

Review and Reflections: Music and Dance Traditions of Ghana

by

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Introduction

The music of Africa is an oral tradition that has existed since the beginning of time. Any society that is totally dependent upon oral communication for the transmission of its culture between generations is doomed to failure because of outside interpretation and the breakdown of the human memory over the course of time. Therefore any written documentation on these oral traditions is welcomed. Furthermore, *Music and Dance Traditions of Ghana History, Performances and Teaching* by Paschal Yao Younge (Jefferson, NC: MacFarland & Company, 2011, pp.466) addresses both Ghanaian music and dance, not just the music as other writings offer, and finally it is welcomed because it is written by an African, considering that the primary sources of written literature on African music available to educators of my generation were the writings of missionaries, hence, outside interpretation.

Younge's work is basically divided into seven parts, namely Dance-Drumming of Southeastern Ewes; Dance-Drumming of Central and Northern Ewes; Dance-Drumming of the Gas; Dance-Drumming of the Akans; Dance-Drumming of the Dagbambas; Song and Percussion Scores and Teaching African Music and Dance-Drumming with 404 photos, an eye-catching section of 25 color photos, maps, a glossary, a bibliography, and an index.

Historical Context

The teaching of oral art forms has been of great interest to African people in general, and Ghanaians in particular. It has also been a source of concern as to how to effectively teach it particularly in the Western world because African music is largely percussive, and the Western system of notation does not lend itself to the sounds and nuances of African percussion instruments. Hence, those who have applied the Western system of notation to African instruments have felt its limitations, because African music and dance are not supported by written documentation, and thus they cannot be assessed for validity and do not conform to test which is problematic for courses in African music and dance in the academy.

Retrospectively, in the early seventies in an African music rostrum, held in Ghana, under the aegis of the International Music Council and UNESCO to search for a method to write percussion music so Africans could share their music with other Africans. In this conference there were a number of recommendations put forth to resolve the situation and transfer African music and other aspects of the culture, such as dance, from oral traditions into written documents so African music could take its rightful place in academic institutions. It has been almost forty years since this conference. Therefore, I am looking for follow up evidence on these important recommendations put forth by Ghanaians that effectively preserve and document Ghanaian oral culture for the future.

Accordingly, the Ewe music of Ghana is the foundation upon which the field of ethnomusicology was constructed, and thus there have been more investigations into the Ewe music of Ghana than any other music in Africa. Ghana was the first country south of the Sahara to gain its independence with Kwame Nkrumah as the first president who was important in establishing the University of Ghana in various regions. Hence, Arts Councils were also created under his aegis, and at the University of Ghana at Legon African music and dance was a part of the curriculum which included the offering of a diploma and certificate courses and later degree courses wherein all students had to participate in African studies in order to graduate. Thus, the University of Ghana at Legon became the focal place to study traditional African music and dance.

The visionary behind Ghanaian dance was the late professor Albert Mawere Opoku. He was summoned in 1962 to the University to teach courses on traditional Ghanaian dances as well as to create a national dance ensemble for the country. He did and he was extremely successful with both, and thus a pioneer in African dance education in Ghana and in the United States. He was the first person to establish a program leading to a master's degree in African dance at the State University of New York at Brockport, New York (when he retired and returned to Ghana, the program ceased). Professor Opoku was also a visionary because he recognized that once the dances of Ghana were exposed to the outside world in performance, people would attempt to duplicate them and the dances in turn would be adulterated. Therefore, he brought a personality to Ghana to teach Labanotation, a system for writing dance movements on paper, to preserve the integrity and authenticity of Ghanaian dances.

In the Preface to *Music and Dance Traditions of Ghana History, Performances and Teaching* Younge includes the classification of Ghanaian music as traditional, neo-traditional, western art music which is not too different from the classification of African music first revealed by Akin Euba. Also, Younge confirms that a specific term or word that defines "music" as we know and define it does not exist in the Ewe language. I have often told my students that a definitive word to define 'music' and 'dance' does not exist in a number of African languages. I could not support this allegation with written documentation as the original document that revealed this fact was misplaced. Hence, it was the colonizers who gave us the words 'dance', 'danse, or 'ballet' to define movement to music as dance, and the sounds heard when African instruments were played as 'music' 'muziki' or 'musique'. And of course, there are those in the field who resent the use of the term 'ballet' in the title of a national dance company such as The Guinea Ballet.

Nevertheless, under the organization of musical activities Younge introduces the term 'dance – drumming' that loosely defines dance as movement that accompanies music. There are basically two forms of dance-drumming, one that is specific – linked to religious activity, political or life cycle events, and the other is non-specific – not linked to any specific function, mainly for pleasure, enjoyment and entertainment. I do not know when the term 'dance-drumming' came into existence as part of the glossary to describe Ghanaian dances. In fact, my cultural informants told me that they were banned from participating in musical and dance activities in exchange for Western education.

