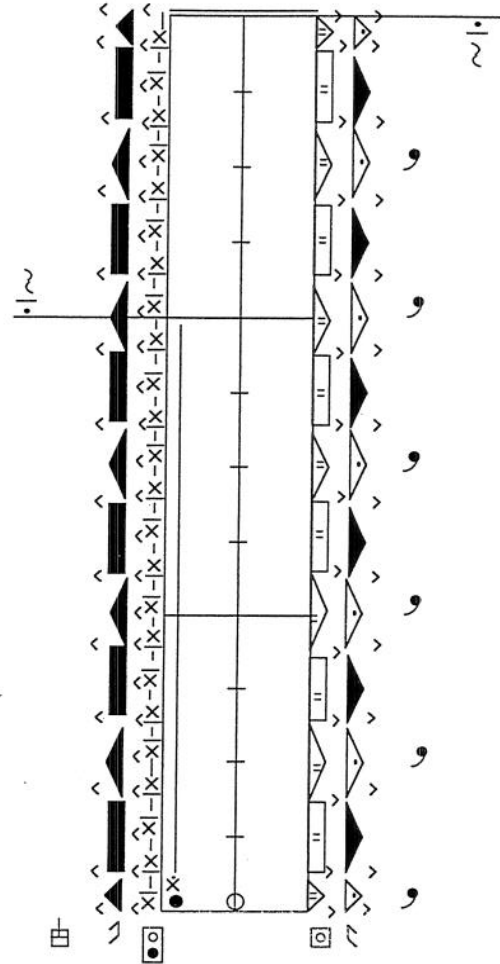


The strong and dangerous quality of water: a force to be reckoned with.

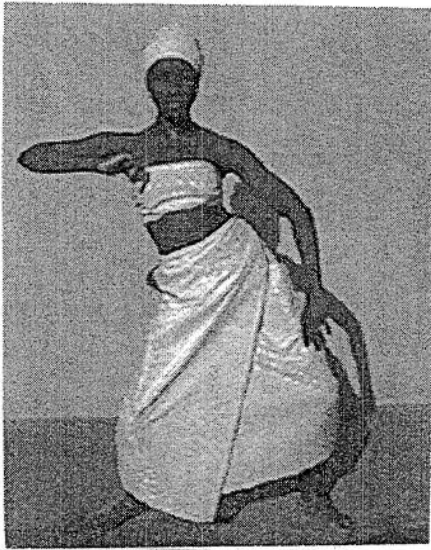
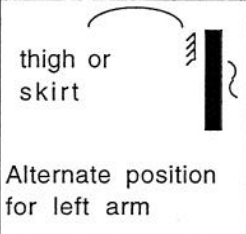
Explanation of blank turn signs in support column: the four turns in each measure, added together, result in approximately one-half turn. Because the degree of turn on each beat is not specific, the turn signs in the support column do not include a degree. Instead, the overall degree of turning is indicated in the turn signs in parentheses to the right of the staff.



Smiling--look out to audience or at person next to you--ad lib.



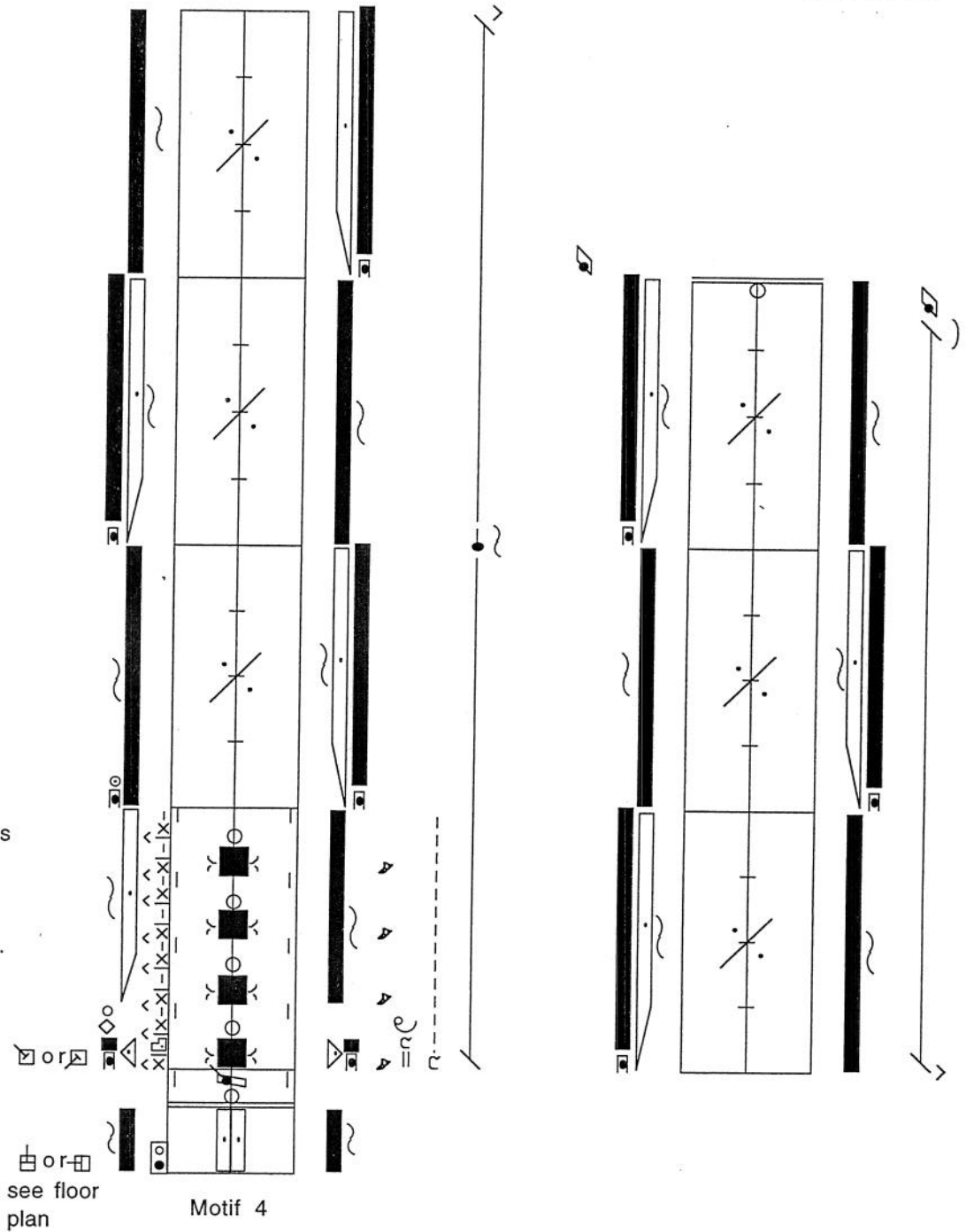
If a child misbehaves and is scolded, someone will always come along and make the child laugh so that he doesn't feel so sad. This step is performed with that same playful quality: (now that you know that I can be strong, you see that I'm still that loving person).



Motif 3, count 1 Illustration 51

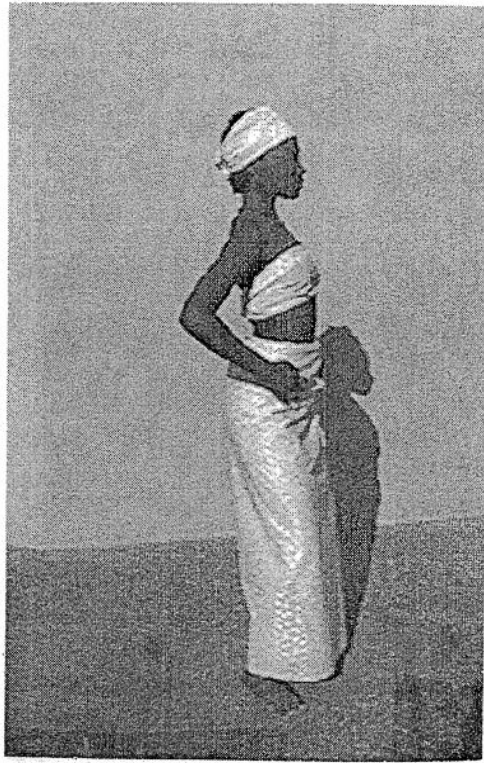
Torso contractions are smaller than notated. They are performed as a pulse in the torso.

Feet barely leave the ground

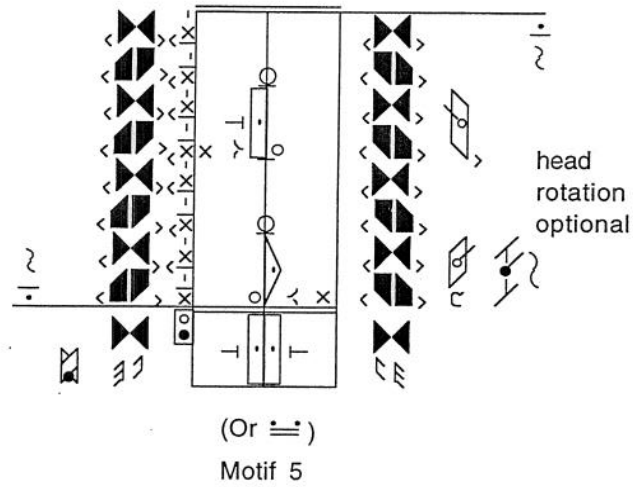


Wash your head.

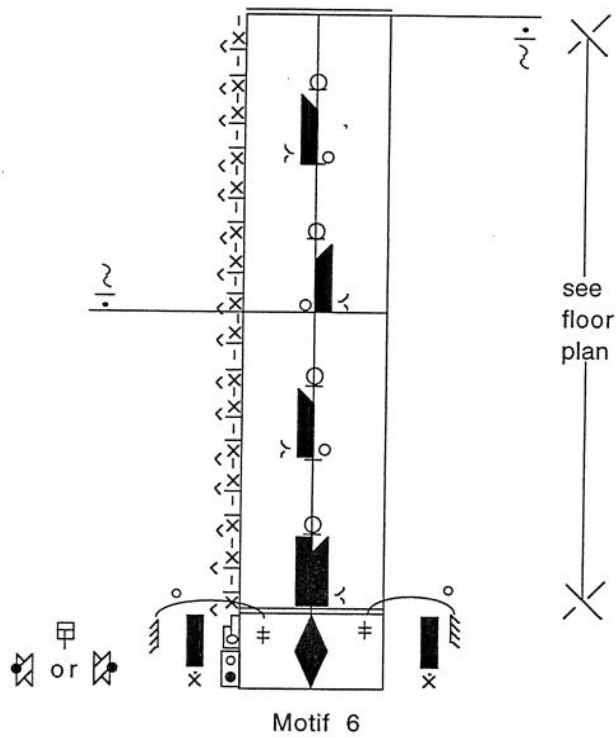
(Before birth, God speaks to the unborn child and tells it what its purpose will be. The dancers wash their heads to "keep the head clear" and stay true to their purpose, to remember what it was they came here to do).



