

Recording organized by Michael Verdon,  
with the technical assistance of Larry Christopherson



ETHNIC FOLKWAYS RECORDS FE 4258

# Songs of War from the Slave Coast

ABUTIA-KLOE

EWE



THE ASAFO BAND

COVER DESIGN BY RONALD CLYNE

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# Songs of War from the Slave Coast

## SIDE 1

Band 1 Asafovhu—war drumming  
Band 2 Asafovhu—war drumming  
Band 3 Adevhu—hunters' drumming

## SIDE 2

Band 1 Adevhu—hunters' drumming  
Band 2 Irovhu—drumming to the gods  
Band 3 Irovhu—drumming to the gods

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# Songs of War from the Slave Coast

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DESCRIPTIVE NOTES ARE INSIDE POCKET

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## SONGS OF WAR AND DEATH FROM THE SLAVE COAST.

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The Ewe people occupy the southeastern part of Ghana and the southern part of Togo, which was formerly known as the Slave Coast, because of the infamous trade to which it was intimately linked. The Ghanaian Ewe can be divided into three geographically and socioculturally distinct subethnic groups: the coastal Ewe, the riverine Ewe (along the Volta River) and the mainland Ewe. These three groups occupy most of what is called the Volta Region in Ghana, and the music recorded here comes from one of the mainland groups.

The mainland Ewe were divided into a mosaic of small confederacies of two to five sovereign villages, in contrast to coastal and riverine Ewe who formed more powerful chiefdoms. In their cultural life, the Ewe from the mainland also differ markedly from their southern brethren, and this is nowhere more noticeable than in their music. This may partly be explained by the fact that the mainland Ewe were subjected to a much greater influence from their western neighbors, the powerful Ashanti.

The music presented here was recorded in Abutia Kloe, a village of the Abutia confederacy. Although no systematic comparative analysis was carried out in the other mainland confederacies, there

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is no reason to believe that Abutia music is not representative of other mainland Ewe music.

Mainland Ewe social organization is completely geared around the village. The village is a bounded unit and, although not walled, it is the center of social existence and clearly distinguished from the outside, the 'bush'. This dichotomy is manifest in the rituals, and the symbolism in general; to the contrast between village and bush are coupled those between life and death, inside and outside, kinship and citizenship, peace and war, social and animal existence. Within the mainland Ewe villages there are only citizens, all equal in their rights. The women only being excluded from the full franchise associated with eldership. There are neither ranks, nor exploiting gerontocracies, nor abusing chiefs, nor fearsome secret societies, but a complete egalitarianism. The villages are divided into clans, but songs are not the prerogative of certain clans, nor are there clan-linked guilds of musicians. There is no secret or special transmission of musical knowledge. Music is learned and performed by anyone who is interested and talented enough, on the public place.

The Ewe language has no special word to translate 'music'. Instead, they speak of 'drumming' or 'singing'. The Abutia can perform some fourteen different types of drumming and singing, seven of which are reproduced on these two records. These fourteen types can further be reduced to three main categories: drumming and singing related to the bush (category I), drumming and singing related to death (category II), and drumming and dancing related to chiefship (category III). Record 1 presents a sample of music from category I, and record 2 from category II. No music from the third category has been included.

### RECORD 1

#### SIDE ONE:

Band 1 and 2: Asafovhu - war drumming.

The traditional mainland Ewe army recruited all male citizens old enough to carry a gun; the warriors did not form a distinct group. Apart from defending the villages from slave-raiders coming from the south and west, the warriors were also responsible for burial

and funeral rites in cases involving 'bad deaths', that is, deaths resulting from violent accidents or warfare. Such deaths were considered evil and the spirits of those who died in such a way are believed to come back to possess the living. Nowadays, the war-drumming takes place during such rituals only, since traditional warfare has now disappeared.

Drummers, choir, soloists and dancers are always men. Women will occasionally join in the dancing but only when possessed by the spirit of a dead warrior; they then go into a trance and wear the warriors' clothes. The dancing of the men is an imitation of war and communal hunting movements in a pantomime of what used to be. The songs are simple and speak of war preparations, of enemies about to be killed.

