

4-1-1998

The Tradition of Drumming in Kitase Ghana

Marisa A. Zapata

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School for International Training

College Semester Abroad - Ghana

Arts and Culture Program

Spring 1998

The Tradition of Drumming in Kitase Ghana

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ABSTRACT

The aim of this paper is to establish how people in one Akan community, Kitase, learn how to drum. In order to establish this, the history of drumming, role of drumming, and an introduction to the people who drum in the community is examined. The second section of this paper details the manner in which people learn how to drum discussing when they learn, who teaches them, and the techniques used. The last section looks at the role of the Kitase Junior Secondary School in drum education and explores the importance of the school in the continuation of drumming. Many factors influence and help a person learn to drum. Acquiring the knowledge of the art of drumming takes place over a lifetime creating an internal feeling of beat within the person.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Meda wo ase...

To the Fianko family. For inviting me into your home and letting me become part of their family, I am eternally grateful. I would like to extend special thanks to Mrs. Fianko for the wonderful meals, translations, advice and friendship.

To Mr. Banafo for being a patient and willing teacher. Thank you for showing me your life and opening the world of drumming to me. May all your dreams and wishes come true.

To Dr. Asiama for your support, advice, time and for finding me a home in Kitase.

To Kitase for welcoming to your community and letting me play your drums. I will not forget

To the Kitase Junior Secondary School for giving me such a warm welcome. Special thanks to Eric and Osman and to the students who performed for me.

To the drums. . .

To Susu Biribi providing me with songs that I can carry for a lifetime.

To the people I drummed with or watched drum, you have my eternal thanks.

To each person I interviewed or worked with. Your help is forever appreciated.

To Yaa-Kinney for reminding me what trust is.

To Jordan for being fifteen minutes from where I lived.

To Yemi for always being willing to give help.

To Ann, for being Ann

To the computer room for help and laughter when it mattered most. Don't forget to save.

To Sister Yaa and Brother Kwaku for just being my friends. Mmmm lobster... See you in Puerto Rica. Thanks guys for helping make this term so wonderful.

To Josue for being my brother and never failing to make me smile.

To my mother for being my mom. This year never would have happened without you. What this year has given me, I may never be able to fully express, but no amount of thanks can ever repay you for helping me live it.

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INTRODUCTION

Sitting in my second term freshman year English class, I listened as my classmate Drixell read from his autobiography. The pages he read from spoke of life as an athlete, a scholar, a black man, and of a distant land his mother called home named Ghana. These different aspects of his life were carried together by a force that he felt was ever present - the internal beat of a drum. It would be only in retrospect that I would understand that Drixell's paper was the beginning, as clearly as beginnings can be marked, to my intrigue of drumming and of West Africa. Over the course of the next year and a half, drums and West Africa would show up occasionally in my life. Drums created a mystery mind. However, I could never find out much information. They became illusive, forming an enigma. I finally decided that I would go to Ghana and, with all the naivete that I was capable of expressing, become a drummer.

After one week in Ghana I quickly realized that the little knowledge I had about drumming was nothing as I began to understand how much information there was to learn about drumming. I quickly abandoned my plan of becoming a drummer and focused my energy on learning everything I could about drumming and its role in society. As my time in Ghana progressed, I gradually acquired a basic understanding of drumming particularly as it existed in Akan societies.

One topic that would continually surface during our lectures and fieldtrips was that of the many changes currently taking place in Ghana. Most discussions focused upon how these shifts were also changing Ghanaian culture. I began to wonder how these changes were effecting drumming. I became increasingly interested in how societal transformations were adjusting the manner in which drumming was handed down from

generation to generation, in essence how it was taught. To question this though, I realized that I needed to understand how drumming was retained within the culture to begin with.

During my stay in Kumasi, two events would reinforce and help shape my interest in this topic. The first was my own drumming lessons. During the first few lessons, I had difficulty understanding when it was appropriate to change from one rhythm pattern to another. My teacher, quite frustrated by the whole process, kept shouting at me to listen to the bell. I remember thinking "Listen to what! What I really need is a conductor giving me downbeats with some sheet music telling me where everything goes!" However, given time I was finally able to understand what my teacher meant and hear the bell. My lessons in Kumasi peaked my curiosity about how people learned music in Africa as it seemed so different from my own upbringing in music.

Also during my stay in Kumasi, I stumbled upon a teaching session in a small community within Kumasi. My friends and I heard drums and followed the sound to what turned out to be the palace. In the back of the palace were a group of young boys playing the drums as older men looked on. The older men turned out to be the elder drummers in the community and they were teaching some boys how to drum. They met everyday for about an hour.

It was this experience that finally solidified what I wanted to spend my last month in Ghana examining - how the tradition of drumming was retained from generation to generation. The session of teaching I had observed intrigued me greatly. From what I had read and been told about how people learn to drum, this session was not typical. Drumming was not taught in such an organized, formal manner (Nketia 1974: 59). Was

this method of teaching a product of a changing Ghana or was what I had read and told just wrong?