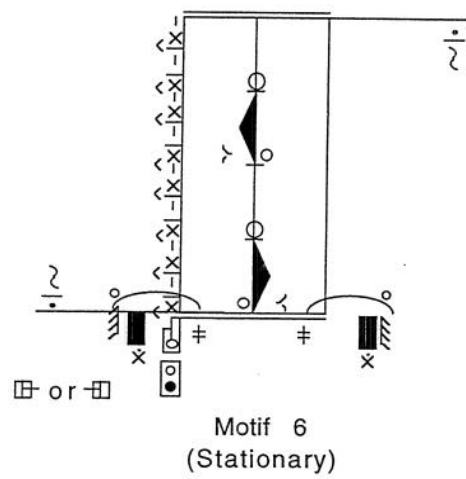
Motif 5, count 1
Illustration 52

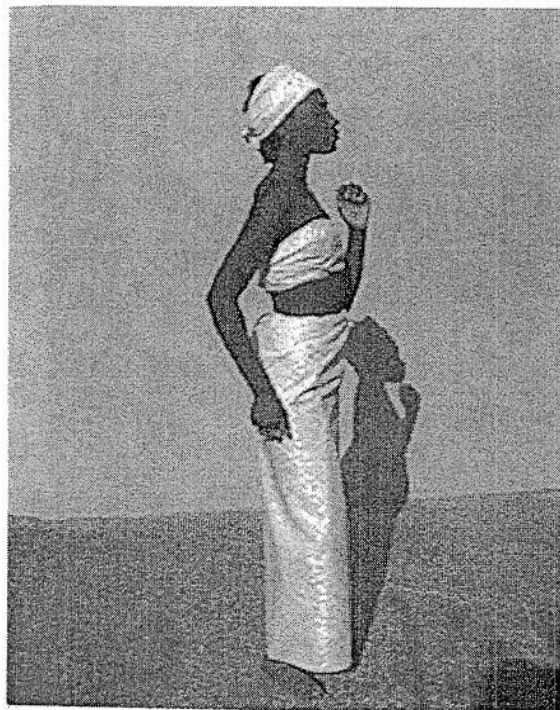


Self-expression. Womanly self-confidence and ease.



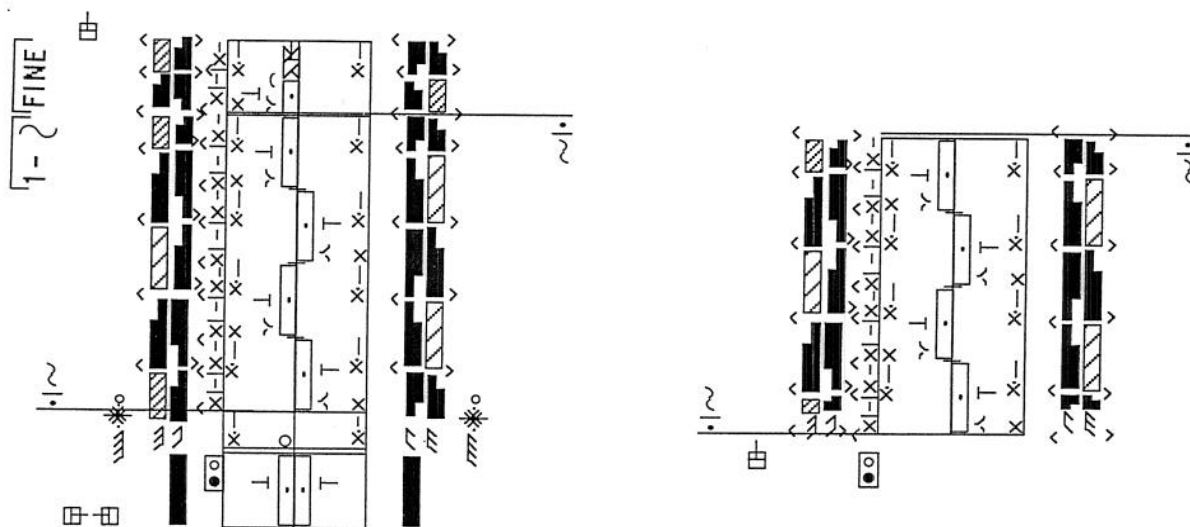
Showing how the body moves; joy in the capability of the body.





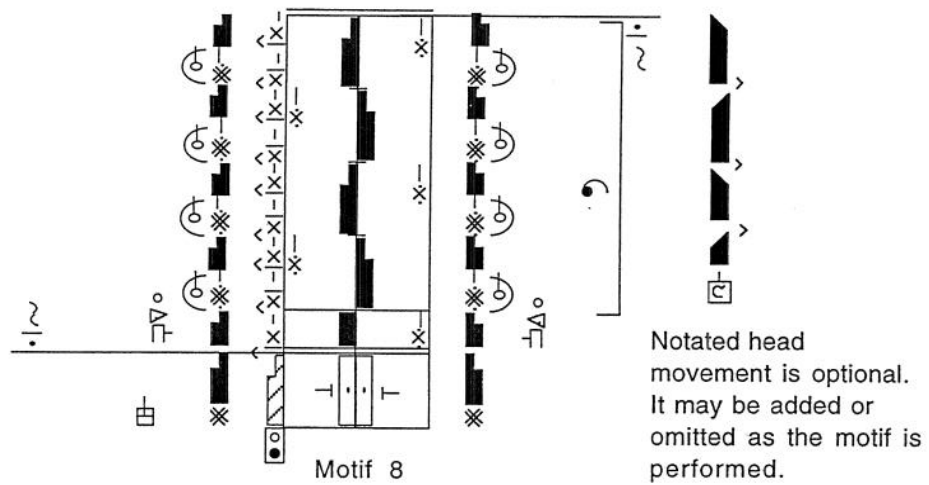
Motif 7, count 1.

Illustration 53

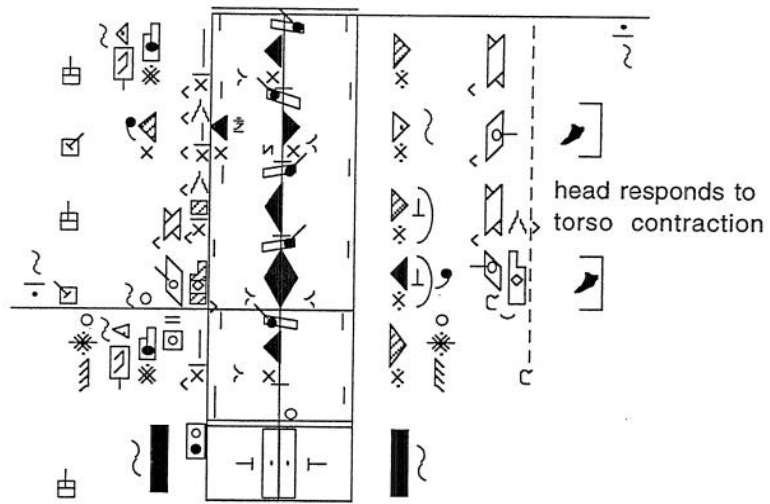


Motif 7

Self-confidence, self-expression.
A transition to the next motif.

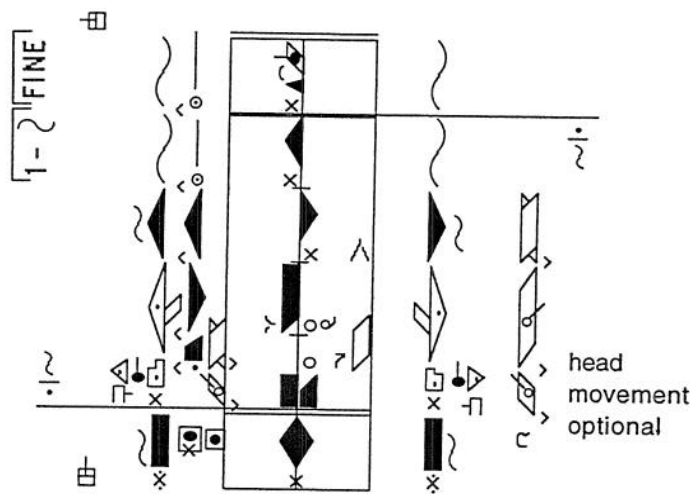


Churning water. Very strong.
Force coming down like a
wave--builds into next motif.



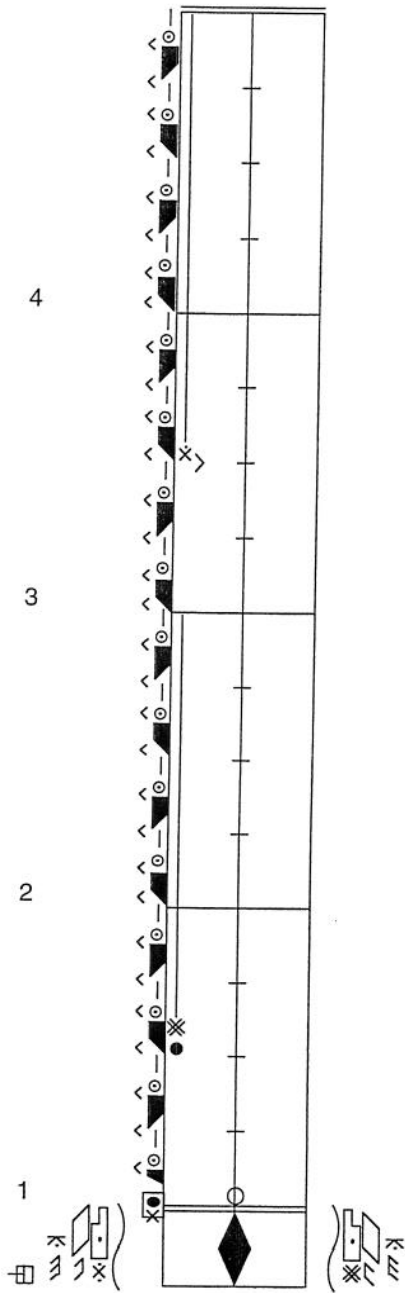
Motif 9

The force of water. Aggressive.
Arises out of previous motif.



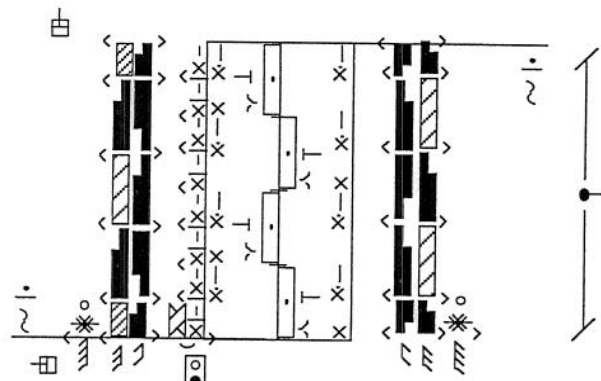
Motif 10

Contentment, happiness,
softness. Fish in the water.

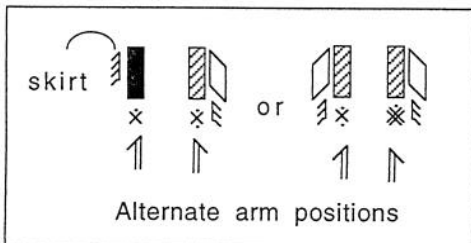


Motif 11

Self-esteem.



