Commis

(last edited on 11 January 2023)

An old balafon piece that dates back to colonial times when the French occupied large parts of West Africa. It is shown here with a Bambara / Djoula song. At the time of the French occupation, only the (white) French men actually wore trousers. Within the government, the only native allowed to wear trousers was the "Le Commissair", or as the Africans called it: the "Commis". It was the highest civil servant position that could also be held by black people.
Sometimes black people tried to get a bit closer to the white ruling class. Once someone came back from a trip to the city and had put on a pair of trousers, a Djeli balfonist responded by making an appropriate story / song and this song came up with the message: "The trousers don't make you Commis". It is a metaphor; external display, expensive (brand) clothing, expensive cars, TVs, the latest smartphone, or other things don't make you a better person.

Commie ye, Commie ye, Commie ye, bète Commie ye
Commie ye, (bète) Commie ye, pantalon donba, bète Commie ye

I made pattern D myself by reversing the left and right hand setting of pattern C. I freely interpreted patterns B and E from my own sound recordings where Youssouf Keita played the song more freely during the workshop. I have adjusted the (structure of) the melody so that it now comes in 8 bars. I have also added a possibility for percussion. Note the flam in pattern A.

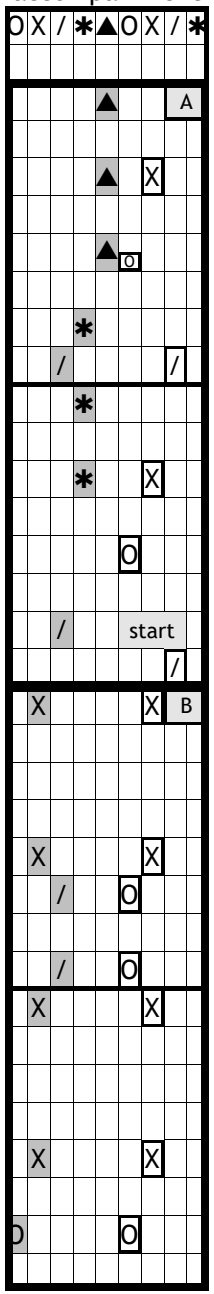
Sources: Youssouf & Kassoum Keita, Konsankuy, Mali 2012. Youssouf Keita, Tilburg, Netherlands, June 2022

Possible percussion accompaniment

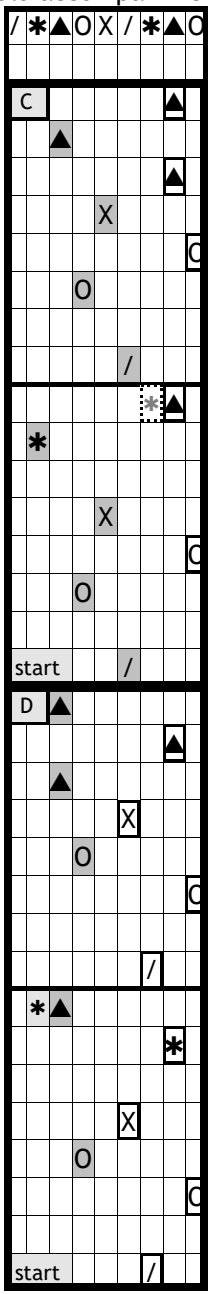
1	S			S	S		T	T	S			S	S		T	T	S			S	S		T	T	S			S	S		T	T
2	B		B			T		T	B		B			T		T	B		B			T		T	B		B			T		T
K						●		●						●		●						●		●						●		●
S	●		●						●		●						●		●						●		●					
D	●		●	●																						●		●		●		●
S			★				★				★				★				★				★				★				★	

(1=Djembé 1, 2=Djembé 2, Kenkeni, Sangban,Doundoun and Shaker)