After deciding that I wanted to understand how drumming was inherited from generation to generation, I needed to select a location to conduct my project. Initially my ideal place was an Akan speaking remote village. The "remote" aspect was of particular importance. I wanted to dive as deep as possible into village life. I wanted to exist someplace with as few Western influences as possible. The reasons for this were numerous, most of them quite personal, as I wanted to try and experience life as far removed from my own as possible.

Also, one of the reasons I had been so excited by the drumming session that I witnessed in Kumasi was that it had nothing to do with me, the foreigner. Since most of the drumming I had seen during the course of my stay in Ghana had been because I was with a group that was willing to pay for performances, I had begun to feel quite disillusioned about drumming as anything more than a current means to make money. Essentially, I wanted to see drumming in its most traditional setting - in a raw, unabridged form.

However, many obstacles would prevent me from finding this ideal village. As reflected on what I hoped to find and achieve during my project time, I began to realize that perhaps the best location to conduct my study would be in a less remote environment. Time began to run short, and I made the rather impulsively decisions to study in Kitase, a small town in the Eastern Region.

I did not meet any of the drummers before I left for the community nor did I inquire as to the art of drumming in the community. These aspects had become less and

less important to me as I had begun to feel that what I really wanted to study was drumming in a community. The community did not have to be known for drumming, in fact I preferred it not being so. I also felt that being in a community with a school would allow me to explore aspects of music education and possible influences the school had on the tradition of drumming.

Settled by the Akyem people, Kitase is the first town you encounter on the road up to Akwi. The people are Akuapem Twi speakers. Kitase is a relatively small town but because of its proximity to Accra is growing. New housing developments have opened and there are people from many different areas settling there. Most families depend on farming for their source of income. Furthermore, because the road that goes through the town is a heavily traveled road, many people sell items on the road.

METHODOLOGY

I returned to Kitase on the 4th of April 1998 where I was formally introduced to the elders and moved in with the family that had agreed to house me. There was a debate regarding who my teacher would be and eventually the decision was reached that Nana Kwasi Banafo would instruct me.

Nana Banafo is an asokwahene, master drummer for the bomoa ensemble in Jankama, the neighboring town.¹ He is considered to be one of the best drummers in the surrounding areas. He is often called on to play in Kitase.

My lessons would prove to be invaluable in my understanding of how people from Kitase learn to drum as I undertook the process myself. Over a period of three weeks, I met with Nana Banafo 16 times. The first week we met every other day for roughly 2 hours and for the last two weeks we met almost daily. Usually two other drummers Collins Kwateng and Kwasi Agyare joined us.

In the palace, Nana Banafo and I would sit, him playing rhythms and myself repeating them. He employed a number of different techniques that I will discuss later in the paper. We worked almost exclusively on the bomoa ensemble learning the basic patterns of the gongon, three supporting drums, *foNTomfrom* drums and atumpan drums. In addition, we worked on approximately 16 statements on the atumpan drums.

I by no means believe that I learned drumming in the manner that a person from the Kitase area does. The knowledge of how to drum is accumulated over a lifetime, I had only three weeks. In addition, I was going to "school" to "learn the culture" -

¹ Though my report pertains directly to Kitase, the towns of Jankama and Kitase are so closely linked that they share many things, including drummers. In many cases, families are sprinkled between the two

phrases set forth by the community. However, I firmly believe that there were aspects in my lessons that are used when instruction takes place for the people of Kitase.

Nana Banafo proved endlessly patient throughout our time together, patience I know that is not always extended to others in the community, as I watched men be hit in the head with sticks or boys swatted on the rear for playing something incorrectly. This is something I appreciated to no end as my decision to learn to drum was also in part because as a musician one of my largest weaknesses was the ability to keep the beat. In fact when I told my high school band director of my intentions of going to Africa and learning to drum, he doubled over in laughter. Throughout marching band seasons, he would constantly yell at me for ending up on the wrong foot as a result of stepping too slowly or too quickly. Staying on tempo was something that plagued my entire musical existence and I knew that learning to drum would challenge this.

In addition, I came to Ghana with only a high school education in music. I knew that trying to research and write an academic paper on something out my subject range would prove quite challenging. I was certainly not wrong regarding this. I found myself having to read numerous books to understand what was going on in a musical context especially when it came to technical words used in many academic sources. Combined with the fact that I came here with no true understanding of drumming, I feel that my own initial lack of knowledge, has limited my ability to conduct a truly effective study and write a well-versed paper. I do not regret for a moment undertaking the project for I learned many things, but it is only now as I sit and write the end-product that I feel even half-way prepared to go out and conduct the study.

towns. Many of my informants were in fact from Jankama, but I do not feel that this in any manner

Participant observation was conducted through my lessons. I was able to not only observe what was going between myself and my teacher but also between him and the people who would occasionally drum with us. I was also allowed to participate in a funeral.

In addition to my lessons, I employed a number of other research techniques. I conducted formal interviews with various members of the community. Some of these people were drummers, chiefs, children, and members of the community. I taped these interviews and took notes during them.

