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**Voices of Ghana: The Evolution of
Traditional Identity Through Music**

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Abstract

"Music constitutes the bed-rock, the grass roots of popular consciousness." -Ronnie

Graham

As long as societies have existed on this planet, music has existed as a shared activity within these societies. Music acts as a mirror of culture, allowing a more intimate view of the history, traditions, troubles and successes of those people brought together by the music. Whether it is traditional African music or Western pop music, the idea of sharing something within the sounds and the silence has always remained the driving force behind musical creation. In this paper, I explore the effects of Westernization on traditional Ga music. What is truly shared in this traditional music and how has the experience changed with the onset of colonization and Western influence? Is the traditional music being overrun in favour of more secularized and mainstreamed music? How have ethnic groups adapted themselves to the colonial framework and the political realities of globalization? And what, if anything, does this mean for the future of traditional music and dance? By comparing Ga traditional music to the phenomenon of the cultural troupe, I hope to bring some of these questions into the open. In addition, by looking at the status of modern Ghanaian music and modern Ga music, I hope to ascertain the current extent to which traditional music continues to affect modern African music. It is also important to notice how much colonization has affected Ga communities, and how these changes show in their modern music. Is there a continuity of identity, and, if so, what is that identity that spans generations and generations of traditional life as well as the challenges of modern civilization?

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Introduction

The Ga people of the Greater Accra region have used music since the birth of their culture. It is interesting to see how much even the music we call traditional has changed over the generations. In order to fully understand the evolution of these people as well as their music, it is necessary to look at as many perspectives as possible, examining traditional music, the more popular cultural troupe that has grown out of the traditional music, and finally those popular musicians who have taken African traditional music and Ga music in particular, as strong influences. This way we can view the full influence Ga music has had on the present day people here in Ghana as well as other cultures around the world.

In the first chapter, I examine the history and traditions of the Ga people and give a brief background of the role traditional music plays in their culture. This will help to understand the changes that have taken place since colonialism. In chapter two, I examine the Ga traditional music I witnessed firsthand here in Accra, and include a discussion of the attitudes and feelings of the participants. In chapter three, I look at the development of the cultural troupe in Ghana, and, using Wulomei as an example, I discern the changes to the culture and music that fostered this development. In chapter four, I discuss the current role of Ga music in Ghanaian and international popular music, attempting to cut back to the heart of the Ga identity, the Ghanaian identity, and the African identity. How much is the modern musical identity in African music affected by the roots of the various traditional African musics?

Methodology

Since my arrival in Ghana, I have known that I wanted to study music here. It is impossible to resist in such a rich culture, where music plays such an active role. Everywhere you go rhythm is the primary surrounding daily life. Even when I could not understand the language at all, I could hear the basic rhythms at the heart of it. The rhythms themselves are a subconscious part of life here in Ghana, but there is no doubt that rhythms are the glue that everything hinges on. As a student visitor in Ghana, my curiosity was piqued, and all I could do was to soak up as many different styles and uses of that rhythm beating in my ears.

When I arrived back in Accra after our excursions around the country, I still had rhythm on my mind as I realized how much different Accra was from any of the other urban centers in Ghana. Indubitably, the developed parts of Accra far outweigh any other city in Ghana and the amount of Western influence remains the most concentrated in Accra. So when I found the traditional areas of the city, it was fascinating to watch the dichotomy of life. Some people in Accra live out a very traditional life, remaining in small shared homes of humble size very much connected with the rest of their community. Some people own large fenced off homes in expensive areas, seemingly cut off from the communities that gave them the roots they have used to survive.

As I began to find out more about the Ga people, the chief traditional residents of the Greater Accra region, I began to realize that they have been influenced by countless cultures from inside of Ghana as well as outside. Being fisher-folk allowed the Ga to travel to places and meet people that other cultures may not have had the opportunity to do. This fact, in conjunction with Accra growing into the most sizable port in all of

Ghana (as well as the center of the most Western trade and influence) has brought the Ga people to a new level of creativity and constructive social change. As I traveled around the city, I became fascinated by how the people retained their cultural roots while also accommodating the hustle and bustle of a large and very diverse urban center. Dissecting and understanding this "melting pot" became an obsession.

