A Tradition of Innovation: An Exploration into the History, Cultural Role and Playing of the Atenteben and Odurugya flutes of Ghana

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A Tradition of Innovation:

An Exploration into the History, Cultural Role and Playing of the Atenteben and Odurugya Flutes of Ghana

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Project Advisor: Ms. Misonu Amu
Academic Directors: Dr. Olayemi Tinuoye & Dr. Meredith Kennedy
Abstract

This paper investigates the playing, history and cultural role of the Atentebe family of Ghanaian fipple flutes, and to a lesser extent the Odurugya, its brother instrument, and their unique role as neo-traditional instruments. In order to study the Atentebe, the researcher worked closely with a number of professors at the University of Ghana, Legon, including Ms. Misonu Amu (whose father developed the modern Atentebe), Professor M. A. Opoku (expert and consultant in African dance), Professor Asante Darkwa (who wrote his thesis on the original Atentebe), and Professor John Collins (expert on neo-traditional music). The work consisted of a number of interviews and some informal advising. The researcher also interviewed Mr. Joseph Tetteh (flute instructor for the Ghana Dance Ensemble), Mr. Yaw Dela Botri (leader of the Hewale Sounds group and former member of the Pan African Orchestra), Mr. Nana Danso Abiam (leader of the Pan African Orchestra and Atentebe player on Peter Gabriel's albums), and Mr. Henaku-Pobi (the senior expert on the Atentebe at U of G, Legon). The researcher also observed performances featuring the Atentebe by Hewale Sound, the Ghana Dance Ensemble, and several musicians playing with a jazz band at a nightclub called Bassline, as well as listening to a number of recordings. A great deal of research was also conducted in the University libraries. The researcher participated in daily lessons on the Atentebe with Mr. Henaku-Pobi, Mr. Yaw Dela Botri and Mr. Joseph Tetteh. In the end the researcher found that the Atentebe and Odurugya are wonderful instruments with a rich history of creativity and innovation and a bright future.

Acknowledgments

"The more you give, the more there is. "
The above quotation is something my mother always says to me and signs each and every letter with. It's a philosophy that I've learned to tried to live by and whether I have been successful or not in that attempt, the trying has made all the difference. In Ghana, I feel I have I have been given more than ever before and at the same time given more of myself than ever before. The results have been wonderful. I wish to thank all the people who gave so much to me - who shared so much with me. That list numbers easily hundreds of people, not all of whom I can name here or even name at all. You've given your kindness, generosity and wisdom to me and have, through your giving, made my experience here so much richer. Thank you all!

I give great thanks to my advisor, Ms. Misonu Amu. Special thanks must go to my teachers who taught me to play the Atenteben - Mr. Henaku-Pobi, Mr. Yaw Dela Botri, Mr. Joseph Tetteh (Abio), without whom none of this would have been possible. Thanks also to my many informants besides my teachers - Mr. Nana Danso Abiam, Prof. A.M. Opoku, Prof. John Collins, Prof. Asante Darkwa and the many others who provided bits and pieces of information along the way. Tremendous thanks go out to Mrs. Cecilia Adjei who was the best host mother one could ever hope for, and my foster brothers and sisters, Atta, Kwame, Ehla, Asantewa, Kwaku and my favourite little rascal - Brother, who gave me my new name: Crips. Thanks to all SIT staff who taught us so much during this journey: you are all teachers, friends and family all in one. Yaw, I love you like my brother - long live Fanyogo and dinosaurs. Thanks to all my brothers and sisters in SIT-you each brought your own wisdom to this experience and made me understand it so much clearer. I love you all. To my friends in Peace Corp - thank God you showed up when you did' To all my friends back at Ham-tech - I'm in Ghana, you're in snow; sucks to be you. To my friends in the Irish music community - let the craic flow and the Guinness flow stronger! Finally, thanks to my American family for putting up with my craziness and non-stop music - no words can express how much I love you.
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**Introduction**

The Atenteben plays a unique and interesting role in the Ghanaian music as a neo-traditional instrument - one that is simultaneously old and new in both form and function. The Atenteben, a simple, seven-holed, upright fipple-flute constructed out of bamboo,
was developed by the famous late Dr. Ephraim Amu as an improvement to the traditional transverse flutes which many musicians found to be very limited in terms of tone, versatility, and volume and also very difficult to play. Today the Atenteben appears to be the most popular traditional melodic instrument in Ghana and also the most versatile (Nketia, pg. i). Since Amu's development of the instrument, it has become an integral part of Ghanaian traditional music and, to a lesser extent, contemporary music, even becoming the source of a wealth of new music composed specifically for it. The range of its uses is very wide, considering the simple construction of the instrument. Besides being used in traditional and neo-traditional music it has increasingly been used in jazz, orchestral music and even popular music, largely due to the development by Mr. Nana Danso Abiam and Mr. Henaku-Pobi of an innovative fingering technique, most famously demonstrated by Abiam's work with the Pan African Orchestra and with international pop star Peter Gabriel. When one thinks of Ghanaian music, or African music, one typically thinks of drumming. The truth is that the drum, while indisputably one of the most important instrumental family in African music, is only one of the many types of instruments integral to the African music tradition. In Ghana there are entire Atenteben ensembles, where the drums serve as support instruments while the master Atenteben leads the entire ensemble just as the master drum usually would (Henaku-Pobi, interview, 26 April, 2000). This is, admittedly, a localised phenomenon, occurring primarily in the southern and central parts of Ghana. The fact that it is such a cultural anomaly makes the success of the Atenteben even more impressive. My own personal interest in the Atenteben is rooted in my interest and experience in the history, cultural meaning and playing of the Irish traditional transverse and fipple flutes, as well as the fusion of various world musical traditions with each other and with contemporary and Western music. As a wooden flute (or bamboo flute), a traditional/neo-traditional instrument and one that is being used in a tremendous range of musical idioms, the Atenteben represents the perfect embodiment of these interests. My goals in this project are to come to a basic understanding of the history, cultural meaning and playing of the Atenteben, find personal inspiration for my own music, and begin to introduce the beauty and versatility of the Atenteben to the rest of the world.
Study Area

The entirety of this study was conducted in the city of Accra, the capital of the country of Ghana, West Africa. The majority of the research was conducted at the University of Ghana, in Legon, a suburb of Accra.
Methodology

In Ghana, they say, things have a way of just happening. In my experience that happening usually takes place after an often extended and frustrating period of not
happening. Such is the case with my ISP. First I was sure things would work out, then I
was less than sure, then they worked out. Such is life in Ghana.

