

Mamady Keita's "Mendiani"

BY B. MICHAEL WILLIAMS

"Mendiani," also known as "Mandiani" or "Manjani," is a social dance of the Malinke people of Guinea and Mali, West Africa. According to ethnomusicologist Eric Charry, "Mendiani" is "associated with young girl dancers in upper Guinea (the region of Siguiri especially), primarily with the Maninka (known as Malinke in French colonial writing). This is the region usually cited as the source for the tradition, just as Kouroussa (not too far from Siguiri) is cited as the source for Dundunba. Ladji Camara has indicated that one of the lead dancers in Les Ballets Africains of the 1950s was a Manjani (best pre-pubescent dancer in her village) when she was young."

"Mendiani" has become one of the most popular jembe rhythms among American drumming enthusiasts. This transcription is from Mamady Keita's recording titled *Nankama*, on the Fonti Musicali label (fmd 195, 1992).

The recorded performance begins with a lively group improvisation out of which emerges Keita's opening jembe call. The ensemble then comes together with an interlocking pattern of dundun, sangba, and kenkeni rhythms supplemented by bells and shekere. The single accompanying jembe sets up the standard "slap, tone-slap" pattern commonly associated with this family of rhythms.

Mamady Keita's solo is a study in motivic economy. This transcription shows clearly delineated thematic areas that are marked on the score with reference letters. Following his initial call, Keita launches a short cadential motive (based on the call motive) which will be used to bridge sections of more developed material throughout the solo (bars 3–4). The first of three such motives, I call this "cadential motive 1."

Reference letter A marks the first appearance of a solo motive so widely recognized that many ensembles include it as an additional jembe accompaniment pattern. The motive consists of a 3:4 polyrhythm that weaves in and out of the strong four feel of the ensemble accompaniment. Keita concludes this section with a new cadential motive at bar 9. This motive has a striking symmetrical balance, consisting of identical rhythmic figures on beats 1 and 3 with a contrasting idea on beat 2. Because of its symmetrical shape, the motive could be said to have an "arch" form. This "arch" shape will be found in later motives as well. Because this little motive appears several times in the course of the solo, always concluding a thematic section or heralding new activity, I call it "cadential motive 2."

The B section begins with dundun activity interspersed with cadential material taken from the call motive and cadential motive 2 in Keita's jembe. Except for a brief pattern of broken eighth notes in bar 17 and an offset 3:2 polyrhythm on muffled slaps in bars 19–20, this section is made up entirely of cadential material. The jembe solo material in this section mostly serves as punctuation to the broader ensemble activity, and as such is relatively undeveloped.

Section C introduces a new motive that is loosely based on the accompaniment jembe pattern. The pattern begins as a

single bar sounded three times (bar 22) before being extended to a two-bar phrase (bars 23–24). The section concludes with a variation on cadential motive 2 in bar 26 followed by material from cadential motive 1 in bar 27.

Section D presents a two-part motive that is developed in some interesting ways. The first part of the motive consists of a 3:2 polyrhythm ending with a triplet figure, while the second part has a double-stroke anacrusis (or "pick-up") leading into a double-stroke downbeat. This motive is sounded three times before the concluding fragment takes over and establishes its own identity at bar 33. Bar 34 shows an excellent example of the use of sonority changes to provide timbral variety to a repeated phrase. The double-stroke downbeat, which had been consistently played as two tones, appears in bar 34 played as two slaps, increasing the sense of forward momentum in the process.

In bar 35, Keita embellishes the motive with material from cadential motive 2. He extends the arch form of cadential motive 2 in bar 37 by repeating the sixteenth-note figures. The section closes with a 3:2 cross-rhythm created through sonority patterning, followed by yet another statement of cadential motive 2. A binary sonority pattern (slap slap, tone tone) is executed within a ternary beat division to create the polyrhythmic effect in the last half of bar 39.

At letter E, we see the return of the 3:4 polyrhythmic material first stated at section A. The "turn around" figures, used to bring the four feel back into play on the last half of bar 7, are restated with a slightly different sonority pattern in bars 42 and 44. Cadential motive 2 brings the section to a close at bar 46.

At letter F, we see the return of mostly cadential material found originally at letter B. The offset 3:2 polyrhythm that appeared as muffled slaps in bars 19–20 returns in a somewhat altered form as flams in bars 49–50. Material from cadential motive 1 appears in bar 52 and again in slightly altered form in bar 54.

Letter G marks the appearance of new thematic material. A new "arch motive" is stated four times at bar 56, and expands to a two-bar phrase with the introduction of a "double triplet" motive in bar 57. This "double triplet" motive begins to alternate with the original arch motive from bar 56 with a change of sonority in bar 59, a return to the original sonority pattern in bar 61, and yet another change of sonority in bar 63. A new cadential motive ("cadential motive 3") appears at bar 64 to close out the section.