In Africa dance does not exist without musical accompaniment of some form. Therefore, it would be logical to postulate that prior to 1960 a classification of African music, or African dance did not exist, as courses on African music and dance were not included in institutes of academic learning. My preference is to refer to the writings of early African dancers, musicians and musicologists, such as Keita Fodeba, Maurice Senghor, Francis Bebey, Akin Euba, and Albert Opoku. Keita Fodeba commented that true African dance was a spontaneous emanation of the lives of African people.

Professor Opoku states that dance is the culture of the people. Maurice Senghor said that African dances were created behind a 'happening' or 'event' that the people chose to remember, the subject of which could be general or specific. The movement was then set to the pre-existing rhythm of the people. Thus the music is older than the dance. I mention Senghor and Fodeba because they were Africans, legends of the post-colonial cultural awakening movement. I also mention these two people because they became friends in 1950 and worked together to produce the first national African Dance Company that debuted in France at the Etoile Theater in 1953. This company later became the famous Guinea Ballet. I also mention Maurice Senghor because he was Africa's first theater director as well as the creator of the National Ballet of Senegal, the company that changed the perception, study and performance of African dance, raising it to a new level of acclaim. He achieved this in the inaugural performance at the Brooklyn Academy of Music in October 1971. I watched this performance with jubilation and witnessed the overnight change of African dance.

Classification of African Music

The music controls the dance therefore definitions of dance would be the same as that of African music. Akin Euba classified African music into five sections, which were traditional music, neo-traditional, Westernized pop music, Western pop music and Western 'conservatory' music. From this classification, you will note that there are only two distinct types of African music. Each of the classifications preceded by the word West is exactly that – an import from the Western world that is utilized in Africa. What I like about Euba's classification is that he makes a clear distinction between tradition and neo-traditional and gives examples. Naturally traditional music is the oldest and most widespread form of African music, created in the villages and hamlets of African countries which does not travel far from its place of origin, because other ethnic groups who speak a different language would not understand it. To clarify this point one must understand that African instruments are designed to replicate the spoken speech of the ethnic group. Therefore if you do not speak the language, you would not be able to interpret the language of the drums.

Euba explains that neo-traditions are those presentations that have been taken out of the social context for which they were originally designed. For example, in the case of rites of puberty or initiation, if these presentations are performed on stage, they are no longer traditional, but are now neo-traditions as they have been removed from the social context for which they were designed. Euba places the folk operas of the Yoruba people in this category because although it uses traditional music, it is not utilized in the same context of social ceremony. According to Akin Euba's classification, it is safe to postulate that dances we see in the theater, classroom or in a hotel lobby are not traditional but neo-traditional performances. Another striking fact about Euba's classification is that he firmly relates it to the music and use of African instruments therein.

Consequently, any African ensemble that uses traditional African instruments but combines them with Western instruments such as the guitar, trumpet, or accordion, that particular ensemble drops down another level. Accordingly 'Juju' music and highlife music are included under Westernized pop music. I find the classification of Akin Euba easy to follow and feel it is representative of African music on a continental basis. Over the course of time some selections have been downgraded because the purpose for which they were originally created no longer exists. Dances that were created in preparation for war may no longer exist because the groups are no longer warring, thus these war dances are now used for general recreation.

Ewe Musical Instruments

In this presentation I found the section on Ewe musical instruments particularly illuminating as it presented an array of Ewe instruments, some of which are not commonly known outside Ghana. It is a pity that a large section of students currently studying African dance in the U.S. and the diaspora only know of the Djimbe drum (in this text, the Djimbe or Jembe drum is not part of the Ewe drum ensemble). Yet, I relish the photographs of the instruments as they were taken in their natural habitat. The first instrument described is the Gakogui, also called Gankogui, or Gakpevi, a two-prong bell, the bottom of which is larger than the top bell, a natural sonorous instrument capable of producing a sound when struck. The sound of the larger bell is "Ti" and the sound of the upper bell is called "Go". Thus sometimes the bell is called Tigo. Hence, the sounds used to describe the tone of the bell depend upon the person teaching you. I was taught the sounds "Ting", and "Go", syllables that facilitate the learning of rhythmic patterns when both prongs of the bell are used. For example, when the top bell alone is used the syllables are called Kon-ko-lo. The use of this rhythmic pattern expresses the relationship between each note of the expression in relationship to other notes of the cycle. Thus "Kon" is a long note and "Ko" is a short note, and "Lo" is a long note that follows a short note.

Also, the Axatse rattle is a shaken idiophone that often shares the same rhythmic pattern of the bell with added embellishments. Striking it against the thigh and the inner palm of the upper hand is how the rattle is played. "Pa" was the sound used when the rattle was struck against the thigh. "Ti" was the sound when it was struck against the palm of the upper hand. Kobla Ladzekpo told me that these sounds were derived when candidates were running for office on different platforms- different parties. Thus the sounds "Pa" and "Ti" were derived from the word "party".