When I arrived at the University of Ghana, Legon, two weeks before the ISP
period was scheduled to begin, I had planned to conduct my ISP work on neo-traditional
music among the Agoro cultural troupe in Cape Coast. I had heard of the Atenteben and
was very interested in finding out more about it, but before arriving in Legon I had not
had the opportunity to hear it played and despite my strong instrument in flutes I did not
think it was wise to plan my ISP around an instrument I had never even seen. During my
time in Tamale in the north I had been exposed to local transverse flute and actually
participated in daily lessons on it for some time, but I left Tamale uninspired by either the
music or the instrument and, frankly, unable to appreciate it much at all, no matter how I
tried. After that somewhat negative experience I was wary that I might have a similar
experience with the Atenteben and thus I put my flute interests on the back-burner, so to
speak. That all changed when I arrived in Legon.

My first day on the Legon campus I was walking towards the Mobile Station for
my tri-hourly Fanyogo (a delicious, sugary sweet, strawberry flavoured frozen yogurt in a
bag that sells for about 14 cents American) fix, when the beautiful sound of flutes playing
in gorgeous harmony and funky African rhythm drifted to my ears. I stopped dead in my
tracks, completely transfixed by the sound. Flutes have a way of doing that to me. Any
time I am walking and hear a flute I am immediately transfixed and need to know where
the sound is coming from. Flutes are legendary for their hypnotic powers and I think I'm
living proof that those powers exist. I looked all around me but nowhere could I see any
sort of flute, so, eager to find the source of the beautiful melodies I followed the sound.
Eventually the sound brought me to the foot of an enormous old tree under which were
gathered a group of musicians joyfully jamming together. Among them were several
people playing xylophones, some drums, a seprewa, and to my great delight, four
bamboo flutes, which I recognised from pictures as Atenteben. Totally engaged and
loving every second of their performance I sat and listened to them play. They seemed to
be having a wonderful time, jamming out on African instruments with enthusiasm,
energy and joy. The Atenteben players were playing in beautiful harmony with each
other but on top of that they were playing chromatic scales and often shifted key in the
middle of playing. The lead Atenteben player was amazing, playing brilliant jazz style improvisation against a backing of traditional harmonies and rhythms. The chromatic playing is what most impressed me. As little as I knew about the Atenteben, I knew that it was supposed to be a simple system flute, a flute with seven holes that generally plays a diatonic scale in two or three keys and is not really capable of chromatics. Thus hearing these musicians play in a number of keys using a full range of chromatics was astonishing and exciting. I knew I needed to learn more about this instrument.

After the musicians finished their song they gestured to me and called me over in Twi - "Bra, bra". With a huge smile on my face I walked over to them and introduced myself. They welcomed me and told me that they were Hewale Sounds (Energy Sounds in Ga - a fitting name), one of the resident musical groups on the Legon campus. The leader introduced himself as Mr. Yaw Dela Botri and told me a little bit about the group. I explained to him who I was, that I had come as a student from the United States and that back home I played the traditional Irish flute and tin-whistle and was very interested in the Atenteben. He expressed enthusiasm in my interest and offered to teach me, an offer that I told him I appreciated greatly and would definitely consider. I bought their tape, thanked them and walked off to the Mobile Station for my Fanyogo with a big smile on my face and the beautiful melody of the Atenteben playing in my mind. I was entranced. I was exited. I was in love. I knew I needed to learn more about this beautiful instrument. Thus began my experience with the Atenteben.

Eager to find out more about this marvellous instrument I went straight from my Fanyogo to Dr. Olayemi Tinuoye, my academic director, to inform him of my change of plans. I was going to study the Atenteben and I wanted to know as much as there was to know about it. Yemi, as we affectionately call him, responded with one of his wonderful knowing laughs, and told me he approved completely. He directed me to Ms. Misonu Amu, a lecturer at the Institute of African Studies, whose father invented the developed version of the Atenteben, and Professor M. A. Opoku, the senior expert and consultant in African dance at Legon. Ms. Amu and I decided during our first meeting that she would be my advisor on this project. During my conversations with two I was told that the best person to study with was one Mr. Henaku-Pobi, the now retired former chief engineer, audio archivist and Atenteben instructor at African Studies.
For over a week I tried to get in contact with Mr. Henaku-Pobi, but he appeared to be missing in action. During all this time I conducted research in the library, met another Atenteben instructor, Mr. Joseph Tetteh of the Ghana Dance Ensemble and Dr. Asante could talk to Mr. Henaku-Pobi. Finally, after more than a week, I met Mr. Henaku-Pobi and told him of my intentions and asked him to be my teacher and mentor. Initially he was quite apprehensive of the idea. He explained to me that he was on retirement and only came in on Monday, Wednesday and Friday because he enjoyed the work and was bored at home. He wasn't sure he had the time to work with me and he was also apprehensive about taking over what he perceived to be Ms. Amu's job. I assured him that Ms. Amu was just my advisor, not my teacher, but he was still wary of stepping on her toes, so to speak. He told me to come back later and we would discuss it more. Frustrated, I left and told Mr. Abio and Mr. Dela Botri that I wanted to begin studying with them. I began lessons, meeting for an hour a day with each of them, for a total of two hours a day. These lessons went well and I quickly began to pick up the Atenteben. I found that Abio and Dela, as I call them, play with different fingering techniques. The one Abio uses is the one developed by Dr. Ephraim Amu plays a diatonic scale, while the one Dela uses was developed by Mr. Nana Danso Abiam (or Nana Danso) and Mr. Henaku-Pobi (or Henaku) and is capable of a full chromatic scale. I found that the diatonic fingering was almost identical to the fingering I was accustomed to using on the tin-whistle and Irish flute and so it came very easily for me, while the chromatic fingering technique was very different and would take a great deal of practice to become familiar with. Within five minutes of picking up the Atenteben I could play Irish tunes on it using the diatonic fingering - a feat that impressed everyone I showed it to.

