

Gahu Dance-Drumming

(Anlo-Ewe people of Ghana, West Africa)

By CK Ladzekpo

Gahu [gah-hü] is a popular secular dance-drumming among the Anlo-Ewe people of southeastern Ghana. It originated among the [Gun-Gbe](#) (gõn-bã) people of Ketornu in [Benin](#). The [Gun-Gbe](#) people later introduced it in Badagry, southwestern Nigeria, where migrant fishermen from Afiadeniyigba adapted it and brought it back to the Anlo-Ewe area where I grew up. Whether in Benin, Nigeria or Ghana, Gahu is a popular communal entertainment performed whenever the community finds the excuse to celebrate life such as weddings, funerals and other formal celebrations.

Gahu is a living tradition. Even in its birthplace of Ketornu, it continues to reinvent itself. In [Badagry](#) in southwestern Nigeria, there was recasting of the old ideas of Gahu in a contemporary version with a spirit and style of its own. As migrant fishermen from Afiadeniyigba adapted Gahu from the version they witnessed in Badagry, they reinvented it to fit an Anlo-Ewe taste. The Gahu that we do is based on the version adapted by the Lashibi community of Anyako. The following is my eyewitness account of how this version of Gahu evolved.

Gahu arrived at my hometown, Anyako very early in the morning. The year was 1952. I was twelve years old. The early morning quite in the village was interrupted by the hard throbbing sound of Gahu. Visitors from Afiadeniyigba were performing the customary *ɲudivu* (ñou-divwoo), or morning teaser, to wet the appetite of their hosts.

The whole town was aglow. Many missed performing their usual morning chores and rushed to *woeto* (way-tow) or [woe \(way\) community](#) to witness history in the making.

We had heard of this phenomenal dance drumming brought to the town of Afiadeniyigba by migrant fishermen who returned from Nigeria. We had heard about its fascinating new rhythms, dance forms, costumes and songs in a strange language for some time.

Giving family and the community *ashimenu*, a gift upon a return from a trip, is an important Anlo-Ewe custom. The *ashimenuewo** (plural*) are highly appreciated if they are indigenous of the area of the visit. Gahu was a fitting *ashimenu* for the community of Afiadeniyigba from the exotic land of Badagry.

Afiadeniyigba is east north east of Anyako. Both towns are among a cluster of settlements that forms the [Keta lagoon](#) basin of the Anlo-Ewe traditional state.

The Woe community of Anyako invited the Gahu club from Afiadeniyigba as part of funeral ritual observances.

The *ɲudivu* performance ended at around ten o'clock in the morning and was simply magical. From the reactions of my hometown folks, they really dig what they experienced. We the kids showed our appreciation by accompanying the visitors with admiration when they took a break for refreshments before the main performance in the afternoon.

* In the Ewe language, adding the suffix “wo” to a noun makes it plural

Instrumentation:

The instrumentation of Gahu by the visiting Afiadenyigba community was very interesting. In *vutsɔtsoe* (vu-tso-tswe), the main dance drumming session, they featured two *Boba* drums; one playing lead using two sticks and sometimes with two bare hands and the other was playing support adlibbing on the texture of the drum melody with two bare hands technique. There was *sogo*, *kidi* and *kagaŋu* as support drums. *Sogo* occasionally would take over lead and direct the choreography with short climactic passages drawn from *Kinka*, another popular secular dance drumming. One *Gankogui* (gãn-ko-gwi) and a couple of *axatsewo* (a-ha-tse-wo) provided the critical metronomic layer.

In *hatsiatsia* (ha-cha-cha), or song interlude, two *atokewo* (a-tow-kay), boat shaped bells, provided the metronomic layer in a *gamamla* (bell ensemble) that featured many *ganʔkoguiwo* (plural) in improvised bell patterns that interlocked in a polyrhythmic energy that flavored the melody of the songs in a very effective and dynamic manner.

