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## Afro-Brazilian Songs and Rhythms for General Music K-8

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### Candomblé: The Afro-Brazilian Religion of Bahia

Candomblé is the Afro-Brazilian religion of Brazil that originated in the state of Bahia in northeast Brazil. It is part of the religion and culture of the Africa diaspora, which include the religions of Cuban *Santería* and *Vodun* of Haiti. Although the spellings and pronunciations of the deities (called *orixás* in Candomblé) are different between the countries due to syncretism and miscegenation, they have a shared tradition of rituals, songs, rhythms, mythology, worship, and social and cultural context.

Of the approximate 10 million Africans that were enslaved and brought to the Americas, 4 million of those landed in Brazil. During the years of the Trans-Atlantic slave trade (1500-1850), Africans were taken from 3 different regions. Candomblé originated in the state of Bahia and its capital city of Salvador as a result of the concentration of enslaved Africans. The religious traditions of the enslaved Africans were founded on practices from Central and West Africa, who believed in a single god that was accompanied by a pantheon of deities called *Orixás*. Due to the mixing of the different tribal and cultural groups, the slaves were allowed to form *irmandades*, which were social organizations of Catholic lay brotherhoods that allowed the slaves to gather together from their points of origin in Africa. As a result of oppression, the enslaved Africans disguised their worship by syncretizing the *orixás* and religious rituals with the saints of Catholicism. This allowed the African cultural, musical, and religious traditions to survive in Brazil. Even though slavery was abolished in 1888, oppression and persecution of those who practice Candomblé still exists today.

From these *irmandades*, three *nações* (nations) emerged:

ANGOLA: Bantu-speaking people who originated from the Congo, Angola, and Mozambique

JEJÊ: the people who originated from Ghana, Togo, and Benin (more importantly, the Ewe-Fon people of Ghana)

KÊTU: the people who originated from the Yoruban tribes of Nigeria and Benin. This group was the largest and last group of slaves brought to Brazil.

The repertory of songs and rhythms is vast and many songs are shared among the three nations although the rhythms are not. The musical styles, however, are often identified by the Angola and Jêjê-Kétu styles. Superficially, the primary difference is in how the atabaques are played and the close geographical connection that comprise the Jêjê and Kétu tribes. In the Angola tradition, the

drummers, or Ogan Alabê, only use hands, while the Jejê-Kêtu use sticks, or one stick and one hand. The use of sticks or combination of a stick and a hand is a common feature of Sub-Saharan drumming.

### Terms/Instruments of Candomblé

Afoxé (ah-foh-SHAY) – Carnival groups that play the rhythm of ijexá and sing Candomblé songs in the street

Agadavi (ah-gah-DAH-vee) – the sticks used to play instruments in the JêJe-Kêtu nations of Candomblé

Agbê (AH-beh) – a hollowed gourd covered in netting with strung beads  
(the West African equivalent to a *shekere*)

Agogô (ah-go-GOH) – from the Yoruban word “bell”, a two-toned bell originally made from iron

Alabê (ah-lah-BEH) – the bestowed title for master drummers of Candomblé

Angola – one of the three primary nations of Candomblé whose people come from the Bantu speaking tribes of central Africa. In Angolan Candomblé, the alabês only use their hands to play the atabaques

Atabaque (ah-ta-BAH-kee) – the general name for the drums used in Candomblé. Similar in shape to Cuban congas, they are thinner and taller and only goat or cow skins are used for the membranes, as these animals are considered sacred. Always played in a set of three (three is a sacred number) and the names of each drum from lowest to highest are:

**Rum** (hoom) – the lowest sounding drum, this drum calls and leads the other drummers through the ceremony and plays phrases that embody the movements of the dancers

**Rumpi** (HOOM-pee) – the middle sounding drum

**Lê** (leh) – the highest sounding drum

Axé (ah-SHAY) – the Yoruban word for life force or divine energy (not a literal translation)

Bahia (bah-EE-ah) – a Northeastern state in Brazil that contains the highest population of Afro-Brazilians. Recognized as the capital of Afro-Brazilian culture in Brazil.

Baque (BAH-kee) – beat

Cabôclo (cah-BOH-kloo) – a person whose ethnic heritage is African and indigenous Indian (*indios*)

Caxixi (kah-SHEE-shee) – small woven basket shakers filled with beads

Gâ (gah) – the Ewe-Fon (Yoruban) tribe word “bell”, a single-toned bell originally made from iron

Ganzá (gahn-ZAH) – a cylindrical metal shaker filled with metal beads or dried seeds

Ijexá (ee-zchay-SHAH) – a sacred rhythm of Candomblé of the Kêtu nation, now used by all nations. Said to be one of the most spiritually powerful of all the Candomblé rhythms.