Several days after my first meeting with Henaku I met him again and reasserted my desire to work with him and reassured him that working with me would in no way offend Ms. Amu. This time around he was much more receptive and told me he'd think about it and I should come back in a few days. When I returned several days later he had made up his mind to teach me. We would meet for two hours every day and he would instruct me on the playing, history and cultural aspects of the instrument. That Monday, a week after the ISP period began, I finally began my lessons with Henaku.
Up until that point I had studied for two hours a day total with Abio and Dela and now, with the addition of Henaku's tutelage, I was taking four hours of lessons a day. Things were finally starting to work out. Lessons went well, though each teacher had a very different style of teaching, a different philosophy about music and a different musical repertoire. I realise in retrospect that studying with so many teachers may have been harmful in terms of my actual learning of the music, since I was trying to learn so much at once, but I think my exposure to each of their unique approaches was very valuable.

Those lessons continued for two weeks, as did my library research. I also tried to attend as many musical performances as I could while I was in Accra, and several of them ended up including the Atenteben. One such performance was a jazz band that played at Bassline, a popular jazz club in Accra. About halfway through the act one of the saxophonist put down his saxophone and pulled an Atenteben out of his back pocket. He put it up to his lips and miraculously he started jamming along with the jazz band with amazing speed and precision using Nana Danso's fingering technique. A few minutes later another saxophonist put down his saxophone and repeated the feat, only even better than the first guy. I was very, very impressed. After the set I managed to chat with the second musician - he gave me his name, which I promptly forgot, and told me he played with the Pan African Orchestra, which Dela had formerly been part of, and that's where he learned to play the Atenteben. Unfortunately I didn't see him again. I also observed several performances by Hewale Sounds and the Ghana Dance Ensemble as well as several solo musicians playing off stage. Finally, I conducted a number of interviews, some formal and some informal with the following people: Mr. Abio, Mr. Yaw Dela Botri, Mr. Nana Danso Abiam, Mr. Henaku-Pobi, Ms. Misonu Amu, Professor A.M. Opoku, Professor Asante Darkwa, and Professor John Collins.

**Body of the Paper**

I. - History and Development
The Atenteben has a long and rich history in Ghana. It has passed through several evolution’s in physical form and playing technique and has been used in a wide range of musical styles.

The original Atenteben was quite different from the one commonly played today. The name Atenteben is combination of the words "atente" and "aben" - "atente" being the name of the type of music the Atenteben is commonly used in, and "aben" meaning pipe or flute, (Danso, Personal Communication). Literally, it is the flute for the atente drum.

The original Atenteben is not a vertically played fipple flute or flageolet, as the modern Atenteben is, but rather a transverse flute, played sideways like an orchestral silver flute. These flutes are crudely made of bamboo with one end plugged, a rough embouchure and only five finger holes. It is capable of playing just five notes, a pentatonic scale consisting of do, re, mi, so, and la and is very difficult to get a good tone out of, even for a trained flautist (Amu, Personal Communication). In Kwahu the Atenteben was commonly used in what were called "atentebands", which are entertainment bands consisting of several Atenteben and drums (Abiam, Personal Communication).

The development of the modern Atenteben is a result of the pioneering work done by the famous Ghanaian ethnomusicologist and scholar of African music, the late Dr. Ephraim Amu. Then a young man, Amu first became interested in the Atenteben during the 1920s in his home in Peki-Avetile, where he heard a man playing the original Atenteben and was entranced by it (Mensah & Nketia, pg. i). Having learned carving skills from his father who was a stool carver, he began to study with the flautist and learned how to play and build the flute (Amu, Personal Communication, Nketia, pg. i). Some years later when Amu was teaching at the Akropong Presbyterian Training College he found it necessary to introduce African traditional music into the school's curricula. Thinking back, he remembered his fascination with the Atenteben and decided to do some more research into it (Amu, Personal Communication). He travelled to Kwahu where he perfected his skill at constructing the Atenteben, learned how to play it and studied the music. He soon realised that playing it was very difficult, the tone was weak, the tonal range was limited and because of its pentatonic scale it could not be used in the diatonic music of the Akan and Ewe (Amu, Personal Communication). Armed with the
knowledge he had gained during study among the Kwahu, Amu set out to build a new Atenteben with the goals that it be easier to play, more pleasing to the ear, stronger in tone, capable of a diatonic scale and able to hold its own as an orchestral instrument (Amu, Personal Communication).

By the mid 1940s, while teaching in Achimota, Amu came up with his final design for the developed Atenteben (Amu, Personal Communication). He began by taking the original transverse Atenteben and turning it so that it was played vertically, like a recorder or tin-whistle. Next he changed the mouthpiece, so the sound was produced in the same method as the recorder, with a semi-hardwood block stopping up the node and an airway bored in it through the block and the bamboo. Lastly he added more finger holes and changed their position - putting six holes on the front of the instrument and one in the back for the thumb. The benefits of his new, improved Atenteben are numerous. The tone is stronger and clearer. The range of the instrument has increased to two octaves and plays a diatonic scale with a leading tone. The instrument has also become much easier to play - so easy that a pure beginner can play a basic scale in a matter of minutes. While the instrument was still in development he began to teach it at the college in addition to drumming and African songs. Amu believed firmly in the beauty of African music and culture and felt that one should begin by studying ones own culture and from there expand outward to study foreign and uncharted territories, instead of simply embracing the Western way of life and abandoning the rich African culture (Amu, Personal Communication).