Theatrical Form:

Gahu was described as a social dance drumming. The dancers/singers formed a circle around the drummers and moved in a counter clockwise direction. With the exception of the *boba* players, the musicians sat on armless chairs and benches.

There was a basic movement as the home base and a repertoire of *atsiawo* (a-chã-wo), or climactic movements, each with an appropriate *vugbe* [vwoo-gbe] (drum episode). The lead drums (*boba* and occasionally *sogo*) used the *vugbewo* to conduct the choreography. Each episode has a beginning, middle and an end making it easy for it to be introduced and conveniently return to the common home movement.

ɣetrɔvu [ɣeh-trö-vu] (Afternoon Performance)

The splendor of the *ɣetrɔvu* or afternoon performance started around one o'clock.

The costumes were spectacular and quite revolutionary to Anlo-Ewe tradition. It featured *agbada*, popular Gun-Gbe traditional attire in many bright colors as the primary base. *Agbada* attire is also common among the Yoruba of Nigeria. The western culture was also elaborately featured in the form of shoes and eyeglasses. The fusion of cultures in the costuming was breathtaking.

For about an hour, the visitors performed the traditional protocol by visiting some of the other communities in Anyako. There is a laid down route for this important courtesy call. The group would stop at designated spaces in each community to perform short selection of songs. In addition to drawing more audience for their performance, these courtesy call exhibitions are traditional symbols of respect for the host communities.

The group arrived at the performance plaza around two o'clock and performed until dusk. It was a memorable afternoon as the whole town was treated to a phenomenal rendition of Gahu touching off what I can only describe as a Gahu craze.

The Woe community of Anyako immediately adapted Gahu into their repertoire based on the Afiadenyigba version they had witnessed.

In the Lashibi community, two young men in middle school, Kpeglo Kofi Ladzekpo and Alfred Kwasi Ladzekpo also started a game of playing Gahu in the evenings after dinner. Their efforts and innovation attracted the attention of some elders of the community who joined them and provided the leadership needed to start a full-blown adaptation of Gahu.

According to Anlo-Ewe traditional practices, evening song rehearsals known as *hakpa* started in earnest. During mock performances in the evenings, choreography and the unique drumming was integrated with songs and evaluated. When an acceptable blend was achieved, a delegation was requested from the Afiadenyigba Gahu club to seek help and approval. Afiadenyigba Gahu club sent a six-member delegation that participated in several mock performances and approved the innovations made by the Lashibi Gahu club.

The innovations included the introduction of a new *sogo* basic pattern. A second *kidi* was added playing a counter rhythm to the first *kidi* pattern in a call and response mode. (See music transcription).

The instrumental ensemble of the Lashibi Gahu club included one *boba* (lead), one *sogo*, two *kidiwo* (plural), and one *kagaŋu* as support drums. Several *gaŋkoguiwo* (plural), and *axatsewo* (plural) completed the instrumental ensemble.

***Gbedziyi* [ba-dji-yi-yi] (Formal Coming-Out Festivities)**

In Anlo-Ewe custom, a new dance-drumming becomes part of the community repertoire after going through *gbedziyi*, a formal coming-out festival. It is the debut performance of a new dance-drumming in public.

The *gbedziyi* festivities for the new Gahu started before dawn. Members of the Gahu club retreated quietly from the village to the sacred Kleve forest located at west north west of Anyako. This was during a drought season when the Keta lagoon was dried up and it was possible to make the journey on foot instead of shuttle by canoe.

The first order of business at the Kleve forest was the pouring of libation invoking the gods and ancestors to bless and witness the historic event about to unfold. This was followed by the election of the official leadership of the club and the confirmation of the governing rules and regulations of the new club. Procedures and formations of the procession to the village were rehearsed.

