

# AFRO-BRAZILIAN PERCUSSION GUIDE

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## CANDOMBLÉ

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Instruments and  
Rhythms from  
Salvador, Bahia, Brazil

## OVERVIEW OF CANDOMBLÉ

Candomblé is the Afro-Brazilian religion of Bahia. Candomblé has its roots in Africa, and bears close resemblance to other New World religions of the African Diaspora, such as Cuban *Santería* and Haitian *Vodun*. They all have in common a tradition of devotion, music, dance, mythology, healing, celebration, and a pantheon of deities. Although Brazil has many spiritual traditions in other regions, including Tambor de Mina in São Luis de Maranhão, Culto de Xangô in Recife, Umbanda in Rio de Janeiro, and Batuque in Rio Grande do Sul,<sup>1</sup> Candomblé is noted for its resistance to outside influences, and for maintaining a high degree of fidelity to African traditions. Although the origin of the word is uncertain, some people theorize that it comes from a Bantu word *kamdombile*, meaning “to praise.”<sup>2</sup>

Considering the consistent presence of Africans in Brazil from about 1600 onwards, we can probably assume that various kinds of religious practices were taking place from the time of their arrival. Although we do not know much about what they did, those enslaved were surely attempting to reconstruct and maintain—to the extent that they could—beliefs and practices from their native lands. In fact, in 1618 the Inquisition denounced the customs of the slaves.<sup>3</sup> Regardless, the next stage of development occurred within the context of the *irmandades*—the social organizations that grouped the slaves by their origin in Africa, and whose formation parallels the major time periods of the slave trade. From the *irmandades*, the three primary spiritual traditions, or “nations” as they are called, of Candomblé developed. They are:

- 1) **ANGOLA:** comprised of the Bantu-speaking peoples from Congo, Angola, and Mozambique, including the Umbundu, Kimbundu, and Kikongo.
- 2) **JÊJE:** comprised of peoples from the former Kingdom of Dahomey, today the countries of Ghana, Togo, and Benin, including the Fon, Ewe, Mina, Mahi, and Savalu. The origin of the word Jêje is unclear. For the Yoruba it was a pejorative word referring to the Dahomeans.<sup>4</sup> Other ideas include a variation of “Ewe” and a modification of the word “Aja”—a people whose dynasty ruled before the Dahomeans. To add to the confusion, the word was known in Bahia before in Africa. Sub-nations are Mina, Modubi, Mahi, and Savalu.<sup>5</sup>
- 3) **KÊTU:** comprised of the Yoruba group of peoples from Nigeria and Benin, including the Anagono, Egba, Tapa, Egbado, and Ijexá. Sometimes this branch is called Nagô, a word used pejoratively by the Jêje to refer to the Yoruba. The word Kêtu also refers to a border town between the Oyo Empire of the Yoruba and Dahomey, which was raided so much for slaves by the Dahomeans that it was virtually destroyed—and was even annexed into Dahomey. The city was populated by the Anagono people, who became a majority within the *irmandade* at the Barroquinha church. And lastly, women from that *irmandade*—who started the first temple in Bahia—were initiated in Kêtu.<sup>6</sup>

A few additional nations are no longer surviving, either because they were absorbed into the above nations or they have no more surviving members. *Ijexá* has been absorbed into the larger Kêtu branch, as their traditions are similar to each other. Despite their similarities, however, *Ijexá* remains distinct in terms of language, songs, drums, and dances. *Efon* is also very similar to Kêtu, and like *Ijexá*, is a city near Oyo with its own distinctive characteristics. The last temple was called *Lorakuê* and is said to have been abandoned.<sup>7</sup>

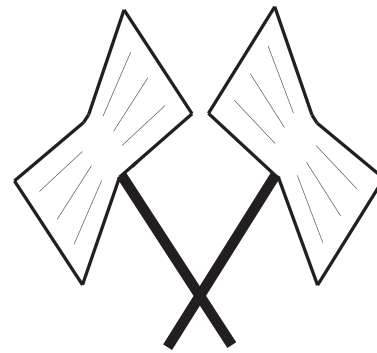
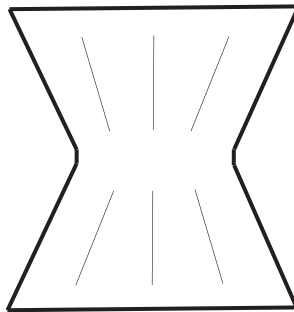
Of special mention here are the *Cabôclo*, a related and common spiritual manifestation. These are the spirits of people who were indigenous to Brazil, or of mixed African and indigenous ancestry, and are honored in their own separate and distinct ceremonies. In *Cabôclo* ceremonies, two archetypes are found—Indians and peasant workers (e.g. hunters, farmers, herdsman, miners, sailors, and fisherman).<sup>8</sup> Borrowing from Candomblé Angola, their liturgy uses all the rhythms of Candomblé Angola, while the song lyrics are in Portuguese with occasional Bantu words. Curiously, although often seen as a national symbol because they were the original inhabitants of the land, and helped liberate Bahia from Portugal, the *Cabôclo* do not constitute their own nation within Candomblé, as most temples do not accept them. See the *samba de cabôclo* score on page 40 for more information.