At times translators were necessary. Language proved critical when conducting my study. My Twi is marginal, at best, and most of the people I needed to speak with spoke limited English. Although I was able to locate people to translate for me, arranging meetings between people proved to be difficult. I firmly believe that knowing the language of the people you are trying to learn from is essential to the validity of the project. I believe this is especially true with something like drumming. I believe that I missed many informal comments by simply being unable to understand what was always being said. In addition, drum language is in Twi and I was unable to understand much of what the drums said.

Furthermore, I believe there is always something lost in translation. This was not only a concern from Twi to English but also from my English to English that could be fully understood by the people that were translating or that I was speaking with. I found myself having to reword questions to get a general meaning across to the point that the questions would lose part of their meaning I have always relied on the power of the compromises my findings, as the towns are considered to have the same history.

meaning of a word or phrase, and although I did my best to learn to work without that I do have some doubts as to whether my meaning was always understood.

Furthermore, many of the questions that I was trying to answer were based on concepts and ideas that were foreign to the community and I had to create ways to get across meanings in a manner that would fit into current cultural constructs. Having to do this in a different language was certainly an exercise in patience.

After the interviews I would transcribe the information and compare it to information obtained from other sources. This was a way to check for inconsistency. Inconsistency in information proved to be a large problem when collecting data. If I asked seven people a question I would sometimes get seven different answers. In these instances I would generally go back and ask a couple of the questions over and over again, often times having them explain other answers to different questions. This technique proved to be fairly effective because it usually turned out to be that people were answering questions that I was not asking. However in some cases I was never able to resolve inconsistency in information.

For instance, I could never ascertain what the difference was between the people who played in the *Asafo* group and the *Bomoa* group. I would sometimes hear that anyone can play *asafo*, but only proper *okyermas* can play *bomoa*. Other times I would be told that anyone can play anything or that *okyermas* only can play either *bomaa* or *asafo*.

The one person I felt could clear up the matter was the *asafohene*. Unfortunately he was never willing to meet with me. This was because people did not understand why I needed to speak to so many people regarding my subject. Many felt that I had a teacher and that he should be able to answer all my questions. In addition, I spoke with the oldest

drummer in Kitase who is considered to be the master of all drumming in Kitase and thus the most knowledgeable. Between talking with these two people, it was extremely difficult to explain to people why I needed more interviews, as these people are regarded as the people with the knowledge on drumming. This was the case even after I explained to the people I was seeking interviews with that I was seeking information about the* lives and not necessarily about the history of drumming in the town. Though I was finally able to achieve most of the interviews I felt were important to my project, never speaking to the *asafohene* I believe greatly diminished the amount of information I was able to collect and use when writing about *asafo*.

There is another explanation for the above problems of inconsistency and language. The problems that I encountered could also have been because I was asking questions about a part of the lives of the people that nobody really thinks about, they just do. Drumming has its role in the community and that role appears to be quite firm. It has its place and function and though everyone knows what that role is, it is not something they choose to reflect on or sit around and discuss.

For instance when I was trying to ascertain how many drummers were in the village, I kept hearing from seven to twelve. However, as I began to construct a list of names, there were well over twelve. As it turns out at any given occasion when *bomaa* is being played (and it is the most common) there are seven drummers with support, or relief drummers, adding up to twelve. The actual people who drum might change from event to event or even over the course of the day, but the number is constant. Usually the same people drum; however, this is subject to change for a variety of reasons.

Besides formal interviews and participant observation, informal interviews were conducted. Because I was taking lessons almost daily, there were always questions that would come up or information that would surface during them. In addition, I found it more effective to listen and observe through informal settings than in formal ones. I recorded informal interviews in a daily work journal. Naturally language prevented me from engaging in as many informal interviews as would have been helpful.

I also tried to engage in non-participant observation as often as possible. I kept my eyes and ears open at all times. I was fortunate enough to observe one teaching session. Also some of the boys from Katise lived in the palace where we practiced and observing the interchange between the older drummers and the younger ones was quite informative.

I feel that observation was extremely important in fully understanding what I was examining. The old saying 'seeing is believing' rang through my head on numerous occasions. Unfortunately, non-participant observing was a difficult to engage in as time was an important factor during my study. I had only three weeks to move into a town, build rapport and establish how people learn to drum. Based on what I did learn and see I firmly believe that observation is the key. To have been truly effective I feel that I would have needed to be there for a much longer period of time and preferably lived with one of the master drummer in order to observe as much as possible.

I believe my being who I am had a bearing on my findings. First and foremost I am an obroni -a white person, a stranger. A stranger can only become so much a part of a community, especially in three weeks. Additionally I was from the United States. I heard the US referred to as heaven on number of occasions and many people wanted to

talk about my home and how they could get there more than they wanted to talk about their community.

Lastly, I was a woman. I was studying in a man's world - *bomaa* drumming. I intentionally have not written about people's feelings on a woman drumming *bomaa*. This is because when I asked a few people about it, the only comment I could get was that "you are free here" or "feel free." Regardless of what is said, there are certain attitudes that men have regarding women that I feel might have effected the information that I received.

Furthermore, on more than one occasion, sex became an issue. On one occasion, the matter became such a problem that I was unable to attend a particular function. Furthermore, as it became clear that some of the men I interviewed were interested in me beyond the bonds of friendship, I had to consider that what I was told was actual said to please me.