Itan (ee-TAHN) – the stories, myths, and legends of the orixás that define their characteristics and personalities.

Jejê (ZCHAY- zchay) – one of the three primary nations of Candomblé whose people come from the kingdom of Dahomey

Kêtu (KEH-too) – one of the three primary nations of Candomblé whose people come from the Yoruban people of Nigeria (the largest and last group of slaves brought to Brazil)

Oriki (Oh-REE-kee) – short poems about the orixás that define their characteristics and personalities.

Orin (OH-reen) – songs about the orixás that define their characteristics and personalities.

Ritmo (HEETCH-moo) – rhythm

Syncretism – the amalgamation or attempted amalgamation of different religions, cultures, or schools of thought. An example of this in Candomblé is when the enslaved Africans disguised their African deities with Catholic saints when the plantation owners began to oppress their religious practices.

Terreiro (teh-HEY-roo) – the temple, house, or building where Candomblé ceremonies are held

Vodun (voh-DOON) – the Jêje nation word for spirit guide in the Ewe-Fon language

Xekerê (SHEH-keh-reh) – a dried, hollowed out gourd covered with netted beads

### **Instrument Substitutions**

#### **Xekerê**

egg shakers  
sand blocks  
maracas  
cabasa  
pod shaker

#### **Agogô**

cowbell  
triangle  
rhythm sticks  
claves

#### **ATABAQUES**

##### **Rum**

conga (tumba)  
tubano  
gathering drum

##### **Rumpi**

conga (tres dos)  
Remo™ tubano  
djembe

## Lê

Conga (quinto)

bongos

small djembe

### Song text, Pronunciation, History and Meaning

#### Sou eu Maculelê

Sou eu, sou eu (So eh-oo, so eh-oo)

Sou eu Maculelê, sou eu (So eh-oo Mah-coo-lay-leh, so eh-oo)

#### History/Translation/Meaning

This song means “I am Maculelê” or “It’s me, Maculelê.” The history and origins of this song and dance are vague and inaccurate due to the oral tradition and lack of documentation. The most probable theory is that it was a song and dance that existed in Africa and made its way to Brazil via one of the tribes of enslaved Africans. It was originally a sparring dance between young men. In Brazil, the song evolved into a circle dance (*roda*) that was performed by enslaved Africans working in the plantation fields to release their frustrations and anger as a result of their enslavement and oppression by the Portuguese. Over time, the song found itself in the practices Afro-Brazilian practices of Candomblé and Capoeira (the martial art/dance form). In Candomblé, the rhythms were changed from the *Maculelê* to the rhythms known as *Congo de Ouro*. Capoeira, on the other hand, kept the original rhythms, but applied them to Capoeira instrumentation.

#### Morô omim má

Morô mi má (Moh-rhoh mee mah)

Morô mi maiô (Moh-rhoh mee my-oh)

Morô mi maiô (Moh-rhoh mee my-oh) Abadô aiê aiê ô (Ah-bah-doh ah-yay yay oh)

(2x)

Alá de Oxum (Ah-lah gee-Oh-shoong)

Oxum mirerei ô (Oh-shoong mee-reh-reh oh)

(2x)

Ela é mina nicarodô (Eh-lah eh mee-nah knee-kah-roh-doh)

(4x)

#### History/Translation/Meaning

This song is about a queen (Oxum) of a large and strong river who is giving praise to the great mother (Mother Earth). It is sung to the *Orixá* (deity) Oxum, whose domains are fresh water, beauty, femininity; wealth, gold, music, dance, creativity, and fertility. The words and meanings of many Candomblé songs have been lost over the centuries through the oral/aural tradition. As a result of miscegenation with the Portuguese, many Candomblé songs use words from both African and Portuguese languages.

### **Performance Notes**

Candomblé songs are always sung first, usually as call and response, with a lead singer and chorus often accompanied by the bell pattern. A song is usually sung once by the lead singer and then the chorus responds the second time through, although this is not strict guideline and the performance practice can vary greatly within each nation and even from one terreiro to another.

The bell enters next and the song continues to be sung.

Finally, the Rum (lead drum) calls in the Rumpi and Lê in.

The Ijexá is primarily associated with the *orixá* Oxum, but is also used with songs to the *orixás* of Ogum, Oyá, and Oxalá.

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## **Resources**

### **BOOKS**

Brundage, Kirk. *Afro-Brazilian Percussion Guide: Candomblé*. Milwaukee: Alfred Music Publishing, Inc., 2010.