Indeed, African instruments are designed to replicate the spoken speech of a given ethnic group. These instruments actually instruct the dancers on what movements to make and when to make them. Therefore, when traditional instruments are combined with non-African instruments, the ensemble loses the ability to instruct the dancer. Consequently these ensembles are reclassified as Western popular music and function on a social and recreational level. The pictures of the Ewe instruments were a welcome addition to the photogravure presented, but the photo of the Kagan drum in figure 1.24 is misleading because it gives the impression that it is a tall drum. In actuality the Kagan drum stands only 23 inches in height. In comparison to photos of the other instruments on the page, the Kagan appears to be as tall as the Sogo drum.

Next, the section of the book on making the drum from chopping down the tree to affixing the skin on the drumhead was appealing. I stress this because the average reader has no idea of the mechanics that constitute the construction of a drum. In my day men were not anxious to show a woman anything about drums, much less about the art of the construction of a drum. I developed the habit of being keenly observant of everything a drummer did. Throughout my research in Africa, when men realized that I had the aptitude for the drums they began to show me things not usually viewed by women. I even learned how to lace the drum. Throughout Africa my preference is the Ghanaian method of affixing the skin to the drum as well as their peg design and lacing the drumhead. When I needed additional pegs I took samples of them to Senegal and asked the carver there to make the pegs. The carver liked the beak-shaped design of the pegs, so I would not be surprised if this style of pegs surface in the Sene-Gambian region.

The Adzogbo Dance

The Adzogbo ritual dance routine comes to Ghana from Dahomey (Benin) originating from the ancient Fon people of that region. This dance was primarily a war dance and has six different parts. It was taught as the Adzogbo, the war dance suite, Adzogbo, the Dahomey dance suite. We learned only two parts “Kadodo” the female part and “Atsia”, or “Atsiawowo”, the male part. I was taught this dance in Ghana by onomatopoeia, because drums were scarce, and the drums I ordered specially made for me had not yet arrived.

My group from Brooklyn College and NYU joined forces to perform this dance at the Brooklyn Academy of Music and at several other venues in the New York area. Our musicians were Ghanaians: Donkor, Adzinah, from Wesleyan, and Kwaku and Kofi Ladzekpo of the famous drumming Ladzekpo family. Obviously we did a blend of Kadodo and Atsia, as we did not have any male dancers in this ensemble. When the drummer played ‘dza-dza’ ‘dza-dza’ ‘dza-dza’, we executed a step where we jumped on both feet going ‘in-out, in-out, in-out.’ This is a word description of a step that may actually be visualized, but I cannot say with any degree of accuracy that this will happen as the reader sees these words on paper. As dance is still largely taught as an oral art form, it is only through knowledge of this dance that one truly knows what action and movements to perform when they hear sounds on the drum.

What is even more exhilarating is the costume worn by the male dancers of Adzogbo. This includes the 'Atsaka' trousers with a white seat'; the Televi, worn on the legs just under the knees; the 'Ala' four tiered layers of raffia like material also worn on the legs. The most impressive part of the male costume is the skirt 'Avlaya' that is made of many layers of cloths of different colors and designs. When the dance was performed here, the male dancers wore as many as twelve layers of cloth. Each of these materials is folded over a single length of cord and is then wrapped around the waist of the dancer. Added to this would be the 'Mafi'- a scarf that covers the chest of the dancer, topped off with a 'Kuku'- a stocking cap worn askew on the head. The male costume of Adzogbo is definitely extremely eye catching and most impressive.

The Agbadza Dance

When many of the Ghanaians relocated to the west coast around 1969/1970, the east coast was left virtually barren of teachers of African music and dance. Some universities had not created courses in African dance. When NYU decided to offer a course in African dance, they asked me for advice, and to assist in Faculty Search. Unable to find a suitable candidate, I was then asked to ask my colleagues in Africa if they wanted the job. Subsequently, I asked my cultural informants and others who had taught me during my research projects throughout Africa. This was not an easy task as a number of my cultural informants spoke only French and were eliminated. Although Ghanaian, Godwin Agbeli was not one of my cultural informants, he was a capable drummer. He responded to the faculty search was successful and eventually he was brought to NYU in February 1972 to teach graduate students.

The Agbadza was the first dance he taught to graduate students at New York University. Learning African dance was a new experience for the majority of the students, because as dancers they harbored certain expectations that were not realistic. I will share more about this when I cover the teaching aspects of African dance. For the first time the dancers would have to learn how to play each instrument of the selection they studied. This was an unusual experience for the dancers because they were never required to play the instruments before. The first instrument was the bell Gankogui that Agbeli often referred to as Gon-go. The rest of the instruments were the rattle (Axatse), and three drums, Kagan, Kidi, and Sogo. Agbeli was a rural teacher, not ensconced in academic ideologies and concepts, thus he would teach the students in the same manner he learned his skills in his village. The students learned each pattern of the music without the benefit of modern technology, no computers or playback from audio tracks, nevertheless, the students did well and were able to successfully perform in end term projects.

