

Emerging Musical Trends in Aboakyer Festival of the Winneba-Efutu People in Ghana

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Abstract: - Aboakyer festival, annually celebrated by the Winneba-Efutu people of Ghana is characterized by performances of different musical genres. One could observe that apart from the indigenous Asafo dance, other musical performances feature prominently throughout the township during the festivities. This study therefore, sought to find out the different forms of music that are performed during the festival, the role of these musical forms in the festival and their educational implications for practice. Two participants, a master drummer and a cantor were selected purposively and interviewed. By means of interpretive phenomenological data analysis, results revealed that besides the Asafo dance, musical types from other cultures were appropriated to the embellishment of the celebration, partly due to modernity and globalization. Findings further indicated that these musical groups were not usually offered the privilege to feature during the durbar activities (on the durbar ground). They therefore, tended to express themselves roaming the length and breadth of the town. It is recommended that since the festival has assumed an intercultural dimension, these musical types should be accorded the needed recognition to participate more actively, with their roles well-defined to boost the splendour of the festival. The study finally implores music scholars and educators to acquaint themselves with the emerging musical trends in Aboakyer festival which consequently have implications for the teaching and learning of music in schools.

Keywords: Aboakyer, Asafo, Efutu, festival, performance, youth, modernization

I. INTRODUCTION

Music is such a pervasive form of human experience that everyone in any society can have some sort of meaningful experience with it in one context or the other. Africans, like some countless other cultures are fond of music making music. We make music when we mourn the dead. Our forefathers made music on departure to the war field. They made music on arrival from war” (Nketia, 1998, p. 3). In African communities music making indispensably permeates human life in such identifiable continua as from birth to death and from an individual to thousands. The former continuum includes but not restricted to rites of passage such as naming ceremonies, puberty initiations, marriage customs and funeral rituals (Enniful, 2013). The latter continuum embodies the communal sense of festival celebrations and durbars as diverse as there are ethnic and community uniqueness (Hodges, 2020), certainly characterized by different shades of musical performances. Without music, our festivities and all other social, religious and political events would be too

desiccated, boring and ‘lifeless’ to merit humans participation. Despite the number of studies already conducted by scholars from different disciplines on Aboakyer (deer hunting) festival, no work has been found attempting to identify all musical performances that are associated with the festival. The study therefore sought to fill this gap to add to the literature on the Aboakyer festival of the Effutu people of Ghana.

Aboakyer is one of the key Ghanaian indigenous festivals celebrated on the first Saturday¹ of May each year. Although this study focuses on Aboakyer festival, recognition is given to the fact that the Effutu² have several other annual festivals, all of which thrive in the beauty and power of musical performances. These include the colourful Fancy Dress Festival held on 1st January; “Akomasi” a ritual festival celebrated in August; and Easter, the passion of the Christ which is observed in either March or April. All of these festivals are dominated by music, an art form dear to the heart of the Effutu folks. In the past, every educated Effutu person was expected to know how to play the piano, at the very least (Brown, 2005). Generally, celebrants of the Aboakyer festival are preoccupied by musical performances. For example, at the commencement of the deer hunt festival, elders meet at a shrine and invoke the spirit of the war god “Penkye-Otu” who will lead them to the forest to hunt for a deer. Invocation is accomplished by singing provocative songs that anger the spirit which in turn mounts and possesses its followers, preparing them for the hunt. Indeed, the main musical ensemble that features at the festival has been the asafo, however, other musical groups are seen emerging to get involved in the celebration of the Aboakyer. The specific roles played by these musical groups in the celebration of the festival are not defined. One is left to ascertain how indispensable these musical genres in the context of the festivity are. Despite the laterality of ritual musical performances in Aboakyer festival, the inconspicuous presence of these emerging musical performances, evolving spontaneously among the youth is deemed to be of some significance. The study therefore sought to find out the different forms of music, trending within the Aboakyer festival and make suggestions for practice in music education. Undoubtedly, such knowledge would not only inform music

¹ Saturday was selected for the celebration because it is believed the Effutu first arrived at Winneba on a Saturday after their migration from the Western Sudan Empire.