I started by meeting with my advisor, Oh! Nii Sowah, director of the Ghana Dance Ensemble and a Ga himself. Together, we focused my ideas into a workable thesis, centering my study on the evolution of traditional culture and the consequent changing of the music of that culture. The essential idea of the study became the identity of the Ga people. How, in an urban center like Accra, where people of all ethnic groups come to live together and share common ways of life, do people maintain a meaningful sense of self as a Ga? Was it a different identity for those people more involved in the traditional aspect of music and life? Or could the modern musicians who were more open to outside influence and ideas, still find common bonds with all Ga people? In essence, I wanted to know how much the roots affected the trees?

Oh! Nii introduced me to Tago Akwetey, also known as the comiche, who took me under his wing and helped me to meet some of the most important Ga performers in all of Accra. I first met with Wulomei, whom represented the first cultural troupe in all of Ghana. Cultural troupes were an offshoot of traditional music that played both traditional music and newer social music for the entertainment of their fans. Wulomei was certainly not limited to playing for only Ga people, but their music was an affirmation of the traditions from which they had come. They had been initiated by Nii Tei Ashitey in 1973 and had become popular amongst all Ghanaians. I met with them, saw them perform,

conducted interviews, and took observational data. These techniques allowed me understand the groups I worked with from the perspective of an unbiased audience member. I then used my interviews to establish a dialogue about the performer's own sense of identity and how that related to their being Ga, Ghanaian, and African.

After meeting with Ashitey and Wulomei, I began to look for even more traditional outlets. I met with a group of old women, whom perform only at funerals, birth celebrations, and marriages. They were twelve women between the ages of fifty and seventy-five, and one man whom played the drum for them. They were very interesting to see and to speak to, as they reminded me very much of my own grandparents in the United States. They were more traditional and conservative than Wulomei and had little to no need to take influences from the outside world. Their music came from their own rich history and culture. I also gathered interviews from them about their sense of Ga identity and the evolution of their traditional music.

In an area of Osu, very nearby the old women, I met a fetish priest and attended part of a weeklong ritual celebration performed at her house. This music was also more static than what Wulomei played with, but allowed itself openness to the necessities of the moment and the performers. For instance, the master drummer plays on top of a series of other drum parts that are locked into a cycle, but his own rhythms are always accommodating the movements of the priest dancing under possession. This music provided a great view into the life in a Ga village, as these were the very same rituals performed by generations and generations of traditional Ga peoples. The fetish priest and I were also able to sit down and discuss the changing identity of Ga people. After seeing these groups and talking to many people, I began to get a sense of Ga music as a

foundation for Ga culture, but also as a foundation for more modern, popular music heard today in Ghana. I met Cedi Kubarro of the musician's union in Ghana and Mac Tontoh of Osi Bisa. Both of these performers had much to tell me about traditional music's role in modern popular forms in Africa and around the world. The trees are always being made out of the roots.

Chapter One: The History of the Ga People and Traditions

Ga society has always been organized as a theocracy. The chief priests (wulomo) that directly communicate with the gods are accordingly given powerful roles within society. They are joined in the political arena by the mantsemei (elders), and asafoatse (war chiefs). Though there existed no paramount chief until colonialism, at that time the Ga communities bonded together and elected a paramount king (Sackeyfio).

Some research indicates that the Gas have come from Nigeria while others say they are originally from Israel. Still others point to the Nile Valley in the Sudan as well as Benin. What is certain is that the Gas are a wandering people and have moved around many times before finally arriving on the southern tip of Ghana, settling in Osu, Ga-Mashie, Labadi, Nungua, Teshie, and Tema. The seven clans of the Ga include the Sempe, Asere, Abola, Gbese, Otublohum, Akumadze and Alata, though they also share ties with the Adangbe. Relatively disconnected until the time of the Akan wars, this mutual threat to their well being brought them together again (Asiama, 1968).

The Ga are a fishing folk who also use agriculture to supplement their food supply. Their location on the Gold Coast, allowed them to become the middlemen for European trade around the 1670's, and they have continued this role until the present day. Accra has grown into the largest urban area in all of Ghana, and has experienced the largest amount of Western influence. Ga traditions have remained strong, but have taken influence from both nearby African cultures and from the West (Asiama, 1968)

The traditional worshipping structure of the Ga people includes a paramount, unifying God, various gods and lesser spirits that exist under the One, and, finally, every person has a God of his or her birth. The paramount God is considered the supreme

performer of wonders, who is still showing proofs of his omnipotence. He is the creator and the force that binds the universe together. Though I use the masculine to describe this paramount God, it is an entity both masculine and feminine, embodying all concepts and their opposites. In other words, this God is the source of everything. The lesser spirits and gods are responsible for communicating with the priests (wulomo) during rituals and other possession occasions. There are also the personal birth Gods and household Gods, who are prayed to in times of need, but whom represent a more intimate and personal contact with God (Personal Communication, fetish priest, 4/5/01).

