

Bell and Clave Patterns Summary

The more bell patterns we learn for the West African dununs, the more we realize that the number of combinations is fairly limited. One traditional limitation is that there are seldom more than two notes in a row struck in a given pattern. Another limitation is that there are seldom even two rest notes in a row. This makes sense when we think of the bell as the timekeeper - if not a metronome, then at least marking the passage of time steadily, without any ambiguous or crowded spaces. Thus the most common patterns over the space of a half-bar of 4/4 time are as follows:

1	.	*	.	2	.	*	.
X		X		X		X	
X		X	X		X	X	
X	X		X	X		X	
X	X		X		X	X	
X		X		X	X		X

These same patterns can be repeated or used in various other combinations to complete the bar, for example:

	1	.	*	.	2	.	*	.	3	.	*	.	4	.	*	.
Sofa dununba	X		X	X		X	X		X		X		X		X	

While the above patterns nearly exhaust all the possibilities (given the traditional rules of thumb), there are a few other possibilities allowed, which we might as well have in our toolkit. Also it is useful to include a few other basic rhythms commonly used to establish and maintain the pulse: the clave, samba and juju patterns.