For various reasons, the Kêtu tradition is seen as more pure (i.e., more African) than the other branches, and

# XANGÔ

## **CHARACTERISTICS** (see pages 60 and 62 for the musical transcriptions):

DAY:	Wednesday
COLORS:	Red and white
SYNCRETISM:	Saint Jerome
DOMAIN:	Fire, thunder, lightning, justice; wealth and power
SALUTE:	<i>"Kawo kabiesile! Kawo kabiesile! Kawo kabiesile!"</i> —meaning his majesty has arrived
CITY OF ORIGIN:	Oyo, Nigeria, and was its fourth king
PERSONALITY:	Strong, dominant, elegant, beautiful, diplomatic, sexual, vain, a partier; 12 types exist in Bahia
SYMBOLS:	A symbol called <i>Oxê</i> that is represented in 2 ways: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1) A throne made of Iroco wood</li> <li>2) A pair of double-headed axes</li> </ol>



## **ITAN:**

Oxalá decided to leave Ife and visit Xangô in Oyo. He told this to his son Oxaguian in Elejigbo, who said, *"You need to make an offering to Exú to ensure a safe trip."* But Oxalá said, *"I am the father of Exú and of all creation, why?"* So Oxalá left without making an offering to Exú. He took with him three sets of white clothes to change into along the journey. On the way, Exú gave Oxalá three warnings, in the form of accidents, which got his clothes dirty and ruined them. The first accident was with coal; the second with palm oil; and in the third Oxalá fell in the mud, leaving all his clothes destroyed. At that moment the favorite horse of Xangô, which had disappeared, ended up next to Oxalá. Oxalá began petting the animal and it started making a lot of noise. Xangô's guards, who had been looking for the horse and heard the noise, came running and found the two together. They accused Oxalá of stealing the horse (*"Ole eshi oba"* means "the thief of the king's horse") so they beat him and threw him in prison. Xangô was so happy to have his horse back he forgot about the incident. However, Oxalá spent the next seven years in prison, during which time many people became sick, died of hunger, women became sterile, and babies were stillborn. Desperate for an answer, Xangô asked a babalawo, *"Why am I being punished if I'm a just king?"* The babalawo replied, *"Because you imprisoned your father."* Xangô exclaimed, *"No I didn't! That's ridiculous! How is that possible?"* *"You must find out,"* the babalawo responded. Xangô thought and thought and finally remembered the incident with the horse and that the visit of Oxalá never happened. He decided to search his prisons and find out just who that thief was. He demanded that during the search everyone wear white (the color of mourning) and be silent. When they found Oxalá, Xangô wept very deeply for the pain he had caused his father. Xangô demanded a house be built in honor of Oxalá, and that three of Xangô's ministers, called *Airas*, watch over Oxalá's recuperation. For 16 days, everyone prayed for forgiveness. Xangô decided to take Oxalá back to Oxaguian. Everyone wore white and was silent. Of his ministers, Aira Igbona carried fire on his head in front, Aira Intile carried Oxalá, and Aira Mofe carried the indemnification that Xangô had to pay to Oxaguian because their father could not walk anymore. Along the way they encountered Oxaguian, who was ready to do battle, as he had no knowledge of their father. Xangô told the whole story and afterwards they held a big festival in honor of Oxalá's safe return and recovery. This story is commemorated in Bahia on the last Thursday of August.

# ANGOLA: CONGO

$\bullet = 120$

Agogô

Lê

Hunpi

Hun

Sometimes called *congo de ouro* (congo of gold), congo is played for the deities of Candomblé Angola. The agogô plays a pattern that many non-Brazilians know as “3-2 clave.” As is the case with all the rhythms of Candomblé Angola, the drum parts are played with the hands, and the slaps on the lê and hunpi are open. Because of the way they fit together, the collective syncopation of the parts is challenging, therefore start off slowly.