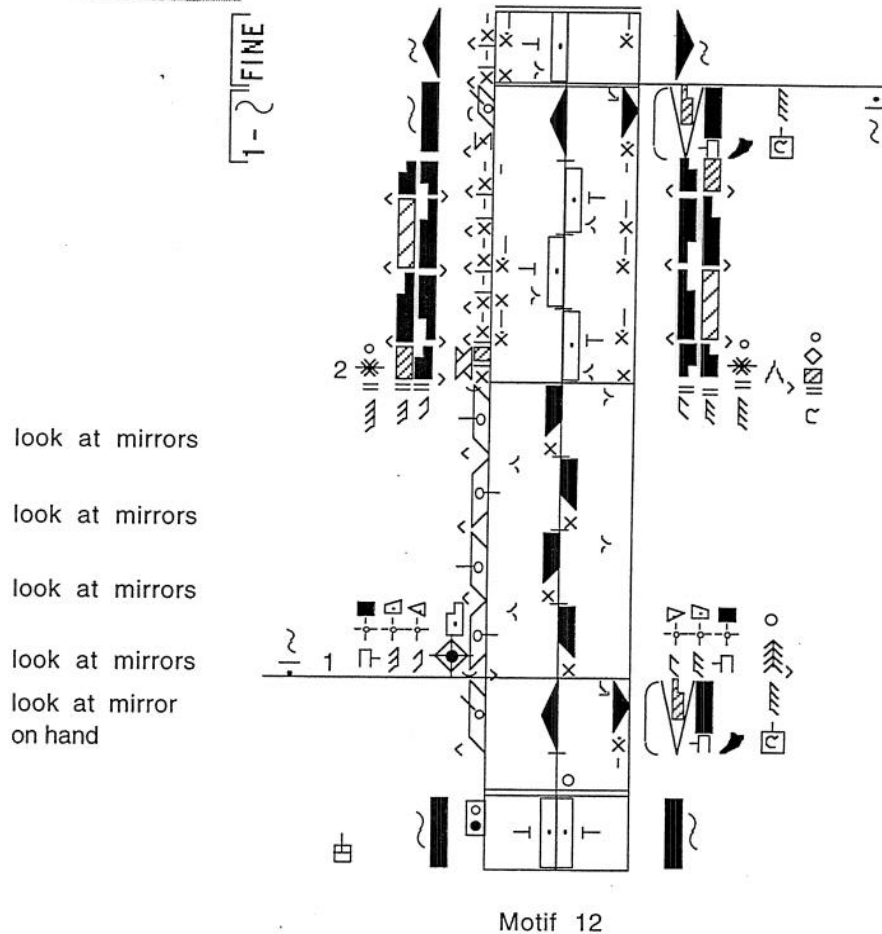
Transition to Motif 12



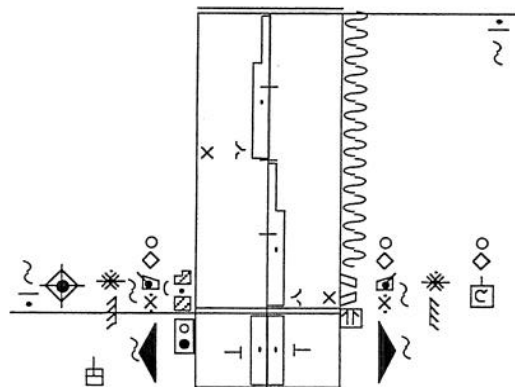


Motif 12, count 2 (dancer is facing down-stage right for purposes of photograph)

Illustration 54

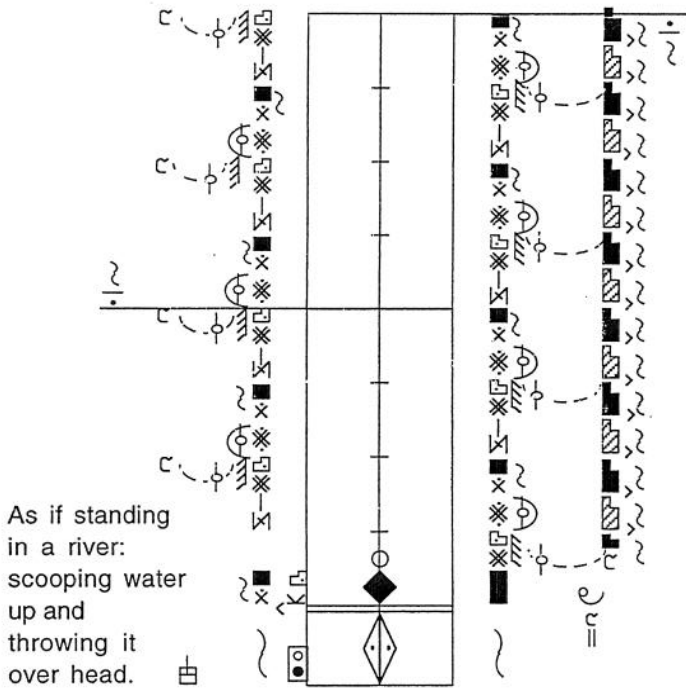


Looking at mirrors on hands.
 Olokun has mirrors on her costume and on her hands. She is also herself a mirror--people see themselves in her.



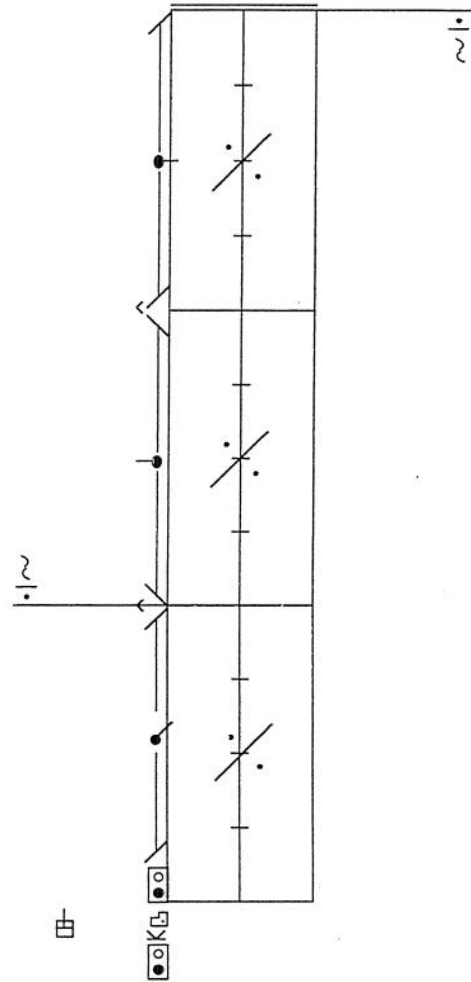
Motif 13

Presentation of self.

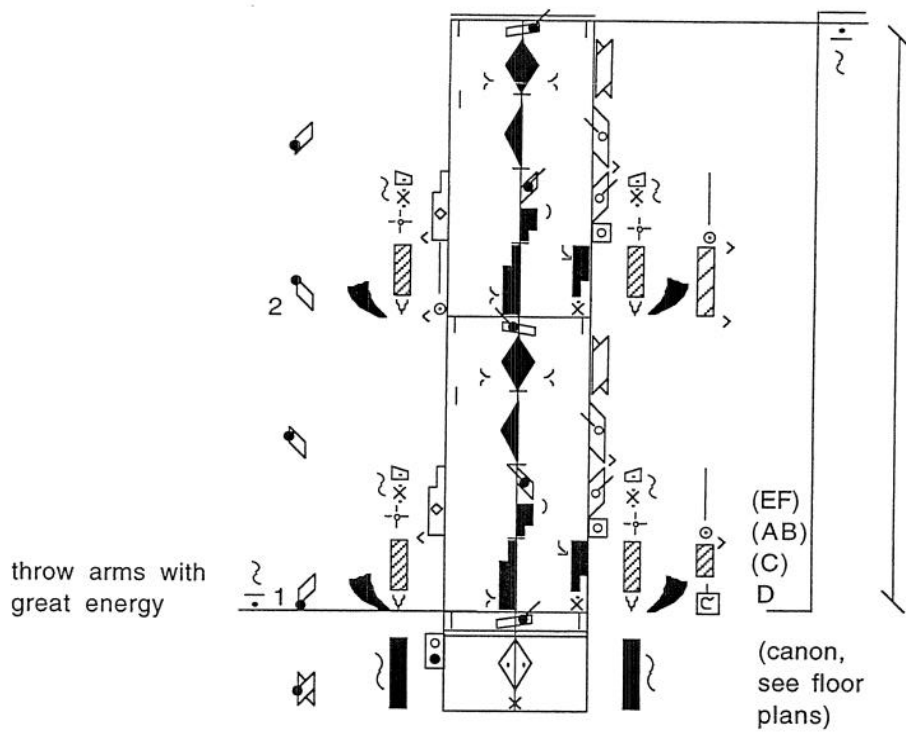


Motif 14

Washing the head

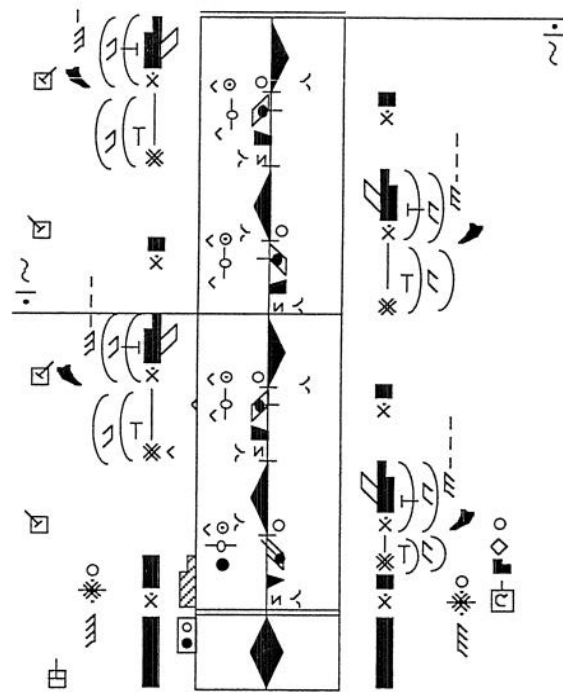


Torso wheeling is added to the
arm and head movements.
May begin in other direction;
notated timing of the wheeling
is approximate.






Motif 15

Warding off evil.
Throwing off pain, envy, jealousy,
negativity, poverty, loneliness--anything
that blocks your path and keeps you from
doing what you need to do.