While Amu was in the midst of developing the Atenteben he also heard about an instrument called the Oduruga - an end blown notched flute similar in form to the shakuhachi of Japan or the quena of Peru, but much larger in size. This instrument belongs to the court of the Asantehene (the king of the Asante peoples) sounds more like a reed instrument than a flute (Henaku, Personal Communication). Curious as he was, Amu went to visit the Asantehene, then Otumfuo Nana Sir Osei Agyeman Prempeh II, and was granted royal permission to study the Oduruga under Papa Opoku Mensah, the King's personal Oduruga player. Amu learned how to play and build the Oduruga, but he found it also very difficult to play, especially since it had a sharp, notched mouthpiece that could easily cut ones lips (Henaku-Pobi, Personal Communication). It was also very
limited tonally, with only four holes on the entire flute (Amu, Personal Communication). Just as he had with the Atenteben, Amu set about developing what he hoped would be a better Odurugya and by the early 50s he had completed his final design (Amu, Personal Communication). He came up with two versions, the Odurugya and the Odurugya-ba. The Odurugya was the larger of the two and had a special wooden mouthpiece attached by a neck to the top of the flute. The odurugya-ba, meaning "odorugya-child", was smaller and while it retained the wooden mouthpiece it was without a neck. Both instruments were played vertically like the Atenteben but had slightly different fingering (Mensah & Nketia, pg. i). While the old Odurugya sounded like a cross between a flute and a reed instrument the new Odurugya sounded like a lower pitch Atenteben. Amu also began to teach the Odurugya in school, but because it was difficult to build, delicate to handle, and still rather difficult to play he made far fewer of them and students were less apt to pick them up. In fact the Odurugya has almost completely died out, except at the Asantehene's court where it is still played in its original form by Papa Opoku Mensah (now about 98 years old) who taught Amu (Amu, Personal Communication).

After its introduction the Atenteben rapidly gained popularity all over Ghana, especially in the schools and universities where students adopted it because of its low cost, portability, ease in learning and beautiful tone. Composers, most notably Prof. J.H. Nketia and Amu himself, began incorporating the Atenteben into their music and even writing new compositions specifically for it. One notable example is Nketia's "Suite for Flute and Piano", which pairs a solo Atenteben with piano in the African idiom. From 1962 to 1971 Amu was a Senior Research Fellow at the University of Ghana (Agyemang, pg. 121). Since that time all music students at the School of Performing Arts have been required to play the Atenteben in addition to their primary instrument of study (Amu, Personal Communication).

Recent years have seen a renaissance in the playing of the Atenteben, thanks to Mr. Nana Danso Abiam, leader of Ghana's innovative Pan African Orchestra and Mr. Henaku-Pobi, former Atenteben instructor at the University of Ghana, both of whom developed a chromatic fingering system for the Atenteben which allows one to play a full chromatic scale and in any key using a combination of cross fingering, half-holing, and over-blowing to achieve harmonics (Abiam, Personal Communication). This style has
been adopted primarily by the members of the Pan-African Orchestra, but the technique is slowly spreading and marvellous new uses of the Atentebe in jazz, classical music, and fusion can be heard in Ghana, especially in the Accra area. As interest in the instrument increases, especially on the international level, musicians continue to come up with further innovative uses for it. The future of the Atentebe looks bright and time can only tell where it will go.

II. Construction and Form

Most of the Atentebe played today are made by Mr. Sika Dzorbu, who lives in Achimota, an area of Accra. This man was trained by Dr. Amu in the construction of both the Atentebe and the Odurugya and is respected as the best Atentebe maker in Ghana. He no longer continues to make the Odurugya however, since he found it too difficult to make. Because of this the odurugya has all but disappeared. Today this man is training at least one apprentice I am told. Amu had trained two others before Sika but they did not make a job out it (Amu, Personal Communication).

Atentebe:

The Atentebe comes in two sizes: the larger Atentebe which is pitched in Bb and measures about fifteen inches, and a smaller Atentebe-ba pitched in C, a major second above the Atentebe. Both are made of a special bamboo that can only be found in certain forest areas of Ghana. The Atentebe has seven finger holes on it- six in front and one in the back. A semi-hardwood block stops up the top of the flute just below the node and has a windway cut through it which leads out through a sharp notched hole in the side of the bamboo, which is how the sound is created - just like on a recorder or a tin-whistle except that the mouthpiece is built into the body of the instrument instead of extending outside it like on a recorder. It is a simple instrument, but has a beautiful tone.

Ms. Misonu Amu described the basics of the construction process to me (Amu, Personal Communication). First the bamboo for the Atentebe must be gotten from the forest. A certain kind of bamboo that has a long enough distance between the nodes and is thin enough for the flute is required. It has become increasingly difficult to obtain
the bamboo due to major deforestation in Ghana. Once the bamboo has been obtained it must be cut - just above the node and then again at the proper length on the bottom. Ms. Amu said that her father usually cut a number of them at a time and then let them sit for some time to cure a bit. After the wood has cured one begins by creating the mouthpiece. A special semi-hardwood cork is fitted into the top opening of the flute, just below the node. A diagonal air channel that focuses the air across a sharp edge is cut into the side of the bamboo, just like on a recorder of a tin whistle. Once the mouthpiece has been formed one blows into it to test the tone quality and to make sure the flute plays in the correct pitch. Once the proper pitch is obtained the maker marks the placement of the finger holes on the body using a card with the proper distances marked on it for reference. With a heated iron rod the holes are bored, starting from the upper end of the instrument and the pitch is tested against a piano after each subsequent whole is bored. After all the holes have been bored the flute is finished and can be played immediately.