² Fante dialect which means Effutu folks

teaching and learning in our educational institutions but also motivate further research on the subject matter. Taking a clue from the view that “music communicates, passes literature, and welcomes heroes communities” (Shepherd, 2008), we anticipate that the study will contribute immensely to literature in music and music education.

II. REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

2.1 Celebration of Aboakyer Festival

Some authors have written on the Aboakyer festival of the Efutu people in Ghana, describing it as a major traditional ceremony (Ampomah, 2014; Adu-Bortsie, 2006; Agawu, 1986), which is held each year towards the end of April; the season of planting and sowing, in the traditional capital town, Winneba (Takyi, 2015; Adjaye, 1987). It is reported from these scholars that the festival begins with preparations for about four weeks prior to the main ritual events with the fixing of a date for the deer hunt. At the same time a ban is imposed on hunting the deer until the eve of the ritual hunt itself. The period of greatest ritual activity lasts three days, from Friday to Sunday. On Friday, members of the town's two Asafo (military companies) intensify consultations with their gods and ancestors, from whom they also seek guidance and protection in the hunt on the following day. Early on Saturday morning, the hunt begins and the two Asafo groups compete for the first catch. Although more than one deer is usually caught, it is the first catch which has ritual significance. It has to be taken alive with the bare hands by the hunters and presented amid Asafo music to the paramount chief who places his feet upon the live animal before it is carried by the victorious company to the fetish priest of the major deity, “Penkye Otoo”. The deer is then killed by the priest, who clubs its throat. When this has been done, the animal is carried by members of the successful company to the grove of “Penkye Otoo”, where it remains until dusk. During the night it is kept in the house of the priest at the edge of the grove and is brought out again on Sunday afternoon. Throughout Saturday afternoon and evening the people are in festive mood and engaged in traditional drumming, singing and dancing.

On Sunday afternoon the deer is decapitated, skinned, and cut into portions which are boiled and strewn around the grove as offerings to “Penkye Otoo” and to lesser Effutu gods and the ancestors. This is followed by the ritual known as “Ebisatsir” which is interpreted as seeing into the future, at which time “Penkye Otoo” is believed to forecast the shape of events in the subsequent year. After the forecast of “Penkye Otoo” has been received, the relationships between the two Asafo undergo a marked changes, characterized by mock hostility, jeering, and disdainful behaviours. Sometimes, they erupt into physical violence between members of the opposing companies. Brown (2005) commented on this social conflict:

After the rituals, the drumming and singing continues throughout the streets. At this moment jubilating supporters exchange insults with opposing companies. The

winning side boasts of having the powers to hunt while chastising the losers. The losers respond by stating that the winning company simply bought the deer and pretended to catch it during the hunt. (p.72)

However, on that Sunday evening, members of both companies come together in public to drum, sing and dance in the streets and this ritual reconciliation of the Asafo companies marks the end of the Aboakyer festivities.

2.2 Origin of the Effutu People

Historically, according to Brown (2005) who describes the festival as the most popular in Ghana avers that the Effutu people were part of the large family of Guan speaking people who migrated out of Timbuktu around AD 1100 – 1200 together with other tribes like the Gonja, Kyerepon, Larteh, Nkonya, Krakyi and the Awutu, that migrated with them. The Effutu, who eventually settled at Winneba belonged to the “Awutu” group but they speak a distinct version of Awutu called Effutu (Brown, 2005). A study of the music of the Aboakyer festival can be generalized to most cultures, since it is observed to contain bits of other major cultures. This study, therefore, could provide a basis for investigating musical practice in other Ghanaian traditional festivals.

2.3 Musical Performance in Aboakyer Festival

Being an integral part of Aboakyer, music is performed prior to, during and after the festival. According to Ackom (2005), tradition requires that the youth begin to learn Asafo (war) songs from their elders. They assemble on canoes along the fish landing beaches and at times open parks to learn the art of performing Asafo songs. It is with these songs as well as other less named music that the festival assumes its usual enchantment. The association of some of the musical performance to deities in traditional festivals as ascribed to the Efutufo is a ubiquitous phenomenon not only in cultures across Ghana but also in African and the world at large.