When conducting a study in the field there are bound to be numerous problems encountered. The goal in such a study is to try and limit these problems or find ways in which to correct for the problems. The limitations that I discuss above are ones that I feel, despite attempts to correct, have a bearing on the validity on my findings.

TRADITION OF DRUMMING IN KITASE

The Ensembles

Katise, like most Akan communities, has a rich tradition of drumming. There are three main ensemble groups in Katise. They include the *Bomaa* group, Asafo group, and the Susu Biribi group. Each of these groups play a different role in the community.

Bomaa originated when the forefathers of the area went to war. When they were walking they saw a tree covered with something. They argued over what it was and began to beat it with a stick. They kept saying to beat the thing with the stick. This would become the *bomaa* ensemble.

Bomaa is a form of Akan state drumming. *Bomoa* is also known as *fontomfrom* and though there used to be a distinction between them, this distinction is really not recognized now (Nketia 1963 :139). *Bomaa* is the most commonly played form of drumming in Kitase. When I asked Nana Banafo why he felt I should learn *bomaa* first, he said he believed it was the best way to learn Akan tradition. *Bomaa* is played on numerous occasions including funerals, festivals, and in the presence of the chief.

Drumming and dancing comprise the performance. The drums that are used in the ensemble include the *fontomfrom* set, the *atumpan* set, the *aparo*, the *mmerema*, the *agyegyewa* and the *dawuru* (bell or gongon). Men play the ensemble. There are three different bell patterns. Each pattern is for a specific set of dancers - one for men, one for women, one for the chief. Seven men make up the group, one being the *asokwahene*.

The second group is the *Patu Asafo* group. The ensemble is a type of *asafo* playing. The *asafo* ensemble is part of the war company. And "An *asafo* company consists of all able-bodied men, young or middle aged, who are not members of the royal

companies but who are united under a leader as a force to initiate or counteract aggression in time of war or during internal disputes" (Nketia 1963: 104). The ensemble consists of the *agyegyewa* drum, *twenesiu* and gongon. *Asafo* is played at times of war and when other extremely serious occasions arise letting people know of the problem. *Asofo* is also played at important funerals such as the death of the chief. The *asafohene* is the leader of the drummers and the war troops, a captain so to speak. The ensemble consists of men.

The third drumming group in Kitase is *Susu Biribi* group. This group is composed of all women. Traditionally in Akan communities, women only drum during female puberty rites and generally only play the *donno*, bell and rattles (Nketia 1963:15). However, in Kitase this is not the case. A group of women have come together to dance, drum and sing. These women are now elder women in the community. They formed the group many years ago when one of their uncles passed away. The uncle was the main form of support for the family. They wanted to find a way to honor him so they decided to sing, drum and dance. The name of their group means to think before you use or take anything. The death of their uncle forced them to think about how they were going to support themselves.

The women perform at funerals, festivals and other such occasions. They write songs based on their lives. They continue to write songs today and have taught their daughters and granddaughters what they have started.

Four women drum in the group. They play the *donno*, *agyegyewa*, gongon, and *frikyiwa*. A man from a neighboring community who helped them initially with the drumming is still invited to help them today.

These ensembles are the present day ensembles in Katise. They are not the only forms of drumming played in the community. The drummers play whatever is needed. However, they are the most valued and most often performed.

The Drummers in Kitase

The people who comprise these groups vary. As already stated above, the *Susu Biribi* group is made up entirely of women.² Only men play in the *Asafo* and *Bomaa* groups.³ Men can play in both the *asafo* and *bomaa* groups. In all there are a number of men who can who have the knowledge to play the drums in Katise, far surpassing the actual number required. Furthermore, drummers from neighboring communities are often invited to play. Generally the people who are considered to be the best players are the ones who play.

In the Akan tradition, there are usually two types of drummers. There is the drummer who inherits the position from his father or uncle. Drumming is thus passed down through the family line. There is also the drummer who becomes a drummer because he wants to. However, in Kitase there are no family lines of drummers. The people who learn to drum, drum because they chose to. This is not to say that there are not families that have more than drummer in them, but that the Akan tradition of family inheritance does not exist in Katise.

Anyone who wants to learn to play the drums can. Once they have attained a certain level of skill they are declared an *kyerma*. *kyerma* means drummer. The

² Because the women's group is isolated from the rest of the groups, my study focused more on the men and boys who are drummers for the village. Unless specifically stated, the rest of the information pertains to the men's group.

³ Though only men play in the groups, I was allowed to play.

teacher of the person learning determines when the person has gained the skill level necessary for them to be a drummer.

Once a person is declared a drummer, he may become a master drummer, though this requires an advanced level of skill and vast memory. Drummers are asked to become master drummers by the chief and only the best drummers in the community are asked to become master drummers. In addition once a man becomes a master drummer, he obtains the title of Nana, becoming a sub-chief in the community.⁴

Additionally master drummers must be quite skilled on the atumpan drums, as “thee spice of the performance lies in the master drum's commentary on the dance” (Jones 1961: 39). The atumpan drums consist of two drums. One drum is a high tone considered the female voice and the other is the male voice, a low tone. The atumpan drums are often called talking drums as “what is drummed out is the tonal pattern of the words which make up the drum language” (Carrington 1949: 32). The drums mimic the language of the people using them.

