

Jammin' the Kpanlogo

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Let's take a look at Kpanlogo (pronounced "pahn-LOH-goh"), a rhythm of the Ga people of Ghana, West Africa. Kpanlogo is played on drums that bear the same name. The Kpanlogo drum usually has a head made of antelope skin and its body closely resembles the more familiar conga drum, although with the addition of tuning spikes to hold and tension the skin. This lesson will focus on the basic female (high) and male (low) drum parts common to a Kpanlogo performance, as taught to me by a member of the Akrowa Drum and Dance Ensemble in Kokrobite, Ghana.

As in previous articles, our strokes will be notated as follows:

B = *Bass* tone

O = *Open* tone

S = *Slap* stroke

– = *rest* (moment of silence)

Each drum phrase will be accompanied by a line suggesting which hand (R or L) should play each stroke. A third line will provide a method of verbally counting the rhythm.

When you reach the end of each line, return to the beginning and play it again, without a pause between the lines. Repeat this until the rhythm is relaxed and grooving!

Kpanlogo part #1 is often called the 'female' part because it is played on a higher pitched drum than part #2. The pitches of the drum family's voices vary, as do those of a human family.

O	O	O	O	B	–	S	S	O	–	O	O	B	–	S	S
R	L	R	L	R	–	R	L	R	–	R	L	R	–	R	L
1	E	&	A	2	E	&	A	3	E	&	A	4	E	&	A

Kpanlogo part #2 is the lower 'male' part. Note that the numbering below the rhythm starts with '4.' This is because the Ga see this bass tone as the beginning of the male drum's phrase, however that '4' still needs to be lined up audibly with the '4' on the female part. One good way to line them up properly is to have one player begin playing Kpanlogo part #1 alone. When that player reaches beat '4,' the second player begins playing part #2. With a little practice, the two rhythms will align nicely and sound fantastic!

B	O	O	–	O	O	–	S	B	–	S	S	O	–	S	S
R	L	R	–	R	L	–	L	R	–	R	L	R	–	R	L
4	E	&	A	1	E	&	A	2	E	&	A	3	E	&	A

If a third player is available, you might try adding the **Bell rhythm** to the two Kpanlogo drum patterns. Bells in West Africa come in several different styles, with a variety of shapes and sizes. They are often made of iron and struck with a stick or mallet of sorts, but the bell part below can be played on nearly any sort of metal bell-like object that you find. In Ghana, it was not uncommon to see a bell player banging away on a used auto part. The instrumentation is not as important as the overall function of the music and the celebration taking place.

The bell rhythm is notated using:

X = play a *Bell* tone

– = *rest* (moment of silence)

X	–	–	X	–	–	X	–	–	–	X	–	X	–	–	–
1	E	&	A	2	E	&	A	3	E	&	A	4	E	&	A

Keep in mind that these rhythms were not created to be played by themselves; they were designed to be performed simultaneously. So gather up some friends, learn the rhythms together, then each pick one part and combine them to create your Kpanlogo ensemble! Have fun, I'll see you next time!