"Ol'ómo kìlò f'ómo rè"
Melting Integral Serialism with African Pianism

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Recently, George Rochberg’s *Music for the Magic Theatre* offered me the chance to rethink my position on musical unity. In this work, a juxtaposition of the ancient and modern, Rochberg (b.1918) employs the music of a varied roster of composers including Mozart, Beethoven, Mahler, Webern, Varese, Stockhausen, Miles Davies and himself to create a stylistic confrontation between the past and the present. This work evoked in me the postmodernist attitude of intertextuality, eclecticism and freedom from structural and stylistic unity. This idea of postmodernism embraces contradictions, fragmentations and discontinuities, binary oppositions and quotations or references to music of diverse cultures. It obliterates the boundaries between “high” and “low” styles, and the procedures of tradition and formalism. The postmodernist idea struck a fraternal chord of acceptance with my creative instincts which are defined by my enthusiasm for an intercultural approach to musical composition. Prior to this, I have specifically pondered and experimented with the various ways to amalgamate the musical elements that define the African and Western Classical musical cultures. In addition, I have contemplated the issue of coherence or non-coherence and how either of these might be desirable in the realm of musical symbiosis or integration. *Ol’omo kîlò f’ómo rè* (Process – 1) is a realization of my perception of intercultural musical composition. It is a work that draws on the concept of integral serialism and African pianism, melting the two within the borders of the aesthetic-type that define postmodernism.
1.0 INTRODUCTION

As an African and a product of the pedagogical institutions of Western Art Music, I have consistently researched ways to incorporate my intercultural musical interests in my musical composition. I found an aesthetic basis for my approach to musical ideas in the ideals of postmodernism. Òl'omo kilo fun re (Process – 1) for two pianos is my second major and conscious attempt at approaching musical composition from an intercultural point of view. This work moves from one cultural extreme to the other; it is the process of the establishment of specific compositional rules and the subsequent re-definition and violation of these rules. This work's conceptual basis is rooted in two concepts - integral serialism and African pianism. In actual fact the work is the process of transition from a pre-composed serial structure to a freer and improvisational structure governed by the concept of African pianism.

This short paper is an analytical description of the work, Òl'omo kilo fun re (Process – 1). The first section of the analysis is a description of the pre-compositional aspects of the piano duo: the overall plan, the serial organization and the components of African music used. The second and third sections provide an explication of the compositional procedures and a summary of the procedures respectively.
2.0 OVERVIEW OF CONCEPTS

2.1 Integral Serialism

My exploration and usage of the concept of integral serialism in *Ol'ómo kilò f'ómo rè* was influenced by Milton Babbitt’s application of the concept in his *Three Compositions for Piano* (1947). In this twelve-tone work with serialized pitches, rhythms and dynamics, Babbitt, through the use of a four-element rhythmic series, creates patterns that dictate the position of attack points or durations within the regular flow of traditional meter.

For *Ol'ómo kilò f'ómo rè*, I used a 7-element pitch class series with each element occurring as either a dyad or cluster chord (see Figure II – p.6). I also created rhythmic orderings that dictate the position of attack with the use of four attack sets (see section 3.1.2 – p.6).

2.2 African Pianism

2.2.1 Origin

The term, African pianism was coined in the 1960s by Akin Euba, an ethnomusicologist, composer, pianist and music scholar. The first mention of the term African pianism in print was in a 1970 essay, in which Euba\(^1\) stated:

“For those composers interested in cross-cultural musical synthesis, I see a possible line of evolution in the use of the Western pianoforte in combination

with African drums and other instruments of percussion. The piano already displays certain affinities with African music, and by creating a type of ‘African pianism’ to blend with African instruments, it should be possible to achieve a successful fusion.”

2.2.2 Musical Parameters & Elements

In his pursuit of a style of composition which will function as a reflection of his African cultural and musical background, Euba conceptualizes the percussive use of the piano in a particular manner to:

- Invoke a symbolic representation of African musical textures
- To express the rhythmical and textural components of traditional African music without actually using traditional instruments.