Section H develops a motive that originally appeared in bar 17 as a fragment of broken eighth notes. The pattern appears at bar 66 as a two-bar phrase consisting of paired eighth notes sounded as tones on the downbeat followed by repeated anacrusis activity on the slap sonority. The aural result is a highly syncopated feel anchored by the paired eighths appearing as tones on every other downbeat. This activity is further developed in bar 70, with the slap figures becoming less predict-

Mendiani—Mamady Keita

Jembe Ensemble

transcription by B. Michael Williams

Jembe Sangba, Kenkeni, Dundun

Notation Key

Free Improvisation

Lead Jembe

Jembe 2 Shekere

Bell Kenkeni

Bell Sangba

Dundun

Call

Solo

ad lib freely throughout

able and more syncopated. The paired eighth notes appear on every downbeat starting at bar 70, drawing the listener into the anchoring tone sonority on the downbeats while moving farther away from regularity between the downbeats. The only exception to the regularity of these repeated downbeats occurs at bars 79–80, where a 3:4 cross-rhythm appears across the barline. The section concludes with material from cadential motive 1 in bar 85.

At letter I, we see the return of the arch motive from letter G followed by another statement of cadential motive 1 in bar 88, augmented by a statement (in slightly altered form) of cadential motive 3 (first seen in bar 64) in bar 89. These cadential motives signal new material, closely related to the arch motive originally appearing at letter G, at bar 91.

Letter J marks the appearance of a hybrid motive created out of the two alternating motives from section G. The contrasting material from the original arch motive found in bar 56 (an eighth note followed by a quarter note) becomes the unifying material in bar 91, with the triplet from bar 57 becoming the

contrasting rhythmic element. That motive is altered in bar 92 with the appearance of a single flammed slap on the downbeat. Bar 93 sees the return of the two-part motive from letter D with the addition of a brief cadential extension (taken from the hybrid arch motive) on beats 2 and 3 of bar 94.

By letter K, the entire ensemble has begun building intensity towards the final call. Keita marks the downbeats with repeated flammed slaps at bar 96 as the energy mounts. The intensity builds further as he signals the upcoming call with steadily repeated eighth notes on every beat. The unmistakable final call brings “Mendiani” to a vigorous close.

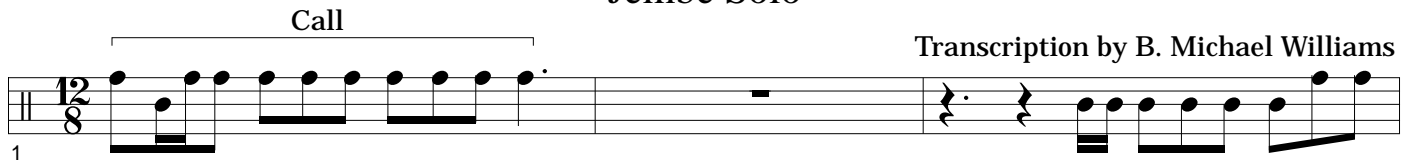
The economy of material with which Mamady Keita constructs his jembe solos is truly extraordinary. His musical ideas fluidly connect with one another with logic and clarity. Just as jazz musicians have learned the art of improvisation by studying transcriptions of the recorded solos of Charlie Parker, John Coltrane, and countless other masters, the jembe student may gain considerable insight into the creative process of drumming improvisation through the study of transcriptions such as this.