When a family or individual encounters a problem that only the gods can help with, he or she can go to the fetish priest and have that priest conduct a ceremony to help in ridding them of that affliction, curse, health issue, family issue, etc. The priest acts as a community doctor on any and all subjects. During these kinds of ceremonies, Ga ritual music is performed to the specification of the priest or priestess and the spirit possessing him or her. Each fetish Priest has his or her own particular spirit that consistently comes on. Some of the types of ritual music include tigali, akon, otu, sakra, kanja, mra, me, kanja, dade, and brekete (personal communication, 4/5/01).

Other venues for music in Ga traditional society include the Homowo festival, and ceremonies like a female's rites of passage into womanhood. Homowo is a festival meaning "hunger will not come again tomorrow". In the past, there were times when food was scarce, so Homowo is performed to thank the gods for the abundance of foods. Before this festival can even begin there is a three-day fast from fishing, as well as a month long fast from music and drumming. When the festival finally begins, music fills the air with celebration, as everyone ears mightily. One might even see people eating

other people's foods during Homowo, as this is meant to be a time when people share everything they have to eat with their community (personal communication, 4/5/01).

Ritual music, like that which you might see at a female's rites of passage, is not the kind of music that makes up Ga cultural music. Other forms of music include spontaneous music, which may occur while making food or working in the fields, but it is always used to pass the time while doing other things. Finally, there is recreational music, or entertainment music, which has seen a great resurgence in the last hundred years. Recreational music, of all the traditional musics, is the one most apt to change over time, as it is most flexible to the tastes of each generation. As Ronnie Graham states, "almost every music is a combination of tradition and innovation. African music has historically enjoyed a high level of innovation, although many western listeners, concentrating on tradition rather than innovation, consider African music to be repetitive" (Graham, 9). Entertainment music, especially, is always changing its shape so that it can be enjoyed in different ways by different generations. In addition, ritual music may remain more static for the simple reason that it fulfils the same cultural purpose year in and year out. But even this ritual music leaves room for innovation.

Traditional Ga music serves several purposes within society. It mirrors and sustains the most important celebrations within that society as well as the most important rituals. For instance, the music accompanying a fetish performance is intended to maximize the efforts of that particular possession spirit. Thus, the master drummer will always be following the steps of the performer to encourage the greatest possible energy from that priest. In this context, the music is seen as merely one force among many and is never taken out of the collective context. It serves its purpose by playing for the

community toward some common, binding, force. It serves to thank and honor the gods that have allowed the celebration and survival of the community. In other words, traditional music is used to allow the whole community- dancers, drummers, audience members, and dead ancestor spirits- to share in the wisdom of the roots and experience collectively this day's vision of those ancient traditions.

Chapter Two: Traditional Ga Music- The Roots of the Tree

Traditional music in Africa has always been integrally connected to the societies from which they came. They are distinctive and tell altogether different stories, but the ways in which cross-rhythms are tied together produces a uniquely African sound. The wonder of traditional music is its precision in contrast to its flexibility. The drummers masterfully create a very exact web of rhythms, while allowing each dancer to find their own individual dance rhythm within it.

"First and foremost is the beat, the rhythmic totality that is repeated in cycles throughout the music. The separate strands of music are woven together by call and response, dialogue and overlapping conversation among the various rhythms, voices, instruments and dancers. Yet each leaves space for the other...Everyone has a voice in the musical happening" (Collins, 1992, 2-3).

The cycles of the music allow for the happenings to occur smoothly in a traditional social event. They allow space and accommodation, while holding down a consistent and precise beat. In essence, the rhythms provide the glue, the foundation and the force behind the event. "The power of African arts lies in the fact that they have always been an integral part of life, accompanying all important social functions- weddings, funerals, communal work and play, festivals, religions ceremonies" (Collins, 1992, 3).