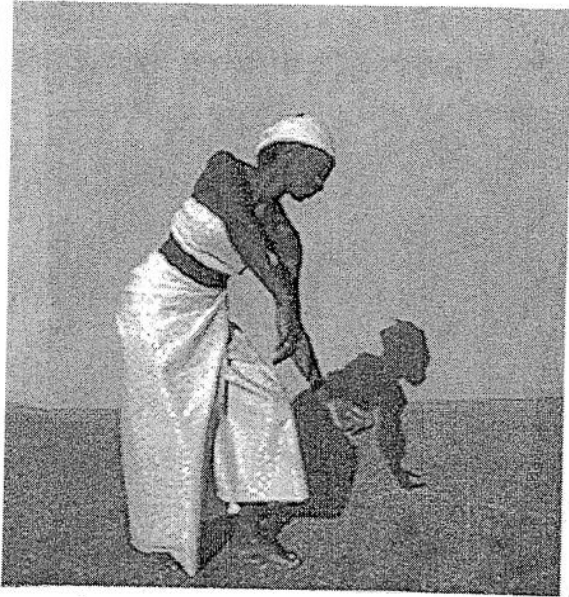
Motif 16

upper arm initiates arm movement--lower arm is flung when arm moves to 

TEMPO CHANGE--Faster
 Motif 16 - 23
 =  = approx. 192

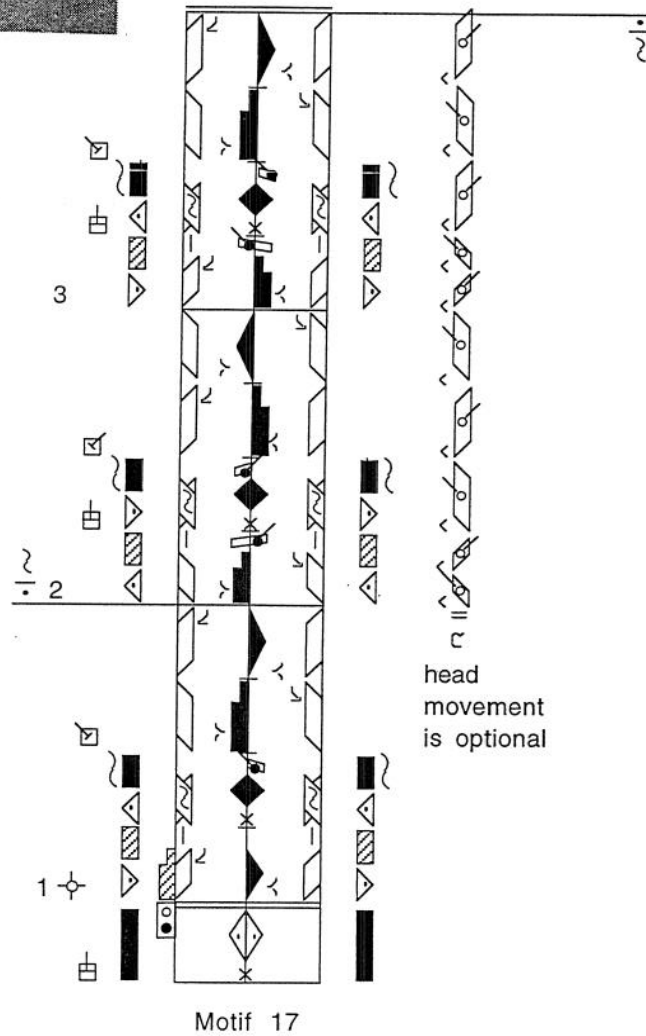
Excitement that Olokun has arrived. The dance is vigorous, an awakening of the dancers.

Call:	Eye mo i jo	Translation
Response:	Gbere ke ye o gbere	Mother is dancing
		Powerfully, vigorously

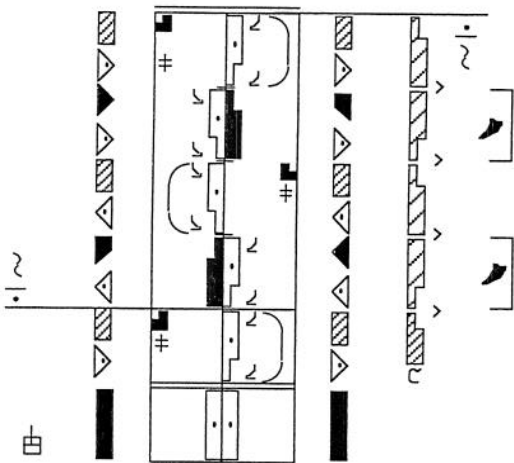


Motif 17, measure 1, count 3

Illustration 55

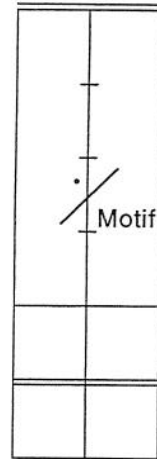


Power of water;
washing the head.



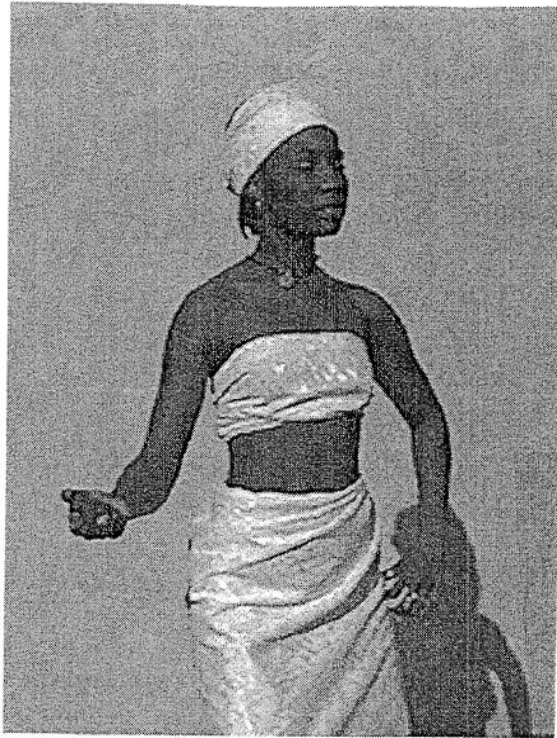
Motif 18

Washing the head

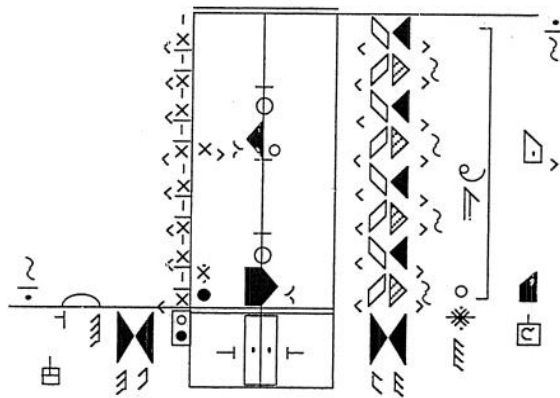


Motif 18,
moving
backward



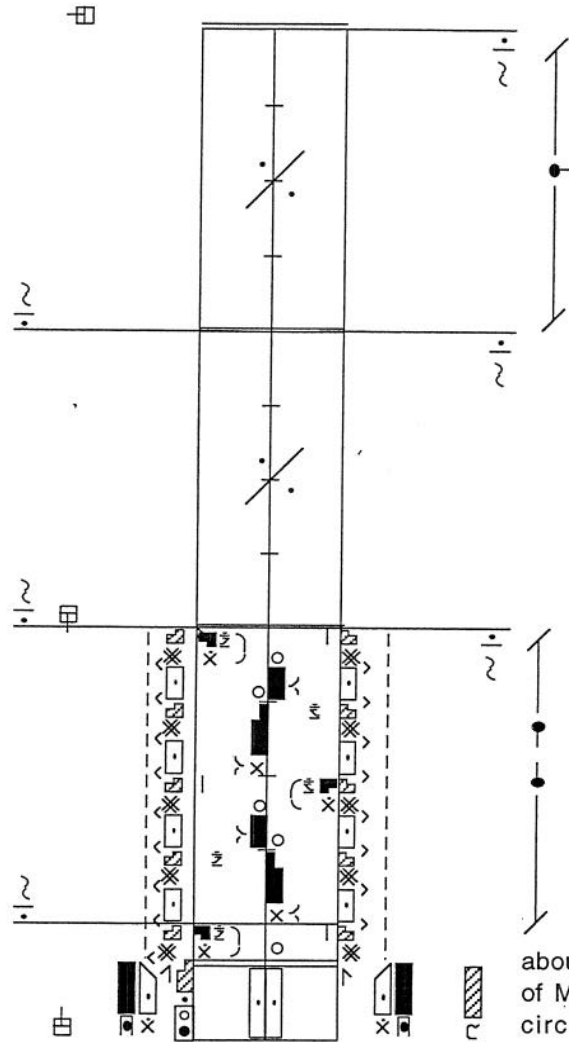


Motif 19, count 1
Illustration 56



Motif 19

Fluidity of water

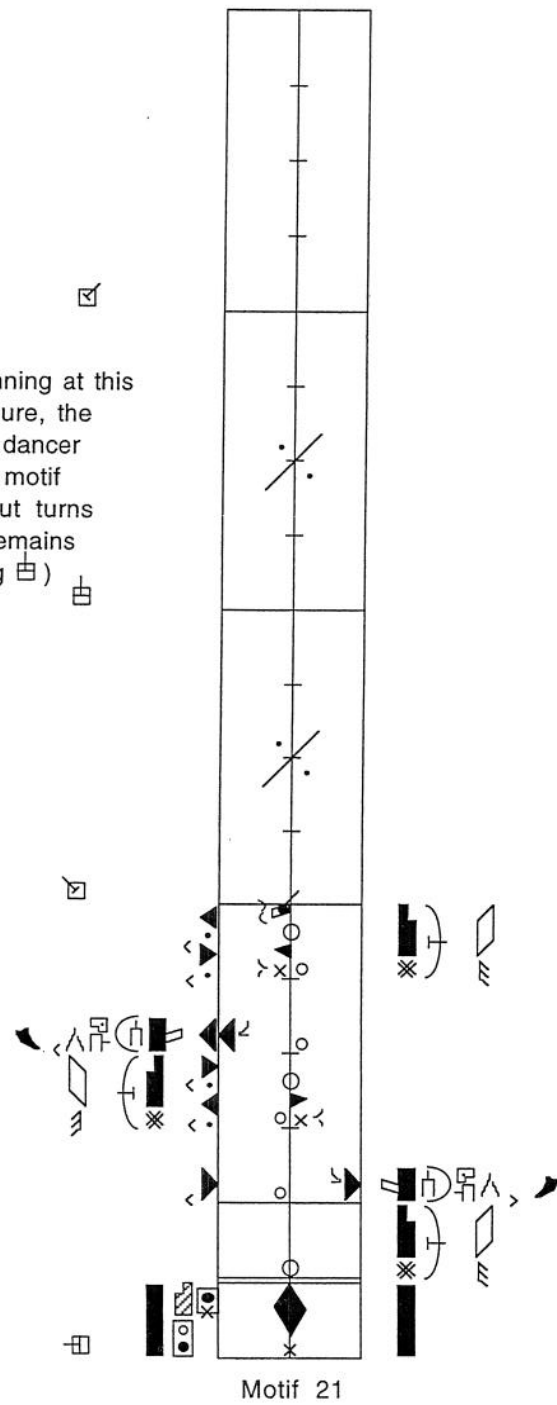


Motif 20
Illustration 57

Motif 20

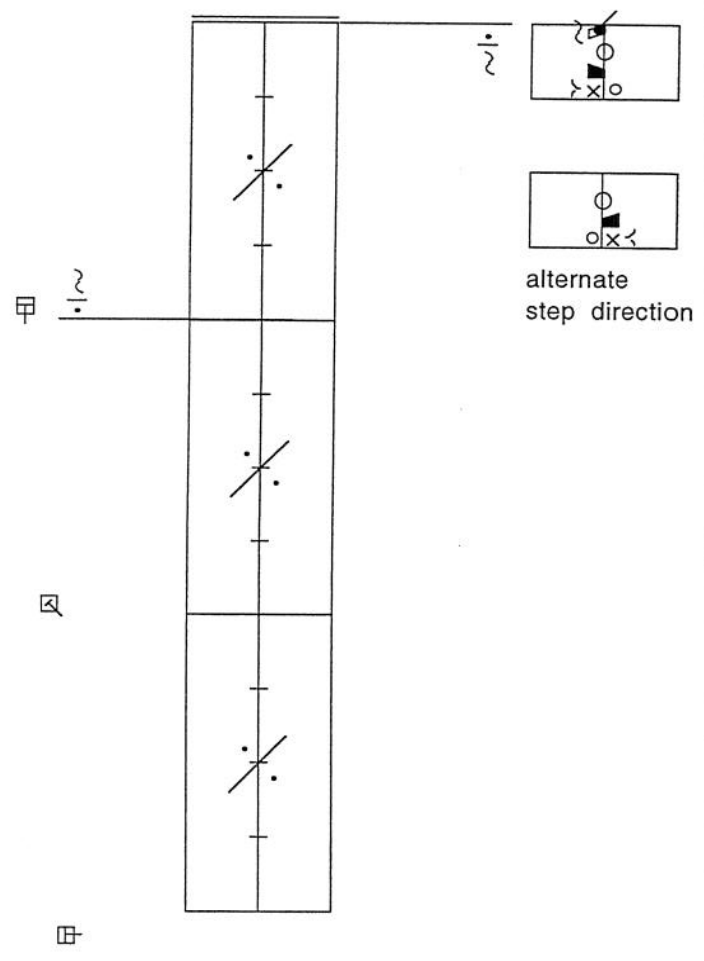
Maintaining balance;
submission of self.