It was not until 1989 that Euba defined the term in an essay saying, “techniques used in the performance of (African) xylophones, thumb pianos, plucked lutes, drum chimes and the polyrhythmic methods of African instrumental music in general would form a good basis for an African pianistic style.” Euba further described the elements of an African pianism as including:

- Thematic repetition
- Direct borrowings of thematic material (rhythmical and/or tonal) from African traditional sources.
- The use of rhythmical and/or tonal motifs which, although not borrowed from specific (identifiable) traditional sources, are based on traditional idioms.
- Percussive treatment of the piano.
- Making the piano ‘behave’ like African instruments.

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3 Ibid p.152
3.0 ANALYSIS

3.1 Pre-Compositional Aspects

3.1.1 Overall Plan

My piece has a three-section plan (Figure I). In the first section (A), I establish the initial compositional rules that govern this section. As the piece unfolds, these rules are violated or modified, and the piece thus redefines itself. The second section (B) redefines the major rules of the previous section and then provides the link for the last section (C), which represents a drastic change in character as compared to the first section. All the rules established in the previous sections are eliminated in the final section.

![Figure I – Overall Plan](image-url)
3.1.2 Serial Component

The serial structure applies to two components, pitch and rhythm. Instead of a twelve-tone row, I have a row of seven elements, with each element occurring as either a dyad or cluster chord. I divide the row into two parts: a 5-element set with all twelve chromatic pitches and a 2-element set with six chromatic pitches (see Figure II). The first four elements of the 5-element set (a, b, c, d) and the first element of the 2-element set (f) are dissonant and have a chromatic character. The last elements of both sets (e and g respectively) are consonant dyads of the d major/minor tonality.

![Figure II – Series of Cluster Chords](image)

For the second component of the serial structure, I use rhythmic orderings (which are formally analogous with pitch-class serialism) by employing four sets of attack series – P7, P5, P2 and P (the versions of P are not ‘transpositions’ of P). Each figure in the attack series determines the number of times the corresponding element in the element series or element set is repeated or attacked. The first three series and their retrogradated (R) or inverted (I – defined through complementation) forms occur in section A, whilst the fourth, which occurs in sections B and C, serves as the ‘target’ attack series (P) for the process:
1. \( P_7 = [3 2 1 2 3 1 2] \) and its retrograde, \( R_7 = [2 1 3 2 1 2 3] \) – these are used with the 7-element series.

2. \( P_5 = [3 2 1 2 1] \) and its inverted form, \( I_5 = [2 3 4 3 4] \) – these are used with the 5-element set. The inverted form is the complementation of the \( P_5 \) contents to 5.

3. \( P_2 = [3 1] \) and its retrograde, \( R_2 = [1 3] \) – these are used with the 2-element set.

4. \( P = [1 1 2 1 1 1] \) derived from the \( wówórinkókókóló \) African rhythm (Figure III) – used at first with the modified form of the 7-element series in section B and with free (non-serialized) pitch collections in section C.

3.1.3 Components of African Music

I engage two components, a rhythmic motif and a song, from African musical culture:

i.) The \( wówórinkókókóló \) rhythmic motif (Figure III) typically exists as the rhythmic basis for many traditional songs in parts of Africa, especially in West Africa, and it also serves as the rhythmic basis for many traditional dance and drum musics.

\[ \text{Figure III – } Wówó \text{ or } Nkónkókóló \text{ African rhythm (Target Rhythm)} \]

As mentioned earlier, the target attack series (\( P = [1 1 2 1 1 1] \)) is derived from this rhythmic motif. With the exception of the third and the fourth attacks, the others are separated by eighth-note rests (Figure III).
ii.) The antiphonal song, *O'omo kilo j'omo ri* (Figure IV) from which the work takes its title, is of *Yorùbá* origin and was typically performed by warriors going to the battlefield during the pre-colonial era of the 19th century. Literally, it warns parents to take extra care of their households and to caution their wards as war is about to break out. Allegorically, the song generally warns of impending danger (e.g. a thunderstorm).

