FACTORS THAT SHAPE AND MAINTAIN FOLK MUSIC IN GHANA

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THE survival of any type of music in Ghana is dependent upon the extent to which the music is able to satisfy the values the people look for in such music. The values, which may be aesthetic or structural, social or religious, may operate individually or in a simultaneous complexity. In other words the factors that shape and maintain the folk music in Ghana may be found in the music *per se*, in the artist or in the context of performance.

MUSICAL FACTORS

There are musical norms which the community expect in a musical performance. One such norm is the sound quality. The Ghanaian concept of music (and this may go for other African peoples too) does not unduly discriminate between sounds of definite pitches and sounds of indefinite pitches. It is true that in some situations the emphasis may be on one or the other. However, examples abound in which musical ensembles employ both pitched and unpitched instruments. And both categories of sound are given relatively equal roles in a performance. This is why in the Ashanti *sikyi* the musicians use three tambourines of different sizes and pitches as well as pitchless clapper sticks and rattle gourds. Again this is why in the *durina* or *goge* music of Northern Ghana, the tuned one-string *goge*, must always be accompanied by the pitchless gourd rattle.

In several communities the sound is imperfect if the element of nasality is absent. It is not an uncommon experience therefore to see a musician choosing to play on an old, cracked *dawuro*, iron bell, in preference to a new and "better" one. It is also common to see drums, such as the male *atumpan*, talking drum of the Akan, carrying an iron rattle on the skin head. The gourd resonators of the xylophones of Northern Ghana are not ready for use until the craftsman bores little holes in them and covers such holes with pieces of mirliton. All these devices and additions are meant to produce "sweet" sounds: rattling or buzzing sounds the absence of which is felt to be an impoverishment of the music.

Folk musicians and audiences alike seem to prefer leading singers, that is soloists, in choral ensembles, who possess strong head voices. Again, a tint of nasality is an additional quality some people—the Akan or Lobi—would expect. This is the type and quality of sound that gives character to folk music in Ghana. There has not been any conceivable change in this regard in contemporary Ghana. Musicians may use an empty beer bottle or an empty gasoline can as pitchless instruments. Or when they use the empty gasoline can as the resonator of the *sansa*, appropriate devices are introduced to give the desired nasal or rattling quality. The absence of such sound quality generates immediate disapproval which results in the withdrawal of patronage of the music.

Other values are reflected in the organization of the sound material. A singer, a band or an audience may prefer one song to the other. The basis of the preference may lie in the modality of the tune, that is its characteristic use of intervals. The Gas of Southern Ghana speak the Ga language and sing in both the pentatonic and

heptatonic modes (Nketia, 1962: 34). The Akans on the other hand sing only in the heptatonic mode. The Gas have adopted the Akan *adowa* (adzewa) and some Akan gods. In this acculturative situation, the music (melody and text) of the Ga *adowa* and *akom* maintains the melodic characteristics and a modified version of the Akan text. This contributes to continuity of the Akan tradition (see Nketia, 1964: 265–283). In addition to modality or characteristic use of intervals providing the basis of preference, it may in concert with other factors shape a whole corpus of music. For instance, irrespective of who sings an *asafo* song—whether he is an Efutu, an Akan or a Ga—the melodic style, as well as the rhythm, tempo, and animated performance is all identical.

Rhythmic organisation in Ghanaian folk music, as in other categories of her music, is an important factor. The music of Ghanaian instrumental ensembles has very limited tone contrast in comparison with, say, that of European instrumental ensembles. To the foreign listener, and to some sophisticated Ghanaians, such music with little tone contrast is not only monotonous, but uninteresting and "primitive." But to the traditional folk music enthusiast, the rhythmic organization more than compensates for the tonal monotony.

The *wia*, notched flute of Northern and Upper Ghana, has a very limited range. It is the complexity of rhythm patterns employed in its music that gives the listener the enjoyment he looks for. The *atumpan*, talking drums of Ghana, produces two tones. But it is capable of reproducing proverbs, statements and instructions. This drum speech is made intelligible and comprehensible partly because of the speech tones it maintains, and partly because of the vocal rhythm patterns it maintains. It is safe to suggest that the great appeal of complex rhythm patterns provides the explanation for the widespread patronage throughout Ghana of drum and other percussive ensembles, with or without vocal accompaniment.

The extent to which rhythm shapes the folk music in Ghana lies also in the fact that almost every musical type has a repertoire of rhythm patterns on which the master drummer draws during performance. In the Akan *kete*, for example, which comprises eight movements (Nketia, 1963: 129), each is distinguishable from the other because of its peculiar characteristic rhythms. An ingenious musician may introduce original additions, but does not entirely abandon what he inherited.

