Afro Celt Sound System: 'Release' from *Volume 2: Release* (for component 3: Appraising)

Background information and performance circumstances

Afro Celt Sound System was originally formed by guitarist Simon Emmerson in 1995 and has featured a number of guest artists over the years. Their music is a fusion of African, Celtic and electronic dance music. They were signed to Peter Gabriel's (former front man for Genesis) record label, Real World Records, and have performed at World Music festivals including WOMAD. Their first album, *Volume 1: Sound Magic*, was recorded in one week and was released in 1996, reaching number 15 in the 1997 Billboard Top World Music Albums.

After the death of a core member of the group (Jo Bruce, son of Cream bass player Jack Bruce), the album *Volume 2: Release* was put on hold until Sinéad O'Connor stepped in and wrote the lyrics to a track that became '**Release**'. The album was released on 25 January 1999. In 2000 Afro Celt Sound System was nominated for a Grammy Award in the Best World Music category.

Performing forces and their handling

African forces: kora, talking drum
Celtic forces: hurdy-gurdy, uilleann pipes, bodhrán, fiddle, whistle, accordion
Western (dance) forces: male vox, female vox, synthesisers (including string pad, soft pad, bells, string bass), breath samples, drum machine, electric piano, shaker and tambourine.

Much of the piece is made from **looping**.

Playing techniques include: glissando, ornamentation, double stopping, open and closed hi-hat.

Structure

There is a distinct **verse** form. It contains an **intro**, **solos**, **breaks** and an **outro**. There are no choruses in this piece and the piece contains three verses.

Note: These set works guides are Pearson's interpretation of the set works and every effort has been made to ensure these are appropriate for use in the classroom.

There may be other interpretations which are also valid and any such differences would not be considered errors, or require any updates to the guides.

0.0–1.38	Intro	The intro starts with a **drone**. It uses two different synth tones, hard-panned L and R. Both synths are being **filtered** with **low pass filters** (these are used to sweep through all the frequencies in a tone and modulate the sound by removing, and then adding, higher harmonic content while always keeping the lower part or fundamental. The filtering is often timed so that when the L is adding treble, the R is removing it and vice versa.
		It is in **free time**. A steady C drone (without 'modulation') fades in gradually from about 19″. **Layering** of parts increase the texture as **talking drum**, **synth strings drone**, **vocal samples** (spoken) are added. **Bodhrán** (1), **shaker** (2) and **drum machine** (3) help to establish the steady tempo (50″). Female vocalisation (Fig. 1) (1′19″) enters using heavy reverb and panned centrally, with synth (4) and drum loops (5 and 6).
1.38–2.55	Verse 1	Main female vocal (Fig. 2) comes in singing verse 1. The accompaniment is simple chords giving a homophonic texture.
		The tambourine (7) takes over from the shaker, playing steady semiquavers.
		Kora (9) enters at the end of the verse along with low synth strings that play an ascending chromatic line (10).
		At the end we have a short bodhrán solo before the breath sample (13), and the bass loop (12) enters playing a riff on two notes (C and B[flat]), which gives a **modal** quality. A short flute effect (showing obvious delay FX (echoes) acts as a link to…
2.55–3.51	Verse 2	Male vocals (Fig. 3) take over singing a variation of verse 1. A more complicated drum pattern (14) appears with a fiddle playing an accompaniment using double stopping, accents and triplets (15).
		Towards the end the low chromatic synth strings enter. A short drum and bass link leads to the solos

3.51–4.55	Solos	Uilleann pipe starts the solo section (Fig. 5), joined by the whistle (an octave higher) playing mainly running semiquavers with the occasional glissando (slide). The solos are accompanied by the accordion loop (playing accented chords)(17) and bodhrán (18)
		The solo continues with the low whistle (Fig. 6) playing a more complicated version of the pipe solo. It is more varied in rhythm and an increase in rhythmic variety (including the use of demisemiquavers). The low synth strings accompany the low whistle along with the accordion. The bass loop has dropped out.
		Towards the end the male vocals (19) (short phrases) are joined by the hurdy-gurdy (20) and bass (12).
4.55–5.51	Verse 3	The texture continues as the female verse takes over.
		The hurdy-gurdy and uilleann pipe solo playing underneath the main vocals – creating a polyphonic texture.
		There is the addition of a new synth sample, which plays static chords (one chord per bar).
		The male vocal takes over (5'35") accompanied by the fiddle (23) with the chromatic low synth strings.
		At the end the bodhrán enters playing its original entry leading to…
5.51–6.59	Build	The bass re-enters with a more complicated drum part (24).
		Layered on top is an electric piano playing a syncopated two-note melody (F and G) over a chordal/arpeggio semiquaver accompaniment (25). Underneath there is a second electric piano playing an oscillating pattern of two notes (E[flat] and F) (26).
		The two electric piano loops drop out as a new hurdy-gurdy loop enters (27). Female vocal samples interject as a new uilleann pipe solo loop (28) creates a heterophonic texture with the hurdy-gurdy. Again they are layered with the low chromatic synth strings.

| 6.59–7.28 | Outro | Female voice sings 'Reach out and you'll touch me' (Fig. 2). The bass loop drops out and the second fiddle loop re-enters. |
| | | At the end the two electric piano loops enter as all the other loops drop out. The music fades out. |

Melody

- Use of nonsense lyrics
- Main verse is syllabic
- Some spoken parts
- Short phrases
- Limited range for the female vocal (6th). The male has a more extended range of a 13th
- Vocal samples
- Repetitive
- Sense of improvisation from opening female vocals
- Use of glissando (sliding)
- Use of ornamentation (acciaccatura)
- Use of double stopping (violin)
- Use of reverb is very obvious for the whole track.

Texture

- Constantly changing
- Use of layering
- Loops
- Main texture is homophonic
- Heterophonic texture (during outro)
- Polyphonic texture.

Harmony and tonality

- Diatonic
- Key of C minor
- Modal
- Chord sequences are repetitive
- Hint of chromaticism
- Use of extended chords (7th, 9th)
- Slow harmonic pulse
- Use of drone.

Tempo, metre and rhythm

- Free time at the start
- Steady tempo established at 50" – 100 bpm
- Simple quadruple meter
- Slightly swung semiquavers (gives a lilting/relaxed quality to the music)
- Syncopation
- Triplets
- Sextuplets
- Accents
- Rhythmic ostinato
- Use of loops
- Use of riffs
- Short rhythmic phrases
- 2- and 4-bar phrases.

Note: These set works guides are Pearson's interpretation of the set works and every effort has been made to ensure these are appropriate for use in the classroom.

There may be other interpretations which are also valid and any such differences would not be considered errors, or require any updates to the guides.