![Figure IV – African Song](image)

The two components described above are developed through different techniques in the course of the work.

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4 The *Yorùbás* are a large ethno-linguistic group or ethnic nation in Africa – typically found in their largest numbers in the South-Western part of Nigeria. They constitute approximately 21 percent of Nigeria's total population, and around 30 million individuals throughout the region of West Africa.
3.2 The Compositional Process

I will explain the compositional process based on the three-section plan mentioned above (Figure I).

3.2.1 Section A (m.1 – 34)

I establish the compositional rules for the section based on the thematic development of the African song (Figure IV) strictly in piano I and the organization of the serial components (Figure II) strictly in piano II. The 17 compositional rules are grouped in three sections:

**General Organization – Pianos I & II**

1. Pentatonic and chromatic materials are layered vertically.
   - Piano I is restricted to the pentatonic materials of the African song (Figure IV).
   - Piano II is restricted to chromatic materials based on the 7-element series and the attack series.

2. The African song is stated in fragments and not stated in full as in Figure IV.

3. The part for piano I fundamentally consists of interjections that make use of melodic fragments that are motivic developments of the African song. While some of these interjections are chordal, some are merely arpeggios.

**Serial Organization - Pitch**

4. The serial organization of pitches is determined by the exclusive use of the 7-element series with the P7 and R7 attack series, the 5-element set with P5 and I5, and the 2-element set with P2 and R2.
5. A statement is defined by the occurrence of either an element-series or set with an associated attack series. Statements in groups of five or two define a phrase (see Table I).

Table 1 – Phrase Structure

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>Phrase</strong></th>
<th>Statement</th>
<th>Attack Series</th>
<th>Measure</th>
<th><strong>Phrase</strong></th>
<th>Statement</th>
<th>Attack Series</th>
<th>Measure</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
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<td>1</td>
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<td>1</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>(I5)</td>
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<td>3</td>
<td>(I5)</td>
<td>4</td>
<td></td>
<td>6</td>
<td>(R2)</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>4</td>
<td>(I5)</td>
<td>5</td>
<td></td>
<td>2</td>
<td>((P2)</td>
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<td>8</td>
<td></td>
<td>2</td>
<td>(P5)</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
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<td>10</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>1</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>3</td>
<td>*(P5)</td>
<td>26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>(R2)</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>*(P5)</td>
<td>32</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2</td>
<td>(P2)</td>
<td>12</td>
<td></td>
<td>5</td>
<td>(P5)</td>
<td>34</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Incomplete statements of the element set

** Note that the phrase numbers are the boxed numbers on the score.
6. Each component (figure) in the attack series determines the number of times the corresponding element in the element series/set is repeated or attacked. For example, if the 5-element set with the elements a, b, c, d, e is used with P5, which has the attack series [3 2 1 2 1], element a will be repeated thrice, b twice, c once, d twice and e once in a single statement.

7. Elements of the series occur in fixed registers (as in Figure II).

8. The order in which the elements of the series occur in Figure II is adhered to.

9. The adjacent elements of the element series/set occur one after the other with no layering or overlapping.

Serial Organization - Rhythm

10. P7, R7, P5, I5, P2 and R2 are the only attack series in use.

11. Rhythm is defined by a fixed 12/8 meter with a configuration based on 8th and 16th notes.

12. The note value for the repeated identical elements of the series is constant. That is, the duration of the attacks is consistent for each repeated identical element.

13. The note value changes between adjacent non-identical elements of the series.

14. Rests may occur between adjacent non-identical elements of the series, but not within repeated and identical elements.