The traditional music of African societies, with the Ga being no exception, performs and sustains the events of the community, while also serving to transfer knowledge and wisdom of the elder generations gradually down to the younger generations. The music itself is used as a tool to tell stories and understand the past in relation to the present. But while trying to understand these traditional musics, one needs to realize the difficulty in taking the music out of its context in order to analyze it. Its significance does not appear separately from n its many uses. Rather, it is only one link in

the chain that is culture, a part like all the rest. Traditional music acts as the cohesive force in traditional cultures.

I was able to see some of a week long ritual music festival performed at the house of a fetish priest. This particular ritual is orchestrated whenever there is a sponsor for such an event, while the length of the ritual varies depending on the resources of the sponsor. Approximately twenty fetish priests and priestesses gathered together to celebrate the final night of the festival. It began around eleven at night and finished at three-thirty in the morning. The purpose of the ritual is to please the gods and to allow a forum for these very same traditions to shine through (even on a street in bustling Accra). In order that the gods are pleased with that particular ceremony, two fowls were sacrificed at the beginning and at the end of the week. They said prayers to the gods holding the fowls in the air and asked that the gods be pleased with what was being offered. They then sliced the necks of the fowls and let them bleed to death. The fowls end up on the ground, but until the animals began flapping their wings and moving, the people are restrained. Once this occurs shout of joy are heard as the gods have accepted with the offering and are happy.

Then the music begins. All of the fetish priests and priestesses came out and sat in the inner ring of the performance area. My were dressed in blue and white cloth with a white undergarment. As the music began to be played, people began to file out of their homes to watch. The priests began to become possessed and the stories began to be told. The music would play until one of the priests was roused by the music. When he began to dance, he was taken out of the performance area and into a nearby home. There the fetish priests would change their cloth to fit their spirit, the women usually re-emerging clothed

only from the waist down while the men had large cloths covering their entire body. In some instances, the priests would return in full costume. I witnessed one man wearing raffia, which is a wig and matching skirt of long grasses. It is hard to decipher exactly what the dances they performed signified, as the moves were many and quick. The dancer would react to the music and the music would react to the dancer, creating explosions of energy from both parties. The dance is part of a celebration to the gods, a thanksgiving for the health and vitality of the entire community. In this interplay between master drummer and fetish dancer, we see the importance of communication in African traditional music.

The performance that particular evening included Tigali as well as Omla ritual music. The musicians used dondon, rattle bamboo sticks, bell, ampentema, prokwa, kroboto, and brekete. Each song and dance performed tells some individual story about the history of Ga people or relates a social anecdote that has become song. The content of each song could probably be an ISP unto itself, but the importance of each song relates back to how the music is performed why it is performed and whom it is performed for. The entire night emphasized the importance of community and history. The gods that were being thanked and that possessed the dancers were both spirits of the ancestors. They were the founders of the community, and, through the ritual music, were being honored. In this way, the chain is never ending and the traditions are always being passed down.

I had a chance to talk to the fetish priest who sponsored that particular ritual music festival and her biggest concern was for the youth of society today not to know their traditions and their roots. Growing up in such a diversified urban center, where so

many different kinds of traditions exist, where so much has to be rearranged to accommodate the necessities of urban life, she expressed concern over the traditional music not getting lost under stacks of Tupac Shakur or Daddy Lumba tapes. She told me that not two days before the ritual ceremony, her son had asked her for some money and had come back blasting rap music out of his room. She was distressed that there were not as many outlets for the youth to become familiarized with the traditional music. However, she wanted to allow her children the freedom to buy what they wanted to listen to. It seems to be an ongoing struggle against the popularized, mainstreamed music from around the world.

I also had the privilege of meeting with a group of very old women, whom played a variation of Ga Adaawe music. They were women between the ages of fifty and seventy-five, accompanied by one man of twenty nine years on drums. They play only at birth ceremonies, funerals, and marriages. They did not deviate from this schedule for any reason, making meeting with them rather difficult. Nonetheless, they reminded me much of my own grandparents in the United States, as they were very conservative and seemed rather closed off to any outside influences. They were very strong women, all the holders of the spiritual wisdom of their community. Adaawe is traditionally played with no drum, but the addition seems to have helped the women keep the energy of the songs going. They play a bell as accompaniment to the drum and sang along with the words to their songs. The rhythm seemed to be the same for each song, but each time a different member of the group would get up and dance. The music within this group was about sharing in community obligations with your peers. The repetitive nature of the music emphasized that they were not chiefly musicians, but rather community elders who were

sharing in these important social events together. In the middle of the ceremony, they all but forced me from my seat to dance, as they wanted everyone to participate. There was no audience and performer, because all was unified. Most of the women came out as I danced to lay parts of their cloth on my shoulders, a sign of support and to say that I had done well. The calm feeling of this kind of community amazed me as our time was very peaceful.