Though all musical performances may be seen in a common lens of the performing art forms, each musical performance may have a unique relevance in lieu of a specific context where it features. As exemplified in the preceding paragraph, several African musical performances are believed to represent a manifestation of a deity. The most compelling reason for music making in Africa derives from religious experience, for it is generally believed that the spiritual world is responsive to music and deeply affected by it (Nketia, 1957). Acting through human media, the gods are known to object to the singing of particular songs and to express dissatisfaction when performances are slipshod or lacking in animation. Now and then they also bring new songs or themes of songs to their worshippers. Hence worship always finds its most intense expression in music making, which can go on for hours or days during major religious festivals, for performing sacred music in this manner gives not only aesthetic satisfaction but also the assurance of continuous contact with

the spiritual world. As Ekwueme (1971) postulates, those who worship particular gods often describe themselves in songs as the children of those gods and may distinguish themselves from other members of the community, among other ways, by their repertoire of songs, instruments, and dances. For instance Titon (2009) describes how the Yorùbá people of Nigeria ascribe their “*dùndún*” musical performance to the “*Ayàn*”, a native of “*Saworo*” in “*Ibariba*” land who became deified as the god of drumming after his death. He also talks about the “*Yeibichai*” music in the Nightway ceremony of the Navajos in the Southwestern desert of India. This music is performed with masked dancers who impersonate the ancestral spirits “*Yeibichai*” believed to be the source of supernatural power and blessings to cure the sick.

Most often these special music and dances are not performed by ordinary people and in ordinary social settings but by “chosen” or special people as well as specified settings. This is because; it is also believed that the spirit of the deity possesses the performers or dancers or both as they perform. The chosen dancer could go into a trance-like state and most often than not receive guidance and wisdom from the ancestors. These would then communicate to the ordinary man through some form of utters and moans. However, it normally takes the intervention of some escorts of the performer to translate the message to the ordinary ears. Association of Aboakyer festive musical performances with deities is therefore, not an unusual scenario.

III. METHODOLOGY

Participants and Procedure

Two participants were selected; from one of the sporadically featuring musical groups during the Aboakyer festival in May, 2019. Selection of the group was randomized while the specific participants were chosen purposively. In view of the fact that these musical groups were not as traditionally iconic as the Asafo groups, we were unable to predetermine the specific individual participants ahead of the festivities while planning the study. However, as they began to emerge during the celebration, we had to snowball through the masses to identify them for interviews.

As such, from Monday through Thursday, we had requested students³ in our classrooms as well as colleagues to alert us via telephone calls whenever they heard or saw any musical performances apart from Asafo, taking place in any part of the town. On Friday afternoon, we had multiple promptings, informing us about on-going musical activities of the prescribed groups. We subsequently converged, traced and located a group at *Pɔ̀nkɔ̀akyir*, one of the coastal suburbs and followed them in non-participant observations through other suburbs including *Nkwantan* and *Abasraba* to *Kwodwo Baadu* where they ended the evening’s “town procession” and

announced their intention to continue early morning the next (durbar) day.

Just as they were dispersing, we approached the leader and disclosed our identity and ‘learning’ intention to him, expressing our desire to join them the next day for the durbar. They were excited to have us show in interest in their group and hoped to see us the next day for the “real show” It was just enough success on that Friday to obtain their telephone numbers since their youthfully ebullient immersion in the festal mood would not warrant a better research interaction than exchange of contact numbers. Moreover, we needed to take time to establish enough rapport with them in order to facilitate a worthwhile data collection attempt. We joined them the next day for the durbar as promised, this time more conspicuously than before, doing participant observations. We made sure to get closer to the leader at the close of the durbar to congratulate them for splendid renditions. He in turn expressed his gratitude to us for lending them our support, and introduced us to the lead singer, whose telephone number we took as well. We did audio-visual recordings of the musical activities on both days. The next day after the durbar, we called and congratulated them on their colourful performances, thereby building stronger rapport with them, and ceasing the opportunity to schedule interview meetings with them so that we could know more about the group. In order to ensure a reasonable triangulation and reliability, each researcher met one participant independently in a separate setting and conducted a semi-structured interview session. In each instance, and with prior permission of the interviewee, data were audio recorded in addition to notes taken by the researcher. Participants were also asked to indicate how the sterling musical performances have implications for educational practice.