15. Rests are also used to separate statements of the serial rows.

16. The constituent notes of the seven serial elements are attacked as block chords or unison (not arpeggiated/linearized).

17. Pianos I and II combine to produce a resultant dense rhythmic activity with a thick texture.
Almost all the rules above are established within the first three measures of the work. However, the gradual process of rule violations/modifications starts quite early in measure 4. The violations/modifications are:

**Serial Organization (Pitch)**
- From m. 4 (piano II), rule 9 is violated as serial element d overlaps with elements c and e.
- Rule 8 is modified from m.6 - the palindrome, 5(P5).
- Contrary to rule 7, elements of the series no longer occur in fixed registers from m.19.
- Incomplete statements of the 5-element set occur at m.19, m.26 and m.31.
- The introduction of a new contrapuntal organization at m.27 hints at the imitation (m.64) and canons (m.68) of section B.

**Serial Organization (Rhythm)**
- From m. 5 (piano II), rule 16 is altered as element d is arpeggiated.
- Serial elements are linearized from m.14 (element f of Phrase 6 - 1(R2) in piano II) thus violating rule 16.
- In violation of rule 14, rests occur between repeated identical elements from m.14 (element e of phrase 7 – 1(P5) in piano II).
- Contrary to the scenario dictated by rule 17, there is a change in the nature of rhythmic activity from m.16: rhythmic activity gradually declines in piano II with the use of longer note values while it increases briefly in piano I. The resultant rhythmic activity finally drops from m.19 and the texture thins out in m.27.
3.2.2. **Section B** (m.35 – 77)

As mentioned earlier, the second section redefines some of the major rules previously established and serves as the transition to the last section, which is a drastic contrast in character to the first section.

In this section I redefine the role of the pianos and make a goal directed move towards the establishment of the ūmūt rhythm motif with the use of the target attack series P [1 1 2 1 1 1]. The role redefinition and the establishment of the ūmūt rhythm are achieved through further departure from the compositional rules of the previous section. The process of violations and modifications include the following:

**General Organization – Pianos I & II**

- Contrary to rule 1, piano II is no longer restricted to serial components as it takes up the piano I material from m.35. Likewise, piano I takes up the serial components of piano II from m.41.

- Initially in the previous section, the pentatonic (piano I) and chromatic (piano II) materials were arranged vertically. However, these opposing materials now occur adjacent in the same piano using a horizontal arrangement. For instance, piano I takes up the material from the African song up to beat 1 of m.41 and then switches to the serial components initially restricted to piano II. In the same fashion, piano II plays materials of a re-defined serial organization (discussed below) up to m.40 before taking up the pentatonic materials based on the African song.
Contrary to rule 1, pianos I and II simultaneously process the same pentatonic materials (derived from the African song) at m.36-39, and they both process the same chromatic materials derived from the element series from m.53.

**Serial Organization (Pitch)**

The elements of the 7-element series are no longer used in the order they occur in the original row (Figure II). Instead, the elements are reduced to six, re-ordered, paired as shown in Figure V, and used with the target attack P. Thus, a single series statement consists of two distinct elements (see explanation under the discussion for rhythmic organization below). This serial organization runs contrary to rules 4 and 8.

![Figure V – Re-Ordered Series: 3 Groups of 2-Element Series](image)

Organization of both pentatonic materials from the African song and the chromatic component from the element series make tonal allusions, such as the use of elements c and g (see Figure V above) with strong tendencies to the D minor tonality in m.41 (piano I), alongside the pentatonic materials in piano II.
The departure from the use of fixed registers (rule 7) is explored in another dimension by expressing elements in the closed position as compound intervals. For example, element a originally expressed as a minor second interval is expressed as a compound interval in m.40.