In the oral culture, there are several definitions of Agbadza. We learned Agbadza as a “war dance” that came from a larger musical form called ‘Atrikpui’. Essentially as a war dance Agbadza told of the march of the Ewe people who escaped the horrors of the court of ‘Agokoli’. Professor Opoku told me as they marched from Dahomey (Benin) to their present homeland in Ghana, that they passed through many hostile territories. Throughout their trekking, a bird hovered overhead guiding them to safety. In the Agbadza, the movements of the dancer’s arms depict the wings of the bird in flight. This is not too difficult to comprehend when you watch a bird in flight.

We were essentially taught two sections of Agbadza, which were determined by the speed of the bell. The slower version was called ‘Agbadza Kpoka’ and the faster version was named Agbadza ‘Ageshie’. In Africa, I witnessed the Agbadza being performed on a number of occasions, for recreation, and at funerals. Of special note, the photos of Agbadza dancers in the book show the male and female costumes; hence you will notice that the position of the arms of the men is wider than that of the women. As we learned to dance from men, the female dancers have a tendency to use the wider arm position. This arm position is now known as ‘Bekor’ arms. On an intercontinental basis of African dance, the name Bekor arms distinguishes them from ‘Adowa’ arms, ‘Lenjengo’ arms, ‘Sindimba’ arms, ‘Sabar’ arms or ‘Diola’ arms.

In addition, we were taught that Atrikpui is the larger musical form from which the dance Agbadza was derived, and it is interesting to read of the historical background and ceremony, because this writing supports the relationship of dance not only to music, but also to the language of people through songs.

The Atsiagbeko Dance

Godwin Agbeli first introduced the dance Atsiagbekor to dance students at New York University (NYU) in 1972. It was extremely popular with the students who learned to play the instruments as well as dance the movements. There were two versions - slow and fast. We were taught that the slow version represented the processional and that the fast version actually depicted action found in war. Atsiagbekor was popular among the students not only at NYU, but also with other dance students and companies in New York.

Although each of the dancers in the class had to learn to play the bell, rattle and, several drums of this ensemble, Agbeli refused to teach women how to play the master drum Atimevu. He did not say whether it was tradition or his personal bias. The drum (Atimevu) controlled the movements of the dance through various sounds that were originally part of the “drum language” of the Ewe people. The dancers in the class were all female. Furthermore, after much repetitions of his performance on this drum, the students knew the sounds that emanated from the drum and could actually repeat them.

Younge states that Atsiagbekor has five different parts. We learned only two of these parts. The ones that we were not taught were “*hatsiatsia*” (the singing portion of any dance routines in Agbeli’s classes), ‘hatsiatsia’ songs were taught in Kobla Ladzekpo classes at Columbia University. It is difficult to teach songs to those without knowledge of the language, because they would have to be taught how to pronounce the words.

Gahu, Boboobo and Kpanlogo Dance

Gahu is a popular dance during the early seventies that was performed with great frequency in Ghana. Depending upon your cultural informant, there are several definitions of Gahu or Agahu. For example, a marching band preparing to march when suddenly a loud sound came from the sky. The band members looked up and shouted Agahu (Agahu meant “air” – vessel or an airplane which was a vehicle that they not seen before). Another accounting of the origin of Gahu is that the dance originated with the Ewe people who lived in Badagry, Nigeria. Initially fishermen who lived in the village transported this dance to Ghana. Alfred Ladzekpo, one of the Ladzekpo brothers, popularized the version of Gahu or Agahu. The costumes generally worn in this dance are those popularized by the Yoruba people, particularly those that are worn at weddings, such as a buba, agbada, and gele (head gear) and shawl. The women also wear fancy jewelry and sunglasses, hence the outfits of such ceremonies are so expensive, this dance is referred to as the money dance, although today it is often seen as a recreational dance.

Second, Boboobo dance, with accompanying music, depicts the vision of a new dawn and new life as an independent nation, and thus emerged as a new form of musical performance in Africa south of the Sahara after the independence movement. And next, Kpanlogo, a recreational dance that also emerged in the fifties after the independence movement in Ghana is one of the most popular Ga dances. Hence, in the book we see a Kpanlogo dance performed by Dr. Zelma Badu-Younge (she is an excellent dancer and interestingly, she hold a doctorate degree in dance).

Instruments and Photos

Next, the reader is introduced to several instruments not included in the previous section of the book on the southern Ewe people. One of these instruments is the Mba, a pair bamboo strips in the form sticks that are used to clap, and the other is the Kretsiwa, an iron finger castanet which has two parts, an elongated lemon shaped part and an iron ring that is struck against its lemon shaped body. Hence, there are several Ga instruments seen in this section, such as Nono or Ngonon, (a single bell), the Maracas, and the Shekeshe rattle, which is displayed with a scant description and no text.