Like the data collection procedure, analysis of the data was also done independently by each researcher, mainly using the Interpretive Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) technique (Quinn & Clare, 2008). By the use of the IPA technique, we were able to explore in detail how the participants were making sense of their personal and social world of musical performances, since the main currency for an IPA study is constructive; revealing the meanings that particular experiences, events, states hold for participants (Palmer, Larkin, de Visser & Fadden, 2010). It involves detailed examination of the participant’s life-world; and attempts to explore personal experience and is concerned with an individual’s personal perception or account of an event (Kleiman, 2004). This analysis technique is also appropriate for our data collected through observation as it emphasizes that the research exercise is a dynamic process with an active role for the researcher in that process. While the researcher tries to get close to the participant’s personal world, to take an ‘insider’s perspective’, one cannot do this directly or completely without the researcher’s own input (Smith & Shinebourne, 2012). Access also depends on the researcher’s own conceptions, required in order to make sense of that other

³ A large proportion of music students, faculty and staff reside in various parts of Winneba.

personal world through a process of interpretative activity. Thus, a two-stage interpretation process, or a double hermeneutic, is involved. The participants were trying to make sense of their world; we also tried to make sense of the participants by trying to make sense of their world. IPA is therefore, useful in this study because of its intellectual connectivity to hermeneutics and theories of interpretation (Packer & Addison, 1989). We drew upon Nketia’s theory of musical integration which explains that knowledge from both the traditional African music concepts and the Western music theories ought to be integrated in discussing a musical phenomenon (Nketia, 2005/1973). Our independent analysis was finally compared and the main commonalities were compiled, with some of the musical sound transcribed for use.

IV. DISCUSSION OF RESULTS

The major traditional musical performances that are conventionally programmed into the celebration of Aboakyer festival in Winneba are those of two main *asafo* companies: *Tuafo* No. 1 Company and *Dentsifo* No. 2 Company. Membership in each company ranges from young to old, but *Tuafo* membership tends to be older than *Dentsifo*. Every Effutu, from childbirth does not merely join his or her father’s *asafo* company but also the division to which he belongs. Non-natives who like to participate in the Aboakyer festival will normally join a group of their choice based on the company’s colors, friends, age group, or area or residency.

Spiritually, each of the *asafo* companies has an inclination to a deity with its specified colour identity. Findings revealed that the *Tuafo Asafo No1* belong to the deity of the *Tuafo* called “Penkyiotu”, which identifies with the white colour. On the other hand, the *Dentsefo* (also referred to as *Asiamo*) *Asafo*

No 2 pays allegiance to a deity called “Basabasa”, whose colour identity is red. Although these two *asafo* companies with supernatural identities constitute the canonic musical groups that perform during its celebration, Aboakyer festival is characterized by other genres of musical activities which are hardly acknowledged in relation to the festival. These include indigenous renditions such as *ɔmpɛ*, *Adzewa*, *Akosualontoba*, *Fɔntɔmfɔm*, *Mpintin*, *Aprede* and Horn-blowing. Reasons for the involvement of these musical genres may be ascribed to What Hesmondhalgh (2008) postulates that music is linked to values of authenticity, self-identity, and creativity and so its use in such contexts as festivals is capable of nurturing urban re-enchantment, regional identity, and possible regeneration of the inner city (Oakes & Warnaby, 2011). As stated in Oakes and Warnaby, Nakagawa (2010) is of the view that such musical practice regenerates cities from the bottom of society upwards through creative use of arts, thus nurturing a more pluralistic society. Other youthful performances seen in the performance of the Aboakyer include *Jama* and Afro-Popular music.

During each year’s procession to the durbar ground, the *Asafo* Company, which is able to catch the deer first from the bush, gains the right to follow suit, the convoy of chiefs with its musical performance. Other elders of the Simpa Community then come behind the hunters. The other *Asafo* Company then takes the fourth position in the order of procession. On Friday, each of the *Asafo* companies embark on a ritual voyage (procession) through some designated routes in the town, with one person or two carrying their respective deities on the head. Examples of songs used for the procession are illustrated below.

EFRU MENYAE

The musical score is titled "EFRU MENYAE". It consists of three staves. The top staff is for the Cantor, with the lyrics "E-sa me-sio me-nya". The middle and bottom staves are for the Chorus, with the lyrics "E-fur me - nyaee" and "e - fru o me-nyaee saa". The music is written in 6/8 time and features a mix of eighth and sixteenth notes.