Crook, Larry. *Music of Northeast Brazil, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed.* New York: Routledge, 2009.

Freyre, Gilberto. *The Masters and The Slaves: A Study in the Development of Brazilian Civilization, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed.* New York: Alfred A. Knopf, Inc. 1967.

McGowan, Chris and Ricardo Pessanha. *The Brazilian Sound: Samba, Bossa Nova, and the Popular Music of Brazil*. Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2009.

### **RECORDINGS**

**Morô mi má**

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RhEpxSXL\\_98](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RhEpxSXL_98)

[Spring Festival of World Music - UCLA](#)

[Video: An Introduction to Candomble](#)

[Candomblé: Brazil's Most Popular Religion You Know Nothing About](#)

[The Rhythms, Instruments, and Orixas of Candomble](#)

[Congo de Ouro Rhythm](#)

[Bale Folclórico da Bahia \(Sou eu Maculelê/starts at 3:00\)](#)

## ONLINE RESOURCES

California Brazil Camp. <http://www.calbrazilcamp.com/>

Great Brazilian Music. <http://www.greatbrazilianmusic.com/index.html>

The Brazilian Sound. <http://www.thebraziliansound.com/>

### Brazilian Instrument Resources

Kalango Percussion: <https://www.kalango.com/en/>

Steve Weiss Music: <http://www.steveweissmusic.com/>

## Michigan State Music Standards

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### KINDERGARTEN

#### PERFORM

**Standard 1: Apply skills and knowledge to perform in the arts.**

ART.M.I.K.1 Demonstrate uses of the voice, proper instrumental technique, and steady beat.

ART.M.I.K.2 Sing and play music from a variety of styles and cultures.

ART.M.I.K.3 Sing and play expressively utilizing extreme opposites of dynamics and interpretation.

ART.M.I.K.4 Sing melodies with confidence in a large group.

ART.M.I.K.5 Follow cues of the conductor to begin and for a cut-off.

ART.M.I.K.6 Play a steady beat.

ART.M.I.K.7 Replicate short rhythmic and melodic patterns.

ART.M.I.K.8 Play a steady beat in a group while other students sing a song.

#### ANALYZE

**Standard 3: All students will analyze, describe, and evaluate works of art.**

ART.M.III.K.1 Identify echo songs and recognize the same and different sections of the music when presented aurally.

ART.M.III.K.2 Use invented or standard notation to transcribe increasingly difficult rhythms and melodies.

ART.M.III.K.3 Describe the music performed and presented in kindergarten by moving, drawing, or through other appropriate responses.

ART.M.III.K.4 Introduce music vocabulary emphasizing opposites; i.e. fast and slow, loud and soft.

ART.M.III.K.5 Categorize the timbre of non-pitched percussion instruments. Identify male, female, and children's voices.

ART.M.III.K.6 Devise student-created criteria for objective evaluation of performances and compositions.

ART.M.III.K.7 Identify and support personal reactions to a musical selection.

**ANALYZE IN CONTEXT**

**Standard 4: Understand, analyze, and describe the arts in their historical, social, and cultural contexts.**

ART.M.IV.K.2 Describe how elements of music are used in examples from world cultures, using music performed and presented in kindergarten.

**GRADE 8**

**PERFORM**

**Standard 1: Apply skills and knowledge to perform in the arts.**

ART.M.I.8.1 Sing and play, with expression and technical accuracy, a diverse repertoire of vocal and instrumental literature, with and without notation, including selections performed from memory.

ART.M.I.8.2 Sing an ostinato.

ART.M.I.8.3 Sing and play accurately as a soloist, and in both small and large ensembles, with appropriate technique and breath control.

**ANALYZE**

**Standard 3: Analyze, describe, and evaluate works of art.**

ART.M.III.8.1 Identify and describe specific musical elements and events in a given aural example, using appropriate terminology.

ART.M.III.8.2 Analyze the uses of musical elements in aural examples from diverse genres and cultures.

ART.M.III.8.3 Demonstrate knowledge of the basic principles of meter, rhythm, tonality, intervals, chords, and harmonic progressions through analysis.

#### **ANALYZE IN CONTEXT**

**Standard 4: Understand, analyze, and describe the arts in their historical, social, and cultural contexts.**

ART.M.IV.8.1 Describe distinguishing characteristics of representative music genres and styles from a variety of cultures.

ART.M.IV.8.3 Compare, in several cultures of the world, functions music serves, roles of musicians, and conditions under which music is typically performed.

#### **ANALYZE AND MAKE CONNECTIONS**

**Standard 5: Recognize, analyze, and describe connections among the arts; between the arts and other disciplines; between the arts and everyday life.**