



The Artistry of Afro-Cuban Batá Drumming: Aesthetics, Transmission, Bonding, and Creativity (Caribbean Studies Series)

Kenneth Schweitzer

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An iconic symbol and sound of the Lucumí/Santería religion, Afro-Cuban batá are talking drums that express the epic mythological narratives of the West African Yoruba deities known as *orisha*. By imitating aspects of speech and song, and by metaphorically referencing salient attributes of the deities, batá drummers facilitate the communal praising of *orisha* in a music ritual known as a *toque de santo*.

In *The Artistry of Afro-Cuban Batá Drumming*, Kenneth Schweitzer blends musical transcription, musical analysis, interviews, ethnographic descriptions, and observations from his own experience as a ritual drummer to highlight the complex variables at work during a live Lucumí performance.

Integral in enabling trance possessions by the *orisha*, by far the most dramatic expressions of Lucumí faith, batá drummers are also entrusted with controlling the overall ebb and flow of the four- to six-hour *toque de santo*. During these events, batá drummers combine their knowledge of ritual with an extensive repertoire of rhythms and songs. Musicians focus on the many thematic acts that unfold both concurrently and in quick succession. In addition to creating an emotionally charged environment, playing salute rhythms for the *orisha*, and supporting the playful song competitions that erupt between singers, batá drummers are equally dedicated to nurturing their own drumming community by creating a variety of opportunities for the musicians to grow artistically and creatively.

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