

PRODUCED AND RECORDED BY VERNA GILLIS



ETHNIC FOLKWAYS RECORDS FE 4257

Traditional Women's Music From Ghana

EWE • FANTI • ASHANTI • DAGOMBA



COVER DESIGN BY RONALD CLYNE

ETHNIC FOLKWAYS RECORDS FE 4257

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Traditional Women's Music From Ghana

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DESCRIPTIVE NOTES ARE INSIDE POCKET

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WOMEN'S MUSIC FROM GHANA

Produced and Recorded by Verna Gillis

The following Introduction and Notes were written by Francis
A. Kobina Saighoe

INTRODUCTION

In traditional Ghanaian societies (as in other societies of Africa) music is organized, almost always, as part of social events. Because music making is prompted by social activities, the contextual as well as the structural organization of most musical types is determined by the type of social activities that evoke the music. While musical activities are determined by social events, individuals for whom the activities are organized form the basis for the organization of those activities. There are types of music in which every member of the community may participate; these include music performed in connection with annual festivals like apoo of the Brong-Ahafo people, kundum of the Ashanti and homono of the Ga. Participation in other categories of music is restricted by age and sex, the two factors that are the most common basis for the organization of music in traditional African societies.

There are specific types of songs and music for children in general; of course the contents of such performances differ from one area to another. These include music incorporated into children's games, children's stories and music performed in the context of corrective rituals and ceremonial rites for children. Children's musical activities may further be subdivided on the basis of sex. There are some musical performances in which boys and girls participate separately: didactic songs used in circumcision and other initiation rites for boys, for instance, are not meant to be sung by girls; nor can boys participate in the music performed in connection with puberty rites organized to teach girls of nubile age the craft of motherhood.

Most musical activities, however, are organized for and performed by adults. These may be subdivided by sex, as in the case of children's music, a distinction may also be made between those performances in which individuals - men and women - may participate because of their interest, religious affiliations, or social and/or political obligations.

Music performed by men only include special communal songs or music of co-operative work groups, music of warrior groups, and beer drinking and hunting songs.

Some of the diverse activities for which the musical activity will be organized by women include puberty rites for young women. Among the

Akan, for example, songs and drumming performed as accompaniment to this ceremony are restricted to adult women. In these songs which are sung for joy, and which are meant to advise the young women for whom the ceremony is organized, references are made to the duties and expectations of a mother. Rites for healing the sick or for correcting certain mental disorders are also performed by women who sing special songs and accompany themselves on rattles and drums. Most musical activities - performed in celebration of various landmarks in an individual's life cycle: birth, puberty, marriage and death etc., are generally performed by women.

The selections on this recording are all examples of music performed by women. Men and children may go to the arena of performance to enjoy the music but they are not expected to actively participate in them. They may not, for example, play musical instruments, sing in the chorus nor be in the dance circle. However, if a man is moved by the performance of a musician or dancer, he may, for example, step into the ring, dance a few steps and offer the performer a gift of appreciation.

Side One

Band 1 Ewe (recorded in Have Etoe) - Akayevi Dance Group. Gabada.
Instruments: Akayevi (small maraccas); Asiwuga and Asiwuvi drums; Tamale (frame drum); two Dawuro (slit bells)

Gabada is a popular recreational music performed among the northern Ewe peoples of the Volta Region of Ghana. It is also known to be performed in some regions of the Republic of Togo. Gabada is performed exclusively by adult women who may be in some kind of associative relationship. As a recreational art form, Gabada is played to entertain, though it may also be performed at funerals in honor and memory of a deceased member, a patron, or for someone who may have demonstrated great interest in the activities of the band. On such occasions the themes of the songs may praise the good deeds of the deceased and/or express messages of sympathy and condolence to the bereaved.

Another occasion that evokes the performance of Gabada is the appearance of the full moon. The members of the band perform Gabada drumming, singing and dancing - to enliven life in the community.

To the northern Ewe the significance of Gabada lies in the avenue it provides the participant for expressing community sentiments, personal thoughts, feelings, as well as personal experiences. In this band the women sing about their poor financial conditions. "Nyeya medo ko loo!"
* * * * *

Band 2 Ewe (recorded in Have Etoe) Akayevi Dance Group. Gbolo - Marriage Songs. After the day's work, the women get together to entertain themselves through the performance of music. Before they come out into the open square these women tightly tie their hand-woven "cover-cloths" around their midriff, just a little bit above their breasts and over their care-

Band 2 Ashanti (recorded in Huntaado) - Using bamboo markers to accompany themselves the members of a recreational band in Huntaado sing to entertain themselves. The song is about unfaithful women, lazy women and about men who shirk their paternal responsibilities.
* * * * *

Band 3 - Dagarti (recorded in Kumasi) As a strategy for coping with the uncertainties of the complex social life, Dagarti immigrants in Kumasi emphasize ethnic identity, particularly through music which is used as a focus of interaction: the performance of music provides forums for sharing each other's concerns and for reaffirming their Dagarti identity. The activities of such socio-musical gatherings usually revolve around xylophone music. Being the principal instrument of musical expression, the xylophone is almost always the lead instrument in an ensemble.