**Odurugya:**

The Odurugya also comes in two sizes. The lower pitched Odurugya is about twenty-four inches long and plays in the key of Bb, one octave below the Atenteben. The smaller odurugya-ba plays in F - a perfect fifth above the Odurugya and Atenteben and a perfect fourth above Atenteben-ba. The basic construction of the Odurugya is similar to the Atenteben but there are some significant differences. The body of Odurugya is made from the fragile husk of a cane plant. On the body there are also seven holes, like the Atenteben, but on the Odurugya the lowest hole, which is on the side, is blocked by placing it against the thigh since the spacing between the holes is too large for a finger to cover it. Instead of having the mouthpiece built into the cane, as on the Atenteben, the Odurugya has a semi-hardwood neck attached to the top of the flute and that neck is then connected to a separated semi-hardwood mouthpiece that is very similar to the head on a recorder. The Odurugya-ba is very similar except that the fingering system is the same as the Atenteben and the mouthpiece, otherwise the same as on the Odurugya, is attached directly to the top of the flute. Both versions of the Odurugya are very fragile and very difficult to make.
Ms. Amu described the basic construction process of the Odurugya as her father had done it. This description may be somewhat inaccurate and I was a bit confused about the process but since nobody makes the Odurugya any longer I was unable to find a more exact description of the process.

The body of the Odurugya, as already stated, is made from the husk of a thorny cane-like plant obtained from the forest. When the cane is brought home a big bonfire is made and the cane is put in the fire. Once they are hot the husks are carefully removed from the fire using cloth to protect the hands and the husk is pulled out of the stalk. Immediately the husk must be filled with sand and one end blocked with paper in order to keep the husk from contracting and collapsing in on itself as it cools. Once the husks have been filled they are carefully lined up against the wall in a safe place. When the husk has cured, the sand is poured out and the husks are cut to the proper length. Once the husk has been cut, the carved wooden mouthpiece, which is made ahead of time, is attached and the tone is tested to make sure the instrument is in tune. Just like on the Atenteben, the length of the Odurugya is adjusted until the pitch is right. Once the pitch is right the holes are bored in the same way as Atenteben', the instrument is tuned to perfection and it is finished.
Illustrations courtesy of Nketia & Mensah (1965)- see references
III. - Playing

The information presented in this section is some of the very basics of what I learned during my lessons with Mr. Yaw Dela Botri, Mr. Henaku-Pobi and Mr. Joseph Tetteh (known as Abio) in conjunction with a hand book written by Mr. Social Aduonum entitled Fingering Techniques for the Atenteben and Odurugya Flutes (1971), several pages of which I have attached in the appendix. Most of the information on the Atenteben I gathered from my lessons, but the information on the Odurugya is mostly from Mr. Aduonum's work. I must note that in my three weeks of instruction I was unable to come even close to understanding Ghanaian/African music - the best I could do was learn some simple tunes. Instead, I concentrated on practicing the two fingering systems of the Atenteben and gaining a basic fluency in playing music that I was familiar with and slowly began to learn the music of the area. Any musician will tell you that three weeks is not even close to enough time to learn an instrument, and I found that to be the case as well. Having played the Irish tin-whistle and wooden flute, both of which have similar fingering to the Atenteben, the fingering was very easy for me to pick up and that aided my study.

This section is intended as a guide to playing the Atenteben with ease and confidence and to attain a good tone on the instrument. Since I was unable to study the playing of the Odurugya I have attached a segment of Mr. Aduonum's tutor in the appendices of this document. I give deepest thanks to Mr. Aduonum for use of this section.

The Atenteben is a rather easy instrument to learn the basics of, but it is hard to master. As stated earlier, there are two primary methods of playing the Atenteben - the style developed by Dr. Ephraim Amu that is capable of playing a diatonic scale and the method developed by Mr. Nana Danso Abiam and Mr. Henaku-Pobi which allows the playing of a chromatic scale. The method of blowing to produce the tone is identical, but the fingering differences are significant and one would take some time to adjust from one fingering system to the other. Unfortunately I didn't have enough time during my study to learn the chromatic fingering in its entirety and it would take a great deal of time to explain it fully. I have, however, attached a partial fingering chart in the appendices,
which details a number of the scales possible with the chromatic fingering. This fingering chart was kindly provided by Mr. Yaw Dela Botri.

**Producing a Tone:**

Producing a tone on the Atenteben is simple. Just pick up the Atenteben so that it is vertically positioned, and place the lips against the mouthpiece. Uncover all the finger holes and blow gently into the mouthpiece. This should easily produce a tone. If producing a tone is difficult try adjusting the position of the mouthpiece on the lips and experiment with various levels of blowing. Blow very gently and evenly - and then increase the air pressure gradually from there. The tone produced should be loud, unwavering and solid without any squeaks. If the tone is squeaky you are either blowing too soft or too hard.

One technique that may help in producing a clear tone is what is called tounging. With the mouthpiece against the lips blow into the flute while vocalising a "T" sound -as if one were pronouncing the word "tea" or "too". This gives the note a clean, sharp attack and can be especially helpful in achieving notes in the second octave (or higher). This is actually the preferred method of intonation in Ghanaian Atenteben music (Botri, Personal Communication). Once you are able to produce a solid tone experiment blowing softer and harder to alternate between the first and the second octave. Blowing harder will achieve the second octave while blowing softer will achieve the first (the chromatic fingering technique uses more than two levels of wind pressure, but we'll discuss that later). Once you can easily achieve a steady tone in at least the first octave you are ready to begin with the fingering.

**Fingering:**

In my explanation of the fingering it will helpful to refer to the fingers using numbers. Begin by counting the pointer finger on the left hand as "1" and continue with the middle finger as “2”, the ring finger "3" and the last finger "4". On the right hand do the same, beginning once more with the pointer as "1". The thumbs will just be referred to as such, without a number assigned to them.
**Amu's Diatonic System:**

This system, which we will refer to as Amu's fingering, is very simple. Since the Bb flute is the most common in this style we will refer only to the Bb flute in this discussion.