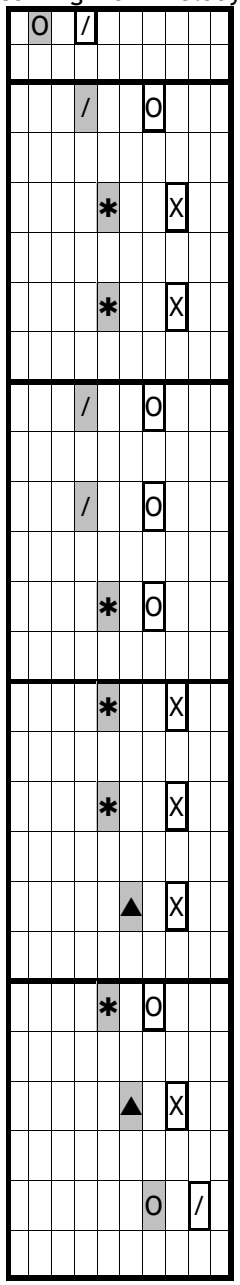
Pattern A & B
accompaniment



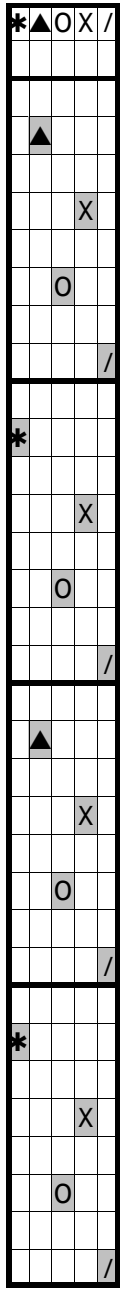
Pattern C & D
solo accompaniment



Pattern E: ternair!
solo accompaniment
coming from melody

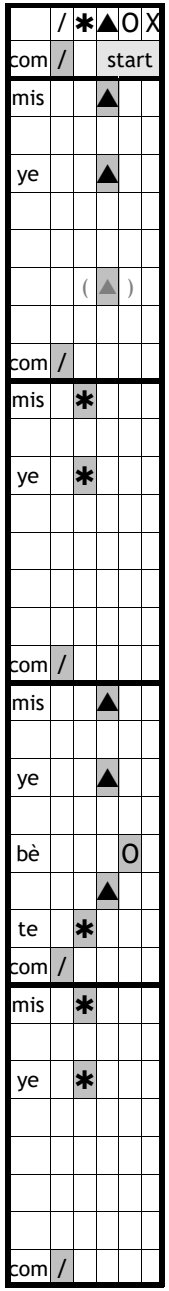


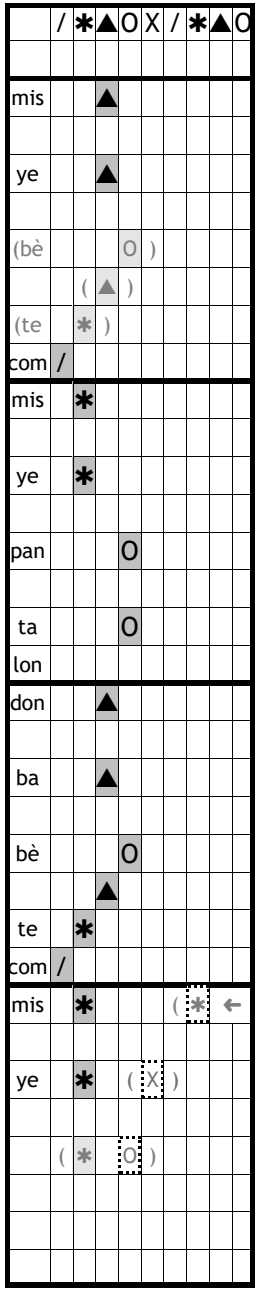
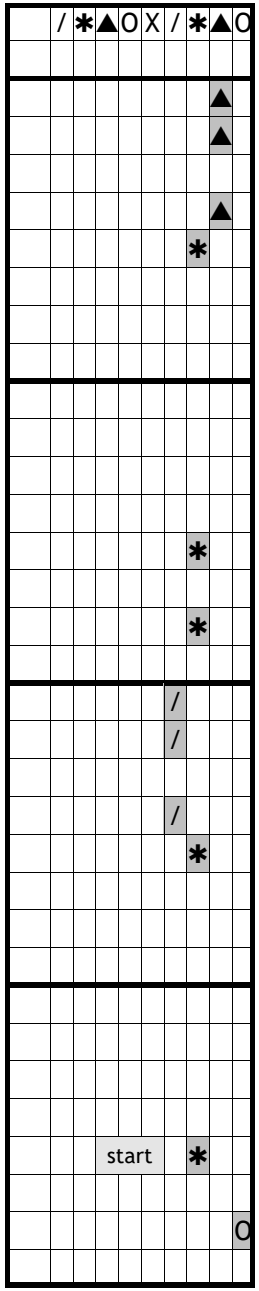
Accomp. left with melody



Melody 1 / Intro

(with connection ← A)





Melody 2