Mendiani—Mamady Keita

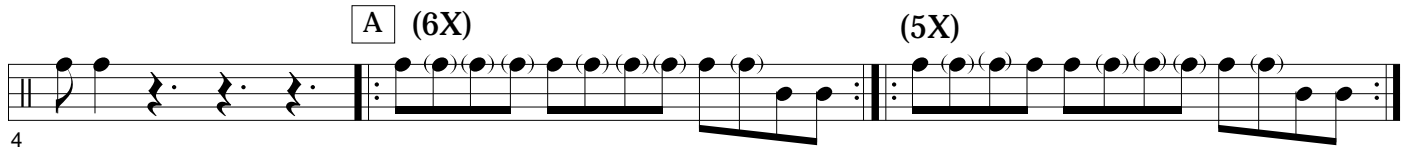
Jembe Solo

Transcription by B. Michael Williams

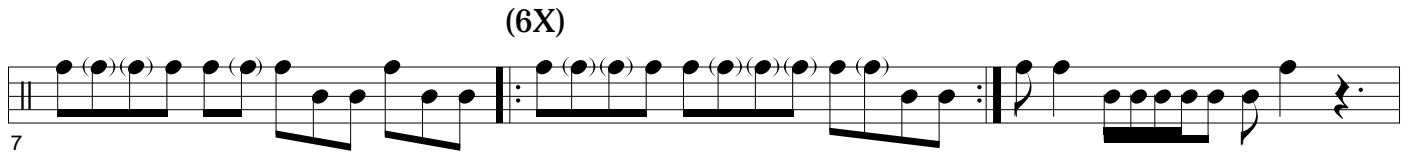
1 **Call**



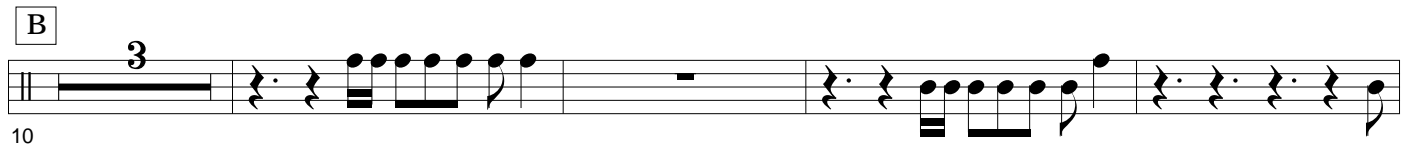
4 **A (6X)** **(5X)**



7 **(6X)**



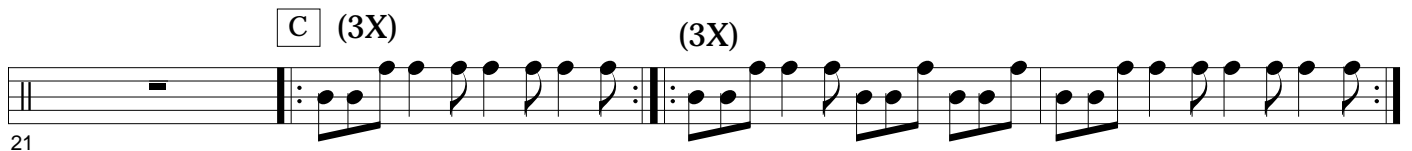
10 **B** 3



17



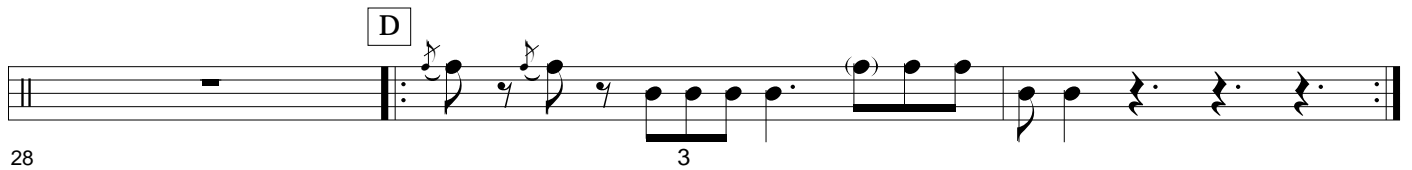
21 **C (3X)** **(3X)**



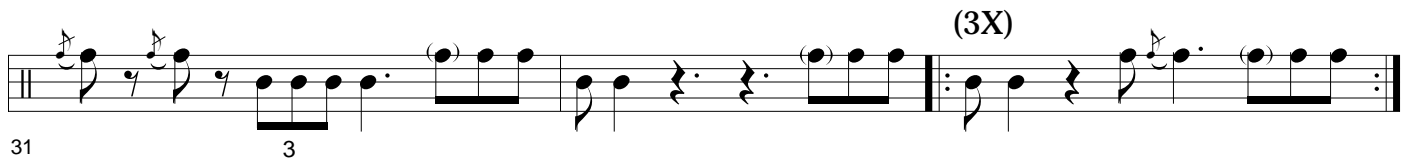
25



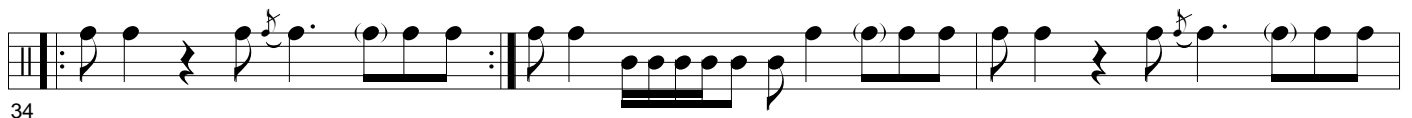
28 **D** 3



31 3 **(3X)**



34



37

E (4X)

40

43

F (4X)

46

49

52

G (4X)

56

59

62

H (3X)

65

68

71

74

77

80

83

86

I

90

J

(3X)

93

K

(4X)

97

(5X)

I cannot emphasize enough the importance of using the written transcription in combination with the CD recording in order to achieve a complete understanding of this creative process. Music is first and foremost an aural art, and jembe improvisation is a spontaneous creation of aural phenomena. Like the solos of a great jazz musician, each recording represents only one performance, and each live performance is fresh and new. Strive to use this transcription, along with the corresponding recording, as a point of departure toward developing your own creative imagination.

B. Michael Williams teaches percussion at Winthrop University in Rock Hill, South Carolina, where he also directs the Winthrop Percussion Ensemble and African Drum and Dance Ensemble. He holds a B.M. degree from Furman University, M.M. from Northwestern University, and Ph.D. from Michigan State University. Publications to his credit include "Four Solos for Frame Drums," "Three Shona Songs for Marimba Ensemble," "Recital Suite for Djembe," "Another New Riq," "Bodhran Dance," and "Learning Mbira," all published by HoneyRock Publications. PN



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