Since women do not play the xylophone, Dagarti women in Kumasi can only simulate xylophone rhythmic patterns when they get together to make music in the absence of their men. Here they sing about men who foolishly spend too much money and they accompany themselves by hitting the cloth on their dresses between their legs to produce the rhythms. By stretching the two legs apart at varying degrees, different tensions are produced in the part of the dress that spans the thighs. When the stretched dress is hit with folded cloth different tones are produced. These tones are then organized to simulate xylophone rhythmic patterns.

Notes on the Dagomba written by Jacqueline Cogdell DjeDje, Ph.D.
University of California, Los Angeles, January, 1981

Dagomba Selections - Introduction

The Dagomba have been settled for a fairly long time in their present area of habitation in northern Ghana. The rulers are believed to have migrated into the area from the northeast conquering the indigenous stateless people around the fifteenth century A.D. Although a large number still participate in traditional religious practices, most Dagomba have been converted to Islam. The primary means of subsistence is agriculture. Men normally do the bulk of the work, clearing land and taking charge of cash crops, while women are responsible for the cultivation of garden crops and render assistance in large fields. Females also take part in market-trading where some have full control or a semi-monopoly for some products. Along with polygyny, a partilineal system of descent, inheritance and succession is used.

Dagomba women do not participate equally in political, economic, and social institutions. Besides work activities discussed in the foregoing, their primary responsibility is to do household chores and care for children. Moreover, it is rare to find a female who is able to read and write.

The role and status that women have in traditional Dagomba society is reflected in their music activities, for they do not have a primary responsibility for music-making or other fine arts. Rather, they fre-

quently accompany or assist men. In spite of these limitations, there are special occasions at which women are generally the only participants, except when drum, string, or wind instruments are played. In addition, courting songs, lullabies, and music sung by mothers to older children for recreation and educational purposes are performed. Also, music is commonly used during work activities, not only to make the endeavor less monotonous but to increase efficiency. For example, singing to accompany the grinding of corn or pounding of pestles in a mortar occurs daily.

The types of instruments women perform also gives an indication of their position in society. The most respectable instrumental types such as membranophones, chordophones, and aerophones are all reserved for men. The gourd rattle, which is not very highly regarded among the Dagomba, is the only one women are known to play. Usually, the idiophone functions as an accompaniment to the major instruments. Yet, even this role is not exclusive, for both males and females play the rattle in performances of one string fiddle music.

Music-making produced by Dagomba women is primarily done spontaneously for personal enjoyment. never for economic reasons or to gain acknowledgment from the community. The examples included on this recording demonstrate the some-what informal and recreational atmosphere that is usually found at such occasions.

Band 4 - Dagomba (recorded in Tamale) "Ooi yaada." Marriage song. Female singing and handclapping. One double-headed hourglass pressure drum (lunga) played by a male.

The marriage ceremony (called Moni in Dagbani) is an important event in the life of a Dagomba woman, for she has trained and prepared for this role since childhood. As early as the age of four or five, she imitates adults in play on how to do routine tasks that will be required of her as a married woman. The ceremony, therefore, is an elaborate occasion that extends over several weeks of in some cases a few days. Several different events make take place before and after the marriage ritual --some for the bride and her female companions, others for the bride and groom with family and community members present. Except for the male who plays the lunga drum, the musical selection presented here is attended only by females.

The leader begins briefly introducing in an elaborate fashion the melodic material that will be used as the chorus ostinato. The chorus then enters in unison restating more simply its repetitive 18-beats (three time lines) statement. This call and response form between vocal leader and chorus continues throughout the performance. In subsequent passages, however, the leader does develop other new material, which extends anywhere from three to eleven time lines. A six beat handclapping pattern (♩ ♪ ♪ ♪), which constitutes the basic time line or rhythm ostinato, also serves as the unit upon which the drummer performs his variations. Ululations, a vocal technique commonly used by the Dagomba, are heard periodically and the melodic material is based on a pentatonic scale.

fully adjusted outer garments. The cloth is worn in such a way that the legs of the women are exposed to show the beautiful beads on their knees and ankles.