When speaking with members of this group, this sense of community came out strongly. They felt a deep identification with their Ga heritage, and seemed relatively uninterested with other influences and musics. Western music was not something that they were either impressed with or very much liked. They did, however, express similar notions as the fetish priest, saying that they were worried that traditional music was becoming marginalized. One woman made a comment that gave me pause. She said that each person had his or her own music that they understood, whether that was cultural music or Western pop or reggae. It was fascinating to hear her say something so open-minded and true. Recognizing that her own identity and strength were forged with her Ga heritage, she could understand how each person had to find similar roots to draw strength from, whatever those roots happened to be (personal communications 29/4/01).

In assessing the importance of Ga traditional music, one needs only to look at the strength and resilience of the community to see that the music its existence is a powerful force. The music is used to tell stories of the culture, celebrate the worshipping of the gods, rejoice in the various festivals of the year, and commemorate the events of the life cycle. The various musics that constitute these events are intricate and cyclical while remaining open. They allow space for the people to move within them as well as the

flexibility necessary for generational revisions. In so doing, the music has weathered the tests of time and now provides a mirror into the heart of all Ga cultural events. The traditional music of the Ga people exists as their connection to their history, to their roots, and therefore to their identity. As Dr. S.D. Asiama says, "It is through music and dancing that the true character of the Ghanaian can be revealed" (Asiama, 116). The character of Gas is everything to do with what has brought them to the present moment. Their music stretches out into their past, telling this story, and infusing their identity with this tradition.

Chapter Three: Wulomei and the Introduction of Popularized Traditional Music

With the onset of colonialism in the twentieth century, new music was also forming within the borders of Ghana. It would have been impossible to avoid taking influences from the British during this time, as they held control over all of Ghana and the Gold Coast. Out of this situation grew highlife, a rhythm and guitar based music blending traditional African song and rhythm with a more European sense of harmony and instrumentation. Changes to the music were mirroring changes to culture, once again, and the colonial effects were being felt. Ronnie Graham says

The mode of performance changed from folk culture to organized stage shows. Secondly, there was a significant loss of spontaneity and a decrease in the number of stylistic variations as concert performances came to be structured around audience, organizer and sponsor. Thirdly, as a national administrative apparatus emerged, 'Maisons de culture' came to replace more traditional (and informal) venues. Finally, the music itself became more streamlined in both form and content, more or less devoid of any organic link with the society from which it arose', (Graham, 12).

It is interesting to note that these developments within the music industry were mostly to do with the colonial corporations monopoly on the African musical market. As the colonizers had come to organize and exploit the resources of African nations to their own profit, it seemed that music, too "became a commodity like any other" (Graham, 11). The reality that the music of Ghana (and most of Africa for that matter) was a much deeper and more integral part of daily life for the majority of the population was hard for the colonizers to come to terms with. After all, how are you to go about making a profit if you have to mass-produce cultural music for fifty different ethnic groups to satisfy a region of Africa only the size of the state of Oregon to begin with? Logically, the companies had to take an alternate route. That meant creating a culture all their own, separate from true ethnic music, but something everyone could agree to buy. The product was unsurprisingly watered-down, devoid of meaning and showing little or no semblance

to the culture that produced it. It is fascinating, though difficult to accept, that this culture has not only survived, but thrived in the last eighty years.

With this as the backdrop, Nii Tei Ashitey stepped in to change the face of African music. In 1973, Ashitey began his group, known only as Wulomei, derived from the name given the high priests in traditional Ga culture (wulomo). Their music began as mostly traditional Ga cultural numbers presented in a recreational setting. They began as thirteen members dressed all in white, with Ashitey moving throughout the group playing his osraman (thunder) drum. They played congas, calabashes, gong, clips, a gome drum (a large square drum from the West Indies, where the tone of the drum is manipulated by the placement of the heels on the drum's face), a guitar, three backup singers in Western harmony, and two lead singers doubling on flutes. The addition of electric guitar allowed them more freedom and more tools to work with. They quickly became very popular in Ghana, not only with Ga people, but with all Ghanaians. John Collins remarks "At one of their shows, I recall being amazed by the variety of the audience. It included elite people in their 'colo' suits and ties, young people in 'Afro-gear', oversized market women carrying babies, and sedate elders in traditional cloth" (Collins, 1994, 141).

