



GCSE Music – Set Work 7 – Afro Celt Sound System

A: Afro Celt Sound System

- Afro Celt Sound System is more of a collaborative musical collective than a band.
- It began in 1995 as an experiment by Simon Emmerson to see what would happen if he brought together some expert musicians from different cultures and let them improvise over some techno grooves.
- Stunned by the results, the four founder members (Emmerson, James McNally, Iarla O’Lionaird and producer Martin Russell) took it to Peter Gabriel’s Real World Studios where a recording week is held to allow people from all over the world to come together and inspire each other, form links and record some new and original music.
- The fusion of Irish and African cultures was what originally inspired Emmerson.
- In that one week when they recorded most of the first album, the musicians didn’t all share the same spoken language, communicating largely through their music, but the results proved that the concept worked.
- The resulting album, **Volume 1: Sound Magic** was released in 1996 after they finished the recording. The music critic Tim Sheridan described the album as ‘a sort of hip-hop jig and reel’
- The group then toured with various personnel for the next two years, building up their audience and their live show to critical acclaim.

B: Release and Instruments

- In 1997, as they were preparing to record their second album, one of their keyboard players, Jo Bruce (son of Jack Bruce from the band [Cream](#)), died suddenly.
- This tragedy almost stopped the project from happening, but when they were in the recording studio, [Sinead O’Connor](#) happened to be in the same studio complex.
- She met with the group and contributed some lyrics in keeping with its collective nature. The lyrics took a different view of the tragedy and inspired the group to continue with what they were doing.
- O’Connor was invited to sing her lyrics – she is the female vocalist on the set work.

C: DR SMITTH

D ynamics	No dynamic markings.	I nstrumentation	African instruments : Kora, talking drum Celtic instruments: hurdy-gurdy, uilleann pipes, bodhrán, fiddle, whistle, accordion Western (dance) instruments: male vox, female vox, synthesisers (including string pad, soft pad, bells, string bass), breath samples, drum machine, electric piano, shaker and tambourine. Looping is used throughout. Playing techniques include: glissando, ornamentation, double stopping, open and closed hi-hat.
R hythm	Free metre at the start Goes into 4/4 Syncopation used throughout Triplets and sextuplets used Rhythmic ostinato – loops.	T exture	Constantly changing Use of layering Main texture is homophonic Heterophonic texture (during outro) Polyphonic texture at times.
S tructure	Verse-Chorus form. <i>Score analysis has more detail.</i>	T empo	Steady tempo at 50 seconds – 100 bpm
M elody	Use of nonsense lyrics Main verse is syllabic Some spoken parts Limited range for the female vocal (6th). The male has a more extended range of a 13 th . Vocal samples Repetitive melody in vocals. Sense of improvisation from opening female vocals Use of ornamentation (acciaccatura)	T onality H armony	Diatonic Key of C minor Modal Chord sequences are repetitive and use of extended chords (7th, 9th) Slow harmonic pulse and use of drone.