Begin by holding the instrument vertically with the left hand on top and the right hand below it. With all the finger holes uncovered blow into it gently to produce the lower octave tone. The sound produced is A.

Cover the hole in the back of the flute with the thumb of the left hand and put the first finger of that hand above the hole on the front to hold the flute. This finger is helps to support the instrument. Blow gently but firmly to produce the note G. If the note is squeaky or just doesn't sound right first make sure the hole is covered all the way and then adjust your breath until the tone is correct.

Starting from the upper end of the instrument, place the "2" finger over the first hole on the front with the pad of the finger while keeping the thumb in place on the hole in the back of the flute and blow. This produces the note F.

Keeping the previously covered holes covered, cover the second hole with the "3" finger to produce and Eb (E flat).

Now we use the fingers of the right hand. These fingers cover the holes using the section of the finger between the middle two knuckles, rather than the pads of the fingertips. Leaving the fingers in their previous positions, begin by placing the thumb of the right hand on the back of the instrument to provide support. Place the "1" finger of the right hand on the next hole while leaving the rest of the fingers in their previous position. This sounds the note D.

Continue with the "2" finger on the next hole and this sounds the note C.

The "3" finger covers the hole second from the bottom. Now every hole except for the very bottom one is covered. This sounds a Bb (B flat). If the holes are uncovered from this point, one after another from the bottom to the top, the diatonic scale is produced.

The very bottom hole is covered with the tip of the "4" finger. This may be difficult since it requires a bit of a stretch. With some practice it will come easily. This sounds an A an octave lower than the one we began with.
Now cover all the holes of the instrument except for the bottom one using the fingering position explained earlier. For the next octave the fingering is identical to what it was in the first octave, just blow harder, giving it a little extra "T". That's it. It's easy.

**Abiam's Chromatic System:**

This system, which I barely began to learn the basics during my time with Mr. Dela Botri, was developed by Mr. Nana Danso Abiam and Mr. Henaku-Pobi. It is a very complex system, relying on cross fingering, half-holing and over-blowing in order to achieve harmonics. I don't feel confident explaining this system after my brief exposure to it, but I have attached to the appendices a set of fingering charts provided to me by Mr. Dela Botri, with which one may come to a basic understanding of several of the scales. Note that this system requires the use of a flute in C. Mr. Abiam assured me that a comprehensive tutor for this system would be published by the end of the year (Abiam, Personal Communication). In my short time with Mr. Botri I was able to learn the basics of several of the scales and I'm sure with more time I could become proficient in this system.

**IV. The Future of the Atenteben**

The Atenteben has had such a rich history of innovation that it seems almost certain that the instrument will continue to be developed in terms of its physical construction, playing technique and the music it is used for. Leading these developments are Mr. Nana Danso Abiam, the leader of the Pan African Orchestra, and his students, most notably Mr. Yaw Dela Botri who now leads the group Hewale Sounds. Abiam's chromatic fingering system fulfils Dr. Amu's vision of the Atenteben holding its own in an orchestra. With the use of this system the Atenteben can play in any key and in over
two octaves. As is evident in Accra, it is used for pop, highlife, jazz, classical, traditional, neo-traditional and many other types of music. This system, which allows the production of a full chromatic scale using a simple system flute, is bound to have an impact on flute players and makers around the world. I can easily imagine Irish flute makers building wooden Irish flutes with the Atenteben fingering system and Irish musicians adopting this system. For years, probably for the entire time the Irish flute has existed, people have tried their best to devise a chromatic fingering system without the use of keys, but the best result was a few chromatics attained through half-holing and cross-fingering, certainly not a full chromatic scale. Many traditional flautist’s prefer the sound of a wooden flute to the silver orchestral flute but feel limited by the scale played on the wooden flutes - now they can have both the rich wooden tone and the complete scale.

Mr. Botri spoke to me about what he and Hewale Sounds are trying to do with the Atenteben and African music. He explained to me that they try to fuse many musical styles together - to mix jazz, traditional and contemporary music- so that people hear the traditional music they are comfortable with and then, as soon as they have settled into their comfort zone, they are pulled outward into a new and fresh exploration of the traditional music without even realising how they got there. Mr. Botri recognises that many people, especially the youth, have grown tired of the traditional music and are eager for something new. In most cases this something new ends up being Daddy Lumba, Lord Kenya, Tic-Tac or some other Ghanaian pop musician simply imitating the popular music of Europe and America. If this trend continues, he fears, then traditional music is in danger of disappearing almost completely. With Hewale Sounds, Mr. Botri provides an alternative- traditional music that is willing to explore new directions within the African ; traditional music idiom and give people a fresh perspective on African music while preserving the integrity of the tradition, pleasing both the traditionalists and those eager for new music. He explained that when Hewale Sounds plays a concert they will usually begin with a strictly traditional piece in order to capture the audiences attention and then they will move into their fusion pieces - providing a balance that, he says, people love. At the end of the performance, he says, people love it so much that they cannot even express their appreciation of his music (Botri, Personal Communication).
Another innovator I spoke to was Mr. Nana Danso Abiam, the man most directly responsible for the development of the chromatic fingering system. With the Pan African Orchestra he has forged new directions in African music and been instrumental in bringing it to the international stage. According to Abiam, the integrity of the traditional music can be maintained while taking the music a step in a new direction. This depends on how one understands traditional music. It is very important, he asserts, to study traditional music and to maintain it and use it as a basis to move in new directions. The tradition is the source of any new development. These explorations, therefore, can only be done when one has a deep understanding of the tradition, otherwise the results are counterfeit (Abiam, Personal Communication). I Agree.