The instrumental ensemble uses five drums and two 'gong-gongs' (kpodoga). The drums are the chalice-shaped type, like the Akan apentemma drums.

Transcriptions and translations (translations are not literal):

Side one, band 1:

Soloist:	Ye, Ndo ee, Ndo ee! Miwoe du ade loo!	Ndo! (probably person's name) (We wish to tell you) We have really shown courage, Yes, we have really shown bravery.
Choir:	Ndo ee, Ndo Yewoe du ade loo! Ndo ee.	
Soloist:	Ye, wakaa, wakaa, wakaa Maku le edzi Yewoto, wakaa maku loo!	Sprawling, I will die sprawled on it. Yes, leader, I can die prone!
Choir:	Wakaa, wakaa, wakaa, Maku le edzi.	

Soloist: E, wasaa,  
Abrafo, wasaa maku loo!  
Wakaa, wakaa maku le edzi!

Yes, warrior,  
Yes, I can die prone!

Wububu.....bububuiiii!

(Alert sound)

Ku de edzi  
Wakaa, wakaa,  
'brafo maku loo!

Sure,  
As a warrior,  
I can die.

Choir: Wakaa, wakaa maku de edzi!

Side one, band 2:

Soloist:	Miwo basaa, miwo nyama, Miyi afhe!	Spare nothing, do anything, Before we return home.
Choir:	Miwo nyamaa, Miyi afhe! Amedzro menyé amenovi o! Egblé o! Enyo o! Enyo ne nye menyé o!	Yes, destroy anything you can, And then let us go home. A stranger is not a kin (no ac- tion against him is criminal) Be it bad or good, To whom does it matter?
Soloist:	Osee yiee!	(No translation).
Choir:	Yee, yee, ayoo! Woategnuia?	(exclamations) Can you too?
Soloist:	Kalé wofhe enye gbedzi loo! Gbedzi loo, gbedzi loo!	One shows bravery in the bush, Yes, one shows bravery at war.
Choir:	Kalé wofhe gbedziee!	Yes, it is in the bush that one shows bravery!
Soloist:	Gbedzi miado l-o, Gbedzi.	Warriors sleep in the bush, In the bush.
Choir:	Kalé wofhe nye gbedzie!	It is at war that one shows bravery.

Side one, band 3 and Side two, band 1: Adevhu - hunters' drumming.

Individual hunting of big game used to be one of the most prestigious male activities because of the risks involved; like war, it required from the hunter the most potent medicines. These big animals (from the elephant to the buffalo) are believed to be so powerful that their spirit 'possesses' the hunter, who must therefore undergo a special ritual immediately after having killed such an animal. Should the hunter fail to undergo the ritual, he would become mad and die. Every year, however, a similar ritual is performed for the god of the hunt to ensure successful hunting. During these rites, the hunters who have killed big game are 'possessed' by the spirit of the animal they killed and more or less fall into a trance, dancing madly in imitation of their victorious pursuit of the animal.

This kind of drumming takes place during these rituals only. Three of the smallest chalice-shaped drums used in war-drumming are used together with the 'gong-gong', which plays the time-line for the ensemble. Drummers, choir and dancers are exclusively male, and men do get 'possessed'. The songs are even simpler than the war-songs; the singers call the names of gods, and pray for good fortune in hunting. They also speak of hunters and animals. Most songs of this type consist of one or two sentences which are repeated for the duration of the song. Some use minor text variations, as in the fourth song. The talking drum is used very rhythmically to imitate the sound of animals running in the bush.

Transcriptions and translations:

Side one, band 3:

Soloist:	Ade wu lã loo! Adela wu lã loo.	Good hunting! The hunter has killed an animal.
Choir:	Alã ku loo!	Indeed, the animal is dead.
Soloist:	Megadae o, malee, Adela, megadae o malee! Megadae o, malee xo!	Don't shoot (to waste your bullets), I will catch it. Hunter, don't shoot. I will catch it with my bare hands.
Choir:	Megadae malee ee. Adela megadae o.	Don't shoot, I will catch it, Hunter, don't shoot.