However, the most celebrated instrument of the Ga, the Gome drum is presented which according to oral history, thus its origin might have been as the ‘Beat’ box that is popular in some parts of several East African and West African countries. And in a positional context, the player of the Gome drum sits on the drum and uses the heels of the feet as well as the palms of the hands to execute the rhythm, and correspondingly, the percussion ensemble consists of the Gome drums, the Tamalin drums, the Apentemma drums, the Shekeshe rattle, and the Maa sticks (I contend that New York audiences are familiar with the Gome drum via Yacub Addy and his Ga ensemble).

Last, I argue that this writing is too important to be lessened by the poor placement of its photographs. For example on page 101, the reader views photographs of the Tamalin, frame drum with only a short description and no text. These photographs would have better served the layout if they were placed on page 103, wherein the description and text could have been written. Yet, in contrast, page 103 contains five lines that refer to the drums previously mentioned, and the balance of the page is blank. However, this volume includes many photographs that portrays Africa at its finest. These images, most obtained from the National Dance Company of Ghana, University of Ghana, are outstanding. And additionally, another exciting aspect of the photographs is that they reveal the different costumes worn by Ghanaians in performance which showcase the traditional dress of Ghana as elaborate and different from that worn in other countries of West Africa in juxtaposition to the realization that dance is a movement that exists in the medium of ‘time and space’, and once you make a photograph of the dance, it freezes the movement in ‘time and space’, absent of music, an essential controller of African dance.

The Akan and their Musical Instruments

One can spend three lifetimes in Africa and never absorb the entire culture of a single ethnic group. In Ghana the Akan people are one of the larger ethnic groups of the region, which consist of sixteen different groups that speak Akan, Fante and Twi. And according to Paschal Younge, we understand that the Akan possess three styles of drumming – signal, speech, and dance; and only in the royal palaces can all three modes of drumming be experienced.

In this section of the book the reader is introduced to the following instruments: Apentemmaa, Petia, Atumpan, Tamalee, and the Donno. Of all the Akan dances, the “Ashanti Adowa”, a funeral dance wherein each movement and gestures of the hands has a specific meaning, it is the most widely taught and celebrated. And although the word “ADOWA” means antelope in the Akan language, the dance itself has nothing to do with an antelope, but it was first a dance that was performed by all-male young Asafo warriors, and subsequently, the Queen mother became interested and ordered women to learn the movements, so they could incorporate them into their funeral lament. Thus, the Akan women became so fluent in the execution of the dance movements, that they eventually took it from the men.

The Ashanti Adowa is widely popular throughout the Akan community not only in Ghana, but also in Cote d'Ivoire (Ivory Coast), a neighboring country that borders on the west coast of Ghana. It is difficult to learn the music of the 'Ashanti Adowa' in the 'open'. Accordingly, the first phrase is the signal that someone has died. Thus people hearing this would cease working in the fields and prepare for the funeral. Still in remote places of Africa, the drum is still used to communicate in the countryside where telephones are few or non-existent.

The mourning dress for the women is a red top over a black bottom with a black head wrap. As established previously, and according to the late professor Albert Mawere Opoku (the architect of the dance curriculum at the University of Ghana at Legon), each gesture has a particular meaning. When the dancers point their fingers toward their eyes, it indicates that they are saying "Do you see the pain, that I see?" Similarly, when the dancer covers her ears with her hands, it indicates a sign of grief. Also of importance is the Sikyi dance, originally entitled Sekyi, a word for beads. Hence, evidence points to the Sikyi as being a dance of courtship wherein the boys expressed interest in girls and their desire to 'court' them in preparation for marriage. This dance was performed with great frequency in the early seventies.

Instruments favored by the Dagomba, the largest ethnic group in the northern region of Ghana who before the introduction of Christianity and Islam held traditional religious festivals are known for the double head drum, and the hourglass drum. Hence, the double-headed drum is known in the Diaspora as Brekete (Gungon) and the hourglass or talking drum is called Donno in the Diaspora and Lunga according to the author. And, there is also a gourd drum known in the Diaspora as "Dali". The Dagomba people also have an assortment of wind and string instruments as well as a woven basket container rattle called 'Syalim'.

Conversely, in Ghanaian culture, women are not allowed to play drums or other instruments even to accompany their own dance such as Tora. Therefore singing becomes the main source of communication. The words of the songs contain human issues such as advice, caution, warning, infidelity, and good parenting. The practice of prohibiting women from playing drums and other musical instruments obviously is changing as the cover of the book displays a photo of a Toro women's recreation dance drumming ensemble. Upon seeing the cover of the book, I recall how the role of women and drumming in the early seventies, wherein women did not routinely drum in Ghanaian societies, and thus, dancing was the primary role for women, not drumming.