Beginning at this measure, the male dancer does motif without turns (he remains facing 由)



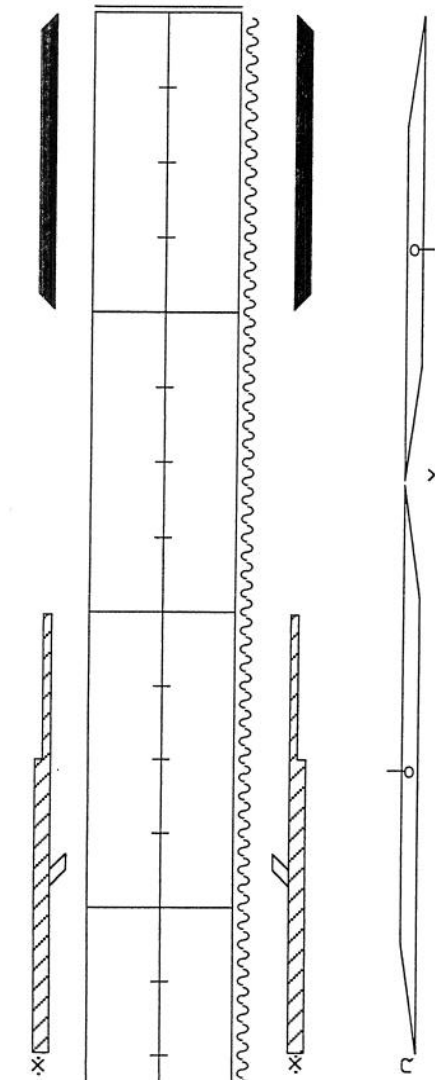
Motif 21

Like minnows that dart quickly in the water.



Arms and head may move ad lib. This is one possibility.