Side two, band 1:

Soloist:	Gli mele eme o, Nye meye o, Gli mele eme o, Nye meya o. Lãwoe yi nuagbe be: Gli mele eme o, Nye meyi na o.	If the elephant is not going, I am not either.  All the animals are on their way but each and every one says: if the elephant is not coming, nor am I.
Choir:	Gli mele eme o, Nye mayi na o.	If the elephant is not of the party, I will not go.
Soloist:	Lãwoe yi dee!	The animals are on their way.
Choir:	Gli mele eme o, Nye meye o.	If the elephant is not included, don't count me in.

This refrain by the choir is repeated after each of the following lead by the soloist:

Soloist:	Dzatawoe yi nuagbe... Adawoe yi nuagbe... Kiuwoe yi nuagbe... Towoe yi nyagbe... Ziwo hã yi nyagbe Kpõwo hã yi nuagbe Lowo tsie yi dee Kisi tsie yi dee Lãwo fhe lawoe yi nuagbe	The lions are on their way... The...(?) are on their way... The tortoises are on their way... The buffaloes... The (?) are also... The leopards ... The crocodiles are also on... The rats have also joined in. All sorts of species are...
	Ade wu lã loo!	The hunter has killed an animal!

Side two, bands 2 and 3: Tróvhu - drumming to the gods.

The mainland Ewe pantheon is mainly composed of two categories of gods: the autochthonous and the immigrant ones. The immigrant gods are by definition outsiders, they inhabit a stool which cannot touch the ground, and select women as their priestesses. They possess these women, who then speak as their voices. The autochthonous gods, on the other hand, shelter in chthonic abodes and choose men as their priests, but never possess anyone. These gods all have their yearly rituals but drumming is performed for the immigrant gods only.

The instruments used in this type of drumming are basically those used in the hunters' drumming, and the 'gong-gong' is still used to play the time-line. Drummers and choirs are all men but, since the immigrant gods have priestesses only, women perform the dancing. As they become possessed by their god they enter into a trance and start dancing to the trovhu rhythm. These songs, like the texts of the previous songs, use quite simple texts and mainly list names of gods and beg their favours. The meter is very fast and the rhythms are extremely complex.

#### Transcriptions and translations:

##### Side two, band 2:

Soloist: Osee yiee! (exclamation for calling).  
Choir: Yee, yee, Atando, oo. (they call the name of Atando, an Abutia god).  
Soloist: Yawoe, yawoe, Frama Yawo. They call the name of Aframa Yawo, another Abutia god.  
Choir: Yawoe, Yawoe. The choir repeats the name.  
Soloist: Dzinui, Dzinui, Nana Dzinui. Calls the name of Nana Dzinui, an Abutia goddess.  
Choir: Dzinui, Dzinui. Choir repeats the name.  
Soloist: Asiome, Asiome, Kofi Asiome be Ye yeade agblefhlefhe zã? Really? Did Kofi Asiome say that he needed to 'buy life'?

Choir: Asiome, Asiome? Gbedegbede o! Asiome said that? Never!  
Soloist: Asiome, Asiome, Kofi Asiome yi de agbefhlefe loo. Indeed, Kofi Asiome has gone to beg for life.  
Choir: Asiome, Asiome, Asiome, Asiome loo.  
Soloist: Asiome, Asiome, Kofi Asiome kpã yi de agbefhlefe loo. Yes, even Kofi Asiome has to pray the gods for life.  
Soloist: Asiome, Asiome, Tadi Asiome Yi de agbe fhe fhea. Asiome, Kofi Asiome must be close to death to seek to 'buy life'.  
Soloist: Asiome, Asiome, Nyame Asiome kpã Yi de agbe fhle fhe loo. Yes, even Asiome has to 'buy life'.

