Cornell World Drum and Dance Ensemble

Music 3612
Fall 2012
Tuesdays, 7-9pm, Lincoln Hall B20
Either 0 credits, S-U, or 1 credit, letter grade

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About the Cornell World Drum and Dance Ensemble

The Cornell World Drum and Dance Ensemble focuses on performing percussive music of the Ewe people, an ethnic group of approximately four million people living in southeastern Ghana, Togo, and Benin. Ensemble members will come into contact with all aspects of this complex and diverse musical culture, including singing, drumming, and dancing. Special attention will be paid to the historical and cultural function and implication of the music, through readings and discussion.

In Fall 2012, the WDDE will explore dance-drumming belonging to a few different genres, in versions similar to both “village-style” music as practiced in the Volta Region of Ghana, and similar to that staged by the Ghana National Dance Company. In particular, we will focus on Ewe interpretations of Gahu, a recreational dance-drumming style created by Yoruba speakers in Benin and Nigeria in the 1930s and brought to Ghana in the early 1950s.

Materials

Required Texts:

All students will be required to purchase *Introductory Course for African Drumming*, an instructional method written by Dr. James Burns. Since this text is printed on demand, orders will be collected at the beginning of the semester and fulfilled shortly after.

Although will learn our repertoire by memory, this text is useful as a study guide and reinforcement out of class, as well as a concise source of background information and practice tips. In addition, material for short Proficiency Exams throughout the semester will be drawn from *Introductory Course for African Drumming*, and selections from the book’s audio examples will be posted on the Cornell Percussion website.
Reading/ Resources (to be assigned throughout the semester):


Note: This article contains explicit language.


Ladzekpo, C.K. Foundation Course in African Dance Drumming Online Tutorial: [http://home.comcast.net/~dzinyaladzekpo/Foundation.html](http://home.comcast.net/~dzinyaladzekpo/Foundation.html)


With the exception of *Introductory Course for African Drumming*, all required texts and recordings will be available through the course’s Blackboard site (https://blackboard.cornell.edu).

Reference/ Further Exploration (on reserve at the Music Library):


While song texts and translations and drum patterns are available in *Introductory Course for African Drumming*, we will learn the entirety of our repertoire’s musical structure by memory, reflecting the methodology of Ewe musicians. Audio examples from the Burns will be available on the percussion department website, but a personal audio recorder...
might be a smart tool to bring to rehearsals, in addition to a notebook and folder for class handouts.

**Projects**

This semester the WDDE will perform on a joint concert with the Cornell Steel Bands and Binghamton’s Nukporfe ensemble on Friday, November 16th at 6pm at Willard Straight Hall. More information will be available as the semester progresses. Performance is essential to musical learning. As such, the WDDE is actively seeking additional performance opportunities, and welcomes suggestions for venues or programs. Let’s get out there and play! Ensemble members will be expected to maintain a reasonable degree of scheduling flexibility in terms of potential performances.

**Rehearsals**

The WDDE rehearses Tuesdays from 7 to 9pm in Lincoln Hall B20. Members are asked to be set up and ready to begin playing at the beginning of rehearsal – this means setting aside time BEFORE rehearsal to find, build, and set benches and percussion instruments to facilitate a 7pm start time. Members are also expected to help one other pack up at the end of rehearsal. Ensemble members not set up by the beginning of rehearsal will be considered late.

Equipment for the Cornell Steel Band is kept in Lincoln Hall B23, where it must be neatly stored at all times when not in use.

Depending on our members’ availability, the WDDE may hold additional rehearsals on Saturdays before concerts and to accommodate other schedule changes.

**Important Dates:**

- **November 16th:** Concert with Cornell Steel Band, Binghamton African Drum and Dance Ensemble
- **November 20th:** Class rescheduled for date TBA (possibly November 24?)
- **December 4th:** Class rescheduled for date TBA

**Assignments and Grading**

The WDDE’s work consists mainly of rehearsing together; therefore, attendance is of the highest importance. There are no free or unexcused absences. A student missing a class due to illness will need to bring a medical excuse form to the following rehearsal. Should an upcoming meeting, out-of-town excursion, or other unavoidable, once-in-a-lifetime activity impact class attendance, students should inform the instructor.
by the FRIDAY BEFORE the coming meeting. Classes missed without either contact will result in the reduction of one letter grade. Students will fail the course with a third unexcused absence. Two late appearances to rehearsal will also result in the reduction of one letter grade.

**WDDE performances are the culmination of the ensemble’s work each semester.** Students who miss the scheduled Fall performance will fail the course without documented proof of extraordinary circumstance.

WDDE members will also complete a short written assignment related to some aspect of Ewe culture as it impacts the ensemble’s work. For example, one might need to discuss, or write a reaction to, an article discussing modern Agbadza songs of Dzodze Ewe musicians. Each student in this course is expected to abide by the Cornell University Code of Academic Integrity. Any written work submitted by a student in this course for academic credit will be the student’s own work.

**Grading:**

In addition to written work, grading also reflects commitment to the work of the World Drum and Dance Ensemble. A committed musician is on time and prepared for rehearsals, enthusiastic about the music, committed to improvement, and intent on contributing to the group. Intermittent or inadequate preparation and attitude will result in low grades, as well as an unhappy ensemble.

**Ewe drummers don’t “practice,” per se, but they do play a lot more than two hours a week, and are acculturated to dance-drumming from a young age.** To ensure that the ensemble stays “in” in the musical material, there will be a series of short proficiency exams throughout the semester, where students will demonstrate their grasp of course material. More information about the content and structure of these short check-ups will be available as the time approaches.

Participation in and preparation for rehearsals and performances will account for 60% of a student’s semester grade, performance on the proficiencies will count 30%, and written assignments will make up 10%.

**Equipment**

Cornell will supply all percussion instruments, and batik cloths for performance. Students may bring or purchase their own, and the instructor may be of assistance in locating bells, shakers, or batik.

**Concert Dress**

Black T-shirt, batik print supplied by the group, shorts under cloth.