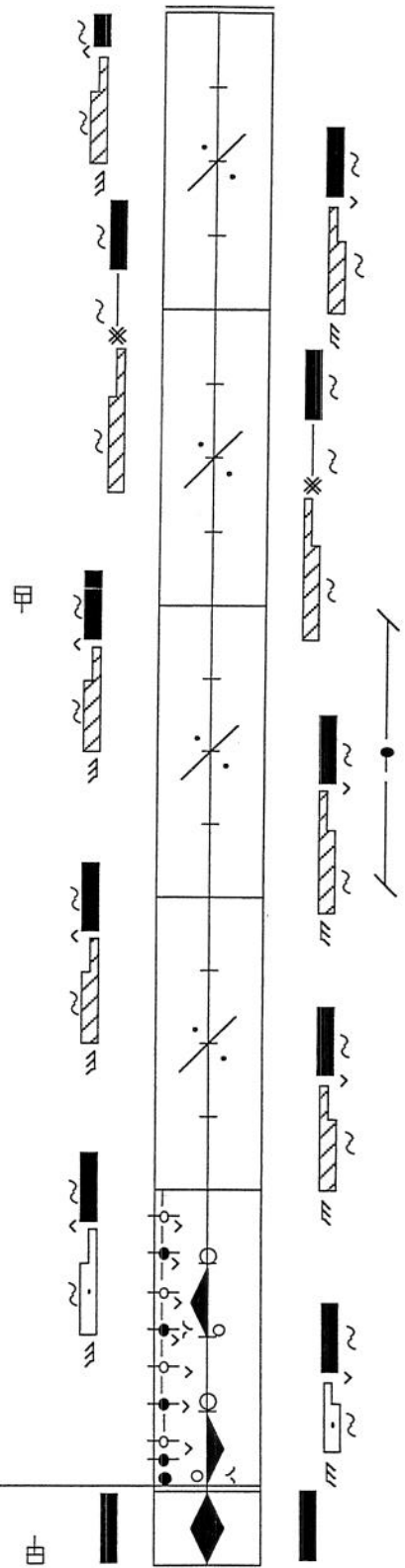
pelvis movement is loose



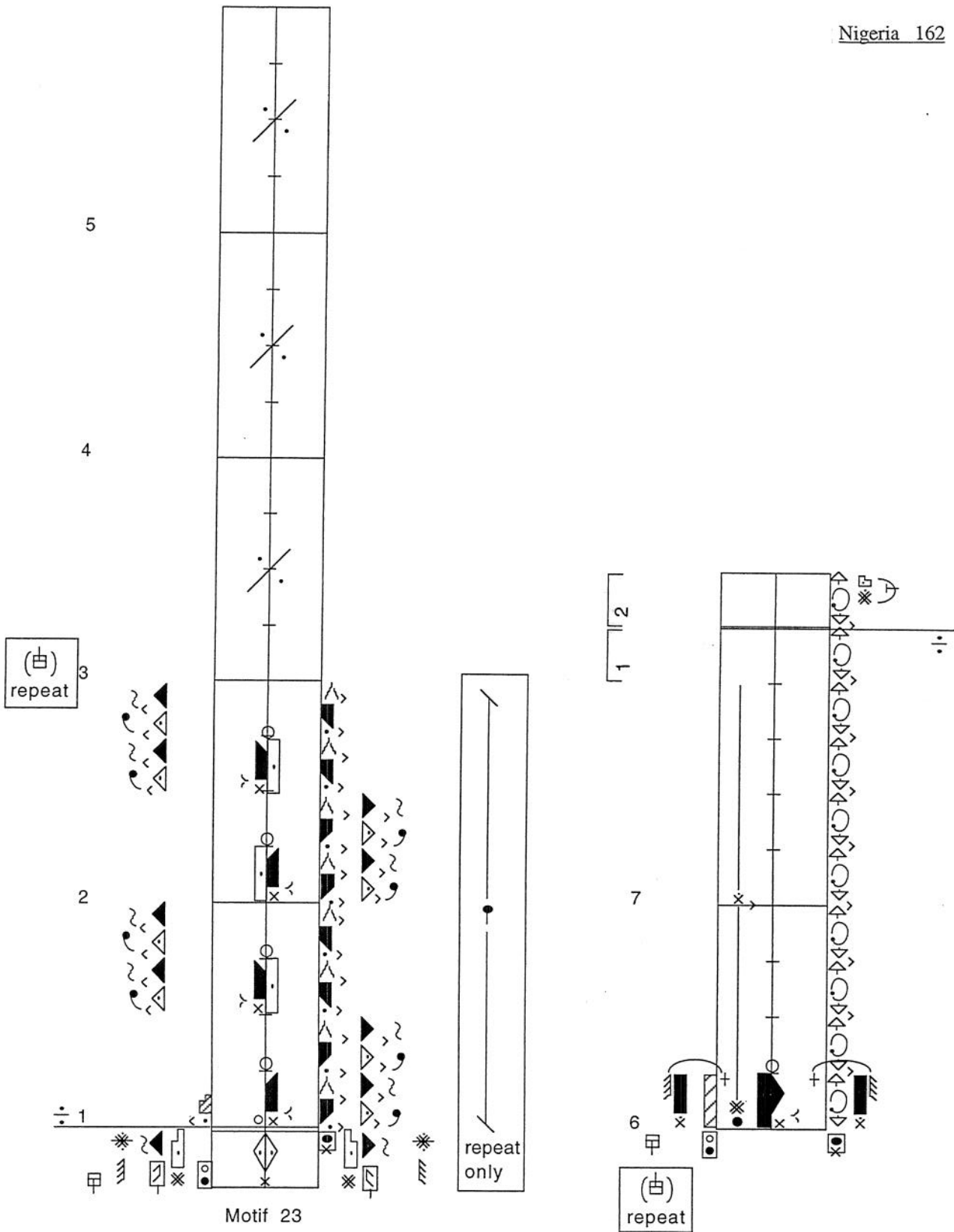
Motif 22

Female dancers

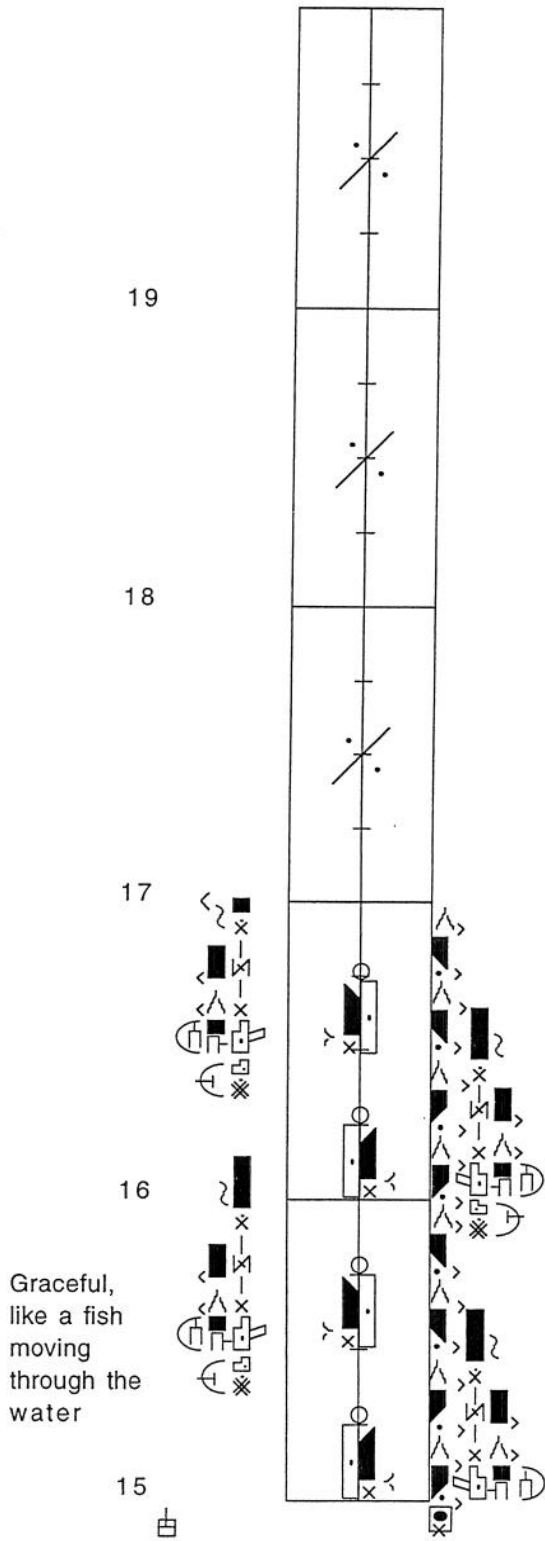
Fish-like



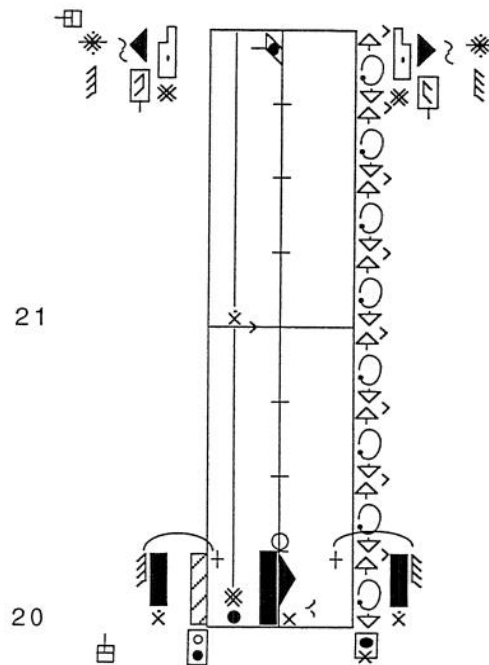
Male dancer

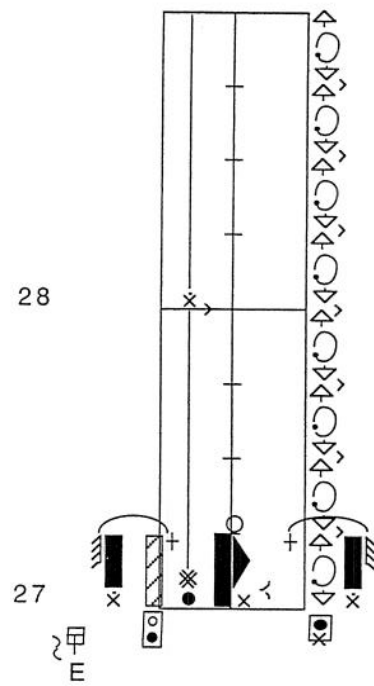
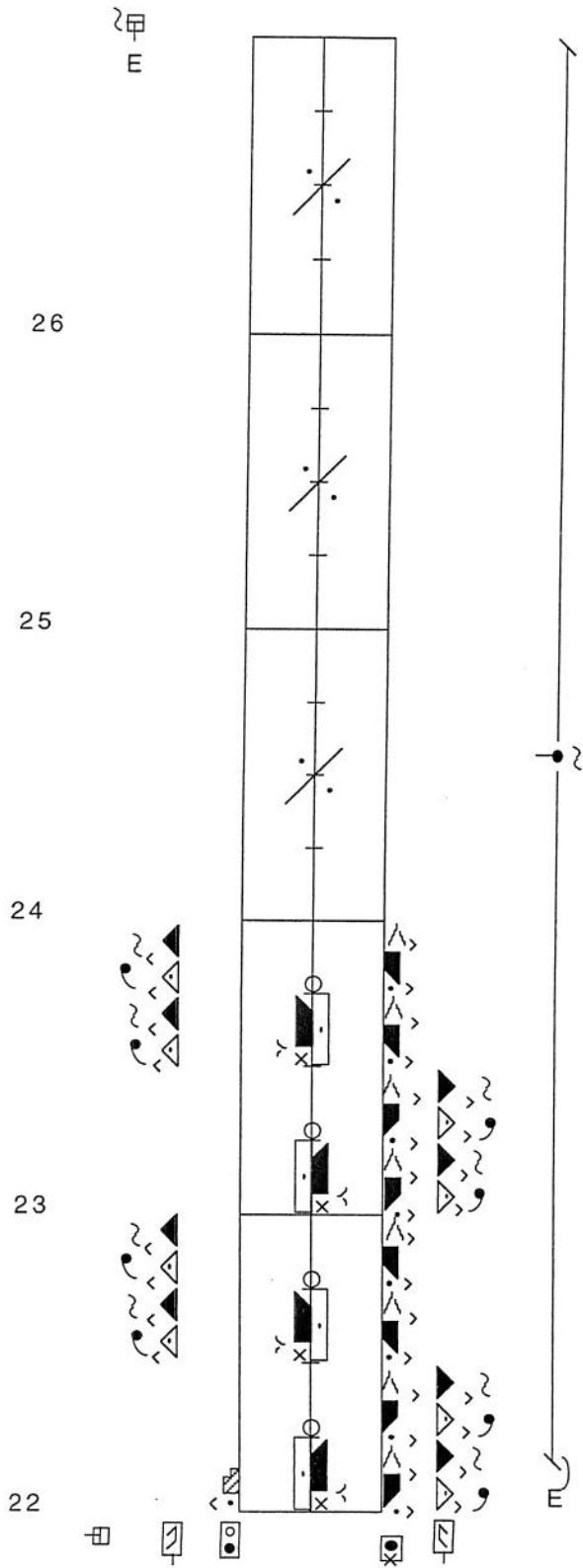


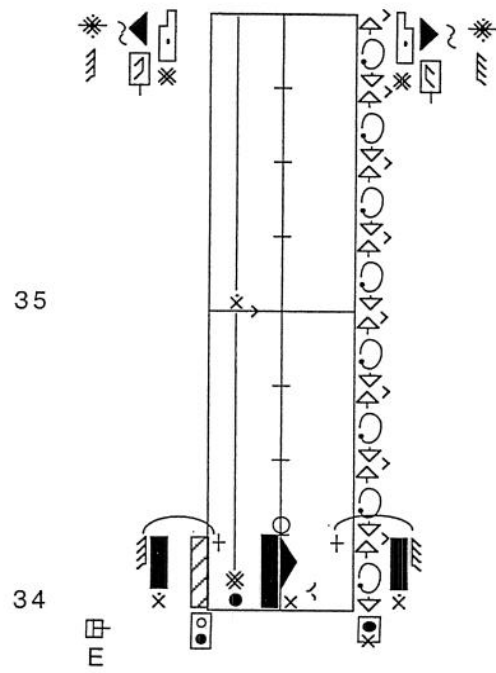
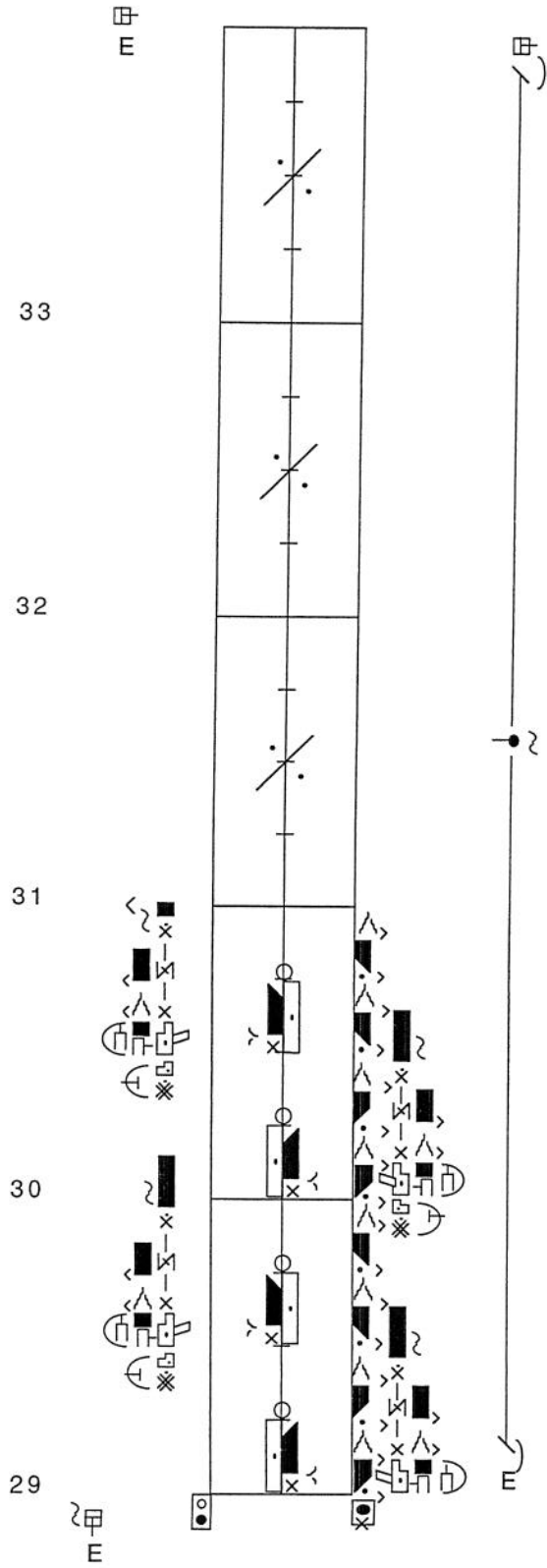
Going back and forth between strength and fluidity. Elbow paving way, clearing path. Feet and arms contain the physical strength. At meas. 6--gentle, playful, fragile. Joy and excitement--Mother has arrived.

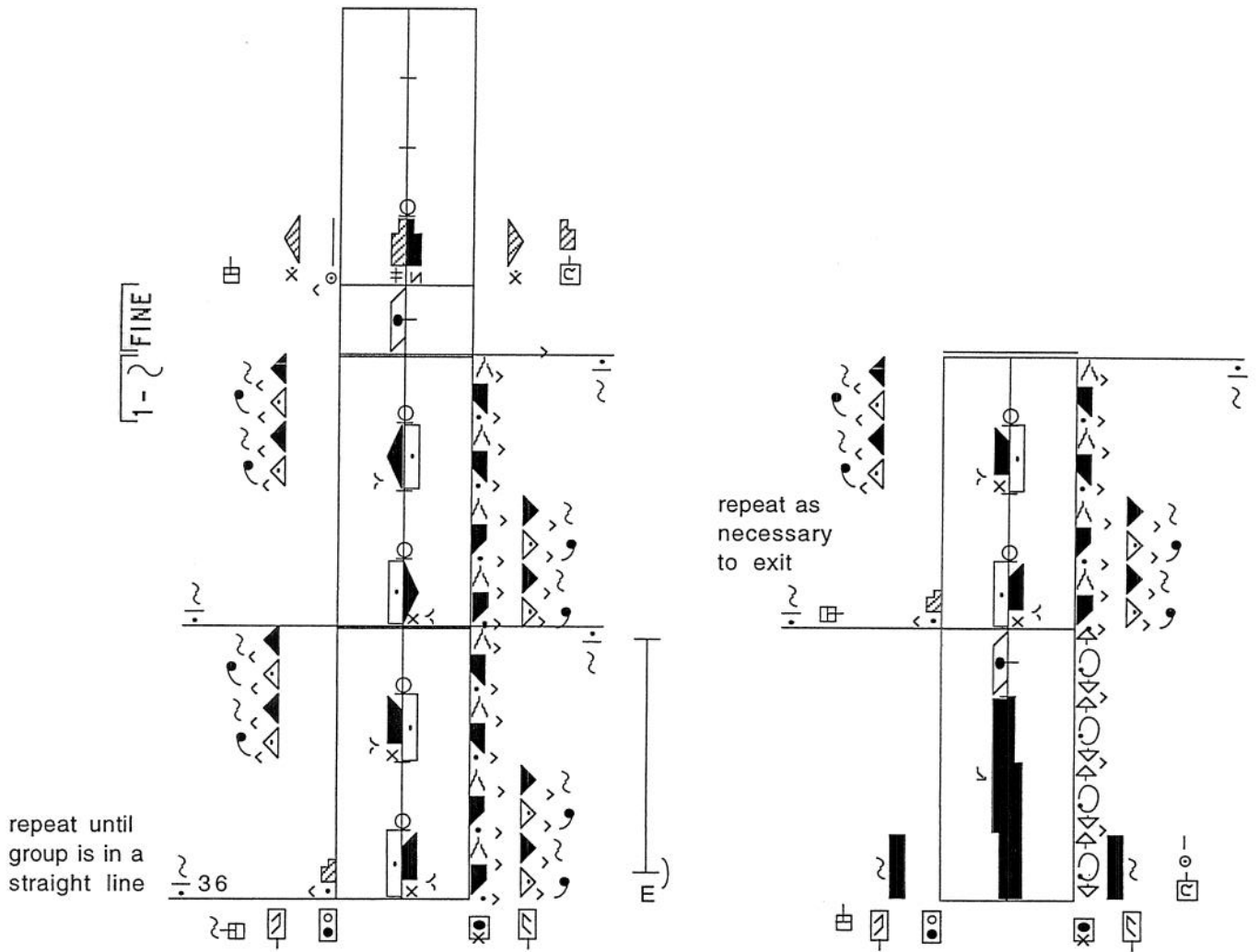


Motif 23 with different arm movement.

