

## ARARÁ

The rituals of the Arará peoples, who came from Dahomey in the 17th century, include religious, festive and funeral celebrations that are accompanied by the instrumental ensemble of Arará drums. These ritual practices became established first in Havana, eventually adding cabildos in Matanzas and Santiago later in the 18th and early 19th centuries. These cabildos flourished during the first half of the 19th century and enjoyed immense popularity, but by the end of the 19th century they began to disappear. Today there are only a few cabildos left in Havana, Matanzas and Cienfuegos. The Arará worship Fodduces, deities similar to the orishas of the Yoruba, like Asoano, the deity of sickness and healing, and Afreketé, the virgin of Regla.

The Arará ensemble consists of a set of three to five drums made out of a hollowed out tree trunk with a skin head on top that is attached to a wooden hoop and laced to a set of wooden pegs. They are highly decorated with detailed carvings and paintings, a signature of the Arará. In present day ensembles the drums are called *caja* (lowest), *mula* (medium), and *salidor* (highest). The *caja* is the soloist and uses a stick/hand combination in its improvisation, while the supporting drums play interlocking parts using sticks only. The drum ensemble is accompanied by a bell (*ogán*) and occasionally a rattle (*cha-chá*). As with the other sacred drums, the Arará drums must go through a series of religious rituals before they are played and the drummers must be initiated to participate in the ceremonies.

### About These Examples

These two Arará are from the Sabalú, one of the ethnic groups that make up the Arará nation and the one with the most Yoruba influence. They are two of the best known and are dedicated to Asoyí and Afreketé - two deities in the Arará religion - but may also be played to other orishas. Although they are different rhythmically, there are similarities, such as the supporting drums answering each other in a typical call-and-response fashion. The parts are deceptively difficult, particularly lining up with the second bar of the *ogán* bell part.

The traditional instrument names are used here because of the music's religious significance and of the consistency with which these names are used in Cuba. The stick/hand combination, the dead strokes with sticks, and the use of flams are all very strong African (Ewe) influences. Usually the bell starts, followed by the supporting drums, the singer and the chorus answering the response. There are many Arará, with different supporting drum parts and songs all dedicated to other deities but all belonging to the pantheon of the Arará.