In Kitase, this would be Aknapem Twi. Nana Banafo and I worked extensively on these drums. Below are some of the statements that I learned in Twi and then translated into English. The third column serves as an explanation of the English translation or example of when the statements should be played

<i>Odotankwankyerma, mumura mumura mumura</i>	Divine drummer, come come now	The divine drummer is calling all the people to come.
<i>Twenebaa kudia, ma wo ho nime so z</i>	Tree from which drum is made, arise and sound!	Drum, awaken and let everyone know you are awake.
<i>Adnura Kofi, ma wo ho z</i>	Gongon, arise and sound!	Gongon, let everyone

⁴ The exception to this is the woman’s group. Though the master drummer receives the title of Nana, it is an honorary title and she is not considered a subchief.

<i>metu so ɛ</i>		know you are awake. This calls for the drummers to start playing.
<i>Sono akara, sono akara, sono akara kramkran</i>	This is a mouse, this is another mouse that is different from the first mouse, and this third, which is different from the other two mice, mouse is the true mouse.	This statement is a proverb praising the chief. It reminds people not to boast, because the chief is above them. The chief is all-powerful.
<i>Nhohon tetare bise ho, wawew nwe, wawew nbi, nhohon tetare bise ho kwa</i>	The red ants are attached to the cola nuts They cannot chew it They do not sell them So they are on the cola nuts for nothing.	A proverb warning that you should not keep or do something you have no use for.
<i>Dammirifua che che</i>	Expression of condolences.	Used at funerals to mourn the dead
<i>Kasa pɛko okum anri</i>	Speak once, brave person	Someone who is powerful need only speak once
<i>Mo aku d'ni mo ahernia</i>	Congratulations, thank you, well done to specific tribes in the area.	For general thanks. For instance it can be used to thank people when gifts are given to the drummer.
<i>Ikwan iware asio? Asio iware ikwan Ipanyan ne nana</i>	The path crosses the river The river crosses the path Which is the older?	The first two stanzas are a proverb that is used to praise God. It is sometimes used to praise the chief. The proverb is used to remind people who think that they are better than God or the chief that they were here long before the person was.
<i>Yeboo ikwan kotoo asio</i>	We made the path and found the river	
<i>Asio firi tete Efiri Odumankoma Oboadet</i>	The river is from long ago From the ancient creator of the universe.	
<i>Agoru ja firi tete Byelere byade Minhu soo dka</i>	This performance is from long ago Since God created the world I have never seen such a beautiful thing	This third section is praising God and the creation of the drums. ⁵
⁵ <i>Afia Marisa hri nrem</i>	Afia Marisa come quickly!	Calls one person

⁵ When I learned this statement on the drums, I learned only the first and third stanzas. When I met with Asiam, he pointed out that the first stanza was part of the proverb. The second stanza and English translation come directly from Asiam unpublished: 10.

These statements are played by themselves or within an ensemble. They demonstrate the vast calls that can be spoken on the atumpan drums. Some are commands and many are provides. The statements are used to give honor, show respect, and praise God, people, and objects. . I will confess that many of the statements I simply memorized the patterns to, but in certain cases, particularly names, I am able to 'hear' them.

Motivations Behind Becoming A Drummer

In a community where the people that learn to drum because they want, the question of why they want to learn to drum arises. The answers were varied and numerous. Often times one person having multiple reasons for learning to drum. Their answer help to demonstrate the role that drumming plays in the community and attitudes towards drumming.

Nana Banafo became a drummer because something inside him told him to play the drums. Nana Banafo's talent was given to him from God and it was God who led him to the drums. However, when we discussed why he thought that boys in the community might be interested in learning to play he mentioned that the boys wanted to be like him. They respect him. Nana Banafo feels that part of his nature is to roam around and teaching and playing the drums fits into this. He is able to lead a relaxed, free life, so to speak, that appeals to younger boys in the community. Furthermore, as drummers are sub-chiefs, they receive an additional, elevated status in the community.

The idea of fees and gifts was mentioned a number of times during my interviews. One of the boys who drummed from the school said that he liked to drum because sometimes people would give him things when he drummed. A drummer enjoying an elevated status is nothing new in Akan cultures as "they are often rewarded for their services in the form of gifts, fees, and privileges. .." (Nketia 1974: 64). Mr. Kwateng stated that everything the African did was for money now and that drumming was no exception. The reality is that drumming can produce an income. If you are good, people will hire you for occasions, lessons, and places like the Agoro Project and AAMA will hire drummers to work at their locations. However, how much money or how helpful the surplus would be was difficult for me to determine.

However, as with most things, a desire to make money is not the only reason to do something. Becoming an Økyerma requires time, desire and dedication. A few of the boys I spoke with said that they were learning how to play because they thought drumming was interesting. In addition, Nana Agymeman believes that drumming is a compulsory part of the tradition in Kitase, that drumming allows for the continuation of culture.