The dancers/singers led the procession in a four-line platoon-like formation. The drums (*boba*, *sogo* and *kidi*) were carried on the heads of some courageous women with the drummers walking in a convenient playing position. The *Kagaŋu* player supported his drum under his armpit while *gaŋkogui* and *axatse* players carried their own instruments and lined up in front of the drum ensemble. The elders form the rear of the procession.

At the first appearance of daylight, the procession started towards the village. The mile long journey into the village was filled with tireless and intense dancing, singing and drumming. In great community spirit each member of the club made lively contributions, as was expected of them.

Welcomed heroically into the village, Gahu had fulfilled its traditional requirements and became an honored member of the repertoire of the Lashibi community. These requirements included public performances for seven consecutive days. The triumph of adding to the creative treasures of the traditional community is a feeling I will never forget.

Because members of the Anyako Lashibi Community are the pioneers of teaching and performing traditional Anlo-Ewe music and dance nationally and internationally in modern classrooms and concert stages, this version of Gahu is the model of instruction and performance throughout the world. Prominent among these pioneering personalities are Husunu Adonu Afadi Ladzekpo (deceased), Kobla Ladzekpo (CAL Arts/UCLA, USA), Kofi Kpeglo Ladzekpo (retired, Ghana), Alfred Ladzekpo (CAL Arts, USA), CK Ladzekpo (UC Berkeley, USA) and Kwaku Ladzekpo (retired, USA).

Southern Volta Region



Doe Ladzekpo

A West African Social Dance-Drumming

Gahu Support Instruments

Basic Parts

Background

<http://www.cnmat.berkeley.edu/~ladzekpo/music148.html>

Gahu

A West African Social Dance-Drumming

Transcribed By
CK Ladzekpo

Sogo Improvization

Gankogui

TIN GO GO GO GO TIN GO GO GO GO

Sogo

DE DEGEDE DEGEDE DEGE KU DE DEGEDE DEGEDE DEGE

3

Gan.

TIN GO GO GO GO TIN GO GO GO GO

3

Sogo

KU TO TO DE DEGE KU TO TO DE DEGE

5

Gan.

TIN GO GO GO GO TIN GO GO GO GO

5

Sogo

KU TO DE DEGEKU TO DE KU DE GE KU DE GE KU DE KU

7

Gan.

TIN GO GO GO GO TIN GO GO GO GO

7

Sogo

DE GEDE KU DEGEDEGEDE KU DE GEDE KU DE DEGEDE KU

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9

Gan.

TIN GO GO GO GO TIN GO GO GO GO

9

Sogo

DE GE DE KU DE GE DE GE DE KU DE GE DE GE DE KU

11

Gan.