##### Side two, band 3:

Soloist: Luvi menye me kum o, Luvi menye me kum o, sea? Dzogbe luvi menye, Ne ekum gle adu wo. I am only a tiny hole, but do not dare to dig me. I am only a tiny hole in the savannah, but if you dig a snake will bite you.  
Choir: Luvi menye me kum o. Luvi menye me kum o.  
Soloist: Da du nui ma! Da du nui ma be Bredzimã duanu senge. The snake has bitten. The snake that has bitten says he is a viper, the most dangerous of all.

The remaining part of the song was too difficult to transcribe and translate.

## SIDE ONE:

Bands 1 and 2: Gogodzi - mourning songs.

In all cases involving a normal death, that is, death by sickness or old age, the funeral and burial rites are performed by the deceased's relatives and fellow-villagers. The deceased is normally buried on the day following death and the burial is preceded by a wake which lasts through the night. The wake-keeping attracts mostly a female audience but, wherever the mourning songs involve drumming, men are invited to perform. The Gogodzi mourning songs are accompanied by drumming, but on a limited scale. The instrumental ensemble is, however, still percussive and the rhythm is obtained by pounding two sticks together and hitting an empty bottle with a pebble. The choir is composed of women and young men, and only women dance. Most mourning songs of this type start with a long introductory text, sung by a soloist. This introduction is followed by a solo-response section which carries a dialogue with a long series of varied sentences. These songs talk of love, grief, and sorrow, and the melodies are somewhat restrained. As mourning songs, they are only sung at night.

Transcriptions and translations:Side one, band 1:

Soloist: Dzalele, lele, lele,  
Mene nya de sem le adzo nyu  
Adzo mele nyu atsi nam o?

(Exclamation sound). What is this gossip that I hear about my lover? Yet, how can I learn the truth from her?

Agotime de be  
Da bra tsi o.

No translation.

Soloist: Teva nyugue  
Mesena tele nyugue zua o.  
Adanfo nyenu e gbloe  
Gbo de eyu  
Xawui be ade menyo kpã?

Who will contradict the wise woman's observation. Sooner or later we forget when we held hands, clinging to each other with the intense wish to be inseparable. All the same, what vice is there in courting?

Soloist: Dza yee dze agbagba  
Na fho da wo.  
Ame ano alea  
Abe kodzoe nene  
Ne kodzoe go tsie le alea  
Eye adela kpoe de  
Mada (tui) o zã?

Dza, try to have your hair cut. Imagine a man so unkempt as to resemble the antelope 'kodzoe'. Should a hunter see that man, wouldn't he mistake him for the antelope and shoot?

Wobe Dza xoxoa,  
Dze agbagba  
Nafho da wo.

Everyone insists, Dza, that you have your hair cut.

Ahewo loo!  
Yoo!

Side one, band 2:

Soloist and  
Choir: Ame nyanga akanga fhue  
Wolui mevo o.

A bad man is like a vulture and his deeds like its feathers. The feathers are so numerous that one never stops plucking them.

Band 3: Avihe - Plain mourning songs.

These songs are interesting in that they represent the extreme of the tendencies inherent in this type of music. Whereas the music of category I (related to the 'bush') consists of drumming and singing, with the emphasis placed on the drumming aspect, mourning music consists mostly of singing, with little drumming involved only as

an accessory. In these plain mourning songs the drumming is completely absent and only rattles and a pair of metal castenets are used to mark the meter and rhythm. The melody openly wins over the rhythm and the mourning songs have the most sustained melodic structure of all their music. Choir and dancers are exclusively women and the texts are longer, more elaborated and varied than most of the other types of mainland Ewe songs.

Transcriptions and translations:

Side one, band 3:

Soloist: Fhonyemeawo gbem loo, My relatives have forsaken me.  
Fhonyemeawo gbem loo. But what will happen when I find  
Gbeke mefo adzoglo de? an 'adzoglo'(?)?

Choir: Fhonyemeawo gbem loo, My relatives have rejected me.  
Fhonyemeawo gbem loo. But will they love me again,  
Gbeke mefo dzata loo, when I find a lion?  
Fhonyemeawo alom zã!