Wulomei became so popular in Ghana, in fact, that they were invited to tour the United States in July, 1975, Britain in September, 1975, and Liberia in April, 1977. They also played in Holland, Togo, Denmark, Belgium, Libya, and Burkina Faso. They were phenomenon, and the people in Ghana would always welcome them home with open arms. Ashitey, when asked why he formed Wulomei, responded "to bring something out for the youth to progress and forget foreign music and do their own thing" (Collins, 1994, 142). Their following became so large within Ghana that they began playing other

cultural music other than Ga music. Wulomei was picked up by Ghanaian audiences and asked to be folk troubadours in the face of mainstreaming Western influences.

I had a chance to sit down with Nii Tei Ashitey after one of their performances to discuss the present state of Wulomei's music and their sense of self after almost thirty years. The man is a legend in his own time, having been the originator of the now popularized cultural troupe. He began his career in the 1950's when he played with The Tempos, a group that included other famous musicians E.T. Mensah and Guy Warren (Kofi Ghanaba). Later he joined the Police Band, the Ghana Broadcasting Band, and finally Wulomei in 1973. In the bands before Wulomei, he had started as drummer, playing congas for his early projects. He played mostly waltzes and European music until the Police Band, when he was taught how to read music. When he began to read and understand sheet music, he learned more about Western harmony and laid the foundation for his later work with harmonies in Wulomei (personal communication, Ashitey, 18/4/01).

When we spoke, he talked about remaining true to traditions while becoming such a big act. Wulomei has always been popular, but in their rise to success, their struggle has been to not get whisked away by the very same music industry that has corrupted so much of Ghana's airways. He preferred to look at Wulomei as a statement of traditional life as opposed to the more modernized life that has overcome so much of Accra. He also spoke of his impressions of the audience at Wulomei performances. They consider the audience to be the employer and the boss. Thus, if the audience wants them to perform traditional Ga music, they will perform traditional Ga music. If they want them to perform Bob Marley covers all night, that is what they will do. They have learned music

form all over Africa, as they have traveled throughout most of it on tours anyway. Their repertoire is such that they can accommodate for any sort of event. This is largely representative of the flexibility of African musicians, bending over backwards to please their audiences.

When I asked him about the ripple effects of adding a djembe, guitar and bass guitar to their lineup of traditional instruments, he responded that he had had to realize that everyone has their own taste and though some people had not wanted those additions, people had come up and begged him to add piano or keyboards to their sound. In other words, growing in the modern music industry was a balance between maintaining his roots and discovering the path to the audience's heart. He did restate that he felt strongly that a person's roots needed to be maintained. When I asked him whether he thought people would still be listening to the traditional music three or four generations from now, he said that there would probably remain a dichotomy but that the traditional music would never disappear. People would always be drawing on their roots. His home was a small, humble house in Monprobi that he shared with his entire family. It wasn't fenced off or glamorous. He seemed to have no desire for glamour or money, especially if it meant that he could not live peacefully with his family.

Wulomei represents both a reaction against consumer culture and any music that separates people from their roots in Ghana. They were the first group of their kind in all of Ghana and mark a shift away from music that held no valuable content for an African growing up in the age of colonialism. They were intelligent and played from their roots to their roots. Their identity is found in this shift. They are Ghanas that play music from all over Africa, from all over the world. They are not commercialized or sell-outs. They are

citizens of Ghana who have vision enough to recognize the realities of the time we are living in. Wulomei impresses because they are good at what they do, they are an integral part of the music they perform and they are proud of being Ga.