**Serial Organization (Rhythm)**

- As opposed to rule 10, the target attack P [1 1 2 1 1 1] is the only attack series used from m.40.
- The target attack P [1 1 2 1 1 1] is not yet used as it occurs in the wówó rhythmic motif (Figure III) from which it is derived.
- Contrary to rule 6, the target attack series consisting of seven components (figures) is applied to one of the three groups of the 2-element series (Figure V) at a time to constitute a statement. While one element of the series is attacked once for each 1 in P, the other element of the series is attacked twice for the single 2 in P.
- Contrary to rule 12, there is no consistent note value for the repeated identical elements of the series. In other words, the duration of the attacks is not consistent for each repeated identical element.
- From m.45, there is a direct goal to disrupt the 12/8 meter with the rhythmic configuration based on 8\(^{\text{th}}\) and 16\(^{\text{th}}\) notes. With the change in time signature and the use of triplets, quintuplets and sextuplets, odd-number rhythms are pitched against even-number rhythm to weaken the 8\(^{\text{th}}\) and 16\(^{\text{th}}\) note feel, which has been consistent from the start of the duo.

Section B (m.35 to 77) functions as the transition from one extreme (section A with the musical elements controlled by the pre-compositional procedure) to the other extreme (section C where there is a relatively free use of musical elements facilitated by the elimination of the compositional
rules initially established in section A). In eliminating the serial structure of section A, the African song gains prominence as it is treated more as a recognizable theme from m.37 where both pianos are ‘united’ for the first time in the piece. Prior to this, piano I only made references to the African song in fragments. On the other hand, the serial structure becomes less pronounced as the 7-element series is reduced to 3 groups of 2-element sets, with only one group constituting a statement at a time. At the same time, it is the target attack P that alludes more to the \( \text{\textit{wórů}} \) rhythmic motif that is in use.

The change in rhythmic configuration from m.45 marks a climax, which eventually ushers in a slightly varied form of the \( \text{\textit{wórů}} \) rhythmic motif at m.55. The tension built up from m.45, with intense rhythmic activity and thick piano texture, subsides at m.55 as the texture thins out to allow the unordered elements of the element series to take on the slightly varied form of the \( \text{\textit{wórů}} \) rhythmic motif. At this point, the free use of elements, independent of the pre-composed structures, is in force. The augmented version of the \( \text{\textit{wórů}} \) rhythmic motif finally sets in with soft dynamics from m.61.

The transition concludes with interplay between the augmented version of the \( \text{\textit{wórů}} \) rhythmic motif and the recapitulation of the serial components of the previous sections. However, for the latter, the serial components are cast in a contrapuntal structure initially introduced briefly at m.27. At m.64, the linearized version of the 7-element series is stated in piano I and imitated in piano II. Then from m.68, the contrapuntal structure is elaborated through a double canon between the pianos. This time around, the canonic theme is derived from the linearization of the groups from the re-ordered series (Figure V) using the target attack series P. The double canon finally yields to the original version of the \( \text{\textit{wórů}} \) rhythmic motif at m.74.
3.2.3 Section C (m.78 – 139)

The other extreme is established in this section as the African song is fully stated in its original form and treated within the theoretical framework of African pianism. The goal of the section is to invoke the rhythmical and textural components of traditional African percussive music with the piano using the ṭẹ̀rẹ̀ rhythm motif and African song in Figures III and IV respectively as the basis for thematic development. The section is characterized by repetitions and direct rhythmic and tonal borrowings of these themes.

3.3 Summary of the Compositional Procedure

As articulated earlier, the totality of the compositional procedure of Ọlọ́mọ Ọ̀lọ́mọ̀ Ọ̀mọ̀ Ọ̀mọ̀ is the process of moving from a point where musical elements (pitch and rhythm) are governed by pre-determined procedures to a point where the elements are used freely. A transition exists between these two points, facilitating the total elimination of the strict procedures that govern the first section and heralding in the free procedures of the third section.