The Baamaaya and Jera: Dance and Culture

Bamaaya was the spelling common in the early seventies. The dance is a popular recreation dance of the Dagban of northern Ghana. The philosophy behind this dance depicts the culture of Dagbamba and their attitude toward women. The women of Dagban culture were treated as lesser human beings, which accordingly to the author, has not changed much today. Oral accounts of the origin of Baamaaya (although it was originally entitled Tubankpili, which is a protein dish made from beans and peanuts) indicate that it was first performed as a religious ceremony to appease the land Gods. After the conversion to Islam, a great famine occurred, and thus, the powers that be deemed that as long as men disrespected women, the drought would continue bringing death to many. As legend tells it, the men were ordered to dress like women and dance in front of their wives. They also paraded through the village as public humiliation in an effort to express atonement for decades of poor treatment of their women.

The men would have to construct their own attire. This accounting parallels that told to me by the late professor Albert Mawere Opoku, the person who instituted African dance at the University of Ghana as well as creating the National Dance Company of Ghana in 1962. Continuing via the legend, after days of parading through the streets, the Gods blessed the land with bountiful downpours of rain and the land began to turn green again. Thus, the men continued throughout the rains planting new crops until time, and at the time of harvest, the land was endowed in velvet green and therefore, the elders remarked “Baa –maaya,” indicating that the river is wet again. Today men take pride in their new way of dressing as women. They have made additions to the costume and added new movements to the dance, and the town of Tamale remains the cradle of the Baamaaya dance.

Additionally, the oldest funeral dance among the Dagbamba people is known as Bla. In the Bla dance, the men also wear a brassiere under a blouse. Accordingly, the developmental history of the dance is essential to the understanding of the values, beliefs and attitude towards the role of women in Dagban society. Legend has it that the story of ‘Bla’ focuses on a hunter who, on an expedition, stumbled upon dwarfs mourning the dead. The hunter watched the ceremony and upon his return to his home, he told the story to his children, wherein they begged him to show them the movements of the dance. The children performed the movements to the accompaniment of pots, pans, cans and empty bottles. The children became proficient in the performance of this dance. When an elderly villager died, the hunter’s children reenacted the funeral dance of the dwarfs. Their performance so delighted those in attendance that the dance became part of burial ceremonies. The movements of the dance includes ‘rolling of the waist’, thus the name ‘Bla’ which is a derivative of the phrase ‘bil mana’ which means to roll around. Although ‘Bla’ is performed mainly at funerals, it is also performed on other occasions such as ‘naming ceremonies’, weddings, and official government visits.

Furthermore, the dance “Bla” now uses the Lunga and Gungon drums, although originally ‘Bla’ began with one movement or phase, but it now consists of seven phases with the sixth phase as the ‘Damba’ phase that allows the spirit of the deceased an opportunity to participate for the last time in the celebration, and consequently, the seventh phase is the concluding phase. And also of note, the groups ‘Bla’ and Jakpahi Dan Maligu were discovered in 1992 by the Center for National Culture in Tamale, and thus, this makes one wonder how many other selections of natural culture are lurking in the countryside waiting to be discovered.

Interestingly in this culture, the costume of the dance has an intriguing history. Kurugu, a large baggy pants are worn, belted with a layer of six yards of cloth via men in a lady’s blouse and brassiere. This practice stems back to the Dagbamba tradition that women are inferior to men and did not possess the stability, and vigor to dance Bla, a male dance. As the original celebration of Bla as performed by the dwarfs, it involved both sexes, thus, women could not be left out. However, it is reported that in recent years the role towards women among the Dagbamba has changed, and therefore, women who have the strength and stamina are now being allowed to perform.

The origin of the ‘Jera’ dance is another dance clouded in the mythical story emanating from dwarfs that was discovered by a hunter. This time it was a hunter named Nanjaa who only hunted at night. One night he came upon dwarfs entertaining themselves. Nanjaa hid and watched the performance. He gradually learned the dance, and drumming. As he could not understand the language, he managed to memorize some of the melodies. After the dwarfs finished their routine and put their instruments away, Nanjaa entered their quarters and stole the drums and a set of costumes, which he brought back to his village. He gathered his people and demonstrated the movements as he told the story of this new dance he discovered. The chief of the village remarked that ‘Jera’ was a fool’s’ dance. The Jera dance soon spread to other villages. It was first performed at wakes of deceased elders or hunters, but now it is performed at other social events including the installation of chiefs. Women are allowed to perform the dance but without costume. There are seven phases to the dance, and the instruments used to accompany Jera include ‘Gungon’, the double headed cylindrical laced drums, ‘Luna’, the hourglass or tension drum, ‘Sayalim’ (siyalim), a pair of basket container rattles, ‘Fienna’, a castanet that is similar to the Akan ‘Adawura’ (Dawuro); ‘Dawule’, a double bell, and Yua, a wooden notched flute.

