

RESEARCH IN PROGRESS

by JoSandra Jones*

BACKGROUND:

In conjunction with my graduate studies in African Music at Columbia University in New York, I have spent the academic year 1971-72 engaged in research work at the Institute of African Studies, University of Ghana under the guidance of Professor Nketia, the Director of the Department and one of the most outstanding musicologists in the field.

The topic of my research is "The Relationship of Emerging Contemporary African Music to the Social Changes in Contemporary Ghana". Owing to the predominantly historical approach that I have adopted, I have subtitled the topic, "The Situation of Traditional African Music in Contemporary Ghana".

RATIONALE:

In order to understand the music of any culture, one must be cognizant of the organization and significance of its elements. These elements such as the 'symbols', 'symbolic methods' and 'symbolic meaning' constitute a body of ideas and principles that I chose to refer to as the 'symbolism' of a musical culture. Although the 'symbolism' changes from one culture to another, one finds that in western culture, the *classical-art music* style tends to dictate standards for the *traditional folk music* styles. Since music in the African culture lends itself well to the 'traditional folk music style' rather than the 'classical-art music style', consequently many assumptions about African music have been made through generalizations based on western standards. For example, most western societies designate the rhythmic quality of African music as "barbaric" and since the term "barbaric" denotes "an uncivilized state" the assumption was that African music was primitive.

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Although many musicologists have attacked some of these earlier negative assumptions usually through the analytical and theoretical approach, there is an increasing demand for knowledge about the evolution of African music from the historical and developmental approach considering the 'symbolism' of music in an African culture. This study purports to address that demand.

Since one of the most outstanding characteristics of 'music in the African culture' appears to be the aspect of its interaction between musical structure and social use, I have focused my research study on the 'changing musical culture in Ghana in relation to three social institutions, the church, the school and the community. I have divided the topic into three parts:

Part I* — The Influence of the Christian Church and its Western music on Traditional African Music.

Part II* — The Influence of the Christian Mission Schools on the Practice of Traditional Music.

Part III* — The Effects of Industrialisation and urbanization on the Musical Culture in Contemporary Ghana.

OBJECTIVES:

1. To define the 'symbolism' of Traditional African Music in Ghana, i.e. to identify Ghanaian musical standards.
2. To investigate whether or not there is a relationship between the state of traditional music and the social changes in the contemporary society in Ghana.
3. To expose the state of traditional music in relation to the social changes owing to the influence of Christianity, the 'symbolism' of Western music, and the effects of urbanization.
4. To investigate, define, and analyze the emerging musical forms in the contemporary musical culture.

* I presented a seminar paper on this topic to the Institute of African Studies on May 17, 1972. A copy of this paper may be found in the Institute Library and a taped recording of the musical examples may be found in the Tape Archives.

5. To state the problems incurred by the changing role of music in these new social institutions.

6. To suggest solutions to the problems incurred by these new social institutions such as the night club, theatre, and dance hall, and other new settings for musical innovations in the contemporary society.

METHODS:

Investigation of this topic is based on data collected by the following means:

1. Personal interviews with music students, music teachers, composers, musicologists, and musicians in orchestras, dance bands, and choirs.

2. Tape recordings of traditional and contemporary music at festivals, churches, schools, night clubs, and theatres.

3. Reference to existing literature obtained from the Institute of African Studies Library, Balme Library, Ministry of Information Library, Ministry of Education, Research Library on African Affairs, and Ghana Broadcasting Corporation Gramophone Library and Tape Archives.

4. Surveys and opinion polls on music conducted by distribution of questionnaires.

I am presently engaged in a statistical analysis of the following four types of questionnaires:

1. "A Survey on the Practice of Traditional African Music in Ghanaian Christian Churches".

This questionnaire was sent to 200 Christian Churches in Ghana; Catholic, Presbyterian, Methodist, and Anglican. Although the Apostolic Churches were not included in the questionnaire-survey, they will be included in the study through investigation based on personal visits, interviews, and tape recordings of music.

2. "A Survey on the use of Traditional African Music in the Education Programmes in Secondary Schools and Teacher Training Colleges in Ghana"

300 copies of these forms were distributed in this area in January to Secondary Schools and Colleges.

3. "An Opinion Poll on the Musical Tastes and Musical Practices of Ghanaian University Students".

1,000 copies of this questionnaire form were distributed to students at the University of Ghana in February, 1972.

4. "An Opinion Poll on the Musical Tastes and Musical Practices of Literate Ghanaians in Urban Centres".

1,000 copies of this form were circulated during the months of March and April, 1972; 500 in Accra, 300 in Kumasi, and 200 in Sekondi-Takoradi

Since one of the objectives of this survey was to collect data from a cross-section of the population based on occupations, forms were distributed to the following types of workers: professional, commercial, civil servants, skilled factory workers, traders, and labourers.

TENTATIVE CONCLUSIONS:

At present only the first questionnaire on "The Practice of Traditional African Music of Ghanaian Christian Churches" has been tallied and calculated.

Of the 200 questionnaires distributed, 61 were returned. Statistical analysis revealed that 18 or 29 per cent of the 61 churches use traditional African music in their regular church services.

According to the current census report in Ghana, Christianity is the predominant religion. Christians take up 42.8 per cent of the entire population as compared with 38.2 per cent followers of the indigenous traditional religions. Statistics show that the proportion of Christians in the urban centres is 60 per cent compared to the 16 per cent traditional adherents in cities.

Therefore if one considers these factors in addition to the low percentage of traditional African music practised in the Christian Churches, one could conclude that the percentage of the population that participates in traditional religious music will decrease as urbanization extends itself and Christian adherents increase in Ghana.

In addition to such conclusions based on statistical analysis, I hope to determine more definitely what elements constitute 'the African approach' to music, what elements are left out, and what elements constitute the 'symbolism' of the contemporary musical culture. Also a comparison of emerging contemporary African music to Ghanaian society could lead to new assumption about African society as well as provide objective tests for new theories based on the 'symbolism' of music in an African culture.