Chapter Four: Modern Music in Ghana

With the onset of colonialism in the early twentieth century, the entire continent of Africa underwent huge shifts in both cultural identity and natural identity and national identity. To some extent traditions were created based on the colonizers' desire to exploit African resources, natural and otherwise. Music, unfortunately, was no exception, and as the multi-national companies from Europe and America began to exploit the peoples of Africa, there was a cultural shift against this kind of commercialism. "Music has been one of the continent's strongest characteristics, influencing the social and cultural development of societies far beyond the shores of Africa" (Graham, 10). Groups didn't have to sing the traditional songs, but as long as Africans were using their traditional rhythms to create new danceable music, it allowed the European colonizers to sell it to their greedy hearts' content. Some musicians followed down the path least resistance, selling popular music to the masses with little or no connection to its mother culture and thus, with little or no meaning. Some musicians grew up in opposition to this capitalist swindling by the Western countries. But the largest effect of Western presence on African music was surely the rise in recreational bands seen in the twentieth century.

In the late 1960's and 1970's, there was a significant demand for African dance bands all over the world. This movement led to the popularization of groups like Osí Bisa in England, whose criss-crossing rhythms are very reminiscent of the traditional music, which gave the group its birth. Osí Bisa literally means crises-crossing rhythms that explode with happiness, and that's exactly what Osí Bisa sounds like. Beautiful rhythms are blended with exciting harmony lines. Their music immediately took off in the U.K, as they toured the wealthier colonial nations. There was money to support their

exciting and original music, at least until the mid-seventies when it went out of style. Osi Bisa proceeded to pack their bags and move back to their home of Ghana where they continued to be popular with their quick dance rhythms. Their music was a fad in England. In Ghana their music was home.

Osi Bisa is not the only example of African based popular music abroad. African music has directly or indirectly influenced most of the popular musics of the world. Reggae, rap, disco, rhythm and blues, soul, funk, blues, jazz, and rock 'n roll are all offshoots of African or African-American music. "Africa and its Diaspora have influenced a profusion of music and dance-styles that are the nearest thing we have in the twentieth century to global folk music" (Collins, 1992, 9). African music, in contrast to European classical music, is a breed of fun and excitement unparalleled in any other area of the world. "African music emphasizes the spontaneity of the players... It has balanced the cerebral tendency of classical music with footwork and funk, the on beat with the offbeat, the performers with their audience, and the mechanical with the spontaneity and soul" (Collins, 10). The flexibility and adaptability of African traditional music has equipped modern African musicians with the great gift of rhythm and the ability to use this rhythm in most any way the musician desires.

As colonialism has given way to globalization, African music remains strong, in spite of both the economic, social, and political pitfalls experienced by many young and developing nations. It is remarkable that black music continues to be the leader in almost all new forms, now with the rise of hip-hop and rap in the late 1 980's and early 1 990's. The appeal of African music, reports John Collins, probably has a lot to do with the rich cultural traditions that lie behind it. "Black music and black art are bringing this ancient

African wisdom to the modern world - the art of expressing space and time symbolically, and participating in that expression through the moving body" (Collins, 1992, 9).

The uniquely African sounds inherent in blues, jazz, reggae and all the others have to come from somewhere. Who gave birth to these styles, and how did they come to happen? With the rise in entertainment groups in Africa after colonialism, we notice how important influences become in the making of these African popular groups. Really, the question is of how much each popular genre that might be heard in an urban center has been affected by the music being produced in the rural villages of Africa. In other words, is the chief influence for African popular music African traditional music? If so, the influence of African traditions on the world's music is undeniable. As Ronnie Graham writes,

To reinforce this important point, John Collins, the Ghanaian based writer, has rejected traditional-modern dichotomy entirely in favor of the concept of the urban-bush continuum wherein styles of music are situated somewhere along the continuum depending on the degree to which they approximate stereotypes of 'traditional' or 'modern' music. This is a much more dynamic approach to the classification of music and can indeed be extended further to encompass a metropolitan-periphery continuum reflecting the truly international dimensions of popular African music (Graham, 9).

What Mr. Graham and Mr. Collins both seem to support is a continuing cycle of influence and re-influence whereby modern urban music is always being affected and remade by the presence of rural traditional music. By my own work on this project, I can see that this process may be true in the reverse as well (where traditional music is also affected by new modern music,) but the traditional musicians I have spoken to seem to have been less influenced by outside modern music than the other way around. The traditional music seems to be the mother of all the other music.