TIN GO GO GO GO TIN GO GO GO GO

11

Sogo

KU DE KU KU DE KU KU DE KU DE DE GE DE KU

Gahu

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Gahuvua Do Gbe

Gankogui



Song



Ga hu lo_____ Be Ga hu vua do

3



3

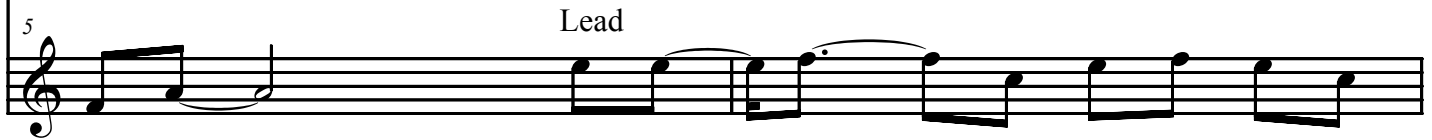


gbe na mi lo ho Ga hu he_____ Ga hu vua do

5



5



gbe lo_____ Ga hu lo_____ Be Ga hu vua do

7



7



gbe na mi lo ho Ga hu he_____ Ga hu vua do

9



9

Lead Group

gbe lo _____ E do gbe _____ Ga hu vua do

11



11

Lead Group

gbe _____ E do gbe _____ Ga hu vua do

13



13

gbe _____ Ga hu lo _____ Be Ga hu vua do

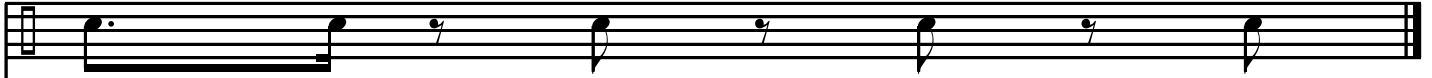
15



15

gbe na mi lo ho _____ Ga hu he _____ Ga hu vua do

17



gbe

lo_____

Lead: Gahu lo
Be Gahuvua do gbe na mi lo ho

Group: Gahu he
Gahuvua do gbe lo

Lead: Edo gbe

Group: Gahuvua do gbe

Lead: Gahu lo
Gahu brings you goodwill

Group: Gahu he
Gahu brings you goodwill

Lead: It brings goodwill

Group: Gahu brings goodwill

Gahu

A West African Social Dance-Drumming

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Lead (Episode Initiating Full Ensemble)
(Two Hands Drumming Technique)

Gankogui

TIN GO GO GO GO TIN GO GO GO GO

Boba

Ga De Ge De Ge De Ge De Tsa Tsa, Ga De Ge

3

Gan.

TIN GO GO GO GO TIN GO GO GO GO

Boba

De Ge De Ge De Tsa Tsa, Ga De Ge Tsa Ga De Ge Tsa Tsa, Ga De Ge

5

Gan.

TIN GO GO GO GO TIN GO GO GO GO

Boba

Tsa Ga De Ge Tsa Tsa, Ga De Ge De Ge De Ge De Tsa Tsa, Ga De Ge

7

Gan.

TIN GO GO GO GO TIN GO GO GO GO

Boba

De Ge De Ge De Tsa Tsa, Ga De Ge Tsa Ga De Ge Tsa Tsa, Ga De Ge

9

Gan.

TIN GO GO GO GO TIN GO GO GO GO

Boba

Tsa Ga De Ge Tsa Tsa, Ga De De Ge Tsa Ga De De Ge Tsa, Ga De

11

Gan.

TIN GO GO GO GO TIN GO GO GO GO

Boba

De Ge Tsa, Ga De De Ge Tsa, Ga De De Ge Ga Da Ge, Ga Da Ge, Ga

13

Gan.

TIN GO GO GO GO TIN GO GO GO GO

Boba

Da Ge, Ga Da Ge, Ga Da Ge, Ga Ga Ga Ga Ge

Gahu

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Transcribed By
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Lead Relax Dancing Episode 1
(Two Sticks Drumming Technique)

Lead Relax Dancing Episode 1 (Two Sticks Drumming Technique)

Gankogui

TIN GO GO GO GO TIN GO GO GO GO

Boba

KPLA KA TU KA TU KA DE GE DE GE DE TU KA TU KA

3

Gan.

TIN GO GO GO GO TIN GO GO GO GO

3

Boba

KPLA KA TU KA TU KA DE GE DE GE DE TU KA TU KA

5

Gan.

TIN GO GO GO GO TIN GO GO GO GO

5

Boba

KPLA KA TU KA TU KA DE GE DE GE DE DE GE DE GE

7

Gan.

TIN GO GO GO GO TIN GO GO GO GO

7

Boba

DE GE DE DE GE DE GE DE GE DE KA TU KA TU KA

Gahu

A West African Social Dance-Drumming

Transcribed By
CK Ladzekpo

Lead Relax Dancing Episode 2
(Two Sticks Drumming Technique)

Gankogui

TIN GO GO GO GO TIN GO GO GO GO

Boba

GA DEGEDEGE DEGE GA DEGEDEGEDEGEDEGE

3

Gan.

TIN GO GO GO GO TIN GO GO GO GO

Boba

GA DEGEDEGE GA DEGEDEGE DE DE GEDE

5

Gan.