Example 1: *Effutu asafo* processional song

BASABASA

The image shows a musical score for a song titled 'BASABASA'. It consists of two staves. The top staff is labeled 'Cantor' and contains the lyrics 'Eee basa-basa wɔmuoo'. The bottom staff is labeled 'Chorus' and contains the lyrics 'ɔ-wɔ muo' and 'ɔ-wɔ muobasa-ba-sawɔmuo wɔ-muoo'. The music is written in a treble clef with a key signature of one sharp (F#) and a 6/8 time signature. The Cantor part features a melodic line with eighth and sixteenth notes. The Chorus part features a rhythmic accompaniment with chords and eighth notes.

Example 2: *Effutu asafo processional song*

The main musical instrument used extensively throughout the voyage is a pair of shaken bells; one in each hand. While the masses sing the songs, one person, usually a male, keeps shaking the bells vigorously to accompany the singing. Occasionally, some individuals among the crowd blow whistles at their own impulse. Besides, intensive hand-clapping enhances the show especially when the one who is carrying the deity happens to halt movement at a point. Aboakyer festival draws together a multitude of people; natives and non-natives, youth and elderly, Ghanaians and foreigners, tourists and sight-seers to Winneba as Nagy and Nagy (2013) postulate. The occasion is therefore, a great competitive business opportunity for companies and all manner of individuals. Some of these commercial entities mount their desks at vantage locations including the durbar grounds and play recorded music, made up of repertoire that markets their respective products.

Jama Music

Although it may be considered a common place knowledge that the Ghanaian youth spontaneously engage in “Jama” music on a variety of occasions, it is worth identifying it as one of the sporadic musical compliments to asafo music in Aboakyer festivities, since such genres form the crux of this study. “Jama” music is basically of Ga origin. Its instrumentation and singing style is similar to that of Kpanlogo which also is a Ga dance. However, it has become prevalent among the youth all over Ghana. The music features mainly in social activities such as games, funfairs, and club celebrations. In the same vein, the youth manifest the involvement in the Aboakyer festival with their “Jama” music especially on the durbar day (Saturday). Notably, there were two Jama groups; one in white outfit and the other in red. Apparently the former identified itself with *Tuafo Asafo No. 1* and the later with *Denstifo Asiamo Asafo No. 2 (Basabasa)*.

Instruments used in performing Jama (as in Aboakyer celebration by the youth), comprises arbitrary pieces of sonorous objects such as wooden clappers, empty tins, a few portable drums including tamalin, donno and whistles. As it has usually been, the Jama group performs in a crowded disposition. The performance takes the cantor-chorus or call and response form which is typical of indigenous African

music renditions. That is to say that, there is always a lead singer at a time referred to as the cantor and all other members of the group constitute the chorus. During the procession of chiefs to the durbar ground, this group positions itself as the last group behind the main traditional musical groups participating in the procession. In consonance with the occasion, they appeared in red clothing, suggesting that this particular “Jama” group is organized from the *Denstifo Asafo Company*. Besides, they hold and wear green leaves which portray them as having been to the bush (to participate in the deer hunting expedition).

The youth participate meaningfully in the traditional activities through the medium of “jama” thereby, offering them an avenue for enculturation during the festival. Though “jama” music is not one of the indigenous dances of the *Effutu/Winneba*, it is noted among the favourites of the youth. Therefore, as they join the indigenous folk in the festive activities through their “Jama” music, they observe the actual traditional activities including musical performances that take place. Some of the young ones eventually find themselves participating spontaneously in the indigenous dance performances, thus getting gradually enculturated, especially, in the area of musical performances. Like *McFarland and Thomas (2006)* asserted, youth organizations that includes musical groups have modest, significant, additive, positive effects on the societal festive activities including political activities. Similarly, two female musical groups also featured in the procession of chiefs to the durbar ground. One of the female groups appeared in red clothes while the other was in white clothes. The group in the red-colour was in front of the other group which was in the white outfit. These two gourd-musical groups were sandwiched by a dancer who appeared in a neutral colour. The group sung songs accompanied by beating of gourds with the bare hands only.