LEARNING TO PLAY

The previous section discussed what drumming is in Kitase exploring ideas about the role that drumming plays in the community? what ensembles are present, who drums, and why people choose to become drummers. What remains to be examined is how the people who decide to learn the art of drumming acquire that knowledge.

When and Where

Drumming is something that is learned over a lifetime. In all essence, the training of the African child starts right from the cradle by the mother rocking him, singing of nonsense syllables to him, the child being carried at the back of the mother to ceremonies, singing to the child, and through children's games and stories with interludes of dancing and singing, playing of toy drums until he becomes perfect

Agordoh no date: 30

All children are exposed to music and rhythm in the beginning part of their lives. Rhythm itself is present in engrained in the culture of Kitase. Even the pounding of futu has its own rhythmic structure.

Meki Nzewi has developed three phases that children go through in becoming musicians. The first stage he calls the pulse stage. In this stage "the child starts getting enculturated into the society's cultural rhythm as well as musical sensibility as a passive participant: sensitivity for pulse, awareness of the regular flow of music in time is somatically enculturated" (Nzewi unpublished: 3).

In the second stage, the child leaves the realm of passive participation. Nzewi calls this second stage rhythm sense and in this stage the child is encouraged "to learn standing, balancing, and walking with exhortative rhythmic chants" (unpublished 3). Children's games help to develop this. Every child goes through these two stages as they

are resultant from events that range from everyday occurrence to festival days. Thus, all children develop a sense of rhythm.

It is helpful at this juncture to make a differentiation between drumming and rhythm, as "for many people, 'African rhythm' still means 'African drumming'" (Agamu 1995: 2). Almost all children I encountered in Kitase could and would play rhythm patterns on desktops, buckets, or whatever else they could get their hands on, this, however, did not imply that all children could drum.

As I stayed in Kitase, I found myself reflecting much on this sense of rhythm. I believe that this sense of rhythm becomes an internal one, one that is constantly present in the minds and bodies of the people in the community. Almost everything done is done to a beat. One morning I was awakened to hammering from a nearby house. The hammering was taking place in a perfect cadence, never veering from the beat.

Though the child learns rhythm simply by living in the community, he must make a conscious decision to learn an instrument. Dr. Nwezi refers to this third stage as general musicianship where the child decides to join a music group (1996 4). In Kitase, to learn to play, all the person needs to do is express the desire to an elder. This expression may be verbally or through demonstrating interest at say a funeral. Age does not appear to be a factor as the people I spoke with began learning to play anywhere from 6-24 years of age.

As they are learning to play, the person is an apprentice of sorts. Dr. Nketia states that "musical apprenticeship. . . is not a highly developed institution" (1974: 63). However, while I do agree that these apprenticeships in Kitase are informal, I believe that "informality does not imply lack of philosophy and systematic procedure in transmitting

the knowledge of a music culture" (Nwezi 1996: 1). There is little doubt in my mind that there is a system in which drumming is inherited.

The people in Kitase learned and learn to drum in two distinct forms. The first form of instruction takes place through social occasions. At events like funerals, weddings, and festivals where drumming occurs, the apprentice is exposed to material that they are seeking to learn. They are able to watch the elder drummers and hear what they are learning. They see when the ensemble plays and how it works with dances and, in certain cases, songs. Though the person learning has surely attended these events before, and thus already have a basis of knowledge, once a person demonstrates an interest in learning, these events become times of instruction.

Funerals appear to be the most important of these events, probably due to their frequent occurrence. Charles Dosu told me that he learned to drum mostly at funerals. During my stay there was a funeral in Jankama. At the invitation of Nana Banafo I attended and played some at the funeral. There were times when only the Økyermas played as the performance needed to be perfect. However there was ample opportunity for instruction. Furthermore, about half way through the funeral there was a lull in activity and three boys appeared out of nowhere to sit down with some of the drummers and learn.

In addition to social occasions, many of the people I spoke with took lessons from someone. The word 'lesson' by no means implies the organized system of teaching that I witnessed in Kumasi or that I undertook myself. People work together when they can. This meant anything from everyday, once a week, or once a month.

During my stay in Kitase a group of boys had recently begun taking lessons. I attended one of the lessons. I sat down and watched them for about an hour. Between six to nine boys were in attendance, alternating between drums and watching. A number of elders filtered in and out of the area shouting out rhythms, correcting patterns played improperly, and demonstrating what the boys should be playing. Younger men would also come in to help.

Both of these situations of learning are different, yet they are in essence "learning through social experience" (Nketia 1974: 59). Perhaps demonstrating the largest from Western music education. I could never imagine having to take my flute lessons in public. Lessons are not held in private in Ghana. Drumming is a communal activity, not to be done alone. The Teacher

The lesson I watched also enabled me to better understand the role of the teacher in the acquisition of drumming. The teaching of drumming remains in the hands of the elders in the community who are drummers. Each of the people I spoke with named one teacher as their main teacher with other help coming from the elders. These teachers were or are drummers, usually master drummers or at the least regarded as one of the best drummers, from the town or the neighboring community. Nana Banafo was the only one to not initially name a teacher, as he is considered a natural drummer who received his talent from God. The work he did with his teacher was for more detailed, precise knowledge later in his career as a drummer and the meetings only took place for a short amount of time.