Although the A section is based on a pre-determined procedure, intuition plays a big role in the realization of the compositional procedure. For example, the choice of attack series (see Table 1), choice of rhythmic note values for each element of the element series/set and textural variations were all based on my musical instincts. The process of violating and re-defining the rules in section A is also based on intuition.
As a result of the compositional procedures explicated above, this work is characterized by different types of binary oppositions. The process of the establishment and the subsequent violations of the compositional rules shape the whole work, giving it the quality of re-defining itself as the process unfolds. These binary oppositions, which play a fundamental role in the creation of areas of tension and repose include:

- Short statement versus long statement of the element series/set (e.g. the individual statements of phrase 1 span an average of one measure or less as compared to the individual statements of phrase 8 which span over a measure – see Table I)
- Dense (m.53) versus sparse (m.61) rhythmic activity
- Fixed (m1-17) versus free registers (from m.19 onwards)
- Thick (m.7) versus thin texture (m.27)
- Homophony (m.37) versus contrapuntal writing (m.64)
- Tonality versus quasi-atonality (section A)
- Alternation between pentatonicity versus chromaticism by vertical arrangement (section A) and pentatonicity versus chromaticism by horizontal arrangement (section B)
- Occurrence of elements as block chords (m.1) versus the linearization of the same (m.13)
- Lyrical/song mode versus percussive/drumming mode
- Serial organization of pitches (section A) versus free pitches (section B)
Whilst it was George Rochberg’s *Music for the Magic Theatre* that awakened my postmodernist instincts, it was Milton Babbitt’s *Three Compositions for Piano* that brought about my conviction to compose using the principles of integral serialism. My attraction to Babbitt’s work is best expressed in the words of Schwartz and Godfrey:\(^5\):

> “The controlled, deterministic aspects of Babbitt’s rhythmic continuity may not necessarily be apparent to the listener. At the surface level, in fact the Three Compositions for Piano provide an unassuming, easily flowing narrative, with offbeat accents closer to the syncopated world of jazz than to that of Webern or Messiaen.”

I previously found Schoenberian (and also Webernian) serialism less appealing because of its mechanical and restrictive nature. As part of post-Webernian serialism, Messiaen’s approach to serialism, especially in his etude for piano entitled “*Mode de valeurs et d’intensités*,” certainly paved the way for the emergence of integral serialism. However, it was the rhythmic aspects of Babbitt’s type of serialism that plunged me into thinking that I could use his idea (especially his control of the deterministic aspects of rhythm to achieve a compositional result different from that of Schoenberg, Webern and Messiaen) to approach repetitive African drumming patterns via integral serialism. Consequently, I derived the 7-element series and the attack series from the 7 attacks that characterize the African *ñor* rhythm (Figure III). Although the attack series P7 and its retrograde, R7, each have seven attack components – [3 2 1 2 3 1 2] and [2 1 3 2 1 2 3] respectively, they cannot

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be ordered rhythmically to conform to the *u̯ó̯r̥o*. This inability occurs because P7 and R7, used in section A of the piece, each generate a total of fourteen attacks. It is for this reason P, the target attack series – [1 1 2 1 1 1] in section B, the transition to section, C exists. The attack series P has a total of seven attacks, and it yields completely to the original version of the *u̯ó̯r̥o* rhythm at m.61. In addition, Babbitt’s idea of serializing elements of music other than pitch prompted me to extend serial principles in a different direction with the use of cluster chords instead of single pitches for the series.

With the foregoing serial possibilities and the tendency of the piano, especially in its percussive nature, to behave like an African instrument, I decided to exploit the idea of integral serialism and African pianism in *Ól’ómo kiló fómo rè*. Within the walls of these two concepts, I engaged a compositional procedure that is an amalgam of a mechanical approach and my musical intuition. I opted for the instrumentation of two pianos because they enhance the re-creation of an African drum ensemble as well as the African scenario of song (in one piano) accompanied with drums (in the other piano). As discussed earlier, I found a catalyst and aesthetic basis to articulate my ideas via the ‘canons’ of postmodernism.
Pedal each chord