TIN GO GO GO GO TIN GO GO GO GO

Boba

DE GEDE DE GEDE DEGE DE GE

7

Gan.

TIN GO GO GO GO TIN GO GO GO GO

Boba

DE GEDE DEGE DE GE DE GEDE

Gahu

A West African Social Dance-Drumming

Transcribed By
CK Ladzekpo

Lead Relax Dancing Episode 3
(Two Sticks Drumming Technique)

Gankogui

TIN GO GO GO GO TIN GO GO GO GO

Boba

DE TO TO DE GE DE GE DE TO TO DE

3

Gan.

TIN GO GO GO GO TIN GO GO GO GO

Boba

GE DE GE GA DE GE GA DE GE GA DE GE

5

Gan.

TIN GO GO GO GO TIN GO GO GO GO

Boba

DE GE DE DE GE DE DE GE DE GE

7

Gan.

TIN GO GO GO GO TIN GO GO GO GO

Boba

DE GE DE DE GE DE GE DE GE DE

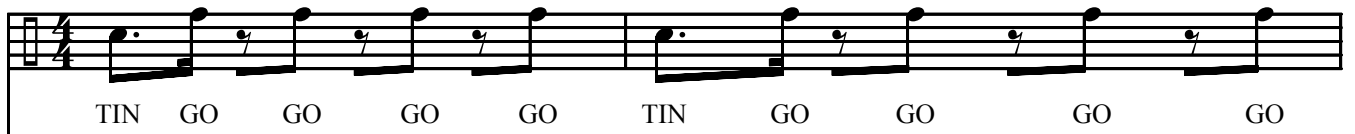
Gahu

A West African Social Dance-Drumming

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Atsimevu Climatic Dancing Episode 1
(Two Sticks Drumming Technique)

Gankogui



TIN

GO

GO

GO

GO

GO

TIN

GO

GO

GO

GO

GO

Transitional Passage

Episode

Boba



DE GE

DE

DE GE

DE

DE GE

DE

DE GE

DE

3

Gan.



TIN

GO

GO

GO

GO

GO

TIN

GO

GO

GO

GO

GO

3

Bob



DE

DE GE

DZA

DZA

DZA

DZA

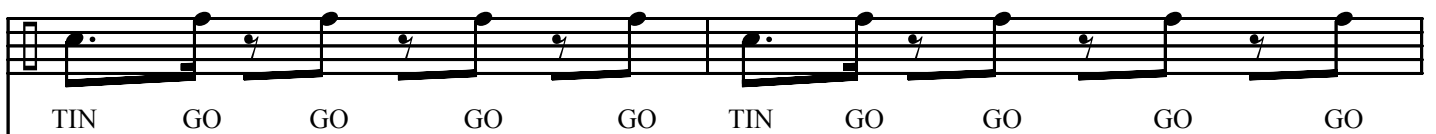
DZA

DZA

DE

5

Gan.



TIN

GO

GO

GO

GO

GO

TIN

GO

GO

GO

GO

GO

5

Bob



DE

DE GE

DZA

DZA

DZA

DZA

DZA

DZA

7

Gan.



TIN

GO

GO

GO

GO

GO

TIN

GO

GO

GO

GO

GO

7

Bob



DZA

DZA

DZA

DZA

DZA

DE

DE

GE

Episode Concluding Passage

Gahu

A West African Social Dance Drumming

Transcribed By
CK Ladzekpo

Lead Climatic Dancing Episode 2
(A Stick & Bare Hand Drumming Technique)

Lead Climatic Dancing Episode 2 (A Stick & Bare Hand Drumming Technique)

Gankogui

TIN GO GO GO GO TIN GO GO GO GO

Kidi

KI TO KI DI KI TO, KI DI KI TO, KI DI KI TO, KI DI

Transitional Passage

Sogo

KU DE KU KU DE GE DE, DE GE DE, DE GE DE, DE GE DE DE

Boba

3

Gan.