Soloist: Etofomeawo gbem loo, My patrilateral and matrilateral  
Enofomeawo gbem loo, relatives have forsaken me. But  
Gbeke mefo adzoglo dee? what will happen when I find an  
'adzoglo'(?)?

Choir: Fhonyemeawo gbem yoo, My relatives have completely  
Fhonyemeawo ke3 gbem, rejected me. And what is to  
Ne eva me be mefo dzata dee? come if I find a lion?

.....

Soloist: Èè, nye menya mi o, Yes, if I had not known you,  
Nye mayo mi o. I would not have called you.

Choir: Dzi de mebe You would not have been pleased  
Yeadzo mi o with me,

Soloist: È, menya mi o fheteè, Yes, if I had not known you at  
Nye mayo mi o. all, I would not have called you.

Choir: Dzi de mebe What happiness would you have  
Yeadzo mi o. derived from that?

Soloist: De meyo mi za, But who knows? Had I called you,  
Miato o. You might not have responded.

Choir: Dze de mebe But even this action,  
Yeadzo mi o. Might not have pleased you.

.....

Soloist and Choir:

Ne meka be gbemagbe When I talk of that day, who  
Amekae mado hu na wo? would not sympathize?

Nuagbe yigbe gbemagbe Of that day when sickness took  
Amekae mado hu na wo? me to a faraway hospital, who  
would not sympathize?

Kpalime yigbe gbemagbe Of that trip to the Kpalime hos-  
Amekae mado hu na wo? pital, who would not understand?

Korle Bu yiyi gbemagbe, To the Korle Bu hospital...  
Amekae mado hu na wo?

Ho degbe, To the Ho hospital...  
Amekae mado hu na wo?

Adidome yiyi, To the Adidome hospital...  
Amekae mado hu na wo?

Tondome degbe, To the Tondome hospital...  
Amekae mado hu nawo?

Fidagbe be gbemagbe, Whether it was a Friday,  
Memledagbe be gbemagbe, a Wednesday,  
Egbe be gbemagbe, or even today,  
Amekae mado hu na wo? who would not sympathise?

SIDE TWO:

Band 1: Gabada - Funeral music.

A mainland Ewe funeral is not a sad occasion. People mourn on the burial day but the funeral marks the end of bereavement. It emphasizes the victory of life over death, the re-insertion of the



bereaved ones to normal life. Funerals used to take place on the seventh day after the burial but, nowadays, the two events can be separated by as much as one year. The funeral thus emerges as an occasion of rejoicing and commemorating. The funeral day is preceded by a commemorative wake-keeping, where Gabada is performed. The songs are still elaborate and diversified and they are accompanied by drumming, but the drums used are no longer of the Akan type; they are cylindrical and are akin to the drums found among the coastal and riverine Ewe. As usual, men drum but the choir is composed of both men and women, and the dancers also belong to both sexes. The dancing is not imitative but rather conducive to flirt, with partners of both sexes dancing together.

Transcriptions and translations were impossible.

Bands 2 and 3: Yazo - Funeral music.

Yazo belongs to the 'music of rejoicing' played on the day of the funeral. It is a modern and Christian version (introduced around 1965) of a traditional type of drumming and dancing which was phased out by missionaries for its erotic overtones... Yazo is still more of an occasion for flirt, since it is only performed by the young and unwed people and very often leads to love affairs. It is performed on the day of the funeral itself, starts in the afternoon and lasts late into the night. The drummers are men but all those present, choir and dancers, assembling members of both sexes, join in the singing. Dancing and singing are not dissociated, as in other instances, and the choir dialogues with the dancers.