Nevertheless, the description of the dance described the author is not comprehensible. Not everyone reading this description would draw the same conclusion as to the actual movement. Dance cannot be defined by word descriptions, particularly when the movements do not have an established vocabulary that defines each movement. Hence, even the established vocabulary is insufficient to define the movements in its totality; therefore, dance notation can solve this problem.

And contextually, this is a recreational dance of the Dagbamba women of Northern Ghana, although its exact origin is somewhat obscure. Yet, this writing reveals three possible origins of the dance. I am more familiar with the second version wherein the royal princes of the palace danced Takai in full regalia of fancy smocks, and fancy leather boots. Hence, the women wanted to be part of this lavish ceremony and performed it alongside the princes as they dance Takai, and thus, the female routine became known as Toro with the principal part of the dance being clapping and the bumping of their buttocks against that of another female dancer.

Songs and Percussion Scores

This section of the book is in reference to songs that are based on the indigenous languages spoken by the different ethnic groups in Ghana and other African nations that is in some respects is part of a linguistic divide or language barrier that complicates Africa because in general, there is no single language common to all people on the continent. Hence, having a single language that the majority of the people speak in is not the situation in Ghana.

Nevertheless, in some locations, language is not a divide. For example, when I was creating plans to establish a Pan-African facility in Senegal, singing and songs was the last subject incorporated in my course of study, and thus it was possible to include a comprehensive program to teach songs, as they would be in the vernacular Wolof, because Senegal speaks Wolof as a national language wherein greater than 95% of the people speak the language, regardless of their ethnic heritage. This is important because in Africa dance is based upon the music and thus the music is based upon the spoken language of the people. And most important, music and dance have been successfully transferred from oral to written traditions through a system that has bypass the linguistic divide, although the same has not been done for languages which hinders progress.

The Percussion Ensembles

As is true of most African music, there is no standard written notation for Ghanaian dance drumming. (p.317)

I wholeheartedly disagree with the above statement because the transfer of the oral traditions of music and dance has been discussed and debated in Ghana for decades. Under the aegis of the International Music Council, and the African Music Council and U.N.E.S.C.O., formal recommendations were put forth for this transfer.

Accordingly, the visionary Professor Opoku brought Labanotation to the University of Ghana in the mid-sixties (for example, the works of Georgette Gorchoff via http://www.hyperactivesw.com/solutions_artsuite.html has demonstrated the use of Labanotation with *Lifeforms*, a system that gives a moving image of the movement). For several years the students studied writing Ghanaian dances. In the early seventies, Greenotation was introduced to the continent of Africa. Hence, Greenotation has been taught at the University of Ghana Legon campus, and both Labanotation and Greenotation have been available for forty to fifty years, and furthermore, the O.A.U. has approved the work for inclusion in all schools and colleges in Africa.

The author cannot deny the existence of Labanotation and Greenotation, as they are part of the scholarship in the field. The reason the author is not a practitioner in the technology, is because he has not availed himself of opportunities to learn this craft. Hence, a newspaper article on teaching students at the University of Ghana how to write music and dance on the computer is available at: http://web.me.com/dorisgreen/African_traditions/African_Newspapers.html. And also, Greenotation and Labanotation are considered as the standard methods of written notation. Students at the University of Ghana, the National Dance Ensemble of Ghana and the Noyam Dancers of the Ghana State Theater have successfully applied Greenotation and Labanotation to the selection Tokoe (see http://web.me.com/dorisgreen/African_traditions/The_Future.html, a sample of their work via the music and dance performed by Ghanaians).

Several students who participated in the above program have appeared on Ghanaian National Television. This broadcast allowed Ghanaian viewers to witness the latest technology in transferring music and dance from oral traditions into written traditions. Correspondingly, this work was done in an attempt to establish an archive of written notation of African music and dance that is direly needed throughout the continent of Africa.

In addition, the outstanding features of Greenotation and Labanotation are that they are not only applicable to the music and dance of Ghana but they are also universal in scope wherein they can notate both music and dance of all African nations. For example in a *You Tube* presentation (<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wnTJwPWXK8c>) on Greenotation students in the Long Island area of NY who studied with me perform the dance Sabar from Senegal as a part of a show to highlight the achievements of Black women for Black History Month and Women Month in 2011.

And notwithstanding, another outstanding feature of Greenotation (<http://www.freewebs.com/onlyonlineexhibitions/greenotation.htm>; <http://www.dorisgreen.org>) is that it can be applied to a variety of instruments, not only drums, bells and rattles. These are some of the instruments included in the system; music boxes, xylophones, single head and double headed drums, clappers, tension drums, stones, castanets, gourds, calabash rattles and even water drums. As a high school student I wrote my first drum strokes using Pitman stenography. You can follow the development of the creation of Greenotation in my autobiography *No Longer an Oral Tradition: My Journey Through Percussion Notation* (http://web.me.com/dorisgreen/African_traditions/Review_p1.html).