TIN GO GO GO GO TIN GO GO GO GO

Kid.

KI TO, KI DI KI TO, KI DI KI TO, KI DI KI DI

Episode

Sog.

GA, DE GI DE GA, DE GI DE GA, DE GI DE DZI DZI

Boba

2
5

Gahu

Gan.

TIN GO GO GO GO TIN GO GO GO GO

Kid.

KU TU KU TU KI DI KI DI KU TU KU TU KI DI KI DI

Sog.

DZA DZI DZI DZA DE GI DE DZI DZI

Boba

7

Gan.

TIN GO GO GO GO TIN GO GO GO GO

Kid.

KU TU KU TU, KI DI KI DI KU TU KU TU, KI DI KI DI

Sog.

DZA DZI DZI DZA DE GI DE DZI DZI

Boba

9

Gan.

TIN GO GO GO GO TIN GO GO GO GO

Kid.

KU TU KU TU KI DI KI KI DI KI TO, KI DI KI TO, KI DI

Sog.

DZA DE KU KU DE KU KU DE DE GE, DE DE GE, DE DE GE,

Boba

DZA DZA DZA DZA DZA DE DE GE

Sogo's Climatic Emplövisation

Concluding Statement

Gahu

A West African Social Dance-Drumming

Transcribed By
CK Ladzekpo

Lead Climatic Dancing Episode 3
(Two Sticks Drumming Technique)

Gankogui

TIN GO GO GO GO TIN GO GO GO GO

Transitional Passage

Boba

DE GE DE DE GE DE DE GE DE DE GE

3

Gan.

TIN GO GO GO GO TIN GO GO GO GO

3 Episode

Boba

DE GE DE GE DE GE DE GE

5

Gan.

TIN GO GO GO GO TIN GO GO GO GO

5

Boba

DE GE DE GE DE GE DZA DZA DZA DZA

7

Gan.

TIN GO GO GO GO TIN GO GO GO GO

7 Episode Concluding Passage

Boba

DZA DZA DZA DZA DZA DE DE GE

Gahu

A West African Social Dance Drumming

Transcribed By
CK Ladzekpo

Lead Climatic Dancing Episode 4
(A Stick & Bare Hand Drumming Technique)

Lead Climatic Dancing Episode 4 (A Stick & Bare Hand Drumming Technique)

Gankogui

TIN GO GO GO GO TIN GO GO GO GO

Kidi 1

KI TO KIDIKI TO, KIDI KI TO, KI DI KI TO, KI DI

Transitional Passage

Sogo

KU DE TU KU DEGEDE, DEGEDE, DEGEDE, DEGEDE GEDE

Atsimevu

3

Gan.

TIN GO GO GO GO TIN GO GO GO GO

Kid.

KI TO KU TU DEGEKU TU KU DEGEKU DEGEKU TU KU DE GE

Episode 4 (a)

Sog.

DE, TO TE GI TO TE KI TE GIDE GADE GIDE KI KI

Ats.

2₅ Gahu

Gan.		
Kid.		
Sog.		
Ats.		

7

Gan.		
Kid.		
Sog.		
Ats.		

9

Gan. TIN GO GO GO GO TIN GO GO GO GO

Kid. DEGEKU TU KU, GE DEGEKU KU KU TU KU TU, GE DE GE KU KU

Sog. DE DEGEDE TO, (KA) GA DE DE GE DE TO (KA) GA DE DE GE

Ats.

11

Gan. TIN GO GO GO GO TIN GO GO GO GO

Kid. KU TU KU TU, GE DEGEKU KU KU TU KU TU, GE DEGEKU KU

Sog. DE TO DE TO (KA) GADE DEGE DE TO DE TO (KA) TO TE

Ats.

13

Gan. TIN GO GO GO GO TIN GO GO GO GO

Kid. KU TU KU TU, GE DEGEKU KU KU TU KU TU, GE DEGEKU KU

Sog. GATO GE GA, (KA) TO TE GATO TE GA, (KA) KI TE GA

Ats.