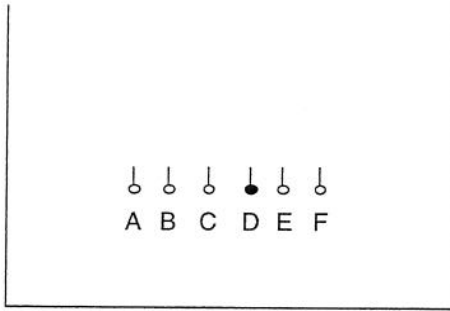




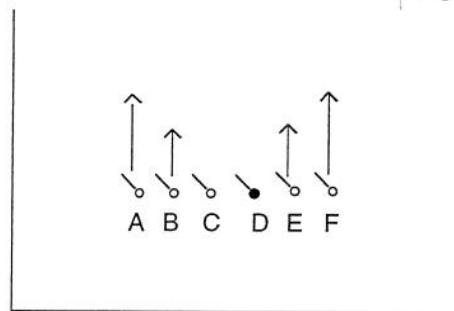




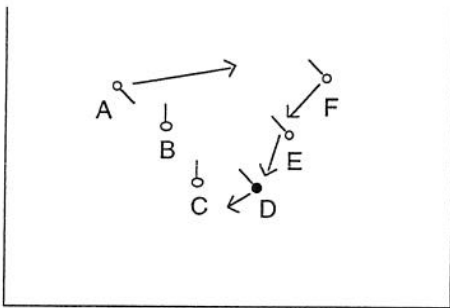
Floor Plans



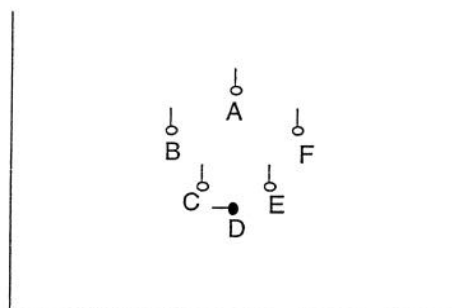
Motif 1



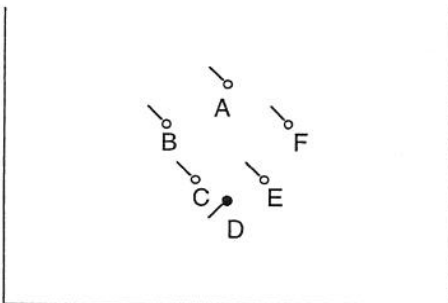
Motif 1, last six or eight repetitions, general indication of paths.



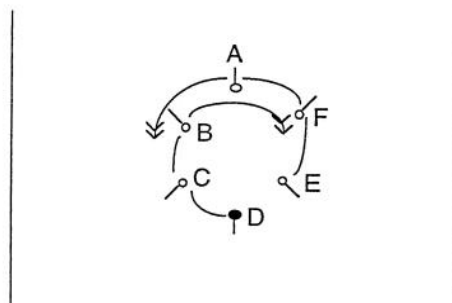
Motif 2



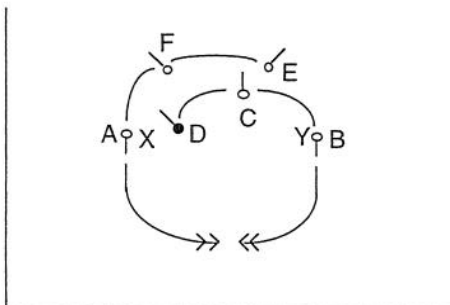
Motif 3



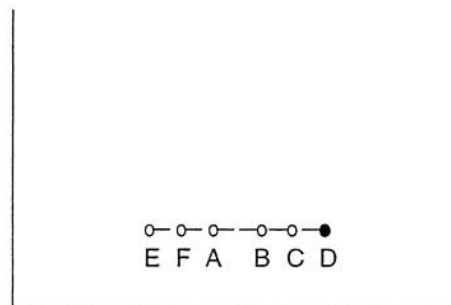
Motif 4



Motif 5



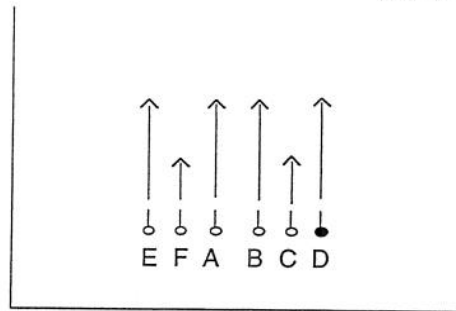
Motif 5 (cont.) and Motif 6. Continue Motif 5 until arriving at point X or Y, then turn (AFE turn left, BCD turn right) to face 甲 and begin Motif 6, travelling upstage and toward the center line.



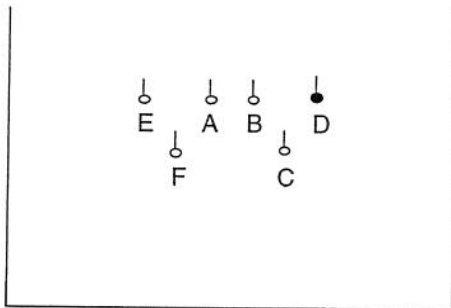
Motif 6, stationary



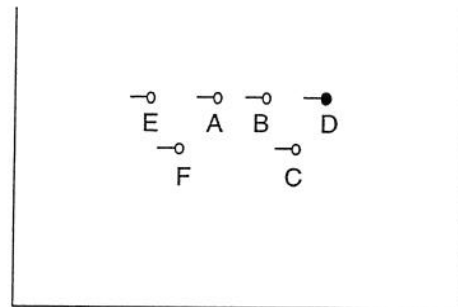
Motif 7 (also performed facing front--see notation).



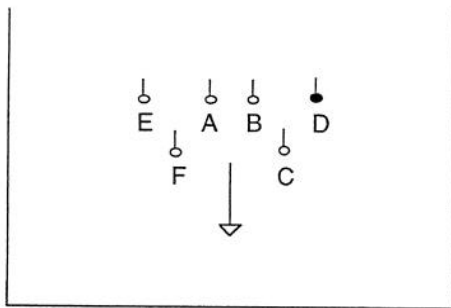
Motif 8



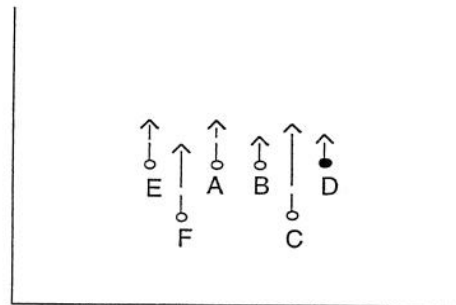
Motif 9 and 10



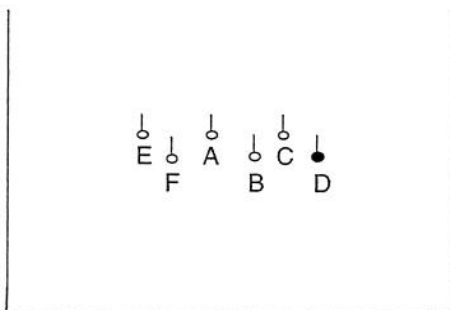
Motif 11



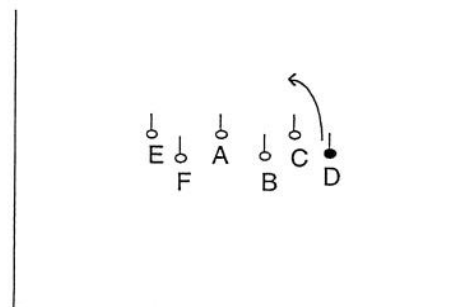
Motif 12



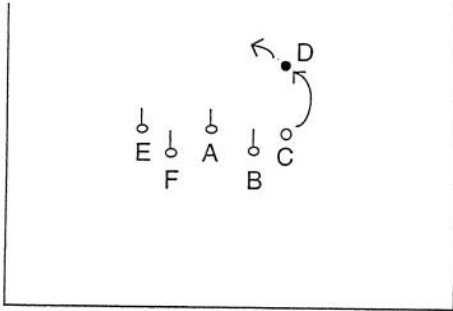
Motif 13



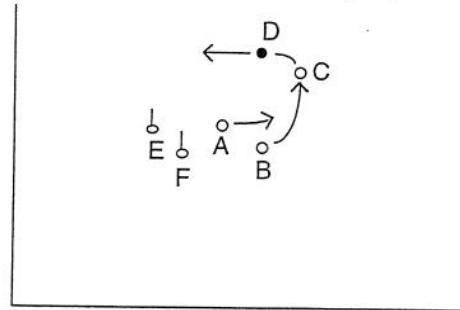
Motif 14



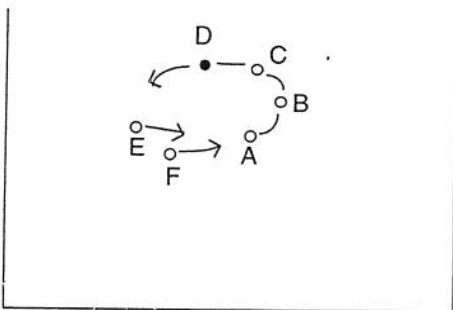
Motif 15. Begin this motif in canon as shown on floor plans; eight counts per canon entrance. Continue performing Motif 14 until canon entrance for Motif 15.