Then to the accompaniment of drum rhythms and handclapping, the women sing about their marriages, about other relationships between men and women, and about the type of men they adore. In this section we hear the performers praising women who do not bear children without first getting married. They also ridicule women who are in some kind of "immoral" relationships with men. It is asserted that women whose relationships with men are not "officially" acknowledged go to their lover's homes through the back door.

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Band 3 Ewe (recorded in Have Etoe) Akayevi Dance Group Aviha - Funeral Dance for Women. The Logba people of Northern Eweland speak Logba and Ewe as their first and second languages respectively. Available evidence, however, indicates that the Logba sing music of their mourning songs in Ewe, their second language, and demonstrate a strong competence in it. Why they do not sing these songs in their first language has not yet been explained. According to most Logba people their Gods forbid them from singing mourning songs in Logba.

Aviha in Ewe literally means "weeping song". Aviha, therefore is performed mostly at funerals and on memorial occasions for important and respectable figures of the community. Though it may not be performed outside such contexts, individuals may sing Aviha in private in remembrance of dead relatives. The performance of Aviha creates an atmosphere of solemnity which helps individuals to express their grief for the dead and to identify with the bereaved family. On funeral and memorial days women parade the streets singing aviha and making stops every now and then at the appropriate places to inform the members of the community of the occasion.

As songs for mourning, most of the themes of the texts are based on death and the havoc it does to individuals and their families and the community at large. Hence in this song we hear the women sing:

The snail has bitten me
And my enemies are laughing.
Grandsir, mother, the snail has no teeth,
Yet it has bitten me.

That these songs are sung in Ewe may be an indication that the Aviha tradition is Ewe in origin and was borrowed by the Logba people as a result of some kind of social interchange between the two groups. Interestingly, however, the Logba claim to be the originators of the "genre".

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Band 4 - Fanti (recorded in Cape Coast) Adzewa Women's Group. Adzewa. Instruments: - Mfobah (gourds) Ampae drum. Adzewa is the Fanti variation of adowa a graceful dance-music of the Ashanti people. Though it was formerly performed at funerals, today it is performed on other ceremonial and festive occasions. Adzewa features prominently in the installation of chiefs and on occasions of naming ceremonies and marriage.

Membership which is predominantly female is open to both young and

old. On festive occasions, however, participation by the entire community is highly encouraged. Since it is social music the themes for the song-texts cover a wide spectrum of subjects. The verbal contents of the songs may allude to love, kindness, respect and obedience for old age as well as covering the history of the community.

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Band 5, 6, 7 - Fanti (recorded in Cape Coast) Abibindwom - Fanti lyrics. Until recently the management of Christian churches and their activities in Ghana was in the hands of European missionaries. These missionaries forbade their converts from practising African indigenous musical traditions both outside and inside the church - on the grounds that African music was primitive and satanic. Christian worship, therefore, emphasized the singing of hymns and anthems which were western in content, structure, and texture. Local priests and laymen were trained to translate hymns into local languages and soon Ghanaian Christian-musicians were writing hymn tunes to which texts in their "natural" tongues were set.

In the last century Fanti women of the Methodist Church departed from this practice and created a new musical style. Abibindwom (Fanti lyrics) as the new sacred music came to be called, was organized, as illustrated by this piece of music, in traditional Fanti singing styles: overlapping call-and-response-patterns created by the alternation of two lead singers above a chorus that sings a short refrain repeatedly. Sometimes the alternation is between a soloist and chorus. Usually the more melodious refrain is preceded by a declaimed passage.

This new style of singing at worship gained popularity with other Christian churches and came to be adopted by many of them; its influence was particularly strong on the music of the syncretic Christian churches that sprang up in the early part of the present century. Despite the Africanness of the musical contents and structure, the texts of these lyrics are almost always based on biblical texts. This song first tells the story of the offering of Isaac to God by his father, Abraham, and then goes on to laud the mightiness of the power of God.

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Side 2

Band 1 Ashanti - (recorded in Domenasi). Instruments: Frikyiwa (an idiophone consisting of two pieces: a metal ring worn on the thumb and a small round bell constructed to be worn on the middle finger); Dawuro (metal bell); Nnawuta (double bell). In many Ghanaian societies the appearance of the full moon provides occasion for musical performances. In villages where there are established bands, the leader summons the women of the band to the village square to perform music and dance to entertain themselves and the community. If there is no formerly organized recreational group, friend call one another to the square to sing, drum and dance. This song is sung by a woman's group of Domenasi to entertain themselves. The song is on praise of men:

It is true that real men are not easy to come by
When I give birth to my first child it will be a male
Who will give me a befitting burial on my death.

