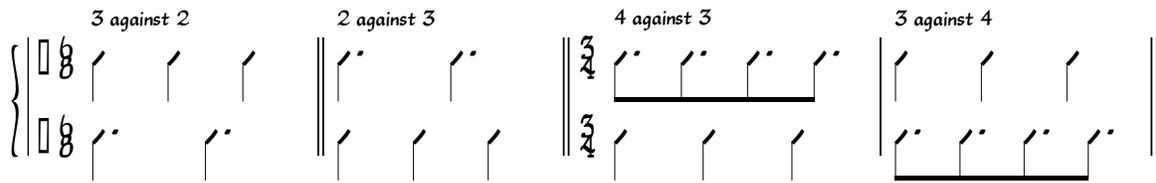


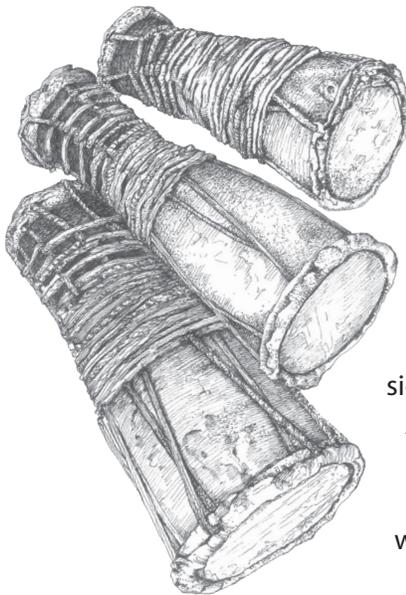
1.1 - Cross-Rhythms



- **AFRICAN SACRED AND SECULAR FOLK MUSIC**

Taking into account the premise of this book to celebrate the repertoire of one of Cuba's most groundbreaking bands, let us acknowledge that among Irakere's most compelling attributes was its exploration of myriad African-derived folkloric genres. As with several Caribbean and South American countries, Cuba has experienced a high level of cultural preservation of both sacred and secular folkloric traditions, many of which have carried on despite being forgotten in Africa. In rural as well as urban communities, Yoruban, Congolese and Dahomean drumming traditions were largely maintained within the established *cabildos*, and while certainly undergoing transformation and variation, they have endured both in the context of sacred ritual as well as through popular expression, leading to the development of several genres that can be regarded as "mother musics."¹⁶ Throughout the island, musicians from within spiritual drumming communities continue to pass on their sacred rhythms and chants through **oral transmission**; only recently has there been an attempt to document the hundreds if not thousands of rhythms, songs, dances, and ritual practices that have informed Cuban popular music and culture. For the most part, these rituals were preserved in secret during colonial times, and have carried forth the powerful legacy of the African Diaspora for centuries.

fig. 1c - Batá Drums



Originating from the Yoruba people of Nigeria (referred to as *lucumí* or *lukumí* in Cuba), the **batá** drums (fig. 1c) are a key component of the sacred music of the syncretic *Regla de Ocha* religion, also commonly known as Santería.¹⁷ The three hourglass-shaped drums are responsible for a complex liturgy of **toques** (rhythms) used to invoke and honor the deities known as *orishas*, and were introduced in Cuba in the early 1800s. Noted author, Santería priest and musician/musicologist John Mason stresses the significance of the batá in Cuba, highlighting the ongoing efforts by Africans (and Afro-Cubans) on the island to "represent and assist in cultural reclamation," and considers the drums to be "the most important musical symbol of the reclamation movement."¹⁸ Along with acting as the core component to the ritual practice of Santería

¹⁶ In many countries in the Americas, one can witness a similar evolution of folkloric and popular traditions (stemming from both sacred and secular forms of African origin) that merged over time with varying European styles, resulting in new hybrids that serve as foundational genres. In Cuba, these "mother musics" include *son* and *rumba*, two of the most influential genres in all of Latin music.

¹⁷ Religious syncretism in this case is a combination of Roman Catholicism and Yoruban polytheism and cosmology.

¹⁸ Mason, John. Foreword to the book, *Carlos Aldama's Life in Batá: Cuba, Diaspora, and the Drum* by Umi Vaughan.