15

Gan. TIN GO GO GO GO TIN GO GO GO GO

Kid. KU TU KU TU, GE DE GE KU KU KU TU KU TU, GE DEGEKU KI DI

Sog. (KA) KI TE GA (KA) KI TE KU KU KU KU KU KU

Ats. Concluding Statement

DZA DZA DZA DZA DZA

17

Gan.

TIN GO GO GO GO

Kid.

KI TO KI DI KI TO KI DI

Sogo's Climatic Passage

Sog.

KU DE DE GE, DE DE GE, DE DE GE,

Ats.

DE DE GE

Gahu

A West African Social Dance-Drumming

Transcribed By
CK Ladzekpo

Lead Climatic Dancing Episode 5
(Two Sticks Drumming Technique)

Gankogui

TIN GO GO GO GO TIN GO GO GO GO

Transitional Passage

Boba

DE GE DE GE GE DE, DE GE DE, DE GE DE, DE GE

3

Gan.

TIN GO GO GO GO TIN GO GO GO GO

3

Boba

DE GE DZA DZA DE GE DE GE DZA DZA DE GE

5

Gan.

TIN GO GO GO GO TIN GO GO GO GO

5

Boba

DE GE DZA DZA DZA DZA DZA DZA

7

Gan.

TIN GO GO GO GO TIN GO GO GO GO

7

Boba

DZA DZA DZA DZA DZA DE DE GE

Episode Concluding Passage

Gahu

A West African Social Dance-Drumming

Transcribed By
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Lead Climatic Dancing Episode 6
(A Stick & Bare Hand Drumming Technique) 2

Lead Climatic Dancing Episode 6 (A Stick & Bare Hand Drumming Technique) 2

Gankogui

TIN GO GO GO GO TIN GO GO GO GO

Kidi

KI TO KI DI KI TO, KI DI KI TO, KI DI KI TO, KI DI

Sogo

KU DE KU KU DE GE DE, DE GE DE, DE GE DE, DE GE DE, DE GE

Boba

Transitional Passage

3 4

Gan.

TIN GO GO GO GO TIN GO GO GO GO

Kid.

KI TO, KI DI KU KI DI KU KI DI KU KI DI KU TU KU KI DI KI

Sog.

DE, DE GE DE, GA DE KI DE KI DE KI GI DE GA DE KI KI KI,

Boba

Episode

2₅ Gahu 6

Gan. TIN GO GO GO GO TIN GO GO GO GO

Kid. KU TU KU TU, KU KI DI KU KI DI KU KI DI KU TU KU KI DI KI

Sog. DZA KI DZA KI DZA KI DZA DZA KI KI KI,

Boba

7 8

Gan. TIN GO GO GO GO TIN GO GO GO GO

Kid. KU TU KU TU KU KI DI KU KI DI KU KI DI KU TU KU KI DI KI

Sog. DZA KI DZA KI DZA KI DZA DZA KI,

Boba

9 10

Gan. TIN GO GO GO TIN GO TIN GO TIN GO TIN

Kid. KU TU KU TU TO DE TO DE TO DE TO DE

Sog. TO DE TO TO DE TO DE TO DE TO DE

Boba TO DE TO TO DE TO DE TO DE TO DE

Ending Statement

11 12

Gan. GO TIN GO GO TIN GO TIN TIN TIN GO TIN GO GO

Kid. TO DE TO TO DE TO DE DE DE TO DE TO TO

Sog. TO DE TO TO DE TO DE DE DE TO DE TO TO

Boba TO DE TO TO DE TO DE DE DE TO DE TO TO

13 14

Gan. GO TIN GO TIN TIN TIN

Kid. TO DE TO GI DE GA

Sog. TO DE TO GI DE GA

Boba TO DE TO GI DE GA