These systems have been around for almost fifty years and have been applied to the music and dance of more than twenty nations. Legends of the post-colonial cultural awakening era, from Tanzania to Senegal have praised this work. Some of these people are the late Professor A.M. Opoku of Ghana; the late Timi of Ede, Oba Adetoyese Laoye; the late Duro Ladipo of Nigeria; the late Maurice Sonar Senghor of Senegal, as well as the Ladzekpo family and Professor J.H.K. Nketia.

Conclusion

I began this review essay by stating the reasons I applaud this outstanding publication. After reading it I also stated that the majority of the dances captured in book are known to the dancing populace within the tri-state area of New York, thanks to Ghanaians who came to the U.S. as students, in the fifties and sixties, and shared their culture with us. Thus, particular credit goes to the Ladzekpo family, namely Kobla Ladzekpo, Alfred Ladzekpo and later Kwaku and Kofi Ladzekpo. I applaud them because they did not exaggerate their culture. I studied with Kobla Ladzekpo before going to Ghana. The first time I arrived in Ghana I could actually sit in and play with the musicians, which shocked some of the musicians because women, at that time, (the early seventies) did not drum, nor were they taught drumming. Their role was strictly 'dance'. In Ghana I met other members of the Ladzekpo family such as C.K. Ladzekpo, and overall, I was pleased to be in Ghana because a) it was the first country in Africa to gain its independence in 1957, b) the first country in Africa to establish African music and dance as courses in the curriculum, first on a diploma and certificate basis and later as degreed programs, c) it laid down the 'floor plan', the pattern, for the comprehensive study of African oral culture, namely music and dance, for all other colleges and universities to follow, d) it commanded a leadership role in education in music and dance throughout the international community, particularly, seeking ways to transfer African music from an oral tradition to a written tradition. Consequently, certain recommendations for the realization of the transfer from oral to written traditions were implemented, and e) before Ghana's effort it was thought that oral traditions, music and dance cannot be assessed nor tested and therefore not considered valid courses in academia (this is why it is imperative that the recommendations put forth by Ghana in the early seventies be followed through)

Much to my chagrin, the writings of Paschal Yao Younge do not fulfill the recommendations that Ghana set forth and deemed vital to the survival and acceptance of these oral traditions into the academic community. With all the technology that exists today, it is a pity that he chose to continue with the 'missionary' approach to writing music for percussion instruments that has long proved itself ineffective. In contrast, technology exists to transfer dance from an oral tradition into written document so it can be written, so dance can take its rightful place in academia. I was somewhat surprised that the traditional dances, Sebre, Naagla, Dipo and Tokoe, that were popular in the seventies, were not mentioned in this book.

In the case of African dance, there is absolutely nothing that reflects even an attempt to transfer dance into a written document. I found this disconcerting because it was the late Professor Albert Mawere Opoku who created the National Dance Ensemble of Ghana, as well as being the first person recruited specifically to teach African dance at the University of Ghana. It was he who brought Odette Blum to the campus to teach Labanotation not only to preserve the authenticity of African dance, but also to transfer the dance into written documents, and thus usher them into perpetuity.

Overall, Paschal and Zelma Younge are both excellent performers, and I found the book to contain a wealth of knowledge on the history of the different dances. But as a text that transfers music and dance from oral to written traditions, it ignores the technology that has been in use in Ghana and other countries for decades. Second, when Younge interrupts the fluidity of reading by describing the nature of the rainfall and tropical vegetation in certain parts of Ghana, he could have eliminated or substituted that by instead, introducing a sentence describing the various ways the Ewe people earn a living according to their ecological niche within the environment.

As I read this work, I reflected on the fact that I have studied, researched and learned about music and dance on the continent of Africa from Tanzania to Senegal, and that essentially, the best way to learn the music and dance is the natural way as the Africans learn it as a rhythmic emanation of their lives, hence learning it naturally as part of a rhythmic experience of the African ethos (see an aspect of this rhythmic African experience at http://www.youtube.com/watch?feature=player_embedded&v=IVPLIuBy9CY). Consequently, it also would be interesting to see if some of the precedents Professor Opoku established as the foundation of dance in education have been absorbed and carried forward as an established practice.

Undoubtedly, African people will be the ultimate task force that will conduct the lion share of the gathering and collection of dances from their villages and hamlets as they are best equipped to do it. Africans know the language, people and terrain, and once trained in systems of notation, they can rapidly harness these dances and music to be written, checked and catalogued. Thus Africa would have an enormous archive of written notated scores of traditional music and dance that can be read and performed from a print source. Textbooks can be written giving African music and dance the scientific basis it formerly lacked, and then it will take its rightful place as a valid course of study in academia, because it can be properly assessed and tested. At that time, the world will be able to appreciate the wealth of African music and dance.