This alliance with the teacher is important and one night I found myself being reminded by Nana Banafo that he was my teacher and should anyone else offer to teach me, I should tell that Nana Banafo was my teacher. Furthermore, he pointed that he was the teacher to the other two men that often drummed with us, and that they were not my teachers, only helpers.

This does not imply for any moment that only one person is responsible for a person's or group of people's learning. In fact quite the opposite is true. The lesson that I witnessed demonstrated this. Although I was told later that one man was leading the lesson, when I was watching the session I did not notice one person more in charge than another. Quite often the boys were left alone during the session. Many people would come in to help the boys playing. After the session I asked the boys if all the people who had been helping were drummers and they said no. Essentially, although one person might be the main teacher to a person, everyone in the community is responsible for teaching. Techniques

A number of different techniques are used in helping a person learn to drum. Imitation is the most well used most well used technique in teaching people to drum. When I would speak to people about how they learned to drum the answer was usually such and such person showed me how to play the drums. The important word in that statement being 'show' as they literally meant show. Many of my own lessons were silent with the occasional 'no' said in response to something that I played incorrectly. Generally Nana Banafo would play a rhythm for me and I would repeat it. Then he would play it again and I would repeat. This would continue until I had satisfactorily

mastered the pattern. This was the most used means of teaching I would observe. People playing rhythms and someone imitating it. Whenever the person playing would make a mistake they would be re-shown the rhythm. .

Often times the rhythm would be quite long and the person being shown it would be expected to play it back without a problem. Drummers are expected to have a large memory. One afternoon, a couple of the boys in the school, following a performance by the school children for me, stood around the drums. One would play a pattern on the drum and I was expected to repeat it. The rhythms would get harder and faster and more complicated until I could not play it, eliciting much laughter. This was one large difference between how I was taught and others that I watched were shown. I simply did not have the ability to remember long rhythm patterns. Nana Banafo would break down the rhythms into small sections until I could understand them.

From these breakdowns came an interesting discovery. It is not always the case that you should play one part of a pattern with your left hand and one with your right, it was how it sounded that truly mattered. Naturally, because of the construction of drums the sound would dictate the use of one hand or the other, but this was not always necessary. As long as the rhythm spoke what it was supposed to, it was not an exact science as how to play it. Thus the importance of understanding what you are playing and what the rhythm is saying is emphasized.

After mastering the rhythm through imitation, we would repeat the pattern. Repetition is an essential part of the learning process. This helps ensure the person's remembrance of the rhythm, knowledge of when to play it and how it fits into the rest of the ensemble. At the session of teaching that I watched in the palace, the boys would sit

playing the same patterns over and over again for long periods of time. The same was true in my own lessons. Repetition also serves as a means of building endurance. It is expected that during performances, such as funerals, that drummers play nonstop for extended time frames. In addition, I believe that the use of repetition aids in the building of the ability to keep a consistent beat, of building the internal beat. In John Miller's book on Ghanaian drumming, he discusses his experience in teaching Western students drumming and keeping the beat as "apart from simply learning to maintain their rhythm, the most difficult task the students faced was learning to continue to maintain their rhythm" (1979: 60).

There were other techniques that were used less commonly. One was the teacher showing the pattern by taking the wrists of the person learning and playing with them, guiding their hands. This would allow for the person to feel the manner in which the rhythm should be played. Another technique was playing the rhythm on the shoulder blade of the person learning so that they could feel the rhythm as they played it. Sometimes people would speak the pattern to the person learning. Using short syllables, they would mimic the pattern so the person could hear it. This is often referred to by academics as using nonsense syllables as "each type of beat can be mimicked by an onomatopoeic syllable which has no meaning except in reference to drumming" (Chernoff 1979: 78).

In my own lessons, Nana Banafo would occasionally leave something that we were just learning and move to something else for a short time only to return to the original item. He did this especially when I was having difficulty with a pattern. More often than not, leaving and then returning to the item would miraculously solve the

problem I was having. I would suddenly be able to play the original pattern. However, sometimes we would leave the pattern all together, it having been judged too difficult for me to master at that stage.

Though there is certainly a system that drummers learn their art, it is done more informally done than it sounds here. My chief concern with the above information is that it falls into the trap Nwezi warns of:

Quite often modern pedagogic propositions assume that elaborate theoretical explanations, which short-circuit experience, more relevant than performance to the acquisition of knowledge about music - its creative rationalization, performance dynamics, appreciation and human values 1996: 12

This does not imply that my analysis is by any means an 'elaborate' explanation of the teaching of drumming. What it refers to is the dangers and the changes that such studies can create. These traps become particularly important as music education begins to take shape in the Ghanaian school system.

THE SCHOOL

Factors that have determined the trends in the modern teaching and learning of music in African countries, many of which have heterogeneous cultural manifestations, include foreign missionary activities, imported state and school systems, urbanization, modern economic pursuits, radio, cinema, and television (Nwezi 1996: 4).

