

# Soboninkun

WAP-pages / Paul Nas / Last updated on 13 January 2015

*Sobonincun* (*Soboninkun*, *Sobonincu*, *Sogonincun*) is a mask dance. In different areas in West Africa, the meaning of this dance is slightly different. Mamady Keita speaks of the Antilope-mask (sobo= antilope, ni= smal, kun= head). The dance is performed by a initiated person to the secret of the mask and a specialist in dancing skills and balance. This specialist often travels from village to village to to this dance, that is usually danced after harvest. The dance is presented on a big sieve that is normally used to sift grains . The dance can last several hours and is rewarded with food and gifts. In Mali there is a connection to the 'Banama ciwara Antilope mask' and in the southern parts of West Africa it is connected to the Pourou society' a secret society for the initiation for the Senufo people, living in Ivorycoast, Liberia and Sierra Leone.

It is actually dangerous to try and give an accurate notation of this rhtym in the way that I use here on the WAP-pages: According Mamady Keita the rhythm hovers between binary and ternary! Therefore I suggest listening to the examples on the wonderful CD's of Mamady Keita 'Wassolon' and 'Balandugu Kan'. I hope the given notation can be of help in understanding the problem of 'hovering between ternary and binary'. For a better understanding of this you can also read more information on micro timing in an interesting article by Rainer Polak.

I will give a ternary and a binary interpretation. Vincent Manuelle gave me a notation that he uses. It is a notation able to present better the "hovering between ternary en binary (or better quarterternary as he prefers to say). At the end an interesting exercise for two djembé's once presented by Momo Touré during a *Sobunincun* lesson I attended during the (Kakilambe-) workshops on the Dutch isle Terschelling in 1998.

*Mory lee, dya n'di wa omori fe, Soboninkun Mory lee, Dya n'di wa omori fe*  
I am going with Mory, Mory who carries the mask of Soboninkun, I am leaving with Mory (on Wassolon CD from Mamady Keita:)

*Aibo siyalaa wii mogulu Sobodonkanyee*  
Clear the way! It's the sound that announces Sobo's arrival!  
(on Balandugu Kan CD from Mamady Keita)

## Sobunincun Ternaire version:

Kenkeni	○	● ●	○	● ●
	x x	x x	x x	x x

Sangban	○ ○	●	● ●	
bell 1	x x	x x	x x	x x
bell 2	x x	x x	x x	x

Doundoun		●	●	●
	x x	x x	x x	x x

## Djembé patterns with micro timing

Djembé 1	S	S	T	S	B	S	T
	r	l	r	r	l	r	l

Djembé 2	S	T	T	S	S	T	T
	r	l	r	r	l	r	l

Djembé 3	S	T	S	S	T	S
	r	r	l	r	r	l

Sobunincun Binary version:

Kenkeni	○		●●	○		●●
a	x	x	x:x	x	x	x:x

or

Kenkeni	○		●●	○		●●
b	x	x	x	x	x	x

Sangban / Doun doun combination 1

Sangban	○	○		●●		
	x	x:x	x:x	x	x:x	x:x

Doundoun			●	●		●●
	x	x	x	x	x	x

Sangban / Doundoun combination 2

Sangban	○	○		●●	●●	
	x	x:x	x	x	x:x	x

Doundoun			●			●
	x	x:x	x	x	x	x

Momo Touré once gave as an exercise a binary and a ternary pattern on two djembé's against each other to play:

Djembé 1	T	T	S	S	B	S	T	S	S	B
	r	l	r	l	l	r	l	r	l	r

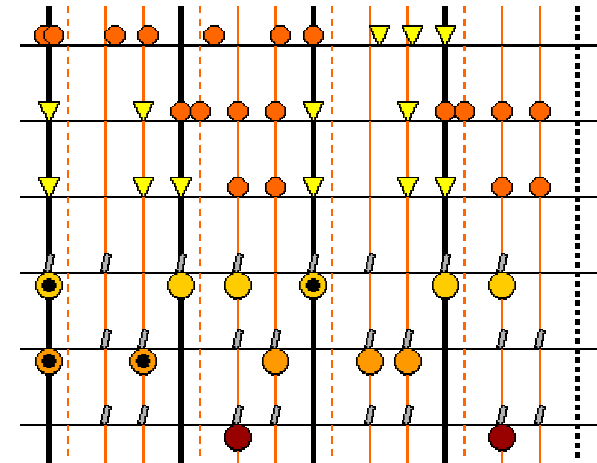
Djembé 2	S		S	S	T	T	S		B	S	S	T
	r		l	r	r	l	r		l	r	l	r

Transcription by Vincent Manuelle:

"Soboninkun is the perfect example for the "partial ternarization": This notation shows how you can play exactly between 4 elementary pulsations per beat and 3 elementary pulsations per beat : it's as simply as  $(3 + 4) / 2 = 3\frac{1}{2}$  (in fact,  $\frac{1}{2} + 3$ ). All in this rhythm is normally played with this feeling, except for the call which is played as if it was quaternary, and the solo, that can be ternary, quaternary or anything else of course, depending on the inspiration of the soloist. This "3½ feeling", is of course closely related with the concept of microtiming developed by Rainer Polak

Legend:

- there are six patterns here: a call, two djembe patterns and the three patterns for kenkeni, sangban en doun doun
- red balls are djembé tones, yellow triagles are djembé slaps
- a black dot inside a ball is a muffled stroke
- a grey line is a bell stroke



About the douns, the way they are played can depend on who plays them. Some will play more ternary and some other more quaternary. The best feeling is when the Dounoun players put their strokes right on the djembe accompaniment, if this one is played correctly.