A fascinating proponent of this important idea is a man by the name of Guy Warren, who later took the name of Kofi Ghanaba. Ghanaba, who was a popular jazz drummer in the United States in the 1950's, struggled long and hard with the commercialization of his jazz in the U.S. He wanted to be playing jazz with a bit of African traditional music thrown in. But nobody wanted to hear his blending of Afro jazz, so he decided to return to Ghana and play his traditional music. Thereafter, he refused to commercialize his rhythms ever again. He says, in an interview with John Collins, "If they [the commercial interest] ever tell you that you are succeeding (commercially,) you are failing... I consider myself anonymous, my music is from the masses, and I don't want it to have commercial appeal. I have been a jazz musician, but now I am a folk musician. In other words, I have come home" (Collins, 1994, 136). It's important to understand what he is saying, because he could have been a successful drummer in the United States without too much trouble. However, he wanted something more for himself and realized that the music he was playing was, as he calls it, "a cheap bastardization" (Collins, 136) of the original African rhythms. He knew that if he sold albums, he was only going to be used by the powers that be for their own material gain, a culture and an idea he simply would not accept. Ghanaba instead recoiled into a hermit's existence in Accra, performing musically, but not for the benefit of any sponsors other than the ones he chose specifically. Ghanaba understands the political, economic, and social problems surrounding and entrapping African musicians of today, and has refused to be taken for a ride by commercial interests.

This is the reality that faces present-day Ghana as well as present day Africa. There exists a tension between what is for sale and what is considered beyond this buy

and sell of the market place. The traditional African musicians, who remain the most popular musicians in all of Africa, exist within that tension, and must try to avoid being caught by commercial interest. A Ronnie Graham states,

...Today the role of the African musician is not too far removed from the traditional role of entertainer, newscaster, and therapeutic healer. Music acts as the cement which holds society together - a hidden form of consciousness which is at once more pervasive and more important than the overt forms of resistance to the exigencies of everyday life (Graham, 10).

The modern struggles of African people are against the oppressors that continue to hold them down as globalization rolls forward. "The survival of African culture, in an age of multi-civilization battle in the face of global economic disruptions and political uncertainty, attests to the kind of glue that holds African cultures together" (Akosah-Sarpong, That glue seems to be the rhythm of these cultures, the songs of the people, and the voices of traditions finding their new way back to the people in new forms.

Conclusion

The traditional music of the Ga ethnic group in southern Ghana has provided a strong backbone to the rest of culture. Its role is very much connected to the society as a whole. It provides music for ritual ceremonies, religious occasions, and events of the life cycle. Traditional music is very precise, but the tension created by the crossing rhythms leaves a sound that is very open to each member of the community. In all of the traditional groups I worked with, there was great pride in these songs and rhythms. The songs that I saw commemorating different aspects of cultural life highlighted this aspect of community and togetherness. The music was a main part, but the idea was that everyone could participate equally. There was no separation between performer and audience. Everything in traditional culture is unified and flexible.

As the colonial situation has given way to globalization, we have seen many changes to these traditional cultures. Especially in urban centers, there is a tendency of the youth to turn toward modern and Western music and away from the traditional music. These urban centers have traditional people in them, but urban life requires a flexibility and willingness to adapt. Thus, the modern predicament has affected traditional music greatly, influencing where it is performed, how it is performed, and why it is performed. For instance, the outgrowth of the Ga cultural troupe was a reaction against colonialist mainstreamed culture. Appearing as folk musicians in a time when that voice was needed, Wulomei came to represent a new wave of cultural and traditional music. They retain their proud Ga identity and roots. In spite of the changes and dangers that come with modernization, Wulomei proves even traditional music can make the change into modern band without losing its appeal.

In addition to the predicament faced by traditional music in the modern age, there is now the serious consideration of African popular dance music, the twentieth century child of the traditions. As has gone on for hundreds of years, the exploitation of African nations has led to immaculate riches in other nations. Overt forms of slavery having died out, companies now control the buying and selling of popular music. The power this gives to European and American companies is overwhelming. Most musicians in modern Africa balance a desire to perform with an awareness of who is making money off of their success. The modern music is still being affected and influenced by rural and traditional music, and therefore retains its importance to senses of community. Black music has changed the world over by the intricacies of its rhythms and the dance crazes it excites in its audiences. African music is the closest thing we have to a global folk music, as the ancient traditions remain unified in the work of modern African musicians. So, in spite of the political and social changes in the last hundred years, African senses of identity remain strong. The African people's identities as Africans in addition to members of specific ethnic groups have to be balanced. As the globalization train rolls on, identities within Africa will continue to shift, but the past and the traditions will continue to shine as a source of pride to all Africans.

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