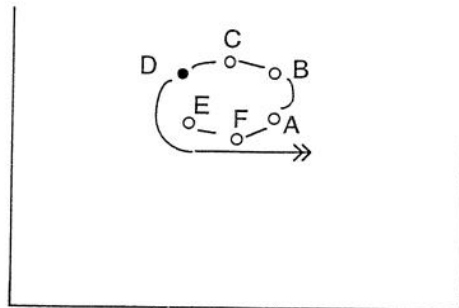
Motif 15 (continued, second entrance into the canon)



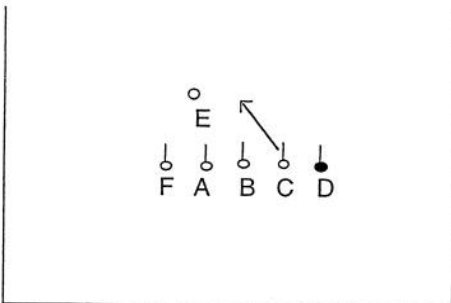
Motif 15, third entrance into canon



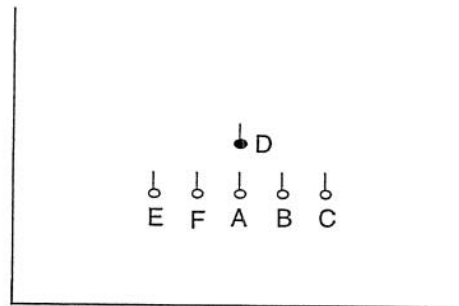
Motif 15, fourth entrance into canon



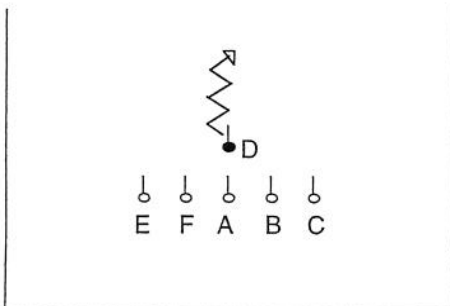
Motif 15, continued



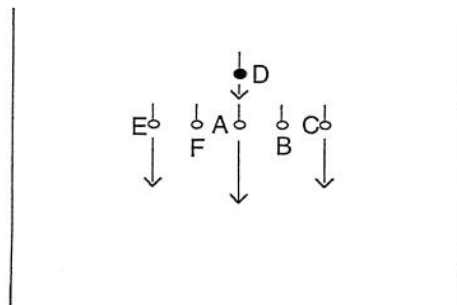
Beginning of simulated possession section (not notated). By the end of this section, dancers are in places shown at Motif 16, when the tempo changes.



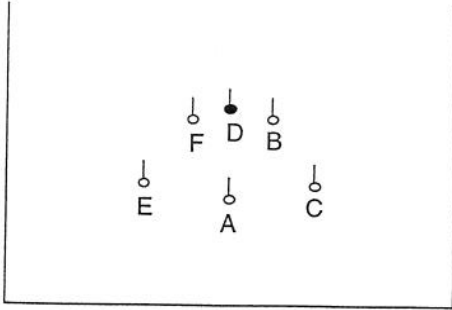
Motif 16 (faster tempo)



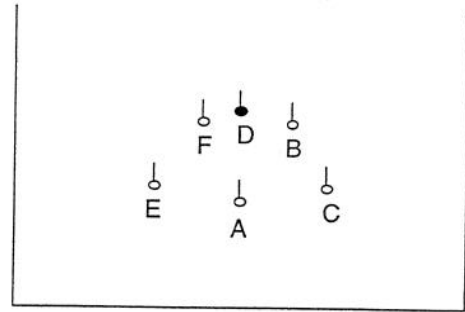
Motif 17



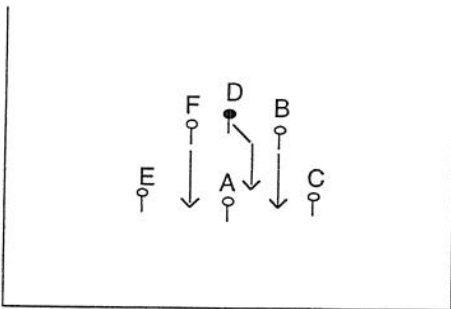
Motif 18



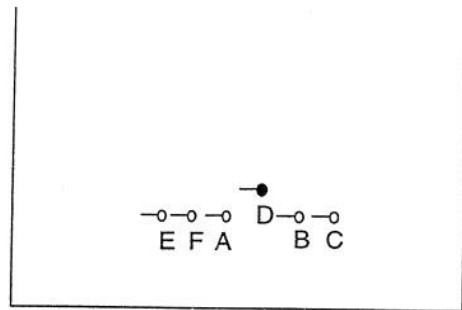
Motif 19



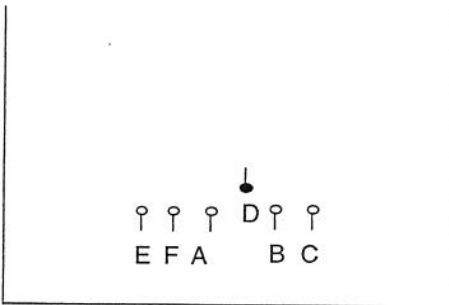
Motif 20 (perform motif facing 白 then turning to face 甲).



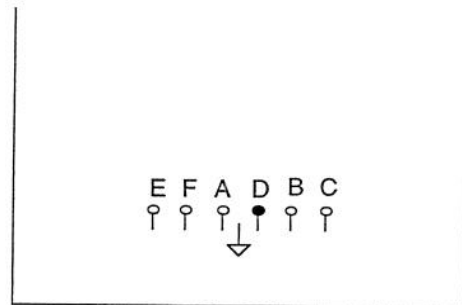
Motif 20, continued
(adjust spacing as needed)



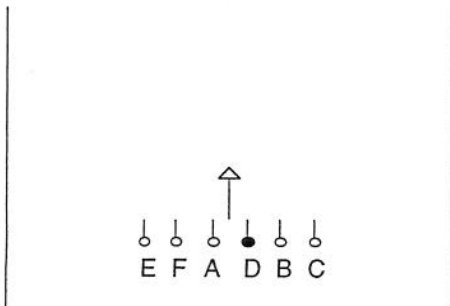
Motif 21



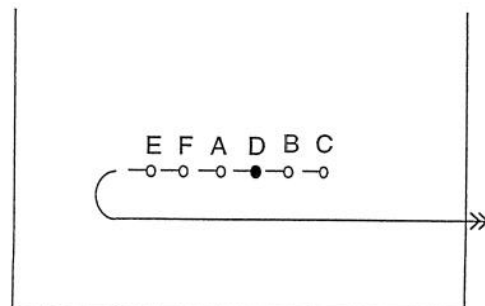
Motif 22



Motif 23, meas. 1-5. (D move into line with others).



Motif 23, meas. 17-19



Motif 23, meas. 22 onward,
continuing to exit

4.15 CONCLUSION

The tempo dictated by the drumming for *Olokun* is fast. As a result, the dance is extremely strenuous and physically absorbing. Also, every part of the body is involved in the dance at some time: the head; the focus; the shoulders; the chest; the pelvis; the whole torso; the legs; the arms; the hands; the knees; parts of the feet; the center of weight, etc. It is difficult to dance so fast and to involve the body so completely in the movement, and to remain psychically detached. The choreography requires intense focus and physical commitment to the movement, which facilitate the immersion into the dance that fulfills its original purposes: to honestly experience dedication; to forget daily concerns; to commune with forces of the greater natural world.

Francis Awe coaches dancers to keep the legs moving fast. "The body depends on your feet; don't slow down." In fact, 14 of the 23 movement motifs have leg actions on every count (motifs 1, 2, 4, 7, 8, 9, 10, 12, 15, 16, 17, 18, 20 and 21). Four more have leg actions on alternate counts (motifs 5, 6, 19, and 23). These 18 motifs use the legs as driving forces to maintain the vigor of the dance and to maintain a steady relationship with one of the drums. Additionally, in motifs 5, 16, 19 and 23, the rhythmic base in the legs is doubled by actions of the arms (5 and 19), torso (6) or pelvis (23).

Five of the motifs interrupt the underlying rhythmic base in the legs. Motif 3 shifts the kinesthetic focus to an accented powerful upper body. As the chest shifts repeatedly to the right, the right elbow and fist create a sense of drive, and a vigorous pulse of contraction is maintained in the torso. This accented upper body rhythm is moderated by smiling and ad lib expressions that imply strength tempered by gentleness. Motif 11 moves the steady rhythmic pulse to the pelvis. In motif 14, the head picks up the beat. Thus, these three motifs continue the overall pattern in the dance of physicalizing the beat, but they re-locate the pulse in actions by the chest, the pelvis, and the head.

Only two motifs break entirely from this pattern: Motif 13, which is about half-way through the dance; and motif 22, near the end. Notice the rapid ad lib lines in each of these motifs. Replacing an underlying beat are rapid free movements by parts of the torso. In motif 13, the shoulder-section shimmies as walking slows to steps extended over two counts. In motif 22, it is the pelvis that moves fast and free, rapidly oscillating side to side as the dancer stands with feet apart. These motifs can produce a sense of exhilaration in performance, since they break away from the constant drive of the beat and allow parts of the body to shake freely.

Olokun uses parts of the body that are still or subdued in dances in the other chapters of Volume 1. Certainly, there is much more movement variety for the arms. But it is in the uses of the torso that we see the greatest chasm between *Olokun* and the other dances. In *Olokun*, the whole torso—or the chest or the pelvis—contracts, tilts, shifts, wheels, twists, shimmies, pulses, wiggles, and draws circular shapes. A huge spectrum of the anatomical movement capabilities of the torso are present in this choreography.

There are two other obvious distinctive features of this cultural dance form. The first is its emphasis on deep levels and a physical sense of weight and the strength derived from weightedness. (See for example motif 3 where the center of weight lowers deeply as the dancer stands in a wide position.) The second is the strength of dynamic accents. Motif 15 offers one example of the extraordinary energy this dance generates and demands. There can be an unusual degree of personal freedom inherent in this dance's forceful performance style, which some dancers have found as cleansing and motivating as the original intent to honor Olokun.

4.16 ENDNOTES

¹Awe, Francis. Personal interview. 7 Jan. 1999. University of California, Irvine. Gassmann Electronic Music Studio.

²Ibid., 7 Jan. 1999.

³Ibid., 7 Jan. 1999.

⁴Ibid., 7 Jan. 1999.

⁵Ibid., 7 Jan. 1999.

⁶Ibid., 7 Jan. 1999.

4.17 RECOMMENDED READINGS AND RESOURCES

Articles:

Solanke, Adeola. "Making Dance Talk." West Africa. No. 3740 (April 24-30, 1989): p. 670.

Books:

Abiodun, R., Drewal, H. J., & Pemberton, III, J. (Eds.). The Yoruba artist : new theoretical perspectives on African arts. Washington : Smithsonian Institution Press, 1994.

Ajayi, J. F. A. Milestones in Nigerian history. Ibadan, Nigeria: University College, 1962.

Àjàyí, Omófolábò. Yoruba Dance. New Jersey: Africa World Press, Inc., 1998.

Atakpu, B. O. A guide to selected traditional dances of the Bendel State of Nigeria. TN: Middle Tennessee State University, 1988.

Awolalu, J. O. Yoruba beliefs and sacrificial rites. London: Longman, 1979.

Babatunde, E. D. A critical study of Bini and Yoruba value systems of Nigeria in change: culture, religion, and the self. Lewiston: E. Mellen Press, 1992.

Bascom, W. R. Sixteen cowries : Yoruba divination from Africa to the New World. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1980.

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Drewal, H. J. & Pemberton III, J. Yoruba : nine centuries of African art and thought. New York : Center for African Art in Association with H.N. Abrams, 1989.

Drewal, M. T. Yoruba ritual : performers, play, agency. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1992.

Fagg, W. B. The living arts of Nigeria. New York, Macmillan, 1972.

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Harper, Peggy. Tiv Women: the Icoug dance. Ibadan: Caxton Press, 1968.
Nigeria. Federal Ministry of Information. Music of Our Land, and Our Traditional Dances. Lagos, 1966.

Nwamuo, Chris. Fundamentals of Dance. Owerri, Nigeria: AP Publications, c1993.

Okwori, Jenkeri. Ije: the performance traditions of the Idoma. Zaria, Nigeria: Instances Communications Resource Centre, c1998.