Djembé solo 1	B	B	B	B	B	S	S	S	S
frase 1	r	l	r	l	r	l	r	l	r

	B	B	B	S	S	B	B	S	S	S	S
frase 2	r	l	r	r	l	r	l	r	l	r	l

	B	B	B	S	S	B	S	B
	r	l	r	r	l	r	r	l

	S	T	T	S	T	T	S	T	T	B	S	S	S	S
frase 3	r	l	r	l	r	l	r	l	r	l	r	l	r	l

	S	T	T	S	T	T	S	T	T	B	S	S	S	S
frase 4	r	l	r	l	r	l	r	l	r	l	r	l	r	l

	B	S	S	B	T	T	B	S	S	B	T	T
	r	l	r	l	r	l	r	l	r	l	r	l

	S	T	T	S	T	T	S	T	T	B	S	T	T	S
frase 5	r	l	r	l	r	l	r	l	r	l	r	l	r	l

	T	T	S	T	T	B	S	T	T	S	T	T	S	T
	r	l	r	l	r	l	r	l	r	l	r	l	r	l

	T	B	S	T	T	S	T	T	S	T	T
	r	l	r	l	r	l	r	l	r	l	r

Ponda O'Bryan's Sobonincun during a workshop with IDON! in 2008

Sangban / Doundoun combination

Sangban	○	○	●	●	●	●	●	
Doundoun			●	●			●	●

Call	T	T	T	T	T	T	T		
	f	r	l	r	l	r	l	r	l

watch micrtotiming here!

Djembé	B	T	T	B	S	S	B	T	T	B	S	S
1	r	l	r	l	r	l	r	l	r	l	r	l

Djembé	S	S	T	T	S	S	T	T
2	r	r	r	l	r	r	r	l

	T	S	T	S	S	B	S	S	B	S	S	B	T	S
solophrase 1	f	l	f	r	l	r	r	l	r	r	l	r	f	l

	T	S	T	S	S	B	T	S	T	S	S	B	T	S
	f	l	f	r	l	r	f	l	r	r	l	r	f	l

	B	S	S	S	S	S	T	S
	r	l	l	l	l	l	f	f

+ 4 counts djembe rest (only douns play)

	S	B	T	T	B	S	B	T	T	B	B
	r	l	r	l	r	l	r	l	r	l	r

<b>Echauffement</b>	T:T	S:T	T:S	T:T	S:T	T:S	T:T	S:S
	r:l	r:l	r:l	r:l	r:l	r:l	r:l	r:l
			●	●			●	●
	○	○	●	●	●	●	●	●

	B:S	S:S	B:S	S:S	B:S	S:S	B:S	S:S
	r:l	r:l	r:l	r:l	r:l	r:l	r:l	r:l
			●	●			●	●
<b>repeat</b>	○	○	●	●	●	●	●	●

	B:S	S:S	B:S	S:S	B:S	S:S	B:S	S:S
	r:l	r:l	r:l	r:l	r:l	r:l	r:l	r:l
			●	●			●	●
<b>last time</b>	○	○	●	●	●	●	●	●

	T:S	T:S	T:S	T:S	S:			
	r:l	r:l	r:l	r:l	f			
			●	●			●	●
<b>ending</b>	○	○	●	●	●	●	●	●

+ 4 counts djembe rest (only douns play)

	T:T	S	S	T:T	S	B	B	S:S
	r:l	l	r	r:l	l	r:l	r:l	r:l

Play again the echauffement but after ending play:

<b>Part a</b>	S:	S:	S:	S:	S:	B:	T:T	T:	B:	T:S
	2:	f	f	f	f	r	r:l	2:	r	r:l
		●	●	●	●	●	●		●	●
<b>repeat</b>	●:●	○	○	○	○	●	●	●	●	●

and follow with

<b>Part b</b>	T:T	S:	S:	S:	S:	B	S	S	S	S	S
	r:l	f	f	f	f	l	r	r	r	r	r
		●	●	●	●		●	●		●	●
<b>repeat</b>	●:●	○	○	○	○	●	●	●	●	●	●

and play another echauffement.

After that again part a and finish the piece

**Sources**

Lessons: Martin Bernhard, Momo Touré, Ponda O'Bryan

Written material: Mamady Keïta, Stephan Rigert, Vincent Manuelle

\* Prouteaux, M., 1929; Premiers essais de théâtre chez des indigènes de Haute Côte d'Ivoire, Bulletin de Comité d'Etudes historique et scientifiques de l'AOF 12: 448-475.

\* Duran, Lucy, 1995: Birds of Wassulu: Freedom of Expression and Expression of Freedom in Popular Music of Southern Mali, in: British journal of Ethnomusicology 2: 117-42.

\* Imperato, Pascal James, 1981: Sogoni Kun, in African Arts 14/2, 38-47, 72, 82.