Transcriptions and translations:

Side two, band 2:

Soloist:	Agba <sup>y</sup> uvo menoa ame <sup>y</sup> u Wotso yina de yome o. Dzoyi do, mide avo nam, Ne mayi.	One does not bury a man with the cloth in which he is laid in state. Friends, remove mine. It is now my turn to depart (in the grave).
Choir:	Agba <sup>y</sup> uvo menoa ame <sup>y</sup> u, Woyina yome o.	A man is not buried with the cloth used to lay him in state.
Soloist:	Ao, Ao, Noviwo, Mino <sup>y</sup> udzo	(Exclamation) Friends, be ready.

Side two, band 3:

Soloist:	Miva, miva, mivaa	Come, come, come.
Choir:	Miva, miwo Mawudo la, Miva, miva, miwo Mawudo la ko.	Come, and let us do God's work.
Soloist:	Agbehia didi Mawu me wotso.	God is the source of want and necessity in life.
Choir:	Miga tsi dzi le e <sup>y</sup> u o. Yehova na go le nusianu me.	But do not worry. Let Jehova be our leader in everything.
	Egbe, hafi <sup>y</sup> u nake la, Etso, menye towo o. Xexeame nuwo kata De wotrona yesiayi. Ao. Noviwo mina <sup>y</sup> udzo.	Today is yours until day breaks, but tomorrow no longer belongs to you. This world is always changing. Yes, brothers, be ready.

Gogodzi, Gabada, Avihe and Yazo, despite their differences, all belong to the same category of mainland Ewe music (category II, related to death). The drums used are the cylindrical Ewe type and the 'gong-gong' does not play a leading role. In the mourning music the singing is most important, at the exclusion of drumming and even dancing, in the plain type (avihe). In the funeral music, dancers and singers are fused, and the drumming is only an accompaniment to the singing and dancing. The song texts are longer and more detailed in their expressions, as they give expression to the varied feelings of grief, sorrow, and love. The choreography is also varied; it is made up of graceful movements of the upper part of the body, as smooth as the melody itself with no intent to pantomime. Overall, this category of music is overtly women-oriented.

In contrast, asafovhu, adevhu and trovhu (category I) share a number of characteristics which clearly mark them off from the music of category II. They are all performed with the same type of chalice-shaped Akan drums, led by the sound of the 'gong-gong'. They have fast meters and their rhythms are highly syncopated and complicated. The songs are made up of texts that essentially address themselves to spirits from the outside. They are the spirits of those who have died in the bush or from accident (war-drumming), the spirits of big game (hunters' drumming), and the spirits of immigrant gods (drumming to the gods). All of their texts are short exclamatory sentences, and they consist of incantatory repetitions of the same sentences which, backed by the drumming, aim at calling the spirits to possess the dancers.

The music of categories I and III (the latter not represented on these records) share more similarities than either of these groups does with the music of category II. In category III, all texts are 'spoken' on the drums (the music is performed on the fontomfrom, the Akan 'speaking drum' of the chiefs) and all 'singing' disappears. Dancing is nearly non-existent

in category III and, in category I (music related to the 'bush'), it is leg-based with motions which are imitative of human and animal behavior.

Seen from a more global point of view, these three categories of mainland Ewe music represent three different orientations: totally drum-oriented in category III with dancing as a sheer ancillary performance, it is almost completely song-oriented in category II whereas drumming, singing and dancing are totally inseparable in category I. These three orientations also express the deep cleavages between men and women, and between elders and youth.

Nevertheless, all three categories of mainland Ewe music share a common denominator: all three are intimately tied to ritual events. It does seem as if there was no 'profane' music traditionally, no music not connected to important moments in the villagers' life. More interesting and important still is the fact that, since the advent of Christianity, the Abutia and the mainland Ewe have retained only those traditional rituals which are music-bound. This in no way suggests that the rituals survived because they were the occasion of musical performance. It does rather mean that the rituals which survived were the most critical ones from their point of view, and that these important ritual events were underlined by musical performance. They were symbolically the most potent rituals, and their association with music gave them a collective dimension more difficult to delete than the more personal aspect of rituals such as outdoor ceremonies or rites of widowhood.

Annotated by Michel Verdon.

Transcriptions and translations of songs by Michel Verdon and John Amenyo.

LITHO IN U.S.A.