

Rhythm Transcriptions

Here you will find transcriptions of rhythms we have gathered from various places over the years. Many of the West African rhythms are local variations, but we always deferred Age Delbanco's book "The Book of West African Rhythms" to be sure. Please assume that any mistakes are our own. There is a list of websites offering rhythm sheets under the contents table.

Please note:

Rhythms are played differently in different areas. Seattle plays Soli slightly differently than Santa Cruz; Mamady plays a little different from Famoudou. Even within neighboring African villages, rhythms of the same name may be played differently. Unless you are from the culture, no transcription can be deemed authoritative.

Notation cannot capture the feel of rhythm. To fully learn a rhythm, you must know its feel. Some rhythms have a staccato sound, some are rolling, others have a swing feel. Notation cannot adequately capture this. Traditional rhythms are part of a culture.

A transcription cannot share the rhythm's reason for being. It cannot share the lives of the people who have created and passed down the rhythm. Respect those who have created the music in the world.

To learn traditional rhythms, take classes with the masters. Find someone close to where you live that can teach what they have learned if there are not Master drummers where you live.

When someone shares a different way of playing a familiar rhythm with you, listen. Learn. Share.