V. MY Lessons and My Experience Learning

In this section I will discuss the experience of trying to learn an instrument and its music in just three weeks. During my time in Accra I studied with three teachers: Mr. Henaku-Pobi, Mr. Yaw Dela Botri (Dela), and Mr. Joseph Tetteh (Abio). All of them
were excellent in their own ways. Studying with three different teachers was a mixed bag. On the negative side I really ended up spreading myself too thin and didn't satisfactorily master any of the music I was taught. On the positive side, the experience of working with three teachers was very valuable since they each brought to their lessons their own unique perspectives, repertories and approaches to music. These lessons will serve me well in the future, no-matter what sort of music I'm involved with, nevertheless, I can not confidently say that I play African music on the Atenteben. The biggest obstacle was my limited time. Three weeks is not enough time to learn an instrument, nor an entire new realm of music. I was fortunate in that I was already familiar with the diatonic fingering system on the Atenteben since it was similar to the fingering of the tin-whistle and Irish flute that I play back home. This gave me a real advantage in that I didn't have to stumble through trying to get my fingers to find the right holes to play the correct notes. In fact, I was able to pick up the atenteben and within several minutes I could play my Irish repertoire on it without a hitch. The chromatic fingering system was still very tricky to pick up and I was only able to learn a bit of it during my time in Accra, but my previous experience certainly aided me even with this alien fingering system. Now that I have the fingering charts for this system I hope to practice it when I return to the United States so that when I come back here I can just focus on learning the music.

Abio: The first teacher I worked with is Mr. Joseph Tetteh, who I will refer to as Abio. Abio is the lead atenteben player for the Ghana Dance Ensemble and he also teaches Atenteben to many of its members. Abio came from the most strictly traditional background of my three teachers. Unable to read sheet music but able to read basic solfeggio, Abio relied almost entirely on listening and watching to teach me, sometimes writing solfeggio representations of the music in order to help me out. This approach actually worked very well for me, since my experience with Irish traditional music has been based primarily in aural.

Abio was impressed with the speed at which I learned. He was patient, enthusiastic and eager for me to learn - a good teacher indeed. He taught me several short pieces, some highlife and some traditional and taught me how to sing them as well. I feel that learning to sing a song is a very important part of learning to play it, and if you really want to be able to play a song well you must first be able to sing it. This comes from my
Irish traditional music background, which dictates that you learn to sing an air (a slow, lyrical song) before you begin to play it. Many Irish music teachers will also demand that you learn the history of the music as well before you learn the music itself. Unfortunately, I was unable to learn very much about the history of the music that Abio taught me. This is one serious shortcoming of my work with him, and indeed with all my teachers, and I wish I had more time to learn it - but some day I will.

Yaw Dela Botri: Dela, my second teacher was firmly grounded in both the aural tradition and the realm of notation and Western theory, so we were able to approach the music from either perspective depending on the situation. I find that sometimes it takes approaching the music from more than one direction to fully understand it and I found this to be the case working with Dela. Dela, a very good teacher with a lot of experience, relied primarily on the aural style of learning to teach me, probably recognising that it was my easiest way of learning, however he also explained the music to me in Western musical terminology and wrote it down in notation form when I asked for it. Dela taught me several basic tunes including one of his own compositions, a traditional South African tune and a Ghanaian highlife tune. My biggest problem was picking up Dela's chromatic fingering technique, which astounds me every time I listen to him. Learning an instrument just takes practice and I didn't have enough practice or enough time.

Henaku-Pobi: Henaku, coming from a classical music background and trained as a music calligrapher, placed a great deal of emphasis on the use of notation, an approach that was ineffective for my learning style. However he was a wealth of information. He told me all about the instrument, more than anyone else did and in this respect he was invaluable. He also provided me with recorded musical examples so I could come to a better understanding of what the instrument had been used for.

Thoughts on Learning:

I'm an aural learner, there's no question about. To me sheet music is a good reference for when I need help remembering a tune or when there's nobody to play the tune for me, but that's all - it's a reference. My tin-whistle teacher back in the USA always says that learning from sheet music is adding an extra, unnecessary step to the learning process and I agree. My flute teacher back home in the United States doesn't
even read music at all yet he is recognised as one of the best traditional flute players in the region. With sheet music you go from the sheet music to the mind to the fingers and back to the mind, but with aural learning you just go from the mind to the fingers and back to the mind. The staff notation, more often than not, just slows me down. Now I am not denying its value - it is a very valuable tool. Staff notation is not the music itself - it is just a crude representation of it - lifeless until a musician interprets it in his or her own performance. Rich musical traditions existed for thousands of years without staff notation and they will continue to exist for thousands of years after it is dead and gone. There have also been and continue to be many other notation systems. Western staff notation is far from being the last word. One of the many stimulating conversations I had with Henaku while he was teaching me was about this point. Upset that we were spending so much time working on notated exercises, I pointed to the page of exercises and said "This is not the music, this is just a rough symbolic representation of it," to which he replied, "It is the music". I still stand by my viewpoint. He also asserted that, in his opinion, a master traditional musician can not truly understand his own music without some sort of Western musical training. I strongly objected to this statement and was confused and surprised that he thought this the case. In a later conversation with Mr. Nana Danso Abiam I asked his opinion. His reply was as follows:

I don’t think that we should all know so-called Western theory to understand African music- we should leave them the way they are, we should study what they do- that’s the way I look at it. We should try to expand from where they are, but we don’t want to compare, talk about who appreciates and who doesn’t appreciate. How can someone not appreciate his music when he created all this in his music culture?” (Abiam, personal communication)

I share Abiam's sentiment.

During my work with Henaku I was somewhat frustrated I felt like I was wasting time slowly stumbling through the notation when I could have just heard him play the piece a few time and then played it back. The ability to read and write staff notation effortlessly is a skill that would serve me well and I know I need to work on it. More
importantly, I think a balance needs to be struck between the two approaches. With this experience it is clear that a combination of both learning techniques supplement each other, making up for each other's weaknesses and combining to create a whole greater than the sum of their two parts. It's all about balance.

