

IYESÁ (OGÚN AND OSHÚN)

The Iyesá originated in the Iyesá Modduń in what is present day Nigeria and were brought over (with the Yoruba) to Cuba, where they founded the Cabildo Iyesá in 1854 in the city of Matanzas. The cabildo is dedicated to both Ogún, the Orisha of iron and a powerful warrior, and Oshún, the deity of rivers and the goddess of love, who is syncretized in Cuba as the Virgen of La Caridad Del Cobre.

The instrumentation of Iyesá consists of from two to four drums: the caja (the largest), the segundo (medium), tercero (highest), and sometimes, the bajo (bass). They are short, cylindrical, double-headed drums with skin heads attached with a hoop and laced with rope around the entire drum. The caja is played with a hand/stick combination while the other drums are played exclusively with sticks. Accompanying the drum ensemble are two cowbells that outline the time cycle and occasionally, a rattle (agbé), which emphasizes the downbeats. The Iyesá drums are religious drums and are therefore consecrated and blessed, but drummers do not need to undergo any initiation.

About These Examples

Although there are Iyesá songs for other deities such as Osain (the God of Herbs) and Orula (the owner of the table of Ifá), they all use the same music. Both are fairly straightforward, with the caja variations being the most rhythmically challenging part. The bells usually enter first followed by the supporting drums and the singer.