Forms of limited proportions characterize most Ghanaian music. Pieces, vocal or instrumental, vary in length: some very short, others quite long. But one aspect of form more than any other that has given shape to folk music in Ghana is the well known call and response. Of this there are several variants (see Nketia, 1962: 29–31 and Aning, 1964). Of a lesser widespread distribution, and yet definite in its own right, is the extended form that follows a prescribed order. In the Akan *akɔm*, Eue *atsiagbekɔ* and Ashanti *kete*, the music is a suite of movements which give character and shape to the respective types. A fetish priest (dancer) must go through the series to reach the point of hysteria (see Nketia, 1957: 8–9; 1963: 93–96). A deviation from the traditional order is just not tolerable.

In vocal music, the text provides a source of special interest and appeal. The Manhyia Kete Nnwonkorɔ Group of Kumasi in Ashanti, for example, is constantly in demand to play at funerals. This group is well known in and around Kumasi for its ability to employ appropriate verbal texts in all situations. The leader-poet, who is an active royal attendant at the palace of the King of Ashanti, freely employs the royal court language and historical data in his lyrics. It is this factor which largely makes him and his band very popular.

The musician as an institution is therefore an important factor in shaping and maintaining folk music in Ghana. A genius usually begins his career by conforming strictly to the beaten track. He succeeds in establishing fame often by combining and crystallizing the various values accepted by his tradition: vocal, melodic, rhythmic and instrumental styles. Then he develops new styles, all his own, but all rooted in the established tradition. Lesser known musicians go to understudy and play with him, and then leave to disseminate his style. Among such musicians can be counted Kwaa Mensa, a celebrated guitarist; Afua Manu of Kumasi, Akpaloo of the Anlo area (see Nayo, 1964) and Atinga Yari of Zari in Upper Ghana, all composer-singers.

Contextual and Other Factors

Music making in Ghana is socially controlled to some extent. The music for *akɔm*, cult worship, for example, may not be performed in another context unless there is a special reason for it. The introduction of Christianity, it is true, has adversely affected the indigenous cult worship which was formerly widespread. Cult worship is not altogether routed out yet, but the groups and their membership have considerably diminished in number. It would be natural to expect an equivalent decline in the performance of the music that is used in this worship. But the people are continually finding new contexts in which they perpetuate that music.

A chief's royal drums may not be played without the permission of the chief and his counsellors. The music of *bragoro*, puberty rites, may not be performed unless there is the occasion for it. Among the Ga and Akwapim peoples, all drumming is banned prior to their respective annual festivals. It is tempting to suggest that this deliberate 'starvation' in music making is in itself a strong factor that helps maintain the music. To prove this suggestion, it is only necessary to observe the rush and lavishness with which the musically hungry resume drumming when the ban is lifted.

A sizeable proportion of Ghana folk music has resisted the onslaught of popular Western and westernized music. One principal reason for this successful resistance is the way the music is socially organized. There is music for infants, for youth and for adults. Men may not participate in the music for women, and vice versa. There is music for different kinds of associations—occupational, warrior or voluntary associations. Then there is the music for political and quasi-political organizations. This system of organizing music predates the colonial era and has persisted through the hundred years of colonial rule; it continues to be the predominant basis of musical organization in contemporary Ghana.

A by-product of this socio-musical organization is the system of musical education given to youth. The baby in the cradle, the one carried on his mother's back, or the toddler, is introduced to the music of his society. He is either a passive or an active participant in public performances by adults. Thus he acquires the musical norms of his society before he is actually given any formal lessons, which may be few and sporadic. It should be pointed out that a comparatively small proportion of Ghanaian youth is fortunate enough to be given formal instructions in traditional music. The few are usually born into a family with a long musical tradition. The problem we are now facing is that many more children are spending the better part of the day in school and are being attracted by other activities. There is therefore less and less opportunity of exposure to their traditional music. Attempts are being made to find a solution to this.

In contemporary Ghana, there is a wave of development and consequent changes taking place in almost all phases and on almost all levels of private and public life.

The building of factories and large commercial institutions, the introduction of mechanized and co-operative farming—all these are attracting the country folk to urban, semi-urban and heterogeneous environments. But such urban dwellers are not entirely detribalized. In the words of Epstein, "the urban African remains a tribesman but is not a tribesman." He lives in two worlds. In some sections of the cities and towns, one will find heavy concentrations of particular immigrant tribesmen. In such situations it is common to find tribal groups banding themselves together to perform their traditional music in the evenings and at week-ends. Thus the tradition is maintained even in the cities and they do not become misfits should they visit or return to their tribal villages.