Without doubt, such things have effected the tradition of drumming. However, the question remains what these factors can now do for the tradition of drumming. Perhaps the most encompassing factor is the school system. As more and more children attend school, lives and traditions are forever changed. Though the school system in the past did little towards teaching the value of Ghanaian culture, numerous changes are taking place. Because of the school's growing importance in the community, I believe that it plays a role, a role that will grow, in the tradition of drumming.

The Kitase Junior Secondary School opened in 1987 and serves Kitase and surrounding towns. The school enrollment stands at 155 students, spreading across forms one to three. A recent curriculum change has occurred allowing for Forms 1 and 2 to follow a slightly different curriculum than Form 3.⁶

Two classes are of importance regarding this study at the school. The first is the Cultural Studies class. Cultural Studies was added to the school curriculum when the school system switched to what is commonly referred to as "the new school system" in the 1980's. Though the class is the cultural studies of Ghana, the music sections of the JSS book devote two chapters to Western music, one chapter to Ghanaian composers of Western music and only one chapter to Ghanaian traditional music. The headmistress,

⁶ The rest of this section deals only with Forms I and 2

Mrs. Asiedu-Dentu, was uncertain as to why the book was written as such but personally felt there should be an emphasis on Ghanaian music.

This focus on Ghanaian music is taking place. In the recent curriculum change two years ago, a music and dance class was added. Though it includes both Western and Ghanaian forms of music more attention is being paid to Ghanaian music than ever before. No books have been written for the class as of yet, though they are in the process of being put together. Dance is instructed in the class, but to date drumming is not.

However, drumming is still present in the school. Four boys drum for the school. They will play the drums to call the students for class and to announce class changes. They also play for the dancers in performances for competitions or "open days." On competition days, the area schools compete on a variety of fields ranging from dance to singing to drama.

As it stands the actual drumming instruction comes from the community and the boys in the school who already know how to drum. When there is something that one of them does not know, boys will show each other. The community becomes involved during the competition time of the year. When the teachers are unable to teach the children the necessary skills, they invite community members to help them. For drumming, the elders will come in and teach the necessary ensembles as well as show statements on the *atumpan* drums.

The importance of the school cannot be understated. More and more children are attending school - many of them away from home. Because the manner in which children grow up is quite different than their forefathers, transfer of cultural products that might be dependent on the old way of growing up must become part of the new way of

living. In light of changing times that include the inclusion of new cultural ideas, from both inside Ghana and outside, the

transfer of traditional music into the classroom – a contemporary context - means that contextual awareness that develops naturally when the child participates in musical events in the community must be consciously nurtured through appropriate instructional strategies

Nketia unpublished: 4

Thus the schools face new and important challenges as they work to develop its music classes. Taking something from its traditional context and placing it in a contemporary one is certainly a difficult task. However, should the school system in Ghana rise to and meet this challenge, the rewards will be innumerable.

CONCLUSION

As a child, music was my escape from the reality of the world. Music would fill me lofty emotions and take me to places buried deep in my mind where words were not possible. Part of the reason I could never stay on tempo was that I did not want to. The beat was an imposing force on my freedom found in music. My music was exactly that, mine. In fact playing in front of people was difficult because to show someone else my music was letting them come into my world.

But music is not mine. It belongs to no one and yet to everyone. I could never imagine playing the drums alone, not playing with someone else while being observed by at least twenty youthful eyes. Drumming is a dialogue, one based on rhythm.

I understand now music is based on rhythm. Regardless of how it moves and flows, it does so around a beat. No matter how complicated or simple the beat is, it is the base that everything goes around, much like the gongon in so many Ghanaian ensembles.

When I came to Ghana, I wanted to understand this beat that I had avoided for so long and then been eluded by. Ghanaians spend their whole lifetime building a sense of rhythm - the beat such a part of them it is internalized. During my time in Katise, what amazed me the most about people's sense of rhythm was that every person's sense of rhythm matched the others. This cadence within one individual was the same as another individual's.

I came to Ghana to become a drummer. Though I am leaving Ghana with a few drums, I would not dare to call myself a drummer. I, "the unenculturated - choose the task of learning a musical tradition which has not been apart of [my life], [my] history,

[my] culture" (Locke 1987 128). But, as Ghanaians love to say ,I have tried.' I will continue to do so.

Music still speaks to me in a way that words cannot, but it has changed for now I hear and feel the beat. The rhythm allows me to form enter a relationship with others, whether it be in playing the drums, dancing or singing, in a manner that would be impossible otherwise, communicating through patterns. The pulse, therefore, does not trap you as through these relationships, indeed 'you are free.' You are linked to your brother and sisters by a pulse that will go on forever. Freedom is not about being isolated and alone. It is about knowing who you are and understanding the way that you fit in with those around you. It is about trusting those near to you to be a part of you.

When I think about returning home to a world where food is not prepared in rhythmic patterns and car horns are not honked to make announcements, I do not worry about losing what I have found. The beat has started to become internal within me and I know that for other people back at home, it is already there.

I have thought of Drixell and his internal drum beat often in the last month. How was it created in him? Does his beat match or can it match the beat the people in Ghana have inside of them? How many people around the world feel the pulse going through them? Who else can talk through the drums?

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