Following the Female gourd-musical group in the royal procession to the durbar ground is the *Kete* performance. *Kete* is court music of the Akan people. It is an instrumental music; performed without vocal accompaniment, neither is hand-clapping a part of *Kete* performance. The two components involved in its performance are instrumentation and dance movements. On the contrary, the dance is performed in

Winneba Aboakyer festival, during the durbar day procession of chiefs with singing though in a chanting manner. Besides this contrast, the Effutu people add hand-clapping to the performance. In terms of instrumentation, “Gungon” which is a Northern Ghana (Dagomba) instrument is appropriated in the performance of the Kete dance. The lead drummer clarified that, the Ashanti Region and the Northern Region (as the current three northern regions used to be) have been good

neighbours historically and there have been marital and other social bonds between the two regions. Thus, it is not uncommon to find northern attributes in the activities of the Ashanti/Asante people. According to the informant, this explains the optional use of “Lunga” (hour-glass of northern origin) in Adowa dance of the Akan people. “It shows love and unity” he stressed. He sang one apatampa song which is usually used in kete performance and we transcribed as below.

YERI BESI ŌHEN

Yer' be-sio - he-ne ee yen-nyaen-sio yer' be-sio - he-nee yen-nyaen-

8
sio o - si - gya ni nao - dze tam a - bo ne yam'

Example 3: Apatampa Song Appropriated in Kete Performance

Beebu

Beebu in the Efutu language means horn. Leading the procession of chiefs to the durbar ground is the beebu (horn) blower. Horns play vital roles in Akan traditions. In some Akan communities, as many as seven horns referred to as *mmenson* are used (blown) in the procession of chiefs. In Winneba Aboakyer durbar however, only one horn is used to accompany the two chiefs. Another disparity observable is that the horn blower in the Aboakyer festive performance has his body painted while in other Akan communities performers appear bear-chested with a cloth tied round the neck. Several families constitute the royal clan of the Efutu people. The investigation revealed that each family has a Beebu. On the occasion of the Aboakyer durbar however, one family takes a turn to blow the Beebu to accompany the chiefs to the durbar ground, hence only one horn blower at a time.

V. IMPLICATIONS FOR MUSIC EDUCATION

The study identified multiplicity of musical performances in the celebration of Aboakyer festival in Winneba. It is also ascertained that societies give credence to asafo music performance in relation to other less-recognized genres which feature to reverberate the grandeur of the festivity as a whole. As initiated in this study, it behooves (music) scholars - educators, musicologists, music psychologist, ethnomusicologists, etc. - to invigorate research on these minorities, yet indispensable musical performances and unearth their roles in the celebration of Aboakyer and other traditional festivals. Furthermore, music educators have the task of acquainting themselves with these less popular musical constituents not only of Aboakyer but also in other Ghanaian

traditional festivals. Gleaning on Nketia's theoretical perspective on integration in music instruction and discussion, it is imperative for music teachers to draw on conceptual knowledge from these traditional African musical practices together with the Western music theories to promote music teaching and learning in Ghanaian educational institutions. Discussing music in the context of Aboakyer festival ought to embrace all subtle musical entities other than asafo.

VI. CONCLUSIONS

The Aboakyer festival takes place in a thriving urban area of over 25,000 people, and brings considerable prestige to thousands of visitors who are able to participate in it each year. Apart from preserving and promoting the history and culture of the Effutufo, the festival marks seasonal economic boost of the township. Musical performances of various kinds play major roles in the beauty and success of the celebration. This study helps identify both the acclaimed and the less heralded musical performances in Aboakyer festival. The overriding presence of the two asafo companies and their competitive war-oriented musical recognition cannot be overemphasized. Beyond that however, other nonage musical groups that sandwich and/or complement the historic asafo genre have been offered a considerable attention in this study. We are optimistic that the tendency to take these non-famous youthful groups such as Jama, Apatampa and Beebu for granted will be resisted through further research and knowledge dissemination on them.

Considering the intercultural appropriations in the evolving musical activities of the youth in the Aboakyer festival, it is also dianoetic to state that the festival, just as Bowman (1998)

avers is significantly being impacted by modernity and globalization for several now (Nketia, 1957). Overt acknowledgement of the factors (musical types) that attract the youth to participate actively in their native festival will go a long way to bond them to their community, make them own their community and share in its cultural heritage and perpetuation.

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