

HIGHLIFE or PANDOGA

(Ghana, West Africa)

Highlife is the general name for a type of West African dance. This Highlife, Pandoga, was arranged and taught in the early 1970s by Dick Oakes, based on elements from dances of the Ewe, Ga, Ashanti, and Yoruba tribes of Ghana. Though African dances are usually improvisational, this is a useful and fun pattern. Dick Oates wrote: "These figures may vary from individual to individual and should only be taken as approximations of actual movements and as refresher notes . . ." Ideas for classroom improvisation are below.

Background: During the late-19th to mid-20th century, West African cultures were influenced by European colonizers. Highlife is a combination of European social dance and indigenous folk movements, using both Western and African instruments. Similar hybrid music has also developed in the West Indies. [From notes of Tony Shay, former director of Aman Ensemble].

Recordings/DVD/video: Music for "Highlife" is found Sanna's CD#1, *Folk Dance Music for Kids & Teachers*, with permission from Aman Folk Ensemble. Aman learned this music from Kwazi Badu, lecturer in music of Ghana at UCLA and former member of the University of Ghana's dance troupe. This recording uses drums and double gongs typical of Ghanaian village music. Highlife music can also be found on many West African recordings. This pattern is taught on Sanna's DVD/video #3, *Living Ethnic Dances for Kids & Teachers* (aqua).

Styling: Individuals scattered around room facing center. Bend elbows at sides, forearms parallel to floor and held loosely, forefingers pointing down—relax!

Music: 8/16 "Bell pattern" - 8 counts: 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 = 1 basic step

Basic step: (Ct 1) Touch R heel twd ctr, straighten L leg, point at R toe w/ R forefinger, drop R shoulder; (ct 3) step on R w/ bent knees, square shoulders; (ct 5) touch L heel twd ctr w/ straight R leg, point at L toe w/ L forefinger, drop L shoulder; (ct 7) step on L w/ bent knees, squaring shoulders.

Dance Pattern

(This description is meant to reinforce learning from workshop and/or video)

Introduction: 2 "bell patterns" (no action)

10 BASIC STEPS

4 SAWING: palms down, L above R, knees bent, cutting motions down to R + L
4 PRAYING DOWN: hands in prayer, small circles, squatting gradually to beat
4 EGG BEATING: staying down, mixing motion under one elbow, then the other
4 PRAYING UP: reverse movements of PRAYING DOWN

(continued on other side)

4 BASIC STEPS moving out a bit

4 SMALL DRUM: 3 steps + lift in place, "beating" drum with hands in front

4 LARGE DRUM: 3 steps + kick to R, then L, "beating" big drum to L side

4 SMALL DRUM: as above

4 BASIC STEPS in place

4 BIG CHICKEN: knees spread, hands on thighs, elbows flap, moving in, Vi turns

4 FLYING CHICKEN: same position, elbows to side, palms to floor, in 2 + out 2

4 BIG CHICKEN: same as above, moving out

4 BASIC STEPS in place

4 SWIMMING IN PLACE: exaggerated "crawl stroke," feet together, knees bent

4 SWIMMING TO CENTER: same movements and position, hitch forward

4 SWIMMING IN PLACE: same as above

4 BASIC STEPS moving backward out of center

4 WAVING CHICKEN: BIG CHICKEN position, waving 1 hand, then other, moving in toward center.

3 BASIC STEPS moving backward out of center

POSE in WAVING CHICKEN position while stamping foot

Suggestions for Improvisation

Discuss with the students that these movements are from a particular culture's everyday lives. Have them practice some movements from their own everyday lives—such as what do they do first thing in the morning, what musical instruments or sports do they play, what chores are they expected to do, what are their favorite leisure activities, etc.? Can they also guess what others' movements represent?

Then they should choose three different ones (Cater perhaps others) that will fit into the Highlife dance pattern, which the teacher might lead like this:

Perform the 10 basic steps, the 4 next figures, and the 4 basic steps. Then instead of the small and large drum figures say, "Do your first movement." Do 4 basic steps. During the big/flying chicken figures say, "Do your second movement." Do 4 basic steps. During the swimming figures say, "Do your third movement." Do 4 basic steps and finish the pattern as above. Try other movements another day.

PRESENTED BY SANNA LONGDEN.

Notes by Sanna Longden © 2007, based on those of Dick Oakes and Tony Shay.