Another significant but perhaps less prevalent opening in which the urban Ghanaian maintains ties with his traditional music is at festivals. Several city dwellers return home to take part in annual festivals in which music-making forms a significant part.

The wave of cultural revivalism taking place in folk music in Ghana is reflected in the ensembles of some popular dance bands in which one can now find the *atumpan*, talking drums, the *donno*, hourglass drum, and a few other indigenous instruments. These would have been frowned on a decade or two ago. Further, such dance bands have begun to include original traditional melodies in their repertoires. The wonderful responses from the audiences to such items are encouragement enough for the musicians to turn more and more to traditional sources.

Conclusion

The folk music of Ghana has depended for its shape and maintenance on a complex of musical and extra-musical values operating simultaneously: characteristic rhythm patterns, particular tonal organization, tonal and rhythmic correlations between words and melody, and so on, individually or severally interrelated with the contexts of performance. The process of musical education, the social control of music, music-making on the basis of religious, political and social organizations, each with its own set of values—all provide an effective mechanism that shape and maintain folk music in Ghana.

Dr. H. Tracey (South Africa) asked whether Ghanaians considered the overall dynamic effect of music more important than technical minutiae. Secondly, he asked how communication was maintained between drummers and dancers. Mr. Aning replied that dance music was judged by its effectiveness in exciting people to participate, rather than on its acoustic merits. The end result was of prime importance. Regarding *rapport* between drums and dancers, he said that in the *Adowa* dance, for example, when the master drummer is satisfied with a dancer's performance, he may give congratulations, through his drumming, and invite the dancer to change to a more vigorous step.

Prof. K. P. Wachsmann (Los Angeles, California) asked whether the term "folk music" in the title of the paper was considered to cover all Ghanaian music, or if other categories also existed, in Mr. Aning's opinion. Mr. Aning replied that he classed most traditional music as "folk music." Apart from that, there was also composed "art music," and "popular music," which included "highlife" and ballroom styles, as well as "popular traditional music," such as was made by young people.

Prof. A. Ringer (Illinois, U.S.A.) suggested that, in the interest of safeguarding the continuation of folk music, research workers and radio or recording personnel should avoid interfering with performers, or making them self-conscious, or encouraging folkloristic mannerisms. Mr. Aning expressed the hope that this danger would be successfully countered in Ghana.

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TRADITIONAL FOLKSONG AND "FOLKLORE" SINGERS

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It is said that folk song is dead. And if under folk song we understand what Gottfried Herder, the creator of this word, had in mind, then this may be applied at least to large parts of Europe. Herder called folk songs "the true, veritable, characteristic songs of a people," and made a clear distinction between street ballads, art songs, and the popular products of the educated classes. Even if one sees in real folk song, as did Béla Bartók, only the songs of tradition, that is, those songs transmitted orally among the less educated classes (as especially among the peasantry in former times), and if one acknowledges only that product as being real folk song which adapts a new form when transmitted from generation to generation, then we can well assert that this true folk song no longer exists, at least with us. We should not however think of the peasantry as the sole class who cultivated folk song, as Bartók did. Folk song has flourished at all times, even within the compass of urban civilization. In former times, as today, it was created there and was then picked up and transmitted by the country folk. Many popular songs have become the common property of the singing people of all classes, of students, workers, peasants, soldiers and children. A large number of such songs became folk songs mainly during the nineteenth century, even if they differed from the "real" ones through the fact that their poets and composers are known and a "right" version of these songs exists, which even the folk singer must follow.

Such folk songs emerge anew; every epoch produces them and like the "real" folk song they become unfashionable after a certain time and are then forgotten, perhaps in order to be revived and sung again. Also the wealth of songs of the lower classes, especially those of the country people, who are considered the guardians of tradition, is and always was, so far as we know, subject to changing times. This is certain when we consider the wealth of folk songs of the recent past, for example, the songs of Hermann Löns in Germany that were composed at the beginning of this century and set to music by Fritz Jöde, Ernst Licht and others, many of whom have remain anonymous, and that became the common property of a whole generation. These songs doubtless had a folk song character up to the middle of the twenties, but then slowly went out of style. Alongside them the "*Wandervogel- und Jugendbewegung*" produced further songs which played a similar role and met with a similar fate. The same applies to the soldier songs of the first and second world