Band 5 - Dagomba (recorded in Tamale) "Sibere sibere" Courtship dance and "Tora rori yamba " Courtship dance. Female singing and handclapping. One double-headed hourglass pressure drum (lunga) played by a male.

Among the Dagomba, courting songs provide lively entertainment for the young. Such music is often performed just for the enjoyment of females without males being present. Girls also want to practice their steps before actually dancing with male partners. A popular courtship dance in Dagbon, called "Tora," is characterized by the touching of the buttocks by two partners on specified beats. The music included here are examples of songs used for the accompaniment of such a dance. This is noticeable by the handclapping rhythm, which is strongly accented on two beats (points when the buttocks are touched) within the 12-beats time line. Along with handclapping, the drummer provides percussive accompaniment by repeating and developing his rhythmic ostinato.

In both songs a call and response form is used. In example of "Sibere sibere" the lead part is alternated between two singers both of whom introduce improvisatory material of varying lengths, while the second is performed by one leader. A repetitive statement is sung by the chorus in both examples. The melody of the response part in example A is very simple consisting of only two notes; however the music is organized into two patterns (see Figure 1). Each of these chorus patterns is used for different purposes. About two or three times during a solo passage, the leader briefly pauses before continuing with her statement. Chorus pattern 1 then can be considered as "fill-in" material that is performed when these short pauses take place. On the other hand, chorus pattern 2 is used after the leader has completed her solo passage. She breaks for at least one time line (12 beats) to indicate that this part of the song has been completed and uses the time to think or create new improvisatory textual material.

In the second part the chorus begins, abruptly ending the first courting song. The response is initially sung in parallel fifths but later changed to a unison melody (see Figure 2).

An anhemitonic pentatonic scale is used in both songs, and ululation is heard throughout the two performances.

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Band 6 - Dagomba (recorded in Tamale) "Mbia cheli vuri yee yee." Lullabye. Female singing and handclapping.

Normally, when one thinks of the lullabye, it is the situation where a mother sings to comfort her own child. Oftentimes, the lullabye is sung not by the mother but a female relative or friend who is not even related to the infant. The latter situation is the case with this example, for parts of the song text indicate that it is not the mother who is doing the singing. Rather, we hear the sitter attempting to comfort the child by explaining why the mother is absent.

Chorus: Mbia cheli vuri yeeyee
Child stop crying

Verse: Ama daa chenla tindamba yiri.

Your mother is gone to the house of the earth priest.

The lullabye presented here has been performed as a social song, totally out of context. In a call and response form, the leader begins by introducing the chorus ostinato. The chorus follows, restating its 12-beats repetitive melody. Occasionally, multipart singing is heard when some members perform a fifth above the response melody but rejoin the group in unison during the middle of the statement (see Figure 3).

A tetratonic scale is used and handclapping is performed in groups of four beats (d. d. d. d.). As usual, ululation is heard during the course of the song.

Figure 1.

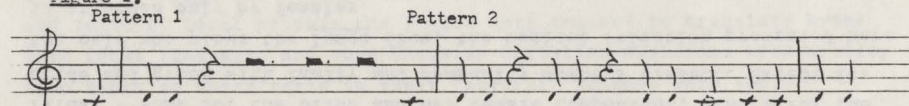


Figure 2.

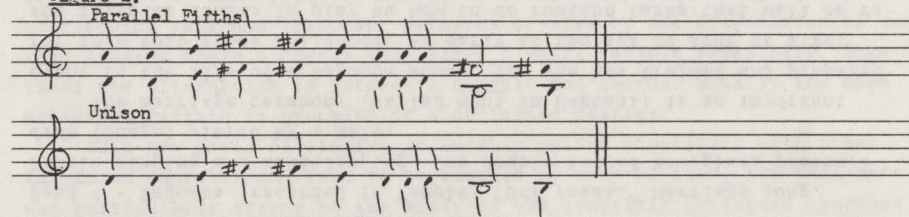
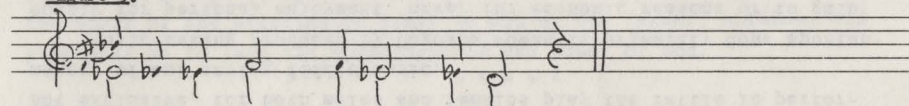


Figure 3.



Recorded in 1976 by Verna Gillis, International Woman's Year
Field assistants - David M. Perez Martinez, and Ramon D. Perez Martinez
Edited by Verna Gillis
Notes by Francis A. Kobina Saighoe and Jacqueline Cogdell Dje Dje, Ph.D.
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Dedicated to Frieda Nieburg Gillis, M.D., an international woman for all
years. * * * * *