One of my biggest difficulties in learning the Ghanaian music was in its rhythms. The rhythms of Ghana and Africa are so alien to me, even after three and a half months staying in Ghana. A lifetime of having my ears wide open has accustomed me to certain sorts of rhythms and my brief time in Ghana was just enough to begin to familiarise myself with the rhythms here and to understand them. To me, playing Ghanaian music on the Atenteben while counting a Ghanaian rhythm was like patting my head and rubbing my stomach at the same time. It was tough! I had the experience at the Ko-Sa guesthouse in Cape Coast, along with several other SIT students, of trying to sing a Ghanaian song while simultaneously drumming a Ghanaian rhythm. To us, the rhythm of the drumbeat seemed so far removed from what we perceived to be the rhythm of the song that it was nearly impossible to keep the two together. The connection was unclear. The same situation applied to me trying to count the rhythm while playing the Atenteben. I could play the tune or clap the rhythm, but doing both at the same time was nearly impossible. Because of the sort of rhythmic connection I was used to hearing in music I often began to count a different beat that made sense to me in the context of the melody, but which was clearly wrong, as my teachers were quick to point out. Besides the rhythm, the melodies were somewhat difficult for me to play as well. Just as with the rhythms, I have become accustomed to standard Western melodic progressions, especially those in Irish music, and I think I rely on that familiarity and intuition in my playing. Unfortunately, my familiarity with Western melodic progressions comes as hindrance to my learning of African melodies, which are so much different than Western ones.

I think it is possible to hear music your entire life, be very familiar with it and still have little to no understanding of it nor be able to play or compose it. If the case were otherwise then almost everyone in this world would be a musician, but instead there are many, many people who can't even hold a melody singing, let alone write a piece of music. Thus I could spend several years in Ghana and definitely learn to play the music, but only through hard work and years of practice could I really begin to understand it.
Part of this has to do with the fact that understanding is so much more than just the technical and theoretical components of music. Understanding also involves knowing the history, the purpose and the cultural meaning of the music. It involves catching the spark or the spirit of the music itself, kindling it, and letting it grow into a fire with its own life and its own direction.

One of the biggest shortcomings of my projects was that I was unable to see very many traditional uses of the Atenteben. I heard all my teachers play, I heard Hewale Sounds play their unique blend of traditional and contemporary jazz-like melodies, I heard the Atenteben being used in jazz, I listened to recordings of purely traditional playing, but I did not get to see a purely traditional ensemble. In this respect I feel like a major component is missing from my ISP. I had actually planned to travel up to Kumasi to work with the Asantehene's odurugya player for a few days, but unfortunately this didn't work out. Such is life in Ghana. In fact, I was quite surprised that things worked out as well as they did considering how much trouble I went through to set up lessons and interviews. There were a few days that I was sure my project was doomed, but everything worked out well in the end. I met some wonderful people, learned a lot about the instrument, a little about the music, a lot about Ghana and a whole lot about myself and how I perceive music. To me my study was a success and paves the way for future study in traditional music in Ghana and the rest of the world.
Conclusion

Though I was unable to achieve all the objectives I set out to achieve, I feel that overall my ISP was a success. I achieved my objectives of learning the history, construction and cultural background of the atenteben. I learned how to play it fairly well. I also made some wonderful contacts and some wonderful friends. What I didn't achieve was an understanding of the music, a goal which I knew from the start was ambitious and unlikely but worth tackling anyway. I did learn several basic songs, but that's about as far as I got. In terms of learning the music itself, I think that having so many teachers was detrimental to my progress since I spread myself too thin and was unable to devote sufficient time or energy to any of the music they taught me.

The atenteben is a truly beautiful instrument with a rich history and a promising future. It has been used in almost every sort of music imaginable and those who play it continue to explore new and exciting directions. African music is just beginning to be recognised on the international stage and the Atenteben is poised to be one of the leading
instruments in this newfound popularity. I feel that the Atenteben, with its chromatic fingering system, has the potential to revolutionise the world of simple-system flutes, and perhaps even revolutionise the music those flutes are used in. Only time will tell but the future looks bright.

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**Appendices**
B Major Scale
C Pentatonic Scale

D Major Scale
D Pentatonic Scale
Eb Major Scale
E Major Scale
F Major Scale
G Major Scale
The interlocking system here is different from that of the interior system. It must be handled with care. Be aware that anything not held by the lower end, if not pressed, may not be held by the lower end. It should not be expected that hammering technique will be effective. In a tight and dense rock, the wedge should be used. Since the instrument is asymmetric, the edge of the instrument is the edge. The edge is more accessible than the instrument itself.
Correct placement of the edges of the plate.

The plate is held securely with the edge of its back, and the plate is placed in position. The plate is then secured with screws.

Diagram XVII.

Hole.

The fourth and fifth holes: the edge not covered.

Diagram XVI.

Hole.

Diagram XV.

Sound. Sound of:

Sand with the second finger. Sand with the second finger, cover the corner.

Diagram XIV.

Picture XXIV.

Diagram XIX.

Picture XV.

Diagram XVIII.

Picture X.
PIECES FOR ENSEMBLE WORK

12. "Wrecked"
11. "Weep" (J. H. Kettie)
10. "Antheme Theme"
9. "Work Done"
8. "Quarter No. 2"
7. "Quarter No. 1"
6. "Pipe Tune (Tipto)
5. "Rotoke"
4. "Pipe Tune No. 1"
3. "Waite's Adagio"
2. "Sempere and Drama"
1. "Pipe and Drum"

The use of the "Triplet" note presents a peculiar difficulty and requires great care in execution. The many expectations to the performance of this note are exposed to a certain extent to error, and the pupil must be particularly careful to execute it with precision. The triplet note, in this scale, is always played with the aid of the "Triplet" note. The pupil's note is the same as that which is always played. The pupil's note must be played with the aid of the "Triplet" note.